

Grand Postcommunist Narratives? A Postcolonial Perspective on Latvian Historical Fiction

Benedikts Kalnačs

Institute of Literature, Folklore and Art, University of Latvia, Mūkusalas iela 3, Rīga, LV-1423 Latvia
benedikts.kalnacs@lulfmi.lv

The article provides an insight into contemporary Latvian historical fiction. It focuses on a new series of historical novels, which aims at the interpretation of crucial transformations in the life of society during the 20th century. The first three novels in the series are discussed through a synchronic as well as a diachronic perspective. The introductory part of the article deals with recent general transformations in the literary scene in Latvia and with changes in the interpretation of history during the period of postcommunist transition in particular. A retrospective of the history of Latvian literature helps to explain the relevance of historical topics in the process of nation building. The novels under discussion are interpreted from the point of view of their literary genre and their use of time and space as constitutive factors in the creation of a literary text.

Keywords: literature and history / Latvian literature / literary genres / historical novel / time and space / postcommunism / nation building / Zebriņš, Osvalds / Bankovskis, Pauls / Bērziņš, Māris

Introduction

The period of the postcommunist transformation in Latvia at the turn of the 21st century has left a substantial impact on the development of Latvian literature. After the initial rise of application of postmodernism in literary theory and practice especially during the 1990s, a gradual return of interest to social and political issues, and, among other themes, to the interpretation of history has been noticeable over recent years. One example of this recent trend is the series of historical novels under the title “We. Latvia, the 20th Century” (“Mēs. Latvija, XX gadsimts”). Publications in the series started in 2014 with the aim of initiating a discussion of the crucial transformations in the history as well as the mentality of Latvian people during the last hundred years. These works also have a close relationship with other texts, which have determined the development of

Latvian letters; therefore, in this paper I focus on both the textual and contextual aspects of the contemporary historical novel viewed through a synchronic as well as a diachronic perspective.

From the textual point of view, I will focus on three recently published historical novels, *In the Shadow of Rooster Hill* (*Gaiļu kalna ēnā*, 2014) by Osvalds Zebris, *18* (2014) by Pauls Bankovskis, and *The Taste of Lead* (*Svīna garša*, 2015) by Māris Bērziņš. Attention will be paid, first, to the changes in the construction of the narrative in these texts. I observe how the stable linear flow of historical novels gradually yields to fragmentation, and the perspective of the narrator is narrowed. I also discuss how the choice of plot interacts with changes in the narrative. Instead of portraying grand historical figures and events, these works of contemporary fiction are more focused on the depiction of the everyday, and historical situations are represented as seen through the perspective of ordinary people in daily circumstances. Specific characteristics of time and place are also dealt with.

This perspective is complemented by the discussion of contextual aspects, which have determined the development of Latvian fiction. In this respect, in the first part of the paper I will pay attention to the position of the historical novel in the genre hierarchy. The history of Latvian literature does not provide sufficient background for foregrounding the genre of the novel. Not only did it appear comparatively late, but in most cases it has also remained aesthetically tainted. Therefore, I argue that the historical novel has been rather marginally positioned in the history of Latvian literature, and the task of identity formation of the nation has been ascribed to other, predominantly shorter fictional forms, thus mirroring the comparatively late rise of Latvian fiction. Within the line of this argument, I also introduce broader regional and East-Central European contexts; in this process, the concepts of postcolonial criticism are involved as well. Especially important for my argument is the idea that, even if the grand historical narratives might be losing strength with the advent of postmodernism, their presence is still crucial in the cultures trying to recover their suppressed subaltern voices after having experienced the trauma of coloniality.

A diachronic perspective on contemporary historical novels

The growing self-reflexivity of Latvian literature became especially important during the late 19th century, and attempts to create a major Latvian novel were exhibited when the very first texts ascribed such stature appeared as late as 1879.¹ In the context of the development of European literatures, this happened not only at a very late date but at a time when

other genres, for example, drama and novella, were already starting to acquire the principal role in terms of intellectual density moving away from the novel which had been the dominant genre for the first two thirds of the 19th century. This belatedness was at least partly grasped by Latvian writers. An interesting tension is noticeable if we briefly juxtapose a novel, *The Smoke of Land Clearing* (*Lāduma dūmos*, 1899) by Andrievs Niedra, conceived and written on a large scale and featuring protagonists who try to forge their own destinies, with a seemingly simple and unpretentious novella, *In the Shadow of Death* (*Nāves ēnā*, 1899) by Rūdolfs Blaumanis, written and published in the same year.

