

THREE TEXTS OF JURGIS BALTRUŠAITIS¹

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Marina Tsvetaeva once wrote, "By the way, has even a single critic ever noticed that the letter B obdurately dominates the so-called symbolist generation? — Balmont, Briusov, Bely, Blok, Baltrušaitis"² In his book, *The Gift*, in one of its dialogues, Vladimir Nabokov touches on the same idea, "In those days my consciousness was totally charmed and gratified, appropriating, without any critical guile, all five (poets), beginning with the letter B — five of the senses of the new Russian poetry. — It would be interesting to know to which one you ascribe the quality of taste?"³ Thus at the beginning of the century readers and writers, even if they doubted the symbolists's taste, held Baltrušaitis to be one of the five most significant ones (although he was the last of the five). Later Baltrušaitis was ceremoniously and for a long time forgotten. His collections became a bibliographic rarity; only the manuscripts or galley proofs of some remained. Researchers of Russian symbolism sometimes recalled Baltrušaitis; his compatriots wrote of him too, but for many years in practice his work did not figure in the literary history. Recently two collections of Baltrušaitis's poetry appeared in Vilnius. His works, which once were translated into the English, Italian and other languages, are once again known to the readership of various nations. Fairly numerous new literature about the poet has sprung up in Lithuanian and Russian. The return of Baltrušaitis has almost coincided with the centennial anniversary of his birth.

It is difficult to compare the five B's that Tsvetaeva and Nabokov discuss. Doubtlessly Baltrušaitis is a writer of smaller stature than Blok or Bely (or even than Briusov and Balmont). However, as a man and as a poet he experienced the rarest of destinies. The son of a peasant from the province of Kaunas, in 1899 he published his first poems in Russian and almost instantly became an important figure in the Moscow symbolist circle. Together with others he founded and managed the publishing house Skorpion and the journal "Vesy" (Scales). He was intimately associated with and often was friends with not only the most important Russian poets but also with Chekhov, Scriabin, Kommissarzhevskaja, Tadeusz Micinski, Gordon Craig and Giovanni Papini. All his life he wrote poems in Russian. Quite a few of them were written in the 1920s and 1930s, when Baltrušaitis represented the Republic of Lithuania in Moscow. "As before, he wanted to associate with writers but he was a diplomat; therefore, the others diplomatically avoided him", remembers Ilija Erenburg about that period of Baltrušaitis's life.⁴ One of the last poems of the author, written in 1942 in occupied Paris, is dedicated to Mother Mary, Elizaveta Kuzmina-Karavaeva, the participant and martyr of the French resistance. Baltrušaitis did not live to see the liberation. In Rome on the 3rd of January, 1944, Viacheslav Ivanov wrote a poem dedicated to the memory of an unknown dead friend. It turned out that the poem (later published in Ivanov's Rome *Diary*) was Baltrušaitis's requiem. It was on that day that he died in Paris.

The last years of his life were the most significant to Baltrušaitis the poet. In the France of war, and later of occupation, he wrote some Russian poems and four books of poetry in the language of his childhood. These books have reached a wider audience quite recently.

The reader of Baltrušaitis, and all the more his critic and the researcher of his texts, is astounded by the poet's "achronicity". His debut and his death span a period of staggering catastrophe. Nevertheless, at first glance it is difficult to discern any difference between Baltrušaitis's earlier and later poems, any differences in theme and structure, at any rate. Baltrušaitis appears to be isolated — or perhaps he has consciously isolated himself — from the literary process. "You feel that his first book has to be his only book. Somehow early on, from his very first steps in literature, Baltrušaitis found himself, sought out his tone and themes, and from that time forward he was to remain faithful to himself. Even with regard to technique for many years his poems were scarcely perfected: he remained the way he was, and his book is like a single hymn, integral from beginning to end", wrote Valeri Briusov, reviewing Baltrušaitis's first collection, *Zemnye stupeni* (Steps of the Earth).⁵

Briusov was telling the truth, and his words proved prophetic: the subject matter and intonation of Baltrušaitis's poetry in reality did not change, he did not enrich the relatively uncomplicated repertoire of his symbols and semantic oppositions. In his poetic universe an essential and significant role is played by opposition: top/bottom, close/far, open/shut. This topological model is reminiscent of Tiutchev, to whom Baltrušaitis was often compared by the critics. The world of "above" (far, open) is juxtaposed to that of "below" (close, shut) as the sphere of original ontological fullness is to the sphere of splitting, captivity and chaos. Man becomes a dissonance in the universe, a strange kind of "anti-world":

I lish tebe, moia dusha zhivaia,
S bezmernym mirom slitsia ne dano . . .

