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Editor of this issue
Rimas Uzgiris

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Miscommunication, 120 cm x 90 cm, 2012. Mixed media on silk.

Introducing Six Young Lithuanian Poets: Ramunė Brundzaitė, Marius Burokas, Ilzė Butkutė, Benediktas Januševičius, Aušra Kaziliūnaitė, Donatas Petrošius

RIMAS UZGIRIS

Lithuanian poetry in the twenty-first century impresses with its diversity of styles, subjects, and forms. The younger generation—those born after 1970 or so, has been especially marked by experimentation, diaspora, and the rejection of old themes. All of these poets came of age as artists in the post-Soviet era. They have seen their borders open, have travelled the world, and lived abroad.

Postmodernism exploded onto the literary scene in the 1990s. It has burrowed into the culture like a bunker-buster bomb. The time has come and gone for poems about countryside cottages, fertile fields with singing birds, the struggling soul of an oppressed Lithuania, the glories of the past... In other words, Romanticism, that nineteenth-century European artistic fount that ran on in Lithuania well into the twentieth century with various neo-Romantic rivulets, is largely dried up. One can still hear a trickle here and there, but for the most part, new springs have been precipitously tapped.

Lithuanian poetry, like the language itself, has been rooted in the countryside. In the words of literary scholar Rimvydas

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Šilbajoris, Lithuanian is "quintessentially a peasant language, grown from the soil, seasoned in the harshness and grace of the changing seasons, tempered by long endurance under enduring hardships."[1] Lithuania was relatively late in developing an urban culture. Vilnius was long inhabited primarily by Polish and Yiddish speakers. Kaunas was a small provincial city. Most writers were in fact from small towns or the countryside. So it should be no surprise to hear poet and critic Eugenijus Ališanka claim that "folkloric and ethnographic traditions have, for a long time, played an important role in Lithuanian poetry."[2] Many of the country's first and most influential poets were also clergymen, from Donelaitis, to Maironis, to Mykolaitis-Putinas. As a result, and to a large extent, literature and national identity developed along the lines of rural Catholicism. Šilbajoris, in his historical account of Lithuanian literary development, points out a significant group of what he calls "village prose" and "village verse" writers, whose work was rooted in "the centuries-old traditions of the Lithuanian farming community, since it is perceived to embody the quintessential traits of the Lithuanian national character and culture."[3] Prominent recent poets, such as Justinas Marcinkevičius, Marcelijus Martinaitis, and Sigitas Geda are examples of this school's reach into the twenty-first century. Of course, there have been exceptions, especially among émigré poets, such as Henrikas Radauskas and Tomas Venclova, or in Lithuania's first real city poet,[4] Judita Vaičiūnaitė, but now the exceptions have become the rule.[5] As Ališanka points out, renewed independence in 1990 brought a sense of freedom to younger poets, who no longer felt they

1 Šilbajoris, *A Short History*, 13.

2 Ališanka, *Six Lithuanian Poets*, 15.

3 Šilbajoris, 169.

4 One could argue that other poets from Lithuania (or Vilnius), such as Czesław Miłosz and Abraham Sutzkever, were also city poets, just not in the Lithuanian language.

5 I am also leaving out of this simplified account the various experimental modernist poets active during Lithuania's interwar period, when Futurism, Symbolism, and general avant-garde experimentalism briefly flourished.

needed to carry the weight of national identity in their verse. That freedom also brought about the republication of émigré verse and intensified contact with the outer world. "Poets no longer feel that they are 'the spokesmen of the nation,' but on the contrary, that they have to find a language that is in keeping with an increased sense of loneliness and detachment. Poetry becomes more subjective and ironic, an expression of the 'I' rather than the 'we.'"[6] Subjective, ironic, urban, contemporary in their themes, the six poets presented here all came of age as writers in the twenty-first century.

This is not to say that Lithuanian culture and history are entirely absent from the poetry of the newest generation. These themes appear in different forms, within a different context and under a more critical eye. Ramunė Brundzaitė, in her 2013 Young Jotvingian Prize-winning debut *Drugy, mano drauge* (Butterfly, my friend), writes of the sense of dislocation engendered by her studies in Italy. She is rooted in Lithuanian culture and history, yet fully engaged with Italy, and like many Lithuanians living in different parts of Europe since the collapse of the Soviet Union, the experience leads her to question her identity. The first wave of émigré writers were forced out of their country by the Soviet occupation and often looked back with unrelenting nostalgia. Now, the Lithuanian poet faces choices about where to live, and this gives rise to an interrogation of what it means to be a Lithuanian. Thus, in her poem "by the Bernardines," Brundzaitė compares Lithuanian history to the slimy trail of a slug. The iconic late-Gothic masterpiece of St. Anne's Church enters her poetry as a skeletal presence. The Lithuanian bonfire, so gloriously celebrated on St. John's Day, is bracketed. Throughout the collection, Italy appears as often as Vilnius, and the poet struggles to master and integrate her foreign experiences with home, always seeming to miss one place when she is in the other. Clever wordplay slides hand in hand with a lyric sensibility that is both at home and lost in different cultures – from Russia to the Mediterranean Sea.

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[6] Ališanka, 17.

The poetry of Marius Burokas is more rooted in Vilnius, yet his perspective is also one of questioning. In his second poetry collection, *Būsenos* (Conditions), he marked himself as a Lithuanian poet while standing naked in an American laundromat – not in the countryside, not on an ancient castle hill. In his latest work from *Išmokau nebūti* (I learned how not to be), which won him the Young Jotvingian Prize in 2011, his Vilnius is the city outside the renovated, tourist-filled historical Old Town. Dingy dives and impersonal apartment blocks present the reader with a seedy and grim contemporary landscape. One can feel the influence of the American beats and Bukowski, whom he has translated into Lithuanian. Burokas searches for meaning in a fallen world, while death in the form of a naked prostitute calls to him from an apartment window.

Ilzė Butkutė, in her debut *Karavanų lopšinės* (Caravan lullabies), imagines herself as having been raised in the circus. Like Picasso painting himself as a harlequin, she connects herself to an outsider culture. Poetry becomes her magic trick for transforming the world, for writing herself as a twenty-first century woman, both cutting and soft, growing knives in her garden instead of flowers, making love in a gasmask, or finding a father's note to an abandoned daughter. She loves both cats and motorcycles. Her femininity is complex and her poetry necessary to a new and more sophisticated comprehension of a woman's identity in contemporary Lithuania.

Benediktas Januševičius is arguably the most experimental poet of the newest generation, winning the Young Jotvingian Prize in 2007. He has written books of poems blended with drawings, poetry books full of wordplay and word games, and his work tackles contemporary issues with playful wit, wild imagination, and pizzazz. In his new poems, "On genes" and "Where do children come from?" Januševičius deals with two sides of the human reproductive story. Folkloric accounts of the origins of children are treated with irony and humor in "Where do children come from?" But the poem uses this playfulness to surprise us with fundamental existentialist questions having to do with where we ourselves come from and why we

are here. The playful questioning of childish accounts of the origins of babies becomes a steppingstone to the questioning of our metaphysical roots and our existential purpose. Similarly, Januševičius answers the seriousness of scientific investigations and manipulations with ironic wit. Genetic engineering and the study of the building blocks of life can be emotionally wrought topics, yet the poet's absurdist treatment of them allows us to put aside our anxieties and face the issue of our fundamental mutability. Whether in a beauty parlor or in a genetic laboratory, we are increasingly capable of changing ourselves, but are we clear on the whys and what fors of these potentially catastrophic changes?

The poetry of Aušra Kaziliūnaitė, a doctoral student in the philosophy department of Vilnius University and the author of two books of poems, electrifies us with startling juxtapositions, surreal imagery, and unexpected twists and turns. Her poems do not admit easy interpretation, but always enchant us with their vivid and far-reaching imaginative journeys. There is no quaint tenderness or romantic sentimentality in these verses. Cruelty, blood, and death burst out of her poemscapes as metaphysical presences permeating our lives. In her second book, *20% koncentracijos stovykla* (20% concentration camp), we find cars impaling themselves on a huge hook in the sky or giant beavers gnawing at the world. This grim imagery continues in her latest work, as the stars sound an alarm that has been ringing for all time, and the moon is a pill, half of which gets stuffed into a dying bird. Our condition is permeated by violence, yet strangely beautiful, and she depicts it with a surprising philosophical calm.

Donatas Petrošius, author of two books of poetry, winner of the Young Jotvingian Prize in 2004 and the Best Poetry Book of the Year Award from the Lithuanian Writer's Union for his collection *Aoristas* (The Aorist) in 2010, writes poems from the perspective of the traditional lyrical subject, replete with biographical elements. There is something about his style reminiscent of the New York School, as he strings together thoughts and events in unpunctuated cascading sentences that

spill across line and stanza breaks with breathtaking energy. Just when we think we know where we are in a poem, we are startled by unexpected juxtapositions or surreal intrusions, yet propelled along by the relentless stream of language. In one work, a bull being led to market becomes a sacrifice to the gods, and a man on a bicycle becomes a titan from the ancient world. Petrošius can discuss his athletic shoes in one stanza and then, in the next, run outside to check on the magical rope-bridge from his balcony to the four corners of the world. Everyday reality is permeated with both magic and doubt. The poet sees himself with irony, questions his life, yet is surrounded by wonder.

