



FEMINISM
AND
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LITERATURE

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The collection of essays is the first attempt in postsoviet Latvia to bring to the foreground feminist literary criticism and theory and to interpret from this point of view the creative writing of outstanding Latvian women writers (poetry, prose, plays). The authors of the essays come from an academic milieu, and they bring with them special knowledge from their own fields.

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ECOFEMINISM: ASPECTS OF TEMPORALITY

ARTURS MAURINŠ

World history has its own gender rhythm,
eras accented by manhood are interspersed
with eras accented by womanhood.

Zenta Mauriņa

The concept of *ecofeminism* appeared in the literature through Francoise d'Eubonne's book Feminism or Death.¹ Ecofeminism is a concept that can be considered in various ways. One can seek its initial appearance in the mentality of humankind, one can trace its genesis and expressions over the course of history, one can seek to characterize its place and significance in contemporary culture, and one can try to forecast its development in the future. One can study not only the structure of ecofeminism, but also its temporal (wordly) aspects in order to lay bare the processual links of the past and the future. It is this last topic that is the subject of this discourse.

The natural environment, as well as cultural creations, are imbued with a certain *temporality*, where time is expressed as a measure of processuality. However, when we look at the spiritual culture of humanity, we must also speak of *temporalism*, that is – of humanity's ideas about time. According to philosopher Julia Kristeva,² the mentality of women has a different temporal nature than the mentality of men. Feminine time can be seen as cyclical, multi-tonal and non-linear, while masculine time can be seen as an "arrow of time". These specific aspects of temporality are linked to fundamental differences between the psyche and character of women and those of men, and these questions were already being researched at the beginning of this century by Otto Weininger.³ When we listen to the Latvian folk songs known as *dainas*, moreover, we can easily discover in them the spirit of womanhood and ecofeminism.

I think that as we survey the process of ecofeminism and its movement from the past to the present, we can also discover opportunities to peer into the future. The idea that humanity is experiencing a spiritual and social crisis, complete with rapid, "third wave" changes that shock the psyche, has become cliché, but no answer has been found to the desperate question – "Whither, humanity?" Obviously there can be no single answer to this global question, as is usually the case with great truisms. If in this treatise I manage to shed light on only one aspect of the answer, I shall have fulfilled my purpose.

Ancient womanhood and "ecologism"

Women, like men, come in many different varieties, but nature has placed upon women functions related to human regeneration that fully set them apart from men. These fundamental differences unquestionably are expressed in the psyche and mentality of women and men. The work of Weininger, Carol Gilligan⁴ and other researchers has always accented the characteristic desire of women to deal with everyday problems by settling relationships with other people. For the male consciousness, by contrast, it is more acceptable to base life on strict rules and principles. The self-identification of a woman is more linked to others, while the man's "me" is more aimed at the identity of the Ego, as well as separation from others. A mother not only gives birth to, but also feeds and tends to her children. For that reason, the freedom for which all living things yearn is expressed by women as care for others, much more so than is the case with men.

In this respect, the nature of a woman is more "ecological" than is the nature of a man. As biology attests, living beings emancipate themselves during the process of evolution, becoming less dependent on the chaotic aspects of environmental factors. But this is a co-adaptive process, one which involves improving relationships with other partners in the respective ecosystem. It is no accident that the focus of modern ecology is not on the structure of nature, but rather on relationships among organisms, their groups (biocenoses) and their environment. Efforts are made to determine ways in which

these relationships (matter, energy and information exchange) can be made more effective. Research by archaeologists and ethnographers suggests that such ecologism was also typical in the development of ancient cultures.

More than a century ago, a researcher into the history of justice, Johana Jakob Bachofen,⁵ divided the history of societal development into three stages. He termed the first stage as "tellurgical" (coming from the Latin word for land – *telluris*), stating that typically this stage was promiscuous, establishing sexual relationships within the primary community without any judicial or moral regulation. The tasks assigned to men and women in terms of providing for existence differed. Men were largely engaged in hunting, while women collected plants necessary for sustenance and healing. Women began to reproduce plants and to breed animals. For that reason, during the tellurgical period of society women were more familiar with the processes and relationships of living nature than men were. It is also true that women produced the first clayware.

