

TWO PETERS: QUEER DOMESTIC SPACE AND ARTIST'S SENSIBILITY IN SOVIET LATVIA

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The article focuses on the phenomenon of queer domesticity in Latvia in the 20th century, analysing evidence of a homosexual couple living together in a house they built in Rīga. Adapting to different political regimes, two men who met while working in the theatre could maintain their lives together for about twenty years. To do this, they had to use various adaptation tactics and subterfuge and create their own concept of family in their daily lives. Their subterfuge tactics have been so successful that their queerness and cohabitation are forgotten today. This case study adds to the knowledge of queerness during the Soviet era by highlighting the complex relationship between personal freedom and conformism concerning state power in the artistic environment.

Keywords: domesticity, theatre, LGBTQ+ history, Latvian history, housing

Introduction

In 1951, on a warm summer day, the prominent Latvian opera singer Milda Brehmane-Štengele (1893–1981) visited theatre director Pēteris Lūcis (1907–1991) and his life partner Pēteris Kaktiņš (1901–1958) in their house in Pārdaugava, the outskirts of the left bank of the Daugava river in Riga, for the first time. She later recalled this visit in her memoirs, including a detailed description of the party:

I was taken to the house of Lūcis in 4 Slampes Street by our mutual acquaintance – dentist Marta Komisāre. Surprise after surprise awaited us there. Entering the garden gate, two men in white shirts suddenly

came out on the path. Kneeling before us, they bowed like Orientals, touching the ground with their hands. I met two Peters there: Kaktiņš, the Tall one, and his neighbour Lūcis, the Little one. The welcoming ceremony was not over yet. We were served a beautiful plate with fruit decorated with roses. There was no shortage of fruits and flowers (grown by both Peters themselves) on the table, which was laid out in the garden under a large parasol. There was even electric lighting installed above the table. After some time, we were invited to the house in Lūcis's apartment, where the new bookshelf stood on the wall, covered with a white cloth. At its festive opening, we said words of appreciation and "washed down" our joy with wine and coffee.¹

The description of such a party seems unusually idyllic for its time. Six years have passed since the end of the Second World War, two years since the large-scale deportation of Latvian farmers to Siberia in 1949.² The last years of the Stalin era were passing when the communist occupation government aggressively controlled the cultural sphere. According to Moscow's mandates, it regularly organised campaigns where scapegoats were sought out and condemned for deviating from the Communist Party's ideology. And perhaps most unusual is that Brehmane-Štengele visits a house built by two men to live there together.

The household of two gay men that lasted for almost twenty years is quite exceptional, given the sexual politics implemented by three authoritarian and totalitarian regimes that replaced one another in Latvia during that period. At the same time, it proves that such a lifestyle was available to a tiny minority of people and was possible only on specific terms. I argue that the queer household of the two Peters could only exist in Soviet Latvia if it were surrounded by silence and discretion about the true nature of their relationship. This discretion was achieved by specific ways of deception, namely making other people part of their household, both practically and symbolically, and disguising the relationship in the fundament of their cohabitation. As many pieces of evidence show, their secret was kept so well that it has disappeared from public memory and can be reestablished only through a knowing queer eye.

Silence, evasive hints, and frankness are the three modes of testimonies about the life of the two Peters. The key evidence is the biography of Pēteris Lūcis, written by the actress and theatre historian Austra Skudra (1926–2020), published in 1983. It contained a rather frank depiction of the love story of the gay couple,

1 Brehmane-Štengele 1986, 136–137.

2 *The deportations of 1941 and 1949*. (n.d.). Accessible at: <https://militaryheritagetourism.info/en/military/topics/view/59> (viewed 18.10.2023).

of course, disguised under poetic sentences about their friendship and shared obsession with theatre. However, it is pretty straightforward when speaking about the emotional attachment between the two Peters and the great sense of loss Lūcis felt after the sudden and premature death of Kaktiņš. My interviews with Austra Skudra, theatre director Māra Ķimele, and Anita (to protect her privacy, I do not mention her surname), the current owner of the house, supplement the “official” biography of Lūcis, as well as published and unpublished memoirs by Milda Brehmane-Štengele, fan letters, and other writings. A new surge of interest in Lūcis’s personal life emerged with the Valmiera theatre production “Lūcis” in 2017, staged by director Elīna Cērpa.³ It made some more evasive hints about the relationship between the two Peters that the show reviewers discussed as a daring gesture or, on the contrary, as a weak attempt to talk about Lūcis’s queerness.⁴

This article illuminates the concept of queer domesticity, as it has been developed by scholars of queer history over the last decade. Matt Cook, in his *Queer Domesticity*, defined home as “a place infused with desires – for love, sex, intimacy, relationships, for pleasure, for security and comfort”. However, he pointed out that men in his case studies “often acted in private with the public in mind – even if what they had and did there was never observed by anyone else”.⁵ Antu Sorainen states, “The term queer domesticity refers to intimate LGBTQI+ arrangements of the activities, space, style, and finances of the home, as distinguished from kinship or family. The concept strictly concerns the setting up and administration of a household as opposed to the family structure.”⁶ Stephen Vider understands domesticity “as a flexible and ongoing act of social performance” when “through the everyday acts of creating, maintaining, and being at home, individuals make continuous claims to the control of space over time. They designate a space as their own, separate from the wider world, while defining simultaneously that space’s insiders and outsiders”.⁷ In the centre of such definitions, we witness the complicated relationship between privacy and agency, on the one hand, and different inner and outer pressures, on the other.

