‘Angry Young Women’ Disrupting the Canon in Late Soviet Latvian Literature: Andra Neiburga’s Early Prose Fiction

Sandra Meškova
Daugavpils University

Follow this and additional works at: https://vc.bridgew.edu/jiws

Part of the Women's Studies Commons

Recommended Citation

This item is available as part of Virtual Commons, the open-access institutional repository of Bridgewater State University, Bridgewater, Massachusetts. This journal and its contents may be used for research, teaching, and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproduction, re-distribution, re-selling, loan or sub-licensing, systematic supply, or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden. Authors share joint copyright with theJIWS. ©2022 Journal of International Women's Studies.
‘Angry Young Women’ Disrupting the Canon in Late Soviet Latvian Literature: Andra Neiburga’s Early Prose Fiction

By Sandra Meškova

Abstract
In the late phase of ‘developed socialism’, shortly before Mikhail Gorbachev’s reforms of perestroika or reconstruction in the Soviet Union in 1985 had reached Latvian cultural establishment, a young generation of poets, writers, playwrights, journalists, musicians, cinema and theatre artists throughout the socialist bloc countries and the Soviet Union initiated new trends in culture. In Soviet Latvia, the new trends in prose fiction produced by young writers were labelled the ‘new wave’. Among them emerged a group of women writers called ‘angry young women’ who challenged the established canon of socialist realism by addressing new themes including the negative sides of Soviet reality and everyday life, silenced pages of Latvian history under the Soviet regime, issues of sexuality, etc., as well as introducing new poetic features in the prose narrative. The representatives of the ‘new wave’ produced short prose fiction works that were published in the monthly journal Avots and thus were circulated among broad readership, arousing quick reaction. Andra Neiburga (1957–2019) is one of the ‘angry young women’ who entered the scene of Latvian literature in 1985 with the publication of short stories in Avots and other press periodicals; her first collection of stories Izbāzti putni un putni būros (Stuffed Birds and Birds in Cages) was published in 1988. The present paper regards the narrative peculiarities of A. Neiburga’s early short stories in a gender perspective that reflects the specific ambiguous characteristics of the late Soviet epoch as a time anticipating change in discourse and expression. Along with other young generation writers of the late Soviet period, A. Neiburga distanced herself from the canon of socialist realism and executed what Alice Jardine termed gynesis by introducing a new voice that expressed indignation, frustration, uncertainty and inscribed a radically different vision of reality that saw the subversive potential of accepted structures and forms of expression.

Keywords: Discourse Analysis, Gynesis, Narrative, Latvian Literature, Women’s Writing

Introduction
In 1985-1987, the late phase of socialism in the Soviet Union, when Mikhail Gorbachev initiated the reforms of perestroika or reconstruction, a young generation of poets, writers, playwrights, journalists, musicians, cinema and theatre artists throughout the socialist bloc countries and the Soviet Union initiated new trends in culture. To convey the novelty of this phenomenon and relate it to similar trends in the world, the term ‘new wave’ was used, both by contemporary Soviet journalists and critics and post factum by theorists who, surveying the cultural transformations accompanying the processes of social and political changes initiated by

1 Dr. Sandra Meškova, author of 2 research monographs and more than 80 research publications, is currently working at Daugavpils University, Latvia, as an associate professor teaching courses of literary theory, the history of British and North American literature, comparative literature. Research on life writing, comparative literature, women’s studies.
perestroika, emphasize the radical character of breaking away from the previous culture canon (Cornis-Pope & Neubauer, 2004). In Latvia, the term ‘new wave’ was circulated in through the publications of journal Avots (Outflow) issued from 1987 to mid-1992. This journal was one of the most popular and central platforms for the exchange of new ideas, and most of the young generation’s authors, critics and journalists entered the literary scene through this periodical. In literature, the term was attributed to the young generation of writers who started their career in the context of perestroika and whose vision epitomized the current public expectations for an open discussion of new topics, issues, and language. Andra Neiburga, one of those writers, started publishing her stories in 1985 and worked as an artistic editor of Avots and was also a regular contributor to the journal.

