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### **Writing the History of Latvian Literature in the Soviet Period: Problems and Perspectives**

### **Latviešu literatūras vēstures rakstīšana padomju periodā: problēmas un perspektīvas**

#### **Keywords:**

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Reinis Kaudzīte and  
Matīss Kaudzīte

#### **Atslēgvārdi:**

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Reinis un Matīss Kaudzītes

## Summary

The article focuses on the political and ideological conditions that shaped the dominant trends in writing the history of Latvian literature in the second half of the 20th century. The main focus is on the situation in Soviet Latvia in comparison to that in exile. The limited possibilities that existed in the interpretation of literary history under Soviet rule as well as the researchers' compromises with the official requirements are considered. The article also scrutinizes the literary research in exile, paying special attention to archival studies in the Western world. Two thematic aspects are discussed here in greater detail. Firstly, we analyze the Soviet-time reception of the novel *Mērnieku laiki* (The Surveyors' Times, 1879) by Reinis and Matīss Kaudzīte – its evaluation in official publications on literary history and in an anthology of literary criticism, as well as in studies by literary scholars Ingrīda Kiršentāle, Elza Knope and Oto Čakars. Secondly, we discuss the reception and interpretation of Latvian texts of the early modern period, concentrating on the discoveries of new facts of literary history that have significantly expanded the awareness of the links between Latvian culture and that of other European literatures. In the Soviet context, these discoveries are particularly related to the publications of Aleksejs Apīnis. This article also follows the process whereby the interests of researchers in exile and of those in Soviet Latvia gradually converged, as they reflected on two important sources of Latvian literature – folklore tradition and translation of the Bible – as they shaped both the national and European identity.

## Kopsavilkums

Rakstā pievērsta uzmanība tiem politiskajiem un ideoloģiskajiem apstākļiem, kas noteica latviešu literatūras vēstures dominējošās nostādnes 20. gs. otrajā pusē. Galvenā vērība pievērsta situācijai padomju Latvijā salīdzinājumā ar trimdu. Aplūkotas ierobežotās iespējas, kādas pastāvēja literatūras vēstures interpretācijās, kā arī pētnieku kompromisi ar oficiālajām prasībām; salīdzinājumā aplūktas arī tendences literatūras pētniecībā trimdā, it īpaši pievēršanās arhīvu studijām Rietumu pasaulē. Detalizēta vērība veltīta diviem tematiskajiem aspektiem. Pirmkārt, aplūkota Reiņa un Matīsa Kaudzītes romāna *Mērnieku laiki* recepcija padomju periodā, analizējot gan romāna vērtējumus oficiālajos literatūras vēstures izdevumos un literatūras kritikas antoloģijā, gan pētījumus, kas veltīti literatūras kritikas attīstībai, tāpat kā atsevišķas romānam veltītas publikācijas. Salīdzināta padomju perioda literatūrzinātnieku Ingrīdas Kiršentāles, Elzas Knopes un Oto Čakara pieeja aplūkotajiem jautājumiem. Otrkārt, iztirzāta latviešu rakstniecības sākotnējo tekstu uztvere un interpretācija, pievēršoties arī jaunu literatūras vēstures faktu atklājumiem, kas palīdzēja ievērojami paplašināt priekšstatus par latviešu kultūras saikni ar Eiropas rakstniecību. Šie atklājumi padomju periodā it īpaši saistāmi ar Alekseja Apīņa publikācijām. Izsekots arī tam, kā pakāpeniski tuvinājās pētnieku intereses trimdā un padomju Latvijā, tajā skaitā atspoguļojot divus svarīgus latviešu literatūras avotus, folkloras tradīciju un Bībeles tulkojumu kā nacionālas un eiropiskas identitātes veidotāju.

## Introduction

In this paper, we trace the impact of the 20th century political transformations and especially the effect of Soviet ideology on Latvian literary criticism and the writing of literary history.<sup>1</sup> The first ideological restrictions imposed by the Soviet state were already noticeable in 1940 and 1941 during the first Soviet occupation, but a more systematic suppression of cultural diversity began when the territories of the three Baltic States were reincorporated into the Soviet Union in late 1944. The transformations caused by the occupations and the Second World War had a major impact on the fate of the Latvian intellectual community; it completely changed the conditions of daily life and made strong ideological demands omnipresent. It is generally agreed that the most suppressive years were those between 1946 and 1956, followed by a gradual easing of the strict Stalinist constraints. While there was obviously no clear-cut road to freedom of thought in the decades to come, in this paper we try to show to what extent this is or is not true.

