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## **Identity at the Crossroads of Cultures: The Case of the Bilingual Writer Juozapas Albinas Herbačiauskas**

### **Abstract**

The aim of the scientific article “Identity at the Crossroads of Cultures: The Case of the Bilingual Writer Juozapas Albinas Herbačiauskas” is to analyse, based on empirical and theoretical research methods, the phenomenon of dual identity in the context of the development of nation-states in the first-half of the 20th century, which is determined by historical, cultural and community-related circumstances. The life of the bilingual Lithuanian-Polish, Polish-Lithuanian writer, cultural, public and political figure Juozapas Albinas Herbačiauskas (Jozef Albin Herbaczewski), the drama and consequences of his identity choices in the context of the very difficult period of Lithuanian-Polish relations is the specific case chosen for such an analysis.

The Union of Lublin, signed in July 1569, created a unique political entity in Europe at that time – the united Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. The original model of the union provided that Lithuanians and Poles would live in the union on equal terms.

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Despite its troubles, this political entity gave Europe its first written constitution and, in the long term, was partly responsible for the formation of a specific cultural and social position known as “Gente Lituanus, natione Polonus” (“Lithuanian by descent, Polish by nationality”). It became common to have a kind of dual identity – Lithuanian-Polish, Polish-Lithuanian.

However, a few centuries later, the above-mentioned position inherited from the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth turned into a problem: perhaps because the political model was only partially successful, the situation changed with the start of the active formation of nation-states. Tensions over borders, territories and geopolitical ambitions led to the need for a clear individual choice. A clearly expressed national identity, including the use of the specific language (Lithuanian or Polish), became an essential indicator of this. Meanwhile, partly due to the influence of the old heritage of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth from a socio-cultural point of view, there was still a relatively large number of mixed Lithuanian-Polish and Polish-Lithuanian families in Lithuania and Poland.

One of the more exceptional cases in this context is that of two brothers, Boleslovas and Juozapas Albinas Herbačiauskas, who were born in the same family of a Polish father and a Lithuanian mother in the second half of the 19th century, but who chose different identities.

Boleslovas Herbačiauskas (Bolesław Herbaczewski) chose a Polish identity. Juozapas Albinas Herbačiauskas had a more Lithuanian identity. This bilingual Lithuanian-Polish, Polish-Lithuanian writer, cultural figure, promoter of the Lithuanian National Revival, the first lecturer in Lithuanian in the history of the Jagiellonian University in Poland, translator and publicist was one of the brightest and most colourful personalities in Kraków and interwar Kaunas of the early 20th century. His biography, the specifics of his activities, his polemics with his contemporaries, and the challenges he faced in his efforts to merge and preserve both Lithuanian and Polish identities in the context of the tense relations between Lithuania and Poland provide the researcher with a rewarding opportunity to shed

light on the extremely complex and multidimensional era of the development of and relations between the Lithuanian and Polish states through the history of one person and his dramatic choices.

### **Keywords**

Herbačiauskas, Polish-Lithuanian relations, the state

For the people of Lithuania and Poland, the choice of dual identity has specific and deep historical roots. The Union of Lublin that was signed in July 1569 created what was a unique political entity in Europe at that time – the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. Its original model provided for Lithuanians and Poles to live in the established union with equal rights.

Despite some of the problems it had, this political entity gave Europe its first written constitution and eventually led to the formation of a specific cultural and social construct known as *Gente lituanus natione polonus* (Latin: “Lithuanian ethnicity, Polish nationality”). Having this sort of dual identity – Lithuanian-Polish, Polish-Lithuanian – become the norm.

However, a few centuries later, the aforementioned construct inherited from the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth turned into a problem – perhaps because the political model only worked in part, the situation changed when nation-states began to actively form. As tensions rose over borders, territories and geopolitical ambitions, the need for a clearly expressed choice of individuals emerged. A clearly expressed national identity, including the use of a specific language (Lithuanian or Polish), became its essential indicator. Meanwhile, partly due to the influence of the old heritage of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in terms of the sociocultural aspect, there was still a considerable number of mixed Lithuanian-Polish / Polish-Lithuanian families in Lithuania and Poland, whose members considered themselves both Poles and Lithuanians at the same time, following the example of the Romanticism poet Adam Mickiewicz.

One of the most exceptional cases in this context is that of two brothers who were born into the same family of a Polish father and

a Lithuanian mother in the late 19th century, but who chose two different identities, with one of the brothers preferring the Lithuanian name Juozapas Albinas Herbačiauskas, and the other going by the Polish name Boleslaw Szczesny Herbaczewski.<sup>1</sup> Boleslaw considered himself a Pole, while Juozapas considered himself a Lithuanian.

Although he knew the Lithuanian language, Boleslaw Herbaczewski (1875–1943) considered himself Polish; however, his brother Juozapas Albinas Herbačiauskas (Józef Albin Herbaczewski in Polish; 1876–1944) had a dual identity. When asked about his identity, Juozapas Albinas often explained that he inherited Polish culture from his father and Lithuanian blood from his mother, but that he belonged to both nationalities. It is interesting to note that Juozapas Albinas Herbačiauskas did not change or adapt his identity his entire life, regardless of the pressure he felt from both Lithuania and Poland. According to Polish historians, he was a Lithuanian who “considered Poland his second homeland” (Bardach, 1988, p. 210) and was “a Mickiewicz type of Lithuanian” (Solak, 1991, p. 460). According to Irena Fedorowicz (2017), Lithuanian opinions about this, likely the most interesting and colourful, but at the same time probably also the most controversial figure in the cultural, political and social scene in the first half of the 20th century,<sup>2</sup> were much more harsh. For example, ethnographer and journalist Mečislovas Davainis-Silvestraitis (Silvestraitis, as cited by Fedorowicz, 2017) called Herbačiauskas a “fake Lithuanian”, and Professor Mykolas Biržiška (Biržiška, as cited by Fedorowicz, 2017) called him “half dog, half goat, and godless”.<sup>3</sup> According to Marcin Bajko (2017), Juozapas Albinas Herbačiauskas’s greatest tragedy was that “he was too little Lithuanian for the Lithuanians and too Lithuanian for the Poles. For the latter, he was always just a Lithuanian writing in Polish.”<sup>4</sup> He sees

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1 The ambiguity of identity is also indicated by the spelling of the surname: *Herbačiauskas* in Lithuania was the same person as *Herbaczewski*, *Józef Albin* in Poland.

2 I.Fedorowicz. Nieznane konteksty korespondencji Józefa Albina Herbaczewskiego i Julii Wichert-Kajriukstisowej z 1939 r., [https://repozytorium.uwb.edu.pl/jspui/bitstream/11320/10345/1/I\\_Fedorowicz\\_Nieznane\\_konteksty\\_korespondencji.pdf](https://repozytorium.uwb.edu.pl/jspui/bitstream/11320/10345/1/I_Fedorowicz_Nieznane_konteksty_korespondencji.pdf) Accessed: 02.10.2022.