The aim of this paper is to analyse early prose fiction by Latvian writer Andra Neiburga (1957–2019) produced from 1985 to 1988 and published in collection Izbāzti putni un putni būros (Stuffed Birds and Birds in Cages, 1988) in the context of radical discursive transformations of the late Soviet period. This paper has a specific focus on the gender perspective, tracing the disrupting potential of gynesis or radical reconsideration of the established forms of cultural expression and literary language in a broad sense.

Various methodological approaches can be used to investigate these processes, but critical discourse analysis is the most productive when it comes to tracing complex interactions in social situations and their linguistic and textual manifestations. This research uses critical discourse analysis along with gender theories—primarily Julia Kristeva and Alice Jardine’s poststructuralist feminism—to reveal the strategies a woman writer uses to challenge representation in the canon and set a new perspective that opened way for new visions, topics and issues for further debate.

According to Latvian and Lithuanian literary critics, the decade of the 1980s witnessed an unprecedented involvement of women writers in literature (Rožkalne, 2011; Daugirdaite, 2011). Indicating the radical novelty of works by Latvian women authors Rudīte Kalpiņa, Valda Melgalve, Andra Neiburga, Gundega Repše and Eva Rubene, who started publishing their stories in periodicals in the 1980s and whose first collections were published at the end of that decade, they were labelled as ‘angry young women’ (Rožkalne, 2011). The emergence of a young, bright women writers’ generation was characteristic of the decades of the 1970s and 1980s also in European and American literature, thus activating a feminine literary tradition with thematic and poetic innovations and distinct peculiarities of women’s writing. This may be treated as an empirical fact, yet, according to feminist literary theories, it manifests a deeper regularity. Referring to Alice Jardine’s understanding of gynesis, the feminine in culture possesses a potential of rupture and radical difference performed by women as they inscribe the feminine into the culture, constructing her story as an alternative to his story, disrupting the male dominance in culture (Jardine, 1985). Jardine’s ideas refer to Julia Kristeva’s notions of the feminine and masculine being not just sexes or genders but two language registers where the masculine marks the systemically stabilized register of signification and meaning production (the symbolical), whereas the feminine marks the disruptive and simultaneously regenerates impulses that periodically destroy stable systems of signification, providing an opportunity of the emergence and formation of new ones (the semiotic). Applying this perspective to the new and different prose fiction that emerged in the 1980s in Latvia and elsewhere, women at this time perceived the budding, partially silenced, vague and dangerous sensations, feelings, and attitudes of the time and could then find (or search for) a new language to register them in text. However, women’s writing is not gender exclusive, as both women and men can express the feminine and partake in gynesis, as both Kristeva (1980) and Jardine (1985) have noted.
Expectations of Change: The Semanteme New in the Late Soviet Period

By the middle of the 1980s, contemporary critics in Latvia already noticed budding changes in the stagnate Soviet culture paradigm. The major platform for managing the policy of glasnost or openness within the context of perestroika reforms in Latvia was the monthly literary journal Avots that started to be published in January 1987. Its very first issues were concerned with the problems of young people who paid too much attention to recent trends in art, literature, and culture. This gave the young generation of artists, writers, poets and journalists an opportunity to express their views. In one of its first issues, Aleksis Grigorjevs published an article titled “Latviešu, jaunā proza”: varoņi un apstākļi” (Latvian ‘New Prose Fiction’ : heroes and conditions). According to the critic, Latvian ‘new prose fiction’ and ‘new story’ revealed characters that had been forming in the time period of stagnation in the Soviet Union of the late 1970s and early 1980s, illustrated with works by several younger writers including Andra Neiburga. The use of the semanteme *new/young* in similar publications as well as other media (e.g., an extremely popular documentary by Juris Podnieks *Is It Easy to Be Young?*) reveal the desire for change prevalent in the society of that time which marks the beginning of a new period in the history of Latvian literature and culture. Distancing from the Soviet culture context, opening up to a dynamic influx of Western theories and cultural influences and attempts at reconstructing national and cultural identity all resulted in a radical shift of culture paradigm. The factor of generation, along with slackening and lifting of censorship, and developing relations with the Western world and others, played an important role in this shift of culture tradition, as the authors of younger and middle generation responded more eagerly to the gradually growing flow of information from abroad that introduced new trends and issues beyond the ‘iron curtain’. These generations showed greater determination and sometimes courage in accepting the political changes and engaging in their promotion. A similar phenomenon in the late 1980s was observed by a number of researchers of Central and East Europe (Pearce & Sojka, 2000). Hence, it was a regional process determined by the changes in the Soviet system of socialist bloc that had a definite place and significance in the general, worldwide process of globalization.

