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Dalia Čiočytė
Vilnius University
Vilnius
dalia.ciocyte@flf.vu.lt
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1837-1673

The Topos of Watching from Afar in Selected Works of Classical and Contemporary Lithuanian Literature

Since the time of Aristotle, classical Western literary studies have treated imitation as the imitation of the essence of the depicted object, the inner reality, in other words – the understanding of the object. For philosophical hermeneutics, it was important to emphasize that a work of art is not a copy of existential experience, but an interpretation of the meaning of that experience. According to Wilhelm Dilthey, artistic imagination creates new connections from the elements of experience: not a "lifeless reproduction" but a "structure of artistic interpretation" (Dilthey, 1989, p. 184). Erich Auerbach, studying literary imitation since the Old Testament and since Homer, presupposes that to imitate reality is not to copy it, but to explain (Auerbach, 1957). Michael Riffaterre's (1983) formulation is similar: the representation of reality is the disclosure of its meaning. Anglo-American New Criticism has coined the term "aesthetic distance" in order to emphasize the *perspective* of perception of experience. This stream, emphasizing form as a semantic structure, as the code of existential experience, argues that a literary work, by providing aesthetic distance

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to experience, enables access to that experience, where form is a variant of meaning (Brooks & Warren, 1960, p. 554).

Aesthetic distance is characteristic of every artistic interpretation of experience, but in the world of literature there are also very specific, intentional forms of this distance. One of them is the topos of looking at the homeland from afar, prominent in classical Lithuanian literature, especially in the context of occupation by foreign powers, exile, and emigration. The present article investigates the topos of looking at Lithuania from afar in literature of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and considers its contemporary transformation.

According to the classical worldview of Lithuanian literature, a person who is far from his/her homeland is in the archetypal situation of Paradise lost. Nineteenth-century Lithuanian literature interprets this situation as a chance to deepen national identity. The tone for such an interpretation was set by the strongly patriotic opening of Adam Mickiewicz's poem *Pan Tadeusz* (published in Paris, 1834):

> Lithuania, my country, thou art like health;
> How much thou shouldst be prized only he can learn
> Who has lost thee. To-day thy beauty in all its splendour
> I see and describe, for I yearn for thee. (trans. George Rapall Noyes; Mickiewicz, 1917)[1]

One truly appreciates what one has lost – this is the logic behind the literary topos of looking at Lithuania from afar. An aesthetic distance is created: the loss of the homeland enables one to grasp its essence. We can see such a view of Lithuania from afar in the works of Julius Anusavičius, an exiled poet, and in poems by other authors, including Antanas Baranauskas' "Kelionė Petaburkan" [Journey to St. Petersburg] (1858–1859), Maironis' (Jonas Mačiulis') "Vakaras (Ant ežero Keturių Kantonų)" [Evening (On the Lake of the Four Cantons)] (1904), and Pranas Vaičaitis' "Yra šalis" [There is a Country] (1897) and "Iškeliaujant iš tėvynės" [Leaving the Homeland] (1898).

Antanas Baranauskas (1835–1902), one of the greatest Lithuanian Romanticists, was a priest by vocation. He highly valued education and pursued the possibility of studying at St. Petersburg Catholic Theological Academy. He writes about his journey to the Academy in his poem "Kelionė Petaburkan" [Journey to St. Petersburg] (1858–1859). Although the narrator goes there to study and does it willingly, he speaks as if he were sent to exile and seems to think about those Lithuanians who were exiled after the uprising against Russian occupation in 1831. Later Lithuanian exiles in different periods of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, during both tsarist and Soviet occupation, connected this poem with their existential situation; the poem's fragments were sung. The sense of exile is heightened by the images of Siberia and by delayed narration in the episodes set in the Lithuanian towns of Utena and Zarasai: dramatic

[1] Unless indicated otherwise, quotations were translated by the author of this article.

exclamations of farewell convey the meaning of an ultimate departure (Čiočytė, 2014, pp. 175–185). The delay fixes the distance between the narrator and Lithuania and results in suggestive visions of the poet's homeland, which is perceived as the land of true happiness: "Sudiev, Lietuva, man linksma buvo / Savo gyvent šalelėj..." (Goodbye, Lithuania, it was joyous for me / Living in my own country...). The Lithuanian river Dauguva, a classical Romantic metonymy of a river, acquires the archetypical meaning of the river of Paradise (Baranauskas, 1994, pp. 46, 50).

