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The Relationship Between Postmodernism and Socialist Realism in the Works of Marģeris Zariņš

Postmodernisma un sociālistiskā reālisma attiecības Marģera Zariņa darbos

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Summary This article examines two works of one of the first Latvian postmodernists, Marģeris Zariņš (1910–1993): *Viltotais Fausts jeb Pārlabota un papildināta pavārgrāmata* (Counterfeit Faust or Corrected and Supplemented Cookbook, 1973) and *Trauksmainie Trīsdesmit Trīs* (The Turbulent Thirty Three, 1988). The author of the article analyzes the postmodern techniques used in these books with a purpose of criticizing and deconstructing the ideological framework of Soviet regime and the Socialist Realism art that was prevalent during that era. Three additional research questions are asked to explore this thesis. First: how is the language used to go against the Socialist Realism grain? What are its peculiarities? Second: what "decadent" and modernistic cultural references and tropes are used? How do they contradict the Socialist Realism standards? Third: what Socialist Realism tropes and archetypes are reinterpreted or confirmed? With what aim? What is their relation with more modernistic elements in the both books? In this research, the methods of close reading and comparative analysis were used. It is concluded that Socialist Realism and socialism is criticized and challenged in both of the aforementioned works: in *Counterfeit Faust* predominantly through the use of language and intertextual connections with Western modernism and postmodernism, and in *The Turbulent Thirty Three* by combining fourth-wall-breaking and surreal episodes with a harsh satire of Soviet life.

Kopsavilkums Pētījumā apskatīti romāni *Viltotais Fausts jeb Pārlabota un papildināta pavārgrāmata* (1973) un *Trauksmainie Trīsdesmit Trīs* (1988), kuru autors ir Marģeris Zariņš, viens no pirmajiem latviešu postmodernistiem. Raksta autors aplūko, kā šajās grāmatās pielietoti postmodernie paņēmieni ar mērķi kritizēt un dekonstruēt padomju režīmu un tajā laikā valdošo sociālistiskā reālisma mākslas ietvaru. Lai izpētītu šo tēzi, tiek uzdoti trīs papildus pētījuma jautājumi. Pirmkārt: kā tieši valoda tiek izmantota, lai vērstos pret sociālistiskā reālisma iedabu? Kādas ir valodas īpatnības? Otrkārt: kādas "dekadentās" un modernisma kultūras atsauces un tropi tiek izmantoti? Kā tie tiek pretnostatīti sociālistiskā reālisma standartiem? Trešais un pēdējais: kādi sociālistiskā reālisma tropi un arhetipi tiek pārinterpretēti vai apstiprināti? Ar kādu mērķi? Kāda ir to saistība ar modernisma elementiem abos romānos? Pētījumā tiek izmanotas tuvlasījuma un komparatīvisma metodes. Rakstā secināts, ka abos iepriekšminētajos darbos sociālistiskais reālisms un sociālisms tiek kritizēti un apstrīdēti. *Viltotajā Faustā* tas tiek pārsvarā panākts ar valodas lietojumu un intertekstuālu sazobi ar Rietumu modernisma un postmodernisma tradīciju, savukārt romāns *Trauksmainie Trīsdesmit Trīs* liek lietā ceturtās sienas nojaukšanu, kā arī sirreālu epizožu apvienošanu ar skarbu padomju dzīves satīru.