The year of 1989 is marked as a recent major watershed that completely changed the political and culture map of Europe in series of research *History of the Literary Cultures of East-Central Europe. Junctures and Disjunctures in the 19th and 20th Centuries* (2004–2010), that represents in 4 volumes the whole of historically and culturally diverse Central and East European literary geography, including Baltic states and Latvia. The editor Marcel Cornis-Pope introduces the series of articles on the proceedings of this time period in literature, stating that the ideological shift of 1989 in Central and East Europe was determined by processes that had started at least two decades before, in the 1960s, when literature attempted to match words to social realities and resisted the totalitarian demagogy and practiced the new way of thinking, becoming a tool of cultural and moral resistance (Cornis-Pope, 2004). Epp Annus and Robert Hughes write about the culture situation of the late socialism when there was a radical discursive split: literature and society got divorced from the critical metalanguage of socialist realism that made it possible to see Soviet reality as a simulacrum (Annus & Hughes, 2004). The scholars compare the simulacrum of the Soviet reality to the notion of simulacrum as defined by Jean Baudrillard and ideas of Frederic Jameson concerning simulacra in late capitalism. They conclude that the only difference between Soviet reality and late capitalism is the Soviet Union’s lack of new technologies that are available for public use. Yet Jameson states that this is not the only factor, rather they represent the global system of multinational capitalism that is in fact a network of power and control. Applying the postcolonial perspective to the Soviet period in the Baltic republics, Kārlis Račevskis writes about
the total control of the semantic dimension of linguistic expression implemented by the regime (Račevasvksis, 2006). That was the way of imposing a unified metalanguage throughout the whole of the controlled region, implementing colonization of human minds, leading to what Karls E. Jirgens calls the cultural genocide—an imposed redefining of culture identity by means of systemic censorship and propaganda (Jirgens, 2006).

Researchers from the Baltic states have issued a series of research paper collections on Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian literatures at different time periods including the Soviet period, regarding the peculiarities of literatures of these nations and setting typological parallels in various literary genres in a comparative perspective. In the Soviet period, starting in the 1960s, tendencies of modernization appeared in Baltic literatures, manifested both as attempts at renewing the artistic form and poetics including subjectification of narrative, use of grotesque and irony, intellectualization of poetry and social and political resistance to Soviet hegemony (Baliutytė & Mitaitė, 2011). Characterizing the 1970s and the first half of the 1980s as a period of stagnation and intense russification, Estonian literary scholar Anneli Saro notes that, along with the growth of dissident moods in the society, new topics appeared in literature concerning the negative aspects of the Soviet life and new interpretations of history (Saro, 2011). Latvian literary scholar Benedikts Kalnačs delineates diverse strategies of the literature in the 1970s-80s in relation to the hegemony of the aesthetics of socialist realism (Kalnačs, 2011, B). Lithuanian scholar Jūratė Sprindytė emphasizes the advantages of short prose fiction and the small novel in the literature of the Soviet period. Representing the ‘silent modernism’ as opposed to the ideologically controlled literature, short prose fiction in the late Soviet period revealed a conscious deviation from mainstream ideologies and the search for an individual position (Sprindytė, 2011).