The poem "Upe Tėvynės, Tatula miela" [River of Homeland, Tatula Dear] by Julius Anusavičius (1825–1907) – a nobleman and poet who participated in the uprising of 1863 and was exiled to Siberia – develops the metonymy of a river in a similar sense: the river of the homeland indicates the freshness and blessedness of the Paradise space. The river Tatula is a magical mirror that shows the perfect harmony of Paradise. The speaker looks into the water and sees the miraculous harmony of all creation: he sees fishes and the reflection of trees and birds, and interprets this unity by making an allusion to the biblical allegory of a wedding: "Rods, lakiojanti prigimtis visa / Su vandens gyviais suvinčiavota" (It seems that the whole flying nature / Is married to the creatures of the water) (Anusavičius, 1980, p. 51). The speaker, like biblical Adam, is at the very center of creation: it seems to him that the trees and bushes have gathered around him only to see him and comfort him, to cheer him up, and to congratulate him. The poetic explanation of the lyrical subject's state conveys the idea of appreciation through loss: "Kaip brangi kraštai, kuriuos aplieni!" (How precious are the lands you have abandoned!) (Anusavičius, 1980, p. 51). The antipode of "the dearest Tatula" is the Siberian water (Siberian rivers Tura and Obia), a sign of lovelessness: "Drumzlino vandens vilnys dūkstančios / Be jokios meilės mane bogino / Per pūstas girias varstų tūkstančius, / Nors širdį smūtkas baisus kruvino" (The waves of the murky water, roaring / Without any love, enslaved me / Through the empty forests for thousands of miles, / Although my heart was bleeding with terrible grief) (Anusavičius, 1980, p. 52). The blissful vision of the poem disappears like a dream, like a fictional literary quasi-reality (the meaningful metanarrative leitmotif "it seems").

The lyrical masterpiece of the prominent Lithuanian Romanticist Maironis (Jonas Mačiulis) (1862–1932) "Vakaras (Ant ežero Keturių Kantonų)" [Evening (On the Lake of the Four Cantons)] (1904) develops the contrast between the perfection of foreign beauty and the memories it evokes of modest, simple, and dear Lithuania. The image of charming Swiss landscape is masterfully created by selected visual details and acoustic means: by the harmony between the poem's imagery, motifs, and its rhythm. In this poem, the intimacy of Lithuania is evoked not by an environment of exile, not by a foreign archetypal wasteland, but, on the contrary, by the aesthetic experience of extraordinary beauty, which makes the lyrical subject long for the special beauty of his native land:

Ežero skaisčios bangos liūliavo
Žaliu smaragdu;
Laivą be irklo varė, lingavo
Vėsos dvelkimu.

Saulė už Alpių leidos sutingus;
Varpai Liucernos
Dievui aukojo darbus vargingus
Žmogaus ir gamtos.

Medžių ant saulės kepintas lapas
Nuspindo rasa;
Rožių iš kalnų papūtė kvapas
Skania sveikata.

Audžiau nurimęs aukso svajones
Aušros spinduliais;
Lėkė jos, skrido, pilnos malonės,
Padangių keliais.

Vedė jas paukščių kelias žvaigždėtas,
Lydėjo širdis
Į tolimąsias, į numylėtas
Tėvelių šalis.

[…]

Kiek atminimų-atsitikimų,
Gyvų kitados,
Vienas už kito brėško ir švito
Anapus ribos! (Maironis, 1987, p. 185)

Chilly lake breezes rippled the waters
Of emerald green
And with no oarsman drove the boat forward
As if in a dream.

Slowly the Alpine sunset was fading;
The bells of Lucerne
Man's load of troubles and those of Nature
To Heaven returned.

Scorched in the blazing sun russet foliage
Sparkled with dew.
Down from the mountains health-giving roses
Their sweet perfume blew.

Into my golden dreams I lay weaving
The rays of the sun;
My thoughts went soaring, earth gladly leaving
Down sky-roads to run.

Starlit the path was down which they hurried,
My heart followed too,
To my forefathers' country beloved
So far now from view.

[…]

How many faces, happenings, places
In memory rose
And bright as dawning shone from beyond where
The boundary goes! (trans. Peter Tempest; Maironis, n.d.)