The relationship between the two Peters began in the early 1930s, survived the authoritarian regime of Kārlis Ulmanis, the first year of Soviet occupation, Nazi Germany’s occupation, the Stalin era, as well as the first years of Khrushchev’s “thaw”. All this time, male homosexuality was criminalised in the territory of

3 Adamaite 2017.

4 Radzobe 2017; Vējš 2018.

5 Cook 2014, 9–10.

6 Sorainen 2019, 1312.

7 Vider 2021, 7.

Latvia. Therefore, the longevity and relative openness of these relationships raise the question of how they were possible under such conditions. As the analysis of archival evidence shows, they faced similar challenges that queer couples on the other side of the Iron Curtain; however, in their own specific context.

Queer domesticity has become a subject of interest for several scholars. In contrast to the popular belief of gay life as a series of cruising, hook-ups, and casual sex, it is home life and a long-term relationship, as well as different partnership models, that is the focus of recent scholarship.⁸ Steven Vider, writing about American queer domesticity in the decades after the Second World War, sums it up: “Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer people did not simply reproduce or reject [heterosexual] ideals but rather elaborated new domestic styles and intimacies as a primary means of negotiating their relationship to postwar sexual and gender norms and the nation.”⁹ A prominent case study of queer domesticity in America is the love story of wealthy Robert Allerton and his younger lover John Gregg whom he adopted as his son after decades spent together. The couple held conservative views and never publicly acknowledged their queerness.¹⁰ The case study of the two Peters shows how these models of intimacies were invented in various countries, including Latvia, under different regimes and periods of occupation.¹¹

Chronicle of the mansion on Slampe Street

The relationship between the two Peters lasted from the beginning of the 1930s when they were young actors who had graduated from Latvian Drama Classes and met at the Farmers Drama Theatre to “become inseparable”.¹² Both Peters

8 On casual gay sex in Soviet Latvia, see: Lipša 2021; Lipša 2022; Aripova 2020; Vērdiņš 2022.

9 Vider 2021, 3. Matt Cook has summarised several points about queer domesticity: (1) heterosexual normality as the ideal of all kinds of relationships (queer men’s relationship has often been judged against that ideal, sometimes forgetting that heterosexuality can be very variable, too); (2) masculinity as a privilege that allows for greater independence and earning potential means that queer men were often more able to make their own way domestically; (3) eccentricity, Bohemianism, and exoticism associated with queer life; (4) woman’s presence at queer men’s home as helper and caretaker when it is necessary; (5) acting in private with the public in mind even when not observed by anybody else; (6) there is no queer monopoly on familial and domestic difference; no straight monopoly on conformity. Cook 2014, 6–18.

10 Syrett 2021.

11 On Soviet occupation and colonisation of the Baltic states, see: Annus 2018.

12 Skudra 1983, 77.

had common backgrounds and interests: they came from farmhand families and pursued their dream to be on the theatre stage.¹³ However, their professional life took different paths. Kaktiņš, the older of the two Peters, received an actor's education but maintained a semi-professional status in the theatre. In the 1930s, he played in the Farmers Drama Theatre and other troupes, also serving as a manager. In the 1940s, during the Nazi occupation, he was involved in the travelling Stage Art Ensemble. However, he maintained his primary profession as a printer all this time. After the Second World War, he was the head of the zincography workshop of the Rīga Model Printing House until his retirement. It was different with Lūcis, who already started directing during his years at the Farmers Drama Theatre. After the Second World War, he first became a director at the Jelgava Drama Theatre, which was located in Rīga during the post-war period. After liquidation of this theatre, he became the director of Valmiera Drama Theatre in northern Latvia. Shortly before Kaktiņš's death, Lūcis was appointed the chief director of this theatre and kept the position throughout his long life until his death at the age of eighty-four, one month before the August Putsch in Moscow, which was followed by the restoration of Latvia's independence. Nowadays, Lūcis's fame is still lasting while Kaktiņš has wholly sunk into oblivion.¹⁴