Each of these texts might be examined from the point of view of authorial intentions, genre and narrative peculiarities, and their position in the literary process. Special emphasis should be put upon the genesis of modern Latvian literature, but questions of cultural transfer could also be addressed. The mentioned texts provide ground for a theoretical discussion of fin-de-siècle literary trends and their specificity.

In the treatment of Andrievs Niedra's work, the desire of the author to create a modern, European-style novel is worth accentuating. The author traces the complicated relationships between the rising Latvian middle class and its aristocratic German counterpart. The explicitly manifested ideology of the author's so-called new nationalism forms the core of the conflicts portrayed in the novel, and psychological characteristics are subordinated to this main goal. Niedra also follows well-established conventions of the 19th century European novel, especially the tradition of *Bildungsroman*, which is well suited to his aim of revealing the potential strengths of the emerging Latvian industrialists and *literati*.

Compared to this rather pretentious text, Rūdolfs Blaumanis's novella *In the Shadow of Death* most clearly portrays the doubts and insecurities of the colonial difference of the Latvian nation. The masterful portrayal of a group of fishermen, who happen to find themselves on a piece of ice in the open sea, might be considered as a metaphorical representation of the fragile existence of the subaltern stratum in a colonially divided society. Blaumanis thus uses poetic conditions of the novella genre to provide a cutting edge analysis of the inner experience of the fin-de-siècle Latvian population. Instead of Niedra's novel where the protagonists often express opinions shared by their creator, in Blaumanis's text we are introduced to a situation, which is not followed by any sort of judgment; only the masterful groupings of the people on the ice allow us to speak about a cross-section of the contemporary society.

Literary works written at the end of the 19th century reveal the specific circumstances of Latvian society of that time in a comparative perspec-

tive. Still lacking the possibility of economic self-determination and being subjected to foreign rule, Latvian people are exposed to the problematic of existential uncertainty and the void, as well as a feeling of subalternity. This feeling of inferiority and difference in self-perception toward bigger powers even within the European Union is still to a certain extent characteristic of contemporary Latvian society; and it is also mirrored by the current attempt of recreating the 20th century history of the nation in the series of historical novels.

The genre of the novel has repeatedly manifested its importance during the 20th century, more in terms of political and social significance rather than aesthetic. The novel in Latvian literature has been primarily linked to ideological issues both during the 1920s and 1930s, as well as the 1950s and 1960s, even if for different reasons. The first of these time periods was, following the establishment of an independent state, marked by an attempt to create a historically reliable narrative of continued and organic national history, which should be detectable even through the centuries of oppression. During the colonial period following the Soviet occupation at the end of World War II, a new kind of socialist grand narrative was again created to replace earlier representations, and historical tables were turned in order to demonstrate the deep and indispensable links between Latvian and Russian destinies, with the Russian people always portrayed as liberators. During the 1970s and 1980s reaction to this dominance of socialist realism was provided primarily not by creating historically panoramic literary texts, but rather by linking alternative narratives with shorter literary forms, such as the novella or the so-called small novel, a common trend also in the development of Estonian and Lithuanian literatures. Only occasionally such important authors like the Estonian writer Jaan Kross who considered the representation of history as a tool to discuss and negotiate the development of the nation in large-scale novels appeared. His oeuvre has stimulated discussion of the relationship between complicity and commitment, as there is no doubt that “[t]he Communist regimes made ample use of the historical novel to gain support by appealing to nationalism and to generate a combative and ‘heroic’ mentality”. (Neubauer 467) But in a recent article the Estonian scholar Eneken Laanes argues that the level of complicity in Kross’s writing has been relatively low and that after the restoration of independence he continued along principally similar lines of commitment in his historical novels even if their more recent topics have been closer to the 20th century reality (62–71).