As the lyrical subject experiences beauty, the poetic function of this experience is to express his longing for the homeland – the very experience of beauty itself reminds him of what he loves most deeply. The motif of boundary refers to the lost blessed past, and the foregrounding of this motif through repetition forms the connotation of the metaphysical boundary.

In Pranas Vaičaitis' (1876–1901) poem "Yra šalis" [There Is a Country] (1897), Lithuania, seen from afar, emerges as a mysterious place: an unknown, distant fairyland where talking rivers flow merrily. At the center of this idyllic vision, the speaker sees love between people of the land: they work hard and are poor, but they are generous to each other and to visitors. By solving the riddle of the mysterious country: "Šalis ta Lietuva vadinas" (The country is called Lithuania) (Vaičaitis, 1996, p. 24), the poet subtly conveys the experience of being at home. For him, to be truly at home means to experience a special, indescribable spiritual alertness. In the poem "Iškeliaujant iš tėvynės" [Leaving the Homeland] (1898), Vaičaitis' speaker, on his way to study in a hostile land, looks at Lithuania receding into the distance. In this case, the poetic distance deepens the speaker's sense of personal responsibility for his homeland (looking from a distance, he begins to feel responsible for its political fate).

In the works of Baranauskas, Anusavičius, Maironis, and Vaičaitis, Lithuania is seen through the eyes of an exile or quasi-exile. This literary technique deautomatizes poetic perception and deepens, intensifies national self-awareness.

In the context of the Soviet occupation of the twentieth century, a Lithuanian far from his/her homeland was a Siberian exile or a refugee to the West. The writers and poets of the Lithuanian Exodus fled from persecution and death, and perceived themselves as exiles. However, in a way, they essentially did not leave Lithuania: in many of their works Lithuania is the center of the literary worldview (e.g. Kazys Bradūnas, Alfonsas Nyka-Niliūnas, Henrikas Nagys, Liūnė Sutema (Zinaida Nagytė-Katiliškienė), Marius Katiliškis).

The talented Exodus poet Kazys Bradūnas (1917–2009) marks Lithuania as the center of his literary worldview by using especially expressive archetypal metaphors. Thus, in this study, his poems have been selected to consider the topos of looking at Lithuania from afar as employed by Exodus writers.

As Bradūnas reflects on exile, the poetic means for this reflection is the image of the uprooted tree. The lyrical subject identifies himself with this image. The sonnet "Ūkininkai tremtiniai" [Farmers Exiled] evocatively connects the motifs of uprooted trees and uprooted ("bloody") hearts. The image of the lost homeland becomes ambiguous: the homeland is lost and at the same time it is not lost – it exists as what is most deeply longed for:

Nei žemės, žagrės, nei žirgų,
Nei saulėj šylančių vagų
Nėra tuštėjančioj buity.

Taip sėdi jie dienų dienom
Širdim kietom ir kruvinom,
Kaip medžiai, tylūs, išrauti. (Bradūnas, 1994d, p. 48)

Neither land, nor pasture, nor horses,
Nor sun-warmed furrows
In the emptying world.

Thus they sit day after day
With hearts hard and bloody,
Like trees, silent, uprooted.

The metaphor of rooting also acquires a religious meaning, namely that of rooting in the Divine land. We can see this metaphysical meaning of rooting in the verse "Tautos autoportreto eskizas" [Sketch of a Nation's Self-Portrait]:

Aš – tavin įsišaknijus tauta,
Ne klajoklių gentis.
Aš istorijos neišrauta,
Man tik žaislas mirtis.

Ne liepsnojanti stepių žolė,
Aš – ledinė šiaurės gėlė,
pūstelta Dievo kvapu,
Į milijonus trupu
Ir lydausi vėl širdimi –
Mane tu užgimęs imi. (Bradūnas, 1994c, p. 262)

I am your rooted nation,
Not a tribe of nomads.
I am not uprooted by history,
Death is only a toy for me.
Not a flaming steppe grass,
I am an icy flower of the North,
Blown by the breath of God,
I crumble into millions
And unite again in my heart
You are born and you take me.