During the post-war period, contemporary literature was the main ideological stronghold of the power structures, being strictly constrained in order to correspond to the moral principles of the self-declared communist society. However, similar rules were also applied to the interpretation of literary history. Characteristically, the choice of authors included in school curricula was restricted to those directly or indirectly displaying their loyalty to the regime and to those who retrospectively fit such ideological purposes. In his book, *Latvian Literature under the Soviets, 1940–1975* (1978), the exile scholar Rolfs Ekmanis reflects on the main principle of Soviet ideology, namely the concept of two cultures in bourgeois society – one progressive and the other reactionary: “We take from each national culture only its democratic and socialist elements, we take them solely and unconditionally as a counterbalance to bourgeois culture, to the bourgeois nationalism of each nation” (Ekmanis 1978: 16). Providing a complete reversal of the principle of the freedom of thought, these opinions critically assessed by Ekmanis became indisputable truths under Soviet rule.

Toward the late 1950s, the majority of the population in the Baltic countries had come to the painful realization that the existing conditions would last much longer than initially expected. They had started to cope with the situation, even though below the surface there was a deep disagreement with the Soviet regime – as Estonian researcher Epp Annus called it, paraphrasing Homi Bhabha, “consent but not quite”

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1 This article continues the authors' research previously presented in the publication *Latviešu literatūras vēstures recepcija no 1945. līdz 2015. gadam* (The Reception of Latvian Literary History between 1945 and 2015) (Grudule, Kalnačs 2019).

(Annus 2018: 39). All principal Soviet-time publications on the research of literature in Latvia bear signs of this contradictory situation, as they were subject to censorship. In our paper, we examine some of the main sources of literary history written during that time, such as the six volume history of Latvian literature (published between 1956 and 1963); the six edited volumes of Latvian literary criticism that appeared between 1956 and 1964; the analysis of Latvian literary criticism of the second half of the 19th century by Elza Knope in 1962; a history of Latvian literature in Russian in two volumes in 1971; a monograph on the history of the Latvian novel by Ingrīda Kiršentāle in 1979; and the history of Latvian literature from its beginnings until the 1880s by Arvīds Grigulis, Milda Losberga, and Oto Čakars, published in 1987. In all these projects, largely based on serious research and displaying the competent knowledge of the contributors, the scenery of Latvian literature was consciously deformed both on a large scale, concealing or completely omitting important authors from the literary process, and in the minor details as well. In order to trace these attempts in more detail, our two case studies focus on one of the first Latvian novels, *Mērnīeku laiki* (The Surveyors' Times, 1879) by Reinis and Matīss Kaudzīte, as well as on the Soviet-era reception of early Latvian-language texts.

### ***Mērnīeku laiki* (1879) by Reinis and Matīss Kaudzīte in Soviet literary criticism**

The official theorists of the Soviet regime promoted an extremely narrow understanding of the concepts first established in the 19th century Marxist philosophy. The main task of a literary historian was to evaluate the ideological position of each author. The ideas expressed in literary texts, not their aesthetic features, were of primary importance. Writers' compliance with the ideological rules was explicitly stated as more important than literary talent. 19th century authors who contributed to the rise of national consciousness were interpreted from the point of view of the ideology of class struggle, and historical links to Baltic German literature were mostly ignored. The ties with Russian culture were foregrounded, while almost all connections to other European literature passed over in silence.

The novel by Reinis and Matīss Kaudzīte, *Mērnīeku laiki*, has been fortunate enough to escape the fate of many other literary texts, as it was never fully expelled from cultural memory. Met with some reservations by the first reviewers, it was nevertheless almost immediately recognized as an important contribution to Latvian literature. The novel enjoyed public attention and was printed in several new editions. The 1913 edition contained about 60 visual images of the main characters, drawn by

the artist Eduards Brencēns, and this contributed to the popularity of the novel (Ābele 2022: 204–205). Already in 1909, a concise essay by Roberts Klaustiņš delving into the poetics of *Mērnieku laiki* was published; its expanded version in the form of a monograph appeared in 1926 (Klaustiņš 1926).