Edinaia v prokliatii droblenia,
Ty v polden — ten, a v polnoch — kak zvezda . . .

(And only for you, my living soul,
It is fated not to blend with the endless world . . .

Indivisible despite the curse of splitting,
At noon—you're a shadow, at midnight—like a star . . .)

However, more often the poet or his mythical substitutes (here it is easy to notice the archaic symbol of the "tree of life", so characteristic of Baltrušaitis) become the mediators of opposite worlds. This code almost totally conditions most of both the Russian and Lithuanian poems. The underlying model of Baltrušaitis's poetry undoubtedly is connected to the longstanding tradition of romanticism as well as to that of the Russian philosophical lyric, it is close to the other symbolists, and at the same time it resonates with the much deeper and older cultural traditions—the symbolism of Gnosticism as well as of the Middle Ages and the myth of paradise lost.

This coherent system, articulated in various textual layers, determines the unusual unity of Baltrušaitis's work but at the same time it causes its rare and sometimes almost ritualistic monotony. Even the several prose attempts, articles and letters of the poet, do not violate this monotony. The same universe is to be found everywhere, the same grouping of ideas and the same tone. Baltrušaitis is an extraordinarily codified writer. It would not be too difficult to reconstruct with some degree of accuracy his "zero texts"—the unrealized attempts. The poet often stated that he was in the process of writing poems and dramas in verse of which only the titles ("The Bedouins", "Columbus's Followers", etc.), or some small fragments remain. But from the title, Baltrušaitis's mythopoetic system and vocabulary, one can perhaps derive the entire text. No one would dare to make such an attempt with Bely or Blok.

A closer analysis changes and extends the characterization of Baltrušaitis' poetry.

We know that every artistic (and not only an artistic) text is connected to other texts; it is by means of these texts that it is given meaning by the addressee, and it relates to them hierarchically. The poem becomes part of a wider text — a cycle or a collection. Its meaning and value can vary depending on its background. The symbolists more than other poetic movements tended towards cyclization and textual hierarchization (for them, the very text of the world was hierarchical and meaningful). Baltrušaitis held to this principle with great consistency. He thought not only or so much by means of separate poems as through collections, and each collection was an integral, closed universe. "My book is finished, all that's left is to write it", the poet's wife quotes his words.⁶ It's true that Baltrušaitis's collections are constructed mathematically; e.g., *Zemnye stupeni* consists of four parts with 25 poems each and a prologue; *Cornaia tropa* (Mountain Path) is in three parts of 25 poems each; *Aukuro dūmai* (Altar Smoke) has four parts (the first two contain 12 poems each, the third 11, the fourth consists of 12 strophes of the unfinished (?) poem reminiscent of *Infancy* by Viacheslav Ivanov.) It is easily noticeable that a great role in the collection's structure is assigned to the triad and tetrad, especially the second of these symbolic "Jungian" numbers, which Baltrušaitis codes in the semantic systems prevalent in the European cultural region (the seasons, times of the day, the four cardinal points, the elements). In this connection it is worth remembering a poet of a different country and a different scale, namely T.S. Eliot, whose text of the Four Quartets is organized in a very similar fashion (though perhaps at a deeper semantic level).

"Mathematicity" is characteristic of Baltrušaitis in a slightly different aspect as well. A detailed structural analysis, performed by us in another context, shows that in his books — evidently unconsciously — he aims for a certain balance of direct and reverse semantics, of assertion and denial (as in the myths, which Levi-Strauss has described and interpreted).⁷

However, the collection—and the poet's entire oeuvre— is a component of an even broader text. Baltrušaitis entered his unified and integral poetic system into two national cultures of different type and different maturity. The three collections of the poet belong to a gigantic text, which is called Russian symbolist poetry (and to Russian poetry in general); the other four books of poetry belong to the text of Lithuanian symbolist poetry (and to Lithuanian poetry in general). Baltrušaitis ends up in different, though related, linguistic, literary, and partly mythological and religious (Russian Orthodoxy/Catholicism) contexts. The tension between the text and its background, the dialogue with other texts—past ones, present ones and even future ones— becomes an integral part of his poetry. In some cases, this dialogue

"extinguishes" the poetic text, in others it stresses its unexpected potentialities. And at this point we observe that the Russian Baltrušaitis and the Lithuanian one are two very different poets.