The role which contributed to Lūcis's fame the most and made him a national star was his leading role in the movie "The Fisherman's Son" (*Zvejnieka dēls*) which was shot in 1939 and screened in overcrowded movie theatres in early 1940. Lūcis played the young fisherman Oskars, who rebels against the old order in his father's home, thinks about technological innovations in fishing, and eventually finds a wife, the beautiful Anita. Lūcis became a sex symbol of the generation that received much attention from women.¹⁵ As Austra Skudra writes,

Along Mārupe river, the ladies of Rīga paraded in droves. They came with small boats and boats under their arms, made of amber, carved from wood, and bent from the bark. The souvenir collection

13 On Lūcis's family in Jaunsvirlauka, see: Freimanis et al. 2003.

14 For short biographies of Kaktiņš and Lūcis see: Niedra 2002, 25, 313–315.

15 Part of the letters written by women admirers to Lūcis is collected at the Museum of Literature and Music. For example, young Rita and Ilona in Liepāja wrote to Lūcis on 8 May 1940, after his guest performance at Liepāja Theatre: "Your handsomeness has bewitched very many girls in Liepāja who already plan to chase you. We also start to be interested in you because we have not seen a more handsome man in Liepāja who could bewitch us with his handsomeness like you. (...) Actually, we ought to be watching the whole show, but all we saw was you. Every lover suffers from jealousy, and we are not an exception. Just one night at the theatre has made us martyrs. Because all you cared about was [actress] Marianna Zile, and we envy her since." Rita and Ilona 1940.

of the house stored a whole history of shipping. Under the windows of Slampe Street, serenades were sung even by famous voices.¹⁶

This attention did not seem to change the relationship between the two Peters. Unlike the homosexual Hollywood movie star Rock Hudson, Lūcis did not marry any woman to hide his queerness. The character of Oscar accompanied Lūcis for many years: he has played it in several theatre productions, as well as staged a dramatisation of this novel by Vilis Lācis in the theatre several times. Ironically, the generous fee he received for this movie role, the representation of the heterosexual fisherman's son, soon became the financial fundament of the home of the two Peters.

Around 1939, both Peters decided to exchange their furnished room for a house. They put Lūcis's fee to good use and took a loan from the bank, which they later paid back over a long time. The house was built quickly, and both moved in with Lūcis's elderly father, who spent there his old age. The house on 4 Slampes Street was situated on the southern border of Riga City by the little Mārupe river. Kaktiņš was the practical side of the couple and had some knowledge of architecture, house building, and law. Legally, he was the one registered as responsible for the construction work: as the municipality magazine *Pašvaldību Darbinieks* (Municipalities' Employee) informed in July 1939, he was building "a two-story house, a one-story outbuilding, and a fence".¹⁷ The completed two-story house consisted of two apartments connected by the staircase inside the house. Such an arrangement allowed for free moving between the two flats that neighbours and passers-by could not observe. Two Peters started to share one building that officially counted as a two-apartment house with two independent owners and simultaneously served as their private mansion. Such a cohabitation model proved successful and lasted for almost twenty years.

The closest friends of the two Peters obviously treated them as a couple. When Milda Brehmane-Štengele first visited the house in 1951 to celebrate the arrival of the new bookshelf, she was invited to the upper-floor apartment owned by Lūcis. In her published memoirs, the two Peters are called "neighbours", while in a takeout passage stored by the Literature and Music Museum, she offers a more detailed characterisation of their relationship:

Everything in life is balanced: day and night, good and evil, black and white, light and dark, etc. That's why two Peters have met: the tall

16 Skudra 1983, 80.

17 Būvju valde 1939, 666.

one and the small one. I got to know both of them simultaneously, but the tall one died soon. He was the main gardener, the grower of vegetables and flowers. Lūcis is more of a consumer and a good cook. So, little by little, we started visiting, making friends, and attending the Valmiera Theatre's opening performances.¹⁸

Interpreting the two Peters as each other's *yin* and *yang*, the singer gives their relationship an almost mystical tone, which indicates the solid and long-lasting affection, clearly the love of their lives. She also touches on their shared domestic life, including gardening, cooking, and throwing parties for friends. In 1952, Lūcis started his collaboration with Valmiera Theatre and had to divide his time between Riga and Valmiera, where he eventually was given a small apartment and where Kaktiņš, Brehmane-Štengele, and other friends visited him for premieres. Kaktiņš continued his work at the Model Printing House of Riga as the head of the zincography workshop and, in 1947, was awarded an honorary letter from the Presidium of the Supreme Council of Soviet Latvia (LPSR AP 1947). Unfortunately, this work contributed to his untimely death in 1958 when he was already retired: zinc dust gradually ate away at his lungs.¹⁹ In Lūcis's biography, love between the two Peters manifests most profoundly in the pages dedicated to Kaktiņš's death and its consequences on Lūcis's personality.

