A possibility of autobiography in Jonas Mekas’ poetry collection “Dienų raštai”

Ramūnas Čičelis

Doctoral student, Vytautas Magnus University, Kaunas, Lithuania

Autobiography appeals to death, thus it is almost an impossible genre for a philotoper, who is always “here” and “now” and for whom writing about the past has no meaning. The philotoper refuses to construct his own identity: as the verbal text and a living person are always differing, a person is never integral and has nothing in common with the principles of modern history. The philotoper is not constructed or formed; he experiences not himself but the things – not human beings. He is not interested in the certainty of events. Premodern autobiography is more acceptable for the philotoper, as it exceeds person’s egoistic interests and gives a possibility to experience the Other. One possibility for a philotoper’s autobiography is his works (they belong to the past), which have a substantial form and exceed humanness and dead past.

Mekas’ poetry collection “Dienų raštai” (“Daybooks”), published in Lithuania in 1998, consists of the poems, which have not been published in his previous poetry collections. In this book Mekas does not tell his autobiography and does not group the poems according to the themes, motives or problems: the texts are published in their chronological order and do not give a possibility to talk about Mekas’ integral autobiography. On the other hand, in the “Preface” of the book Mekas prompts the reader to look at the poems as to his “journey through life” [Mekas: V]. Though this book does not present the summary of the development of his poetry, still the main trajectories of Mekas’ poetry can be identified: from the rejection of the Western philosophical poetry and mind, towards the orientation to the Thing and the Other, and finally to the desubjectivisation of poetry. In “Dienų raštai” these trajectories intersect and do not provide a possibility to define the reasons of his poetical writing; Mekas *does not* create a system. In his poetry the main role is given to the mood of the day, on which the poem is written, and to the circumstances of “here” and “now” situation. In “Dienų raštai” Mekas argues: there is no reason to create an integral personal story, as the modern Western history has come to its end; the story of a person’s life has no reason or aim; it is possible to speak only about “personal story”, which is always accidental and has no plot as the events and things change accidentally.

Already in the first poems of the book Mekas speaks about the end of the Western history and philosophy: as the classical thinking reached its end, the time has come to open up to the perception and memorial experience of a moment; there is no need to define the values or ideas. The collection reiterates Mekas’ concepts: being as a silence, and meaning is in the Thing, which almost always is natural. In the first parts of “Dienų raštai” the speaker, the same as in the collection “Semeniškių idilės” (“Idylls of Semeniškiai”/ “There is no Ithaca”), reveals his relation to nature: it has nothing in common with the consuming and isolation – the parallel between nature and a person is created. This parallel helps the person to overstep his interest in himself.

In “Dienų raštai” a person sensually experiences nature as a Thing, and this perception is more important than the contents of natural experience. In Mekas’ poetry nature is not a panorama, but a concentration of being. The speaker’s orientation to the environment, the rejection of utilitarian interests, the being in nature, and responsibility for this being give a possibility to describe the poems of this collection as ecotexts.

Though Mekas tells a kind of his autobiography in this book, he himself is important only as the one, who experiences the nature; Mekas oversteps his subjectivity and creates a relationship with the Thing, which is not human. Mekas reminds us that he is not an egoist or narcissus. On the other hand, Mekas *does not* unite with the Thing – it would be an oriental property; there is a distance, which makes it possible to care about the Thing by using discursive language. Once more this poetry collection reveals that Mekas does not analyze, feel or think – he only cares by using language. In “Dienų raštai” the contexts of Mekas’ poetry meet: from the ancient Greek philosophy to the postmodern American poetry. The experience of Mekas as a reader of Thing-oriented poetry is between these contexts.

 “Dienų raštai” is not a traditional narration about a personal creative past: it is the past, and not the text about the past. Once more Mekas erases the boundary between poetry and reality. There is no need to speak about reality as it is alive in the texts. After “Dienų raštai” Mekas published only one more poetry collection – “Žodžiai ir raidės” (“Words and Letters”). Some properties of the latter collection started developing in the former. And though in the poems of “Dienų raštai”, written more than twenty years ago, the hieroglyph has still not been created (as in “Žodžiai ir raidės”), but the aim to unite the speaker, the text and the reader is already important: “Dienų raštai” ends with poetical letters to the friends, who are not the addressees, but the participants of the texts.

Mekas’ poem is not a result of logical relation without a substantial background. It is embodied in the speaker and on the leaf of paper. When the subjectivity is overstepped, the past is always the present. This presence is a medium between the discourse and Thing. The autobiography for Mekas and his readers is not retrospection; as time is the present, which overcomes death.

Literature:

Mekas J. Dienų raštai. Vilnius, 1998.