Introduction The word "dissident" tends to carry with it an association of self-sacrifice for a greater good: a partisan leaving his family for a lonely life in the woods or, perhaps, a cynical pamphleteer who risks his own skin every time he uses the printing press. Marģeris Zariņš (1910–1993) – the author of the novels *Viltotais Fausts jeb Pārlabota un papildināta pavārgrāmata* (Counterfeit Faust or Corrected and Supplemented Cookbook, 1973)[1] and *Trauksmainie Trīsdesmit Trīs* (The Turbulent Thirty Three, 1988) – can be seen as a living contradiction to this: a composer who, despite never joining the Communist party (Grāvītis 2005), was well-liked by the leading regime due to writing a series of pro-Soviet compositions during the 1950s, chief among which was the opera *Uz jauno krastu* (To The New Shore, 1955), for which he received a Latvian SSR award (*LPSR Nopelniem bagātais kultūras darbinieks*). Furthermore, from 1940 until 1950 Zariņš served as the musical director of the Dailes Theater in Riga ([Anon] 2023) – a role that only helped his social and political position. He was also the People's Artist of LSSR (1965), USSR People's Stage Artist (1970), and the Chairman of the LSSR Union of Composers for many years (1951–1968). Creatively, Marģeris Zariņš was an influential Latvian composer and writer who is seen as one of the pioneers of the postmodern genre in Latvia. As a composer, he was known for the great variety of his musical work which ranged from opera scores and music for the church organ to compositions for the theater and soundtracks for eighteen Latvian films ([Anon] 2023).

The characteristics of his writing were innovative idioms, uncommon linguistic style and unorthodox word choice, and the mixing of fantastical, realistic, comical and theatrical elements. His prose was also oftentimes grotesque and/or humorous, interwoven with subtle critiques of the both the Soviet regime and the human nature.

The focus of this paper are two Marģeris Zariņš's novels, namely *Counterfeit Faust* (title will thus be shortened for the sake of convenience) and *The Turbulent Thirty Three*, as case studies of how the postmodernistic tendencies of that era can be read as an ideological and literary contrast, as well as how the relationship with the occupation regime was deconstructed through the author's irony and reinterpretation

1 His most translated work, rendered in eight languages – Czech (1979), Russian (1981), Estonian (1981), Bulgarian (1983), Slovakian (1984), Polish (1985), English (1987) and Romanian (1988) (Marģeris Zariņš, literature.lv).

of cultural tropes, genres and references (for example, the archetypes of Faust and Mephistopheles in *Counterfeit Faust*), and use of language.

Socialist Realism has been rather widely researched in Latvian literary studies.[2] Likewise postmodernism in Latvian literature has also been studied in detail.[3] The works of Marģeris Zariņš have already been analyzed by the Latvian literary scholars Mārtiņš Laizāns (Laizāns 2021), Lita Silova who has dedicated both her doctoral dissertation (Silova 1998) and a monography (Silova 2004) to the research of his work, and Evija Veide in her thesis (Veide 2005).

The present research paper posits that postmodernism, as a genre and literary form, during the Brezhnev Era could function as a criticism and deconstruction of the Soviet regime and the Socialist Realism art framework that was prevalent during that era.

For this hypothesis three additional research questions will be asked. First: how is the language used to go against the Socialist Realism grain? What are its peculiarities? What is the aim of it? Second: what "decadent" and modernistic cultural references and tropes are used? How do they contradict the Socialist Realism standards? Third: what Socialist Realism tropes and archetypes are reinterpreted or confirmed? With what aim? What is their relation with more modernistic elements in the both books?

In order to successfully prove or disprove the hypothesis posed by this study, it is important to give a brief introduction to the contents of both novels and the theoretical framework of this paper. All citations are translated by the author of the article, unless indicated otherwise.

Counterfeit Faust can be seen as a retelling of Christopher Marlowe's version of *Faust*. In the book by Zariņš, the role of Mephistopheles is played by the aptly named Kristofers Mārlovs (Latvianized version of "Christopher Marlowe") – a young composer and writer (and possibly suffering from delusions about his own identity). Mārlovs visits the alchemist, pharmacist, and gourmand Jānis Vridriķis Trampedahs – the equivalent of Faust in Marģeris Zariņš's novel – who lives in a small riverside town (which is supposed to be Kuldīga, a town in Western Latvia). Mārlovs offers Trampedahs the chance to regain youth in exchange for the rights to rework and republish his verbose, yet gastronomically excellent cookbook – hence the name of

2 Some of the research where I looked for inspiration: Klotiņš 2016, Spalvēna, Kušnere 2022, Zelče 2004.

3 From Guntis Berelis's collection of essays (Berelis 2001) to the recent Zanda Gūtmane's research about the works by the Lithuanian writer Antanas Šķėma and the Latvian writer Ēvalds Vilks (Gūtmane 2022).