In the second phase of society, known as the matriarchal or lunar stage, sexual relationships were regulated by the rights of the mother. Mothers owned children and the property of the family – domesticated animals, crops, dishes, the hearth and home. Men traditionally continued to hunt and to avert the attacks of strangers. An increasing part of the family's sustenance came from the woman. The lay authority and sacral influence of women in the tribe increased, and this was expressed in the community's tyranny over man's aggressive and searching nature. After the domestication of the horse and accomplishments in the production of battle weapons, the matriarchal stage was replaced by a third – solar or patriarchal – stage. People began to conquer other people, tribes and nations were robbed and subjugated, man and nature were exploited. The public attitude toward the natural environment changed, too – from one where partner relationships and sacral piety were dominant to one where the relationship was one of governance and subjugation.

In her book The Chalice and the Blade, Riane Eisler⁶ analyzes the ancient cultures of the Middle East, concluding

that in a very broad territory and over many centuries, society managed to make do without aggressive conquest and subversion. It was a culture of partner relationships which was violently overcome and destroyed by the patriarchal model of conquest and subjugation. Eisler concludes that the extremism of this model was caused by an alienation of man from nature, of people from other people, and of individuals from themselves. Armed with powerful technologies, people are destroying their planet in order to satisfy the demands of the power-hungry Ego.

A well known researcher into Baltic mythology and ancient Baltic history, Marija Gimbutiene,⁷ has written that the agricultural cultures of Old Europe were matrifocal, egalitarian and peaceful. In crass contrast to these cultures were the Indo-European cultures which flowed into Europe. These were patriarchal, hierarchically organized and oriented toward conquest. The three waves of Indo-European invasion came between the 5th and the 3rd millennium BC, arriving from what are now the steppes of Southern Russia. The male-oriented religious cults of the Indo-Europeans oppressed any honoring of female deities, but to some extent the two approaches melded, thus tempering the warlike approach of the new arrivals. Nevertheless, in the pantheon of the skies, goddesses were assigned a secondary role, most often as wives to male gods. Once the period of monotheism arrived, Yahweh, Allah and the Christian God had no mother, no wife. Not too long ago Christian theologians were still arguing whether women have souls. Is it possible to think of a woman as a Jewish rabbi or a Muslim mullah? Even reformed Christian congregations often refuse to ordinate women as clergy.

Agony of the patriarchate?

Much has been written about the social, ecological and other aspects of the Western cultural crisis, beginning with the now-classical work of Otto Spengler.⁸ Warnings from the Club of Rome sound like an alarm bell. Efforts to look at these macroproblems from as high a vantage point as possible, merging the problems of technocracy, rationalism,

industrialization, militarization, capitalism and socialism – these all lead to a recognition of the guilt of patriarchal traditions. In the aforementioned book by d'Eubonne,⁹ we read that no “revolution” in the spirit of the patriarchate can avert the horrors of environmental destruction and the self-destruction of humankind. But even more horrible is the pollution of minds, spirits and flesh which is created by phallogocratic consciousness at all levels – from the style of grammar and the myths of religion to racy anecdotes and advertising, from the dogmas of churches to falsified recipes and “high” art.

Even at the end of the 19th century, there were some areas of culture in which one could see signs that the patriarchate tradition was being threatened. There were increasing numbers of publications about the problems of womanhood. Battles were waged on behalf of women’s emancipation, and these gradually evolved into what is now known as the feminist movement. To a certain extent we can state that a counter-reaction to liberalism (including the movement for women’s rights) was the National Socialist traditions of Aryanism, complete with their mythical doctrines and the superhuman cult that surrounded their hero.¹⁰

Efforts to rejuvenate the hero cult of manhood are being made by those who are establishing the metaphysics of Russia’s neo-imperial ideology (e.g., a special metastrategic research center). A monthly magazine called *Elementi*, which advertises itself as the most elite publication in Russia, often publishes articles about the nature of the aggressive Euro-Asian hero who will save humanity from its path toward the degradation of “gyneocracy” (the term comes from Bachofen’s book).¹¹ Bachofen defines gyneocracy as an ordered naturalism in which property considerations overcome spiritual and material development.