3 Ibid.

4 Ibid.

Herbačiauskas “as a person between the hammer of ‘Lithuanianness’ and the anvil of ‘Polishness’, and he loved both the hammer and the anvil at the same time.”<sup>5</sup> He himself was made from the hammer of Lithuania, which at that time was creating its national identity based on ‘anti-Polishness’.<sup>6</sup> The anvil was Poland, did not even exist on the map at that time – indifferent or disregarding the national aspirations of Lithuanians... Sometimes himself being on the side of the hammer, and sometimes on the side of the anvil.”<sup>7</sup>

According to Vladas Sirutavičius (1996), Juozapas Albinas Herbačiauskas traced his family to Belarus, and the documents (14 November 1822) proving the nobility of the Herbačiauskases, or more

5 For comparison, an excerpt from the autobiography of Mykolas Römeris, a prominent Lithuanian politician and lawyer who was a representative of the Lithuanian-Polish nobility: “I did not yet clearly understand that my skin was peculiar – not purely Polish and not purely Lithuanian, but a special combination, in which there are signs of both ‘Polishness’ and ‘Lithuanianness’ – the old skin of Adam Mickiewicz, a special creature of the history of our homeland – skin in which the soul is also special – not Lithuanian, but not Polish either.... Our tragedy – that of the so-called Lithuanian Poles... is that we do not have our own name, that our soul is a special conception of two national souls.” (Cited from: Maksimaitis M. (1996). *Mykolo Romerio autobiografija. Lietuvių atgimimo istorijos studijos*: Vilnius (Vol. 13), p. 190)

6 I would not agree with this statement of Marcin Bajko; basically, there were good reasons for the defensive position of Lithuania in the period mentioned by this researcher. In my opinion, in order to understand today what opinions and attitudes Herbačiauskas was trying to fight against, and precisely why he was trying to explain Lithuanian affairs and the situation between the two states to Polish readers in as much detail as possible in his books, it is necessary to take into account the prevailing mood in the Polish press and society at that particular time. For example, in his book *Polityka Wschodnia Piłsudskiego*, Bogusław Miedziński (1986) asserted: “The most important historical correction would be that the term ‘Lithuania’, which was given to the rapidly growing territories at that time that were supported by two generations of the House of Gediminid, is an agreed term. [...] The Lithuanian ethnic factor occupied a small area of that state on its northwestern border. [...] The state union of those lands with the Kingdom of Poland was, strictly speaking, a union of ethnographic Polish lands with ethnographic Russian lands; Lithuanian by origin, but newly Russian in terms of the adopted culture and language, was only a dynasty, which quickly adopted the Polish language and culture.” (Miedziński, B. (1986). *Polityka Wschodnia Piłsudskiego*. – Sygn. 2577, p. 18 (typescript), Biblioteka PAN w Warszawie.)

7 Bajko M. (2017). *Bardziej polski niż sami Polacy. O młodopolskiej twórczości Józefa Albina Herbaczewskiego*, [https://repozytorium.uwb.edu.pl/jspui/bitstream/11320/10335/1/M\\_Bajko\\_Bardziej\\_polski\\_niz\\_sami\\_Polacy.pdf](https://repozytorium.uwb.edu.pl/jspui/bitstream/11320/10335/1/M_Bajko_Bardziej_polski_niz_sami_Polacy.pdf) Accessed: 11.10.2022.

precisely – the Horbačiauskases – who moved from Gudija to the vicinity of Prienai, are stored at the Lithuanian Academy of Sciences (Sirutavičius, 1996). In 1894, Herbačiauskas was expelled from the Marijampolė gymnasium because banned Lithuanian press was found in his possession. According to Professor Mykolas Biržiška (1953), the reason for the writer being expelled was that a calendar in Polish characters was found in his father's possession, i.e., a publication that was illegal in Lithuania during the ban on all publications printed in the Latin alphabet, but Juozapas Albinas Herbačiauskas took the blame for his father.

To avoid the persecution of the tsar's gendarmes (the possession of prohibited publications could lead to fines, imprisonment or even exile to Siberia), he withdrew to Poland. As he said himself about this period in an interview with Lithuanian journalist Juozas Keliuotis (1932), who was the editor of the *Naujoji Romuva* magazine (1931–1940):

I attended gymnasium at the expense of the government, because I was a good pupil[...]. But I didn't finish gymnasium. I was expelled from sixth grade for having illegal books [...]. They did a search. Found banned books. They issued a burn notice and handed me over to the custody of the [Russian tsar's] gendarmes. [...] The gendarmes demanded that I leave Marijampolė. I headed to Warsaw. There I was an assistant accountant at a sweet factory. But I didn't want to settle for that. I secretly crossed the border in Silesia. I got on a train and went to Kraków. I immediately went to the police there and told them who I was. Austria-Hungary was taking in in Russian [Empire] political refugees. That's why they didn't object to me settling in Kraków.<sup>8</sup>

In Kraków, Juozapas Albinas Herbačiauskas was initially an audit student at the Jagiellonian University Faculty of Philosophy. With the massive strengthening of national movements in Europe, as well as the intensification of Lithuanian national activities in Lithuania and abroad, the Rūta Lithuanian society was established in Kraków on 27 February 1904 at the initiative of Herbačiauskas and other

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8 Conversation with J.A. Herbačiauskas. *Naujoji Romuva*. 1932. (12) pp. 265–267.

Lithuanian youth who were studying in this city. Herbačiauskas became chairman of its board. The most important outcome of the society's activities was *Gabija* (1907), the first almanac of Lithuanian literature, which was compiled by Juozapas Albinas Herbačiauskas. According to his memoirs (1932),

I organised *Gabija* to honour Bishop Baranauskas. I wanted to publish a whole series of Lithuanian books, with the printing costs being covered by... Lithuanian magnates. Unfortunately, they did not want to contribute to the development of Lithuanian culture and I had to look for funds elsewhere. I published *Gabija* and *Erškėčių vainikas* mainly to the credit of the [Jagiellonian] University printing house.<sup>9</sup>

Juozapas Albinas Herbačiauskas participated in the Slavic Club of Kraków – Professor Marian Zdziechowski noticed the talented student from Lithuania and invited him to take part in their activities. Herbačiauskas and Professor Zdziechowski met under rather interesting circumstances, though ones that were not unusual for Herbačiauskas. It happened in 1900 at the Slavic Club, where a meeting was being held to discuss the problems of Lithuania. Later, Herbačiauskas will recall:

...I asked for the floor and scolded the speaker terribly for the fact that based on the authority of Prof. A. Brückner, he had taken the liberty of promulgating a frivolous opinion of my countrymen, which he only knew from rumours and foolish conjectures. I gave the longest speech about Lithuania and Lithuanians and caused a scandal [...]. When I finished, Prof. Zdziechowski came up to me, all red in the face (from excitement or indignation, I don't know), and invited me to lunch the next day.<sup>10</sup>

And thus began his close friendship with Professor Zdziechowski, which lasted for 38 years. In 1905, Herbačiauskas also became

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<sup>9</sup> Conversation with J.A. Herbačiauskas. *Naujoji Romuva*. 1932. (12) pp. 265–267.

<sup>10</sup> *Lithuania. Dzieje, naród, kultura* (1998). Kraków: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego (UJ), pp. 11–12.

very involved in the activities of Zielony Balonik (Polish: “Green Balloon”), a literary cabaret founded by members of Young Poland. As Tadeusz Boy-Żeleński (1964) wrote,

...after the first few evenings, his prose ‘number’ became a traditional item on the programme. Herbačiauskas would go out on stage and deliver long speeches in his sing-song Lithuanian accent, where you could just feel that he cared about something very, very much; but what it was, the listener’s mind could not grasp [...]. Since the Zielony Balonik period, he became one of the most popular figures in Kraków. Everyone accepted him as their own [...]. He lived with us all like with brothers. It was impossible to imagine Kraków without his big head of hair; without his ascot and double-breasted jacket (Boy-Żeleński, 1964, pp. 417–422).

Juozapas Albinas Herbačiauskas’s first book, *Odrodzenie Litwy wobec idei polskiej* (Polish: “Rebirth of Lithuania Against the Polish Idea”), was published in Kraków in 1905. He enthusiastically welcomed the Lithuanian national movement, delighted with the emergence of *Aušra*, the first Lithuanian newspaper, and fervently supported Lithuanian aspirations. He wrote (1905) that it was time for the Poles to understand and realise the legitimacy and validity of Lithuanian aspirations for self-dependence,

that they are dealing not with some ‘sick vision’, but with a highly spontaneous nation that ardently loves danger, has been hardened in the fight against obstacles, and persistently implements its goals and intentions (Herbačiauskas, 2001, p. 20).