Many critics and readers valued Baltrušaitis's Russian poetry highly, although he never enjoyed great popularity. Viacheslav Ivanov, to whom the Lithuanian poet seemed to be a soul brother, discussed his work in an enthusiastic article.⁸ We know Andrei Bely loved Baltrušaitis and left a wonderful literary portrait of him.⁹ The influential critics,

Aikhenvald¹⁰ and Ivanov-Razumnik praised Baltrušaitis's lyrics.¹¹ However, his poetry aroused a different reaction also. Nikolai Gumilev in his *Letters about Russian Poetry* wrote: "Baltrušaitis belongs to the older generation of Symbolists and in his work the style of the founders of *Skorpion* and *Scales* can really be felt: an elevated, even ceremonial relation to the theme and a ringing rhythm, although it doesn't always suit the weight of the idea . . . However, the thick blood of the people of the fin de siècle prevents the poet from breaking out of the cobweb of metaphors, and his poems, so very similar to each other, march before the reader so stern, ceremonious and unnecessary".¹²

Another important Acmeist, Vladimir Narbut, was even harsher. He reviewed Baltrušaitis together with third and fourth rated poets, who today are entirely forgotten— Bobrinski, Zhivotov, Feiga Kogan—and discussed the "hackneyed evenness of their strophes, the poverty of their poetic material."¹³

Without a doubt Gumilev and Narbut were poets who polemicized with symbolism in general. However, even Briusov, who at the beginning of the century had held Baltrušaitis (and Blok) to be the most beautiful hope of the young Russian poetry, on 27 May, 1914, had the following to say to S. Vengerov about Baltrušaitis's poems: "Their overdone abstraction irritates me rather than enchants me".¹⁴ He was also the author of a fairly unfriendly parody of Baltrušaitis.¹⁵ And this kind of reaction doesn't strike the researcher of Russian literature as being random.

Baltrušaitis's collection were belated. A new generation, practicing a different poetics, had already matured. According to Gumilev, by 1911 Russian symbolism had finished its development,¹⁶ and its language "had turned into a dead dialect" (Boris Eikhenbaum).¹⁷ During a short period of two or three years Russian poetry changed suddenly (a qualitative leap which can be compared to a genetic mutation.) Akhmatova, Mandelshtam, Kuzmin, Khlebnikov, Maiakovski, all made their appearance. That which a decade before had seemed astounding innovation, under one's very eyes became a frozen "common place". All the symbolists tended towards "achronicity", and Baltrušaitis—most of all. Now this achronicity became a lack of modernity. The Russian poet Baltrušaitis's collections at the moment of their appearance already belonged to the past. To the younger poets Baltrušaitis was to remain alien.

There was perhaps one, rather important, exception. The poet and rather insightful critic Sergei Bobrov, in reviewing Mandelshtam's *Tristia*, said: "It seems that he used Voloshin and Baltrušaitis, who were not especially noticeable in the general background of symbolism."¹⁸ These words are credible and not only with reference to Voloshin. In their vocabulary, images and intonation some of the young Mandelshtam's poems remind one of Baltrušaitis: *Kogda udar s udarami vstrechaetsa* (When blow meets with blows), *Skudnyi luch kholodnoi meroiu* (The meager ray by a cold measure), and perhaps even *Zvuk ostorozhnyi i glukhoi* (A sound careful and muffled), the poem which initiates Mandelshtam's first book of poetry.

The features of Baltrušaitis's poems which are directly related to his bilingualism are of special interest to the literary theorist. It is partly because of them that Baltrušaitis is "not very noticeable" in the general background of Russian symbolism.

