



## The Ratio between the Dialect and the Standard Language in the 19th c.

### Lithuanian Literature for Children

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**Abstract:** The paper discusses literature for children and youngsters written by Lithuanian authors Motiejus Valančius and Antanas Tatarė with the focus on the writers' efforts in terms of linguistic expression, on the one hand, to be understood by all the population of the country, and on the other hand, to remain representatives of their native dialect. The 19<sup>th</sup> c. has a specific role in the history of formation of written Lithuanian. This is a period when there was no standard Lithuanian written language; that is why it is natural that many authors of that period based their writing primarily on their native dialect. However, the rudiments of standard written Lithuanian have been noticed since the very beginning of the century.

**Keywords:** 19<sup>th</sup> c. children's literature, the native dialect, the standard language.

Antanas Tatarė (1805-1889) and Motiejus Valančius (1801-1875) are the most famous creators of Lithuanian didactic prose. These authors are the pioneers of Lithuanian children's literature. In 1868 Valančius publishes a book of didactic short stories called *Vaikų knygelė* ("Children's Book"). This is considered the first book for children in Lithuanian literature. At the same time it is the first illustrated book for children. An unknown artist has presented 15 lithographs, all of them coloured by hand. Antanas Tatarė wrote fables and didactic short stories meant for children. Both authors were clergymen, raised on the same religious literature, nurtured by the same cultural and aesthetic subsoil, which is the ideas of the Age of Enlightenment. On the other hand, the works of these two authors are rather different, especially in terms of the style of their prose and the specificity of their poetics. This has been determined to a large extent by the fact that Antanas Tatarė was a representative of Western Aukštaitian dialect (a *zanavykas*), while Motiejus Valančius was a seaside Samogitian (a *dounininkas*). The dialect colouring is an important dominant in the works of both authors and an aspect for research of their prose. Dialectal dependence is to be emphasised here also having in mind the period of creation of Lithuanian didactic prose between the twenties and the seventies of the 19<sup>th</sup> c. It was a period when there was no standard written Lithuanian, that is why it is natural that many authors of that time based



their writings primarily on their native dialect. Thus Tatarė and Valančius weren't an exception.

The 19th c. has a particular role in the history of formation of written Lithuanian. Right from the beginning of the century "the rudiments of standard written Lithuanian are obvious" (Palionis, 1995: 165). The first half of the century is marked by very active ideas concerning the standard language coming from Samogitia (see Subačius, 1998), later followed by numerous discussions, reasoning and arguments as to the suitability of separate dialects for written language (see Palionis, 1995: 165-224; Jonikas, 1987: 155-208, 234-352; Zinkevičius, 1990: 64-224). Theories of writing suitable for all the dialects have been created and efforts at reforming writing have been made (Antanas Baranauskas, Simonas Daukantas, brothers Juškos, Kazimieras Jaunius et al., for more detailed information see Palionis, 1995: 220-223; Skardžius, 1997: 380-389). Finally, Western Aukštaitian dialect has been gradually established in written Lithuanian (Palionis, 1995: 165).

Thus the relationship with the native dialect is a typical feature of the language of the writers of the period under discussion. However, another very important quality, contrary to the mentioned one and characteristic of almost all writers of the 19th c., is their effort to write in the way understandable to all Lithuanians. The attitudes of Aukštaitians and Samogitians in this respect are different. Samogitian authors tried to write in the way that they are understood not only by the representatives of their own dialect but by the Aukštaitians as well (Palionis, 1995: 199), while for the Aukštaitians writing in the way understandable to all meant efforts to comply with the traditional written language (Zinkevičius. 1990: 202).

In this context it is obvious that the works of the two discussed authors haven't been chosen for comparison by chance. In a way they represent the two main tendencies of the development of Lithuanian writing in the 19th c.: the Samogitian and the Aukštaitian one. The language of Motiejus Valančius' prose has multiple elements of the Samogitian dialect, while the linguistic background of Antanas Tatarė's writings is his native *zanavykų* speech.