A similar pattern of development of the historical novel may be noticeable in East-Central European fiction more generally. In *History of Literary Cultures of East-Central Europe*, Marcel Cornis-Pope and John Neubauer argue

that the rise of the historical novel in the region mostly refers to the 19th century and thus fits into the period of nation building. Characteristically, the authors of the book “have replaced the usual Romanticism/Realism/Modernism/Postmodernism structure with a flexible tripartite division of (i) National Awakening [1800–1890], (ii) Modernism [1890–1945], and (iii) Literature during the Soviet-controlled period [1945–1989]. All national cultures went through these periods, though not always in synchrony with one another.” (6) In his book *Atlas of the European Novel 1800–1900*, Franco Moretti argues that the rise of (West) European novel has been closely connected to the process of nation building and the creation of the nation-state. (17–18) It appears that nation building, alongside related issues of anti-essentialism and inclusiveness, has played no lesser part in the development of the literatures of East-Central Europe and is still a task relevant even for the early 21st century in East-Central European and Baltic societies. Contrary to most cultures of the region, however, Baltic literatures have not considered the genre of the novel as the most important instrument in the process of nation representation due to their comparatively delayed patterns of development. Even so, there are occasional attempts to provide a novel, and the historical novel more specifically, with the task of strengthening national identity and self-confidence.

Contemporary Latvian historical novels: contexts and genre

The current rise of historical fiction in Latvia and the neighbouring Baltic countries is closely linked with the development of history writing after the restoration of independence in 1991. In this context Larry Wolff emphasizes that “the recent and remarkable historiographic literature on Eastern Europe, works published a full decade after the end of the Cold War, have pointed the way toward new problems and paradigms for historical research and political reflection.” (118) Recent developments indeed mark a substantial change if compared to the history writing of the Soviet period, which was considerably altered to fit ideological propaganda. Jaan Undusk has identified one of the main causes of this decline by pointing out that in Soviet times “[t]he morals of history writing was standardized on an official level. [...] You could find and work through huge masses of new empirical data in the archives [...] still your general conclusions could not be changed. [...] And it is precisely this fact that had an immoral influence, and created an impression of unhistory.” (130) Taking into account the mentioned conditions, it is not a great surprise that following the restoration of independence in the Baltic countries

there were attempts to look at the history from a reversed perspective. However, in the expression of Cornelius Hasselblatt, such an approach was also not free from a certain “postcolonial trap” when a new period of history and political development simply tried to replace previous assumptions by adapting completely opposite interpretations in order simply to rewrite earlier histories and their implicit narratives. (104–109)

In an attempt to summarize the recent changes in Lithuanian literature, Mindaugas Kvietkauskas also points to the inevitable peculiarities in the transition from communist to postcommunist reality:

The struggle against the totalitarian system required strong symbols and consolidating beliefs, and Lithuanian literature directed much energy to win the battle with the Soviet ideology and the totalitarian mentality. Therefore, the reality of post-Soviet liberal democracy could not mean anything other than the breakdown of many cherished cultural myths and the crisis of numerous discourses that were formed in the situation of anti-totalitarian struggle. (Kvietkauskas 2)

However, the gradual return to normality in social life has also led to the reconsideration of the use of earlier established forms of literature and communication, perhaps providing them with a new shape. It is in this context that the return to the genre of the historical novel raises great public interest in the Baltic countries. The contemporary Latvian novels under discussion, *In the Shadow of Rooster Hill*, *18*, and *The Taste of Lead* are all part of a joint project where thirteen Latvian authors have been asked to tackle a specific historical decade within the time span from the beginning of the 20th century until today. The project was initiated by one of the authors, Gundega Repše, who sees it as a possibility to reflect upon history and contemporary Latvian society on the eve of the 100th anniversary of Latvian independence which will be celebrated in 2018. The specific decades were distributed among the authors, and, even though some changes in the initial plan were made by way of negotiation, basically all authors agreed to work on what might be, at least to some extent, defined as the commission of a particular topic. Even more, each book is expected to provide an insight into specific historical circumstances also through the study of diverse documents, scholarly works, memoirs, etc.