The meaning of national dignity and national pride is related to Bradūnas' concept of agriculturalism. The verse "Barbarai bijo" [Barbarians Are Afraid] formulates the distinction between farmers and nomads. In the context of Bradūnas' poetic philosophy, agriculturalism (farming) means loyalty: farming means to have a strong connection with one's land, to be like a rooted tree. (To be a nomad, on the contrary, means to have no homeland and no loyalty.) This means to be loyal not only to the land, but also to man and God. While Bradūnas interprets the images of the land and tree in the sense of loyalty, he also gives these images the connotation of metaphysical loyalty.

Maironis, in his poetic philosophy and theology of landscape, sees his nation in a broad panoramic perspective and formulates the meaning of the nation's own space sanctioned by the metaphysical authority, as in the verse "Kur bėga Šešupė, kur Nemunas teka" [Where the Šešupė Runs, Where the Nemunas Flows]. Bradūnas' lyrics modify this poetic concept, giving it intimacy. Through the land, Bradūnas' subject experiences the house and the farm. The poet thinks about the nation and its place on earth by looking vertically, looking deep at the family, at individual houses. Through the intimacy of family relationships, a kinship relationship with every Lithuanian is formed. This poetic vision is articulated by the images of feet in the ground and a furrow of plowed land: "Aš, pravertęs dobilienos plutą, / Tūkstančius pėdų po ja randu, / Kiekvienoj vagoj senolių būta, / Neišplovė jų nei laikas, nei vanduo" (I open the land's crust, / And find a thousand feet under it, / In each furrow there were antecedents, / Neither time nor water washed them away) (Bradūnas, 1994a, p. 24).

The capacious metaphor of furrow subtly Lithuanianizes the archetypal meaning of the right path of existence, related both to the evangelical teachings about wrong paths and the right path (Mt 7:13; John 14:6, etc.), and to the search for *la diritta via*

of Dante's *Divine Comedy*. Bradūnas interprets the right path in his verse "Pėdos arimuos" [Feet in the Plowed Land]: "Ir tėvai jom eidami neklydo, / Nepaklydo tarpe džiaugsmo ir kančių" (Our parents did not err in walking the paths of furrows, / They were not lost between joy and suffering) (Bradūnas, 1994a, p. 24). The poet concretizes, deautomatizes the Christian concept of incarnation, inviting us to ponder: what does it mean that God also left footprints on the ground, that he really walked the earth? The poetic ego of the verse "Tai atsitiko Betanijoje, anapus Jordano" [This Happened in Bethany beyond the Jordan] asks: "Tai kas gi atsitiko? / Argi po to, kai vaikščiojai žeme, / nieko reikšmingo, nieko?.." (So what happened? / After you walked the earth, / nothing significant, nothing?..) (Bradūnas, 1994b, p. 150).

In Bradūnas' verses, the Lithuanian road, the path, also symbolizes the relationships between people. In the poem "Kaimo takai" [Village Paths] the graphic metaphor of the network of paths indicates harmonious connections between neighbors; the paths end at the village cemetery and plunge into the village's past – in the spacetime of the poem, the living and the dead are together (cf. Thornton Wilder's *Our Town*; Wilder, 1938). Lithuania seen from afar takes on a metaphysical dimension that is not subject to spatial distance.

When Lithuania regained independence and the Iron Curtain fell, there was a wave of emigration of writers (e.g. Zita Čepaitė, Dalia Staponkutė, Gabija Grušaitė). This migration is quite different from the Lithuanian Exodus: a modern writer emigrates with a high degree of freedom. For the classical literary mentality, the center of the migrant's world is Lithuania, while the contemporary works of émigré writers are in many cases multicentric: alongside Lithuania as a starting point of literary worldview, there are also other cultures as additional (dialogical) starting points.

In contemporary émigré literature, the novels of Valdas Papievis, who has been living in Paris since 1992, are distinguished by philosophical depth. This is why in the present study his works are selected to discuss the literary topos of watching from afar as it is today. For this writer, leaving Lithuania is not only a variation of the *homo viator* archetype, but also a peculiar philosophical metaphor for "leaving oneself". The French environment is fundamentally important to the writer: in the novel *Eiti* [To Go] (Papievis, 2010), Provence is a unique reality that transforms colors into radiance; multilayered Paris is the protagonist of *Vienos vasaros emigrantai* [One Summer's Émigrés] (Papievis, 2003) and *Odilė* (Papievis, 2015). Papievis' novels interestingly modify the concept of watching from afar: to leave the homeland is to look at oneself from the outside and thus understand oneself.

