Eugenijus Žmuida

ORCID: 0000-0002-2387-788X

Institute of Lithuanian Literature and Folklore, Lithuania

E-mail: eugen.zmuida@gmail.com

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Historical and Literary Contexts of the Establishment of the Lithuanian Nation-State in the First Half of 20th Century

Abstract

The article is dedicated to the developments in Lithuanian literature and history that led to the establishment of an independent modern state in the 20th century. The article analyses the historical context of Lithuanian literature in the 19th and early 20th centuries; the path of Lithuanian nationalism towards maturity, the panorama of literature and literary life at the end of the 19th century and on the eve of the Great War (WWI); the potential visions of the state emerging at the time of war in the political and power centres; and the new impetus within the literature in the aftermath of the war and through the fight for independence. The paper concludes with a discussion of the relationship between contemporary collective memory and the perceptions of the significance of the Great War and the fight for independence (1914–1920). The Lithuanian nation-state was established in 1918–1920 and went down in history as the First Republic.[1] On the other hand,

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1 Although 16 February 1918 is now commemorated as the Day of Independence, the state of Lithuania did not exist *de facto* or *de jure* for the entire 1918; the

Poles refer to inter-war Poland as the Second Republic, the first one being the Rzeczpospolita. There is the logic behind it: never before 1918 had there been a nation-state, i.e., a state with a Lithuanian-language governmental structure, educational system, and Lithuanian culture. Thus, for Lithuanians, unlike for Poles, the independence achieved after the Great War was not a return to a former statehood, but a more significant step: the first ever establishment of a nation-state.

Keywords

The Great War, Lithuanian nationalism, pre-war culture, activities of intellectuals, state projects, post-war literature

Development of Lithuanian nationalism

For such a state to emerge, it was necessary to prepare the ground throughout the 19th century, first of all, by turning the Lithuanian-speaking population (the people) into a nation, i.e., a nation that defines its own distinctiveness and is aware of its identity. A consistent and natural development of nationalism was not possible because of the tsarist policy in Lithuania, which changed over the course of the 19th century: from fairly liberal at the beginning of the century, to a totally repressive regime that closed universities, banned the press in the Latin alphabet, and set out to Russify Lithuanians by the end of the century. For almost the entire century, only small groups of intellectuals, acting underground and under persecution, were still able to spread knowledge of and build Lithuanian culture in one way or another. The nucleus of the future nation as an "imagined community" (Benedict Anderson's term[2]) evolved at the beginning of the century (as it did in all of Europe), and its scientific activities

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struggle for a *de facto* state continued from 1919 to 1920, and it was only in 1922 that it received a *de jure* recognition.

2 Anderson, Benedict, (1983). *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, New York: Verso.

were described as the "Lithuanian Sąjūdis movement."[3] The most important achievement of the period was the appearance of the first historian who wrote in Lithuanian, Simonas Daukantas (1793–1864). Daukantas wrote four books: *Darbai senųjų lietuvių ir žemaičių* (1822), *Istorija žemaitiška* (1831–1834), *Būdas senovės lietuvių, kalnėnų ir žemaičių* (1845), and *Pasakojimas apie veikalus lietuvių tautos senovėje* (1850). With his versions of the history of Lithuania,[4] he, like his foreign counterparts, was beginning to shape the culture of national memory: a foundation that would have the power to inspire a new community of Lithuanian-speaking intellectuals at the end of the century.

In the first half of the 19th century, the literature of Polish-speaking Lithuania and Polish Romanticism was of great importance for the Lithuanian national consciousness, because it relied heavily on Lithuanian historical and folklore sources. Works by Adam Mickiewicz (1798–1855), such as his poems *Konrad Wallenrod* (1828) and *Grazyna* (1830) deserve a special mention because they

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3 The term was introduced, and the period was analyzed by Vincas Maciūnas in his dissertation titled *The Lithuanian Sąjūdis Movement at the Beginning of the 19th Century: Interest in the Lithuanian language, history and national studies* published in 1939 (a collection of Maciūnas' papers *Rinktiniai raštai* was published in 2003). On this occasion, we can mention two earlier movements, also originating in Samogitia. The first centre was formed in Viduklė, under the patronage of the aristocrat Jonas Biliūnas-Bilevičius, who took several intellectuals under his wing, including Martynas Mažvydas (1510–1563), the author of the first book in the Lithuanian language. After the Jesuits defeated the Reformers, the cultural figures found themselves in Protestant Prussia, in the so-called Lithuania Minor, where the first book in Lithuanian, Mažvydas' *Katekizmas* (1569) was published; the highest achievement of the Reformers' activity was the first Lithuanian literary work, the poem *Metai* [The Year] by pastor Kristijonas Donelaitis (1714–1780), first published by Karaliaučius professor Liudvikas Rėza (1776–1840). The Catholic Lithuanian Studies Centre (formerly Protestant) was formed by the Bishop of Samogitia, Merkelis Giedraitis (1536–1609), while his protégé, Maciej Stryjkowski (1547–1593), wrote the history of Lithuania in Polish titled *Kronika Polska, Litewska, Żmódzka y wszystkiej Rusi* (1582). Lithuanian religious publications (Jacob Ledesma's *Catechism*, 1595, and Jakub Wujek's *Postilla*, 1599) were written by another protégé of Giedraitis's, Mikalojus Daukša (1527–1613).

4 During the life of Daukantas, only the third book of 1845, *Būdas senovės lietuvių, kalnėnų ir žemaičių* (1845), was published. At the end of the 19th century, two other books were published: *Pasakojimai apie veikalus lietuvių tautos senovėje*, by the M. Jankaus printing house in Bitėnai in 1893 and *Lietuvos istorija*, vols. 1–2 (free narration), in Plymouth, Pa. by Kasztu and in the printing house of Juozas Paukszczis, 1893–189.

played the role of heroic epic poems and became a source of inspiration for other poets at the end of the 19th century.[5] Józef Ignacy Kraszewski's (1812–1887) activities, works, and interest in Lithuanian past and mythology also made an important contribution.[6]

Two names were significant for literature and nationalism in the middle of the century: Antanas Baranauskas (1835–1902) and Motiejus Valančius (1801–1875). In his poem, *Anykščių šilelis* (1859), Baranauskas juxtaposed images of the romanticised past with those of the impoverished present and wrote poems encouraging resistance.[7] Valančius, Bishop of Samogitia, became an unofficial Lithuanian political figure. He founded a widespread sobriety movement involving thousands of peasants and strengthened Catholicism. Later, after the ban on the press was introduced, he organized a network of book smugglers and underground home schools, which raised literacy rates over several decades.[8] According to one historian, Muravyov's role was twofold. The positive aspect of repressions that he brought about is that they accelerated the maturity of Lithuanian nationalism (Snyder, 2003, p. 58). Valančius supported the underground press and wrote popular didactic books himself.[9] During the period of the ban on the press, the most important "apostles" of Lithuanian culture were the best organized clergy, who were

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5   *Konrad Wallenrod* was translated into Lithuanian and published in 1891, while *Grazyna* – was in 1899.

