



VILNIUS
LITERATŪROS
MIESTAS



LIETUVOS LYGINAMOSIOS
LITERATŪROS ASOCIACIJA
LITHUANIAN COMPARATIVE
LITERATURE ASSOCIATION

INTERNATIONAL SCIENTIFIC CONFERENCE

ROOT CAUSE: COMPARATIVE STUDIES IN LITERATURE AND TRANSLATION

14 NOVEMBER 2024

Vilnius UNESCO City of Literature, Šv. Jono g. 11–16

ABSTRACTS

Eva Velsker and Mart Velsker

Uppsala University, University of Tartu

Soil and Exile in Kalju Lepik's Poetry

Kalju Lepik (1920–1999) was one of the most important Estonian exile poets, whose debut collection was published in 1946 in Stockholm, and the last book he compiled himself was published in 1997 in Tartu. Residing in Sweden, Lepik actively participated in the Estonian diaspora's cultural and political life, and worked, among other roles, as the director of the Baltic Archive.

Estonian poet Hando Runnel has claimed that "[...] soil has risen to become the dominant of dominants in his poetry." (Runnel 2002: 5). This presentation aims to delve deeper into the meaning of this statement and analyze how Lepik's soil-related imagery intersects with themes of exile. Does this imagery capture a specific feeling of exile? Does the soil contain roots, and how does life within the soil carry meaning in general? What emerges from this soil? What role does the rest of nature play alongside the soil, and how do these nature-based images interact? For instance, in Estonian exile literature, the sea often represents separation from the homeland. Does soil also meet the sea in Lepik's work? These are the questions we plan to address in our presentation.

References

Runnel, Hando 2002. Mulla mütoloogia Kalju Lepiku luules. – Kalju Lepik, Valguse riie ei vanu. Kogutud luuletused 1938–1999. Tartu: Ilmamaa, 5–7.

Eva Velsker (b. 1969) graduated from the University of Tartu with a degree in Estonian language and defended her doctoral dissertation in Tartu in 2018. She has worked at the Universities of Tartu, Helsinki, and Vilnius, and is currently Senior Lecturer at Uppsala University. Among other topics, she has researched Estonian dialects and multilingualism in Estonian literature. Eva Velsker has also been active as a translator for a long time, especially translating from Danish into Estonian, but she has also done translation from English and Finnish.

Mart Velsker (b. 1966) graduated from the University of Tartu with a degree in Estonian literature and defended his doctoral dissertation in Tartu in 2014. He has worked at the University of Helsinki and is currently Associate Professor at the University of Tartu. Mart Velsker has particularly studied Estonian poetry and South Estonian literature, and together with Eva Velsker, he has also researched multilingualism in literature. His works on poetry are collected in the book *Luulejutud (Poetry Tales, 2022)*.

Ene-Reet Soovik

Department of Semiotics, University of Tartu, Editor of the journal Sign Systems Studies

Reading the river: Tartu and the Emajõgi River in Estonian literature

The vicinity of water has been a crucial factor in the emergence of human settlements, and place-related practices connected with bodies of water have been marking the traditions of particular local communities. Tartu, Estonia's second and oldest city, is situated almost exactly

mid-course of the Emajõgi, the Estonian river that can boast of the most substantial literary reputation of all rivers nation-wide. Over time, the local river-city interface in Tartu has developed a literary aura of its own. Such riverine literary representations range from a mythologised ideal *Ur*-river of the 19th-century era of the National Awakening to a contemporary conception of the river as a natural environment that nevertheless functions as an integral component of the lived urban space. In such works, the river's presence erodes the supposed duality of nature and culture, representing these as seeping into each other and inexorably intertwined. The talk will look at the literary presence of the Emajõgi in Estonian literature with a particular focus on the oeuvre of the poet and author Jaan Kaplinski (1941–2021) whose semi-autobiographical novel bears the title *The Same River* (Est. *Seesama jõgi*, 2007; Lith. *Ta pati upė*, 2018).