the novel. What follows is an exuberant and vivid, albeit short-lived adventure, in which a beautiful and alluring poetess Margarēta (Latvianized version of "Margarete") also is involved – she is the novel's equivalent of Gretchen from Goethe's play. Eventually, it also turns out that the cookbook has been reworked by Trampedahs from the text by its previous author, continuing an endless line of reinterpretations. As mentioned, equally ambiguous is Mārlovs's role – throughout the book he references the realities and details of the real Christopher Marlowe's life, while also oftentimes emphasizing his hardships and experiences as a poor traveling musician and composer in Latvia in the early 20th century. Furthermore, the means whereby Mārlovs helps Trampedahs regain his youth are pseudoscientific and cosmetic rather than supernatural, and he even contradicts himself within two subsequent pages by first describing how "he [Jānis Vridriķis] believed I was sent by a demon and would take him through all twelve circles of hell. Belief does wonders, just as the pages of a novel can endure anything a writer thinks of, from which the reader holds illusions for pure truth" (Zariņš 2015: 113). A page later, Mārlovs ironically quips to himself in response to a *maître d'hôtel's* offer of a shabby room: "This goatbeard obviously thinks I am the new master's private tutor or valet. Not suspecting I'm the Devil himself" (Zariņš 2015: 114).

Meanwhile *The Turbulent Thirty Three* was intended as a sequel (and a second part of a trilogy) to a previous book, *Kapelmeistara Kociņa kalendārs* (The Calendar of Chapelmaster Kociņš, 1982); the two books share the latter's titular character. While its predecessor, as the title suggests, was indeed structured as daily entries in a calendar or a day planner, *The Turbulent Thirty Three* follows a more convenient novel structure. It depicts the lives of artists and writers during the 33 years of Soviet occupation from 1945 until 1978. It is the story of strong personalities trying to come to terms with the new social and political realities: the political and career repercussions for not toeing the political line, and the necessary buttering-up to authority in order to advance one's career and creative ideas. It describes living in a constant balancing act between appeasing the paradigms and expectations of the political power while trying to maintain some semblance of artistic integrity; of trying to live large and enjoy a certain version of bohemia, while the constant boundaries of Soviet life can be felt all around. Yet behind the irony and satire, it is an ode to the author's belief in humanism, as well as a warning for future generations not to make the same mistakes.

As mentioned, in order to properly display both the ingenuity of Zariņš and the genre frameworks he was playing with, a short theoretical description of Socialist Realism and postmodernism is necessary. When it comes to literary movements, Socialist Realism was an officially sanctioned theory and method of literary composition prevalent in the Soviet Union from 1932 to the mid-1980s. Socialist Realism

followed the great tradition of 19th-century Russian realism in that it purported to be a faithful and objective mirror of life. It differs from the earlier realism, however, in several important respects. The primary theme of Socialist Realism was the building of socialism and a classless society. In portraying this struggle, the writer could admit imperfections but was expected to take a positive and optimistic view of socialist society and to keep in mind its larger historical relevance. Furthermore, criticism and satire of preceding religious institutions and capitalist or monarchist regimes were commonplace (Dobrenko, Balina 2011: 100, 103–104).

A requisite of Socialist Realism was a positive hero who persevered against all odds. Socialist Realism was thus looking back to Romanticism in that it encouraged a certain elevation and idealizing of heroes and events in order to mold the consciousness of the masses (Leighton 1983). Socialist Realism was required to present a highly optimistic image of life in the Soviet state (Reid 2001: 157). This, however, was greatly subverted and satirized in Marģeris Zariņš's works, as will be illustrated later. Other necessities of the genre were highly formulaic plotting (including characters overcoming all odds through willpower) and ultra-positive depiction of Soviet life and the regime. Such modernistic techniques as stream-of-consciousness or mixing of genres or literary techniques were virtually absent. In poetry, strict forms and rhyme patterns dominated. However, it is worth noting that the beginning of the 1970s also brought a variety of authors who exhibited irony and phantasmagoria (Vladimirs Kaijaks) and social criticism (Alberts Bels), or broke the fourth wall (like Regīna Ezera in her novel *Zemdegas* (Smouldering Fires, 1977). Thus, while Marģeris Zariņš can be seen as an innovator in many aspects, it would be unfair to say that he was the only one challenging the Socialist Realism paradigm at the time.