6   His most important works for Lithuanians include a collection of poetry *Biruta, Keistutis, Ryngala, Devynios Lietuvos giminės* (published in Vilnius in 1838); the three-part epic *Anafielas* (*Vitolio rauda*, 1840, *Mindaugas*, 1842, *Vytauto kovos*, 1844), and the novel *Kunigas* (1881), which popularised the legend of the defenders of Pilėnai.

7   These poems, which were later to become songs, accompanied deportees to Siberia not only in the 19th century, but also in the 20th century; Baranauskas himself, after the suppressed uprising of 1863, distanced himself from national affairs, and saw the Lithuanian movement as a weakening of Catholicism.

8   Historians believe that "ethnographic Lithuania at the end of the 19th century was one of the most literate regions of the Russian Empire, second only to Latvia and Estonia, where the educational conditions were incomparably better," see: Aleksandravičius, 1996, p. 279.

9   Recent studies conclude that "the Diocese of Samogitia led by Valančius was the first form of the political life of the modern Lithuanian nation, an intermediate entity between the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and the nation-state; Valančius headed an institution of political significance and built an individual period of the country's political history," for more see: Jokubaitis, 2014, pp. 7–17.

allowed to work in the North-West. Until the Great War, the most important Lithuanian writers were priests: Kristijonas Donelaitis (1714–1780), Antanas Strazdas (1760–1833), Antanas Baranauskas, and Maironis (born Jonas Mačiulis, 1862–1932).

After the abolition of serfdom (1863), the Law on the Restoration of Russian Beginnings was adopted, allowing young people of peasant origin to study in Russian universities.[10] The law aimed, among other things, to Russify the peasant intelligentsia, but it achieved the opposite result. Despite the restrictions (those educated in their home country were not allowed to work, except for priests and doctors), underground Lithuanian groups were set up at universities, teachers' colleges, and seminaries. They discovered Daukantas, became fascinated by medieval history, and understood the reverence and value of the Lithuanian language – all the things that helped to define national identity. In the 1870s and 1880s, a generation of Lithuanian intellectuals came of age and soon formed the nucleus of the national movement. Their humble origins distinguished them from the cultural figures of the early 19th century, who had come from the Polish--speaking Lithuanian aristocracy. After the 1863 uprising and the ensuing reforms, Lithuanians distanced themselves and detached themselves from the old Polish-speaking culture of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, from the Polish language, and Poland. This trend was reinforced by the emerging narrative of Lithuanian historical memory. The period before the Union of Lublin was the "golden age" of Lithuanian history when a future vision of a nation-state was starting to emerge.

The first periodical *Auszra* (1883–1887), published in Tilžė and circulating underground among Lithuanians, brought together intellectuals engaged in targeted cultural activities, which never ceased.[11] Periodical and fiction continued to proliferate, and interest in history was continuously growing – all this led to the formation

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10 The law aimed to create a Russian-speaking intelligentsia of peasant origin, which would help to Russify Lithuanian and Belarusian peasants, see *Carų valdžioje*, 275.

11 The founder and publisher of this landmark newspaper was Jonas Basanavičius (1851–1927), who graduated from Moscow and became a famous doctor in Bulgaria and the Czech Republic, admired the "Spring of Nations" in Central Europe and passed on its "spirit" to the Lithuanians. He is, therefore, considered to be the patriarch of the national revival. Thanks to him, the letters

of historical memory which was turning society into a political nation.[12] In the spring of 1904, the tsar lifted the ban on the press, which was the greatest political victory Lithuanians had ever achieved. The transformation of the imagined Lithuanian community into a political nation was marked by the 1905 elections to the so-called Great Seimas of Vilnius and the Seimas (congress) itself, held on 4–5 December, which demanded autonomy for Lithuania with a Seimas in Vilnius. All the projects for the future of Lithuania emerging a decade later, i.e., during the Great World War, would always refer back to this Seimas as their starting point.

Lithuanian literature before the Great War

Before the Great War, Lithuanian literature, which had regained its right to exist after the return of press in the Latin alphabet, was still in the process of transformation: Romanticism continued to be the most influential, realism was rapidly gaining popularity, and aesthetics of modernism were starting to take hold. Romanticism was represented by all the poetry of the so-called *Aušrininkai* movement, whose artistic and worldview limitations were outweighed by the talent of Maironis, eventually recognised as the national poet. Maironis's collection of poems, *Poezijos pavasaris* (1895), is regarded as the manifesto of the Lithuanian revival and the book that has had the greatest impact on the Lithuanian mentality to date. He also transformed verse writing, in a way liberating the Lithuanian language for literature.[13] Maironis probably made his greatest contribution

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'č', 'š', 'ž', borrowed from the Czech language, came to be used in Lithuania instead of the previously used Polish 'cz', 'sz', and 'ž'.

12 Besides *Auszra*, the 19th century underground newspapers *Varpas*, *Ūkininkas*, and *Tėvynės sargas* were the most significant for national consciousness. Publications legally published in the usa that reached Lithuania were also important (e.g., Daukantas' *Pasakojimai apie veikalus lietuvių tautos senovėje* was published in the usa in 1899, and the first Lithuanian novel *Algimantas* by Vincas Pietaris was published in usa in 1904).