With the ardour and emotions characteristic of his early works, he stood up to defend the Lithuanian position, clearly identifying himself with the Lithuanian nation and feeling himself to be a kind of herald of their national revival aspirations in Poland.<sup>11</sup>

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11 During this period, there were not very many potential heralds of this sort – according to 1912 data, there were 12 Lithuanian students studying in Kraków: four in medicine, three in natural sciences, one in philosophy, one in agronomy, one in art, and another two studying externally.



He urged the Poles to change their futile tactics towards the Lithuanians to lead them “by the leash of Polish politics”, and to give up empty national ambitions, pretending that their nation had taught the Lithuanians this or that. It is likely that this attempt of Herbačiauskas’s to present the Lithuanian revival to Poland’s cultural society can also be explained by the search for arguments acceptable to the Polish audience, with the aim of contributing to the discussions that had begun in Poland and Lithuania around that time about the future prospects of the development of Poland and Lithuania. In Lithuania at that time, new goals were beginning to crystallise, matured by the powerful national revival movement. The latter developed the idea of a national Lithuanian state. Thus, the vision of an independent state appeared in Lithuania and Poland at a similar time and was successfully realised within a dozen or so years. However, let’s say if in 1918, Poland could be partly considered the so-called *Polonia restituta*, a kind of reconstruction of the old Poland in a modern form, including claims made to certain lands, then calling the Lithuania of 1918 *Lituania restituta* would not be appropriate at all. This fundamental difference in views on the future development of the former parts of the united political union (Lithuania and Poland) was partly the result of both the stormy debates between Poles and Lithuanians in the early 20th century, as well as, unfortunately, the strained relations with Poland in the first half of the 20th century.

Neither Herbačiauskas’s first book nor his efforts to present Lithuanian culture in Poland went unnoticed: he was sharply criticised by Zygmunt Gloger (1907), who reproached him for having so many words, which – according to him – mocked elementary knowledge of Polish history, in a book that spoke about the “Polish idea and was written by a talented author who has a good command of the Polish language and the pen, and who is not actually Lithuanian, but *Polish...*” (Gloger, 1907, pp. 33, 672).

In his next book, a drama entitled *Potępienie* (Polish: “Condemnation”; 1906) that was written in Polish, Herbačiauskas made it a point to write that this work of his

belongs to Polish literature only formally, i.e. because it is written and printed in Polish. But with its secret content, and especially with its essential spiritual tone, it belongs to Lithuanian literature (Herbaczewski, 1906).

The drama itself was not particularly exceptional – it was a combination of the elements of fantasy space and mysticism often promoted by the members of Young Poland, originating from the awakening interest in medieval mysticism during that period and enriched with the image of the main hero (Polish: Olgierd; Lithuanian: Algirdas), a rebel connected to the exotic and mysterious Lithuania. It is likely that Herbačiauskas wanted to express his ethnic uniqueness through the image of this hero – this conclusion is also implied by the autobiographical elements found in the drama. As stated in the epilogue, he wrote it in order to reveal and express the deepest spiritual essence of the Lithuanian people and the origins of the spirit of the Lithuanian nation (Herbaczewski, 1906, p. 143).

Juozapas Albinas Herbačiauskas debuted *Erškėčių vainikas* (Lithuanian: “Briar Wreath”) in 1908 – this was his first book written in Lithuanian, and today is deservedly considered one of the first manifestations of modernism in Lithuanian literature (Vienuolis, 1908).

Another one of Herbačiauskas’s books came out in 1911, but in Polish again – *I nie wódź nas na pokuszenie...* (Polish: “And Lead Us Not into Temptation...”). Taken from the Lord’s Prayer, the title was probably not chosen by chance – around that time, there was a fairly major turning point in Herbačiauskas’s worldview (due to some painful personal experiences), turning the famous Zielony Balonik cabaret swearer who was against any religious values into a passionate Christian until the end of his life. Maybe because of its particularly colourful descriptions of current events in the Polish art world, or maybe because of its sharp-tongued internal criticism of the modernist world, this book opened the way for Juozapas Albinas Herbačiauskas to recognition in Poland and became one of his two most popular books among Polish readers. According to Krystyna Saryusz-Zaleska (1911, pp. 262–263), who reviewed the book:

Some of [its] sentences may cause controversy, but the refreshing spirit that emanates from this book must resonate in every virtuous, Christian heart [...]. The book has a lot of potential to succeed as a young and significant voice about the young, the reaction of a literate, thus competent [person] to literature [...]. This book should and must do a lot of good!

In 1911 or 1912, a special Lithuanian language course was established at Jagiellonian University and Juozapas Albinas Herbačiauskas was officially employed – probably with the recommendations of Professors J. Rozwadowski and M. Zdziechowski. Juozapas Albinas Herbačiauskas was *the first Lithuanian language lecturer in the history of Jagiellonian University* – this fact cemented him in the history of the university, both as a teacher and writer and also as a university employee, who, with his Lithuanian language lectures, officially gave meaning to the change of cultural and historical concepts at Jagiellonian University. He taught intermittently starting in the 1912 autumn semester until 30 June 1923. During this period, he published five more books (four in Polish and one in Lithuanian); in 1919, one might say – to his misfortune, he got deeply and directly involved in what was then the extremely complicated political relations between the Poles and the Lithuanians.

In 1912, Herbačiauskas finally managed to fulfil an old dream that he had already mentioned in his letters to Lithuania back in 1909:

Dear Father Editor! I have taken it upon myself to write a serious, deeply thought-out piece about the Lithuanian [national] movement (in Polish and Lithuanian). Therefore, I would beg you, Hon. Fr. Ed., to give me as much knowledge as possible: 1) Regarding the current functioning of the Saulė and Šv. Kazimieras Societies (statistics of schools, issues, funds, etc.) 3) regarding the matter of the Church in Lithuania, 4) regarding the state of [Lithuanian] literature (broader bibliographic messages). I would also beg you to be so kind as to send me the most interesting issues of *Draugija*, which contain a lot of the material I need. For this, Hon. Fr. Ed., I will be extremely grateful. I long to seriously serve Lithuania. Enough of those childish dreams. To work, together! I fervently beg of you – help me to work! I, for my part, of course, do not renounce the obligation

of repayment. I heartily salute you, Your Juozapas Gerbačiauskas. My address: Cracovie, Kanonicza 22. I. Roma, Bargo Nuovo 80. 3.II.[1]909.<sup>12</sup>

In 1912, the aforementioned work came out – Herbačiauskas's book entitled *Głos bólu* (Polish: "The Voice of Pain"). On the first page, the author dedicated the book to the "Brothers and Sisters of Aušra", i.e., the fosterers of the Lithuanian national revival and, as they called it, the Polish national liberation. In it, the following points of reference of the author's analysis are outstanding:

- (a) the assessment of the current situation of the two countries, Lithuania and Poland;
- (b) the examination of political relations and the internal party situation in Lithuania;
- (c) the criticism of the ideological/party direction of the clergy (or in his words, the "clericals");
- (d) the discussion of the purpose of the nobility and its mistakes in the context of the Lithuanian national revival and relations with the Poles (1912):

Alas! Most of the Lithuanian nobility does not want to think about either Polish or Lithuanian affairs; they do not want to feel or fight with either the resurgent Lithuania or the liberating Poland. [...] [T]errible is the tragedy of the Lithuanian nobility, which is gradually losing the awareness of its historical mission [...]. [The nobility] got stuck in a sick state of ridiculous, unrealistic, historically [...] unjustified 'Lituanophobia'. (Herbaczewski, 1912, p. 182);

(e) the overview of the public reactions of Polish society to the Lithuanian national movement. Herbačiauskas paid special attention to the issue that was extremely pressing at that time in the Lithuanian/Polish-language churches in the Vilnius Diocese. He expressed dismay as to why broader sections of society and secular representatives were not included in his decision, why it was left for the clericals of both sides to decide by way of internal negotiations:

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12 Letters of Adomas Jakštas-Dambrauskas and Juozapas Albinas Herbačiauskas. *Naujoji Romuva*. 1938 (11).