Austra Skudra, Lūcis's biographer, was a beginning actress at Valmiera Theatre who often visited 4 Slampes Street in the 1950s. She worked on her roles with Lūcis and treated the couple's dog, Hertans, with some sausage. The dog had joined their household as a premiere present from the actors of Valmiera Theatre in 1952. Skudra witnessed the affection between the two Peters, who, as she remembered in 2015, were "always walking hand in hand" and who treated her as their "stepdaughter". Another person, important to their chosen family, was Marija Trautiņa, a widowed woman who lived nearby and who became Lūcis's close friend. She helped him out with "women's chores" around the house. As Skudra points out, Lūcis's obsession with theatre and faith in himself as an actor and director was what differed him from Kaktiņš, who believed in himself much less and, over the years, gradually estranged himself from active participation in the theatre. However, Kaktiņš served as an advisor and critical voice when Lūcis worked on his productions.²⁰ When Pēteris Kaktiņš suddenly died on 2 April 1958, Lūcis was devastated and sunk into depression for a long

18 Brehmane-Štengele 1980, 1.

19 Skudra 1983, 114.

20 Ibid.

time. As Skudra remembered in 2015, “It was extremely tragic for Lūcis when Kaktiņš died. After Kaktiņš’s death, I looked at him and thought: he was going to commit suicide. But he buried himself into his work.” As she recalled, Lūcis brought to his partner’s grave all the flowers he got after the opening performances of his productions. Lūcis remained single for the rest of his life, and the house on Slampes Street gradually turned into a museum full of memorabilia from the happy days together and presents from his many admirers. He spent more and more time in his small apartment in Valmiera, visiting Rīga about once a month and staying longer at 4 Slampes Street during the guest performances of Valmiera Theatre. After he died in 1991, Lūcis was buried in Meža Cemetery in Riga next to Kaktiņš, enjoying the privilege of having a grave beside his partner, an opportunity that not all homosexual couples had. In the summer, when thick myrtles grow on both graves, their shoots connect, so it seems that both Peters are buried in a common grave.

In 1964, the ground floor apartment that had belonged to Kaktiņš was sold by his heirs to a Latvian family who moved in with their four-year-old daughter Anita. She shared her name with the beloved girl of Oskars, Lūcis’s famous movie hero, like many girls of her generation. The family invested in the building’s amenities, enlarged the ground-floor apartment, and covered the outer walls with plaster.²¹ In the interview in 2023, Anita recalled the particular design and furniture of Lūcis’s apartment, including his memorable writing desk and portrait on the wall where Lūcis looked much more severe than in real life. When Lūcis died, his apartment on the second floor was inherited by Irēna Trautiņa, the daughter of Lūcis’s friend Marija, who had passed away some years before the director. Irēna kept Lūcis’s memorabilia in the apartment untouched till her death in 2018. After her death, her heirs cleared the apartment of Lūcis’s things, took his collection of poetry books to second-hand bookshops, and moved in. Now both flats are owned by Anita’s family: she lives on the ground floor while her son Kristaps renovates the upper-floor apartment. Lūcis’s piano, the last piece of memorabilia, was given as a present to Valmiera Theatre in 2023. The house of

21 A private house on Slampes Street offered higher living standards than the big complexes of apartment houses built in several neighbourhoods of Rīga City during the period. As Jānis Matvejs points out, “Most large-scale panel housing micro-rays in Riga were built from the end of the 1950s to the late 1980s and were located in the suburbs. Nearly 485,000 people were settled in the housing estates of Rīga created during the Soviet era. In 35 years, 13 residential areas were built. Most importantly, it was a utilitarian living space that provided people with flats but offered minimal comfort and did not take architectural aesthetics much into account.” Matvejs 2022, 85.

the two Peters has changed over time; the premises have been enlarged and made more comfortable, and its current inhabitants keep in their memory the idealised image of Lūcis and, to a lesser extent, also Kaktiņš whom Anita classified as Lūcis's cousin.

The only visible testimony of the era of two Peters is a painting on the staircase wall, a landscape in brown and green colours with a huge oak tree, a birch grove, and a river beyond them. Two small figures are seen in Latvian national costumes at the oak tree: a man and a woman. The painting seems to be a work by a stage painter because it reminds of the painted set decorations that dominated stage design before more contemporary aesthetics took over. Many other gay male couples in history decorated their homes with homoerotic pictures.²² The two Peters, on the contrary, decided to have on their staircase wall a painting that fully conforms to the Latvian nationalist dream of a heterosexual couple that lives close to nature and, as the painting implies, follows the pagan world order with rituals in the sacred groves and honouring the giant oak trees. Whenever the two Peters visited each other's apartment, they had to go past the painting that seems to have served as a disguise for the true passions and desires of the house's builders. Now it serves as the last evidence of the aesthetic sensibility that dwelled in the house in its most happy years and could exist only as an open secret.