The symbolists had only a slight interest in the linguistic problems of poetry. Rather they supported translinguistic

and interlinguistic positions. Interesting exceptions—in Russia primarily Bely, and Ivanov on a much smaller scale— only prove the rule. The plane of expression and the plane of content, as some researchers have already noted,¹⁹ do not intersect in symbolist poems; they separate and veer "beyond language": the plane of expression gravitates in the direction of music, while the plane of content towards abstractions, or "pure constructions of thought". "The symbol acquires the prestige of mythical "depth": the symbol is deep and therefore, as it is asserted, it is not a "simple sign" (is the sign really that simple?); since the power as well as the dynamics of the content is constantly disturbing the form ... A symbolic consciousness implies an image of the depth: it sees the world as a relationship between the external form and the many layered, massive and powerful *Abgrund*."²⁰ Although these ideas of Barthes touch on a much broader sphere of phenomena, they also fit the Russian symbolists very well. Their programs and declarations mention the mysterious unity of the "depth" and the "surface" in the symbol; however, the typical symbolist instead of deepening the relationship between form and content, simplifies it.

Baltrušaitis is perhaps the most typical of the Russian symbolists; he fulfills their canonical requirements very clearly, simply and methodically. His work can be considered to be an invariant of this literary school (this observation belongs to Iuri Lotman). The oppositions of Baltrušaitis's poetic universe (top/bottom, fullness/splitting, continuous time/discrete time, etc.) describe the semantic code of every Russian symbolist from Vladimir Solovev to Blok. However, all the other prominent symbolists fill out, enrich and transform this structure—sometimes to the point of making it unrecognizable. Baltrušaitis leaves it exposed. Beside the decorative Balmont, the chaotic Bely, the refined Ivanov, the dry Briusov, the dark Sologub and the tragic Blok, Baltrušaitis seems to be a veritable "golden mean". It has been asserted with good cause that

he is more conservative than his brothers in arms; that he avoids metric and phonetic experimentation; that the intuition of impending catastrophe, so characteristic of Russian symbolists is alien to him, as are many of the symbolist themes (the tragic city, the demonic and sin); that his poetry, which evidences a peasant-like gloom in its own way is democratic. Baltrušaitis chooses mostly philosophical themes, and his works often turn into translations into poetic language of the theses of his contemporary Russian thinkers (Florenski, Losski, Berdiaev, Trubetskoi) or even into their restatements in verse form. His poetic universe is declaratively mysterious, but really quite orderly and rational: the very regular meter and the very symmetrical composition suit this abstract order as well as the harmony. Of all the Russian symbolists (if we stick to the acknowledged masters and not to their derivatives) Baltrušaitis is the one who least avoids clichés and traditional idiom, he is the most "redundant" and the most faithful to "the aesthetics of identity" (in Lotman's terminology). It is precisely to him that the words about the lack of a linguistic problematic most apply. And where there is no linguistic problematic, no inner interest in language, no research into the possibilities of language, there is a lack of poetry as well. Most likely one of the basic causes of this trait of Baltrušaitis's Russian poetry is the fact of his bilingualism. Although he knew Russian quite well, he learned it rather late and had no feeling for its mechanism "from the inside": the language for him was a tool and not an innate value.

The Russian poetry of Baltrušaitis is a textbook example illustrative of several literary problems: how the significance and value of a text change in a dynamic context; how the "translinguistic" and alinguistic orientation of symbolism expresses itself in the clearest form; how the requirements of a literary movement combine with the concrete linguistic biography of a poet. The analysis of these problems shows at least in part why Baltrušaitis is a minor Russian poet, who played no great part and who could not have played one in Russian literature (even if Baltrušaitis enthusiasts assert the opposite). In Russia he is primarily a figure prominent in literary life and atmosphere.

Jurgis Baltrušaitis's Lithuanian text was formed in a completely different situation.

