

Aesthetic Cosmopolitanism in Latvian Press of Soviet Latvia: Reflections on the Detachment of Art from Life

Ilze Kacane

Institute of Humanities and Social Sciences, Daugavpils University

Vienības iela 13, Daugavpils, LV-5401, Latvia

Email: ilze.kacane@du.lv

Abstract Having originated on the threshold of Modernism, literary Aestheticism is a reaction against the objective perception of art, an affirmation of aesthetic subjectivity, and an expression of writer's cosmopolitan imagination that due to its "cosmopolitan ethos" prevented many national literatures from having an air of provincialism. A complete detachment from social concerns and the aestheticization of art, highlighted by employing a cosmopolitan style and new narrative forms, contributed to the depiction of cosmopolitan locations, international and metropolitan settings, cosmopolitan circles, "strangers" in the world of pleasures (Bohemianism), as well as cosmopolitan outlooks, experiences, and values. After the loss of national independence (1940), the development of Latvian literature was halted by the sovietization and ideological censorship of culture and art, which, demanding the reflection of social aspects of reality and typization in literature, turned against any manifestation of individualization. The paper is aimed at studying the attitudes to aesthetic cosmopolitanism in Soviet Latvia periodicals *Karogs* [Flag] and *Literatūra un Māksla* [Literature and Art] within the 1940-1950s—the period of time when the aesthetic component was rapidly losing its basic value and became the decisive means for educating the Soviet man. The research allows concluding that the distinctly negative attitude to aesthetic cosmopolitanism and to writers representing it was part of a great ideological struggle targeted against the West European avant-garde trends on the whole and writers—"renegades" in Latvia, without highlighting one specific trend or tendency but reducing them to the category of "-isms" harmful for the Soviet power, which do not show "the reality of flourishing life." The research has been carried out by applying cultural-historical method and content analysis.

Keywords cosmopolitan art; Modernism; Aestheticism; Latvian Soviet literature; Socialist Realism

Author **Ilze Kacane**, Dr. philol., is a senior researcher at the Institute of Humanities and Social Sciences at Daugavpils University (Latvia) and Acting Head of the Centre of Cultural Research within the Institute. Her methodological expertise lies in cultural studies, comparative literature, mainly British and Latvian literary contacts; she is the editor of *Journal of Comparative Studies*.¹

Introduction

For many decades and centuries, such terms as “cosmopolite,” “cosmopolitan” and “cosmopolitanism” have been the centre of attention for thinkers, philosophers, and researchers of various disciplines. The concept of Greek origin in the meaning of a “world citizen” of “universal community” has also become a topic of investigation in literary studies where cross-cultural communication and openness to cross-border influences have been perceived as the means for enrichment of national literatures. According to Ulf Hannerz (2006), cosmopolitanism can be approached as the structure of the double: it has two faces and therefore is generally perceived as clusters of ideas where the first, namely culture, is related to interconnectedness in the culturally diverse world and the second, namely politics,—to the government and its laws and policies. Cultural dimension of cosmopolitanism is “a happy face” that not only enjoys “new sights, sounds and tastes, new people” (Hannerz 214), but by participating, learning and re-learning also feels enriched with aesthetic tools and materials to experiment and make something new and unique out of something old. There is some affinity between the conception of “the cultural face of cosmopolitanism” and that of intellectuals, including modernist writers and representatives of literary Aestheticism, striving for an absolute freedom of an artist and expressing a variety of cosmopolitan impulses embedded in a literary text by the writers’ cosmopolitan imagination. Nowadays, due to people’s engagement with cultural diversity on a daily level, every person may be perceived as a cultural cosmopolitan to some degree (Cicchelli et al.; Papastergiadis; Patell), however in some nations, who at some specific period of their history had been behind some literal and symbolic walls or “iron curtains,” cosmopolitanism as a cultural phenomenon and aesthetic cosmopolite as an advocate of aesthetic subjectivity and

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artistic freedom were rejected and considered as rebellious opponents and political enemies of the system. The article is concerned with the investigation of the attitudes towards and interpretations of aesthetic cosmopolitanism in the press of the first two decades of Soviet era in Latvia (1940s-1950s) when due to radical political and historical changes the dynamics of Latvian cultural and literary processes was interrupted and greatly impacted by enhanced ideologization of art.