The two-apartment house of the two Peters embodies queer domesticity, analysed by Matt Cook, especially of the British artist couple Charles Shannon and Charles Ricketts, whose homes were "not oriented towards the procreative family but rather to a cultural legacy and the nurturing of collectors and artists who were usually male and often queer".²³ Preserving of that legacy was taking place in Latvia, where socialist rules were established after the Second World War. While queer couples in capitalist countries of Western Europe could keep servants, secretaries, and other paid workers under their roof, this was not an option for households in Soviet Latvia. The people living under the same roof were conceptualised as one family, and kinship ties were invented to justify the existence of such a household. The two Peters became two "cousins" or at least "neighbours" while Austra was proclaimed their "stepdaughter". The function of the apartment as an artistic place for accumulating material evidence of one's career became even more prominent in Lūcis's life after Kaktiņš's death.

22 See, for example: Vider 2021, 19.

23 Cook 2014, 51.

Queer sensibility vs. nationalism of the colonised western borderstate

The second section of the article is dedicated to the afterlife of the love story of the two Peters, or Lūcis's life as a single man after Kaktiņš's death. This period lasted from 1958 to 1991, when Lūcis was the chief director of Valmiera Theatre and mainly lived in his small apartment in Valmiera, surrounded by his actors, colleagues, and audience. There is no evidence of another Lūcis's love relationship or affair in that period. When Kaktiņš died, Lūcis was a man in his fifties who buried himself in his work and purposely affiliated himself with morality and dedication to the ideals of art. His portrayal of 1972 said: "Pēteris Lūcis works with every smallest part of his being: everything in him is work, and he himself is a full dedication work personified. There is nothing private or personal that could distract him from work and that he would prioritise above work."²⁴ Lūcis created his public image as the kind and emotional artist who was always among people; he could joke and recite poetry and never actually talk about his feelings.

The main and the most visible element of Lūcis's public persona was himself as the symbol of the past – the good old days of the Republic of Latvia. It was expressed by the ethnographic tie he always wore, the choice of plays he enjoyed to stage (besides the mandatory plays of the Soviet playwrights he had to produce as the chief director of the theatre), his "archaic" directing style, based on actors and their pedantic delivery of text, and his fame as Oskars from "Fisherman's Son". Being such a symbol was obviously a political statement that implied silent resistance to the aesthetics of socialist realism and the robust style of the politically oriented mainstream of Soviet theatre.²⁵

Another feature of Lūcis's personality was his performative behaviour, characteristic of both his professional life and leisure time. Some people who professionally collaborated with Lūcis remember his public persona as artificial. For example, theatre critic Silvija Radzobe remembered: "When meeting with the director on several occasions, one could not help but notice that his jokes and sayings (such as "Nothing is so good that it cannot be made even better" or "My dear, my golden one, my only one") repeat often and, most likely, we see not the true face of this person, but a carefully elaborated mask."²⁶ We can easily speculate that Lūcis needed to create this masked persona as a defence mechanism

24 Skudra, Ferbers 1972, 140.

25 On resistance to the official culture of Soviet Latvia, see Svede, Vērdiņš 2023.

26 Radzobe 2017. A similar opinion on Lūcis's personality was held by Latvian movie director Oļģerts Dunkers, who, in the process of making a documentary about Lūcis in 1981, had to provoke him to throw off his "mask" and open to sincere conversation. As he revealed in his memoirs, they gradually became closer, and

to protect himself from the scrutiny of his personality, sexuality, loyalty, or artistic practices.

However, the memoirs of Milda Brehmane-Štengele interpret Lūcis as somebody who could act continuously and had made acting his usual way of communication in his private life as well.²⁷ She shared her impressions of what Lūcis's regular private conversations would look like:

When Pēteris Lūcis arrives in my apartment, it is always an original theatre production. (...) He stops when he enters and asks loudly: "Don't you see who has come?" (It's a line from a play.) Serious conversations don't start right away. First, he utters various interesting and amusing lines; sometimes, he sits down at the piano and plays and sings Schubert's melodies from *Die schöne Müllerin*. (...) He is surprised when I object to him. After a moment of silence, he puts his hands together and calmly says: "I don't understand why you hate me." (Again, a line from a play.) Smirking slyly to himself, he finishes: "I can't say a single bad word about myself." (Also from a play.) (...) When I enthusiastically praised him, he became shy and let loose his devil of humour: "You see! You're out of words!" (Again, a line from a play.)²⁸

Judging by the singer's memoirs, Lūcis could communicate using only quotes from the plays he had worked with as an actor or director. In 1964, Susan Sontag conceptualised such behaviour as "camp" in her famous essay. As she put it, "Camp sees everything in quotation marks. It's not a lamp, but a "lamp"; not a woman, but a "woman". To perceive Camp in objects and persons is to understand Being-as-Playing-a-Role. In sensibility, it is the farthest extension of the metaphor of life as theatre."²⁹ As I suggest, camp can serve as a tool to gain insight into Lūcis's public and private persona as well as his apartments in Rīga and Valmiera. In photographs and memoirs, his flats are remembered as stuffed with poetry collections, artworks, knitted mittens in different colours and other memorabilia. Over time, they gradually turned into his memorial museums while

Lūcis talked about his love life. However, Dunkers kept this sensitive information to himself after Lūcis's death. See: Dunkers 1997.