In 1911, the novel was adapted for the stage by Pāvils Gruzna and performed at the New Riga Theatre. During the interwar period there were, among others, three productions by the modernist director Eduards Smiļģis at the Daile Theatre in 1924, 1929, and 1942. Later, this important novel was again staged in a new version in the Drama (formerly the Latvian National) Theatre in 1950. In the late 1970s, the dramatist Pauls Putniņš, coming from the same Piebalga region as the brothers Kaudzīte, created a new stage adaptation. This version became a huge success in the open-air performances of the Drama Theatre in the mid-1980s (Struka 2009, 194). In 1968, a movie was based on the plot of the novel, featuring many of the most popular Latvian actors of that time.

There were several factors that contributed to the official recognition of the novel. Firstly, *Mērnieku laiki* arguably embodied one of the first instances of realism in Latvian literature, and its reception was thus tailored according to the idea that pre-Soviet literature was already paving the way for the upcoming revolutionary transformations in society. Secondly, the authors were local schoolteachers from a modest social background, and thus were well-suited for the ideological claims of the regime. An important detail constantly emphasized in the Soviet period was that Matīss had attended a Russian-language rural school (Kiršentāle 1963: 637). He was even forgiven for writing a sequel called *Jaunie mērnieku laiki* (The New Surveyors' Times, 1924–1927) later in his life, where the events unfold during the period of the socialist takeover in 1919.

Still, some features of the reception clearly display certain trends in the literary histories that we are going to discuss now. The first edited anthology of Latvian literary criticism in 1956 includes a section on the early reviews of Kaudzītes' novel. Interestingly, not all of them were reprinted; the article by Aleksandrs Vēbers, a member of the Riga Latvian Society, was omitted. Paradoxically, Vēbers in fact provided the most balanced evaluation of the novel, especially with regard to it as an important achievement in Latvian literature. Nevertheless as a representative of the Riga Latvian Society and meanwhile also a Baltic German, he was subjected to ideological exclusion from the Soviet-time publication of 1956.

Elza Knope in her history of Latvian literary criticism, *Latviešu literatūras kritika 19. gs. otrajā pusē* (Latvian Literary Criticism in the Second Half of the 19th Century, 1962), devotes a subchapter to a brief evaluation of the importance of *Mērnieku laiki*, where she also comments on these early reviews. Knope especially stresses the close ties of

the brothers Kaudzīte with Russian realist literature (Knopé 1962: 65). The two authors' worldview is characterized as idealist and partly "reactionary" due to their religious beliefs and conservative social position (66). However, she claims that the realist method allowed them to present a truthful picture of life despite their own opinions, a possibility that had been "rightly" raised by the classics of Marxism-Leninism (65–66). This statement is made with reference to Jānis Niedre, an orthodox Soviet Latvian literary critic who in his *Latviešu literatūras vēsture* (History of Latvian Literature), published ten years earlier in 1952, used the word "aims" (*nodomi*) instead of "opinions" (*uzskati*), explicitly directing attention toward the serious limitations of Kaudzītes' approach; to a certain extent, Knopé minimizes the ideological threat potentially caused by the novel. The word *pareizi* ('rightly' or 'correctly') remains one of the most often employed words in Knopé's book, as if it provided a safe haven for her thoughts, giving them the strength of collective authority. Her topic being 19th century literary criticism, she mentions all the early reviews of the novel, including that of Vēbers, and thus takes a step toward reinstating a more reliable overall picture of the novel's importance.

An interesting case is presented by Haralds (a pseudonym of the poet Vensku Edvarts), who in his review deals with two Latvian novels published in the same year – the other text, alongside Kaudzītes' work, being *Sadzīves viļņi* (The Waves of Everyday Life) by Māteru Juris. The latter novel was constantly pushed out of the literary reception of the Soviet period as one belonging to popular literature. The early reviewer is thus, in the eyes of Knopé and many others, "right" to condemn it, while also denouncing the influence of popular German literature, especially novels by Eugenie Marlitt. However, Knopé does not accept reviewers' remarks that Māteru Juris has a good understanding of the novel genre, and states instead that the reactionary ideological stance of the author makes it virtually impossible for him to create realistic characters (Knopé 1962: 71). Knopé also criticizes the Kaudzītes for their use of some elements of popular literature that add picaresque features to *Mērnīeku laiki*. She does not specifically address the shortage of positive characters in the Kaudzītes' novel (a problem for some reviewers) and states that the satirical tradition that goes back to Nikolai Gogol is most important.