Literary Cosmopolitanism: Aestheticism

Fin de siècle as an important period of transition witnessed an extensive controversial debate about cosmopolitanism and contributed to the formation of local and global identities in an increasingly interconnected world. The literature of that period “became an important medium for simultaneously promoting and interrogating cosmopolitanism” (Evangelista 3) in the frame of such opposite positions as connectivity, belonging to the world, universalism vs. disconnection, non-belonging, nationalism and conveying the opinions that “patriotic and cosmopolitan sentiments cannot thrive on shared ground” (Evangelista 10). Literary modernity of the second half of the nineteenth century, seeking for various innovative forms of expression in art, protested against positivism, conservatism and realism. Relying on the philosophy of art that highlighted its intrinsic value, the representatives of Decadence, Aestheticism, Modernism, Symbolism and other avant-garde trends on their pathway to the renaissance of art followed Théophile Gautier’s (1811-1872) coined slogan *l’art pour l’art*. They rejected art’s political, didactic and utilitarian functions, perceived it as “the only real mode of individualism that the world has known” (Wilde 130), and imaginatively led individuals (and also nations) towards foreign spaces in their search for new identities. In their works (and sometimes in life), they looked at the prevalence of form over content and delved into expression of hedonism, Bohemian way of life, mysticism, decorativeness, erotic sensibility, and eccentricism to convey the idea that it is not the art that imitates life, but, on the contrary, life is the reflection of art.

These literary tendencies, including Aestheticism, preserving the homogeneity of their structure, simultaneously or consecutively “migrated” from one region and country to another, and in a direct or mediated way through other cultures entered into other national cultures transcending them, thus acquiring cosmopolitan characteristics. At the beginning of the twentieth century, i.e. with a shift of a couple of decades in comparison with the mature western literatures, the new Latvian literature, too, entered a rapid phase of development and was on the path towards individual freedom in art. This process was stimulated by widening the circle of

literary inspirers, seeking for modernistic expression forms and improvement in the individual manner of writing.

From the end of the nineteenth century until 1940, a public debate in Latvian periodicals reveals that cosmopolitan and anti-cosmopolitan positions often existed within the same discourse. Polyphony of opinions is observed regarding cosmopolitanism as an essential phenomenon of the modern epoch that was perceived as both threat to Latvian national values and benefit for the development of culture and literature, i.e. Europeanization that ensures cross-cultural communication. "Significant investment in the circulation of the idea of cosmopolitanism was made by cultural cosmopolitanism or cosmopolitan art—the modern artists' and writers' personas, as well as their works aiming at transforming the culture from traditional to anti-traditional, from national to modern and cosmopolitan" (Kacane, "Interpretations of Cosmopolitanism..." 201).

Aestheticism as a phenomenon of culture, which, contrary to the slogan "art for the sake of life" used by the representatives of Realism, has "art for art's sake" as its motto, thereby declaring the autonomy of art, in Latvian literary criticism has been both praised and blamed, thus revealing differences in approaches to the understanding of art functions. Criticism that tended towards Positivism and declared a utilitarian function of art as primary, perceived dissociation from the dominant of Realism negatively. When turning against the manifestations of autonomous art and individualism, against withdrawal from the reality of life and art as a value in itself, such concepts as "decadence" and "destruction" were used. While usefulness and practicalness of art (referred to as "art as a proclamation" (Bārda 264)), which developed in its interface with the society was praised, art's deviation from depicting the real life (defined as "art as worshiping" (Ibid.)) was sharply criticized and attributed to exaggerated seeking for an artificial world and manifestation of egoism. Despite such a serious split within writing and literary criticism, the history of Latvian literature reveals several noticeable developmental periods when the freedom of the individual (artist) was actively cultivated and Latvian modernists employed the means of the "universal language" of Modernism and "cosmopolitan art": firstly, in the first decade of the twentieth century when "Latvian early modernists projected the synthesis of decadence, symbolism, modernism and other modern phenomena, as well as brought to the foreground human's (artist's in particular) individuality and inner freedom within the context of art autonomy" (Kacane, "Expressions of Aesthetic Cosmopolitanism..." 374), secondly, after the foundation of the state of Latvia (1918) when due to openness to foreign impulses and active Europeanization Latvian literature was striving for