13 Before Maironis' syllabic-stress metre, Lithuanian poetry was dominated by syllabic verse borrowed from Polish poetry. Syllabic-stress metre is based on free stress rhythm typical of the Lithuanian language, while syllabic verse is typical of the Polish language, where the stress always falls on the penultimate syllable in a poetic text.

to the building of Lithuanian memory: his book *Apsakymai apie Lietuvos praeitį* was published in 1891. Here, Maironis used a more modern language to convey Daukantas' historical research and supplemented it with his own conception of the medieval times of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and of Grand Duke Vytautas, who introduced Christianity to the country. Maironis changed the view of Lithuanian history as something finite (the histories that had been written until then ended with the loss of statehood). By bringing the 19th century into the historical horizon, the author argued that as long as a nation is alive, its history is not over, which is a rather bold statement of faith in the future of the nation. Maironis spread his ideas of history in poetry, which became popular and went on to become songs in the 19th century.

Romantic poetics and historical themes also dominated other genres: the novel and drama. The historical novel *Algimantas* (the first Lithuanian novel) was written by a member of the *Aušrininkai* movement Vincas Pietaris (1850–1902), while another *Auszra* writer, Aleksandras Fromas-Gužutis (1822–1900) wrote several historical and mythological dramas: *Išgriovimas Kauno pilies 1362 m., Eglė žalčių karalienė, Vytautas Krėvoje, Vaidilutė, arba Žemaičių krikštas*, and *Gedimino sapnas*. The beginning of realism in Lithuanian literature is associated with Žemaitė (born Julija Beniuševičiūtė Žymantienė, 1845–1921). At the end of the 19th century, she became famous for her short stories with social themes, which appeared in periodicals. Satirical short stories were written by the poet and publicist Vincas Kudirka (1859–1899), the author of the Lithuanian national anthem.[14] At the beginning of the 20th century, Jonas Biliūnas (1879–1907) wrote short psychological short stories. The future classic realist writer Antanas Vienuolis (1882–1857), nephew of Antanas Baranauskas, made his debut with novellas.

Symbolism and Impressionism were the most prominent among the modernist movements. Their aesthetics are evident in the works

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14 In addition to *Auszra*, one of the most important ideological figures of Lithuanian nationalism – Kudirka – also published the most prominent periodical *Varpas* (1889–1905). In the fifth issue of *Varpas* in 1901 Povilas Višinskis (1875–1906), who had introduced several talented people to Lithuanian literature, wrote: "Our ideal is a free and liberated Lithuania."

of prose writers Šatrija Ragana (born Marija Pečkauskaitė, 1877–1930), Ignas Šeinius (1889–1959), Vincas Krėvė (born Mickevičius, 1882–1954), and the poets Vincas Mykolaitis-Putinas (1893–1967) and Liudas Gira (1884–1946).

Of great importance for spreading Lithuanian culture were amateur theatres or "Lithuanian nights," which became popular throughout Lithuania during the press ban and survived until the Great War. Lithuanians lived in homesteads (only 2–6% of them lived in cities) and did not have any buildings dedicated to Lithuanian culture. After agreeing on a programme and obtaining permission from the censors, "Lithuanian nights" were held in houses or in granaries that could accommodate hundreds of spectators. The centrepiece was a play performed by amateur actors (usually a comedy, which encouraged the development of this genre), but the recitation of poems and singing of songs (based on the lyrics of the *Aušrininkai* members, mainly Maironis) also influenced national consciousness. The troupes, often made up of different performers, travelled across the country with the same or an evolving show.

As one drama researcher writes, "The artistic value of the repertoire was not decisive in early Lithuanian stage events…. What mattered was that the plays were performed in Lithuanian (albeit poorly), that the mother tongue sounded from the stage, and that compatriots were gathered together. All this lent such performances a magical significance" (Lankutis, 1979, p 32).

After the restoration of the press, but in the absence of any Lithuanian institutions, periodicals were the engine and mirror of cultural life. The number of publications was growing, with book reviews published in them. The creative energy of the nation expressed itself in various fields, and in the first decades of the 20th century many authors debuted and became classics of 20th century Lithuanian literature. Before the war, several literary almanacs were published, and several magazines devoted to literature, *Draugija, Vaivorykštė*, and *Švyturys*, came out.

Visions of the nation-state in wartime

Lithuanian intellectuals welcomed the outbreak of the Great War with trepidation, but also with high hopes. The project of national

autonomy, which had been stuck in a protracted *status quo* since 1905, was picking up momentum again. After Germany declared war, the Russian military leadership rushed to win over the Polish people, promising them broad autonomy in the future.[15] "Almost all Polish political forces declared their allegiance to the tsar in a joint letter," said Tomas Venclova[16] (2019, p. 132). Lithuanians felt unfairly forgotten and rushed to remind of themselves and of divided Lithuania. Jonas Basanavičius and his followers were gripped by the vision of a merger of the two "Lithuanias": Lithuania Minor and Lithuania Major. According to this vision, if the Germans were pushed westwards, a historic opportunity would arise to annex authentic Lithuanian lands to Lithuania. It was decided not to miss this opportunity. The famous Amber Declaration[17] was published in Lithuanian and in some Russian newspapers, sent to top government officials, and presented by Martynas Yčas (1885–1941) to the Russian Duma. Yčas, as a representative of the people, met with Prime Minister Ivan Goremykin (1839–1917). Unfortunately, the latter dismissed the declaration as nonsense. Yčas, who knew the backstage politics best and expected such a reaction noted that it was nevertheless "the first voice of Lithuanian society" (1991, p. 232).

Interestingly, earlier, on 1 August, Vilius Gaigalaitis (1870–1945), a deputy at the Landtag of Prussia, proposed the same project in reverse order, i.e., to incorporate Greater Lithuania to Little Lithuania (Venclova, 2019, p. 132).

The idea of uniting Lithuanian lands into a joint autonomy was also supported by the first wartime Lithuanian Seimas (congress) in the USA, which took place in Chicago on 21–22 September, and demanded that Lithuanians should be heard at the forthcoming

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15 The Manifesto to the Poles, published on 1(14) August 1914, portrays Russia as the liberator of nations.

16 This topic is more broadly covered in *Empires and Nationalisms in the Great War...* 2015, pp. 46–72.

17 On 17 August 1914, the declaration was signed by Stasys Šilingas, Jonas Basanavičius, Donatas Malinauskas, and Jonas Basanavičius at a meeting of representatives of the Lithuanian societies and press of Vilnius. It was officially called the "Lithuanian Declaration," nicknamed "Amber" because of the metaphor contained in the text: to gather amber pieces into one, *Universal Lithuanian Encyclopaedia*, 2004, vol. VI, p. 683.