A typical example of this approach is already provided by the first book in the series, *In the Shadow of Rooster Hill*, where the author, Osvalds Zebriš, has included endnotes explaining the sources of some important episodes of his novel as well as mentioned literary texts, which have been suggestive for particular character traits of the protagonists of the work many of whom are historically real. The author of the second novel, *18*, Pauls Bankovskis, also mentions important works which have been influential for his own

concept as well as the truthful interpretation of historical realities, while Māris Bērziņš, in *The Taste of Lead*, makes extensive use of quotations predominantly taken from the press of the period. Each novel is supplemented by an explanatory afterword, also provided in English translation.

From the perspective of literary genre, each of the novels utilizes a different approach even if there are occasional overlaps. The main patterns are those of an adventure novel (*In the Shadow of Rooster Hill*), a psychological novel (*The Taste of Lead*), and a philosophical inquiry (*18*).

The main character of *In the Shadow of Rooster Hill*, Rūdolfs Reiznieks, has become a member of the local revolutionary committee in the Latvian countryside during the 1905 mutiny; and, in the course of events, he unintentionally kills an innocent child who happens to be in the place where two different groups of adults, rural neighbours, quarrel about propriety issues. This event appears to be the turning point in the life of Rūdolfs, and leads him to the bizarre idea of kidnapping three unrelated children in order to provide them with new happiness. This initially unexplainable deed holds together the plot of the novel, which also allows us to have an insight into the everyday circumstances of the rebels as well as the daily routines of the official state secret police, which investigate not only this accident, but also the activities of the rebels more generally. Only gradually it appears that the story we read is actually created by the main character, who writes down his notes while hiding in a separate city apartment with the kidnapped children. What we encounter here, thus, is a narrator whom we definitely cannot trust; and, the more the story continues, the more we doubt not only how sound the mind of this person might be, but we are increasingly encouraged to figure out our own interpretation of the events.

In the philosophical inquiry of Pauls Bankovskis, *18*, there are two parallel story lines, both designed as diary excerpts. One of these diaries, written during the second half of 1917 as well as in the following year, portrays the political visions of the protagonist, who actively reflects on the events which take place around him while, on the other hand, being rather poorly informed about the real historical circumstances due to the lack of sufficient information. The author makes his protagonist leave Riga in order to escape German invasion in the fall of 1917, and thus the narrator, who even avoids telling his name, and refers to himself simply as “Someone”, flees to the eastern part of the country, Vidzeme. Later on, when he is assigned a mission to get more information from behind the lines, he also makes a trip to the western part of Latvia, Kurzeme, thus symbolically covering the territory of the potential new state. His sources of information, however, still remain rather sporadic. Bankovskis writes in his afterword to the novel that he himself also made the journey

he ascribes to his protagonist, and did it on foot, in an attempt to catch the different rhythm of the previous century; another discovery for him has been the lack of information which he immediately felt after leaving his usual place in front of his laptop. The second story line of the novel, provided by a diary written by the 21st century narrator, who suspiciously enough reminds us of the author himself and his publicly known habits, is in mysterious ways linked to the experience of the other narrator, and features a contemporary reflection not so much of earlier events, but also of the importance of an independent state or rather of the role contemporary Latvia plays in the formation of individual destinies and reality perception. Bankovskis also points to the title of his novel, simply *18* instead of “1918”, which for him provides a broader space for reflection not only linked to the proclamation of a new state but also signalling towards the most idealistic and optimistic age in an individual’s life.

Māris Bērziņš, in *The Taste of Lead*, follows a more chronological narrative pattern, which allows the reader to experience crucial transformations in the lives of the protagonists during the period starting in 1939 (the last year of independence) and gradually leading to the Soviet occupation in 1940 and the Nazi takeover in 1941.

What we find common in all these texts is that the authors are developing a form of modern/postmodern narrative, which goes even beyond the concepts of the unreliable narrator or subjective interpretations of history. Here we feel ourselves directly at the crossroads of different interpretations, with the events not only lacking strong juxtapositions, but also clear points of reference, in order to figure out whose narrative might be most truthful, or with whom the reader should feel his or her sympathies.² Even so, moral principles remain crucial, especially in *18* and *The Taste of Lead* as the main protagonists of both novels reveal their personal opinions and try to preserve humanity in the middle of crashing social and political transformations.