In this process, the generation factor played a significant role in the sense that in the late 1980s a generation entered the Soviet culture space who had not accepted utopian ideas of socialism (Parnell, 2011), but had grown up with the feeling of socialist dystopia; this conditioned the different vision of this generation and its different positioning within the culture processes. This generation took a dissident position and viewed the imposed conformism or colonization of minds as the main manifestation of the post-totalitarian systemic violence against the individual. Czech writer, thinker, and dissident, the last president of Czechoslovakia and the first president of Czech Republic, Václav Havel wrote about this in his political essay *The Power of the Powerless* (*Moc bezmocných*, 1978) and essays produced in the 1980s using notions ‘living within the lie’ and ‘living in truth’. The former denotes the way an individual is incorporated into the post-totalitarian power regime by means of strictly controlled ritual communication, whereas ‘living in truth’ refers to the metaphysical dimension of humanity that complies with essential goals of the individual’s and society’s material, social, and spiritual life (Havel, 1990). J. Sprindytė sees the opposition of conformism and truth as an important feature of the literature of ‘silent modernism’ (Sprindytė, 2011). It also appears in many statements by Latvian authors in the first issues of journal *Avots*. Writer and art critic Gundega Repše writes that a personality who has learned by great effort to lead a double life is now encouraged to come out and crown her people and culture by her nakedness (Repše, 1987). Philosopher Pēteris Laķis states that society is just halfway to rejecting the deformed norm of living in half-openness, half-truth, half-strength, thinking one thing, saying another and doing still another (Laķis, 1987). The other half of the way is creating new values. Journalist Ābrams Kļockins writes that a great vice inherited from the previous epoch is a two-dimensional way of thinking, completely distanced from reality and negating reality, developing on a purely rhetorical basis when it is enough to use a phrase ‘developed socialism’ without trying to refer it to what is going on in real life (Kļockins, 1987).
‘Living within the lie’ and ‘living in truth’, formulated by V. Havel, are manifested in culture as false referring to the canon of socialist realism that, according to Estonian writer and literary scholar Jaan Undusk, had actually fizzled out by the 1970s and early 1980s (Undusk, 2008) or, according to B. Kalnačs, was undergoing its last stage of decanonization (Kalnačs, 2011, A). As opposed to ‘living within the lie’ of socialist realism, there was actually on-going development of various literature, cinema, theatre, and art genres within the trends of modernism and postmodernism influenced by the West, available both officially and via *samizdat*², concerning Existentialism, psychoanalysis, deconstruction, feminism, sexual revolution, the ‘new wave’ in cinema and music, etc. that reached the post-totalitarian culture space with a shift in time, selectively, and often underwent local transformations.

Returning to the ‘new wave’ as the first broader label for the achievement of the young generation of Latvian authors in literature, it may be interpreted in different ways. The “new wave” is a metaphor that denotes a new tradition and refers to French “new wave” cinema that had been affected by Italian neo-realism and was also shown on Soviet screens. Researchers of neo-realism point out the socio-historical context of its formation in post-war Italy – a post-dictatorship society that was liberating itself from the total limitations of censorship, ideological schemes and aesthetic clichés, taking up social, political and economic issues and providing a critical vision of social and individual life. The larger aspect of neo-realism that brought together great individual masters such as Roberto Rossellini, Vittorio De Sica, and Luchino Visconti was its desire for a deep renewal of the human and society. This was inspired by the ideas of humanism in the period of transition from dictatorship to democracy, with its characteristic hopes for change and related illusions of the possibility of quickly leaping from one form to the other (Morandini, 1996). Regarding the specificity of the poetics of cinematograph, the dramatic plot was replaced by a chronicle and detailed depiction of everyday life; screenwriter Cesare Zavattini formulated the idea of replacing a character with a real person and staying with him/her in a scene in natural duration of action. Hence, a new character type appeared—an observer, on-looker (as opposed to active agent) who observes, perceives, and reflects on the world and life without reacting or with minimum reaction to it in action (Haaland, 2012). The on-looking character’s perspective becomes a central element of the narrative structure that significantly reduces the importance of plot and highlights the significance of lyrical elements, like imagery, symbolism, and myth, used to create a distanced depiction of mundane reality, in search for new aesthetic, thematic, and narrative models addressed to a particular audience(s) (Barattoni, 2012).

**Critical Reflection: The On-looking Heroine**

The poetics and subject matter of A. Neiburga’s stories clearly relate to the features of neorealism mentioned above, the major trait among them being the on-looking heroine that appears in the writer’s early prose fiction and particularly in the collection under discussion.

