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Examining the Concept of Space in Soviet Lithuanian Poetry

Izpētot telpas jēdzienu padomju laika lietuviešu dzejā

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Summary The article analyzes an aspect of the conception of space – its openness or isolation. This aspect is analyzed as it appears in the works of three Lithuanian poets that belong to different generations and who were involved differently in Soviet life: Alfonsas Maldonis, Judita Vaičiūnaite, and Antanas A. Jonynas. The analyzed poetry was written when the dogmatic censorship in Soviet literature was already less strict and its protectors less vigilant. In the poems by Maldonis the isolation of a space can save lives, which corresponds to the views of a poet who has agreed to collaborate with Soviet authorities. He sympathizes with people that seek freedom, but he wishes that they safely survive in their currently hopeless situation (referring to the 1968 Prague events). Vaičiūnaitė perfectly expresses the oppressive isolation and lies of the Soviet world in her poem "*Atsisveikinimas*" (Farewell) of 1977: it is only possible to be honest and to remain faithful to oneself in a madhouse. In the poetry of Jonynas, resignation and despair stop a musical phrase; he expresses the closeness of the world with the image of a cage, a directionless railway, and a break-up in human relations. This article also refers to poems that were important for these Lithuanian poets and were written by Russian poets Osip Mandelstam and Anna Akhmatova who never attuned themselves to the totalitarian regime. It is possible to assume that the conception of space in the analyzed poems is not always related to the structure of the society in which the poets lived; however, that relation is quite essential.

Kopsavilkums Raksts analizē vienu no telpas jēdziena aspektiem – atvērtību vai izolētību/noslēgtību. Tiek pētītas šī aspekta izpausmes trīs lietuviešu dzejnieku darbos – šie dzejnieki ir Alfonss Maldonis, Judita Vaičūnaite un Antans A. Jonīns, kuri pieder trim dažādām paaudzēm un dažādā mērā bija iesaistīti padomju dzīvē. Šeit analizētā dzeja tika sarakstīta laikā, kad padomju literatūras dogmatiskā cenzūra jau bija atslābusi un tās uzturētāji bija mazāk modri. Maldoņa dzejā telpas noslēgtība spēj glābt dzīvības – kas saskan ar autora uzskatiem, kurš bija piekritis sadarboties ar padomju varas pārstāvjiem. Viņš jūt līdzi cilvēkiem, kas tiecas pēc brīvības, taču vēlas, lai tie labāk paliktu drošībā un izdzīvotu arī tālaika bezcerīgajos apstākļos (atsaucoties uz 1968. gada Prāgas notikumiem). Vaičūnaite savukārt precīzi attēlo padomju pasaules nomācošo izolētību/noslēgtību un melus savā 1977. gada dzejolī "*Atsisveikinimas*" (Atvadīšanās), kur palikt godīgam un patiesam pret sevi iespējams vienīgi trakonamā. Jonīna dzejā rezignācija un izmisums apklusina mūziku; pasaules nomācošo izolētību/noslēgtību viņš izsaka ar tādām metaforām kā būris, dzelzceļš bez virziena vai izjukušas attiecības. Šajā rakstā arī pieminēti arī daži šiem lietuviešu dzejniekiem svarīgi dzejoļi, kurus sarakstījuši Osips Mandelštams un Anna Ahmatova – krievu dzejnieki, kas nekad nepieskaņojās totalitārajam režīmam. Iespējams, ka telpas jēdziens šeit analizētajos dzejoļos ne vienmēr ir saistīts ar tās sabiedrības struktūru, kurā to autori dzīvoja, taču šī saistība ir diezgan būtiska.