enrichment, and thirdly, in the 1930s when the next generation of modernists reflected their aspirations after cosmopolitan spirit in the search for new forms of expression, style and contents in the situation when “modernistic trends in Latvian literary situation coexisted with those antipodal literary tendencies which belonged to the national ideology-based literature of positivism where emphasis on Latvian values was placed” (Kacane, “Expressions of Aesthetic Cosmopolitanism...” 375). By processing and creatively employing the borrowed innovations, the acquired new models marked by nuances or transmutations testified to the orientation beyond the local cultures.

Aesthetic Cosmopolitanism vs. Socialist Realism

The occupation of Latvia (1940) marked the beginning of drastic reforms, including those in the field of culture and literature (Badina et al.) when millions of books were removed, destroyed, and banned (Briedis). It was the year when “[w]ith lightning speed, the old system of book-printing and periodicals on culture were destroyed, writers’ organizations were dissolved, but writers themselves—sorted out into the right and the wrong [...]” (Berelis). The attitudes towards and approaches to the “otherness” were at the peak of controversy in the Stalinist years, “since ‘internationalism’ was the mantra in politics while the reality was incomparably greater isolation from the rest of the world than the relatively liberal approach of German or Italian fascism” (Veisbergs 77).

The leading literary periodicals in Soviet Latvia became the literature, culture and socio-political monthly *Karogs* [Flag] (founded in 1940, during WWII known as an almanac published in Soviet Russia; first editor the Latvian writer and literary scientist Andrejs Upīts (1877-1970)) and the newspaper *Literatūra un Māksla* [Literature and Art] (first editor Latvian poet and journalist Valdis Lukss (1905-1985)). Adhering to the set ideological principles, they did the job of educating young Latvian writers in the spirit of Communism for the development of Latvian Soviet literature. In addition, they supported the publication of full literary works or their fragments written mainly by the representatives of Socialist Realism in Latvia. Specific instructions and recommendations for the development of Soviet literature and creation of ideologically permeated literary works were given also at congresses of Latvian Soviet Writers’ Union¹ and by the Writers’ Association. The issue 3 of the literary monthly *Karogs* (1940), published “The Declaration of Writers of

¹ Latvian Soviet Writers’ Union was founded on 26 October 1940. The First Congress took place on 14-15 June 1941 during which Socialist Realism was declared the dominant method of creative writing (Tabūns; Eversone).

Soviet Latvia” adopted at the opening ceremony of Latvian SSR Writers’ Union, declaring that the Soviet literature must be socialist by its content and didactic by its nature, so that people would be educated in the spirit of communist morality and patriotism and would be oriented towards new achievements in their work in honor of the Soviet people and the vast Soviet country, and that “all attempts to jeopardize people’s interests in literature and art will receive in return a hard and crushing blow” (“Padomju Latvijas rakstnieku ...” 323-324).

Socialist Realism had been declared the only official method of literature and literary criticism in the USSR in the 1930s. It turned sharply against any manifestation of modern art and literature. In Soviet Latvia, as in the then “periphery,” the definitions, provided by the political figures from the “center” (Moscow) and by writers representing Socialist Realism, were extensively multiplied, since they were based on the formulation given by Secretary General of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) and Chairman of the Council of Ministers of the Soviet Union Joseph Stalin in 1932, stating that Socialist Realism can develop only on the basis of socialist reality and, though the basics of this method or its elements had been observed earlier, officially its history begins with the Great October revolution (1917) (“Diskusija par sociālistiskā...” 3).

The “artistic method” of Soviet Socialist Realism included true depiction of reality and was aimed at educating the society in the spirit of Communism (James ix), i.e. the supreme task of a Soviet writer was to inspire Soviet citizens and call them to new struggles and victories rather than to provide artistic pleasure and entertainment. The development of a politically mobilizing literature required political-ideological education of writers, involving an in-depth acquisition of Marxism-Leninism science. Soviet aesthetics was based on the official attitudes, principles and ideology of CPSU, therefore only such forms of artistic experimentation that revealed a positive view of socialist society were supported, whereas other creative forms were largely censored or banned.