In contrast, we have postmodernism, a movement characterized by broad skepticism, relativism, a general suspicion of reason (see again the unreliable narrator Marlowe), renunciation of objective reality, and playfulness with language, since language does not refer to a reality outside itself. When it comes to literature, this is often expressed through play, fragmentation, metafiction, and intertextuality, as well as the mix between high and low cultural forms. Furthermore, postmodernism contrasts Socialist Realism and even modernist belief in order, stability, and unity metanarratives by questioning and deconstructing them, even suggesting that every interpretation of reality is an assertion of power (Bertens 2021). Thus, postmodernism sees history, politics, and culture as grand narratives of the power-wielders, which comprise falsehoods and incomplete truths. Representation, because of its attempt to fixate reality, is thus inherently totalitarian; it necessitates a new confrontation with the unpresentable (Bertens 2021).

Living in the USSR: the dance between Socialist Realism, modernism and postmodernism in the novels of Marģeris Zariņš

Certain elements in Marģeris Zariņš's *Counterfeit Faust* also locates it within the magical realism genre, which is also often grouped underneath the postmodernism umbrella due to showcasing the literateness of a given work with non-realistic metanarratives and elements, in such a way jarringly challenging and subverting the rational and logical (Stephen 2015: 4).

Thus the aforementioned novel, while set in a specific time and place (Latvia in 1930 and onwards), contains certain pseudo-magical or almost-but-not-fully magical elements (Reeds 2006) – such as, for example, the properties and effect of Mārlovs's rejuvenating serum given to Trampedahs, as well as the issue of Mārlovs's identity and his almost encyclopedic knowledge and understanding of 16th-century English life. This has the added value of juxtaposing the power structures and cultural hierarchies of the preceding Late Middle Ages and the modern era, with the end result being an implication that these social categories have remained by and large unchanged until the Soviet regime. Certain other mentions and discussions of "decadent" or modernistic cultural movements and works within the two analyzed Marģeris Zariņš's novels also tie them into the thread of cultural continuity, while juxtaposing the aims of Socialist Realism and the limits of its expression.

For example, one of the subtler examples of an allusion to non-conformist art takes place at the beginning of *Counterfeit Faust* where, amongst various paintings that decorate Jānis Vridriķis Trampedahs's abode to stimulate and inspire his appetite, there are also cubist works depicting guitars and flasks, as well as expressionist paintings that express, to quote, "only hangovers" (Zariņš 2015: 30). The aforementioned postmodern playfulness is also conveyed throughout the rest of the novel, including the cookbook's recipes that include such colorful passages as "the partridge pâté in cheese should only be served in seashells, gathered in the Balearic islands shortly before a typhoon" (ibid.: 27). Again, while seemingly innocuous, such passages inherently go against the accepted Socialist Realism grain of the narrative and style that serves predominantly to depict (and glorify) Soviet life.

However, the passages that subvert Socialist Realism and life in general in the Soviet Union the most are sprinkled throughout the book in a seemingly innocuous manner, such as a discussion between Mārlovs and Trampedahs about contemporary literature (or, to be more precise, the literature of their time), where the latter defends more classical works in the style of Shakespeare while criticizing modern writers for "getting bogged down in phantasmagoria and symbols upon symbols [..] with not a single realistic character [..]. For them the most important

thing – subtext, annoying subtext; thinking that rulers would not understand them and that they would be able to feel so proud and brave, brandishing their fists – which were hidden in their trouser pockets" (Zariņš 2015: 43). He is countered by Mārlovs, who defends modern expressionism and futurism by saying that its essence is "not to reflect life, this deceiving farce, but the elusive movements and feeling streams of the soul". He further explains that this is the era of "chopped-up souls, and writers nowadays collect these shards and create mosaics" (Zariņš 2015: 44). Mārlovs argues that this will eventually give place to some glorious "neorealism", which will again be followed by "phantasmagorias", but that this should not be seen "as an order of things", but rather a "play of contrasts [..]. Light-darkness, black-white, just not grey, then there's nothing to breathe" (Zariņš 2015: 45).