It could well be that Baltrušaitis's first poems were written in his native language, but these early attempts did not survive. Late 19th C. Lithuanian poetry, which was the not very refined lyrics of the national reawakening, was hardly a fitting starting point for an European polyglot, an admirer of Nietzsche, Maeterlinck and Ibsen. Baltrušaitis's aims did not suit the Lithuanian tradition, which relegated primarily social and patriotic goals to poetry. For a long time Baltrušaitis had no addressee in Lithuania. The influential critic Adomas Jakštas—even though he was a student of Vladimir Solovev—valued Baltrušaitis's Russian work with great reserve.²¹ The young people acquired an interest in it gradually. Some testimony from his contemporaries shows that the poet secretly tried to write in Lithuanian about 1907.²² But from that period up to his first collection in Lithuanian three and a half decades were to pass. And not just any decades. Lithuanian poetry matured, it reached a European standard, the changeover of several generations took place within it. Though they came belatedly, movements, typologically close to Russian symbolism and futurism, German Expressionism, Polish Skamander and Žagary, appeared. Some of these movements yielded a significant crop—unfortunately, due to the hermeticism of the Lithuanian language, it is almost completely unknown to readers of other nations. The first current, that of Lithuanian symbolism, was already formed before 1918 and national independence. Baltrušaitis's poems, not too significant against the background of Russian symbolism, at that time did interest and encourage Balys Sruoga, Vincas Mykolaitis-Putinas, and Faustas Kirša. However, by the time that Baltrušaitis returned to Lithuanian poetry, symbolism in it, as elsewhere, was already a thing of the remote past. The poet's work in 1911 Russia appeared *outdated* but in 1942 Lithuania it was *old-fashioned*, it had acquired taste and strength. That which in Baltrušaitis's Russian past was the norm and the standard, in the changed Lithuanian context sounded anticonventional, uncanonic, almost like a challenge. His poems became the parallel path which literature, in its search for renewal, sometimes takes. Lithuanian poets reacted to Baltrušaitis's new works variously, some enthusiastically, others (like Faustas Kirša) quite the opposite; however, it occurred to no one—as it had earlier to Narbut—to say that his poems were "hackneyed". The best part of the Lithuanian intellectuals saw hope, comfort—and innovation, in his work. Lithuanian poetry feels the effects of this "second impulse" of Baltrušaitis even today. The most talented poets of the younger generation keep up a dialogue with it, even though they themselves do not always realize this.

Of course, this did not happen only because the context changed, and all the more it was not because Russian and Lithuanian literatures are phenomena of a different scale. Even if one could demonstrate the difference of scale, it has nothing to do with the topic at hand.

If at one time Baltrušaitis was unable to view a foreign language and its poetry "from inside", then it is equally true that he viewed his native language and its poetry somewhat "from outside". However, at this point it turned into a source of strength rather than of weakness. The poet had to study grammars of the Lithuanian language and the dictionaries of Baronas and Sereiskis. In his everyday existence he more often spoke Russian, thus he treated Lithuanian as a special, sacral language (this variety of bilingualism is known as diglossia). In any case, the return to the language of his childhood gave him dual status—that of a guest and a member of the community. And this duality especially enriched his poetry. Russian culture, in which the poet was not totally at home, nevertheless came in useful: it became the wider circle of texts from which he could observe the text of Lithuanian culture. The language offered resistance, he had to search for its hidden reserves in order to recreate the model of the world which had formed in a different language and poetic tradition. This *debate with the language*—as often happens—gave Baltrušaitis strength. Therefore, the Lithuanian Baltrušaitis, even if he retained a rather meager repertoire of themes and symbolistic metaphors is a completely different poet. By no means is he an invariant or a common part of Lithuanian symbolism. Quite the contrary, he departs radically from the usual model

of Lithuanian symbolists, enriching it greatly. Baltrušaitis's Russian lines are an ideally transparent algebra of signs; in the Lithuanian ones we find a great number of surprises, stylistic advances and ruptures, semantic conflicts. The vocabulary is archaic and new at the same time, elevated and commonplace, while the syntax is confused and does not always communicate:

Todėl tiek daug būties aušrų prašapo—
Bet ir savimp, kaip mirksnio laisvas tarnas,
Tu pats migai nuo žemės žiedo kvapo,
Ir žemės vyliaus klausė tavo sparnas . . .

Negėstamo ir gėstamo verpete
Du amžių toliai remia žemės tiltą,
Kur jie tave—kad juos sujungtum—metė,
Kaip kibirkštį nuo jų mįslės atskiltą . .

Therefore so many of existence's dawns have gone off—
But to thineself, like the free servant of a blink,
You yourself fell asleep from the fragrance of earth's blossom,
And your wing obeyed earth's seduction . . .