In reply to the question how “the new literary method” of Soviet literature could be characterized, the post-war Latvian Soviet periodicals expounded on Socialist Realism as the Realism’s highest level achievable in a socialist society (Grigulis 2; Upīts). More scientifically sound conceptions of Socialist Realism appeared after many decades, therefore initial attempts to create literary texts in the new mode after the collapse of the national identity, which interrupted the process of its development as a constituent of European cultural space, and the construction

of Soviet Latvian identity were largely based on writers' intuition (Badins).¹ Both literature of national positivism and literature of modernism were perceived identically negative in the Soviet period—as attempts to drag the Soviet literature into the mire of philistinism, absence of ideals and decadence (Padomju Savienības Komunistiskās Partijas Centrālā Komiteja 3-6).

The social function of art and ideological contents contradicted with the aesthetic function of art and the philosophy of “art for art's sake” (*l'art pour l'art*) seen as the primary by modernist writers of the second half of the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth century. Socialist Realism characterized as “a weapon” in the ideological war (Gutkin) and art performing the function of “a campaigner” was perceived as an ideological tool for the sake of the collectivity—referred to as “moralisation” by the opposite party. In its turn, cosmopolitan art, contrary to standardization and typization, was striving for genuine or pure art that expressed individual cosmopolitan (Modernist) subjectivity. The dichotomy of the functions of art is also the underlying reason for the emergence of such poles as “conformists” and “dissidents”: by definition a Soviet writer must be a Socialist Realism writer, whereas those focusing on form became marginalized intellectuals, among them aesthetic cosmopolitans oriented towards the artist's rights for freedom of expression and aestheticization.

Results and Discussion

In the periodicals of the second half of the 1940s, regularly prevail expanded articles focusing on tasks and responsibility placed on writers by the Communist party, including the task to stimulate, via socialist realistic art, people's participation in economic-political and ideological-creative activities. The duty of a writer to carry out a comprehensive “building work of culture” (Ābols 2) with the aim to increase the wealth of socialist culture and enhance Soviet patriotism is formulated by analogy that the duty of any Soviet citizen is an active participation in building socialist life and system: “A Soviet writer must be responsible for every word, every sentence he writes and offers to the people. In the Soviet society, literature is not playing games, is not a pastime, and is not an irresponsible aestheticization” (Krauli, “Rakstnieka atbildība” 2). Writing in the spirit of Cosmopolitan Aestheticism is perceived as

1 Such works as *Zaļā Zeme* [Green Land] (1945) by Andrejs Upīts, *Caur ūguni un ūdeni* [Through Thick and Thin] (1945) by Arvīds Grigulis, *Vētra* [Storm] (1946–1948) by Vilis Lācis, *Pret kalnu* [Towards the Summit] (1948) by Anna Sakse as well as other books written by the same and other authors can be mentioned as examples of Latvian Soviet literature written in the spirit of Socialist Realism (Tabūns).

spreading “the dangerous apolitical tendency, detachment from the life of today, and clinging to the past” (“Par rakstnieku politiski...”), therefore it is heavily criticized and characterized as not understanding the social duties, lacking conscientiousness and ignoring the burning interests of people. Formulation “irresponsible aestheticization” is addressed to the so-called salon literature—Romanticism and Modernism—, which gets included into the context of decadence and is interpreted as hooliganism, adventurism, and snobbishness in art created under the impact of “capitalist culture” (Pelše 4), as well as “a speculative fancy in the artificial world” (Rešals 6), namely, it is labelled as “defacing” of the real art and as the harm to the new Soviet system: “All different trends of decadence, all symbolisms, mysticisms, different constructivisms and other formalistic and anti-realistic tendencies do nothing else than release the writer [from the duty] before the people [...]” (Krauliņš, “Rakstnieka atbildība” 2).