The novel *Vienos vasaros emigrantai* reflects on the entire human life as a short-term (just "one summer's") emigration in the reality of space and time. The narrator is fascinated and intrigued by a woman from another culture, another social level – an inhabitant of a Parisian slum called Nathalie. Looking at her, he encounters

the question of human meaning. The author interestingly actualizes the biblical metaphor of the mystery of the face: the narrator looks at Nathalie's face, seeing it as revealing a deep human mystery ("if only I could guess her face..."; Papievis, 2003, p. 13). Nathalie distances the narrator from high society and in this way enables him to understand its spirit. According to the narrator, such "classic" inhabitants of a slum as Nathalie are

> the last aristocrats of our time, who can afford the luxury of doing nothing […]. Like Nathalie, there is not a trace of complaint or lamentation on their faces, they do not blame anyone and they do not want retribution, rather the opposite – without showing it, but feeling superior to others, they live at their own mercy, accepting alms with dignity, as a gift sent from heaven. (Papievis, 2003, p. 308)

The relationship with Nathalie defamiliarizes the narrator's concept or religion. When asked if she believes in God, she replies after a long pause: "I don't know. But sometimes I act as if He exists" (Papievis, 2003, p. 192). She reveals to the narrator the logic of anonymous Christianity (to act as if God exists), shedding new light on the concept of religious faith.

The novel *Odilė* is named after the main female character, which makes us expect a romantic plot. In this case, the implied reader's expectation is fulfilled, but in an unexpected way: the love in this novel is between the ninety-year-old Odilė and the nameless narrator, who is much younger than her. Considering current cultural mentality, which appreciates a young, healthy body and joyful success, a novel about a ninety-year-old heroine is an impressive contrast.

We can interpret the narrator's relationship with Odilė in the context of the realities of Lithuanian emigrants: many of them work as caregivers for elderly people, and the novel's narrator is also a nurse, or rather – as if a companion from nineteenth-century novels. The author convincingly shows that the nursing job, which many people consider boring, mundane, and done only to earn money, can become a source of everyday poetry and joy if the person being cared for is looked at with the gaze of love for one's neighbor (Christian *agape*).

In another sense, the narrator's love for Odilė is a love for the aristocratic Belle Époque. Odilė, by taking her companion to meetings with her friends and acquaintances, introduces him to this world. As in the novel *Vienos vasaros emigrantai*, the question of true aristocracy arises. The narrator of *Odilė* longs for the true aristocracy represented by the "Belle Époque" but not limited by it. The notion of true aristocracy has an interesting pun: "noble" means both an aristocrat and a generous person. To be an aristocrat (to be a member of aristocracy) in the deepest sense means an invitation to be generous (*noblesse oblige*). Thus the narrator mainly longs for a more moral society. In her youth, Odilė wrote a story (a story in a story) that has autobiographical elements. The narrator interprets it and highlights a sequence of oppositions:

> I would like to return to the times described by Odilė, when there was more modesty than impudence, more sincerity than cynicism, more doubts and hesitations than impudent self-confidence; when everything, at least when reading Odilė's story, seems to have been a little more fragile, delicate, subtle; perhaps a little sadder: not bright, eye-catching colors but shades, not lines but trembling contours, not bold brushstrokes but careful strokes after looking closely and listening. (Papievis, 2015, p. 183)

A significant intertext of this novel is Marcel Proust's cycle *In Search of Lost Time* (1913–1927), especially the first part, *Swann's Way* (1913) – we could interpret *Odilė* as a Lithuanian improvisation on the works of Proust. The lost time that Papievis' narrator is in search of, is not only an abstract "belle époque", but also the past life of every person. The narrator perceives the lost time in the archetypal space of Paradise lost, the gates of which are closed: "Longing for the past, but the door to the past is slammed" (Papievis, 2015, p. 23).

By interpreting the figures of Odilė's guests – *visiteurs* – the novel's narrator subtly modernizes the biblical metaphor of a human being – a stranger in the land: "We are foreigners and strangers in your sight, as were all our ancestors. Our days on earth are like a shadow, without hope" (Chronicles 29:15; *The Holy Bible*, 2011). We are all *visiteurs*, implies the narrator. On a bleak November day, listening to an amateur brass band in the rotunda of the Luxembourg Gardens, he perceives the Montparnasse skyscraper as a modern monastery tower, where the office workers are monks in their loneliness. With a bright and warm humanistic gaze, he sees those people swarming in Montparnasse as people of common destiny and expresses his desire to ask them to pray for Odilė's family and her visitors, and for all visitors to this land: "For all of us, *visiteurs*" (Papievis, 2015, p. 254). Thus the narrator's compassion and love for Odilė becomes a noble humanistic love for both the people around her and for every person.