27 In another passage, omitted from her memoirs that were published after her death, Brehmane-Štengele emphasises Lūcis's practical side: "What else can I say about little Peter? He knows how to manage: to bake, cook, brew juices, make cakes, and how to hoe the land. He has a big garden, lots of apple trees and apples. He will never get lost – he is warmly welcomed everywhere." Brehmane-Štengele 1980, 2.

28 Brehmane-Štengele 1986, 137.

29 Sontag 1966, 280.

he was still alive. The specific situation he lived in – as a chief theatre director of a provincial theatre in occupied Latvia – created his style that combined representations of camp similar to what Sontag associated with Western culture with Latvian ethnographic imagery and multilayered references to the past. This sincerely curated environment served as a dream space for reminiscing about the golden age of the pre-Soviet period.

The contemporary debates about queer temporality are usually based on Western case studies and life in capitalism under conditions of democracy that can be understood as a slow progress towards tolerance, visibility, recognition and respect. As José Esteban Muñoz argued in *Cruising Utopia*, “Queerness is not yet here. Queerness is an ideality. Put another way, we are not yet queer. We may never touch queerness, but we can feel it as the warm illumination of a horizon imbued with potentiality.”³⁰ Under the Soviet occupation, queer individuals nurtured utopian hopes for a better future, which included the decriminalisation of male homosexuality and recognition of queer sexuality. These hopes overlapped with nostalgia for the interwar period of the Republic of Latvia, also felt by the majority of the population, and the potential of the future restoration of state independence. Thus, nationalism with its expressions, allowed by the Soviet authorities (such as glorifying the artefacts of the past, including handicrafts, ethnographic objects, literary works, and artworks etc.) became the language for queer persons to talk about their private melancholic feelings. Lūcis effectively used this language while exploiting his status as an artist and celebrity who had built his career on sentiments felt by a large part of his audiences.

Artistic circles in urban metropolises were considered to be relatively accepting spaces for queers on both sides of the Iron Curtain. In New York City, Broadway theatres, Carnegie Hall, and Metropolitan Opera were among the few places where gay people could pursue their artistic careers.³¹ In the capital of the USSR, according to Dan Healey,

The important locus of Moscow’s male homosexual subculture was the art world. Homosexuals believed with some justification that they were tolerated there, and they gravitated toward music, drama, dance, the visual arts, and allied professions. (...) Mosfilm Studios, the Moscow Conservatory of Music, and Moscow State University were scenes of at least one sodomy scandal each in the 1950s through 1970s. Such scandals were normally hushed up, and archival access to criminal records on them remains blocked.³²

30 Muñoz 2009, 1.

31 Albrecht, Vider 2016, 108.

32 Healey 1999, 55–56.

To a certain degree, the same could be said about Riga and its art scene, as well as the theatre world of Soviet Latvia in general, where public outings of queers rarely occurred. The Soviet authorities were interested in submissive and supportive artists who did not get involved in conflicts with the Communist Party's vision of the development of the Soviet republics. Therefore, in the eyes of the authorities, Lūcis, who had become a member of the Communist Party in 1958,³³ fulfilled the task of preserving the ideological and artistic status quo in his theatre, while in the eyes of a large part of the public, his national stance and sentimental understanding of art reminded of the "good old" days.

Both kinds of expectations could be fulfilled only by an artist with impeccable behaviour. Lūcis conformed to such a type of artist, carefully controlling his behaviour even among his colleagues. As Skudra remembered in 2015, Lūcis in Valmiera Theatre enjoyed respect and authority as well as kept open his small apartment to sporadic bohemian gatherings that sometimes could last all night. His physical endurance allowed him to party till early morning and never miss a rehearsal the next day. However, there is no evidence (or even rumour) of his love life or affairs after Kaktiņš's death.