In the result of the crucial political and cultural shift, western modern tendencies, so well-known to several generations of Latvian modernists, were labelled as “alien” literature, therefore to appreciate it and create works under the influence of this art posed a threat for immediate exclusion and identification with such attributes as “sick,” “leprous,” and “egoistic,” whereas their writing was rejected due to the lack of then prioritised “fundamental real-life values” (such as heroism and selflessness of the Soviet people, education in the spirit of Communism etc.) which would be oriented towards the majority of people. Thereby, the originality was interpreted as artificiality, individual’s choice was characterized as aimless since it “confuses,” “deviates” and “leads” the reader’s consciousness into “vague inventions” (“Padomju cilvēka tēls” 4). In addition, the perceptions of positioning writers as superhumans and divine beings, as well as of manifestation of freedom of art and individualization (with an admixture of sexuality) were completely denied as being extremes. Within the frame of the Soviet ideology, the opinion was enhanced that writers who were “entertainers of a handful of snobs” (Gerasimovs 5) and the art which is “not” virtuous and does not strive for achieving collective aims, i.e. art that is “useless,” must not be supported politically and be banned.

For the achievement of aims set for the Latvian Soviet literature, socialist content became of primary importance, since combined with a great ideological force it could reflect what was the most typical and the most characteristic, and, as it was emphasized, it made “the nation’s spiritual values the cultural values of the whole mankind” (Žurgins 1). Experiments with form, in turn, were labelled as an expression of a devoid-of-ideas bourgeois literature and defined as “individuals’

spontaneity” and “cult of vanity” (“Partija un literatūra” 1). In the context of turning against formalism, a strong denial of aesthetic cosmopolitanism is revealed:

The disguised supporters and propagators of the rotten western art, people who are used to bowing deeply to everything that has a foreign trade mark attached to, speaking about the western art usually do not deny its emptiness and lack of principles and ideas, but constantly emphasize the technical mastery of its representatives. [...] We have to dispel the mirage as if a free bourgeois art would exist, an unnecessary boasting which smart people need to implement theories and aims advantageous for them. (Gerasimovs 5)

According to the definitions published in the periodicals of that time, Socialist Realism, contrary to aesthetic cosmopolitanism, is also writer’s ability to depict a human “truly”—“such as he is and at the same time—such as he should be in Socialist Realism, speaking in point of fact, Realism intertwines with revolutionary romanticism, with striving for the ideal” (“Padomju cilvēka tēls” 4). Aesthetic cosmopolites were sharply criticized for human depictions in the context of both “ugly reality” and “unrealistic beauty” focusing on an individual’s inner feelings rather than a wider society. By accentuating the demand for an opposite approach in the characterization of “a Soviet man,” Socialist Realism denied “the old” in point of fact in order to emphasize “the new,” i.e. positive collective beginning: “The one who does not notice the beginning of the positive and looks at the society only from the back and sees only difficulties and drawbacks, this one [...] is not able to show the reality of our life truthfully” (“Padomju cilvēka tēls” 4). Unlike the portrayal of a new hero of that time—“the Soviet man,” the human depicted in aesthete’s literary works is characterized as creatively unhealthy and individually snobbish, i.e. as both an egoistic biological creature wrapped in an erotic mystery (“bestial man,” “brute,” “mean physiological creature” etc.), and as a mystical being engrossed in transcendentalism and deep subjectivism. Thereby, in Socialist Realism, such binary oppositions as “Romanticism—Realism” and “individualism—collectivism” are brought into focus with the aim to reveal and show the elements of free art’s, so called, “false” slogan as being untrue and harmful. They were interpreted as phenomena of the outdated culture of the by-gone time, which were spiritually poor, seeming and having no content necessary for the society. In the same way, any focusing on the poetics of the Bible and mythology was perceived as “the propaganda of madness” (“Marasma un neprāta propaganda” 6).