Congress of Europe after the war (Liulevičius, 1981, p. 312). The question of the merger of the "two Lithuanias" was revisited at the end of the war, on 30 November 1918. The Council of the Prussian Lithuanian Nation, encouraged by the Provisional Government that had already been active in Lithuania, addressed the world community gathered at the Paris Peace Conference (which began on 18 January 1919), in order to resolve many issues that arose after the war with the Act of Tilsit. However, it received no support either.[18] A large number of Prussian Lithuanians did not back the idea.[19]

In the face of the war, there were calls for unity in Lithuania itself. The editor of *Vairas* and the future president Antanas Smetona (1974–1944) wrote: "It is the duty of our small intelligentsia to understand the existence of the nation, to relieve it, and to seek a way out of many misfortunes..... The time has come for all currents to merge into one stream and to demonstrate national identity" (1990, p. 69). The war was perceived as a trial of destiny for Lithuanians, as a step forward to a better future and independence. At the same time, it was also seen as a great catastrophe befalling humanity: "Steel and fire are destroying everything that has been built for centuries. Where rich cities once stood, where there were beautifully cultivated fields, there are now embers and ashes, and ruined farmhouses. A great war of an unprecedented scale has shaken all mankind" (Smetona, 1990, p. 69).

Alongside the merger of the two "Lithuanias," a parallel idea of creating a joint three-member state including the Latvians was circulating at the time. The idea of Lithuanians and Latvians working together was the brainchild of Juozas Gabrys-Paršaitis (1880–1951), who held a joint conference with Latvians in Switzerland in 1915 and submitted a project called Independent Lithuania to the German diplomatic mission in Bern, in which he proposed incorporating Lithuania and Latvia, as autonomy with their own monarch (similarly to Saxony) into Germany (Šipelytė, 2019, p. 52). The most fervent

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18 For more see *Tilžės akto šviesa*; Šidlauskas, pp. 188–199.

19 In his memoirs, priest Vincas Bartuška (1881–1956) recounts the opinion he heard from Gaigalaitis: "never in the souls of the Prussian Lithuanians will there arise a desire to separate from Germany and to belong to the newly reborn Lithuania" (1937, 171).

advocate of the vision of a Lithuanian–Latvian union was a member of the *Aušrininkai* movement, Jonas Šliūpas (1861–1944), who studied at Mintauja Gymnasium, had been following the Latvian revival, published the weekly newspaper *Unija* in the USA (1884–1885), and promoted the idea at various political meetings during the war (in the USA, Russia, and Nordic countries), albeit without much success.[20] After the war, from 1919 to 1920, Šliūpas was the representative of the Republic of Lithuania in Latvia and Estonia. It is worth mentioning that Professor Gaigalaitis, a member of the Landtag of Prussia, published a book in Berlin in 1915 entitled *Die litauisch-baltische Frage* [The Lithuanian–Baltic Question], which also considered the possibility of creating a Lithuanian–Latvian state as a buffer state that could protect Germany from the danger of Pan-Slavism. Toward the end of the war, the Germans themselves were considering the possibility of an autonomous entity that would include the Lithuanian and Curonian lands.

After Germany occupied all Lithuanian territory in late 1915 and established the Ober Ost administrative unit, the borders of which resembled those of the medieval age Grand Duchy of Lithuania (GDL), two projects immediately emerged. On 19 December 1915, the publication of the Confederation of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania was distributed in Vilnius, stating that members of Lithuanian, Belarusian, Polish and Jewish organisations had founded the confederation and would seek to establish a common Lithuanian–Belarusian state after the war (Klimas, 1988, p. 111).

In February 1916, the Confederation issued a second, much broader proclamation saying that the country represented by the Confederation was at odds with Russia. The yoke of one hundred and twenty years, it said, had proved that "nothing good could be expected… from Russian liberals who hope to gain power by overthrowing the tsarist bureaucracy" (Klimas, 1988, p. 111).

The second idea for the reconstruction of the GDL emerged on 6 January 1916 within a circle of Kaunas citizens: Saliamonas Banaitis (1866–1933), Adomas Jakštas (1860–1938), and Antanas Alekna (1872–1930). It was called The Project for the Reconstruction of the GDL

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20 For more see Mačiulis, pp. 83–98.

(*Pirmoji Lietuvos konstitucija*, p. 2). This lengthy document consisting of two parts, Demands and Foundations of the Constitution, proclaimed the restoration of the constitutional monarchy of the GDL, ruled by a grand duke (a descendent of the grand dukes of Lithuania) and the Seimas. The national basis would be the two Baltic nations, Lithuanians and Latvians, coexisting on an autonomous basis. Belarusians, once part of the GDL, could join if they so wished. The principles of the constitution were discussed in seven points: the rights of the people, the rights of the grand duke, the rights of the parliament, the rights of the church, and more (*Pirmoji Lietuvos konstitucija*, p. 21).[21]

On March 1–5, 1916, Gabrys-Paršaitis along with seminarians from Switzerland organized the first Lithuanian conference in Bern, where it was decided to "demand that Lithuania be restored to full freedom and independence at the peace conference," and to emphasize the dissociation of Lithuania from Poland. "The union between Lithuania and Poland was abolished by the two partitions at the end of the 18th century and by the same token ceased to exist *de facto* and *de jure*. The Lithuanian nation, while sincerely wishing the Polish nation independence within its ethnographic borders, wishes to remain the master of its own land and vehemently protests against Polish attempts to usurp the rights of the Lithuanians," reads the final resolution (Purickis, 1990, pp. 45–46).

At the end of March 1916, a group of Lithuanian intellectuals in occupied Vilnius secretly distributed a proclamation "Lithuanians!" which also drew a line between Lithuanians and Poles, referred to Lithuania within ethnographic boundaries, and called for faith in freedom and a future nation-state (Klimas, 1988, pp. 340–341). This was the first of the projects to spread more widely in Lithuania, reaching provinces mostly populated by Lithuanians. The proclamation was eagerly read by young people, rewritten by hand, and distributed. Petras Klimas, one of the main authors of the document, was followed by the Germans and, during a Christmas visit to his hometown of Liudvinavas at the end of the year, he was arrested, interrogated, imprisoned, but in the absence of direct evidence and as a result

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21 For more on this issue see Grigaravičius, 1991, pp. 353–357.

of skilful work of Klimas himself, he was released a month later (Klimas, 1990, pp. 82–84).