When it comes to gender, it is important to note that it is both a heroine and a hero. Hence, one cannot state that Neiburga in her early writing produces a pointedly feminine reflection; *gynes* in her works is manifested as the overall effect created by the author where greater significance is attributed to introducing radically new subject matter (e.g. the topic of repressions

---

² *Samizdat* – ‘self-publishing’; a form of illegal circulation of literature officially banned in the Soviet Union and other socialist countries.
of the Soviet regime against Latvian people and deportations to Siberia, various social and psychological problems previously associated with the negative impact of imperialism and capitalism, sexuality and body issues, etc.). Referring to Jardine’s understanding of the role of the feminine in radical reconsideration of the established forms of cultural expression and literary language, the feminine is manifested in text as the radically new, subversive impulse that opens the way for the renewal of culture forms and poetic means of the language. These means of language establish a new vision or mode of depicting a particular topic; they are innovative configurations of poetic language. The feminine negates the old, canonized, stale and incompatible views and invokes a new style of expressing one’s subjective attitude and vision, and questions the status quo. The semiotic in Kristeva’s sense possesses this libidinal energetic potential and thus is capable of initiating a discursive change. Before it happens and the new culture forms are approbated giving rise to new symbolical forms, there is a passive (hence, feminine) observation process that ferments, accumulates and matures in the gaps of the present culture situation (the symbolical). The old does not vanish instantly as it is replaced by the new. The new grows in the gaps and splits of the old, takes over and feeds off the old, preserves something of it, yet there is transformation that grows and stabilizes, and at some point, becomes old to be discarded again. This cycle does not usually happen within one generation; it is implemented by several generations – some initiate a change to be continued and finalized by others. The young people of the 1980s were a privileged generation to perform the critical reflection and desire the new language. In Latvian literature, politics and journalism both male and female authors were engaged in it.

The first story in the collection “Spīdēja saule” (The Sun was Shining), the first story by Neiburga to be published in press, set the poetic code for the whole book. The story lacks a dramatic plot line, yet it conveys the dramatism of daily life historicized by relating the time of the action (1964) to the time of publishing (mid-1980s), the time of a more liberal, post-Stalinist period in the 1960s called period of ‘thaw’ and the following time of stagnation since 1970. In addition, the time of action is the narrator’s childhood: “I am a child, I am home again. […] Today I started school. The sun was shining.” (Neiburga, 1988, p. 34). Hence, the title of the story conveys a nostalgic note both in the context of the narrator’s subjective perception (childhood memories) and the historical epoch. The story was published during the period of ‘thaw’ when its liberalization of the regime seemed to be the optimal realistic vision of the future. The plot is based on the autodiegetic narrator’s way home with a great emphasis on the description of the space that registers her observation – areas of Pārdaugava (the left bank of the river Daugava in Riga), the marketplace, home, the flat and the room that make the living environment of the narrator. On the one hand, the observation of the familiar environment conveys regularity and normality, as the narrator’s route is repeated from day to day; it is a realistic depiction of Pārdaugava of the mid-1980s with abundant details. Such details include new houses, fences along the yards, a marketplace with fish counters, a small garden with bottles of cheap eau de cologne stolen by drunkards, a four-story apartment with a dilapidated façade and heavy front door, a dank staircase, the smell of cats and fried onions and all the residents of the house. On the other hand, it describes the narrator’s Lebenswelt with the battle between the good and the evil, and the search for meaningful existence, zones of safety, and the risks represented by certain people and phenomena (the repulsive unkempt disabled man Chizhik, chattering windbag Mirdžiņa, stern officer, senile aged ballerina) depicting the air of the communal flats where neighbours reside in a community