In the system of humanity’s cultural values, as well as its understandings of science, there has been a shift from a universally determined orientation (according to Weininger, this is a masculine character) to one which has multiple possibilities (the character of womanhood). Modern ecological

thinking is based on the idea that multiplicity is a value in and of itself, and the postulate of conquering nature is rejected. The vast variety found in living nature is the basis for the survival of the biosphere and the long-term existence of humanity. Also characteristic of ecological thinking (the "green consciousness") is the feminine (according to Weininger) phenomenon of the disappearance of strict boundaries between the subject and the object: in his perception, man flows together with the biosphere or the noosphere. Modern physics, too, has begun to refute the idea of an independent external observer and binary opposition.

The "third wave" of the noosphere has proven to be fateful to the heroic soldier. The author of this concept, Alvin Toffler,¹² has written that this marks the shift of humanity into a new stage, where the main type of property is information, as well as systems for its processing and utilization. Information, unlike other types of property typical of the patriarchal phase (land, herds of livestock, cities, industry, natural resources, airports), cannot be taken away, nor can it be preserved through military force. The superiority of informative systems can ensure victory over an opponent who has greater numbers and more aggressiveness. We can remember the rapid defeat of the Iraqi army, which was raised in the spirit of heroism and armed with modern Soviet weaponry, in the Persian Gulf war of 1991. Imperial armies have become an anachronism of history, to say nothing of their being a major burden on national economies.

Efforts to polish the aggressive image of an army's heroism cause even greater damage to the virtue of a nation, degrading the nation's mentality. For many years, for example, American society suffered from the "Vietnam syndrome"; The criminal problem of Russia's "Afghan" adventure now flows together with the criminal activities of participants in the Chechen war. Quite a few retired soldiers continue in their murderous ways after they return home: they go to the world's "hot spots", offering the services of a professional warrior (murderer) to the side which offers better rewards.

New non-confirmists believe that there is no great difference in the views of Marxists and those of liberals with

respect to the process of production; the difference, they say, lies in views concerning distribution of that which is produced. Both of these seemingly irreconcilable views are based on the limitless development of production capacity, and the radical exploitation of natural resources. Soviet socialism was nothing more than a type of state capitalism. The chaos of the Soviet "prison" was simply a starting point for the destruction of the political and economic system in which there were efforts to achieve limitless increases in production capacity.

A member of the Club of Rome, Chilean scientist Claudio Naranjo, has said that the current crisis of civilization represents an agony of the patriarchy.¹³ He writes that he has spent a long time researching views about patriarchy as the only source of the industrial mentality, capitalism, exploitation of humans, greed, alienation, inability to live in peace, and destruction of nature. Naranjo feels that the current situation in the world is a sickness, the diagnosis of which is linked to the patriarchal structure of society and conscience.

The agony of the patriarchal system of values leads to serious psychological problems for some men, who lose their traditional governing role in society and in the family. The desire to maintain this governing role is an important force behind Islamic fundamentalism. Men have experienced not only psychological and social, but also biological problems. Influenced by technogenesis, the pressure of oxidative factors on the biosphere has increased radically. Here we speak of such global factors as acid rain, holes in the ozone layer of the ionosphere, increasing amounts of ozone on the Earth, electromagnetic waves, etc. Even in the 1920s the French scientist Ph. Jouet-Lavergne was noting that oxidative factors oppress the sexuality of men. In future years this idea was confirmed by many researchers.

Possible options for the future

In order to get a sense about possible events in the future, we must take a close look at the driving factors and temporal aspects of trends in the present time. First of all, we must seek to answer the question of whether the current wave of feminism

is the result of an accidental leap of fashion, or whether there are powerful social, mental and metaphysical driving forces at work. Weininger has written¹⁵ that the women's movement has had a cyclical nature over the centuries: in the 10th and 11th, the 15th and 16th and the 19th and 20th centuries there have been more emancipated women and hermaphrodites (as well as homosexuals) than has been the case in the intervening phases of approximately four centuries. He writes that in periods of upswing in feminist movements, there are more manly women, and the influence of manly fashion increases even on normal, feminine beings. Weininger has not, however, analyzed the causes of this cyclical process.