Both the narrator and Odilė perceive the possibility of transcendence in the agnostic way. An important intertext of the novel is Albert Camus' existentialism. Odilė has many of Camus' books, and she even knew him. The novel subtly reinterprets Camus' Sisyphean stance: in the face of human mortality and metaphysical risk, it is Sisyphean to lighten sadness and rejoice every day. Not knowing what lies beyond, and admitting that it might be meaninglessness (and that perhaps God is just "man's greatest invention"; Papievis, 2015, p. 114), Odilė rejoices in everyday pleasures and creates them. The poetics of everyday life developed in the novel suggests that every day of every person's life is of incomparable value. In the context of the novel as a whole, the musicality of speech and the rhythm of image arrangement form a connotation of metaphysical harmony and indirectly mark the hope for the existence of meaning.

The novel *Odilė* highlights the idea of human life as a whole. In the Bible, many characters are depicted from youth to very mature age; the biblical anthropology thus claims that people differentiate; their uniqueness becomes evident precisely throughout life: to create one's life is to create oneself.

Papievis' Odilė is a deeply individualized character, and at the same time she is not exceptional. She is not a fateful female figure, and she does not emanate the wisdom that comes with old age. She is interesting, intriguing, and at the same time she is "like everyone". The novel suggests the idea that every person can be interesting and intriguing if seen as attentively and with such empathy as the narrator sees Odilė. The mystery and uniqueness of each person are highlighted. The narrator claims that his relationship with Odilė, apart from a special intimacy, is also characterized by an insurmountable distance: "I knew something about Odilė, but oh, how I didn't know everything, and the answers that I thought I had found when I sometimes thought about her were often just fictions, supposed clues to mysteries, often the easiest ones" (Papievis, 2015, p. 25).

The narrator's gaze is focused on the other, and his state is one of looking at the other and not at himself, which amounts to a certain self-forgetfulness. The reader can only guess what he feels for Odilė: he does not speak directly about his feelings or analyze his emotional experiences because it is not important for him. He cares about the other, about the person who needs his help. This means that the narrator's character is talented at listening to the other: he is not eager to express himself, he does not flood the interlocutor with his own hasty interpretations, but attentively listens. Odilė comments that she has much to talk about with him – while in fact the narrator speaks mainly by listening. The narrator's character imperceptibly discovers himself not through a search for himself, not by analyzing his feelings and thoughts, not by trying to express himself and so on – but through attentiveness to the other.

The narrator leaves the country in order to look at himself from the outside and thus understand himself: "How can you leave yourself – just like you leave home, leave the city, fly from one country to another? How can you understand yourself if you cannot look at yourself from the outside?" (Papievis, 2015, p. 10). The implied author makes an interesting conclusion: "to leave oneself" (and to acquire distance in order to understand oneself) means to forget oneself in the situation of loving attentiveness to the other.

In the sociopolitical context of occupation and exile, Antanas Baranauskas, Maironis, Pranas Vaičaitis, and others developed the topos of looking at Lithuania from afar as a literary technique to deepen national self-consciousness. The writers and poets of the Lithuanian Exodus of the twentieth century, in a way, essentially did not leave Lithuania; as can be seen from their works, Lithuania was the center of their literary worldview (e.g. Kazys Bradūnas). Contemporary literature (free migration of writers) creates the multicentric worldview and interprets the topos of watching from afar as the individual search for oneself (reinforced by the philosophical context of modern individualism).

In classical literature, to leave the homeland means to understand it and its profound beauty (Paradise lost), while in contemporary literature – to leave the homeland means to look at oneself from the outside and thus understand oneself. This difference between classical and contemporary literature reflects an important shift in cultural mentality: from a balance of individualism and community towards extreme individualism. The topos of watching from afar has changed in terms of perspective: from looking at Lithuania (as the archetypal Paradise lost) to looking at oneself (as leaving Lithuania creates distance for self-perception).