Introduction

In literature, space is studied in various ways: some researchers write about a specific geographical space reflected in a text, while others focus on the aesthetics of space or do a literary mapping. I will only mention a relatively recent Ian Davidson's work, *Ideas of Space in Contemporary Poetry*, which is dedicated to the analysis of contemporary poetry from Great Britain, Ireland, the USA, and Canada and which discusses the relations between poetry, ideas of globalization, identity, language, and geography. My article focuses on one spatial feature relevant to the totalitarian society that was Soviet Lithuania – lack of openness. Similar to other captive countries, many of its inhabitants (especially artists), compared the life in the Soviet Union to living in a cramped prison with not enough air. In his last public speech in 1921, Alexander Blok had said that Alexander Pushkin was killed by lack of air rather than by the bullet of d'Anthès (Blok 1989: 387). Lack of air was later named as the reason for Blok's own death. This lack of air is especially evident in Russian literature – after all, Russia has never been democratic, except for maybe a few months after the 1991 attempted coup. In 1969 Gennadij Aigi wrote to Tomas Venclova: "I am like everyone else. It is stifling and airless here" (Aigi 1969: 1). Vladimir Voinovich, a Russian writer who disagreed with the Soviet policies, spoke of Khrushchev's Thaw as follows: "There was a thawing, a feeling I compare to a prison cell – as if someone had opened a vent and let in some fresh air. [..]. But that time was very short" (Rykovceva 2018). In her article about the "mature" Soviet time, the philologist and theologian Olga Sedakova writes that at that time more and more people searched in culture for something that "would connect [them] with the world, with history, with the most serious topics of human thought. The official populist culture with its trimmed branches and cut roots was seen as a sort of a prison" (Sedakova 2021). Different variations of this metaphor also appeared in Lithuanian poetry, because the writers (like all Lithuanian society) lived in isolation from the world and its various cultural layers.

Hans Gunther, who has studied the development of Socialist Realism, states that in 1953 a "progressive erosion of socialist realism" started, and during 1960–1970 the literary critique stopped trying to force literary developments to conform with the dogmas of Socialist Realism and instead expanded its conception to simply "socialist literature," a conception which allowed that Soviet literature also contained other directions: romanticism, satire, etc. (Gunther 2000: 283). The poetry analyzed in this article was written at a time when the dogmatism inherent to Soviet literature had lost much of its rigor and its guardians had lost their ideological vigilance.

Although the theme of space in Soviet poetry seems rather clear – a prison –, it is still interesting and broad. In this article, I will draw attention to some aspects of the isolation and openness of space in the works of a few poets. Only someone like Tomas Venclova could then afford to write openly, e.g.: "Inside the empire by the locked-up seas" (Venclova 1997: 41). He wrote the poem "As in a Photograph, Unsafe and Vast" in 1974 while still in Soviet Lithuania; however, it was only published in 1977 after he had emigrated. Those who stayed had, in the words of Venclova, to play the "game with a censor" (Venclova 1991: 418).

The poets that will receive the most attention in this article belong to different generations and have engaged with the Soviet reality differently. Alfonsas Maldonis (1929–2007), who was a close friend to Justinas Marcinkevičius and Algimantas Baltakis, held important positions for many years – a member of the Communist Party, he was the editor-in-chief of the publishing house *Vaga* (the only publisher of fiction in Lithuania at that time), and later the chairman of the Writers' Union; he also served as a deputy at the Supreme Councils of the Soviet Union and Soviet Lithuania.

Judita Vaičiūnaitė (1937–2001) made a living off her literary work (poems and translations), though she did not perform any state service and was not a communist. The youngest of the three, Antanas A. Jonynas (born in 1953), was an editor in a publishing house, and in his youth lived a bohemian life along with many of his friends.

Maldonis's first books contained many Soviet topics (war, collectivization, optimistic cities that were rebuilt after the war, Soviet atheism, etc.) and a vocabulary close to the official phraseology. However, archives contain a copy of an unpublished poem that starts with a rhetorical question: "Little poets of a little nation, what do you / Still believe after choosing this path?" and ends with another: "Without feeling space [these words are written above the crossed out "And without flying anywhere"], will you feel / That you are made for the greatest flight" (Maldonis 1960). So how did the lack of space and inability to fly away manifest in the works of different poets?

Almost all of the most essential and interesting of Maldonis's poems related to the theme of space have two dates: the poet started writing them still in the "mature" Soviet time and finished already after the Awakening. Of course, the poet's position offered him certain privileges: several times he was allowed to leave the Soviet Union, though we know that such journeys were well-supervised by the KGB. In 1968, when the Prague Spring was suppressed, Maldonis wrote several poems that were only published in 1996. Regarding our analysis of space, the most interesting of these poems is "*Pečialinda*" (Chiffchaff) (Maldonis 2009: 304). The poem's connection to the events in Prague can be guessed not only from the date of writing but through allusions: "[..] In these sad days there live / Hopes, hearts, voices and relentless heads"; "Day after day / Every time more eyes turn towards the sun." The title of

the poem refers to the common chiffchaff (*Phylloscopus collybita*), a small bird of indistinct colors that builds enclosed nests. The poem emphasizes the parallels between nature and human society. The poet wishes that people who "turn towards the sun" and over whom a great danger looms were able to cover and hide, just like the chiffchaff. The poem ends with a contradiction between suggesting to live in secret and worrying that no one will notice the death of those in hiding. Nevertheless, in this case the poet considers isolation to be positive – while there is no way to resist the state (or the occupant army, if we consider the Prague Spring), it helps to survive and gather strength. Such a view is today considered conformist.