It is time to realise that the 'issue of the church'... is already a national-political issue!... Poles must not accept the fact that Polish clericals, inflating the authority of the Polish nation, are provoking the national feelings of Lithuanians. Nor should Lithuanians tolerate the politics of the Lithuanian clericals that provoke the Polish nation.<sup>13</sup>

The author based his analysis of the political, social and cultural situation of Lithuania and Poland on specific data of cultural activities in Lithuania – Lithuanian press publications and various types of societies founded by Lithuanians, from cultural ones to trade unions and publishing cooperatives, examining in detail the characteristic fields of activity, the number of members, and the goals set. While discussing the press publications, he also provided the specifics of the contents of the publications, the circulation sizes and so on. These detailed data form an extremely valuable part of the book. He claimed that the national liberation of Lithuania is closely related to the national liberation of Poland, and as a possible form of cooperation, he suggested inspiring scientific research into the history and culture of the past of Lithuanians by giving young Lithuanians the opportunity to do so at Jagiellonian University. According to Herbačiauskas (1912, p. 11),

Every right- and noble-minded Pole knows that without a free Lithuania, there will be no free Poland. Whoever fights for the independence of Poland must also fight for the independence of Lithuania without any claims to the future. Even *post factum*, let Lithuania break away from Poland completely and forever; this would be an insignificant trifle – stupidity – compared to the great fact that Poland's national conscience would become clear in respect to Lithuania: the words 'Poland killed us' will burn with gratitude – 'The Poles contributed to our liberation!'

It seems that around 1912, the concept of Lithuanian sovereignty was gradually developing in Herbačiauskas's consciousness – from various different details. For example, in this book, he asserts that Lithuania is at the intersection of two cultures, East and West, so the

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13 Ibid, pp. 161–163.

entire further cultural and national development of the country may depend on the point of reference chosen at this significant moment. Therefore, following the example of Hegel's spirit of the nation, it is important to refer to the origins of one's own culture: "A culture that does not draw the juices of life from its own roots, which have grown up with the depth of the nation's history, has no right to exist today. Such a culture is only a parasite of foreign cultures..." (Herbaczewski, 1912, p. 117).

Herbačiauskas believed that historical and cultural continuity and the connection with the depth of the nation's spirit were almost the only guarantee of a proper place in the European cultural community. Otherwise, too much is at stake: "A nation that destroys its own traditions becomes... a beggar of Europe!" (Herbaczewski, 1912, p. 118).

Herbačiauskas's latter book received comments in both the Polish and Lithuanian press. For example, a reviewer who went as K. S. (1912, pp. 289–292) wrote:

...from his book we hear the best voices, pure features of the Lithuanian spirit, from the patriotism akin to the heroic passion of Margiris<sup>14</sup> to the wisdom of Mickiewicz. – Along with the bitter truth, the author allowed us to feel that honey of the past and the spiritual pull to the heights. Such a writer must continue to research and continue to write. Herbačiauskas's previous book, *I nie wódź nas na pokuszenie...*, put a seal of merit on his critical and literary activities not only with respect to his home society. – The present book, *Głos bólu*, must be published in Lithuanian as well.

However, the opinions that Herbačiauskas expressed in this book that were so favourably received in Poland were not in line with the views of the Lithuanian intelligentsia in Lithuania at all. The opinion of this side was expressed by Mykolas Biržiška (1953, p. 200):

Herbačiauskas vividly and graphically explained the Lithuanian national movement to the Poles, to the extent that he understood it

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14 Margiris, who died in 1336, is a legendary prince of Lithuania (Samogitia) – a historical hero.

himself, while watching from the sidelines and not actually participating in it, and therefore not understanding the maturing and inevitable clash of the national Lithuanian cause with the Polish cause, and not picking up that the unionist traditions were particularly alive and undisturbed in Kraków, far from the little bit of Lithuania visible from here through the veil of the grim past, when they were able to face a living, mutually (Lithuanian-Polish) combative Lithuanian reality, thus archaising and poeticising the current one like Mickiewicz.

If that wasn't enough, in the review, Professor Biržiška (1953) called Juozapas Albinas Herbačiauskas an "insulted [rejected] prophet", "hysterical", and so forth:

...when in 1905 the Lithuanians began to demand from the Poles the return of their enslaved rights in the church, and then to openly deny the Poles' right to leadership in Lithuania and in general to clearly organise themselves for their future leadership, Juozas Albinas began teaching (rallying) them in the Lithuanian press, and published, in Polish, his *Głos bólu*, hysterically written by a prophet insulted by society, which for both Lithuanians and Poles, of course, was just *głos wołającego na puszczy*.<sup>15</sup>

However, at that moment in Lithuanian-Polish relations, would it have been better if Herbačiauskas had not tried to explain the Lithuanian national movement to the Poles in Poland at all? Probably not. Especially since the enemies of Lithuania and Poland had been successfully using the principle of *divide et impera*<sup>16</sup> and manipulations also based on insufficient mutual knowledge not for years, and not even for decades, but for centuries. And as evidenced by the aggression of states hostile to democracy today, there is a reason why Clio, the muse of history, is considered a very strict teacher.

In 1914, Juozapas Albinas Herbačiauskas published his second most popular book among Polish readers, *Ironiczna nauka dla umysłowo dojrzałych dzieci* (Polish: "An Ironic Lesson for Mentally Mature

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<sup>15</sup> Polish: "The voice of someone crying in the wilderness".

<sup>16</sup> Latin: "Divide and rule".

Children"). The main objects of the author's attention in it are the concept of literary creativity and its relationship with the human will to choose and individual morality, and the harmonious combination of the uniqueness of one's own literature and the world's cultural achievements, as an aspiration:

What was the Jagiellonian Poland? It is what France was at the height of its power [...]. There was a moment in European history when Poland demanded the respect of the French the way France demands the respect of Poland today! [...] who knows, maybe in the person of France we love ourselves!... The cult of France does not allow us to be ourselves (Herbaczewski, 1914, p. 19).

In the book, Herbačiauskas also examined the works of Polish literary authors Tadeusz Miciński, Stanisław Brzozowski, Stefan Żeromski, Wilhelm Feldman and Stanisław Wyspiański, as well as their world view and that of his own:

I am living by the ideas of the heroes of the Catholic faith; I am maturing in the atmosphere of Roman and Latin culture. That is my attitude... The nation [...] is as our fathers and forefathers created it, as we are creating it today! It is a product of will, our historical will – our past and present! And there is nothing accidental about it [...]. Then why the constant hypochondriacal endeavour to persuade the nation – the constant notion that it is sick and despicable? (Herbaczewski, 1914, p. 40).

Herbačiauskas (1914, p. 13) also complained about the fact that his attempts, as an author who considers himself a Lithuanian, to evaluate Polish literary phenomena were assessed negatively in the Polish press: "Why, Sir, are you meddling in something that is none of your business?". And that there were opinions in Polish society that by daring to write about this culture in a different way than is due, he, a transplant from somewhere else, was violating the "right of hospitality". A separate, particularly ironic, sarcastic and critical chapter of the book was dedicated to Tadeusz Miciński, a poet, playwright and one of the most hostile Polish authors towards Herbačiauskas,



who, like Herbačiauskas, was one of the most gifted polemicists of the early 20th century. It is somewhat strange that these authors hated each other so bitterly, because according to Elżbieta Flis-Czerniak, there were more similarities than differences between them – the works of both Miciński and Herbačiauskas are full of Lithuanian motifs and colourful, exotic forms of the image of Lithuania.<sup>17</sup> They both sincerely admired the archaic Lithuanian culture, history and its old religion. They both adored the Polish literature of the Romantic period, drawing inspiration from it and holding the firm view that the path to the liberation of Lithuania and Poland leads through the spiritual rebirth of both nations.<sup>18</sup>

According to contemporaries, the disagreements started after Herbačiauskas's review of Miciński's novel *Nietota* (1910). In his harsh review of Miciński's novel *Xsiądz Faust* ("Father Faust"; 1911), Polish literary and theatre critic Adam Grzymała-Siedlecki (1913, p. 47) reproached that, "Miciński's novel or drama is only a form of deception", and that in the novel, the author "portrayed persons who exist in real life, and acted unethically." According to the reviewer, the figure of Albin Hebetko is created in the novel – a criminal who is a despicable and excessively depraved person:

But with Hebetko, there is, apart from the torture, one more thing that critics cannot ignore in silence. By introducing the figure of this snake [into the novel], the author of *Xsiądz Faust* had the arbitrary scheme to endow it with a physical resemblance to a Polish writer living today. There can be no question of coincidence – the figure is characterised with a rare correspondence to reality in Miciński's work (Grzymała-Siedlecki, 1913, p. 47).