Along with Sovietization, collectivization and patriotization, modern tendencies

were marginally revealed and characterized as a “psychically abnormal art” and “a cheap fraud,” but writers, “cultural rubbish,” in turn, were blamed not only for distorting the reality of life (anti-realism), decline, indifference towards plot and ideological content of art, but also for taking the hopeless labyrinth paths of “different -isms” and going the “alien cosmopolitanism way” (“Divas kultūras” 3-5). To idealize the objectivity of art, subjectivity of art rapidly became more and more severely criticized, mentioning the arbitrariness of individual “misinformation” and exaggerated sensuality of Aestheticism among the qualities unacceptable for the political power of that time. To communicate the ideas of Aestheticism by illustrating negative examples, traditionally well-known representatives of western culture were chosen, while the names of Latvian writers were kept back for a certain period of time. In the first post-war years, belonging to aesthetic cosmopolitanism or, as it was often noted in periodicals of that time, “straying into aesthetic fantasies” was interpreted also as a matter of chance and naivety, and thereby was justified if the writer’s works published during the period of Soviet Latvia were considered by the new power as ideologically acceptable, as it was in the case of the dedication to Eriks Ādamsons’ (1907-1946) on the occasion of his death and discussion of post-war literature (Sudrabkalns 335-337). Attempts to describe one of the striking representatives of the second generation of Latvian modernists and Aestheticism in Latvian literature as an advocate of Soviet people, as a fighter for equality, due to his ability to reflect the minutest details of life in his writings, can be characterized as politically determined. By including Ādamsons among the ranks of writers-realists, he was not only paid some respect under the conditions of censorial restrictions when the expression satisfying the ruling power was required. It is also an indication to the fact that in war and post-war years, Latvian writers were obliged to change their literary expression and adjust themselves to the new conditions imposed by the Soviet power if they wanted to get their works published.

At the end of the 1940s, the attitude to any “prophet” of pure or formalist art based on Parnassian¹ aestheticism, became openly hostile: writers were reproached for having created a world of cynicism, hatred, horror, absurdity, anarchism, existentialism, sadism, and homosexuality “under the roof of apolitical individualism and aestheticism.” The authors themselves were compared with criminal groupings, supporters of Nazi Germany and implementers of imperialist policy, and their works characterized as literature of aggression (Krauliņš, “Literatūra imperiālistu kalpībā”

1 The name is a reference to the nineteenth-century French journal, *Le Parnasse contemporain* issued in the 1860s-1870s. It is the initial phase of the development of the Aesthetic Movement (Thain).

97-107). At that time, the persecution of aesthetic cosmopolitans, known under the title of “Cosmopolitans’ case,” began in Latvia (Radzobe). Aesthetic cosmopolitans in the USSR were called ideologists and dissidents of the bourgeois West and decadence, “alien people” and “cosmopolitans having no motherland” who deny “the progressive role of Soviet literature and art” and whose interpretation of art and ideas “makes a direct loss to people’s interests” (quoted after Sprūde). Open attacks were launched against those, who in their creative work used “excessive expression means” resulting from decadence, mysticism and aestheticism, mentioning Latvian writers of different generations, such as a leading figure of Latvian “decadents”¹ Viktors Eglītis (1877-1945) and early modernists who have followed the aesthetic style in a concrete period of their creative work, e.g. Jānis Akuraters (1876-1937), Kārlis Skalbe (1879-1945), as well as the representatives of the second generation of modernists of the 1930s and those trying to adapt to new demands towards writers in post WW2 situation – Aleksandrs Čaks (1901-1950), Pāvils Vīlps (1901-1979), Valdis Grēviņš (1895-1968), Jānis Plaudis (1903-1952), etc. (“Formālisma paliekas...” 2; Vasars 237-242; Upīts, “Padomju literatūras desmit gadi” 2-31). In line with the principled position postulated by the communist system, literary cosmopolitanism was based on the ideology of capitalism, hostile to communism, and on “world culture” (Višinskis 5-6), thereby it was positioned by the leading power as a tool for denying “one’s own” (Soviet) people and fatherland, as well as a means of a spiritual destruction, and as such had to be eradicated, while the so-called “aesthetical snobs” and “cosmopolitan saboteurs,” destructive for the development of the Soviet literature, had to be unmasked. It is worth noting that the reproach was addressed not only towards the writers, but also towards the literary critics who, in the opinion of the ruling power, did not fight actively enough against the damaging bourgeois aestheticism and imperialistic cosmopolitanism, “completely forgetting that this is their direct battle task set by the people and party. After the two great meetings dedicated to exposing cosmopolitanism and after the publication of the respective reviews, this struggle has become less intensive” (“Par principiālu un lietišķu ...” 2).

