

Interlitteraria – 20/1

The Changing Baltics



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Introductory note

The 2015 spring issue of *Interlitteraria* brings to the readers a series of articles issued from the conference *The Changing Baltics: Cultures within a Culture*. This is yet another occasion for the journal to welcome guest editors, and an opportunity to offer to its readers a thorough look into the literary culture of the East Baltic region. The conference was held in September 2014 in Riga, organized by the Institute of Literature, Folklore and Art of the University of Latvia in cooperation with the Under and Tuglas Literature Centre of the Estonian Academy of Sciences and the Institute of Lithuanian Literature and Folklore.

The biannual conference of Baltic Literary Scholars has established itself as a continuing tradition in the Baltic academic space since 1995. During this time, many new insights have been developed by bringing together Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian scholars and discussing topics both current for the whole literary area and distinctive for each country. In the 2014 conference, the organizers decided to develop the previous tradition further, by turning attention to the Baltic experience as an example for reflections on topics such as memory, identity and cultural translation. The main focus of the 10th International Conference of Baltic Literary Scholars was cultural change and cultural diversity in a comparative perspective. The conference gathered scholars from Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania as well as other countries to discuss the growing awareness that culture has existed and exists in plural and to develop a broader and more general view on cultural change that challenges the tendency of singularizing culture.

Over the last decades, the Baltic example has been mentioned as a vibrant site of both merging and conflicting cultural identities. Processes occurring in socio-cultural border areas – negotiations, inclusion/exclusion, usurpation, borrowing, interpreting – and resulting in mixed or hybrid cultural forms are not exclusively characteristic for the Baltics, however the Baltics provide a specific example of the growing sense of an in-betweenness that can serve as a starting point for further discussions on the role literature and art plays in responding to global challenges. Reflecting upon the Baltic experience prompts asking what lies behind the non-problematically used denominations: “national culture”, “national society”, “national literature”, etc. To what extent is it possible to observe the Baltic example as a unique situation – or does it rather mirror larger patterns of cultural change as well as awareness of those changes and their capacity to produce new meanings?

Answers to these questions could be sought by developing the border thinking and by looking for diverse cultural representation forms, be it the

relationship between one's own and the unfamiliar (different), the dominant and the subdued, the central and the peripheral, the global and the local, the collective and the individual, the official and the unofficial, the accepted and the rejected, etc. In this issue, those conference papers, which reflect upon these questions by bringing forward cultural parallels and cases of border crossing in the Baltic literature and culture, have been compiled.

Papers published in this volume include both the case studies focusing upon the works by individual authors and broader insights in literary process concentrating on separate branches of literature (émigré, regional, minorities' literature) or historical change through the centuries. The papers embrace different theoretical approaches, among whom studies of nationalism, postcolonial studies and gender studies are most thoroughly represented.

In the opening article, Jüri Talvet uses the notions of "fashion", "officialism" and "resistance" to explore the relationship between intertextuality and originality in different cases of Estonian literature within the context of the identity of Estonian and Baltic literature. The relationship between national identity and national literatures is analysed in the next two articles (Aušra Jurgutiene, Miguel Ángel Pérez Sánchez) by turning attention to cultural diversity, building and deconstruction of national identity. This section is followed by three articles (Pietro Umberto Dini, Anneli Saro, Anneli Kõvamees), which discuss the significance of ethnic minorities in the literary process.

The next section of the volume (Manfredas Žvirgždas, Mart Velsker, Gintarė Bernotienė, Eva Eglāja-Kristšone) deals with the self-perception of national literatures and addresses the questions of representing national literatures to foreign reading public and discovering the diversity within a national literature itself. The issue continues with topics of political change and postcolonial studies in a comparative approach (Anneli Mihkelev, Laura Laurušaitė, Olga Bazileviča). The volume ends with three papers dealing with gender (Anna Auzuņa, Zita Kārklā) and queer studies (Kārlis Vērdiņš) and their role in understanding the diversity of literary process.

Another series of articles based on the *Changing Baltics* conference will be published in the 2015 winter issue.

Editors