There was a Lithuanian information agency in Switzerland, founded in 1911 in Paris by Gabrys-Paršaitis (Senn, 1977, p. 16), probably the most famous Lithuanian in the world at that time. The agency published the bulletins *Pro Lituania* (in French) and *Litauen* (in German) and was moved to Lausanne in mid-1915 after the outbreak of the war. In addition to conferences for Lithuanians, Gabrys organized a large third Conference of the Enslaved Nations in June 1916 (the first one was held in London in 1911, where Gabrys made a presentation on Lithuania; the second one was held in Paris in 1912). It was an anti-Russian event sponsored by Germans, which attempted to bypass the Western countries (Britain and France, with their many colonies). Gabrys corresponded with representatives of many countries: he sent out questionnaires and an appeal to US President Woodrow Wilson (1854–1924). The ideas contained in the appeal were also shared by the Germans, who wanted to destroy Russia from within through national movements. One of the paragraphs of the appeal refers to Lithuania, to the statehood of the past, and to the policy of cultural destruction pursued by the Russian Empire. The document reached Vilnius and was signed by seven representatives of the Vilnius group (*Lietuva vokiečių okupacijoje ...*, 2006, pp. 67–68). This initiative encouraged the Lithuanian diaspora in the USA to become more proactive. On 17 August 1916, at a convention of Catholics, nationalists, and social democrats, the Lithuanian diaspora in the USA set up the Lithuanian–American Central Committee, which also appealed to the President of the United States to institute a Day of Lithuania. Lithuanian clergymen from Switzerland obtained an audience with the Pope to establish a Day of Lithuania in the Catholic churches of the world. During a visit to European capitals in 1916, the Protestant Martynas Yčas also received an audience with the Pope. Yčas travelled through the Entente countries (with eleven other deputies of the Russian Duma), and met personally with the kings of Britain and Belgium, the President of France, and the prime ministers of France, presenting himself as a representative of the Lithuanians, attracting attention, and gaining support for his nation, as he recounts in detail in

his memoirs. In the USA, the Day of Lithuania was established on November 1, 1916 and in the Vatican on May 17, 1917.

Before the Conference of the Enslaved Nations, Gabrys organised a conference for Lithuanians (the First Lausanne Conference) from 31 May to 4 June 1916. Apart from the "Swiss" participants (there were six of them), it was also attended by Lithuanians from the USA, Vincas Bartuška, Julius Bielskis (1891–1986), and Romanas Karuža (1883–1963). On his way to Rome, Martynas Yčas stopped in Lausanne to participate in the conference (to chair it). Many presentations were heard and a comprehensive ten-point resolution was adopted, condemning the German occupational regime, expressing concern for Lithuanian prisoners of war, expressing the need to establish a Lithuanian archdiocese in Vilnius and in the USA, as well as the idea and necessity of founding a Lithuanian university in Vilnius (with an appeal to the Holy See). The statement of Lithuania's future dissociation from Russia was not made for fear of harming Yčas, who was a member of the committee chaired by Tsarevna Tatyana, which supported compatriots who had fled to mainland Russia (there were about 250,000–300,000 of them).[22]

Thanks to the efforts of Gabrys, who had established contact and co-operated with high German civil officials[23], Antanas Smetona, Jurgis Šaulys (1879–1948), later envoy and ambassador in Germany, and Steponas Kairys (1878–1964), later Minister of Supply, came from Vilnius to attend the Conference of the Enslaved Nations (June 27–29) and the Lithuanian conference (Lausanne II) immediately afterward (from 30 June to 4 July). At the Conference of the Enslaved Nations, Bartuška read out the Lithuanian Declaration of Freedom. Some

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22 Yčas managed to raise enough money to not only pay allowances to the majority of those who had fled or had been exiled, but also to organize a wide range of social and cultural activities, to set up schools and gymnasiums for the youth, various craft courses and workshops for adults, to pay teachers' salaries, to publish the Lithuanian Newspaper with a large circulation, and, in short, to create a national imaginary community in the hinterland of Russia (Voronezh being the Lithuanians' main centre), an almost Lithuanian state within Russia. For more on the situation of war refugees, see Balkelis, 2019, p. 352.

23 These were Gisbert Romberg (1866–1939), Friedrich von der Ropp (1879–1964), and Matthias Erzberger (1875–1921), a member of the Reichstag and leader of the Catholic Centre Party (opposition).

tension arose as a result of this declaration, as it seemed to be a prov-ocation to participants coming from the occupied zone. Gabrys, who saw things differently, managed to convince his compatriots that the declaration was necessary and the timing was most appropriate. Later in his memoirs, Gabrys stressed that it is not 16 February 1918 that Lithuanians should celebrate as their Independence Day, but 29 June 1916, because that is when the Declaration was read out before a large international audience, in the presence of numerous correspondents from the most important countries (Gabrys-Paršaitis, 2007).[24]

The Second Lithuanian Lausanne Conference which took place shortly afterward endorsed most of the resolutions of the First Conference, including the establishment of a Council in Switzerland (which was to include, in addition to the "Swiss," representatives of the USA, Lithuania, and Russia)[25] and ratified the Declaration of Freedom read at the Conference of the Enslaved Nations. Freedom was now understood as freedom for the "genuine" Lithuania, i.e., within its ethnographic boundaries, without any reference to the Confederations, East Prussia, Belarus, or Latvian lands.[26]

24 The resolution of February 16, 1918, which was read in occupied Vilnius only among its signatories, was not immediately published in the newspapers (*Lietuvos Aidas* daily managed to be published on February 19, 1918, despite the fact that the german censorship tried to destroy the entire circulation; more details – Vaišnys A.: Spauda ir valstybė 1918–1940, V.: 1998); however, a copy of the resolution reached Berlin and was soon published in German newspapers.

25 The Council, the project of which had been in the making since 1915, could not be set up, because it was not possible to mobilise representatives of all the cen-tres; it remained more theoretical, and its functions were performed by Gabrys' information bureau, although Gabrys himself published some documents on behalf of the Council.