Herbačiauskas, for his part, mocked his opponent sharply in his book and called him *Magik Mistyfiński* (Polish: "Magician Mistyfiński"), much to the chagrin of Miciński, since this moniker really stuck.

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17 Miciński T. (1911) *Nad Bałtykiem*, [https://pl.wikisource.org/wiki/Nad\\_Ba%C5%82tykiem\\_\(Mici%C5%84ski,\\_1911\)](https://pl.wikisource.org/wiki/Nad_Ba%C5%82tykiem_(Mici%C5%84ski,_1911)) Accessed: 30.09.2022.

18 Flis-Czerniak E. „*Tajemna księga Litwy*”. *Józef Albin Herbaczewski i Tadeusz Miciński*, [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/337864577\\_Tajemna\\_ksiega\\_Litwy\\_Jozef\\_Albin\\_Herbaczewski\\_i\\_Tadeusz\\_Micinski](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/337864577_Tajemna_ksiega_Litwy_Jozef_Albin_Herbaczewski_i_Tadeusz_Micinski) Accessed: 08.10.2022

He also hinted at a supposedly real event – a mysterious story with a young lady whose honour was allegedly made an attempt on by “Father Faust”:

I, a poor Lithuanian burial-mound, had the pride to compare myself to the Caucasus of thought, to the Himalayas of logic,<sup>19</sup> to the Fausts of alchemy, to the Babylon of the spirit! [...] I, a snake from the Lithuanian forest, wanted to bite the eagles who after all scorned the plains of Mazovia<sup>20</sup> and ‘lay their eggs in the Himalayas.’ [...] Father Faust performed a mysterious kind of miracle on a young girl, the fiancée of Albin Hebetko’s cousin. Father Faust’s miracle began to take place in the square and it would have been a scandal [...]. Father Faust publicly declared that Albin Hebetko was the cause of the mysterious kind of miracle [...]. The people beat [him] with sticks and drove him out of the parsonage (Herbaczewski, 1914, pp. 66–91).

Herbačiauskas ended the intense polemic by stating:

The improvement of customs in Poland should start with oneself [...]. I don’t want to be acquainted with Mr Miciński anymore. I will never respond to his [...] provocations again. I taught him *pro publico bono* (Latin: “for the public good”), so that he would know that in order to teach others the righteousness and sanctity of the way, you need to be a fair and decent person yourself... (Herbaczewski, 1914, pp. 375).

So, as Kazimierz Bereżyński (1914, p. 5) so aptly put it in his review of Herbačiauskas’s books, “Whoever reads Herbačiauskas for the first time sees in him a man who spits on everything, but spits blood...”.

There is almost no data about Herbačiauskas’s work and activities during World War I.

In 1918, Lithuania and Poland regained their freedom and independence. The next stage of mutual relations between the two restored, energetic nation-states had begun.

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19 Allusions to the motifs and details of Miciński’s work.

20 Mazovia is a historical region in eastern Poland.

Around 1919, the enthusiastic Lithuanian and Polish “mediator” Juozapas Albinas Herbačiauskas reappeared to the readers and the societies of both countries.

In 1919–1920 he visited Lithuania – Vilnius and Kaunas. He came on the initiative of Józef Piłsudski’s environmental politician Leon Wasilewski, who had come up with the idea of finding a “real” Lithuanian who would be able to speak publicly as a supporter of the “Lithuanian-Polish Union”. They turned to Herbačiauskas for this purpose, and since the writer himself supported the idea of the union at that time, he agreed to be a “mediator between the two countries”. In this way he became embroiled in political games, and, judging by the consequences, he was taken advantage of rather brazenly.

For the sake of clarity, here are some historical facts about the events of that time in Poland and Lithuania.<sup>21</sup> In the first years of Independent Poland, Wasilewski, a well-known figure in Polish culture and society, belonged to Piłsudski’s closest circle and was actively engaged in politics. He served as Minister of Foreign Affairs of Poland from 18 November 1918 to 16 January 1919. It was on his initiative that a special department was established for Lithuanian and Belarusian affairs. During the Paris Peace Conference, Wasilewski was part of the Polish Government delegation and a member of the National Committee. He tried to use his position to establish relations with countries that were previously enslaved by Russia and were looking to assert their independence. He informed Piłsudski about contacts with the representatives of the three Baltic states, who, for the purposes of a possible federation with the Baltics, urged him to maintain contacts with the Latvians and Estonians (Wasilewski, 1936, p. 174): “If they were to join a federation, I can’t imagine how the Lithuanians could resist such double pressure”. In 1919, Wasilewski informed Piłsudski that the Estonians and the Latvians supported the formation of a Polish-Estonian-Latvian front, and that Poland should be at the forefront of such a league of Baltic states. In his August 1919 report to Piłsudski, Wasilewski wrote that the Estonians

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21 For more, see: Vaitkevičiūtė E. (2007) *Žinomas nežinomas Juozapas Albinas Herbačiauskas*. Kaunas: Naujasis lankas. pp. 75–95.

had also requested that Poland recognise their state *de facto*, and that Poland should do so.

Talks with the Lithuanians did not go as well – despite the contacts established in Paris with some Lithuanian delegates, Lithuanian politicians and diplomats were strongly opposed to the idea of any kind of “federation” or “renewed union” with Poland. The situation was worsened by Poland’s desire to obtain more territories, rejecting Lithuania’s demand to recognise Lithuania’s ethnographic borders with the Kovno Governorate, Lithuania Minor, the Suwałki Governorate, part of the Grodno Governorate (now part of Belarus) and the Vilnius Region, with its capital of Vilnius.<sup>22</sup>

In the first half of 1919, letters, protests and even diplomatic notes were constantly travelling between Lithuania and Poland. And in April 1919, the Polish army, advancing to the East, pushed the Bolshevik Russian army out of Vilnius and... stayed there. According to Lithuanian diplomat Petras Klimas (1990, pp. 227–228), this move did not seem like open aggression at the time, because “it could be assumed that it was a strategic manoeuvre by which Piłsudski wanted to block Russia’s path to the West.” Soon there was even greater diplomatic and even military confusion: the Lithuanian delegation in Warsaw did not receive the Poles’ recognition of Lithuania’s independence, and instead, the Legislative Sejm of Poland took the decision to take control of the lands of Vilnius from the Russians and annex them to... Poland. And there were some odd situations as well, like when Wasilewski had to urgently deal with another one of Piłsudski’s assignments in 1919 (Barbara Stoczewska, 2005): “When he returned to Warsaw in mid-July 1919, it turned out that

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22 For the sake of clarity, it should be noted that Vilnius is an old Lithuanian city whose history dates back to the 10th millennium BC. It became the capital of Lithuania in the 14th century (c. 1322). It was first mentioned in written sources on 25 January 1323, in a letter written by Grand Duke of Lithuania Gediminas to the cities of Germany. This city demanded the respect of Poland as a centre of academic and cultural life from the times of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. The Belarusians also had sentiments for the Vilnius Region for similar reasons. The most unfounded claims to this part of Lithuania (just like today’s claims to Ukraine, Poland and the Baltic States) were expressed by Russia, which brazenly lied that it had belonged to the Russians since the times of Catherine the Great, so Russia supposedly had to “take it back”.