The duration of the aforementioned intervening phase is the object for another article. Here, let me just note that such cycles of time have been known since ancient days. In his *Aeneid*, Vergil writes of the lessons taught by Sibilla about changes in eras and the "grand year" which lasted 440 years. The Old Testament (in Exodus 12:40-41) tells of 430 years of enslavement by Pharaoh, while the New Testament (Matthew 1:17) tells of three periods of approximately the same duration between Abraham and David, from David to the exile of Babel, and from the exile of Babel until Christ.

Based on the cyclical nature to which Weininger has pointed, we might well conclude that the current upswing of feminism will soon experience a downswing. But this wave differs from previous efforts toward women's emancipation in several important ways. The current feminist movement resonates powerfully and positively with fundamentally new global phenomena in our civilization. First and foremost it is a powerful ecological movement which involves ecologization of all types of public consciousness (science, philosophy, religion, morality, justice).

Ecologization is occurring not only in the consciousness, but also in the sub-consciousness of people. It is an issue not only of rational science, but also of mystical, sacral and metaphysical reflexion. The New Age movement, which draws the hostility of traditionalists, is a visible example of this. One New Age community in the North of Scotland has been

described vividly by Paul Hawking in his book The Magic of Findhorn.¹⁶ The community specializes in contacts with plants, intuitively feeling their needs and providing what is required, especially positive emotions aimed at the plant world. The community has managed to grow beautiful plants and harvest bountiful crops of vegetables in the poor, sandy soil of the North Sea shore, and they do it without chemical fertilizers. There is no problem with inferiority in the community, because there is no superiority either. Of particular importance to the members is creative and positive thinking, because they believe that people must get a feel for the forces of nature, harmonizing with them the energy and thoughts of the individual's psyche. If this is done, the community believes, people and plants change in a positive way, and it becomes possible to attract the vibrations of a new type of cosmic energy. This leads to a planetary consciousness which differs considerably from aggressive internationalism.

In the Encyclopedia of World Problems, there is a list of 8,000 global problems, starting with earthquakes and disease and ending with the power of multinational corporations and the insufficient coordination of the work of international organizations. Research by the Club of Rome suggests that in the near future, no technical, economic or legal approaches to resolving the world's major problems will be effective, because these attempts are too complicated to harmonize and, therefore, they are quite ineffective. What is needed is a change in the psyche and spirit of individuals themselves.¹⁷

What we are seeing is a cardinal and global tendency for Western democracies to engage in the implementation of the ideas of an open society. Karl Popper¹⁸ characterized this trend of social development as the victory of democratic open societies over the utopian ideology of closed groups (classes or castes of people) that was promoted by Plato, Hegel and Marx. According to Popper, that utopian idea represented a halt in political change after the establishment of an ideal state on the basis of "scientific" models or ancient traditions.

Popper emphasized that it is wrong to try to predict the future of humankind on the basis of "laws" postulated by

philosophies such as Marxism, even if those ideas are based in historical considerations. This view corresponds to the conclusions of modern-day synergetics, which teach that it is impossible to predict the direction in which a system will develop on the basis of its bifurcation (fundamental transformation, "catastrophe"). From the perspective of temporalism, we could say that in a system that is undergoing transformation, dominance is achieved by desire and creative processes which have no causality.

But the existence of humankind is not a homogeneous process. Even during the most rapid transformations, the effects of heredity, inertia and partial repetition do not disappear. The future emerges from the present. Naturally, it is difficult to separate durable trends from those which will wither away, but, as experience has shown, it is possible to achieve that distinction even within the framework of rationalism.

If we see humankind as part of the biosphere, then we can apply the principle of irreversible evolution to the transformation of people just as we do to the transformation of the biosphere. What is past does not reoccur, not only because the conditions of the environment have changed fundamentally, but also (and primarily) because there are no longer the materials to create that which occurred at one time but is now gone. Based on the principle of irreversibility, we can say with some certainty that the feminist movement is not leading humankind to another matriarchate or gynocracy. It is much more likely that a new and previously unseen stage of society will develop.