One can read much twentieth-century Lithuanian poetry and feel that it was behind the times.[7] These six poets inform the world that Lithuania in the twenty-first century is fully caught up. They are not the first to take up postmodern influences, but they have eased into it with integrity and creative gusto, and are redefining what it means to be a Lithuanian poet or even, simply, a Lithuanian.

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[7] See Ališanka's *Six Lithuanian Poets* for examples of the poets who came of age in the 1990s and began the processes of change in Lithuanian poetics that are now bearing so much fruit in the newest generation.

Ramunė Brundzaitė

by the Bernardines

for Olga

grasses shoot through hands,
airplanes into shoulder blades,
a host of hosts

we sit, the two of us
encircled

by gravestones like the crossed arms
of austere monks
under a cowl of sky –
the Bernardines

duchess, is it far to Petushki?
beyond the river, down Polotsk Street
by Saint Anne's lurking Gothic skeletons
and all those saints

only that!
or a few burning shots

somewhere, a bonfire,
in brackets –
our histories
slink by
like a snail on a leaf
leaving a trail of ooze
a river

the snail a paintbrush
the snail a pen
slowly, slowly –
word by word, stroke by stroke,
the windfall fruit, the melting wax of chestnut trees –
the chronicles of Vilnius, advances, retreats,
lay out our history's trail of ooze

Translation of "ties bernardinais"

wisteria

the first task was to name,
to find out what we call
those blooms of
violet color

then sit in a little cafe
shaded from the Mediterranean sun
by an arbor enlaced with them

put a cup on the page
my pen
spill coffee
lean a used bike
fifty euro
on the fence

in my favorite place
piazza San Giacomo
paved by the Romans
to touch my tongue
to the already melting
gelato

sundays climbing the castle hill
to sharpen my view of the mountains,
seeing the streets enshrouded below with fog,
imagining my city there
hundreds of miles away

hundreds of weeks later
sitting in a frozen East European
auditorium
reading D'Annunzio
I remember this bloom

Translation of "glicinijos"

lepidoptera graves

moths, monarchs
friends

our day is only a little longer
than yours

we end in worms
where you began

unfurling
like flowers from sorrow

in mini bouquets,
as scythe-winged eggars,
as down-bellied spinners,
as bumblebee flames

fluttering in my stomach
with delicious words, florid forms,
until you painfully wilt

my palms
are monarchs
led home
by pages
from the kingdom of Hades

to her –
whispered
in every tongue
with covered lips,
bitten tongues

Proserpinus proserpina
the sleepwalking sphinx,
the hawkmoth –
a wingéd woman
with lion's nails

Translation of "drugelių kapinės"

Marius Burokas

***

In the city, quarantine
and grief. everyone
waits for the snow.

on the facades, and
in the streets –
an indelible hideousness.

witches have multiplied.
they publish polished
books
about themselves.

shamans in the gateways
shine amulets,
whose spells
have gone stale.

Belarus, Poland –
burning fences
everywhere.

overturned trucks
with contraband
of winter.

meat is sold
by the road,
virtually free.

animals have emigrated,
along with the connoisseurs
of sacred script,
and any woman
who could walk.

only men
with fishing poles
and flags,
rocks
in their bosoms –

everyone
in one square,
so that it would be easier
to take them up
into heaven
and lock them up
until they sober.

in the window
of the facing house,
in the kitchen,
a light burns.

naked death
rummages through
the refrigerator.

it's her
yellow jackboots
that shine
when she walks
the streets.

she notices me
and nods.

see you soon.

Translation of "Mieste kvarantinas..."

Station – Dzūkų st.

The station sounds every night. Sad beastly trains rumble by. A checkpoint on the pedestrian bridge: those in possession demand more from the meek. The moon is a gypsy knife gleaming through smog. A dive along the road: blue Hopper ghosts. Beer, drunken brotherhood, a cross dog across the road. All of us here are over the edge. Farther on, there are the fumigated hills, in which we have no faith. Children – we fear. Trees turn to snakes below ground. At dawn – only at dawn – the station seems like snug stables. When you returned, you saw how the locals soap the sides of trains. You hear shouts, sometimes sun and wind from over there: where we will ride.

Translation of "Stotis – Dzūkų g."

Instructions for building an ant-hill

–for Edgaras

To begin with, you have to spit on the ground for a long time, earnestly, with clean, white spume. Next, bite and chew, bite and chew. Then toss together what you like. A refuge of crumbs, a cabin from clay, a shelter of sticks and straw. Spit-smear it like a cake. Scratch out some openings, a flue. Invite friends and relatives. Raise a ruckus for three days, four nights. Go out to the porch early in the morning, in bare feet, and look: some stare at fog, some at the clouds, some at the highway – then drive everybody out. Bring home a little mother, breed a whole brood, multiply until the get doesn't fit. Then baptize them all, raise them, marry them, drive them out of the house. Later, paste up the openings, leaving only the flue and a key around your neck, some logs, the domestic beast. When the animal croaks, lock the doors, take a bottle, go out to the porch and sway on the swing for a long time. Until it freezes.

Translation of "Skruzdėlyno statybos instrukcija"

Ilzė Butkutė

Lullaby for Rachel

– My father's note (1943)

Gather your dolls,
Rachel,
lay them
in the carriage,
and close
up their eyes.

The city
has not yet awakened.

We
can still get out.

No one
will see.

The pale
clothes of morning
soaked in a blue fog,
the panting
of a dog.

Like a dove
cowering
there,
distant,
a person.

Cried out.

And fell
in the grass.

Gather me,
Rachel,
from the scraps of dawn,
from the tired echoes.

That time –
that time I didn't wake you –

left you sleeping, child.

You were left.
Left
just you.

Translation of "Lopšinė Rachelei. Tėčio raštelis (1943)"

Embroidery in the garden of knives

I am a woman – an open window,
who buries a bastard in the garden
every night, naked in the crosswind.
I quietly cut a clutch of hair

soaked with the scent of hands
that haven't been touched –
my braids grow shorter with
each trimming. In my stables,

great steeds rear as they feel
the approach of armed sleep,
driven by a man without a face –
he is not forbidden – nor is he given

to me, or to others. Let him be.
My friend, please button my corset,
so that I won't lean out the window
to watch how my crosswind knives

sprout inch by inch in the garden –
how blades rise from the soil
and slice the full moon into wane.
And dogs – even they don't feel

how sleep is the beginning of assault.
My love, give me that box
with needle and thread – I want
to sew up my hands with dreams.

Translation of "Siuvinėjimas peilių sode"

To yearn is to walk with one's hands

Forgive me, I didn't tell you – I grew up in a circus.
They left me to study with the magician –
to draw a handful of rabbits from the night.

And someone without a ticket,
unbuttoned to the dusk, taught me
the courage to rise – never to shatter.

I was raised by ten dwarves.
I helped them with costumes and makeup,
and leaning over, I listened to lullabies –

I outgrew them and my time there.
They would tell me: to travel is to be late
to those places that don't know you.

I was raised by a blind acrobat –
he trained me to forget the pull of the earth
and to walk with my hands through every

town of the valley so that my shoes
would fill up with the sky. In a field
of narrowing tires, I was the target.

And I wasn't allowed to touch – not the walls,
not strange voices, not fear – until I could
stand still through the flight of knives:

whatever is domesticated by the blade – remains.
They remembered me of their own accord.
Please, just don't say that you pity me.

Translation of "Ilgėtis – tai vaikščioti rankomis"

Benediktas Januševičius

where do children come from?

As we know, some children are brought by storks
others are found in cabbage patches
others yet are bought by parents in stores

do all storks carry kids, or only some – e.g., stork fathers?
how many children does one stork bring?
do storks carry kids throughout the year, or only now and then?
do storks take special child-carrying classes?
are they licensed professionals? or maybe self-taught
dilettantes? does the Ministry
of Education pay any attention to this?!
are storks legally importing children to Lithuania?
do they have insurance in case of unfortunate accidents?

among what cabbages – early, late, or middling – is it most
beneficial to look for children? maybe in pickled cabbage?
in what strains of cabbage is it most probable to find something?
it's no secret that cabbages aren't only green, but white and red
not only lump cabbages, but budding, leafy, even – creeping
there are also brussels sprouts and puffed-out Peking cabbages
but I've never heard of finding children among broccoli
can the correct care of cabbages affect a child's gender?
how would children respond to unconscientious
overfertilization with manure?
what would happen to a child if he weren't found in time?

how many children can a person on minimum wage afford to buy?
what firms officially sell children?
are children that are sold in stores of sufficiently high quality?
what warrantee comes with their purchase? a year? two?
perhaps unlimited?
is it worthwhile to buy children made in China?
what is the sales tax on children? normal, lessened, raised?
what laws govern the sale of children?
are the rights of child-users properly circumscribed and enforced?

if we don't know the particular origins of children, how do we
tell which was brought by a stork,
which was found in a cabbage patch, and which was purchased
in a store?
maybe that's why people are so different? some fly in the
clouds, others idle about with their
eyes peeled to the ground, and yet others madly love money...

why are there fewer and fewer children? maybe because *the business of children in Lithuania has not yet achieved mass-market status?* maybe because there are more and more sales of genetically modified cabbage and children don't linger in gmo cabbages? or maybe because in our country the storks are oppressed by the burden of high taxes and they take their business elsewhere?

maybe we don't need children?

and how did you get here?
are you children?
what are you doing here?

and what am I doing here?

what am I all about here?