In the whirl of the extinguishable and the nonextinguishable
Two distances of the age support earth's bridge,
Where they threw you—so you would join them,
Like a spark split off from their riddle . . .

The planes of expression and of content continually outgrow and overflow one into the other. The evenly flowing musicality more often than not is replaced by the meaningful, though incoherent phonetics, the abstractions by concrete items. The lexis veers closer to the "earthly" pole. More detailed statistical research demonstrates this clearly.²³ In the Russian collection *Gornaia tropa* (Mountain Path) 24 percent of the nouns belong to the semantic field of "nature", while 26 percent express abstract (geometrical, philosophical, etc.) concepts. In the Lithuanian *Ašarų vainikas* (wreath of tears, the first part) the corresponding figures are 34 percent and 14 percent. For this reason even the semantic core of Baltrušaitis's poetry is modified (for instance, the purely Lithuanian, local plants, rather than the literary and exotic ones turn into the tree of the world). A great number of words circumscribe the direct surroundings of the peasant. Instead of the conventionally romantic and even international lexis Lithuanian archaic and dialect words (*germena*, *perlenkis*, *purkšmenos*, *sinkliai*) begin to dominate. By the way, the new Baltrušaitis is a very strict purist: international words are rarely found in his works (this strategy is not characteristic of other Lithuanian symbolists). But there is no shortage of neologisms: even among the movement of the "Four Winds", the Lithuanian futurists, it would be hard to find a poet who outdid him in favoring neologisms and creating such accurate ones.

True, the neologisms are created less according to the futurist model than according to the model of old Lithuanian writers, Mikalojus Daukša and Konstantinas Sirvydas. The morphological archaisms also go back to M. Daukša and K. Sirvydas; e. g. the rare forms of the locative, and the "morphological ellipses" (*būgsta*, *lygsta*, *gaudis*, *troškis*). The rejection of the usual prefixes and suffixes gives informational density to the line. In many poems the expressive verbs and syntactic structures (e.g. the anaphora 'ant'/on) resound from Kristijonas Donelaitis. The line of ancient ballads with a caesura after the fifth syllable begins to dominate in the metrics, and also the trochee, vividly reminiscent of 19th c. Lithuanian poetry (which was oriented toward the Polish; e.g. to Karpinski's hymns). Thus the meter also becomes an additional factor giving the poems an archaic character. Great attention starts to be paid to the pronunciation and articulation of the lines: to this is related the fact that there are virtually no poems by the Lithuanian Baltrušaitis without addresses and imperatives.

This is already poetry which does not find the problematics of language alien; a poetry constantly fighting with automatization, verbalism and inertia. It is interesting that in his later period Baltrušaitis does not avoid humor and paradox, he writes several poems for children (this usually happens to poets who are oriented to linguistics). Gradually the mask of "the sorcerer" and "prophet" fades; a human, original and attractive face emerges.

Among the Lithuanian symbolists Baltrušaitis stands out primarily because he is oriented not toward folklore but to older Lithuanian literature. However, the new post-symbolist currents are not foreign to him either. And not only the Lithuanian ones but the Russian ones as well. In spite of everything he was not so absolutely "achronic", as his severe program demanded. The reminiscences of his contemporaries show that he valued and understood the younger generation of Russian poets, even if they did not always repay him in kind. He liked both Pasternak and Mandelstam. In the collection, *Lilia i serp* (The Lily and the Sickle), rhythms which made their appearance under the influence of Marina Tsvetaeva (*Alea jacta est*) break through. In the Lithuanian poems the mythology of the farm, the love of dialect and of linguistic rarities are reminiscent of Nikolai Kliuev and his school, to which Esenin also belonged. While *Įkurtuvės* (Housewarming), to my mind, one of the most mysterious works of Lithuanian poetry, would be easier to interpret juxtaposing it to Tsvetaeva's *Ratcatcher*.

The relation between the Russian and the Lithuanian Baltrušaitis illustrates rather well the thesis of Aleksandr Potebnia: bilingualism is not a "poetically neutral" phenomenon, a poet cannot express one and the same content in two languages, he cannot write in them equally well. We would add: if the removal from the native language and culture is at the very least risky, then the ability to view them from another language and culture is most often useful because it emphasizes the specifics of "one's own element".