Talking about Valančius, one cannot forget the fact that the territory of the Samogitian diocese of which he was the head included the whole of Kaunas County; thus the subjects of the Samogitian Bishop were representatives of several dialects, and he was concerned that the writings were understood by all the people of the bishopric. Thus it is not surprising that in Valančius' prose there are quite a few Aukštaitian forms, although used sporadically and inconsistently. On the whole researchers state that Valančius' language has a lot of variation and dialectal mix (see Zinkevičius, 1990: 160-161; Palionis, 1995: 209).

Antanas Tatarė, who didn't have such objectives as Valančius, is closer to his own native dialect (according to Zinkevičius, Tatarė "was the first author who used in a significant way the dialect closest to our modern standard language for writing books" (1990: 201). However, this author as well wanted to be understood by a wider audience, so he tried to adjust to the representatives of other dialects.

However, talking about the two authors, it has to be emphasised that the wish to be understood by the representatives of other dialects does not put into the shade the colouring of their native dialect. The vocabulary is probably the factor best reflecting the dialect dependence of the two writers. It is the layer of the dialect vocabulary that allows us talking about the specificity of the style, text poetics of Valančius and Tatarė, and gives a lot of life to the naked didactic phrase.

As has been mentioned, Antanas Tatarė was a *suvalkietis*, while Motiejus Valančius was a Samogitian. This fact is very important for the comparison of the styles of the two authors. Kazimieras Župerka, a researcher into stylistics, writes:

The first factor determining the style is the author, the creator of the text. The style of one author differs from that of the other because they have different psychology (temperament, the type of memory, imagination, etc.), attitude of mind, education, world-view, aesthetic position, etc. The style combines the means of expression chosen consciously and subconsciously. The specificity of the language of the text(s) that distinguishes one author from another makes up an individual style (Župerka, 1983: 9).

It would also be appropriate to quote de Buffon, the French naturalist of the 18th c., who said: "The style is the person". Thus genetic and psychological factors do their job,



determining a certain predisposition for one or another way of speaking. It is not possible to mix Tatarè's and Valančius' texts.

The dialectal colouring of Valančius' texts has been widely discussed by Vincas Maciūnas in his study "Motiejaus Valančiaus *Giwenimu szwentuju Diewa stilius*" (Maciūnas, 2003: 493–503). He rightly notes: "It seems that the author of the *Giwenimū* is not a highly cultured bishop but some old Samogitian (similar to the character of the old farmer in *Šiaulėniškis Senelis* created by priest Juozas Silvestras Dovydaitis), who has never been different from other Samogitian villagers, the only difference probably being the fact that he had seen more of the world, or having drifted through numerous church festivals, had heard more sermons" (Ibid., 493). The dialect colouring is most obvious in the speech of Valančius' characters; the text perfectly conveys the intonations of the spoken language, the author uses colourful phrases and the vocabulary typical of the Samogitians.

Valančius' word is rough, sharp, often direct, his language is expressive, dynamic, while the text is decorated by the unique use of onomatopoeic interjections. The Samogitian writer likes talking in a short and decisive, logical and persuasive manner. Of course, the mentioned features are typical of normative poetics, the didactic type of the text on the whole (the addressee has to understand easily what is written). While talking about Valančius, such economy of phrase, its laconic form, is also the sign of the ethnic dependence of the writer.

The abruptness of the Samogitian word, directness of speech without euphemisms is quite natural in some works of Valančius; it seems that the author forgets his didactic commitment and produces really artful, mature lines. Although informative word is more typical of didactic prose writers than talking in images, there are really beautiful images in Valančius' writings. When a preconceived didactic idea or an example of religious or some other texts does not constrain the author, when he trusts his nature, the images are unexpectedly revealed and flourish. Literary scientist Zalatorius, talking about the prose of later times, has said: "Where there is more elemental force and naturalness, the story wins, where there is more reading up, it loses" (Zalatorius, 1980: 18). This thought suits



describing the creation of the analysed didactic writers. Authentic impressions, remarks, comparisons are most precious and original. Of course, the individuality of the author stems from folklore, from the spoken language of the people, and particularly from one's dialect.

Antanas Tatarė is close to Valančius in this sense. He is a typical mouthpiece of the Aukštaitian soul and an ambassador of the native dialect. The world in Tatarė's "*Pamokslai išminties ir teisybės*" (1851) (Sermons of Wisdom and Truth) as if reflects the life of the Suvalkija village (just as Valančius' texts reflect the realities of the 19th c. Samogitian village, gone forever). Both authors first of all rely on the authenticity of their own environment (from landscape to the dialectal vocabulary and phonetics).