Translation of "kaip atsiranda vaikai?"

on genes

unexchangeable people don't exist!
and there is no unchangeable world!

the secret of life is coded in genes
good genes, bad genes, quality genes
old genes or somewhat new genes
so-so genes, little by little genes

so I say:
genes, genes, and only genes
I repeat:
genes, genes, and all and only genes
once more:
genes, genes, and mutagenes
all and only autogenes, halogenes, colagenes, and mutabor

do you dream?
probably your father was a nitwit
do you use?
maybe your mother was a user?
do you eat?
apparently, your grandparents didn't starve
do you breathe?
obviously, one of your ancestors enjoyed that too
you are re-peat-ing-your-self!

just listen:
that's your sonny-boy
that's your little girl
the apple doesn't fall far from the tree
(and where does the pear fall? – science doesn't say)

are you creative? – genes
do you work at the furnace? – genes
do you crave work as a security guard? – genes
were you well-known and popular? – genes
you ended up worthless? – gene-tastic

do you feel like you're a woman?
well, probably you have that
among your relatives
do you feel like you're a man?
hmm... maybe your mother was
impregnated by a horse?
you have the characteristics of a man, but feel like a woman?
a difficult situation...
damn it all! from now on everything can be changed!
everything can be mixed, fixed, then mixed up again

genetic engineering, genetic mechanics and cybernetics,
genetic biology and alchemy
genetic physics, schizics and metaphysics are all ready to
help you out

here!
we can make one hand black, the other – your choice – white
or violet
we can make one eye pink, the other – salad
we can make your face stick out like a brick
or your rear end shine like a mirror,
but do you really need that?

you pick your nose? – that means you have the nose-picking gene
you cut the cheese? – the cheese-cutting gene is to blame
you wet the bed?
the shark gene will help – believe it or not, sharks never wet
themselves!

your conscience gnaws at you? – you lack the free air
director's gene
you bemoan your fate? – throw out your fate gene
your head aches? choose the worm gene and you won't have
a head to ache!
you want a head, but there are just too many of them for you?
be a half-head!
but think hard – what would happen if you lost the silliness gene?

damn it all!
hurry up and choose: the philistine business gene or the
sedentary country gene
the eastern polygamy gene or the western licentious gene
the height gene or the long-life gene
the Lithuania gene or the lickmania gene
and if you happen to feel hungry –
eat some genetically modified poop!

change yourself and you will be changed!
let general gene-istry and geneology live!!
let gmo, ufo, omg live!!!

and there is nothing to be scared about if one morning, on
waking,
you happen to ask yourself:
who am I???
Sharikov or Frankenstein?
A chickrat? or a mushfrog?

then we'll install for you the lively imagination gene
but for the beauty salon – you'll have to pay your own way!

Translation of "apie genus"

Aušra Kaziliūnaitė

signal lights

lying in the heads of dream people
in all the forgetting-remembering entrails
thoroughly digested and digesting
you suddenly turn over to the other side
so that you would wake up
in the dreamt dreams of the dream people
when the town executioner cuts off the head of dawn
you arm yourself with the sharpened blades of unease

you skip like a summer breeze
like freedom that knows no will
like a desert jackal scenting the reek of victory
separating you from the executioner's neck

another split-second
AND

it's cold,
a red light
blinks in the distance –
an alarm sounds
in the neighboring house's lot

lifting your eyes
you see the entire sky
is full of similar lights and unease –
stars that don't blink, but burn

that
is the alarm
sounding above
from a long time ago

a longer time than we have been
a longer time than the word
proclaiming that someone
is stealing –
that someone stole the sky

Translation of "šviesos signalai"

the moon is a pill

the moon is a pill
with a groove
down the middle

anger is a pill
with a groove
down the middle

mindaugas bridge is a pill
with a groove
down the middle

summer is a pill
with a groove
down the middle

draught in africa
that wipes away
the lives of 500 thousand children
is a pill
with a groove
down the middle

a loving woman is a pill
with a groove
down the middle

a cop striking the protestors' dog
is a pill
with a groove
down the middle

to give up one's seat on the bus
is a pill
with a groove
down the middle

to sing from joy
having buried one's self
is a pill
with a groove
down the middle

silence is a pill
with a groove
down the middle

drunken time lies
in the groove
and babbles

never ask
who cut this groove
who dug this day for us
who nailed a twitching bird
to its teeth
BREAK IT

swallow one half
and the other –
opening the bird's lid with both hands
insert it and close

then you will finally
see –

drops of blood
rolling
over the day's teeth

Translation of "mėnulis yra tabletė"

minotaur vacations

in the landscape, calmly
a woman drowns

from the lifeguard
stand echoes

attention!
a woman drowns in the landscape

suddenly
you fall and cut yourself
on god

and slivers of clouds
calmly swim in the sky
as if nothing
had happened

as if
giant beavers
did not gnaw
at the tree of the world,
or minotaurs wander
or
the fish of sadness
did not intend to drink
everything,
small worthless fish

whose river
reflects
slivers of clouds
drowning above us

whose landscape
reflects a naked woman –

you could scoop out
with a teaspoon
or by the handful
her eye
nose
chest
or shoulder

and the woman would feel
nothing

Translation of "minotauro atostogos"

Donatas Petrošius

The sacrifice of the steer

with a hired horse tied to the cart we lead the steer
to be sold as meat 400 kg for 2.70 lt by live weight
the stopped animal ruminates – empty bowels – who
warns them before death and what makes them cleanse
themselves and who sets the price

we lead the bull over the asphalt hill until finally
the animal rolls over into a ditch – the whole procession stops
and I understand at this moment that I don't believe
this sacrifice will be accepted that it's not wanted by the gods

the bull knocks the cart into a street sign turns
the whole world wheels up and at this moment the sun
is rolling along the ground so I understand what the words
our money is burning really mean – I must decide for myself
at this moment – who am I to this animal and do I have the right
to exchange his death to lengthen the feast of my life will
I have the impudence to slice and scream at his frightened
blood

a white cloud of dust rises and there flashes within it
a nickel-plated fish-scale fettered bicycle a titan
in an olive-oily toga is going about his chores during
his lunch break and he turns us back onto the [straightest]
road
and tells us not to think about where we are going on the
asphalt or
on the tops of trees heaping our heads with guilt searching
for rights
and gifts and the grace of gods which we so desire

o gods accept our herded sacrifice and let our
souls re-dressed in furs into
your eternal hunting grounds

Translation of "Jaučio aukojimas"

How the earth carries me

if I were of noble lineage or at least
if my grandparents had been more resourceful and
hadn't starved all their lives if
my parents had received an allotment for some zhigulis
or at least a voucher for some soft corner
I would be standing on my feet quite
differently firmly taking up a different
status in society I would have gone further among
the people maybe they would even respect me more

if I had inherited silver place settings
a ruined outbuilding of an estate ancient
pictures in meaningful frames noble
ghosts in grimed up mirrors or at least
documents proving we once owned half
of the North West I would now write
aristocratically burning slender candles
crying pearly tears in a white sleeve
I would be an Acmeist or at least in that

direction crossing recreation areas well-
trodden corners I think of what is now
my own besides the walls of books four
pairs of athletic shoes one for dirt
and dust another for artificial
turf [soccer] gray running shoes
for even days white ones for odd days while
the first pair gets wet the others dry I'm
drunk with the dampness of pines bound
to a borrowed dog suddenly I fly to
the railing leaning out to see whether
the wind still sways this suspended
rope bridge whether the earth still carries me
through all four corners of this world

Translation of "Kaip žeme mane nešioja"