26 It should be noted here that at the beginning of the year, representatives of Lithuanians, Poles, Jews, and Hungarians in Vilnius, who were members of the Council of the Confederation of the GDL, were at odds in February and March, and the project of the GDL was abandoned. The most active members, the Vil-nius Lithuanian group, withdrew from the confederation in protest against the Poles. Thus, in March, the Lithuanians! proclamation and the vision of the future Lithuania that was fine-tuned at the Swiss conferences coincided, al-though communication between these Lithuanian political centres was almost impossible (only Vincas Bartuška, a representative of the Catholics in the USA, overcoming various difficulties of the war bureaucracy, managed to reach Lith-uania via Nordic countries and Germany, and then to reach Switzerland again via Germany and participate in the conferences; he described his "hardships" in

In Russia, the Cadet Party, to which Yčas belonged, formed the Commission for Lithuanian Affairs on 28 March 1916. Lithuanian representatives Petras Leonas (1864–1938), a lawyer and future Minister of Justice, Juozas Tumas-Vaižgantas (1869–1933), a member of the Aušrininkai movement, popular priest and writer, and Martynas Yčas, the most influential Lithuanian in wartime Russia, submitted a proposal for Lithuanian Autonomy on 25 August to the Commission. Thus, the Lithuanian political centres in the occupied country, in Switzerland, and in the USA were becoming more daring in voicing their support for the independence of ethnographic Lithuania (the civilian authorities in Germany did not seem to mind; however, the same could not be said of the military authorities in Ober Ost). In Russia, on the other hand, Lithuanians did not dare to formulate their aspirations this way, even in the Liberal Party.

The territory and concept of the "genuine" Lithuania was defined and formulated in 1916 by Petras Klimas in a special study in the German language.[27] The study *Lietuva, jos gyventojai ir sienos* (published under this title in Vilnius in 1917) with the help of Juozas Gabrys was first published in German at the end of 1916 in Stuttgart under the title *Russisch Litauen: statistisch-etnographische Betrachtungen*.[28]

In the first half of 1917, Germany's unexpected move to recognize Poland's independence (Russia had tried to do so earlier; the project of restoring Polish territory within the borders before the partitions was supported by other Entente countries) caused a headache for the Lithuanians. As the Germans had occupied Poland, they were able to influence its fate by proposing that Polish nationalists restore the Polish kingdom, although their real motive was to reinforce their army with conscripted Polish soldiers. In April 1917, the Polish Provisional Council issued a statement that the eastern borders would be extended "unless prevented by the necessities of war,"

his memoirs *Kelionė Lietuvon 1916 karės metais* (1916) and *Lietuvos nepriklausomybės kryžiaus keliai 1914–19* (1937).

27 Klimas mentions that he was assisted by one of the editors of the *Zeitung der X Armee* published in Vilnius, see. Klimas, *Atsiminimai*, p. 78.

28 The name was meant to draw attention to the fact that Lithuanian land is not only part of Prussia (Lithuania Minor), but also of Russia. The book was soon translated into French by Gabrys and published in Switzerland.

thus implicitly expressing the belief that Lithuanians and Belarus would willingly join the kingdom. The Lithuanians were even more outraged by a memorandum signed by 44 Vilnius figures and handed to the Chancellor on 25 May, saying that the Polish language and culture prevailed in the Vilnius and Grodno regions, that they had been the source of religion, education and civilisation in the region since time immemorial, and that the Lithuanians considered themselves to be part of Poland and were striving to merge with it. The outraged Lithuanians of Vilnius spent a long time drafting a detailed counter-memorandum, which they sent on 10 July. It rejected the Polish arguments, by stressing the uniqueness of the Lithuanian nation and the negative Polish influence on Lithuanian culture and political statehood, and the aspirations of Lithuanians to re-establish their former statehood within the ethnographic borders (*Lietuva vokiečių okupacijoje…*, 2006, pp. 139–147).

The February Revolution in Russia encouraged Lithuanians to make bolder statements: on 27 May a Lithuanian Seimas (i.e., parliament) was convened in Petrograd (now St. Petersburg). One hundred and forty right-wing representatives voted in favour of full independence, while 132 left-wing representatives, who saw the danger of a German protectorate, voted against it. In August 1917, the voice of the Lithuanians of Vilnius and Switzerland was finally heard: they were granted the opportunity to publish the newspaper *Lietuvos Aidas* and to organize the election of representatives to the Lithuanian Council. The Council was established in Vilnius on 18–22 September 1917. This was the greatest political achievement of the Lithuanians under occupation. The conference was attended by over two hundred delegates, including some from the USA and Switzerland. A twenty-member council was elected to carry out the pursuit of Lithuanian independence and to delegate its powers to the Constituent Seimas. The Germans did not interfere with these plans but did not delegate any practical powers to the Council, as they regarded it only as an advisory body.

At the conferences, Lithuanians outside Lithuania supported the resolutions adopted in Vilnius and tended to give priority to the Vilnius Council in their political activities. They expressed these positions at the conference in Stockholm on 18–20 October 1917, in the presence

of representatives of all political centres, as well as at the second Lithuanian Seimas in Russia, which convened on 16–19 November in Voronezh. At the Bern conference on 2–10 November 1917, it was decided that domestic political affairs would be decided by the Vilnius Council and foreign affairs would be handled by the Swiss Council. A possible form of statehood was discussed, with the majority voting that a monarchy was the most preferable option for Lithuania under the circumstances.

The German civil and military leadership showed growing support for the model of Lithuania (including the Latvian Curonian and the Belarusian lands in the Ober Ost territory), which was bound to Germany by monarchical ties. On 1 December 1917, the Germans summoned representatives of the Vilnius Council and outlined the declaration the latter could make: independence was to be presented only as a severance of previous state ties, and four conventions were to be concluded with Germany. This declaration was promulgated in a document known as the Act of 11 December.

The conventions with Germany caused a split in the Vilnius Council. It was resolved by a new act of independence, unanimously adopted and signed in secret from Germany, known as the Act of 16 February 1918. It was ignored by Germany, but as the international situation changed, the new German President Georg von Hertling (1843–1919) recognized Lithuania's independence (albeit based on the Act of 11 December) on 23 March 1918.