The exclusion of the critique written by Vēbers from the above anthology and the direct juxtaposition of the first two Latvian novels on aesthetic and ideological grounds clearly espouse the principle of two cultures in one national culture. Overall, the major flaw of the socialist and leftist ideology and literary criticism was that artistic phenomena were principally explained through the prism of class struggle.

One of the most contradictory cases in the writing of Latvian literary history is provided by the six-volume *Latviešu literatūras vēsture* (History of Latvian Literature, 1956–1962), supervised by Ēvalds Sokols, former head of the Press Bureau of the Propaganda Department of the Latvian Communist Party (1946–1948) and director of

the Institute of Language and Literature of the Academy of Sciences (1951–1963). Conceived as an attempt to overthrow the narrative of literary history published in the 1930s, this official Soviet history of Latvian literature divided authors according to their political sympathies. The analysis of *Mērnīeku laiki* for this publication was written by the literary scholar Ingrīda Kiršentāle. It is interesting to compare how her opinions first appear here and how they have changed in the 1970s. In this paper, we take a closer look at three publications of Kiršentāle: her articles in the *History of Latvian Literature* in 1963; in the Russian-language version of *Latvian Literary History* in 1971; and her monograph on the history of the Latvian novel in 1979.

In 1963, Kiršentāle places emphasis on the strong impact of Russian culture in the build-up of the authors' personalities, and, among other aspects, she comments on the formative role of the stagings of Nikolai Gogol's *The Inspector General* and Alexander Ostrovsky's plays in Vecpiebalga. She mentions early translations from the Russian language made by Matīss Kaudzīte (Kiršentāle 1963: 641–642); she even implants the ideologically charged context of "people of the future" in the 19th century Latvian countryside (670) and speaks about "the common sense of the masses" (676). Another detail important for her is the conscious choice of realism in the novel despite the authors' close ties to the Herrnhuter religious community (643); this means that, despite their controversial relation to religion (658), the Kaudzītes are "in the progressive camp" (659) and able to trace the ideological conflict between feudalism and capitalism. At the same time, however, Kiršentāle strongly condemns the authors' inability to provide a positive ideal. (654). Thus, she remains orthodox in comparison to the more nuanced version provided by Knope. According to Kiršentāle, Prātnieks, one of the main characters of the novel, displays typical features of the new type of capitalist who exploits other people (656). In some cases, the analysis points toward important issues mainly addressed in later criticism – for example, the aspect of theatricality in the novel (656, cf. Brooks 1995; Čakare 2011), as well as the thoughtful use of language that allows to depict individual characteristics (Kiršentāle 1963: 664). At the same time, the connection of this novel with popular literature is denounced by stating that most reviewers, contrary to the opinion of Roberts Klaustiņš in the 1920s, "rightly" consider the overall quality of this literary text to be diminished by the picaresque aspects of the novel.

The 1971 edition of the Russian-language *History of Latvian Literature* does not mention whether the contributions had been translated into Russian by someone else or prepared by the authors themselves. In any case, the overall impression is that of a considerable simplification. Kiršentāle maintains that the only books in the Kaudzītes' childhood home were religious (Kiršentāle 1971: 206), even though already in 1963 she had spoken about the collective reading of popular sentimental

stories that took place there (Kiršentāle 1963: 636). The authors of the novel thus “undertake a conscious effort to make themselves free from the ties of the religious worldview” (Kiršentāle 1971: 209). The speech of the character Pietuks, an ironically represented figure of the national awakening period, is described as merely “nonsense”; however, the philosopher Vilnis Zariņš later convincingly demonstrated that the poem recited by Pietuks on a festive occasion should rather be called “eclectic,” as it contains elements of various cultural traditions which he attempts to understand but is not fully able to grasp (Zariņš 2011: 150–151). The observations given by Kiršentāle, which fail to be conceived in terms of literary history, are close to “street language” – this refers not only to Pietuks but also to another character of the novel, Švauksts, who tries to mimic everyday habits of the Baltic Germans (Kiršentāle 1971: 215).