Nature studies in contemporary history

About the human being, his insides
and reproductive functions – not until the ninth grade;
until then, somehow I'll have to suffer through
shaggy eighth grade zoology:
from cnidaria to elephantidae
and elephants. Inclusive.
Seventh grade: I turn into a calf and digest
my way through trees, grasses, shrubs,
lichens, mosses, mushrooms, but not all of it.
And what about getting to know nature? If the sun shines,
then you can find your bearings and get home.
If it's cloudy, that means you get lost. Look down
at the lichens and moss. Don't panic. Don't run.
When you run, your left leg is shorter –
running circles to the same place, to the same time,
the same mood; even the scents are the same – giant
unread books of autumn – the start

of September itself hands out contemporary
history, but I can see at once –
it lies – this history isn't new: three children
enter the records and their condition is rated
as if in the school year: the beginning – v. good; the end –
v. good; the next year – also v. good –
write what you want, you can't dupe me: the farther things go,
the faster the news gets old;
contemporary history ended the year before the year before last:
then I still had two athletic shoes
I kept them in an unlocked locker
and someone threw one behind the ceiling net
that protects lights from blows in the gym –
I should get it down, but where does one find such a long pole?
in my town such trees just don't grow,
so I went to Blackforest to check the situation there – the
impenetrable
stocky might of it all! – I will show up with a hatchet and
that might as well be the end of me;
along the forest edge – broken lumber trucks and
the skeletons of timber industry machines,
skulls of forestry service officers, the petrified footprints
of fleeing collective farmers – here the latest times
began a long time ago but didn't last long –
beavers and other devils clogged the drainage systems,
the land exploded like radiators
in the cultural center during unexpected March frosts;
I used to sit and re-watch old films on dark nights when
the unpiloted sputniks of our empire
would fly in and burn without sound
in the highest layers of our atmosphere –
but not necessarily at night, because sometimes the day
flares
with a gorgeous light, and you can't explain it –
where could it come from?

Translation of "Gamtos pažinimas naujausiųjų laikų istorijose"

Painting, Context, Self

MONIKA FURMANAVIČIŪTĖ

In the continuous process of establishing and reflecting on one's situation in the social environment, an especially sensitive person can become a member of society who cannot and does not want to work mechanically. This is another way of describing the fate of the creative artist.

I have always been interested in the cultural environment in which I find myself, wondering why I am here, now, and what my purpose might be. In this way, I have probably always been looking for my true image. It always seemed like others have their "face," but that I was shattered and gathered up from thousands of contradictory parts. I began to suspect that many-sidedness is a characteristic or even an essential trait of a woman's nature. My study of the creative work of both genders helped strengthen this suspicion, and it was confirmed by my reading of the philosopher Luce Irigaray in her work on characteristics of women's self-conceptions. She argues that a woman's identity can't be merged into one single symbol – as opposed to men, whose gender can be expressed monolithically by analogy to the phallus.[1] Furthermore, in their study of women's autobiographies, researchers Anu Koivunen and Marianne Liljestrom have found polyphony, fragmentation, and a diaristic style to be features of the female gender. They

[1] Irigaray, *This Sex Which Is Not One.*

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speculate that women's unwillingness to write in the "ideal" mode of the genre of autobiography – the presentation of a coherent and continuous "I" – is a characteristic of women's subjectivity in patriarchal culture.[2] I believe that such features can be found in the work of artists. One can see in the plastic structure of their images the motif of fragmentation or collage. For instance, Georgia O'Keefe paints flowers from such a close perspective that they become, on the one hand, abstract compositions and, on the other hand, allude to the female genitals. Furthermore, Frida Kahlo paints herself in an ever-changing environment that gives different meanings to each self-portrait, making herself at one time, for instance, a victim and at another an aggressor.[3] According to Teresa de Lauretis, a woman's subjectivity is a web of momentary differences and revisions, or a never-ending, continuously refilled, renewing project, which is accurately exemplified by the image of fragmentation.[4] The constant selection and coordination that gives new uses to old materials gives meaning to the heterogenous "I," in which not only is the heritage of patriarchy rethought as a woman constructs herself out of myriad elements, but the very genealogy of women is reconstructed and created anew.

While studying at the Vilnius Art Academy, I encountered pressure from the (largely male) academic environment to formulate a coherent "I" for myself – to not wander about in different forms of expression, but to rest in a single place. My colleagues seemed to have their own "I," but I found it much harder to reflect myself in that way. Their work, however, made it easier for me to see my difference. But why was I expressing

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2 Koivunen and Liljestrom, *Sprendžiamieji žodžiai.*

3 Cindy Sherman has done similar work in the medium of photography. She continuously reinvents herself in her self-portraits, sometimes appearing unrecognizable. In her *Untitled Film Stills #14 (1978)*, she presents herself to the camera frontally, as well as reflected in a mirror, and with a framed portrait of herself on the commode – emphasizing that her identity cannot be pinned down, that it is multiple.

4 de Lauretis, *Technologies of Gender.*

myself heterogeneously? I began to reflect on the causes of, and influences on, our artistic development.

Even a few decades ago, knowledge of other cultures (especially Western) had been limited by the political situation during the occupation of Lithuania by the Soviet Union. The Iron Curtain resulted in strict censorship of artistic expression, limiting developmental pathways. Nevertheless, the influence of Western art movements such as Expressionism, Abstract Expressionism, and CoBrA began to trickle through. Vincent van Gogh, Edvard Munch, and Chaim Soutine were especially important in the first formations of new Lithuanian painting styles. In 1973, the group "4" was formed as the first collection of Expressionist painters in Lithuania. In the late 1980s, coincident with the birth of the Sąjūdis political movement, this artistic group grew into "24." Its members were made up of fellow students and later friends and artists with similar views: Kostas Dereškevičius, Arvydas Šaltenis, Algimantas Kuras, Algimantas Švėgžda, Ričardas Vaitiekūnas, Vytautas Šerys, Leopoldas Surgailis. They had a similar worldview and thinking about art. Whether working in greater abstraction or closer to realism, they all took their cues from Expressionism and a desire to oppose state structures, speaking the truth through art. They wanted to show the real nature of life at that time, without decoration. Those times saw the development, within the artistic context, of a movement towards the dramatic expression of everyday reality that put that harsh reality to shame while also discovering within it a quotidian beauty.

The emphasis on emotion that marked these Lithuanian Expressionists was counterbalanced by another group of painters formed in 1990, the neo-Expressionist Angis (Viper), who moved away from reality to a more self-reflective approach, analyzing the subconscious and the nature of art itself. Their nucleus was made up of people who are still active in the art world: Jonas Gasiūnas, Henrikas Čerapas, Ričardas Nemeikšis, and Antanas Obsarskas, among others. Their inspiration came largely from the European avant-garde group "CoBrA" (standing for Copenhagen, Brussels, Amsterdam – the cities in which its painters were based). They were united

by a desire to experiment with painting materials and forms, also paying heed to the primitivism that was a trademark of the CoBrA movement.

These were important moments of change in the history of Lithuanian painting that influenced its future development, shaking up the cultural stagnation of the late Soviet period and stimulating new expression. Their influence was strong and manysided. Some of the painters from earlier generations who continued to teach at the academy, namely Jonas Gasiūnas, Kostas Dereškevičius, and Arvydas Šaltenis, had a significant influence on my development during my early studies. Under their tutelage, I tried out a wideranging palette and many styles, often working from nature. The essential feature that connects this generation of painters with my own is changing modes of figuration.

Artists are always conditioned by their technical means and their cultural environment. From a cultural perspective, painters in Western Europe had returned to the human figure, especially Willem de Kooning, Francis Bacon, and Georg Baselitz. The older groups of Lithuanian painters – 24 and Angis – created their figurative paintings from nature or from sketches and deformed them from that basis, or they created deformed imaginary figures, turning them into signs or symbols. Today, from a technical perspective, painting is being conditioned by photographs, producing a style called New Realism. The omnipotent power of the camera changed coloristic painting to one of tones. Attention has been given especially to changes of light (e.g., high-contrast flashbulb effects, low-contrast imitation of faded photographs) and to repainted images of people from deforming perspectives. Often, the fantastic elements in today's painting are nevertheless based on photographs, not drawn directly from nature nor simply pulled from the depths of dreams.

Thus, photography and painting are no longer held to be competing mediums. One could argue that, with the advent of photography, painting moved away from Realism to Expressionism and abstraction, while now there is a return to the photographic image as the base from which painterly imagination

springs. The possibilities for connection and cooperation between the two mediums has come from the West, from such painters as Gerhard Richter, Marlene Dumas, Francis Bacon, and Lucian Tuymans. All of these artists use photography in the creation of their work, often in the form of images shaped by digital technology.

Later in my studies, I came to consider photography as a possible influence on my art when I chose the analysis of self as my primary theme. This signally changed my method of creating a painting. The woman's body began to find itself on the plane of my pictures in the form of a drawing done on the basis of a photograph. But not only was my painting changing under the influence of photographs, but that of my colleagues as well, such as Eglė Karpavičiūtė, Jolanta Kizikaitė, Konstantinas Gaitandži, and Jūratė Kluonė. In ways that I will explain later, an artist's expression becomes even more subjective when based on a photograph. Furthermore, the subject matter of the painting is often created according to the principle of collage, with changes in the dimensions of time and space (e.g., Gaitandži has painted Arnold Schwarzenegger in a Soviet uniform). Lately, painters using photographs have been exploring the themes of time and identity, projecting artifacts of the past into the present (e.g., Karpavičiūtė has painted Duchamp's urinal in a contemporary context). The work of the new generation is conditioned by globalization and emigration, the culture of state memory, individual self-understanding, and the waning of a clear sense of identity.