A unique and suggestive version of the topos may be seen in the novels of Valdas Papievis. His narrator leaves the country in order to gain distance and thus understand himself, but his self-awareness paradoxically comes when, having forgotten this purpose, he concentrates on understanding the other – a person of a foreign culture.

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The Topos of Watching from Afar in Selected Works of Classical and Contemporary Lithuanian Literature

Abstract

In classical Lithuanian literature, a person who is far from his/her homeland is presented in the archetypal situation of Paradise lost. An aesthetic distance is created: the loss of the homeland enables one to grasp its essence. Lithuania is seen through the eyes of a Siberian exile or quasi-exile, and this literary technique (to use Bakhtin's term) deautomatizes poetic perception. In the context of the Soviet occupation of the twentieth century, a Lithuanian far from his/her homeland was a Siberian exile (again) or a refugee to the West. However, the writers and poets of the Lithuanian Exodus, in a way, essentially did not leave Lithuania; as can be seen from their works, Lithuania was the center of their literary worldview. When the country regained independence and the Iron Curtain fell, there was a wave of emigration of writers. This migration is quite different from the Lithuanian Exodus: a modern writer emigrates with a high degree of freedom. The topos of watching from afar has changed: in classical literature to leave the homeland means to understand it and its profound beauty (Paradise lost), while in contemporary literature – to leave the homeland means to look at oneself from the outside and thus understand oneself.

Keywords: literary topos of watching from afar; aesthetic distance; occupation by foreign powers; exile; literature of the Lithuanian Exodus; contemporary Lithuanian émigré writers

Topos spojrzenia z oddali w wybranych dziełach klasycznej i współczesnej literatury litewskiej

Streszczenie

W klasycznej literaturze litewskiej osoba, która znajduje się z dala od ojczyzny, jest przedstawiana w archetypowej sytuacji raju utraconego. Tym samym wytwarza się dystans estetyczny: utrata ojczyzny pozwala pojąć jej istotę. Litwa jest postrzegana oczami syberyjskiego zesłańca lub quasi-wygnańca, co (według terminu Michaiła Bachtina) dezautomatyzuje percepcję poetycką. W kontekście radzieckiej okupacji w XX wieku Litwin z dala od ojczyzny był (ponownie) syberyjskim zesłańcem lub uchodźcą na Zachodzie. Jednak powojenni pisarze i poeci emigracyjni, w pewnym sensie, zasadniczo nie opuścili Litwy; ich dzieła wskazują, że była ona centrum ich literackiego światopoglądu. Po odzyskaniu niepodległości i upadku żelaznej kurtyny nastąpiła fala wyjazdów pisarzy. Jest ona zupełnie odmienna od powojennej emigracji litewskich twórców, współcześni literaci mogą bowiem wyjeżdżać swobodnie. Topos spojrzenia z oddali uległ zmianie: w literaturze klasycznej opuszczenie ojczyzny oznacza jej zrozumienie i uświadomienie sobie jej głębokiego piękna (raj utracony), natomiast w literaturze współczesnej oznacza spojrzenie na siebie z zewnątrz i w ten sposób – zrozumienie samego siebie.

Słowa kluczowe: literacki topos spojrzenia z oddali; dystans estetyczny; okupacja; wygnanie; litewska literatura emigracyjna; współcześni litewscy pisarze emigracyjni

Dr. Dalia Čiočytė, Associate Professor at the Department of Lithuanian Literature, Institute for Literary, Cultural and Translation Studies, Vilnius University, Vilnius. Ph.D. – 1998, Vytautas Magnus University (Kaunas) and Institute of Lithuanian Literature and Folklore (Vilnius). She is the author of three books, over eighty scholarly articles, essays, and reviews. She has investigated the theoretical perspective of theology of literature as a visiting scholar at Saint Xavier University (Chicago), Loyola University (Chicago), and Fribourg University (Switzerland). In 2003, she taught several courses at the University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC) as a visiting professor. At Vilnius University, she teaches courses "The Bible in Western Literature", "The Theology of Literature", "Lithuanian Literature: Romanticism and Realism", "Essay Genre: Author and Text", and others.

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Correspondence: Dalia Čiočytė, Department of Lithuanian Literature, Institute for Literary, Cultural and Translation Studies, Vilnius University, Vilnius, Lithuania, e-mail: dalia.ciocyte@flf.vu.lt

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