3 There were two waves of mass deportation of Latvian population to distant regions of Siberia (in the Russian Federation) shortly after the incorporation of the independent Republic of Latvia into the Soviet Union – in June 1941 and March 1949, altogether about 57,500 people from approximately 2 million of the population.
with tight living quarters. The residents of the apartment house represent the broad range of Soviet society, from a Soviet officer (a representative of the power) to a debauchee and illegal trader who has a lot of money of criminal origin. Finally, it is the way home leading from outside (the neighbourhood, people met on the way, residents of the house) to inside (the narrator’s house, flat and room). The narrator’s observation is a testimony of the specificity of particular historical time; yet, instead of being an objective reporting, it is a nostalgic childhood memory narrative. As such, it opens several perspectives. It is a full-fledged testimony to the people of her generation who live under similar conditions or are well familiar with them. The nostalgic tone highlighted by the phrase in the title and the last sentence, “The sun was shining”, drives attention to the optimistic vision of a child where humour prevails over negativity implied in the depiction of the environment and relations among people and family members: “I wander about this enchanted realm of silence and it seems it has always been like this and always will. Dad and mum, and granny, and me. And all these dear old objects, and these odours and the fly stained lamp on the ceiling. I am a child, I am home again.” (Neiburga, 1988, p. 34) This double-voiced discourse—the critical observation noting negativity in the Soviet order of life on the one hand and the nostalgic memories of childhood on the other—created an ideological diffusion that, under the conditions of socialist realism, made it possible for this text to resonate in a rather broad range. The story builds up a mosaic of the narrator’s childhood sensations revealing a picture of the everyday life of an ordinary family in the Soviet times that is somewhat estranged by the distance of time separating the narrator from her past experience. Hence, the impression of receding time appears including both the time of the narrator’s childhood and that of the whole Soviet epoch that seems to be fading away, becoming dim and even creating nostalgic memories.

**Generation Debate: Daughter vs Mother**

A very distinct feature of the late Soviet culture is a specific version of generation conflict, younger generation accusing the older of conformism and expressing dissatisfaction with the stagnating atmosphere. It is highlighted in “Izbāžti putni un putni būros” (Stuffed birds and birds in cages) that was written as the last story for the collection and claimed by critics to be the best story in A. Neiburga’s early prose fiction. It was one of the first texts in Latvian literature to depict family traumas related to the repressions towards the people committed by the Soviet regime, acknowledging the presence of traumatic historical legacy of the parents’ generation in family and society. It must be noted that the occupation of Latvia by the Soviet army as a consequence of the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact of 1939 was first publicly announced in Latvia in June 1988 and was not unanimously acknowledged right after it. However, in the underground literature of samizdat or self-publishing that circulated illegally throughout the Soviet Union, this topic and other repressed ones of the Soviet regime against the people had been treated long before.

The story has a double structure of text within text, an anonymous homodiegetic narrator quoting three longer diary notes found in the basement of her new flat. These notes, written by a young woman Kātrīna, provide a story of her childhood growing up in a grim communal apartment with her foster-mother. Her foster-mother was deported to Siberia at the young age of 18 and returned to Latvia in 1956 after the amnesty that followed Stalin’s death and subsequent condemnation of his regime. She brought the orphaned baby Kātrīna, whose 17-year-old Latvian mother had died in the North, with her. Kātrīna’s story is focused on relations that are very difficult: foster-mother and daughter are two strange persons living together yet unable to part. The daughter would like to adapt to the present life; she wants to join the Soviet pioneer
organization and make friends with the children of the several families residing side by side in the large communal apartment which had once belonged to the family of Katrīna’s foster-mother while her foster-mother is trying to distance herself from this different and traumatic life she has experienced. The story provides some information about life in Siberia; we learn that the heroine’s foster-mother had worked at the fish-works—a place where fish preserves are made—and the salt used for making preserves had eaten into her hands and left scars. Her life improved as she found easier jobs and even fell in love with a man. Yet, Katrīna admits that her mother’s ‘Siberia stories’ were always abrupt and told in harsh, unwilling words. The heroine first viewed this distancing from the surrounding world as her foster-mother’s control over her, but toward the end of the story, when her boyfriend—who wants to move out and start a family—proposes to her, Katrīna realizes she is not ready to leave her foster-mother who has created a shared life for them through the very distancing she once found controlling. This living space is marked by the shadow of their common past and it gets to be experienced by the heroine as an important part of her identity. “Don’t forget who you are,” foster-mother had told Katrīna when she wanted to become a pioneer (Neiburga, 1988, p. 148). At first the daughter missed the message of these words but finally they started to make sense. Moving on from the past appears impossible, and the story has an open ending and makes the reader question whether or not she will overcome her history of trauma.