The fact that these young artists live in a new political environment, in a relatively young or reborn state, may influence their selection of the themes of time and identity in their work. The new generation does not think of itself as former citizens of the Soviet Union (something that naturally left its mark on the older generation), but they also lack a clear picture of themselves as citizens of the newly independent Lithuania. This quest for a new identity may be why they show a tendency to use their work to question old photographs (e.g., Jūratė Kluonė painting images of old family photos in minimalist surroundings). Differences between the original image

(the photograph) and its reiteration (the painting) become the new face of painting – the new realism. Every reiteration of the photograph involves a change, so that the subject depicted is also changed, while also remaining more or less identifiable with the subject depicted in the original. Thus, the technique mirrors the nature of the changes in identity that the artist and the society as a whole are going through. And in this way, the new generation generates its own identity that is, nevertheless, connected meaningfully with the past.

In my own work, I use photographs and computer programs to provide a flat image of reality over which my conscious and unconscious mind can play. With the help of these pre-existent images, the canvas becomes my screen onto which I project autobiographical details, facts drawn from life, together with the dreams and fictions of my imagination. My experience with video art has given me the necessary tools to transfer onto the canvas an understanding of the moving, cinematographic image. One can descry different "episodes," disparate elements which the spectator gathers together and ties into a subjectively constructed story.

Today's painter could be compared to Alice in *Alice in Wonderland*. She falls down the rabbit hole and is cut off from the "real" world, entering a world of fantasy or dream that draws upon images of her previous reality. Rational logic is abandoned, and a space is opened up for the play of unconscious impulses. Likewise, the contemporary painter has closed herself up in the studio, where images of reality, e.g., photographs, enter into associative play with the painter's subconscious. This unique interplay of subjectivity and objectivity gives rise to new discoveries and understandings of the self and one's identity.

The search for self-understanding has become the main theme that ties together my creative work. I analyze, in particular, women's identity through various aspects: woman/sacrifice, woman/mother, woman/pop culture, woman/religion, woman/sexuality. In doing so, I rely on my own experience – my emotions and thoughts transferred onto the plane of images in conversation with each other. Through self-analysis, I look for

new possibilities of expressing who I am in my various roles as woman, artist, mother, daughter, lover, friend. Although there is a general interrogation of what it means to be a modern woman, because it is based on my own personal search, I use pictures of myself. This allows me to look at myself from the side, or from outside. In the interactions of photographs and paintings, I see myself from a third-person perspective, my personality and body transferred to the picture like an Other. It is as if I can then say, "that is not me, but only my image." In such a way, looking at myself from the outside, I gain the freedom to change, "rehabilitate," or even "heal" myself.

Another way of expressing the effect of photography on my art is to see the photograph as a first step away from me, followed by another step away in the process of putting the image on canvas. Thus, I am two steps removed from myself. The image literally becomes a third person – at a third remove from me. (In this way of conceptualizing it, we might recall Plato's discussion in the *Republic* of the artistic image being three steps away from the true reality of the Forms.) My image is thereby freed from the body, from personality, and from thoughts about myself. I gain the ability to change the image and how I think about my identity. (This freedom is not a possibility that Plato seems to have considered when he criticized the arts on the basis of their distance from reality.)

I think the situation is similar in the work of other young painters working from photographs in which historical figures, personalities, and objects are fixated. By manipulating these images as they transfer them to the canvas, they gain power over them. The initial pictures become "disarmed," so to speak, losing their status as a given and finished object, becoming open to manipulation and change as suited to the artist's ideas. In this way, the artist is able to re-think what has been given – an important strategy of postmodern art.

Thus, in my work, images from everyday life (teapots, light fixtures, and various shiny, metallic objects) are turned into signs that complement and comment on the image of the woman's body, which itself becomes a sign with its personality, individuality, and previous identity removed. My image

becomes every woman's image, and so no specific woman, open to new meanings and understandings. In this way, the spectator is drawn into the process of identity creation. The picture of the depersonalized body becomes like a blank slate onto which the spectator can project thoughts and feelings, even imagining herself the owner of that body. Thus, men and women can have very different reactions to my work. On the one hand, men can often be carried away into a world of erotic fantasy – albeit limited and even opposed by elements of the grotesque. On the other hand, women will often consider the way in which their identity is shaped by the desires and expectations of those around them. My painting becomes interactive, engaging in a dialogue about what it means to be a woman in today's world.

Silk, a symbol of womanhood, has been the primary material on which I paint since 2008. The colors of various silks raise certain emotional impulses and relieve me from the burden of painting on the empty space of white canvas. This colored fabric becomes the first note of my work, the dominant key according to which I begin to improvise and project images one on top of the other. It can act as an unseen layer or a space for different times or events to overlap and enter into dialogue. It is on this surface that, using photographs as a base for my image creation, I most intensely began to explore the nature of my identity and the nature of modern woman in general. In these pictures of the last five years, I become victim and conqueror, food and feaster, desire and desired, adult and child, living and dead, and whatever else can be seen on the screen of the image captured, collected, and dreamed.

Translated by Rimas Uzgiris

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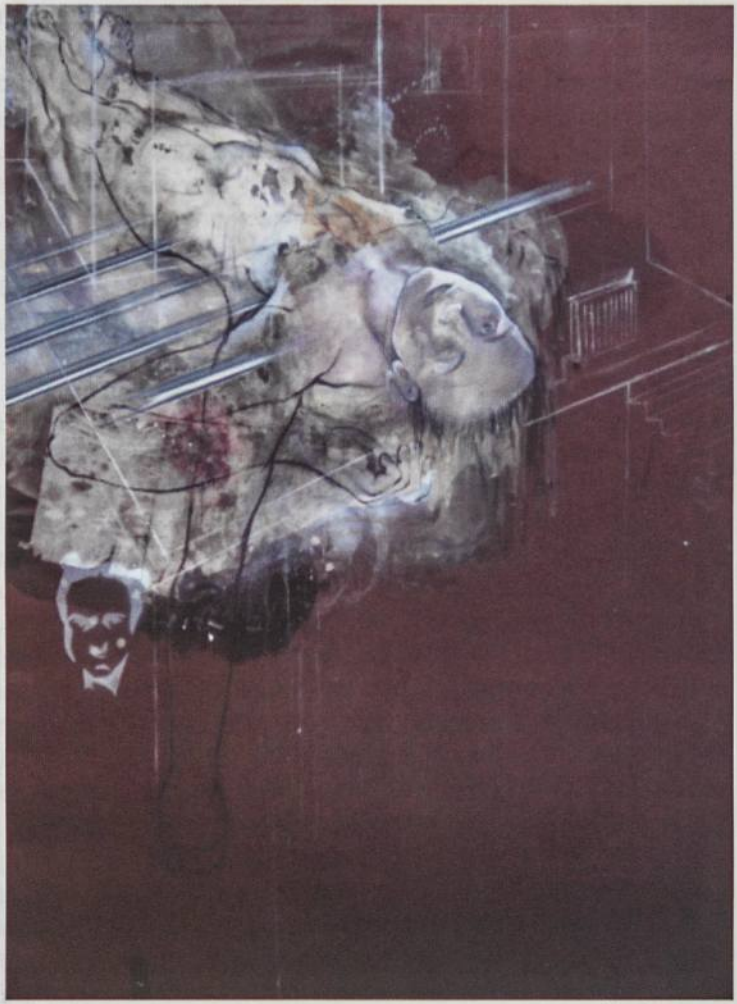


Point B, 140 cm x 120 cm, 2013. Mixed media on silk.

Dessert, 150 cm x 175 cm, 2012. Mixed media on silk.

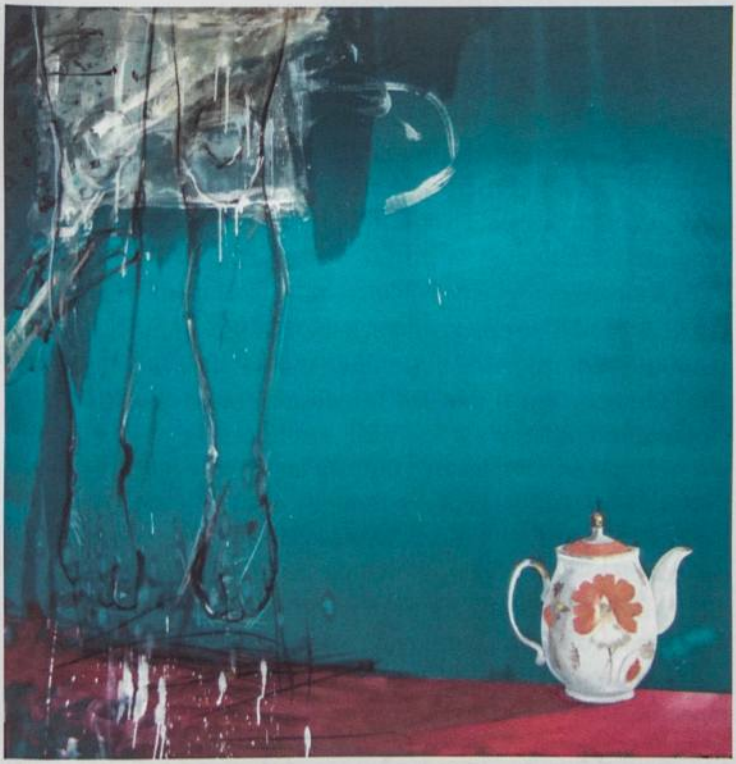
Menu, 180 cm x 160 cm, 2010. Mixed media on silk.