The background of Kiršentāle’s *Latviešu romāns* (History of the Latvian Novel, 1979) is more theoretical. There she introduces the concept of a “panorama” novel (Kiršentāle 1979: 22); invokes a comparison to Miguel de Cervantes’ *Don Quixote* (27–28); broadens the theoretical contexts; and, alongside the traditional Soviet-era references to the 19th century Russian critic Vissarion Belinsky, German theorists Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, Friedrich Schlegel, and Friedrich Spielhagen are also noted. The theoretical approaches of Mikhail Bakhtin are contextualized as well, with a special emphasis on the novel as “the art of the present” (30–31). However, she does not succeed in developing a more nuanced approach, since some of the evaluations paradoxically become even more ideologically charged. This is most clearly visible with regard to the character of the somewhat naïve peasant Ķencis. He is described as silly, superstitious, talkative, and trendy (Kiršentāle 1979: 25, cf. the more nuanced description of his activities in Kiršentāle 1963: 663). It is interesting to juxtapose these characteristics with the ones given to Ķencis by another expert of the Kaudzītes’ novel, Oto Čakars, who speaks of him as a “simple-minded” person while at the same time as being full of “initiative” and “self-confidence” (Čakars 1987: 355).

This last quote refers to the 1987 edition of *Literary History*; nevertheless, some of the main points analyzed by Čakars had already been developed in his articles, published in the late 1950s. In 1964, Čakars defended his thesis on the topic of *Mērnīeku laiki* as the first realist novel in Latvian literature. In his review of this thesis, Arturs Ozols acknowledges the quality of the research, noting the detailed analysis of language use in the novel, while typically placing the approach of Čakars in the context of Soviet literary debates (Ozols 1968). In 1968, Čakars published a monograph of the same title; contrary to literary histories printed at that time, the author is astonishingly confident in his judgements and concentrates on specific poetic details. He pays tribute to the artistic complexity of the main characters and disapproves of some of the traditional aspects of the novel’s reception, such as the criticism of



wealthy peasants. In 1980, Čakars supplied detailed commentaries to a new edition of *Mērnīeku laiki* (Čakars 1980). This publication, like many others of that period, shows the researcher delving carefully into the details of literary texts. In the portrayal of peasants in the Kaudzītes' novel, Čakars sees contradictory characters with many sympathetic features; these attentive observations are still present in the *Literary History* published in 1987.

Two years later the literary scholar and prose writer Jānis Kalniņš, in his book *Kalna Kaibēni, brāļu Kaudzīšu dzīves romāns* (Kalna Kaibēni, the Life Novel of the Brothers Kaudzīte, 1989), included the authors of *Mērnīeku laiki* into the gallery of the main contributors to Latvian literature and culture – alongside others to whom Kalniņš had already devoted some of his assiduous biographic studies. This lengthy book summarizes the intellectual efforts occurring in the Latvian scholarly community of that time, even though such efforts were often beneath the surface and despite the unfavorable conditions of the decades of Soviet rule. We should not, however, ignore the fact that Kalniņš, in his capacity as director of the Institute of Language and Literature of the Latvian Academy of Sciences in the 1970s, was also the main editor of the Russian-language *History of Latvian Literature* mentioned above. Unfortunately and highly regrettably, not on all occasions and not everyone in the generations of scholars working under the conditions of censorship found the opportunity and courage to express their true sentiments and opinions.

## **The reception of early Latvian texts in Soviet Latvia and in exile**

The ideological doctrines adopted in Soviet Latvia had a major impact on literary history writing. In the immediate aftermath of the Second World War, they prescribed an almost complete omission of the comparative approach to literary phenomena (an approach which would extend comparison beyond the ties with the Russian culture) and determined an extremely limited list of authors allowed to be included in literary history. This had severe consequences, especially because the authors of the early Latvian literature had been Baltic Germans. Accordingly, most of the texts were translations from European, mainly German, literary sources. Many 19th and 20th century Latvian writers could not be linked to proletarian or the so-called progressive literature and thus were omitted from surveys of Latvian texts (see Andersone 1949). Under the rule of communist ideology, Latvian culture initially lost almost all connections to Western European traditions and an awareness of the inner logic of aesthetic transformations in literature as an art form.