Representation of Time and Space

One of the most important characteristics of the novels under discussion is provided by the fact that these texts opt for reinterpretation of crucial turning points in the history of Latvia from new angles and in comparative perspective.

In *In the Shadow of Rooster Hill* the author, Osvalds Zebris, focuses on the first decade of the 20th century, and more specifically on years 1905 and 1906, which are important to the history of the Russian empire (and its Latvian provinces) due to the historically remarkable mutiny and its af-

termath of ruthless repressions. Pauls Bankovskis, in *18*, pays attention to an important historical date already in its title, with the implication of the year 1918 when the independent state of Latvia was declared. And Māris Bērziņš, in *The Taste of Lead*, describes the loss of the independent state and the tragic transformations of individual destinies and many deaths caused by the two occupations and the beginning of World War II.

It is interesting to note that two of the initial novels in the series directly tackle the dates of 1905 and 1918, respectively, which have acquired an almost mythological meaning for the history of the Latvian nation. 1905 marked the end of the period of idealistic hopes of growing economic prosperity for the Latvian middle class in the process of open competition with its German and Russian counterparts; but it also provided the first step in the direction of an independent Latvian state implemented in 1918. As put by Fēlikss Cielēns, turn-of-the-century politician, also quoted by the author of *In the Shadow of Rooster Hill*, the events of this year, 1905, finally turned the Latvians from a people into a nation. One of the story lines in Osvalds Zebris's novel also tackles the position of Latvian teachers during the events of the 1905 uprising and its aftermath and, more broadly, during the whole turn-of-the-century period when the Latvian language was denied as a language of learning and all schoolchildren were forced to communicate only in Russian. In the case of both novels, however, instead of drawing a large overall picture, we follow personal stories of the narrators who can hardly be considered noticeable historical figures, and whose fate only incidentally and occasionally comes into contact with the events of determining importance (for example, Bankovskis's protagonist suddenly finds himself as a witness of the celebrations linked to the declaration of an independent state of Latvia on November 18, 1918, in the middle of foreign occupation by German forces). However, this peripheral perspective on the events provides the reader with a new angle to look at the seemingly well-known historical contexts. Especially in the case of Bankovskis's novel we also feel directly involved in a subjective evaluation of the events, even if our own judgment might differ from the contemporary narrator whose story is told from the perspective of the 21st century.

One of the most important themes of Osvalds Zebris's novel revolves around the feeling of guilt. The interpretation of historical events linked to that of World War II is very similar to Māris Bērziņš, where the painful fact of the Holocaust has also been given a new and impressive interpretation. *The Taste of Lead* takes the perspective of an ordinary young man, Matīss Birkāns, who turns from being a young lad with most common desires and making his money as a craftsman into one whose destiny is being deeply shaken by the occupation of his country and the following social transfor-

mations. In the historical turmoil, Matīss gradually learns to notice distinct character features of his neighbours and other people. His family and relatives are also divided along national lines; but the author manages to escape a primitive juxtaposition of different nationalities and portrays their human features instead. All of a sudden, during the Nazi occupation, Matīss finds himself ready for an almost heroic (while dangerous) deed of hiding a Jewish family in his house. In the turn of events, he is not only being accused of this, but himself makes his way to the Jewish ghetto in Riga, and at the end of the novel is shot dead by the Nazis and their local supporters. The story is well documented historically and, while featuring a fictional protagonist, it tackles some of the most painful chapters in the history of the country, which to some extent still arouse feelings of national guilt. In Bērziņš's portrayal, it is especially valuable that instead of focusing mostly on the atrocities of the Soviet regime, characteristic of postcommunist fiction, the role played by the Nazis and their supporters is mercilessly dissected. Still, the protagonists of the novel become mostly figures in a game initiated by alien powers, and it is due to the conflict of global superpowers that ordinary people experience an unexpected distortion not only of their daily routines, but of every principle of humanity and, consequently, lose their lives.