However, the confined space in Maldonis's works is not always positive. The cycle of poems *Rugpjūčio šviesią švelnią naktį* (On a Bright August Night, 1981) is about a self-made world that will "strangle and suffocate" (Maldonis 2009: 278). The lyrical subject considers this stuffy world to be "made by oneself" rather than imposed by any external force. This is characteristic of Maldonis's overall position. He did not want to assume and did not assume the role of a Soviet-era victim, and has repeatedly declared that no matter how difficult the circumstances, he chose his own way of life. It is also interesting that that stuffy world or dwelling is described as a night "Framed by / Ceilings / And centuries-old walls" (Maldonis 2009: 277). When poets of Maldonis's generation write about centuries-old walls, they usually refer to their village homeland. The lyrical subject created my Maldonis needs to get out of the stuffy dwelling, to raise his head to the stars, and to find the river flowing at night. Sometimes the traditions you inherit from your parents or ancestors also limit you.

In the collection *Mūs baltas ratas* (Our White Circle), published in 1996, Maldonis included the poem "*Stiklo karstas*" (Glass Coffin). It is dated 1980–1992 and sums up the experience of a lifetime: "Oh surely all colors were glimmering, / While the sun of our life was shining, rising, curling on the ground, / But the spirit stiffened there, and a glass coffin / Was the sky. And all our life in it" (Maldonis 1996: 77). Here we may remember his official duties, the illusions Maldonis had for some time (during Khrushchev's Thaw and until the suppression of the Prague Spring) that the Soviet system could be improved. For all this, you got a life in a cramped glass coffin. Similarly to the poem "*Pečialinda*", there is a different, dramatic side of isolation: you have to seek reality yourself, feeling your way in the dark. In addition to the well-known literary images of "sister death" (Saint Francis of Assisi), "sister life" (Boris Pasternak), and "sister every day" (Jonas Aistis, a classic of Lithuanian literature who emigrated after World War II and also wrote a poem called "*Stiklo karstas*" (Glass Coffin)), Maldonis added another – "sister space" –, without which he was forced to live. It is meaningless to repent for such a life or to wait for punishment: "Like bread for one that died of hunger / At the end of the bed forgiveness and punishment stand."

Of course, Maldonis had read the tragic Osip Mandelstam's lines: "Living in Petersburg is the same as sleeping in a coffin" ("*V Peterburge zhit', slovno spat' v grobu*") (Mandelshtam 1990: 165). They were written in 1931, but for him – someone who was part of the Soviet fabric – life in a "coffin" constrained the soul but was externally comfortable. Another function of space that was important for Maldonis, as well as for other introverts, is worth mentioning: it helps to hide. A quotation from one autumn poem: "And the further, the bigger the space / You surround and hide yourself in" (Maldonis 2009: 181).

In the poems of Judita Vaičiūnaitė's youth, the space of the world is intuitive ("I tripped / in the white summit of dunes / and opened my mouth for the sun's kisses [..] / and I will never never forget / the heady breath of spaces far away" (Vaičiūnaitė 2017: 12)). However, for a long time the open world was only desired, known through culture, or imagined. The Soviet Union's borders opened rarely, reluctantly, and not to everyone. Most often, only a longing for faraway cities remained. "And the rare names of cities far away sound to me like living droplets in the dark"; "A wet whirlwind cools down a smoky, dusty attic" – such contrast between a dream and reality is noted in the 1965 poem "*Fontanai*" (Fountains) (Vaičiūnaitė 2017: 85). Before Paris became real, this city of artists' dreams had to be longed for: "[A] flash of the sun / in waters of the Seine, / with the smell of rain and shadows of closed blinds in the boulevards / you may never touch the pavement that you walk in dreams…" (Vaičiūnaitė 2017: 31). In Vaičiūnaitė's poetry, the ability to freely leave and return to your homeland that is characteristic of the free world is modified probably by both the history of Lithuania and the times in which the poet lived. The characters of her poems only return to Lithuania after death (Barbora Radvilaitė in the cycle *Kanonas Barborai Radvilaitei* (Canon for Barbora Radvilaitė) or the philomaths in the cycle *Vitražas Vilniaus universitetui* (Stained Glass for Vilnius University)). Since independence, the poet has said on various occasions that in a free world her works would have been different.