Latvian and Estonian delegations, misinformed about the Poles' alleged planned occupation of Kaunas, had come to that [Lithuanian] city to negotiate with the Poles.”<sup>23</sup> There were indeed such plans; even though, according to Barbara Stoczewska, Wasilewski's own role in the whole affair is not definitively clear, he did participate in the “process” of creating a pro-Polish government in Lithuania – in other words, he got mixed up in the military coup against the Lithuanian government that was being put together by the POW (Polska Organizacja Wojskowa) and the OSN (Organizacja Strzelców Nadniemeńskich), two secret Polish military organisations. The coup failed – right before it started on the night of 31 August 1919, the Lithuanian Security Service arrested its main leaders and organisers, as well as most of their helpers. However, great damage had already been done to Lithuanian-Polish relations, as well as to the reputation of Wasilewski himself, who, according to Stoczewska, had spent a lot of energy and considerable sums from the modest Polish state treasury to pursue this disastrous idea.

It was in this context that Juozapas Albinas Herbačiauskas came to Lithuania in the second half of 1919, full of concern about the rumours of the allegedly “chauvinistic Lithuanians, who hate the Poles living in Lithuania” and – *o sancta simplicitas!* – with a burning desire to suggest to the Lithuanians that they “form a federation/union with Poland”. He described this visit, his conversations with Lithuanian politicians, and his later reactions to the worsening relations between Lithuania and Poland<sup>24</sup> in his books

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23 Stoczewska B. *O Leonie Wasilewskim*. 31 August 2005, <http://www.omp.org.pl/stareomp/index7c3b.html> Accessed: 12.10.2022.

24 On 9 October 1920, forces led by Polish general Lucjan Żeligowski entered Vilnius; on 12 October 1920, Żeligowski announced “Independence of the Republic of Central Lithuania with the capital in Vilnius.” (Most historians agree that this was a puppet state of Poland, but are undecided on the degree of sovereignty.) Lithuania was forced to move its capital to Kaunas. Vilnius was only regained in 1939, and if that wasn't enough, it was on the initiative of Bolshevik Russia, which had occupied the Vilnius Region at that time – Soviet Russia did not pass up the opportunity to exploit the disagreements between the Poles and the Lithuanians, especially regarding the “Vilnius question”, for its own purposes. On 1 September 1939, Poland was invaded by Nazi Germany, and then by the Soviet Union on 17 September. Lithuania was occupied by the Soviet Union in 1940.

*Kur eini, lietuvi?*<sup>25</sup> (Lithuanian: “Where are you going, Lithuanian?” 1919), *Rozważania na czasie* (Polish: “Timely Considerations”; 1921), and *O Wilno i nie tylko o Wilno* (Polish: “About Vilnius and Not Only About Vilnius”; 1922).

As he wrote in a letter to Polish politician Ignacy Paderewski (1921),

I belong to that group of Lithuanians who openly sought and are seeking, in word and deed, the renewal of the Lithuanian union with Poland, but in the spirit of modern English unionism [...]. Today, it is necessary to do everything possible to make Lithuania favourable to Poland, because if Lithuania falls into the hands of Poland's implacable enemies,<sup>26</sup> then the fate of the Polish state will turn into a plaything of the enemies' evil will [...]. To take solace in the fact that Germany is beaten and humiliated is a disastrous illusion. As long as Russia is [its] Bolshevik ally... Germany cannot be considered defeated (Herbaczewski, 1922, pp. 5-8).

According to Biržiška (1953, p. 201), when he came to Lithuania, Herbačiauskas

was predisposed by Warsaw, [and] in Kaunas... he attacked the ‘German’ policy of the Lithuanian Government, but after it was explained to him by [Lithuanian] Prime Minister [Mykolas] Sleževičius,<sup>27</sup> he realised

25 In the Lithuanian space, the main title is *Kur eini, lietuvi?* (Lithuanian: “Where are you going, Lithuanian?”), while in the Polish space, *Kur eini, Lietuva?* (Lithuanian: “Where are you going, Lithuania?”) is more predominant.

26 Herbačiauskas was referring to Soviet Russia and Germany.

27 As Herbačiauskas wrote about this meeting: “...after arriving in Kaunas – already late in the evening – I was received by the honourable Prime Minister, Dr Sleževičius himself, in the office of his presidium.... ‘- Is there no more hope at all that friendlier relations could be established between the Lithuanian and Polish governments?... My role as mediator may be of some use to you, as fate would have it...’ ‘- We have never demonstrated anywhere,’ answered the Prime Minister, ‘and we are not demonstrating any malicious intent towards Poland. He who informed the gentleman otherwise is a liar. We want an agreement with Poland, but not at the cost of our honour or the pride of our nation... We absolutely cannot give up the five counties of the Vilna Governorate, which are organically linked to the territory of Kaunas. And on what basis can an agreement with Poland be reached?... Only two states can be restored to life in the lands of the former Grand Duchy of Lithuania –

that he had been deceived by the Poles; insulted, he returned to Kraków with nothing to show for his pains.”

It makes sense – after the Lithuanian audience booed his “union” proposals in Kaunas, and prominent Lithuanian politicians explained the real situation and the essence of the disputes with Poland, it became clear to Herbačiauskas that the rumours in Warsaw about the misdeeds that were allegedly committed by the Lithuanians and the “desire for a union” were nothing more than propaganda. In addition, as he mentioned when talking about his visit to Lithuania, it was during this visit (Herbačiauskas, 1921, p. 17) that

a secret Polish organisation under the pow was revealed in Kaunas that was made up of persons who were unconditionally devoted to Poland, and who were making efforts to overthrow the Lithuanian government and introduce a dictatorship. For that reason, there were arrests of persons. The Polish press [...] accused the Lithuanian government of ‘unbridled destruction of “Polishness” without any fault on the part of the Poles’.”

After terminating the visit, Herbačiauskas, deeply indignant, returned to Kraków and expressed his changed position in emotional public statements. In his book *O Wilno i nie tylko o Wilno* (1922) and in an article entitled “Pożegnanie”, he wrote: “They only wanted to make a battering ram out of me to destroy either the Polish or the Lithuanian masonry!” (Herbaczewski, 1922, p. 8).

Soon, Herbačiauskas was shocked by General Lucjan Żeligowski’s staged mutiny,<sup>28</sup> which ended with the Vilnius Region being ripped away from Lithuania. The letters that he wrote to Professor Zdziechowski immediately thereafter, in October and November 1920, were full of disappointment, grief, fierce indignation and bitter rebuke (1919):

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that of the Lithuanians and the Belarusians. The Polish wedge... is unnecessary because it cannot be proven by the state in any way” (Herbaczewski J.A. (1921) *Rozważania na czasie*, p. 15).

28 7–12 October 1920.

And what, Mr Professor, did you ‘not understand’?<sup>29</sup> Was it all those lies and slander fabricated about ‘Kaunas’ Lithuania in Warsaw? Or the Polish policy towards Lithuania, modelled after the example of Bismarck (Krylov’s fable ‘The Wolf and the Lamb’)? Or perhaps Mr Professor sees the implementation of A. Mickiewicz’s ideas in that policy?! For the love of God! With lies, deceit, violence and coercion, I would think, you cannot turn ‘Kaunas’ Lithuania into a *friend* [of Poland]! And if they don’t make a friend out of Lithuania, then all the devils will pull that ‘subtle’ (ach!) Belvedere plan and Poland will pay its debts to Belvedere with blood, and most importantly, with *honour*! [...] I am warning you – you are wrong in acting like this, because you are doing [exactly] everything that your enemies want and desire.... You will realise too late what is hidden behind the curtain of Lithuania – too late! [...] The cadets wanted Constantinople and got the Bolsheviks! You want Vilnius, and what will you get? It is frightening to think where your arrogance will lead you, your blind militarism – your pan-polonism! (Herbaczewski, 1922, pp. 33–35).