Many futurological books have been written about the various possibilities for the future of civilization and all kinds of utopias and anti-utopias have been created. From the perspective of the topic of this article, I am quite fond of the vision of sculptor and poet Albert Totilla¹⁹ about a harmonic society involving a trinity. It is a society with heteroarchal relationships between the father, the mother and the child, both within families and at the level of the culture of civilization at large. In this social trinity, the principles of Father, Mother and Child do not depend on gender or age, and they can be linked in

various ways at the individual level. This means more than just harmonization of relationships between genders and generations; harmonization of the elements of Father, Mother and Child in one's soul means establishing a factor which can temporally bring together and reconcile one's personal psyche and various biosocial elements, helping to find the personality of one's partner, as well as the deepest essence of that personality. Father's love is oriented toward the "sky" – the world of principles, ideas and ideals. Mother's love is aimed at nature and individuality, focusing on what is needed, not what has been "earned". The love of the Child is a love which is noble and respectful. Interpsychic love (i.e., love which brings together the elements of the mother, the father and the child) ensures harmony in the family, as well as among paternal, maternal and filial values in society. It can also overcome egocentrism, which has created an artificial deficit of resources.

In conclusion it should be noted that in Latvia, as in other post-socialist countries, the feminist movement is unlikely to become popular in the near future, and it will have to overcome a range of prejudices and provincial narrow-mindedness. The fifty years during which Soviet ideology dominated Latvia have left a lasting influence in this area, too. Marxists, both in theory and in practice, always sought to subordinate women's issues to the battle among the classes of society and to the global missions of their authority, including the class-based and party-oriented ideology ("Women from Stahanov in the building of Communism", "Women in the battle for peace, against colonialism, against American imperialism", etc.). The emancipation of the Soviet woman from her family clearly served to subject her to the merciless exploitation of the state's patriarchal system. To the Soviet woman, therefore, the whole idea of emancipation usually meant that which she already had – much heavy work outside the family (equality with men!) and pitiful wages. Our society has become imbued with the idea that woman-specific activities were initiated by the Communist party and that therefore they are of no real purpose in present-day Latvia. Also abroad is the view that feminism threatens the cultural values of the nation, or even the very identity of the

nation. In this period, therefore, as we are seeking to "enter Europe", we are going to receive the modern ideas and concepts of feminism from there.

¹ D'Eubonne, F. Le Feminisme on la Mort. Paris (1974).

² Kristeva, J. Strangers to Ourselves. New York (1991).

³ Weininger, O. Geschlecht und Charakter. Eine prinzipielle Untersuchung. Vienna and Leipzig (1920).

⁴ Gilligan, C. In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development. Cambridge, Mass. (1982).

⁵ Bachofen, J.J. Muterrecht. Stuttgart (1861).

⁶ Eisler, R. The Chalice and the Blade: Our History, Our Future. San Francisco (1987).

⁷ Gimbutiene, M. Balti aizvēsturiskajos laikos (The Balts in ancient times). Rīga (1994).

⁸ Spengler, O. Der Untergang des Abendlandes. Umriss einer Morphologie der Weltgeschichte. Vol. 1 and 2. Munich (1919-1923).

⁹ D'Eubonne, *op. cit.*

¹⁰ Rosenberg, A. Der Mythos des 20. Jahrhunderts. Eine Wertung des seelisch-geistigen Gestaltenkaempfe unserer Zeit. 177-182. Auflage. Munich (1941).

¹¹ Bachofen, *op. cit.*

¹² Toffler, A. The Third Wave. New York (1980).

¹³ Naranjo, C. The End of Patriarchy. And the Dawning of a Tri-une Society. New York (1993).

¹⁵ Jouet-Lavergne, Ph. La physico-chimie de la sexualite. Proto-plasma-Monographien. Berlin (1931).

¹⁶ Weininger, *op. cit.*

¹⁷ Commentary by The Club of Rome Executive Committee on the Limits to Growth. New York (1973).

¹⁸ Popper, K.R. The Open Society and Its Enemies. London (1991).

¹⁹ Naranjo, *op. cit.*