In 1977, Vaičiūnaitė wrote the poem "*Atsisveikinimas*" (Farewell), which was included in the collection *Šaligatvio pienės* (Sidewalk Dandelions, 1984). After deeper consideration, the fact that it was published in 1984 surprises and shows that the Soviet censors were bad readers. The whole poem reads:

> Can you hear the Old Believer nun praying
> In the white madhouse ward?
> Rose, your rose,
> Red rose is still blooming in my memory.
> All Souls' Day has long passed, but there is no snow.
> Can you hear the Old Believer nun praying,
> You, who move beyond time,
> As the railway gleams at night,

As the planes roar over grave-laden –
Northern field?
Can you still hear the dreary homeland speech?
Can you still see the children swaying to the cold autumn silence
On the muddy hills of Antakalnis (Vaičiūnaitė 2017: 150)

The poem becomes easier to understand if we remember that on January 25th of 1977, Venclova left Moscow for Washington with a short stop in Paris. Both poets were childhood friends, and both have called Vilnius "the only city" in their poems. Of course, this is only one of the poem's possible contexts, but it can also be read without association to specific fates – as a story of how a person that has seen others off to emigration perceives Soviet Vilnius. The prayer of the Old Believer nun in the madhouse from the beginning of the poem is a meaningful introduction to the poem's world. During the Soviet era, monasteries were dispersed, their buildings and property were nationalized, and the monks themselves had to dress in secular clothes, working at various jobs – though most did not renounce their vocation. Among other punishments for disobedient citizens, the Soviet authorities actively used the so-called criminal psychiatry. Many people that were inconvenient to the state were called insane, forcibly put into psychiatric hospitals, and mutilated for life with unnecessary doses of dangerous drugs. Only two lines give the poem some light (the only colorful spots in the gray fabric of the poem): "Rose, your rose, / Red rose is still blooming in my memory." Its relation with the topic of romance makes the red rose a possible reference to a love story or at least to a happy moment from the past. However, that is only one rather superficial interpretation of the "rose". Both Vaičiūnaitė and Venclova have translated the poems of Anna Akhmatova, the Russian poet; her work is important to both of them. Neither of the poets has translated her poem "*Posledniaja roza*" (Last Rose) (Ahmatova 1987: 251–252); however, the poem is important regarding the analyzed Vaičiūnaitė's poem. At the beginning of the "Last Rose", Akhmatova mentions some women that are known from cultural history and mythology: Feodosia Morozova; Salome, the step-daughter of King Herod; Dido, and Joan of Arc. Akhmatova's poem suggests that the tragic fates of these women repeat; the poem's lyrical subject tells God about her fatigue of the repeating "reviving, dying, and living" ("*ja ustala / Voskresat' I umirat', i zhit'*") cycle and asks God to take all that away and just let her feel the freshness of the last red rose. This way, the fate of the "Old Believer nun" (Feodosia Morozova was one of the most famous Russian Old Believers who has been represented in works of art – this religious community in Russia were persecuted for ages, yet retained their faith), the lyrical subject of the poem and maybe even the poet herself, is inscribed along with these strong women. Also, in a letter to Natalia Trauberg in 1985, Venclova paraphrased the previously mentioned Akhmatova's poem: "If you just knew how tired

I am of dying and reviving, and living, I don't even want any red roses – I am tired of it" (Venclova 2017: 187). It shows that just like other literary works noted in his letter, the author recalled this poem and easily adapted it to his own situation.

Other than the red rose, everything else in the poem is depressing: madhouse ward, autumn, north, cold, mud. The whiteness of the snow would bring at least some of that lacking light into the landscape and the human soul, but it seems that even nature has changed and become unjust: "All Souls' Day has long passed, but there is no snow." Only children could give some light and hope, but that is also not the case. The topic of children seems to frame the poem: It starts with the Old Believer nun (choice of childlessness), and ends with a hopeless image of children "swaying to the cold autumn silence, / on the muddy hills of Antakalnis". Antakalnis was the district of Vilnius in which the psychoneurological hospital stood during Soviet times.

