

Pre-workshop comment

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Intense and full-scale revival of historic memory that commenced together with the Independence movement in the late 1980s still remains strong in Lithuania resisting its former single-faceted assessment, censorship and 'vulgar' Marxist ideology. This fact is witnessed by increasing publishing of memoiristics and highly-rated television broadcastings prepared by historians. The Institute of Lithuanian Literature and Folklore (ILLF) — with its programme activities focused on national literature and culture research — and literature specialists from Vilnius and other Lithuanian universities are currently issuing quite a lot of significant studies or literary history, intended to rewrite the patterns of cultural memory and historical imagination established during the Soviet era which still deeply affects the post-Soviet mentality. Most of these books have one common 'anticipation for the correct history of literature' as the society that broke free from oppression expressed its rightful desire of having an exhaustive memory narrative of the national literary and cultural past.

However, we cannot help but hear increasingly more criticism expressed towards such national patterns of historical memory. This criticism is of two kinds: first of all there is scepticism, which is more and more frequently expressed by Western scholars in relation to histories of national literature. *Rethinking Literary History* — the selection of articles by famous scholars issued by the Oxford University Press in 2002 — could be used as a specific example of the above. In this book, authors — although some more and others less — in unison question the writing of national literature histories. It is interpreted as a rudimentary phenomenon in the current uniting Europe and in the entire world overwhelmed by the phenomena of globalisation.

Secondly, there is increasingly more open criticism aimed at historicism and the positivistic metanarrative and the need to update the methodology for writing literature history. Therefore, fundamental compensatory Lithuanian literature histories — intended for literature of the 19th and 20th centuries — has received not only well-deserved compliments on fulfilling the expectations of the public but also well-deserved questions on whether the cultural historical school tradition that combines views of positivistic and hermeneutic historicism and its' fostered metanarrative are sufficient to write contemporary histories in the context of increasingly multilayered and fragmentary postmodern memory discourse. Don't the most up-to-date Lithuanian literature histories — still written on the basis of the 'hermeneutics of trust' and modernity — deserve radical critical reflections? 'Unfortunately, in our case we are still asking the same questions as in Soviet times. This is the reason we are getting the same answers and replicate the same trains of clichés' (American Lithuanian literary professor Violeta Kelertienė). But how could our Eastern European historical narratives avoid a chaotic mixing of the traumatic post-Soviet memory return, the pluralisation of the postmodern cultural memory discourse, and at the same time the increasing 'national memory loss' in the popular mind of today? Most new literary history critics maintained that the rewriting of histories can no longer be limited to the usual corrections of ideological nature because they require essential changes of methodological character, which would be initiated by the post-modern hermeneutics of suspicion, reception, and the new historicism. Without this, literary research in Lithuania that broke free from the Soviet schemes would still sustain unchanged the old dictatorial and normative thinking and evaluation habits, as well as common depiction structures and clichés dressed up in the masquerade of postmodern conceptions.

This means that new expectations related to a more in-depth audit of methodological and philosophic regular thinking and evaluation habits (nationalist, romantic, positivistic, pseudo-Marxist and etc.) are forming in the post-Soviet society. This is the second reason that makes us go deeper into issues of historic self-perception complications. Especially conceptual discussions on this issue were held in conferences¹ organized by the ILLF and conventions² of the World Lithuanian Philology Community.

Most middle and youngest generation Lithuanian literary critics come to the very clear conclusion that the developing phenomena of globalism (capital movement flows and new investments, labour force migration, spreading of book translation software and tourism, the boom of commercial entertainment culture and the development of international scientific programmes) demands a historian to change the stereotype of national literature narration. And that is only possible in two ways: strengthening the self-critical reflection and activating the sense of the multicultural present. The growing national and cultural diversity of the contemporary human is the key cause that forces historians to look for new narration methods to replace national models by regional comparatives where no literature would be presented as universal or privileged. The contemporary historian can no longer ignore historicism and criticism of metanarrative, and continue telling the sacred national literary history from the peaceful seclusion of his office. One has to stand up and fight in a problem battle for one's possibility of an outlook to the past and get involved in akin 'interpretational communities' as well as take the risk in telling history differently and diversely so that it would provoke the established memories of contemporaries and wound their imaginations and hearts. Although the provocative history should appear not as chasing or imitating fashion but rather as an absolute pitch of a talented narrator that manages to hear not only the most important concerns of the past but also those of the present.

1 *Senoji Lietuvos literatūra: Literatūros istorija ir jos kūrėjai* (The Old Lithuanian Literature: Literary History and Its Creators), Vol. 17, Vilnius: ILLF, 2004; *Senoji Lietuvos literatūra: istorijos rašymo horizontai* (The Old Lithuanian Literature: Horizons of History Writing), Vol. 18, Vilnius: ILLF, 2005.

2 *Priklausomybės metų (1940-1990) lietuvių visuomenė: pasipriešinimas ir/ar prisitaikymas* (Lithuanian Society during the Years of Dependence (1940-1990): Resistance and/or Conformity), Vol. 2, 1996; *Lituanistika XXI amžiaus išvakarėse* (Lithuanian Linguistics on the Threshold of the 21st Century) Vol. 2, 1997; *Lituanistika pasaulyje šiandien: darbai ir problemos* (Lithuanian Linguistics in the World Today: Works and Problems), Vol. 3, 1998.