He said that he was determined to “give all his strength and achievements to Lithuania”, which he considered his homeland, because he

could no longer be neutral in the fight between Lithuania and Poland.... I will return to my homeland [Lithuania]... To defend Lithuania, I will give up everything I have achieved through self-sacrificing work. *First the person and then the nation!* [...] The Lithuanian is strong (Herbaczewski, 1922, pp. 33–35).

Herbačiauskas began to express criticism more and more resolutely about the actions of the then Polish authorities towards Lithuanians, and in 1921, the editorial office of the newspaper *Kurjer Codzienny* sent a complaint to Jagiellonian University regarding Herbačiauskas’s

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29 Professor Zdziechowski sent an unusually brief reply to the first stormy letter that Herbačiauskas wrote on the topic of relations between Lithuania and Poland: “I don’t understand, Sir.” The hypothesis cannot be ruled out that Zdziechowski sent such a laconic reply out of fear of possible censorship or, perhaps, to avoid a topic that was painful to him as well.



behaviour in Michalik's Den (the venue for Zielony Balonik). According to the complaint,

on Saturday night at Michalik's Den, having met journalists from Gdańsk and thinking that they were Germans, he humiliated Poland and the Poles in front of the guests from Gdańsk and advised them to unite with Lithuania against Poland. Two Polish journalists from Gdańsk who were there wrote a complaint about Herbačiauskas to the editorial office of *Kurjer Codzienny* before leaving and asked to report it to the University, which the editorial office did (Doc. No: L.3996. Archiwum UJ).

The result of this complaint was a specially formed disciplinary commission to investigate Herbačiauskas's activities and loyalty to the Polish state. The conclusions of the commission (13 December 1921) state that even though the tone of his articles is undoubtedly controversial and divisive, there is nevertheless nothing in them to testify to the author's bias against the Polish state. The intemperance and lack of control in Herbačiauskas's articles were obviously due to his individuality. Regarding the incident, the commission decided that the conversation in question was of a private nature and cannot be considered a public statement, and strongly suggested that Herbačiauskas be more moderate when talking about political matters in the future (Doc. No L: 3996/21, Archiwum UJ). He also got a pay cut. Articles appeared in the press suggesting that Herbačiauskas "...take off to that Lithuania of his if he is so happy there" and so on.

Under these circumstances, Herbačiauskas moved to Kaunas in August 1923 at the invitation of Lithuanian professors Balys Sruoga and Vincas Krėvė, to work at the newly established University of Lithuania. According to Juozas Keliuotis (1961), cultural magazine (1931–1940) editor and journalist, they were planning on using Herbačiauskas for discussions with representatives of the Catholic wing, but the writer did not want to, so later their relationship deteriorated sharply.<sup>30</sup>

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30 According to Herbačiauskas's later correspondence, the "intrigues" of these people resulted in him being forced into early retirement and even delays in his pension payment.

After living in Poland for 27 years, Herbačiauskas unfortunately never truly found his place in Kaunas, but he was popular for a while, giving public lectures to the intelligentsia of Kaunas, participating in literary evenings, and teaching various courses on Polish literature at the University of Lithuania.



J. Herbačiauskas (right) and writer Jonas Marcinkevičius (former prisoner for desertion from the Lithuanian army), Kaunas, Laisvės ave., 1932.

Source: The fund of the Maironis' Museum of Lithuanian Literature, Kaunas.



Writers' ball at "Metropol" restaurant, Kaunas, 1932 (photo by K. Baulas)

Source: The fund of the Maironis' Museum of Lithuanian Literature, Kaunas.

He published a popular book of essays entitled *Dievo šypsenos* (Lithuanian: "Smiles of God"; 1929), wrote *Tyrų Vienuolis* (Lithuanian: "The Monk of the Wilderness"), a mystery drama that he submitted to the Kaunas Drama Theatre (but which was unfortunately rejected), and actively collaborated with the cultural and literary press. He was also one of the active members of *Naujoji Romuva*, a humanist cultural movement. According to Lithuanian cultural figure and writer Antanas Vaičiulaitis (1991, pp. 615–620):

Finally, J. Herbačiauskas has come out with his largest [Lithuanian language] work, retaining both his restless temperament and modern edge. While the other mentioned authors were representatives of traditional art, among them Herbačiauskas sounded like an innovator [...] his writings burst with spark, courage, capricious temperament, unexpected turns and a sincere search for new paths.

However, according to his friend Juozas Keliuotis (1961, p. 4), "Unfortunately, few people could read his writings.... Only after World War I

were his articles available in *Baras* and *Skaitymai*,<sup>31</sup> but they were not read by the wider public.”

As Herbačiauskas himself complained, despite his works in Lithuanian, he was only acknowledged as a Lithuanian writer by a small group of friends (e.g. Faustas Kirša, Juozas Keliuotis):

...I write in Lithuanian and Polish. I have published books. I am struck off from Polish literature and not included in Lithuanian [...]. Real Lithuanians who write only in Russian (Baltrušaitis) and French (Milašius) belong to the heraldry of Lithuanian literature, but I do not inspire confidence for the fact that, while writing in Lithuanian, I also write in Polish [...]. The official spheres do not give me a literary patent (Solak, 1991, pp. 463–464).

With some representatives of the literary youth (members of the Keturi Vėjai movement), Herbačiauskas tried to initiate the *Grįžulio Ratai* publication.<sup>32</sup> The idea fell apart because instead of the planned publication, the young people, unbeknownst to Herbačiauskas, changed the name to “Keturi Vėjai” and published it on their own: Juozas Petrėnas, for his part, said that Herbačiauskas was too much of an original for little Lithuania, and that not knowing the local conditions,<sup>33</sup> he would cause... trouble. Juozas Tysliava agreed with this opinion. He wrote to Jokūbas Stikloris, who was the president of the Rytas company in Klaipėda, informing him that the name of the publication was changing. Rather than “Grįžulio Ratai”, it would be “Keturi Vėjai”. Along with Kazys Binkis, Petrėnas and Tysliava informed Herbačiauskas about this decision (Tysliava, 1962):

– You know, Professor, we finally decided to release *Keturi Vėjai*, began Kazys Binkis diplomatically, but rather categorically.

31 *Baras* and *Skaitymai* were Lithuanian cultural and literary magazines published in Kaunas during the period of the First Independent Republic of Lithuania.

32 For more, see: Vaitkevičiūtė E. (2007) *Žinomas nežinomas Juozapas Albinas Herbačiauskas*. Kaunas: Naujasis lankas; Vaitkevičiūtė E. (2005), Kowieńskie lata Józefa Albina Herbaczewskiego w Niepodległej Litwie. *Ruch literacki*, R. XLVI (z. 4–5) (271–272), pp. 393–406.

33 Juozas Petrėnas’s letter to Balys Sruoga: LLTIR. F-53-830. L.1.

– Well then, you see, it would be best, you see, if each of us could publish a newspaper, replied Herbačiauskas, not without sarcasm.

– Why not, Professor?” Petrėnas intervened, “Vydūnas has been publishing his own newspaper for a long time now.