Ene-Reet Soovik is the editor of the international semiotics journal *Sign Systems Studies* published at the University of Tartu, Estonia. She is involved in the Environmental Humanities workgroup based at the University's Department of Semiotics, which has its main research foci in endangerment and extinction studies and more-than-human dimensions of urban environments. Her current research interests focus on spatiality and representations of urban and non-urban landscapes (e.g. forests and wetlands) in literature, particularly contemporary poetry, as well as the interface of ecocriticism and literary urban studies. She is an active member of the Karl Ristikivi Society and the Jaan Kaplinski Society.

Jan-Marek Šík

Masaryk University, PhD student

Translation as transplanting: Viivi Luik's and Vladimír Macura's *Seitsmes rahukevad*

In my presentation, I will discuss the Czech translation of Viivi Luik's novel *Seitsmes rahukevad*. The translation was made in the late 1980s by the renowned Czech literary scholar, poet, novelist and translator Vladimír Macura (1945-1999), a key figure in Estonian-Czech(oslovak) cultural relations in the 1970s, 80s and 90s. First, I will show how the turbulent period of the Velvet Revolution in 1989, the ideological reorientation of Czechoslovakia from East to West, and the newly established economic environment influenced the publication process of the Czech translation of the novel (resulting in the work ending up in Macura's personal archive), and how the changed intellectual and economic climate made the soil from which Estonian literature grew in Czechoslovakia much less fertile. Secondly, I will show a variety of Macura's translation strategies aimed at transplanting the original narrative closer to the experience of Czechoslovak readers, probably in order to strengthen their sympathy for the fate of their Estonian comrades.

Jan-Marek Šík is currently a PhD student and works at the Department of Linguistics and Baltic Studies of Masaryk University. His specialization is Finnish and Estonian literatures.

Daina Valentinavičienė

Vilnius University

Religious Censorship in Translations in Soviet Lithuania: Text Manipulation in the Translation of Henry Longfellow's "The Song of Hiawatha"

The report will deal with the manifestations of religious censorship in translations of fiction in Soviet Lithuania. The phenomenon is examined in the context of the Soviet Union's policy concerning the Catholic Church and religion. Tactics of preventive censorship (excluding an author or a work from publishing) will be overviewed from 1945 to 1990, focusing mostly on English-language authors. A translation from the post-war decade will illustrate manipulative censorship (involving ideologically-driven changes made to the translated text): "The Song of Hiawatha" by the American poet Henry Longfellow, translated in 1947 by Aleksys Churginas and Karolis Račkauskas-Vairas (published by VAGA, the State Publishing House for Fiction). Taking into account that the translation policy in Soviet Lithuania was directly dependent on the overall cultural policy and ideological goals of the USSR, in order to find out whether there were any differences in this field between the centre of the state and its western periphery (i.e. one of the occupied Baltic republics), the Lithuanian translation is compared not only with the original, but with the Russian translations as well; the analysis also includes the comparison of the paratexts by literary critics that accompanied the said translations in the Lithuanian and the Russian editions. The subsequent reprint of the Lithuanian translation is also considered.

Daina Valentinavičienė is a professional translator and a member of the Lithuanian Association of Literary Translators. She teaches translation theory and practice at the Translation Studies Department of Vilnius University; she is also a researcher involved in a project focused on the censorship of Soviet-era translations in Lithuania, the project being conducted by the same Translation Studies Department.

Johanna Roos

Institute of Cultural Research, University of Tartu

Ecopoetics or "senses as the shapers of (poetic) reality". Illustrated by Madis Kõiv's works.*

The study of human-environment relationships in Estonian literary research is a relatively recent development, having gained interest only in the past few decades. Over this period, various theories and concepts have emerged to elucidate these relationships, with ecocriticism or literary ecology becoming particularly prominent.

I argue that while ecocriticism is a valuable theoretical framework, it often confines the understanding of the environment to a pastoral nature. There is a need for a concept that allows for a broader interpretation of the environment, encompassing both natural and cultural elements. Ecopoetics provides such framework by focusing on how texts create and represent environmental spaces rather than merely depicting them realistically.