In 1950, at the 13th plenary meeting of the Committee of the USSR Writers’

1 Latvian early modernists projected the synthesis of Decadence, Symbolism, Modernism and other modern phenomena, as well as brought to the foreground human’s (artist’s in particular) individuality and inner freedom within the context of art autonomy. The next generation of Latvian modernists continued their seeking in the field of style, composition and content, reflecting also their aspirations after cosmopolitan spirit (Kacane, “Expressions of Aesthetic Cosmopolitanism...” 380).

Union, it was announced that the Communist Party had fought against the antipatriotic grouping of writers and critics-cosmopolites, followers of Aestheticism and formalism, who “hindered the development of our [Soviet] literature and art,” and that it had successfully completed its mission. However, as it was emphasized, the struggle against the “distortion” of Soviet reality and ideologically and artistically “inferior” works had started “belatedly,” therefore one of the principal tasks of literary criticism still remained to expose those writers who may adhere to the principles of “pure art,” i.e. to recognize and exclude the opponents who appear under “the banner of formalism and aestheticism” (“Uz jauniem panākumiem ...” 1-2; Fadejevs 2-3). The newspaper *Literatūra un Māksla* focused also on the “cosmopolites” in literary science, e.g. by republishing reports from the Russian language (by A. Fadeyev, Secretary General of the USSR Soviet Writers’ Union), the Soviet literary critics (A. Tarasenkov, A. Karavayeva etc.) were mentioned as an example in critically approaching Alexander Veselovsky (1838-1906), a literary theorist, one of the pioneers of the discipline of comparative literature (comparativistics), known as the one to “offer a synthesis of the study of literatures, both Western and non-Western—that scholars today are increasingly mindful of” (Maslov), and his “school,” generally referred to by the name of “Russian Formalism.” Considering that Veselovsky’s central ideas were related to narrative hybridity, influences, borrowings, it is important to note that cosmopolitanism by nature presumes intercultural communication, or as Hannerz puts it, “It is an intellectual and aesthetic stance of openness toward divergent cultural experiences” (Hannerz 239), thus comparative studies and comparative literature identified with universal or cosmopolitan drive were also caught in the crossfire and actively criticised in Latvian press of Soviet Latvia.

Conclusion

In the conditions of a heightened ideologization of art, Latvian literature, that had developed under the influence of western culture, became a tool of propaganda and, consequently, its artistic value declined. Based on the model of relationships “center – periphery,” the requirements of the Soviet didactics in Latvia relate to identical tendencies elsewhere in the USSR, namely, to break the continuity of Latvian literature and its orientation towards European modern tendencies, national literature was maximally deformed. If in previous decades modernistic trends in Latvian literature coexisted with those antipodal literary tendencies which belonged to the national ideology-based literature of positivism, then since 1940, but especially after re-occupation and in the first decades after WW2, the attitude to literature of

Modernism, (including aesthetic cosmopolitanism), as well as to texts having political and scientific content, and recognized as “nationalistic,” was openly aggressive. The multiple tools used in the process of ideologization and politicisation of literature, including periodicals, proposed literature of Socialist Realism which aligned with the paradigm of socialist culture, while aesthetic cosmopolitanism, reduced to the category of “-isms,” was considered devoid of principles and ideals and immoral. Representatives of intelligentsia of aesthetic cosmopolitanism were perceived as ill-disposed and marginalised, they were often called anti-patriotic and bourgeois aesthetes. Soviet ideological repressions lasted for several decades, and writers and literary critics who had chosen and explored themes not in line with the aims propagated by the Soviet power and were focusing on phenomena of western culture became targets of these oppressions: their literary works were prohibited and writers themselves were sentenced; some of them were deported. This was the way how Soviet man was “educated” according to the position of a political regime and how culture and literature were completely isolated from the West. Aesthetic cosmopolitanism is a cultural phenomenon that emerges due to tensions between the global and the local and may become a productive means for the development of culture and literature, however striving towards cosmopolitanism by Latvian modernists as a manifestation of distancing from and reaction against provincialism (i.e. “aesthetic inventiveness”) was completely stopped during the discussed period. “Cosmopolitan conversations” with “cosmopolite aesthetes” to make a cultural space “a changeable reality” were resumed only by exile writers and reached the wider readership after “the iron curtain” would fall and after the renewal of independence of Latvian statehood.

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