The topic of children is interrelated with the topic of language, which develops in the following manner: the prayer of the Old Believer nun (prayer is spoken in a sacral language), "the dreary homeland's speech" (probably that is how the poem denotes the new Soviet language), and at the end of the poem, the silence to which the children sway. Sacral speech is only possible when you are locked in a madhouse, and children, who could be the hope of the future, remain silent in their everyday gloom. The closed madhouse space usually contains negative connotations, but in Vaičiūnaitė's poem, only here is prayer – a meaningful speech unaffected by the new language (the Soviet *novoyaz*) – still possible. Otherwise, one must move radically beyond the Soviet space – according to the poet, "beyond time". Back then, emigration from the Soviet Union reminded its citizens of death, since there was no hope of coming back and the Soviet government tried to erase every memory of those that emigrated – their names could not be mentioned, books they had published were removed from libraries. As Venclova writes in his essay *On Vilnius as a Form of Spiritual Life*, "[..] we must grow accustomed to this other life in the West. In a way, it is life after death. We meet people whom we had no hope of meeting on this earth, and we may be separated from our old friends forever. Contact with them has a sort of spiritualistic quality, and as the old landscapes grow remote, we begin to see clearly what was once only a haze" (Venclova, 1999: 19).

Ever since his youth, Antanas A. Jonynas (born in 1953) had no illusions about the political system in which he lived, but still felt inner peace. Writing about his early works, the literary critic Vytautas Kubilius noted that Jonynas "develops a poem as a musical improvisation, playing with the consonances of sounds and melodic repetitions [..], easily moving into varying the rhythms of jazz and blues, creating the magic of a continuous deep swell that melts the traces of a priori attitudes" (Kubilius 1995: 565). Still, the musicality of his poetic phrase did not manage to hide the poet's

attitude towards the world and society in which he had to live every day and to write poetry. According to the literary critic Elena Baliutytė, the poetry of Jonynas "ignored the Soviet reality, even if it was associated with it by a relation of indirect denial" (Baliutytė 2017: 8). Quotations from his first collection of poems *Metai kaip strazdas* (Year Like the Thrush, 1977) create the following view of the world: "the world becomes small" (Jonynas 1977: 9), "a year goes by like a thrush [..] knocking about in empty room" (Jonynas 1977: 10), "grey locomotives sleep on their rails" (Jonynas 1977: 10), "very little sky above land / which is only an imaginary play" (Jonynas 1977: 14). The world of his Soviet era poetry is closed: locomotives and trains stand still, even streams run nowhere, and there are many dead ends. Another poem talks about letters sent to oneself – constrained human contact. Even the last resort is restricted: "forged church windows / and there is no way to jump off the bell tower" (Jonynas 1991: 314). Soviet censors were suspicious of his poem which included the lines: "The old gloomy railway / turns west" (Jonynas 1991: 41). The censors mainly saw the word "west" as the suspicious, prohibited space of Western Europe – the Western World. Jonynas managed to defend both the word and the poem, but as we read the poem today, it seems that the censors were right – that the poet's railway turned west for a reason. This poem portrays the railway as "old, gloomy" also for a reason – it is settled, and hardly any trains use it. "West" is a space that should no longer exist. It is also possible to travel in another direction, but such a journey often reminds the poet of the dramatic 20th-century history: "[A] pregnant sister will shout and go crazy / in a car like a coffin" (Jonynas 1991: 324). Being sent into exile in train cars which otherwise transported cattle are still alive in the Lithuanian people's memories (even if the exiled are no longer around, their stories are well known by their children and grandchildren) and are well-established in cultural texts; in a poem, it is enough to give one or another detail of this phenomenon to actualize it in the readers' consciousness.

However, as the Soviet time was approaching an end, it seems that even the censors grew tired. The collection *Tiltas ir kiti* (The Bridge and the Others) that was published in 1987 included a cycle of poems *Šešios R. M. Rilkės eilutės* (Six Lines from R. M. Rilke), which contains six stories about a 'Resort' which like a "madhouse or prison of its own kind has clear allusions to the Soviet reality" (Baliutytė, 2017: 14). Moreover, Venclova in one of his essays in the collection *Vilties formos* (Forms of Hope) has emphasized that a homeland that does not guarantee a person the right to leave and return upon his or her own wish becomes a prison rather than a homeland (Venclova 1991: 24). These allusions are clear in the sixth part of the poem cycle by Jonynas: "I saw a pregnant woman. She was hardly moving along / a school's wall: what did our children learn // the youth of the world, the current generation that will