However, even after these declarations, the situation in the occupied country remained unchanged: the people were even more brutally exploited, and the Council had no levers of influence (the Germans practically ignored the memoranda addressed to them). Looking for a way out of the situation, the Council became increasingly accustomed to the idea of monarchy. A suitable candidate, who agreed to all the conditions put forward by the Lithuanians, was found. It was a relative of Matthias Erzberger, Prince Wilhelm von Urach of Saxony (1864–1928). In August 1918, there was another split in the Lithuanian Council over this decision, with several members resigning in protest. They were replaced by political figures returning from Russia, including Martynas Yčas and Augustinas Voldemaras (1883–1942), the future first Prime Minister of Lithuania.

However, Urach did not have a chance to reign for a single day, as the German military leadership, not wanting to lose control of the government, strongly rejected this option. It was not until the German surrender in the Great War became imminent that Lithuanians formed their first government. On 28 October 1918, the tricolour national flag was hoisted over the building at 13 Jurgis Street in Vilnius, which was the seat of the government headquarters, and the Council held a meeting that day to announce the revocation of the Council's decision to invite Urach to become King of Lithuania and the decision to set out the principles of the Constitution in 29 clauses.

Post-war literature

The creation of the state was accompanied by great national patriotism. For people in rural areas, who had lived in isolation during the long years of the German occupation, the rumour of the Lithuanian army was like a miracle. "The whole village gathered to touch us or to hear what we were saying. Most of the elderly cried with joy," wrote a volunteer in his memoirs (Šukys, 2016, pp. 58–59). Young people willingly volunteered, in some cases leaving home without their parents' permission. Many Great War officers took part in the fight for independence.

Not only folk songs and poems by 19th century poets were sung by marching soldiers: march songs were also written by young poets. Kazys Binkis (1893–1942), a poet who served in one of the regiments, wrote poems for the popular Iron Wolf March. Soon after the war, several almanacs and anthologies of young poetry appeared between 1920 and 1921, namely, *Dainava*, *Veja*, *Vainikai*, and *Vilnius*. Publishing memoirs was encouraged: they were published in the press (magazines *Karys, Kardas, Karo archyvas* specifically devoted to the analysis of war and armed struggle and the memory of them were published), and collections of memoirs were compiled[29]. In a broader perspective, however, literature did not pick up the theme of patriotism. Literature was governed by its own internal laws,

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29 The collected stories of the people appeared in separate books in the 1940s: *Savanorių žygiai*, in two volumes, in 1937; and *Lietuva Didžižiajame kare* in 1939.

which led it to dissociate itself from the patriotic and social engagement that characterized literature at the turn of the century. An article criticizing the wartime poem *Mūsų vargai* (1920), written by the national leader Maironis, expressed a general post-war tendency: to distance oneself from the powerful influence of Maironis, to look for new aesthetic expression and new directions in literature. It was as if there was an effort to forget the war and the battles, to recover from them (in prose, like in all Europe, military themes and account of battles re-emerged on the occasion of the commemoration of the tenth anniversary of the Great War I[30]). As early as 1919, young poets were fascinated by the revolutionary poetry of Vladimir Mayakovsky (1893–1930), and during their studies in Berlin in 1920 – by German Expressionism (Balys Sruoga wrote a series of poems in the Expressionist style, another example is *Miestas* [1922], and Kazys Binkis's collection *100 pavasarių* [1923]). Italian Futurism and a new branch of art – cinema – were also influential ("As if under the bedsheets / Devils made a hell for themselves. / A giraffe crawled out of the wall. / The caverns came out. / The ceiling turned over. / Cinematography began." (excerpt from Kazys Binkis *C 40°* [1921]).

Rebellion against "good taste," against academic rigour, against the worship of art of the past, courage, activism, and arbitrariness of the artistic subject– the most important slogans of expressionism and futurism were best absorbed by the most talented Lithuanian avant-garde artist, Kazis Binkis, who published the poetry collection *100 pavasarių* (1923), and organized the movement of rebellious young poets *Keturi vėjai*, which published a magazine under the same name (1922, 1924–1928). This was the most prominent modernist movement in interwar literary life. The magazine *Pranašas* and its lead articles declared artistic ambition to "change the world," to "blow it up" from the inside, and proclaimed a revolt against the harmony and tyranny of "good taste," against "academic rigour" and the cult of the art of the past. This was a war of "children against their parents" (Kubilius, 1982, pp. 221–222). Binkis and others made parodies of the classics, Donelaitis,

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30 In 1929, a translation of Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front* was published, and it was reprinted in the same year; this novel sparked a certain boom in war literature and the novel as a genre in Lithuania.

Maironis, the Symbolists, folk songs and hymns, and Baranauskas, Juozas Žlabys Žengė (1899–1992) wrote a poem under the same title, *Anykščių šilelis* (1930). "For the first time, ironic subtext, puns, pranks, and sarcastic reworking of the text in a distorting mirror entered Lithuanian poetic culture," a literary historian wrote (ibid., p. 226).

One of the wittiest poets of the movement was Teofilis Tilvytis (1904–1969), famous for his humorous poems. He published poetry collections *Trys grenadieriai*[31] (1926), and *Nuo Maironies iki manęs* (1929). In his poem *Meilė* (1928), *Išpardavimo dūšios*, he ridiculed the sensibilities of the Romanticists and Symbolists. The collections of poems by Salys Šemeris (born Saliamonas Šmierauskas, 1898–1981), *Granata krūtinėj* (1924), and *Liepsnosvaizdis širdims deginti* (1926), include references to war which are used to create new metaphors. The poet portrays the psychological trauma caused by war: the human being is reduced to "someone of little importance", a meaningless, helpless jester in the soulless arena of the elements. The spontaneity of life is expressed through erotic impulses. Each of us is a "flaming carnal bomb": "Give me your hemispheres. Which are blazing in fire/ I'll be licking them with my restless claws" (*Granata krūtinėj*, 1924, p. 11). The main prose writer of the *Keturi vėjai* movement, Petras Tarulis (born Juozas Petrėnas, 1896–1980), expressed this feeling in his novels, of which *Mėlynos kelnės* (1927) was setting new trends in this genre. Juozas Tysliava (1902–1961) tried to spread Lithuanian avant-gardism in Europe. While studying in Paris, he published a collection of poems in French, *Coupe de vents* (1926), and persuaded well-known artists to collaborate on his multilingual magazine *Muba* (1928, three issues published). In addition to Lithuanian poets, the magazine published texts by Jean Cocteau (1889–1963), Vicente Huidobro (1893–1948), Bruno Jasienski (1901–1938), and illustrations by the modernist artists Piet Mondrian (1872–1944), and Kazimiras Malevičius (1879–1935).