The inhuman nature of occupation regimes and events of the war are juxtaposed in Bērziņš's novel through a very detailed portrayal of specific localities, which are forced to change completely under the unfavourable circumstances. Minute observations are characteristic of all novels in the series, be it the portrayal of Bastejkalns and other central parts of Riga in *In the Shadow of Rooster Hill* or the depiction of the surroundings the protagonists of *18* encounter while walking from Riga to the town of Valka in eastern Latvia. The authors want to recover not only the experience provided by another time already considerably distanced from the present day situation, but they also pay attention to the localities which also change over time. Still, these localities have preserved their historical features more clearly; and it is these signs of reality, which at least to a certain extent are still recognizable in our contemporary world that foster the sense of identity and belonging.

Conclusion

The history of Latvian literature tends to value poetry and short fiction as representative of the expression of national specificity alongside novels, which are traditionally ascribed the same task in other cultures. At the turn of the 21st century, the tendency to approach the novel as of secondary

aesthetic importance has also been linked to the rise of popular literature, and the retreat to smaller genres has been an important characteristic of crucial turning points in literature from the 1980s onwards. This trend was to a certain extent continued during the late 20th and even early 21st centuries. It must be noted that another project initiated by Gundega Repše, the mastermind of the novel series under discussion, which focused on the mental experience of the 20th century, first took the form of a collection of novellas. Characteristically enough, only women authors were invited to participate, and Repše explained her decision by the fact that women are “more reliable” in terms of the necessity of bringing the project to an end in a comparatively short period of time.

However, Repše’s next initiative still returns to the genre of the novel. Even if she sees this as primarily an aesthetic undertaking, openly juxtaposed to some popular historical novels written over recent years and, in her opinion, being rather traditional in shape, Repše definitely also plays with the ideological importance of the intended series of historical novels. And men are also on board this time, in order to make the subaltern voices sound even stronger. The empire writes back again and perhaps with a new level of self-confidence. Thus this undertaking is to a considerable extent determined not only by the necessity to re-evaluate historical experience from a new angle of subjectivity, but also to prove the very possibility of a historical narrative even for a postcolonial nation, long enough subjected both to European internal colonialism as well as communist pressures. There are more turning points in 20th century Latvian history than those tackled by the first three novels in the series; and there remains more subjective experience of historicity still to be recovered.

NOTES

¹ It is interesting to note that two novels published in 1879, *The Times of Land Surveyors* (*Mērnīeku laiki*) by Matīss and Reinis Kaudzītes, and *The Waves of Social Life* (*Sadzīves viļņi*) by Juris Māters, combine features of psychological portrayal and an adventure novel. It is exactly these features that are again relevant in contemporary historical prose.