A similar, yet much more tongue-in-cheek and subtle satire of communistic culture can be read, for example, in the off-hand mention of Mārlovs's best friend's father's sawmill being nationalized (Zariņš 2015: 101) or the audience at a classical music concert requesting the orchestra to perform *Katyusha* (Zariņš 2015: 112), despite the classical compositions that preceded it in the performance.

But, besides all the previous examples, perhaps the most biting jeer at Soviet pathos and hero worship comes at the end of the novel in the image of young, cheerful, masculine, simple Soviet soldiers feeding Mārlovs with kharcho soup that has been cooked atop a camp-fire: a homely, simplistic, and ignorant contrast to the preceding events of betrayal, drama, and death; an almost atavistic carelessness and joyful roughness opposite all the extravagant, intellectually saturated winding narratives that preceded it.

While the relationship between an artist and the leading political power is one of the central motives throughout most of Marģeris Zariņš's work, it is still a considerable wonder how this novel got published in the respective time period and political system. An obvious explanation is his aforementioned cultural status and the fact that he had paid the necessary "tribute" to the Soviet regime years prior with certain compositions that allowed him certain liberties in his work. The aforementioned tributes and his work as a composer led Zariņš to receive The State Stalin Prize (1951), The Order of Lenin (1956), and the People's Artist of the USSR award (1970), among others ([Anon] 2023).

However, the overall literary climate of the time should not be overlooked: the 1960s and 1970s in Latvia were a period when the literary scene received an influx of an entire generation of writers who, while not outright challenging the Socialist Realism paradigm, instead rather followed the criterion of literary quality and its natural development: Regīna Ezera, Vizma Belševica, Imants Ziedonis and Ojārs Vācietis were a few of these new authors (Veide 2005: 26). It is also possible that the

Soviet regime believed that Marģeris Zariņš's work was so peculiar as to never truly break away from the limits of marginalism, and that any reader who came upon it would be limited by a lack of understanding of the subtexts and irony that three decades of censorship had achieved (ibid.: 27). Thus, the true satirical and mocking nature of the work would go unnoticed by the general Soviet reader of the time (and, quite possibly, by the average censor of the time as well). Another possibility is that censorship left untouched many of the novel's modernistic elements, including the language (more on that later) due to a number of positive pro-Soviet characters in the novel – Somersetu Jānis or the partisan Vasily –, as well as a few symbolizing the hated bourgeoisie – Frošs and Bandera.

Whatever the case may be, in the novel *The Turbulent Thirty Three*, despite its stylistically being a much more "mundane" work that fits more easily within the Socialist Realism framework, the satire and display of the regime, artistic sycophantism, and the political and cultural double standards and absurdities of the time are much more biting and direct than in *Counterfeit Faust*. This was only amplified by the lack of characters that would align with the Socialist Realism criteria for a positive protagonist.

Similarly to *Counterfeit Faust*, the novel *The Turbulent Thirty Three* has a very illustrative satirical episode at its beginning. In what the author calls an "areophagia" – a ceremonious ritual where wise advice is intermixed with foolishness and demagogy – a theatrical performance, staged by Līna Taube, is being evaluated by a committee. The head of the establishment where the play is set, Konstantīns Šponbergs, criticizes the performance, firstly, for having its main characters illuminated during what is intended to be an air-raid scene. Therefore, he insists that the scene proceed in darkness ("What is more important for you: dialogue or the lives of two Soviet citizens?" he quips). The second criticism is aimed towards a part of the scenery – a gunboat with a searchlight and a pennant placed in reverse from the front to the back (Zariņš 1988: 54–57). This criticism, while utterly absurd from a dramaturgical perspective, showcases the concerns of an official of the state ideology who was willing to ignore the enjoyment of the audience and basic logic for the fulfillment of party positions.