live in these conditions // in cozy pools stuffed swans are floating / and heroes are born from our villainy / and you are still surprised that betraying the father makes heroes // the art of fear is so deep in us / that we even forget that we live only once" (Jonynas 1991: 210). The language of the poem includes the clichés of Soviet propaganda ("betraying the father makes heroes"). Similarly to Vaičiūnaitė in her poem "Farewell", in one of the works written near the end (or soon after the end) of the Soviet era Jonynas directly mentions a madhouse, noting that only there thoughts are not punished (Jonynas 1991: 314).

One of the images repeated in his Soviet-time poetry is that of a cage. This image appears in the previously mentioned cycle, *Six lines from R. M. Rilke*, as a "lost key to a bird's cage". Continuing the poet's thought, it is obvious that the bird remains caged forever. The narrator of the poem "*Paukštis narvelyje*" (Bird in a Cage) is someone who sees the world through the bars of a cage.

I am locked
Among the bars of four walls
What do my walls see
They – my walls – see each other
And I have no other spaces

No watch shows my time
No mirror shows my face
But why do I get the hints
From the glances of a child

I am locked, my morning locked
And my locked evening plays
And the droplet that flows down my face
Repeats that same melody

That I knew
How I don't wish for something else
That I knew
How not wishing for something else
Is a beautiful dream
Of the locked (Jonynas 1991: 163)

The space of the poem is limited by four barred walls. Essentially, the other world might not even exist; the inhabitant of the cage does not know anything about it or himself: "What do my walls see / they – my walls – see each other / and I have no other spaces // no watch shows my time / no mirror shows my face." Only hints of a child's glances (probably he still does not know the reality of life in a cage) remain. Tears flow, repeating the simple melody of the evening. The final strophe shows that some desires persist: "[N]ot wishing for something else / is a beautiful dream / of the

locked". Such is the subtle irony of Jonynas, hidden under nice words. A different world, a different life is desired; however, that desire is so desperate and tormenting that one wishes for it to disappear. Also, this poem is an especially relevant Soviet era variation of Rilke's *Panther* (see Jasaitytė 2023 68).

One of the possible parallels for the "Bird in a Cage" by Jonynas is the poem "*Solovej spasajushchij*" (Saving Nightingale) by Elena Shvarts (1948–2010), a Russian poet who was a few years older than Jonynas and whose poems were not published during Soviet times. As Sedakova characterizes "Saving Nightingale": "The poet chose a bird – a symbol of poetry that persistently tries to break the ball of a night's darkness with its voice and to get to another space where it is possible to breathe without pain, where freedom is" (Sedakova 2021). Of course, the differences between the two poems (the resignation depicted by Jonynas and the persistent action of the nightingale described by Shvarts) are mostly due to the differences between the characters of the poets and their talents – and perhaps the fact that one of them was officially publishing and the other was not. According to Kubilius, "[t]he late books by Jonynas contain an intensifying spirit of internal fatigue and impossibility ('I learned not to scream in the darkness / where I lived for many years') that noticeably reduced the volatility of the musical stream" (Kubilius 1995: 566). This is understandable – music requires freedom.

In conclusion, I suggest that an analysis of even a single aspect of space (its openness and isolation) relays many essentials regarding poetics, but also testifies to the feelings of the poet while writing the poem, their attitude towards society and the political regime of their country at that time. In a canonical work of Lithuanian Socialist Realism, the poem "*Žmogus*" (Man, 1961) by Eduardas Mieželaitis – which won the Lenin award – the human stands "between the earth and sun", as if not feeling any the limits to his own power or the insistent restrictions proscribed by authorities. As the poems of poets from later years show, their authors felt those restrictions, and as the Socialist Realism slowly eroded they began to talk about them – the poetry created in a closed society reflected that isolation. The confined space, commonly related to living in a totalitarian country, is evaluated negatively. This is reflected by images of a coffin, cage, madhouse, or prison; by the poems' intertexts, intonations of resignation, and a prevalent despair that obstructs the poetic musicality. Of course, sometimes the general connotation of space remains relevant – small, enclosed spaces cannot be cozy, and large spaces help people hide. Still, a totalitarian regime essentially distorts one's conception of space, and the prison or madhouse sometimes remains the only place where the poet finds real life and words possible.

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