From– to–, 150 cm x 180 cm, 2012. Mixed media on silk.

Red Shoes, 165 cm x 130 cm, 2009. Mixed media on silk.

Miracle on the Beach, 130 cm x 130 cm, 2012. Mixed media on silk.

Positive, 150 cm x 170 cm, 2010. Mixed media on silk.



Teapot, 120 cm x 120 cm, 2010. Mixed media on silk.

Candy as Memory Catalyst

LAIMA VINCE

Marcel Proust popped a madeleine into his mouth, and that random event triggered a flashbulb memory (psychologist David Pillemer's term) that led to volumes of novelistic writing on the mind, memory, a lost past, lost love, lost youth; writing we still read and reflect on a century later. Obsessed with every flutter of imagery and every thought inside his restless mind, in his 3,200-page, seven-part work, *À la recherche du temps perdu (In Search of Lost Time,* previously known as *Remembrance of Things Past),* Proust mines his psyche as a model for his study of the human condition, employing a device he called "involuntary memory" to conjure up Combray, the idyllic village where he passed his childhood, as one of the central themes of the novel.

This type of vivid description of place built from memory has been explored in the work of psychologist David B. Pillemer. Pillemer notes that in their "flashbulb memory" paper, Brown and Kulik (1977) hypothesized that "any event that is shocking and judged to be highly important or consequential will be recorded initially in sensory rather than narrative form."[1] Although flashbulb memories usually are defined as traumatic memories, such as the assassination of John F. Kennedy (people of Kennedy's day can all recall where they were and what they were doing at the time of the shooting), the

[1] Cited in Pillemer, *Momentous Events,* 27

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routines of everyday life can also provide the intensity of a highly charged life event.

In his book *Proust was a Neuroscientist*, Jonah Lehrer examines the relationship between neuroscience and the senses as they are expressed in the arts. Drawing on numerous examples from the works of Virginia Woolf, Gertrude Stein, Igor Stravinsky, Paul Cézanne, Walt Whitman, George Eliot, Auguste Escoffier, and Marcel Proust, Lehrer argues that writers and artists and musicians who wholeheartedly gave themselves up to their creative process discovered information about how our brains function centuries before the work of neuroscientists caught up with them and confirmed their findings. Lehrer, through a careful analysis of the connection between neuroscience and Proust's novels, has concluded that Proust too made important neurological discoveries a century before the science to prove his discoveries caught up with him. In his chapter on Proust, "The Method of Memory," Lehrer makes the following observation based on the famous passage from the "Overture":

> What did Proust learn from these prophetic crumbs of sugar, flour, and butter? He actually intuited a lot about the structure of our brain. In 1911, the year of the madeleine, physiologists had no idea how the senses connected inside the skull. One of Proust's deep insights was that our senses of smell and taste bear a unique burden of memory.[2]

Lehrer's insights on the connections between the findings of neuroscience and the working of Proust's mind, in particular his discovery of how lost worlds could be rediscovered through taste, inspired me to recreate the madeleine experience under a controlled setting with groups of Lithuanian language and literature teachers participating in writing workshops. At first, I did not reveal to them that they were the subjects of an experiment on how the sense of taste triggers the retrieval of buried long-term memories stored in the brain's hippocampus. I wanted to test a hypothesis: can a person be induced to experience a

[2] Lehrer, *Proust Was a Neuroscientist*, 80.

flashbulb memory if the hippocampus is deliberately accessed via the sense of taste?

In the "Overture" to *Swann's Way*, Proust introduces his beliefs regarding how lost memories can be accessed through what he calls a "lost object," which he later clarifies as the lost taste of a childhood pastry, the madeleine, rediscovered while having tea at his mother's house. While setting the stage for the passage in which the madeleine transports him back to his childhood in Combray, Proust refers to a Celtic folk belief that "the souls of those whom we have lost are held captive in some inferior being, in an animal, in a plant, in some inanimate object, and so are effectively lost to us until the day (which may never come) when we happen to pass by the tree or to obtain possession of the object which forms their prison."[3] What Proust did not know was that the sense of taste and smell are linked to the hippocampus and that, once this area of the brain is activated, lost memories are retrieved from the depository of long-term memory. Not knowing this, Proust struggles with his revelation, following the twists and turns of his thoughts until finally a full-blown memory bursts forth in his consciousness, and he writes the famous madeleine scene.[4] The passage is remarkable for its detailed description of the transformation that occurs inside the brain when lost or buried memories bloom back into life triggered by taste or smell. Many of us have had similar experiences, and so we intuitively recognize Proust's experience.

He writes:

> Many years had elapsed during which nothing of Combray, save what was comprised in the theatre and drama of my going to bed there, had any existence for me, when one day in winter, as I came home, my mother, seeing that I was cold, offered me some tea, a thing I did not ordinarily take. I declined at first and then, for no particular reason, changed my mind. She sent out for one of those short, plump little cakes called *'petites madeleines,'* which look as though they had been molded in the fluted scallop of a pilgrim's shell. And soon, mechanically, weary after a dull day with the prospect of a depressing morrow, I

[3] Proust, *Swann's Way*, 54.

[4] Ibid., 57-58.

> raised to my lips a spoonful of the tea in which I had soaked a morsel of the cake. No sooner had the warm liquid, and the crumbs with it, touched my palate than a shudder ran through my whole body, and I stopped, intent upon the extraordinary changes that were taking place.[5]

Proust continues to describe a feeling of "all-powerful joy" that overcomes him and attempts to examine the source of the feeling. His insight is that "I was conscious that it was connected with the taste of tea and cake, but that it infinitely transcended those savors, could not, indeed, be of the same nature as theirs."[6]

Proust delightfully describes his childhood in Combray in vivid detail, ending the passage with the observation: "...so in that moment all the flowers in our garden and in M. Swann's park, and all the water lilies on the Vivonne and the good folk of the village and their little dwellings and the parish church and the whole of Combray and its surroundings, taking their proper shapes and growing solid, sprang into being, town and gardens alike, *from my cup of tea.*"[7] I emphasize "from my cup of tea" with italics to illustrate how Proust clearly attributes his sudden memory to his sense of taste.

Lehrer cites the work of Rachel Herz, a psychologist at Brown, who proved in her paper, "Testing the Proustian Hypothesis," that because the senses of smell and taste in humans are linked directly to the hippocampus, the center of the brain's long-term memory, accessing specific, vivid, long-term memories through taste can be a powerfully emotional experience for people. According to Herz, the senses of sight, touch, and hearing are first processed by the thalamus, which is the source of language and the gateway to consciousness. Therefore, humans do not typically have epiphanic experiences associated with the senses of sight, touch, or hearing.[8] Lehrer observes that "Proust even goes so far as to blame his sense of sight for

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5 Ibid., 54–55.

6 Ibid., 55.

7 Ibid., 58.

8 Cited in Lehrer, 80.

obscuring his childhood memories in the first place. 'Perhaps because I had so often seen such madeleines without tasting them,' Proust writes, 'their image had disassociated itself from those Combray days.' "[9] We now know that Proust's intuition was correct.

Proust reasoned that the madeleine experience could be replicated. Theoretically, one could taste a sweet or a food from childhood or youth and then record one's involuntary memories and develop them for literary purposes, as Proust did. This Proustian thought led me to wonder: Could the madeleine moment of epiphany be consciously triggered if one were to serve a group of people a memory-evoking food or candy and then ask them to freely write whatever was on their minds? Possibly. Theoretically, yes. The science supports this supposition. However, our relationships and memory associations with certain foods are highly individualized; therefore, how could one recreate the experience in a classroom setting? What if one were to create the setting for the memory trigger with a homogeneous group of people who have lived through a unifying event and quite possibly had consumed a similar food because of cultural traditions, or limitations on the types of foods available at a particular time? Certainly, in times of food rationing, certain foods, especially those that are hard to come by, take on particular meaning. To find the right group for my "madeleine experiment," I had to cross the Atlantic Ocean.