Despite *The Turbulent Thirty Three* being overall considerably less stylistically "extravagant" than *Counterfeit Faust*, it does include episodes where the satirical and surreal are interwoven for both dramatic and humorous effect. Thus, an illustrative episode where the (arguably) main character Kaspars Kociņš goes to the Orgburo to become a full-fledged member of the composer association but gets reprimanded for his work "lacking current [Soviet] themes and actuality", and where he also becomes acquainted with the realities of commissioned work and its different fees

(Zariņš 1988: 133), is followed by a surreal episode with the Director of Domestic Services, Saruhanov. In a scene that is somewhat reminiscent of Charles Dickens's *A Christmas Carol*, the Director – who, half-asleep, ponders about the pianos he stole from houses during the war and is selling back to their owners, and other self-serving deeds ("That lodge in the dunes I built myself with the state's saved-up renovation money") – is visited by a white-dressed and fiery female "spirit of satire" who threatens to destroy Saruhanov and "people like him with satire, nail them to a pillory", to which the accused responds by threatening to denounce the spirit "for haunting the premises and for mythical propaganda" (Zariņš 1988: 136–139).

Similarly, Zariņš breaks the fourth wall between the novel and its reader by inserting himself into an episode where Kaspars Kociņš and his acquaintances visit Moscow (Zariņš 1988: 154). By presenting himself as the author and by drawing attention towards the – by definition – fictional nature of the novel, he breaks one of the accepted standards of Socialist Realism: to depict the everyday USSR reality as directly and literally as possible. Simultaneously, Marģeris Zariņš also showcases the novel's closer alignment with the postmodernistic viewpoint that objective reality does not exist and that any and all depictions are subject to skepticism, relativism, and subjective interpretation.

It is also important to note that it is not only the creative and artistic scene that Marģeris Zariņš unsparingly and bluntly caricatures and criticizes: throughout the whole work are sprinkled various scathing depictions of, for example, the Soviet drinking problem (a gigantic vodka store in Moscow, attended by millions (Zariņš 1988: 144)) or the culture of denunciation, mistrust, and lies that permeated most of Soviet culture (due to which the father of Kaspars Kociņš, an ardent communist himself, was falsely accused as being an agent of the bourgeoise Latvian government and shot (Zariņš 1988: 377)). One explanation for such boldness from Marģeris Zariņš, again offered by Evija Veide, is that only as a writer did Marģeris Zariņš see himself – self-admittedly – as an artist who was not compromising his conscience (Veide 2005: 36).

Thus, it is only consequential that throughout *The Turbulent Thirty Three*, the Russian and Soviet poet Vladimir Mayakovsky is mentioned and discussed as an artistic and poetic ideal, and his work is used as a source of inspiration by Kaspars Kociņš. Mayakovsky serves as a two-fold symbol: firstly, as a personification of an artist trying to function within the stifling artistic limits of the Soviet regime even if, in Mayakovsky's case, ideologically he was to some degree a supporter of Lenin and Bolshevism (in other words, of trying to manage the tightrope act of being acceptable to the communist ideology without completely sacrificing artistic integrity). Consequentially, the second meaning of Mayakovsky as a symbol in *The Turbulent Thirty*

Three can be seen in the way his work after his death was constantly utilized and abused in the Soviet Union: partly censored, partly shredded, with lines taken out of context, such as the almost hymn-like "Lenin lived, Lenin lives, Lenin shall live forever!" from the 1924 poem *Vladimir Ilyich Lenin*. This poem was partly reinterpreted and redone to downplay Mayakovsky's rebellious nature and to emphasize him as a symbol of communism. Thus, the late Stalin era saw an "edited version" of Mayakovsky being used as a state icon to create superficial links with the state's past (Sundaram 2000: 144–145), while during the time when Zariņš wrote his novel (that is, during the late Stagnation period of the 1970s), Mayakovsky (amongst others, including Kazimir Malevich) experienced a sort of revival. There was a surge of films dedicated to him and his work (such as *Majakovskij smeetsja* (Mayakovsky Laughs, directed by Sergei Yutkevich, 1976), and his writings were exported abroad – albeit his more avant-garde aspects were still-downplayed, if not outright ignored (Sundaram 2000: 254–260). Therefore, the role of Mayakovsky in Marģeris Zariņš's novel, just like that of its artistic protagonists, including Kaspars Kociņš and the playwright Gvido Galejs, is essentially a tragic one: his persona and work are doomed to be subject to the regime's ever-changing and oftentimes hypocritical and contradictory whims, censorship, and exploitation until the end of the regime itself. In other words, personal initiative and idealism almost always ends up subservient or deformed by the regime's respective needs and also the demands of the specific time period.