Pranas Morkūnas (1900–1941), a radical creator of nonsense poetry, who published only one poem in the magazine *Keturi vėjai*, was discovered and appreciated much later: his collection *Dainuojantis degeneratas* was published many years later, in 1993. The movement *Keturi vėjai* was continued by Kazys Boruta (1905–1965), a poet with

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31 Grenadier is a military term meaning a soldier in a grenade-armed unit.

the most rebellious biography, who wrote poetry of stark vocabulary and broken syntax, and constructed the self-image of a rebellious man. His expressionist poetry combines avant-garde influences with Lithuanian melancholy. Boruta, Antanas Venclova (1906–1971) and the critic Kostas Korsakas (1909–1986) founded the magazine *Trečias frontas* (1930–1931), which attracted left-wing artists who were subject to ideological manipulation. After the fifth issue was published, the censorship banned the periodical.

The Memory of contemporaries about the Great War

There is a lack of understanding of the significance of the Great War and WWI battles, as well as of the literature that accompanied them. A large part of Lithuanian society has a vague idea of the events of that time and a naive notion that everything started on 16 February 1918, the Day of Independence, the emergence of an independent state, which was established and flourished until the 1940s. This flawed collective memory of WWI is due to two reasons.

One of them is a "fresher," and more painful trauma: World War II. It began with the Russian occupation in 1940, followed by the German occupation, and then the Russian occupation again. Even before the war, the Bolsheviks organized a mass "cleansing" of Lithuanians and their deportation by rail to Siberia. This was happening also after the war until 1951, when armed resistance to the occupation and deportations took place, costing many lives. Many Lithuanians, most of them educated, fled to Western Europe in 1944, and later to the USA, creating a strong diaspora of Lithuanians who made political demands and developed Lithuanian culture under conditions of freedom.

The second reason for the oblivion was artificially created by the Soviet occupying power, which resorted to decisive measures in the summer of 1940: "[a]s early as of 21 July, the Lithuanian national anthem was no longer broadcast on the Kaunas and Vilnius radio stations, and the Lithuanian three-colour national flag was no longer flown on Gediminas Hill in Vilnius, on the tower of the Military Museum and at the monument to the victims, the freedom fighters of Lithuania in Kaunas.... Since the end of August, the Lithuanian tricolour national flag, the symbol of the Chaser (Vytis) and Vincas

Kudirka's "National Anthem" became the symbols of "bourgeois" nationalism" (*Lietuva 1940–1990*, 2007, p. 110). As of 11 October, national and religious holidays ceased to exist and common union holidays were introduced. The name Lithuania also disappeared from official inscriptions, and Lithuania became the Lithuanian SSR (the name of a region within the Soviet state). In order to prevent any thought of resentment or protest, regular arrests, psychological intimidation and the imposition of a new ideology took place. This was done aggressively and brutally, with the aim of shocking the public. In a state of shock, it remained silent, and this enabled trials and legal procedures that determined a one-way course of events. Behind the Iron Curtain, books were withdrawn from libraries, and inter-war and earlier press and publications were banned. Emigrant life and culture were also silenced, and books from abroad could only reach Lithuania by being smuggled in, just as they did during the 19th-century ban on the press. The goal of education and the media was to destroy the cultural and political memory of the nation: to rewrite it. The events of 1914–1920, which were important for Lithuanians, were never mentioned, and were replaced by another narrative: about the maturing of the revolutionary situation in Russia, about the "global" significance of the October Revolution of 1917, and about the epoch-making creation of the proletariat. The nation-states of the interwar period were labelled bourgeois nationalists and treated as the wrong path of history. After Stalin's death, amnestied returnees from Siberia were strictly forbidden to talk about their exile. All this repeated for decades, affecting the understanding of history, especially of the younger generation, distorting memory and disrupting common sense.

With the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the communist experiment, the years 1989–1991 offered an opportunity to erase the white stains of memory, to reconstruct memory. But this was not easy. There was a massive rush to read the press and newly published books and to enjoy the fruits of a culture that had long been banned. Attention turned first to the legacy of emigration, to the literature of the Siberian exiles and members of the resistance, and to the study of World War II. The flow of information was enormous and not accessible to all. The hunger continued unabated for years, but

the Great War (World War 1), the struggle for independence by diplomatic means and by force of arms was never explored.

Historians have begun to bring the Great War, its battles, and culture back into the field of collective memory (at least in part) when the world was commemorating the centennial of the war in 2014–2018.

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Eugenijus Žmuida – graduated from the Vilnius University in 1986 and completed his PhD in 2006. Since 2003, he has been a researcher at the Lithuanian Literature and Folklore Institute. He has published the monograph *Vinco Mykolaičio-Putino poezijos ontologiniai aspektai* ('The ontological aspects of the poetry of Vincas Mykolaitis-Putinas', 2007) and is the editor of several books: *Eglė žalčių karalienė: variantai grožinėje literatūroje* ('The folk tale Eglė the queen of serpents in fictional literature, Vilnius, 2013, 2 vols.), *Maironis: laiškai; atsiminimai* ('Maironis: letters, memoirs', 2016), *Pranas Lembertas "Poezija"* ('Pranas Lembertas: Poetry', 2018), *Profesorius Juozas Girdzijauskas: atsiminimai, laiškai, iš archyvų* ('Professor Juozas Girdzijauskas: memories, letters, from the archives', 2020). Co-edited books: *Alfonsas Nyka-Niliūnas: Poetas ir jo pasaulis* ('Alfonsas Nyka-Niliūnas: the poet and his world', 2009), *Lietuvių literatūros istorija. xx amžiaus pirmoji pusė* ('The history of Lithuanian literature of the first half of the 20th century', 2010, 2 vols). His scholarly interests focus on the literature of the 19–20th centuries (Lithuanian, Russian, European), philosophy (19–20th centuries), mythology and folklore, comparatives, war literature, and memory.