Such are the two texts of Jurgis Baltrušaitis in two national languages. However, it is fitting to mention a third text—the text of life and behavior. Like many poets, Baltrušaitis formed his biography according to a particular canon. It was not empty but full of meaning, it became a *sign* for future generations. This life text was determined by ethical decisions, it was composed of a style of action, gestures, habits, even periods of silence. "A poet, just by his existence in a nation, performs something", said Baltrušaitis in 1938.²⁴ We could say that the text of his life is a transformation of the literary text. If the axis of his poems is two worlds, then in life these two worlds turned into two cultures and two epochs. The poet nobly performed the task of being their mediator, even though this was by no means simple. Without hesitation he aided Balmont, Bely, Mandelstam, Tsvetaeva and Chagall. These human gestures, whose memory his contemporaries have gratefully saved, are worthy of no less than a good book. Because culture is not only books, pictures, music, scholarly endeavors; it is also the lives and deaths of all of us. Or at least the lives and deaths of the best of us.

Translated by Violeta Kelertas

1 Reprinted by permission, with minor emendations by the author, from Tomas Venclova, *Tekstai apie tekstus*, Chicago, 1985, p. 49-61, originally written in 1975.

2 Marina Tsvetaeva, *Proza*, New York, 1953, p. 255.

3 Vladimir Nabokov, *Dar*, Ann Arbor, p. 85

4 Ilija Erenburg, *Liudi, gody, zhizn*, vol. 2, Moscow, 1961, p. 434.

5 Valeri Briusov, *Dalekie i blizkie*, Moscow, 1912, p. 173.

6 Quoted according to Jurgis Baltrušaitis, *Derevo v ogne*, Vilnius, 1969, p. 483.

7 Tomas Venclova, "Erdvės struktūros Jurgio Baltrušaičio rinkinyje *Zemnye Stupeni* (Spatial Structures in Baltrušaitis's *Zemnye Stupeni*) in *Literatūra*, v. 16, No. 1, Vilnius, 1974, p. 41-61.

8 Viacheslav Ivanov, "Jurgis Baltrušaitis kak liricheskij poet", *Russkaia literatūra XX veka, 1890-1970*, v. 2, Moscow, 1915, p. 301-311.

9 Andrei Bely, *Nachalo veka*, Moscow-Leningrad, 1933, p. 380-382.

10 Juri Aikhenvald, *Slova o slovakh*, Petersburg, 1916, p. 79-89.

11 Ivanov-Razumnik, *Zavetnoe*, Petersburg, 1922, p. 25, 28.

12 Nikolai Gumilev, *Pis'ma russkoi poezii*, Petrograd, 1923, p. 127.

13 V. Narbut, review, *Novaia zhizn'* nr. 10 (1912) p. 258.

14 Valeri Briusov, *Stikhotvorenia i poemy*, Leningrad, 1961, p. 832.

15 *Ibid.*, p. 562.

16 Nikolai Gumilev, "Nasledie simvolizma i akmeizm", *Apollon*, Nr. 1 (1913), p. 42.

17 Boris Eikhenbaum, *O poezii*, Leningrad, 1969, p. 81.

18 Quoted from Osip Mandelstam, *Sobranie sochinenii*, v. 1, Washington, 1967, p. 362.

19 Cf. Jan Prokop, "Kazimierz Tetmajer: *Znad morza*" in *Lirika polska, interpretacje*, Cracow, 1966, p. 191-198.

20 Roland Barthes, *Essais critiques*, Paris, 1964, p., 208, 210.

21 Adomas Jakštas, *MŪSŲ naujoji literatūra*, v. 1, Kaunas, 1923, p. 339-346.

22 Mykolas Vaitkus, *Nepriklausomybės saulėj*, 1918-1940, c. 1, London, 1968, p. 189.

23 Tomas Venclova, "Pastabos apie Jurgio Baltrušaičio poetiką" in *Literatūra*, v. 14, No. 1, Vilnius, 1971, p. 69-81.

24 A. Braziulis, "Poetas Jurgis Baltrušaitis kalba apie savo kūrybą *Literatūros naujienos*, nr. 1 (1938).