With the help of Madis Kõiv's works, I demonstrate how ecopoetics can reveal the complex relationships between humans and their environments in texts that do not have explicit ecocritical intentions. Kõiv's texts are characterized by a deep sensitivity to the environment,

exploring how human perception, memory, and experience shape environmental understanding.

The research seeks to answer three primary questions: the relationship between ecopoetic and ecocritical discourse, how human-environment relationships manifest in texts, and how texts create environmental senses. The theoretical framework provided by ecopoetics allows for a broader understanding of these relationships, emphasizing the poetic and phenomenological creation of environments in texts. This approach not only enhances the scope of literary analysis but also opens new avenues for exploring texts that depict hybrid environments where natural and artificial elements coexist.

* Original title of the thesis: Ökopoeetika Madis Kõivu „Akna” ja „Tagasitulek isa juurde” näitel (Ecopoetics as Illustrated by Madis Kõiv's 'Aken' ('Window') and 'Tagasitulek isa juurde' ('Return to the Father'))

Johanna Roos is a master's student in Estonian literature at the Institute of Cultural Research of University of Tartu. She graduated in the spring of 2024 with a bachelor's thesis which focused on the discourse of francophone ecopoetics. Her current research explores how the senses shape the perception of fictional reality in literary texts and how various environments and spaces are represented in poetics, primarily through the lens of affect theory."

Kateřina Běláková

Masaryk University, PhD student

The phenomenon of the Lithuanian personal essay: A brief glimpse into a specific genre of its own

There is no essay like a Lithuanian personal essay. Somewhat surprisingly, in the course of my research I found that what is referred to as an essay in the Czech cultural niche does not correspond to what the Lithuanian public understands by this term. The collections of texts were quite different, even though both of them were referred to by the term 'essay'.

I will use the texts of Sigitas Parulskis (b. 1965, Lithuania) and Jáchym Topol (b. 1962, Czechia) to demonstrate the differences between the Czech and Lithuanian understandings of the essay, but also the unexpected similarities. I will primarily focus on Parulskis' collection of essays *Nuogi drabužiai* (*The Naked Clothes*, 2002) and the book *Chtíč po svobodě* (*Lust for Freedom*, 2014), which was co-authored by Topol. Some of Topol's texts in this book go beyond the standard Czech understanding of an essay, surprisingly resembling the Lithuanian personal essay (*asmeniška esė*) in some respects – although they come from another country and the term itself is not systematically recognised in Czech literary theory.

In this conference entry, I will highlight the main differences between Lithuanian and Czech essays with special consideration for the narrator, which seems to be the defining factor. We will also look at how Jáchym Topol (sometimes) deviates from the Czech standard and how his texts resemble prominent Lithuanian essayists, for example Sigitas Parulskis.

Kateřina Běláková is a second year PhD student in Narratology at the Masaryk University in Brno (Czechia), where she graduated in 2022 with a Master's degree in Baltic Studies. Her current

research focuses on the Lithuanian personal essay (*asmeniška esė*) and aims to define the genre specifics of this unique type of text. This is her first conference participation.

Markas Aurelijus Piesinas

Institute of Lithuanian Literature and Folklore, PhD student

A Comparative View of Two Works by Ričardas Gavelis: *Vilnius Poker* and “Handless”

This presentation will offer a comparative analysis of two works of prose by Lithuanian novelist Ričardas Gavelis: his short story “Handless” (Lith. *Berankis*, 1987) and the famous novel *Vilnius Poker* (*Vilniaus pokeris*, 1989). The two texts will be compared in terms of the image of their protagonists, the environment these narratives are set in, and certain themes associated with the postcolonial nature of both works. This analysis will support the argument that the short story and the novel are closely linked; that there is a certain bond of continuity between the works, meaning that subjects explored by the novelist both in “Handless” and *Vilnius Poker* are “in the same soil,” and indeed sprout from the same roots, or seeds, of literary imagination.

Markas Aurelijus Piesinas was born in Vilnius, Lithuania. He graduated from Vilnius University with an MA in Classics in 2022 and is currently pursuing a PhD at the Institute of Lithuanian Literature and Folklore on postcolonial literature and translation. He also works as a translator and editor.