Therefore, it is both inspiring and inspired how Marģeris Zariņš uses language as a way to challenge and test the literary frame of Socialist Realism. During the so-called era of Stagnation (1966–1985), which partly overlapped with Brezhnev's rule, the Central Committee of the Communist Party issued an order (on January 7th, 1969) that the editor of a given work would bear more responsibility than before for its ideological content. Thus, during that time the ideological battle between the censor and the author that was going on the subtext of a book was magnified (Briedis 2010: 154–155).

"Language is the dress of thought": linguistic peculiarities of Marģeris Zariņš's writing and its relationship with censorship

This, of course, led to some authors employing the so-called Aesopian language as a means to circumvent Soviet censorship. As Russian literary critic Lew Loseff has defined its characteristics, the underlying structure of any Aesopian text consists of the following two basic elements: "screens" which are designed to conceal the real message

from the censorship, and "markers" which signal to initiated readers about the presence of a hidden message in the text. Therefore, one of the purposes of "Aesopian writing" and "Aesopian reading" is to perform a sort of ritual that celebrates the deception of authority (Loseff 1981). Therefore, it is only axiomatic that the author of the literary work does not create the Aesopian meaning alone, nor do the textual structures which we can interpret as only one of the conditions for creating this meaning. Instead, it happens through a conspiracy between the sender (writer) and the addressee (reader) against the censor, who also becomes an indirect co-author of this meaning (Satkauskytė 2019: 22).

Subsequently, throughout the Soviet regime editors and censors worked to eliminate overly noticeable individual stylistics: nonce words almost always were exchanged for literary ones, archaisms were practically allowed in the speech of individual literary characters only. Furthermore, various literary designators were oftentimes made more generic or specific, i.e., "a baron" was sometimes changed to "the masters, the overlords" in plural, or the "the people" to the "the working people". The same applied to various social and political concepts – for example, in an anthology of Ernests Birznieks-Upītis's works such phrase as "Old Russia" was replaced by "Capitalist Russia" and the term "democracy" was exchanged for "working people" – semantically a much narrower term, but considerably more agreeable for the regime (Briedis 2010: 61–64). Moreover, the onset of communism in Latvia replaced the until-then relatively neutral term *žīds* (Jew) with the word *ebrejs* (Hebrew), deeming the former a slur, especially after its use by the Nazi occupation regime (Briedis 2010: 65).

Therefore, it is especially surprising and even baffling to what grade Marģeris Zariņš was able to extend his language experiments within the novels analyzed here. *Counterfeit Faust* especially showcases the following examples of language elements that were, indeed, not only unorthodox for that time, but stand out to this day. There is a plethora of various dialect words: for example, *ģiltenis* (skeleton; Zariņš 2015: 104); *rastaga* (hardship; ibid.: 98); *tvāpt* (to be sleepy; ibid.: 130); *abuks* (fool; ibid.: 2002). Nonce words i.e. words coined by the author include: *sadubis* (slumped; ibid.: 97); *comblāt* (to skin; ibid.: 169); *īgrs* (grumpy; ibid.: 97). Archaisms such as *spānīzeri* (Spanish people; ibid.: 104), and barbarisms and calques are also used, e.g. *tāfelmūzika* (from German *Tafelmusik* – music played at feasts and banquets). *The Turbulent Thirty Three* has comparatively less instances of unusual linguistic choices, albeit still containing some uncommon wordings, such as the conjunction *aizto* (therefore). The latter, however, is utilized so often in both books that can be seen more as a stylistic peculiarity of Marģeris Zariņš than a deliberately meaningful word choice.