In his *Latviešu literatūra* (History of Latvian Literature), published in 1952, Jānis Niedre located the starting point of a self-aware Latvian literature in the middle of the 19th century and almost completely disregarded early written texts in Latvian. Looking at literature from the perspective of the class struggle and emphasizing Baltic Germans as oppressors, Niedre stated that “the German pastors in Latvia did not even try to understand the Latvians and their language properly, and therefore their efforts are not in any way comparable to the creative achievements of the [Latvian] people” (Niedre 1952: 3–4; here and elsewhere our translation). The first Latvian books, according to him, were extremely unsatisfactory in their use of the Latvian language (267). Earlier literary histories, according to Niedre, “shamefully make Latvian poetry, prose, drama, and criticism a disciple of the literary tradition established by the oppressors and enemies of the people” (9). The history of Latvian literature published in 1959 noted the same ideas, e.g. the Bible was regarded as “a strong weapon of ideological pressure and blind conformity” (Upītis 1959: 383).

Similar ideology prevailed in the collection *Latviešu literatūras kritika* (Latvian Literary Criticism; 1956–1964, 5 volumes), compiled and edited by the writer and literary scholar Arvīds Grigulis and his colleague Vilis Austrums (Vilis Ambainis). The inclusion and exclusion of particular authors and texts here closely followed the ideologically prescribed strategy. The edition begins with texts from the latter half of the 19th century, when “literary criticism [became] an active weapon of social struggle [...]. Baltic German pastors created literature which was hostile to the Latvians and provided primitive and cynical examples of literary criticism. These trends had a reactionary and impeding role in the development of Latvian culture” (Grigulis, Austrums 1956: 3). All publications prepared by the local Germans are strongly condemned here.

The 1960s were, however, already marked by several important discoveries that helped to broaden the contexts of Latvian literary history. A document proving the existence of the first book in Latvian printed in Germany in 1525 (instead of 1585, as was earlier believed) allowed to connect the beginnings of Latvian letters to the Reformation in Europe (Apīnis, Zemzaris 1966). In 1965 it was also proved that the first theatre performance in Latvian took place as early as 1818, half a century before the official beginnings of Latvian theatre in Riga in 1868. On this earlier occasion, Latvian peasants staged a German drama – Friedrich Schiller’s tragedy *Die Räuber* (The Robbers, 1781) (Apīnis 1965; Apīnis 1974). The first volume of the *Latviešu teātra vēsture* (History of Latvian Theatre) by Kārlis Kundziņš, published in 1968, also included a brief discussion of the history of German theatre in Latvia. The links with Western European culture were thus carefully reinstated alongside Russian influences.

Some of the main discoveries were made by the bibliographer and cultural

historian Aleksejs Apīnis. His investigations clearly demonstrated the role of an individual researcher in the evaluation of literary history. Apīnis revealed the fundamental importance of archive studies that even in the given circumstances could provide clues for the readers and thus at least implicitly counter some of the sweeping generalizations often used in the ideological rhetoric of the regime. Still working under the conditions of Soviet censorship, Apīnis managed to publish a history of book printing and distribution in Latvia, in which about two-thirds of the text was devoted to the contribution of Baltic Germans from the 16th to mid-19th century. The subchapter "The reactionary role of German pastors in the publication of Latvian books" is the lone striking example of obedience to Soviet ideology (Apīnis 1977: 167–170). The discoveries made by Apīnis were subsequently incorporated into the literary history co-authored by Oto Čakars, Arvīds Grigulis, and Milda Losberga in 1987. The impact of Baltic German literary culture was restored and early Latvian texts put in their historical contexts. This re-evaluation was even extended to an inclusion of religious texts in literary history.

There was a different situation in exile where, despite an enormous lack of sources, serious efforts were constantly put into preserving cultural memory. European libraries and archives opened new opportunities in material-gathering for the research of Latvian literary history. The rich collections of materials dating back to the 17th century, the time of so-called Swedish Livonia, in the archives and libraries of Stockholm and Uppsala stimulated interest in the history of the translation of the Bible into Latvian. The translation and publication of the Latvian Bible (1694) had been supported by the King of Sweden, and the 20th century reception of the Bible translation became an important factor in the European identity construction of Latvian exiles.