The opportunity to test my idea presented itself in February 2013, when I was invited to spend two weeks in Lithuania in my professional capacity as an educational researcher. The chance to teach writing workshops in Lithuania, a member of the European Union, but also a post-Soviet country, provided me with the opportunity to work with a homogeneous group that – because of the Soviet occupation that ended in 1991 – would have had more-or-less similar experiences growing up, working, and adapting to the shift from communism to capitalism. I would assign elementary and high school teachers of

[9] Lehrer, 80–81.

Lithuanian language and literature a writing exercise and then lead them in a writers' workshop.

In the space of two weeks, I led six writing workshops in six distinct regions of Lithuania: Klaipėda, a coastal city; Vilnius, the capital; Siesikai, a small isolated rural community; Domeikava, a suburb of Lithuania's second most populous city, Kaunas; and Onuškis, an isolated community surrounded by forests. In addition to the teacher-training workshops, I'd been asked to privately conduct a two-day writing seminar and workshop for a writers' group in Klaipėda made up of professionals, artists, and teachers who wrote habitually for their own enjoyment. I would conduct the exercises and workshops in Lithuanian, but translate the writing samples into English for the purpose of my research.

My goal was to prepare a writing exercise that would induce participants to produce a powerfully charged emotional piece of writing in a comparatively short period of time – during a fifteen minute free-writing period. In order to produce material strong enough to workshop in the condensed time allocated to us within the constraints of the seminar, I would need to create conditions that enabled a writer to access his or her unconscious mind during this short period of time and to write from that place of lost memory. I had to consider how I would facilitate getting writers to access their long-term memories to produce writing that at its core conveyed an emotional truth, was original, and met the aesthetic standards we expect when we engage in reading literature. I thought about how I could replicate the madeleine phenomenon to gain these results. At the same time, it was important that workshop participants not be aware that I was manipulating their long-term memories. Their memories and their subsequent writing had to be produced of their own free will for my experiment to be valid.

I set up a series of tests in which participants tasted certain candies, which had been the only sweets available during the Soviet era, and then wrote on their thoughts and feelings. I would not prompt the participants or lead them towards involuntary memory, but would keep my eyes and ears open for

such memories when they occurred. I would also interview my participants on how they accessed their involuntary memories and how the experience of accessing those memories affected them.

In the writing process, the mind sheds seemingly extraneous detail in order to create a coherent theme. The editing and revising that take place later organize the involuntary memory born from free-writing experiences into a coherent message. Therefore, in my madeleine experiments, I resolved to pay close attention to how participants recorded raw memories as they played out, and how they shaped and edited those memories into a recognizable narrative or genre. Rational thinking is of little help to the writer in the composing phase. I have used drawing exercises, improvised dialogues, storytelling, and other creative methods to help writers access their unconscious. This time, I was eager to see how the sense of taste might trigger memory, unlock the unconscious, and inspire workshop participants' writing.

I took the unique history of the region into consideration. My workshop participants would have shared a homogenous life, as well as life-changing experiences. A little over twenty years ago, the Baltic States lived through massive cultural, sociological, economic, and political shifts. With the highly emotionally charged independence movement and the collapse of the Soviet Union, followed by two long decades of hard work rebuilding a democratic Western society, Lithuanians, like millions of others living in post-Soviet countries, experienced radical changes in a quarter of an average lifetime. In order to survive and adapt to the fast-paced changes that occurred on every level of society, a type of cultural amnesia was necessary. The memory of what it was like to live under a totalitarian regime had to be repressed in order for people to adapt to a new Westernized mode of living and working and thinking. For the generation that is now forty years old or older, there is a disconnect between the culture and society of their early formative and student years and the present. They may live in the same physical territory, even in the same house

or apartment, but society had changed completely all around them. The points of social, cultural, and economic reference of their youth and childhood have radically shifted. Under the Soviet communist system citizens lived in similar compact apartments allocated by square meter according to family size and Party loyalties. Soviet citizens wore Soviet factory issue clothing and shoes, with the additional challenge of buying something Western and stylish, like blue jeans, on the black market or getting creative with sewing or knitting to design a more interesting outfit. Under the communist system, there was no unemployment, but no choice of employment either. The government assigned you a workplace and you had to comply. Under the communist system you made do with the resources allocated you, and you didn't complain (publicly at least). Money was hardly necessary, because most of one's needs – health care, education, transportation, and utilities – were covered by the government. With the exception of a handful of Party apparatchiks, who had a relatively more comfortable life than the masses, everyone lived a simple lifestyle that was more-or-less equal.

As bleak and repressive as this uniform life seems to us Westerners, when interviewing people who lived through this period of Soviet communism, I learned that there were certain aspects of Soviet life they found positive and missed, and felt a strong nostalgia for. People revealed that they felt closer to their family and neighbors back then because everyone was "in the same boat," and they helped each other to get by. Because of the deficit economy, food and household goods were scarce and hard to come by. If someone heard some scarce food item was on sale at the local grocery store, they let others know so all could benefit. Therefore, small luxuries, such as a special candy, were cherished and appreciated. One person I spoke to told me that, as a child, he never tasted chewing gum, but he had a few American gum wrappers another child had given him he treasured. Another aspect of Soviet life was a type of group think or Soviet idealism. One was encouraged to live one's life dedicated to the good of the "collective" rather than

the individual. This thinking helped people feel they were part of a larger community, working for a greater good.

After independence, the entire nation had to rebuild itself and create a new image in a relatively short period of time. The period of national rebirth was both a time of joy and a time of loss. It was a time of new challenges and, at the same time, nostalgia for a simpler past with simpler choices. Knowing in advance my writers' groups would be mostly women ages forty and up, I knew they would have lived through these massive cultural shifts. I just needed a catalyst to trigger memories of these times in a powerful way. I wanted to use a food that had been scarce during the Soviet era and was therefore special and possibly memory evoking.

The 2003 German tragicomic film *Goodbye Lenin*, directed by Wolfgang Becker, illustrates how confusing the radical change of a country's entire political, cultural, and social structure was for East Germans after the fall of the Berlin Wall. In the film, a woman, Christiane, wakes up after an eight-month long coma after the fall of communism. Her family, worried that the shock of the sudden radical political changes would cause Christiane to have a second heart attack, makes a gallant effort to hide the truth from her. Although keeping her isolated and bedridden in the family apartment preserves her ignorance of the country's political situation, Christiane's son and primary caretaker, Alex, runs into a major snag when she requests a specific brand of East German pickles. These pickles, along with all the other commonly consumed East German brands, disappeared overnight along with the Wall when the East Berlin supermarkets were restructured as Western supermarkets, carrying only Western products. Alex faces the challenge of tracking down remnants of East German pickles to appease his mother. This theme repeatedly plays out throughout the film as he searches supermarket shelves for the "lost" pickles.

These supermarket scenes reminded me of my experiences in Lithuania in the early nineties, just after the fall of communism. The supermarkets began carrying exclusively Western products. Elderly people would approach me in the aisles and

ask me to help them with their shopping because they could not locate any of the brands they were used to eating or read the foreign labels of the new brands. So, the pickle-hunt scenes in *Goodbye Lenin* resonate.

Rather than pickles, I decided to use candy as my memory catalyst. To find the appropriate edible memory trigger for my experiment, I thought back to a memory of my own from the years 1988-1989, when I studied at Vilnius University. It was only two years before the Soviet Union disbanded and Lithuania gained its independence. That winter, I became ill with double pneumonia and had to be hospitalized. My classmates in the Lithuanian literature department were very concerned that, as an American, I would have a hard time "surviving" a Soviet hospital. I am allergic to penicillin and no synthetic antibiotics were available in the Soviet Union at the time, making my recovery even more challenging. My friends brought food to comfort me during my six-week hospitalization. The cabinet beside my bed was crammed full of canning jars filled with pickles, pancakes, and applesauce, and slabs of bacon and rings of smoked sausage brought by friends whose parents lived on farms.

However, the one special treat I remember most from those long days in the hospital was Soviet-era candy. The memory is linked to an event that stands out in my mind. One evening a friend, a student named Vygantas, came to visit me. He had long blond hair tied back into a ponytail and was dressed in the hippie attire of young Lithuanian folk musicians at the time.

"I brought you something that's very hard to come by," Vygantas bragged, eyeing the cabinet crammed with sausage and canning jars, to let me know all those would pale in comparison to his offering.

I sat up in my hospital bed, curious to find out what this rare item would be.

He opened up his hand, and in his palm were two small chocolate candies wrapped in blue paper with a drawing of a polar bear strolling across a snow-covered plain.

"These are called *Meška Šiaurėje* (Polar Bear in the North)," he said. "They are a deficit item, but I was lucky enough to get two. Enjoy. Just let them melt in your mouth and savor the taste."

I slowly and carefully unwrapped the candy and popped the dark chocolate into my mouth. The candy had that typical gritty, Soviet factory issue texture. There was a faint taste of peanut butter mixed with the chocolate. The candy was not especially tasty, not at all as tasty as a Snickers or a Mars Bar, but I appreciated the hours of waiting in a queue it took my friend to get them.