What was the relationship between Lūcis's queer sensibility and his work in theatre? Unlike the canon of camp aesthetics described by Sontag, which often included undisguised sensuality and balanced on the border of bad taste, Lūcis's aesthetic principles, formed by the traditions of Latvian theatre, were characterised by sentimentality and a certain puritanism. Soviet officials did not tolerate exposures of eroticism and sexuality in art, and Lūcis's taste conformed to them. In 2015, Skudra recalled how she had to play a Hella Wuolijoki's heroine who was having a love affair and had just spent a night with her lover. According to Lūcis's demands, they both were fully dressed in their next morning scene and showed no signs of physical desire sitting on a neatly made bed. When Lūcis staged "Fisherman's Son" in Valmiera Theatre in 1963, a critic pointed out that the interpretation of Anita's character was unusual because she was more of a friend and companion to Oskars than a lover. Such a treatment of the relationship between a man and a woman was seen as characteristic of Lūcis's productions.³⁴ In his obituary, the critic Gunārs Treimanis interpreted this style as Lūcis's desire "to protect art from dirt, mud, and perversion".³⁵ There could be several reasons why

33 LPE 1985, 258.

34 Skudra, Ferbers 1972, 143.

35 Treimanis 1991, 2. Homosexuality became an object of public discourse in Soviet Latvia around 1987 when articles on gays and lesbians appeared in periodicals. In the early 1990s, queer characters started to appear in Latvian fiction. See: Vērdiņš, Ozoliņš 2019; Vērdiņš, Ozoliņš 2020.

Lūcis imposed such limitations on the characters of his productions, including his shyness, dated ideals of morals and good taste, and unwillingness to associate his name with anything that Soviet critics and officials might label as sexual promiscuity.

As director Māra Ķimele acknowledged in 2022, Lūcis was more easily controllable than his younger and more rebellious colleagues in Valmiera Theatre, Oļģerts Kroders and herself, because he, like other homosexuals in the USSR, had to live in constant fear because of his sexuality. His fear could have been influenced by the fact that in Soviet Latvia, homosexual relations between men were punished according to Article 124 of the Criminal Code, which provided for a prison sentence of up to five years both for consensual sex and for sexual assault. Between 1961 and 1991, 272 men were convicted of homosexual relations in Soviet Latvia.³⁶ In such conditions, self-censorship and a certain conformism with the Soviet authorities created the possibility of survival, avoiding public scandals, disgrace or imprisonment.

Conclusion

As evidenced by the history of the relationship between the two Peters, it was influenced by the opportunities that opened up for them while living in Latvia under different political regimes unfavourable to same-sex relationships. Closely involved with family, friends, and professional contacts, they shaped their relationships to create a network that supported and helped them or did not hinder them. As Matt Cook wrote,

(...) the way these various men made home was as much about the street or area where they lived, about their proximity to or distance from friends and family, about the money they had and the jobs they did, about their understandings of identity, about their relationship status, health, age and much more besides. It was about their queerness in as much as it affected (and was affected by) each of these things, but that queerness in itself was not necessarily the decisive factor in the way they organized and made their homes and felt themselves to be 'at home'.³⁷

In the case of the two Peters, they hid their domestic life and relationship very well beneath the labels of "friends", "neighbours", "cousins", or "soulmates".

36 Aripova 2020, 111.

37 Cook 2014, 5–6.

The only way their relationship could last was to make it as obscure as possible. However, Lūcis's biography, other publications and archival materials encourage one to read between the lines and feel the emotional power of their relationship and the depth of Lūcis's pain and despair after his partner's death.

As it seems, the surviving strategies of the two Peters with their blending-in policy have been successful. The true nature of their relationship has sunk into oblivion even among the people who call themselves their neighbours and can claim the authentic experience of knowing Pēteris Lūcis.³⁸ Paradoxically, it has to be some outsider, a queer historian, who should disrupt this comfortable but distorted understanding of who Lūcis was and alter his image as the symbol of the past and the symbolic "father of the nation" to make it more friendly to queerness. The relationship between the two Peters in the conditions of various political systems unfavourable to sexual diversity serves as an unusual example in Latvian queer history, where there is very little detailed evidence of long-term domestic life.

Until recently, Lūcis's homosexuality and relationship with Kaktiņš were an "open secret", which was well known to Latvian theatre people, but it was not acceptable to talk about it openly. Such a policy of silence was characteristic of Latvian society and largely determines the attitude towards the LGBT+ community even today. The silence surrounding Latvia's queer history cannot be explained solely by homophobia or ignorance. This silence is maintained both by the members of the LGBT+ community themselves and by their families, friends, and colleagues. This double-walled silence should protect vulnerable community members in a context where much of society is perceived as homophobic. Generations have lived under the conditions of criminalisation of homosexuality and are used to perceiving such identity as something to hide. They continue this policy even today and teach it to younger generations. At the same time, this silence distorts the perception of Latvia's history, allowing it to be portrayed as exclusively heterosexual.

38 As Eviatar Zerubavel has argued, "the proverbial closet often surrounding homosexuality is remarkably similar both structurally and functionally. Fundamentally double-walled, it is essentially "a collaborative construction of gay and straight" built by both of them together. After all, contrary to common belief, it is "not just a shield (...) that prevents those outside it from hearing", as it also "prevents those [inside] it from speaking". Zerubavel 2006, 50–51.