² It seems relevant to add in this context that possibly the most crucial step in the direction of an open juxtaposition of different views on history was recently made by a theatre production *The Grandfather* (*Vēctēvs*, 2009), a monodrama directed by Alvis Hermanis at the New Riga Theatre, and performed by Vilis Daudziņš. In this production, the actor seemingly finds himself in the search for his own grandfather, who was lost without a trace during World War II. In this process, he meets three different characters, each of whom has his grandfather’s last name; and each of these people tells a different story about the events of the war. At the end of the production these contradictory opinions are not in any way reconciled, and the spectators are left completely free to make their own interpretations or judgments. The three novels under discussion follow basically the same trend.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Bankovskis, Pauls. *18*. Rīga: Dienas Grāmata, 2014.
- Bērziņš, Māris. *Svina garša*. Rīga: Dienas Grāmata, 2015.
- Blaumanis, Rūdolfs. "Nāves ēnā". *Kopotī raksti*. 3. sēj. Rīga: Latvijas Valsts izdevniecība, 1958. 9–30.
- Cornis-Pope, Marcel, and Neubauer, John. "General Introduction". *History of Literary Cultures of East-Central Europe*. Eds. Marcel Cornis-Pope and John Neubauer. Vol. IV. Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2010. 1–9.
- Hasselblat, Cornelius. "The Postcolonial Trap – features of recent Estonian discourse patterns". *The End of Autonomy? Studies in Estonian Culture*. Ed. Cornelius Hasselblatt. Maastricht: Shaker, 2008. 104–110.
- Kvietkauskas, Mindaugas. "The Paradox of the Double Post". *Transitions of Lithuanian Postmodernism: Lithuanian Literature in the Post-Soviet Period*. Ed. Mindaugas Kvietkauskas. Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2011. 1–18.
- Laanes, Eneken. "Commitment and Complicity: Jaan Kross' Historical Fiction". *Different inputs — same output? Autonomy and dependence of the arts under different social-economic conditions: the Estonian example*. Ed. Cornelius Hasselblatt. Maastricht: Shaker, 2006. 62–71.
- Moretti, Franco. *Atlas of the European Novel 1800–1900*. London and New York: Verso, 1998.
- Neubauer John. "Introduction". [The historical novel.] *History of Literary Cultures of East-Central Europe*. Eds. Marcel Cornis-Pope and John Neubauer. Vol. III. Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2007. 463–467.
- Niedra, Andrievs. *Lūduma dums*. Rīga: Zinātne, 1992.
- Undusk, Jaan. "History Writing in Exile and in the Homeland after World War II. Some comparative aspects". *Different inputs — same output? Autonomy and dependence of the arts under different social-economic conditions: the Estonian example*. Ed. Cornelius Hasselblatt. Maastricht: Shaker, 2006. 127–144.
- Zebris, Osvalds. *Gaiļu kalna ēnā*. Rīga: Dienas Grāmata, 2014.
- Wolff, Larry. "Revising Eastern Europe: Memory and the Nation in Recent Historiography". *The Journal of Modern History* 78.1 (2006). 93–118.

Velike postkomunistične pripovedi? Postkolonialni pogled na latvijsko zgodovinsko fikcijo

Ključne besede: literatura in zgodovina / latvijska književnost / literarni žanri / zgodovinski roman / prostor in čas / postkomunizem / izgradnja naroda / Zebris, Osvalds / Bankovskis, Pauls / Bērziņš, Māris

Članek odpira vpogled v sodobno latvijsko zgodovinsko pripovedno prozo. Osredinja se na novo serijo zgodovinskih romanov, imenovano »Mi. Latvija, 20.stoletje« (‘Mēs. Latvija, XX gadsimts’). Dela iz te serije so začela izhajati leta 2014 z namenom, da bi vodila v razpravo tako o ključnih zgodovinskih spremembah kot tudi o mentaliteti Latvijcev v preteklem stoletju. Članek obravnava prve tri romane iz te serije, *Gaiļu kalna ēnā* (*In the Shadow of Rooster Hill*) (2014) Osvalda Zebrisa, *18* (2014) Paulsa Bankovskisa in *Svina garša* (*The Taste of Lead*) (2015) Mārisa Bērziņa, tako iz sinhrono kot tudi iz diahrono perspektive.

Uvodni del članka se ukvarja z nedavnimi spremembami na latvijskem literarnem prizorišču, zlasti pa s spremembami v interpretaciji zgodovine v obdobju postkomunistične tranzicije. Retrospektiva v zgodovino latvijske književnosti pomaga razložiti, kako pomenljiva je bila zgodovinska tematika v procesu izgradnje naroda. Temu sledi interpretacija obravnavanih sodobnih romanov z vidika literarnega žanra ter uporabe časa in prostora kot konstitutivnih dejavnikov v ustvarjanju literarnega besedila. Najprej so izpostavljene spremembe v oblikovanju pripovedi v teh romanih. Pri tem opazujem, kako se stabilen pripovedni tok zgodovinskih romanov postopoma bolj in bolj nadomešča s fragmentacijo, pripovedovalčeva perspektiva pa se zožuje. Prikazujem tudi, kako se vzajemno podpirajo izbor zapletov [plots] in spremembe v pripovedi. Namesto izrisovanja velikih zgodovinskih likov in dogodkov se ta dela sodobne pripovedne proze bolj osredinjajo na upodobitev vsakdanjika, zgodovinske situacije pa so predstavljene skozi pogled navadnih ljudi v vsakdanjih okoliščinah. Obravnava zajema tudi posebne značilnosti časa in prostora.

September 2015