Zariņš has frequently admitted that among the sources of inspiration for his literary gastrosymphony, both linguistically and in the use of gastronomy as a

narrative vehicle, were old dictionaries – *Latviešu valodas vārdnīca* (Dictionary of the Latvian Language) by Kārlis Mīlenbahs (which, ironically enough, was complemented later by Jānis Endzelīns and Edīte Hauzenberga-Šturma), Jacob Lange's *Vollständiges Deutsch-Lettisches und Lettisch-Deutsches Lexikon* (The Complete German-Latvian and Latvian-German Lexicon, 1777) and Georg Mancelius's *Lettus, das ist Wortbuch sampt angehengtem täglichem Gebrauch der Lettischen Sprache* (Lettus (Latvian), or a Dictionary Including an Attached [Guide of] Daily Usage of the Latvian Language, 1638), as well as sources of Livonian and Prussian languages (Silova 2004: 31), along with old cookbooks in the early Latvian written language, such as Christoph Harder's *Ta pirma Pawaru Grahmata no Wahzes Grahmatahm pahr-tulkota* (The First [Latvian] Cookbook, Translated from German Books, 1795). To the lattermost book Zariņš owes the gastrolinguistic style of his book. In many parts of *Counterfeit Faust*, he recreates how a Baltic German from the 18th or 19th century would have written in Latvian to the best of his knowledge – Zariņš himself being Latvian, he adopts the style in which Baltic Germans wrote in Latvian not for the purpose of comicality or derision, which would usually be the case, but as a means of defamiliarizing the Latvian language (Laizāns 2021: 128).

Conclusion Overall, this overabundance of "unofficial" literary devices and words has been presented as a game by Marģeris Zariņš. However, his use of language could also be seen as a means of resistance against the stiff "literary language" of that time and also as a self-referential, tastefully irrelevant, and astoundingly erudite dialogue between Western and Latvian cultures and literary traditions: a dialogue to which the socialist literature framework is all but a silent onlooker with barely an occasional note of acknowledgement.

One may conclude that even though *Counterfeit Faust* contains a considerably more indirect satire of Soviet life and Socialist Realism than *The Turbulent Thirty Three*, it is the language and style used in the novel that carry the heaviest critical weight. Through their richness and variety, they reaffirm the power of an uninhibited Latvian literary language. It also places the novel within the realm of pre-war Latvian literary tradition and also the wider Western literary tradition, while essentially completely ignoring the preceding – and even the contemporary – Soviet literary frame. This irreverence for Socialist Realism, further emphasized by the mention of various modernistic artworks and techniques, as well as the use of such postmodernistic techniques as an unreliable narrator and intertextuality, essentially draws attention to both the limitations of the Socialist Realism movement and also to the illegitimacy

of Socialist Realism narratives themselves (if the protagonists and themes of this book are ambiguous, could the same not be supposed about many other books of that time?).

The Turbulent Thirty Three, on the other hand, is considerably more straightforward in its depiction of the absurdity of Soviet life and its art scene, not relying so much on language for these purposes. The postmodern elements or magic realism-esque elements – such as the author inserting himself in the text or the employment of supernatural characters – serve to emphasize the sheer absurdity of the Soviet system and lifestyle, as well as the limitations encountered when attempting to illustrate it within the Socialist Realism method. By mixing the more straightforward and mundane narrative of Socialist Realism with occasional surreal elements and episodes, as well as by depicting the bacchanalia of the art scene as occurring parallelly to the characters' veiled public life and their attempts to ingratiate within the regime, and also by using Mayakovsky simultaneously as an example and reference point for many of the characters, Marģeris Zariņš showcases the inherent absurdity, hypocrisy, and superficiality of the regime and its flimsy demands from art. Through these stylistic and thematic methods, Marģeris Zariņš demonstrates the following: when Socialist Realism meets Western modernism, especially within a single work of art, Socialist Realism and socialism almost always get outplayed, because their essential thematic, social, and aesthetic ideals are shallow and hypocritical by nature.

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