Distance between the narrator and the protagonist (the narrator tried to trace Katrīna or find out something about her but in vain) is marked in the narrative by the presence of two voices – the mimetic voice telling a real story of a typical configuration of life and people’s relations in the post-Stalinist decades of the late 1950s and 1960s, and the metaliterary one that endows narration with conditionality and self-ironically points to the author. Both voices observe, reflect and make generalizing judgements about the late Soviet environment that may only be improved but not radically changed or, even less—abandoned, and people’s relations in it, distinctly in a generational aspect (concerning the daughter’s attitude towards mother). Both voices intersect in the house where former communal flats have been remodelled into small separate flats with a bathroom in each, where rooms are light and clean, with convenient and modern layout that is not reminiscent of the former labyrinths and communal spaces. The redecoration described at the beginning of the story sets apart two living environments: the one left by Katrīna in her journal that describes this world, and the one entered by the narrator, stating the radical positive changes. In the context of the year 1987, this summary of change expresses expectations for normalized life to the extent that would seem realistic at that time, possibly with some irony. The intensity of these expectations is conveyed by treating the life that is narrated as history: its testimony is discarded in the scrap heap of history—in the basement of the apartment house where the diary is found by the narrator in the small old nightstand together with an odd stuffed parrot. The narrator presents both objects as archaic worthless objects of the past; only the pre-war patina of the leather cover of the notebook urged the narrator to take it along. When she started reading the notes, she was disappointed to realize that the notes did not date back to the time of the independent pre-war Latvia. Hence, the Soviet period is represented as uncertain in relation to the past and present; it is the present that is not attractive to identify with and past that is not willingly recalled, unlike the mysteriously attractive mythologized pre-war time of the free independent Latvia. The border drawn by the metaphor of the complete overhaul between two living environments and narrators belonging to them encapsulates the Soviet world into a safe dimension of the past that is lost together with Katrīna. The traces left by it are totally at the narrator’s disposal.
Conclusion

1985-1987 was the time period when, in the late phase of socialism in the Soviet Union, a young generation of poets, writers, playwrights, journalists, musicians, cinema and theatre artists throughout the socialist bloc countries and the Soviet Union initiated new trends in culture. To convey the novelty of this phenomenon and relate it to similar trends in the world, the term ‘new wave’ was used, both by contemporary Soviet journalists and critics and post factum by theorists, to emphasize the radical character of breaking away from the previous culture canon. The broad use of the semanteme new/young in publications in different media in these years reveal the desire for change prevalent in the society marking the beginning of a new period in the history of Latvian literature and culture. This was a result of a distancing from the Soviet culture context, an opening up to the dynamic influx of Western theories and cultural influences and attempts at reconstructing national and cultural identity that resulted in a radical shift of culture paradigm.

The subject matter and poetic novelty of A. Neiburga’s early prose fiction produced in the mid-1980s constitute a bright expression of the ‘new wave’ in Latvian literature. Referring to Alice Jardine’s understanding of gynthesis, which appears in Neiburga’s texts as the overall effect created by the author where greater significance is attributed to introducing radically new, previously silenced issues, e.g. repressions of the Soviet regime against Latvian people and deportations to Siberia, various social and psychological problems, sexuality and bodily issues. It is manifested in the new vision, innovative configuration of poetic elements applied by the author in her first collection of stories Izbāžti putni un putni būros (1988). Among them there appears an on-looking heroine producing a distanced and ambiguous picture of the Soviet reality and creating an ideological diffusion that allowed to escape the rigid poetic canon of socialist realism and resonate with the desire of readers of the late Soviet period for new language, new forms of depiction and possibly, new reality.

The specific double-voice of the narrative in Neiburga’s stories and its numerous variations in constructing characters’ observation and reflection multiplies the diversity of prose narrative, allows for various ways of reading, and also provides a nuanced testimony of the social and psychological atmosphere of the late Soviet period.
References


Parnell, Ch. (2011). Masks of Stagnation: Disillusionment in Mykolas Sluckis’ Novels on the Pre-Perestroika. Baltic Memory: Processes of Modernization in Lithuanian, Latvian and