The 1970s can be singled out here. The two roots of Latvian culture – folklore and the Bible translation – were emphasized once again in the context of a productive interplay between the national tradition and European culture. In 1974, a facsimile of the first Latvian edition of the Bible was published in the United States. It was supplemented by an analysis of the personality of the first translator, German pastor Ernst Glück, as well as by a monograph on the translation of the Bible published in Minneapolis by historian Edgars Dunsdorfs (Dunsdorfs 1979). The facsimile publication of a manuscript by Glück's contemporary Jānis Reiters, discovered in the University library of Uppsala (Reiters 1975), stimulated further interest in the history of Swedish Livonia. Thus, in 1986 a book by the Latvian linguist Konstantīns Karulis, *Jānis Reiters un viņa tulkojums* (Jānis Reiters and His Translation) was published in Riga. It was the first monograph on Jānis Reiters, based on the research of Latvian historians in exile as well as on the case studies in the archives of Latvia. This book

was followed by another monograph on the Latvian Bible, *Bībeles pirmais izdevums latviešu valodā: 1685–1694* (The First Edition of the Bible in Latvian: 1685–1694), written by the same author (Karulis 1989). From the sixteen sources mentioned by Karulis, eleven had been published either in exile or in Latvia before the Second World War. Thus, since the late 1980s, the two separated discourses of literary scholarship in exile and in Latvia were gradually brought together.

The personality of Ernst Glück was the subject of study for scholars in Latvia and Germany. In 1703, Glück and his family were captured and taken to Moscow where he died two years later, already having left an important impact on the Russian educational system. Studies of Glück's documentary heritage in Russian archives began in the 1980s; Glück's manuscript of the Russian grammar was published in cooperation with German colleagues (Glück 1994). In 1998, the Russian historian Vera Kovrigina published an outstanding monograph on German schools in Moscow at the turn of the 17th and 18th centuries, devoting a whole chapter to the school established by Ernst Glück (Kovrigina 1998). Historians and literary scholars from Russia, Sweden, Latvia, and Germany, doing research on Glück and his contribution to education, linguistics, literature, and theology in the German, Russian, and Latvian-speaking world, met for the first time on his 300th anniversary in Halle in 2004. The event was followed by a joint collection of articles (Grudule, Schiller 2010). In 2005, a monograph on Ernst Glück was published in Wiesbaden; the monograph included an anthology of his letters and reports based on German, Latvian, Russian, and Swedish sources (Glück, Polanska 2005). Thus the investigations of the early period of Latvian literature strengthened the place of Baltic culture in the intricate developments of European history.

## Conclusion

In this paper we followed the setbacks that Latvian literary criticism of the Soviet era had to experience, and also discussed its gradual improvements such as a more nuanced interest in cultural history, the heightened acceptance of careful analysis of literary texts, and the gradually diminishing level of ideological rhetoric. Only during the post-Soviet era, however, it became possible to connect the interest in Latvian cultural history with the methodology of European humanities.

Since the 1990s, publications in the literary monthly *Karogs* examined new methods of literary scholarship, and books on literary theory followed. Viktors Ivbulis published translated fragments of some literary theorists from the West, supplied with his own comments and an evaluation of different approaches (Ivbulis 1998).

Several books on prose theory were written and published, among them *Prozas žanri* (Prose Genres, 1991) by Ingrida Kiršentāle, Dzidra Vārdaune, and Benita Smilkčiņa – an important contribution to the field. This work testifies to their considerable knowledge of literary history and theory, acquired during decades of scholarly activity. An important re-evaluation of Latvian literature was provided by Guntis Berelis in his monograph *Latviešu literatūra* (Latvian Literature, 1999). The international context of Latvian literature had also been strengthened by new translations into other languages. Importantly, among these translations is also a German-language version of *Mērnīeku laiki* by Valdis Bisenieks, one of the most instrumental figures in promoting the close ties between Latvian and German literature (Kaudzīte 2012).

Clearly, a discussion of the 21st century literary criticism in Latvia is beyond the scope of the present paper. We want to point to the possibilities now open to scholars in the humanities, especially important for those who themselves experienced the ideological pressures of the Soviet rule. The presence of ideology in literature has a long history. In the early years of the 20th century, the leftist literary critic Jānis Asars, writing about the German dramatist Friedrich Hebbel in the context of 19th century literature, condemned the movement of Young Germany (*Junges Deutschland*) for prioritizing the political views of authors above their artistic ability (Asars 1910: 60). Unfortunately, it was exactly this slippery path that Asars himself undertook some years later alongside some of his contemporaries. Much more dramatically, however, similar views became the basis of an official state ideology during the Soviet era, stretching over several decades of the so-called proletarian dictatorship that significantly changed the cultural scene in Latvia.

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