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DIVI PĒTERI: KVĪRU MĀJAS DZĪVES TELPA UN MĀKSLINIEKA SENSIBILITĀTE PADOMJU LATVIJĀ

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Zinātniskās intereses: Baltijas literatūra, kultūras studijas, kvīru studijas, modernisms

Raksts fokusējas uz kvīru mājas dzīves fenomena izpēti Latvijā 20. gadsimta vidū, tajā analizētas liecības par homoseksuāla pāra kopdzīvi mājā, kuru abi partneri uzcēla Rīgā. Šī kopdzīve pastāvēja autoritārisma, totalitārisma un kara apstākļos, kad homoseksuāli sakari vīriešu starpā bija krimināli sodāmi. Adaptējot savas radošās un ikdienas prakses dažādos politiskajos režīmos, divi teātra darbinieki bija spējīgi saglabāt savas attiecības gadu desmitiem, izveidojot savu mājas dzīves modeli, kurā bez viņiem bija iesaistītas arī citas personas, kas veidoja simboliskas ģimenes attiecības. Kad viens no partneriem pāragri nomirst, otra dzīve vienatnē turpinās vēl vairāk nekā trīs gadu desmitus, un viņa mājas arvien vairāk kļūst par muzeju, kurā saglabāti priekšmeti, kas liecina par iepriekšējā periodā piedzīvoto.

Atslēgas vārdi: mājas dzīve, teātris, LGBT+ vēsture, Latvijas vēsture, mājoklis

Kopsavilkums

Kvīru mājas dzīve (*queer domesticity*) ir koncepts, kas attiecas uz kvīru dzīves organizēšanu māsaimniecībās un kuru savā monogrāfijā “*Queer Domesticities*” (2014) attīstījis britu profesors Mets Kuks (*Matt Cook*). Rakstā analizētas liecības par latviešu aktiera un režisora Pētera Lūča (1907–1991) un viņa dzīvesbiedra – aktiera un tipogrāfijas darbinieka Pētera Kaktiņa (1901–1958) attiecībām. Tās ilga no 20. gadsimta 30. gadu sākuma līdz Kaktiņa pāragrajam nāvei. Šajā periodā abi Pēteri uzcēla māju Rīgā, Slampes ielā, kuras plānojums kalpoja viņu kvīrajai mājas dzīvei, taču formāli tika iegrāmatots kā divi atsevišķi dzīvokļi, kas piederēja to saimniekiem, neprecētiem vīriešiem. Abu Pēteru māsaimniecībā bija klātesoši arī citi cilvēki, kas palīdzēja to uzturēt, kā arī noklusēt viņu attiecību patieso raksturu, dēvējot Pēterus par kaimiņiem, brālēniem vai arī ar teātra mākslu apsēstiem draugiem un domubiedriem. Lai ilgstoši varētu uzturēt savas attiecības laikā, kad politiskie režīmi īstenoja homofobisku politiku, abiem Pēteriem nācās izmantot pielāgošanās taktiku. Viņi izvairījās no publiskiem skandāliem, nebija iesaistīti Rīgas homoseksuāļu subkultūras piekoptajās krūzinga praksēs, nerunāja par savu seksualitāti savās darba vietās, kā arī profesionālajā darbībā nenonāca pretrunā ar attiecīgā laikmeta izvirzītajām prasībām. Lūcis savos iestudējumos tiecās izvairīties no lugu varoņu seksualizācijas, ievēroja pieticību un mērenību mīlas pāru attēlojumā uz

skatuves, neļaudams varoņiem pārāk kaislīgus tuvības skatus. Viņa galvenā režisora amats Valmieras Drāmas teātrī pieprasīja arī regulāras nodevas padomju varas prasībām, piemēram, mazvērtīgu padomju autoru lugu iestudējumus. Tajā pašā laikā Lūcis ar savu nacionālo stāju un filmā “Zvejnieka dēls” (1940) iegūto slavu padomju laika skatītājiem kalpoja par vienu no neatkarīgās Latvijas simboliem, kura mājās Rīgā un Valmierā krājās daudzie apsveikumi un dāvanas no viņa talanta cienītājiem. Viņa dzīvokļi pamazām pārvērtās par piemiņas lietu kolekciju glabātavu, kurā katrs priekšmets saistījās ar atmiņām par pagātņi un tajā sastaptajiem cilvēkiem. Šī gadījuma izpēte papildina zināšanas par kvīru seksualitāti padomju laikā, izceļot teātra mākslas vides sarežģītās attiecības starp personas brīvību un konformismu attiecībās ar valsts varu, kā arī atklāj netipisku gadījumu, kad politisko varu maiņas laikā un staļinisma periodā Latvijā bija iespējama kvīru māsaimniecības pastāvēšana.

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