It was immediately clear to Herbačiauskas that I was also a participant in this conspiracy – I, who had just a couple of days earlier discussed with him the content of *Grižulo Ratai* and so on. Apparently not seeing this coming, Herbačiauskas suddenly stood up, pulled at his cuffs with his fingertips and, with a couple of strokes of his lapels, looked at me with tears in his eyes and left without even saying goodbye. As a host, this was not pleasant for me. Fortunately, it happened at Elta, where I was working at the time.<sup>34</sup>

With one disappointment after another, Herbačiauskas's statements became sharper and his criticism became harsher; he was constantly involved in one scandal or another and began facing fines for “disloyalty to the state” and the like, so eventually a certain dissatisfaction with him began to emerge, as a strange, unhinged “transplant”. Moreover, his visits to Poland to meet with Polish politicians (in 1927 and 1928) did not increase confidence in him at all, especially considering the fact that right up until 1938, diplomatic relations had officially been severed between Lithuania and Poland. He often criticised prominent Kaunas politicians, especially Prime minister dr. Augustinas Voldemaras, whom he disliked very much. He harshly assessed the neglect of cultural matters, selfishness, as well as the behaviour of government representatives in the field of international relations. Herbačiauskas only taught at Kaunas University until the 1932 spring semester. He was dismissed as of 1 September 1932, with the documents stating that he “resigned from the university due to the circumstances at hand.”<sup>35</sup>

There were several reasons for Herbačiauskas leaving besides the fact that he was a strange “transplant from Poland” who just never fit in. And not just that, over time, he had become angry with the

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34 Juozas Tysliava about the members of “Keturi Vėjai”. *Vienybė*. 6 April 1962.

35 Vytautas Magnus University. *Antrųjų penkerių veikimo metų (1927.II.16. – 1932.IX.1) apyskaita*: Kaunas, 1933. p. 206.

official “spheres” in the true sense of the word. According to journalist Valentinas Gustainis, the initial reason for the conflict that led to him moving back to Poland was the fact that once, Herbačiauskas very harshly criticised the young but already famous poet Salomėja Nėris<sup>36</sup> for leaving Ateitis, a religious and cultural student organisation, to join Trečias Frontas, a group of leftist, Marxist youth.<sup>37</sup> The poet complained to Professor Sruoga, and then Professor Krėvė also got involved; a huge conflict<sup>38</sup> ensued and in the end, Herbačiauskas was fired.<sup>39</sup> In protest, he even announced publicly, in the Kaunas newspapers, that he would commit suicide by starvation. Fortunately, the students and friends who liked him managed to dissuade him from this idea. As the then still young Lithuanian poet Jonas Aistis wrote about one of his last meetings with Herbačiauskas in Kaunas:

He was already about to set off to Poland when I sat down next to him at Konradas's one time.<sup>40</sup> For a long time he was silent in thought, then he began to speak louder, as if to himself: 'If I ruled Lithuania, I would take out a loan of half a billion and build brick huts with deep and solid foundations for each of our villagers. The time will come when others will sweep away all these grey wooden houses of ours. Our villager needs to take root deep in this land...' (Aistis, 1991, p. 243).

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36 Salomėja Nėris was the pen name of Salomėja Bačinskaitė-Bučienė (1904–1945), a Lithuanian poet.

37 The real reason for the move in Kaunas was known to many. However, probably only Herbačiauskas could be so enraged by this to rail the poet in a public lecture for “selling Christ for Raila's d...!” (from the memoirs of Valentinas Gustainis: *LLTIR*, F. 6–28.) What Herbačiauskas had in mind was the affair that had started between Nėris and Bronys Raila, one of the leaders of Trečias Frontas. It should be noted that later, in 1940, Salomėja Nėris became one of the first Lithuanian collaborators with Soviet Russia. That is, in my opinion, Herbačiauskas's indignation towards her should be considered fair.

38 For a long time, the main assumption was that Herbačiauskas had only gone back to Poland because he was allegedly offended by the size of the pension he had been allocated.

39 Keliuotis J. Mano atsiminimai apie Juozą Albiną Herbačiauską, Vincą Krėvę, Balį Sruogą ir apie buržuazinę cenzūrą. 2 February 1961: F31/44, LNMB RS.

40 Maksas Konradas's café was one of the most famous cafés in Kaunas during that period and was the most popular meeting place for artists, politicians and journalists.

In a letter to the priest Juozas Tumas-Vaižgantas, the writer complained: “You will calm down after losing J. A. H., who suffered hardship all his life, and in his homeland could not find any place for neither work nor...”<sup>41</sup> In his “word of farewell” published shortly before his departure, Herbačiauskas – faithful to his concern for more harmonious Lithuanian-Polish and Polish-Lithuanian relations against the background of the increasingly aggressive Germany and the increasingly insidious policy of Soviet Russia – emphasised his rejection of union ideas (Herbačiauskas, 1933, p.2):

I am a proponent of [Lithuanian and Polish] reconciliation. But this does not mean that a union should be formed. Today, the friendship between the two states is manifested in economic cooperation. It is necessary to become reconciled in the economic sphere, and then the Vilnius question will gradually work itself out. Only gradually.

After leaving for Warsaw in 1933, Juozapas Albinas Herbačiauskas never returned to Lithuania. He was invited by Polish Minister of Foreign Affairs Józef Beck to give lectures on Lithuania at the University of Warsaw.<sup>42</sup> In his rare articles from this period in the Warsaw press, there was increased criticism of the policies implemented by the then Lithuanian government. As he wrote to Professor Zdziechowski (Herbačiauskas, 1937):

What am I doing in Warsaw? [...] I am vegetating without complaint. I’m getting ready to go – I’m writing [...]. I don’t want to be a real lunatic who believes that someone will ever ‘discover’ Herbačiauskas like Norwid [...]. I understand what’s going on. I know that in 1938, Poland will go through the danger of losing its independence [...]. Did Solovyov manage to force Russia to come to its senses with his prophecy? Not really. I have no ambition to be a prophet and therefore I am silent. I believe in myself. That is my strength.<sup>43</sup>

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41 Juozapas Albinas Herbačiauskas’s letter to Juozas Tumas-Vaižgantas: VUBR, F 1-F384, l.44.

42 *Rytas*, 4 December 1933. No 27 (2832), p. 7.

43 Juozapas Albinas Herbačiauskas’s 1937 [?] letter to Marian Zdziechowski: PAN Archive, Warsaw.

The dates of his last articles (in the Polish press) are in 1938. Bohdan Paszkiewicz (2003) remembers the last years of his life in Warsaw: "I saw Herbačiauskas briefly during a visit to his relative. He stopped by and stood sad and pensive at the window, silently looking out at the street. After a modest greeting, he didn't say a word." According to Paszkiewicz, he had changed almost beyond recognition. It was difficult to recognise the once cheerful, elegant and playful Herbačiauskas – the life and soul of the party – in that incredibly gaunt man who had clearly been weakened from extensive starvation. Sometimes members of the intelligentsia who knew him would help him out, including Paszkiewicz's relative.

In 1944, Herbačiauskas lived through the Warsaw Uprising, after which the German army razed the city to the ground; both he and his wife only survived because they were evacuated to Kraków. In what were perhaps the last letters of his life to Father Mykolas Krupavičius, Herbačiauskas wrote in shock from Kraków:

Everything that was is now a graveyard: our little ambitions, and our hatreds, and our childish counter-defences – everything is a graveyard [...]. Lord, the tiny nation, Lithuania, is at risk of losing its life! I see revenge in the future – Lord, save Lithuania! The raging beast will not be tamed any time soon...<sup>44</sup>

Herbačiauskas died in 1944 at the Helcel Nursing Home in Kraków and is buried in Rakowicki Cemetery. For many years, there was grass growing on his grave, with daisies here and there. In 2007, at a ceremony attended by President of Poland Lech Kaczyński and former President of Lithuania Valdas Adamkus, a new tombstone was unveiled on the grave of Juozapas Albinas Herbačiauskas.

As Professor Vytautas Kubilius (1996) rightly put it, he was a "man of two cultures". As Juozapas Albinas Herbačiauskas himself said, he was the son of "two homelands", equally loved. Or perhaps he was the stepson of a dramatic fate who was not understood in time?

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44 Juozapas Albinas Herbačiauskas's letters to Mykolas Krupavičius, 1944. Cited from: Vosyliienė Česlova. J. A. Herbačiauskas. *Santaka*. 15 June 1996.



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