The language of Tatarė's writings is more reserved, his narrative is slower. Tatarė is more lyrical by nature than Valančius; maybe that is why his didactic prose is more lyrical, too. Literary researcher Vanagas, talking about the specificity of the style of Tatarė's works, rightly notices his "soft speech, full of light shades" (Vanagas, 1987: 17). And indeed, Tatarė tries to speak softly, gently and kindly. His fables are full of various little mice, pansies, rabbits, little weasels, little animals... The language of Tatarė's works is more adjectival, thus the images are more static, not as dynamic and elemental as Valančius' (although there are exceptions). Valančius' texts emanate vitality and energy, while Tatarė's prose is full of concentration and serenity. Tatarė tries to speak in an aphoristic way (as the genre of the fable demands), he even philosophises (he sometimes gets an impetus from ancient plots). When Tatarė translates something from a foreign language, the text is more constrained, when he moves away from the source text, recreates it, moves the ancient plot to a Lithuanian farm, the narrative becomes more free and warm. Often Tatarė manages to talk very suggestively and persuasively. There are really picturesque parts of the text, imaginative episodes, and "although Tatarė didn't have anybody to learn the written language from, he is quite a narrator" (Daugnora, 2003: 520).

In the works of both authors, one can find quite a few barbarisms, hybrids. Barbarisms in the writings of the analysed didactic writers have certain historical stylistic rights: they reproduce the authentic linguistic situation of the 19<sup>th</sup> c., have an aura of the archaic exotica and acquire an aesthetic value.



Tatarė's and Valančius' prose is characterised by a stylistic disparity of the text, which on the whole isn't very frequent in Lithuanian prose, especially in the later writings. Some sentences or even paragraphs are written in correct language, in the most imaginative style, while some others are rather primitive, as if written by different people. This can be explained by the following: where the authors are concrete, where they rely on the live experiences, the knowledge of country life, the natural dialectal environment, the text is picturesque and stylish. Where the authors try to express their views directly, where they slide to the pure didactics, the vividness decreases. In such didactic talk, priority is given to the thought, and not to the image. It is important what is said, and not how it is said. There is another cause of such artistic disparity. The writers of the early period of the development of Lithuanian prose didn't employ any aesthetic or poetic tricks in their works on purpose. Of course, they have been influenced by literary examples; however, there must have been some spontaneity: they simply wrote down what their mind and their heart dictated them. The authors were concerned not so much with the artistic values of the text, its stylistics, as with its didactic message and accessibility.

There are a lot of oppositions, especially typical of didactic literature, in the works of both authors. The application of the principle black/white prompts the authors to characterise the pairs of characters by antonyms. Opposing the characters is very handy for didactic purposes (e. g., Valančius' stories "*Padorus ūkininkas*" (A Decent Farmer) and "*Jurgis, nedoras ūkininkas*" (Jurgis, a Wicked Farmer). The same could be said about opposing images. Images of a different mode when put together point to the goodness and badness (the main didactic categories), beauty and ugliness, etc. For instance, Tatarė describes the beauty of Heaven next to the ugliness of the devil, a representative of hell. On one side of the opposition, the bright one, stands a man, on another, the dark one, is the devil. Oppositional thinking is typical of both Samogitian and Aukštaitian folklore, which, without any doubt, nurtured the works of both authors.

In summary, it should be said that Tatarė's and Valančius' works have been written according to the traditional model of didactic prose. Both authors left quite a few pages of interesting, distinctive style. One of the important features of the style and poetics of the



discussed authors is their dialectal colouring. Valančius paints a Samogitian picture of the 19<sup>th</sup> c. village, while Tatarė presents its Aukštaitian variant. Talking about Valančius' and Tatarė's prose, the fact that at the period of writing of these two authors there wasn't a standard written Lithuanian, is vital. Many authors based their writings first of all on their native dialects. The "preserved" authentic dialectal and ethnical layer to a large extent determines the aesthetic value of the prose under discussion.

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