I will always remember that sense of awe my friend had expressed for the Polar Bear in the North candy. Months later, when I was released from the hospital, I searched for Polar Bear in the North in the groceries and could not find any. The candy had indeed been a special gift. Although it was not especially tasty to me, the gesture of a friend going to such great trouble to bring me the candy stayed with me. The candy symbolized the kindness of taking the time to break away from a busy student schedule to visit me in the hospital and bring me candy along with the latest reports on the protests taking place on the streets of Vilnius. When selecting the memory-catalyst for my Proustian experiment, I knew candies that were once a rarity would be my writing workshop participants' madeleines.

Under communism, even candy production was controlled and limited to less than ten different types. Although these Soviet-era candies are still sold by most grocery stores, with the wide selection of foreign candies and new good-quality and gourmet Lithuanian candies available, the old Soviet-era deficit candies are not the first item on most people's grocery lists. It is the custom in Lithuania to bring candy or wine when visiting friends. Hardly anyone brought the old Soviet candies to gift their hosts anymore. Therefore, I reasoned, like Proust's madeleine, the taste of Soviet-era factory chocolates would have been long forgotten and hence could effectively rekindle memories under the right conditions.

For the sake of nostalgia, I went to one of the last remaining Soviet-style groceries in Vilnius – the kind where you point at the shelf and indicate what you want and a glaring, square-shouldered, hold-over Soviet-era matron in a white lab coat and white cap takes it down for you and rings it up at the counter. This grocery still carries bins of my deficit-era candies and sells them by the kilo. I selected several brands: Polar Bear in the North *(Meška šiaurėje);* Little Cows *(Karvutės);* Pineapple *(Ananasiniai)* and Milk of the Birds *(Paukščių pienas).* I also bought some "zephyrs," tangy marshmallow candies in the shape of half shells. I added tangerines to my list as well. Tangerines, mandarins and oranges were practically nonexistent in Soviet grocery stores. People considered themselves lucky to taste an orange once in a lifetime under the Soviets.

I structured my workshops as follows: I would talk about writing exercises as a catalyst for generating writing and then talk about "freewriting" in particular. Freewriting is an exercise in which one writes continuously for a fixed amount of time – usually in five, ten, or fifteen minute intervals – without pausing, on a theme assigned by the instructor or any theme that comes into the student's head. The idea is to mine the unconscious in order to allow ideas to flow. In a second draft, those ideas are shaped into a narrative. Before the freewriting session began, I would pass around my plate of candies, zephyrs, and tangerines, and encourage participants to taste a treat before they began writing. I would casually say to them: "If you don't have any ideas to write about, just describe the taste of the treat you've selected."

I watched as people made their selections. Many paused to consider before choosing a treat. One woman blurted out, "Can't I just have one of each." "Sorry," I said, "just one." Once everyone had eaten their treat, I'd tell them that I would time them for a fifteen-minute freewrite. I reminded them not to worry about grammar, style, or punctuation. I told them it would be their choice whether or not they shared what they had written with the group. Following the freewriting, there would be an opportunity to share work, share ideas, discuss.

Then, time permitting, participants would take what they had written and shape it into more formalized writing.

I was not prepared for the emotional responses I received. I had expected that fewer than half of the participants would have a flashbulb memory experience. But in the six workshops in which I conducted this experiment, 99 percent of the participants had powerful flashbulb memories and were eager to share them. The one or two people in each group – and each group was made up of between ten and thirty participants – who did not have a flashbulb memory and in fact could not and did not connect with the stories of those who did, were younger women in their twenties. These women expressed a sense of bafflement, frustration, and exclusion when workshop participants aged forty and up eagerly exchanged memories of Soviet-era scenes from their family or work or student lives evoked by tasting the candy. The younger women talked about how they grew up with more candy than they could ever eat or want and what was the big deal? The older participants were uncomfortable with these comments and insisted that the younger generation could not comprehend what their lives had been like under the Soviet system, living in a deficit economy.

When working with a group of thirty professionals who came to my writing workshop as part of a series of writer-led workshops they attended at the Ieva Simonaitytė Library in Klaipėda, several members cried when reading their candy-related memory pieces to the group. Others comforted them and expressed their solidarity on how difficult it was to find themselves back "physically" in a place in their past they had left behind and outgrown. This emotion prompted one woman to shout at me, somewhat aggressively, though at the same time with a touch of irony: "What *did* you *put* in that candy!" When I explained that I was attempting to recreate Proust's madeleine experience, some participants were delighted, while others expressed they felt they were manipulated to feel vulnerable.

People whose memories from decades past are triggered by taste describe the experience not as the type of memory one works to dredge up from the unconscious mind, but as a

sensation that does not resemble memory as we traditionally understand it. The experience is emotionally overwhelming, in that one finds oneself physically, psychologically, emotionally returned to *the place* and *the time* where the memory took place, with all details played back to them in vivid and accurate color. A recurring theme expressed in all six workshops was that the flashbulb memory was not experienced as one normally experiences memory, but that the participant was overwhelmed by a sudden, detailed image from their past that preoccupied them and rendered them unable to think or write about anything else.

In Vilnius, I conducted the candy experiment with a group of thirty educators who taught in an inner city school in the roughest neighborhood. Their job was challenging, but they were well prepared for those challenges. I would have liked to have heard everyone's piece, but there simply was not enough time. During our lunch break, after the writing activity was over, a woman in her mid-sixties approached me and invited me to sit at her table. She was eager to tell me what she had been too shy to express in front of the larger group:

"My mother is ninety now, and I often go to my village to take care of her," she said.

> I always think of her as a frail and old woman. I haven't thought of her as anything but old and frail for many years now. But the strangest thing happened to me today in class. When I bit into the Pineapple candy, I suddenly saw my mother standing in front of me as a young woman. I saw her youthful face and her long blond hair plaited into thick braids. It was not at all like when I try to remember her the way she was when she was young. She was simply there, in front of me, in physical form. It was difficult for me to recover from seeing her standing there in the classroom as a young woman because it came as such a shock. When I was a little girl, my mother worked in the grocery shop in our village. She was in charge of handling large buckets of Pineapple candies when they were available for sale. Those days she would stand beside the candies all day long, weighing them and selling them to long queues of people. I would go to visit her while she was at work. Occasionally, I'd sneak a few candies.

A recurring theme in these candy-writing exercises was an association between the candy and a person who was important to the writer: a mother, a close friend or family member, or someone who had shown special kindness. A teacher in her late fifties from the rural town of Siesikai shared the following piece:

> I chose a Pineapple candy and bit into it. For some reason, the moment I tasted the pineapple flavor I remembered my friend, Vanda, whom I haven't thought about in years. When we were girls, Vanda had a connection with people who worked in the candy factory in Kaunas. She would bring me two or three kilos of Pineapple candy whenever she could. We would climb up into a tree with our books and read and eat the tangy pineapple-flavored chocolate candy. My friend Vanda had such a good heart. She was generous with her candy. We grew up. We both went off to study; we married; we began working; we raised our families; and we grew apart. I hadn't talked to Vanda in years, but when my son needed to pass his twelfth grade exams, Vanda came back into my life and offered to tutor him and help him prepare for the exams. She did, and he passed. He could not have done it without her. Vanda has been very sick for the last few years and is not working anymore. I ought to go see her. She has such a good heart. How could I have forgotten her?

At the Klaipėda writers' workshop, a woman described her memory associated with Little Cows. As a teenager, she had a friend who worked in a candy factory. That friend would sometimes come to her house, bringing a bag filled with Little Cows. The two teenage girls would sit with her mother on the couch and stuff themselves with the candy while watching movies on television. She was very close to her mother, and the Little Cows reminded her of her mother, who had died a few years later when she was barely out of her teenage years. Now, she works as a teacher in a high school. On Fridays, after work, she goes to the grocery store and buys a bag of Little Cows, takes them home and sits on the couch alone, watching a movie, stuffing herself because the candy brings her mother back to her.

The woman seated beside her fought back tears while reading her piece. The Little Cows also reminded her of her

mother, who was dying in the hospital, and with whom she'd had a difficult and painful relationship. The next day, when we worked with shaping the raw material we'd mined from the candies into more focused narratives, this woman chose to write a letter to her mother, in which she recalled her painful memories and which she ended with two simple sentences: "Mother, I love you. I forgive you." In her initial freewrite her emotions towards her mother were wild, uncontrolled, riddled with guilt. Why? Because the Little Cows reminded her of home. It was the candy her mother ate at home, a treat. During our initial discussion of her freewrite, this woman made the association that "Although we always had food and even candy at home, we had very little love." Other writers in the group felt the opposite – there was a lot of love, but candy was a rare and sought-after treat, so the opposite was true. After much discussion and reflection, this woman was able to write the following epistle to her mother:

Letter to Mama

Mama, I want to talk with you about that thing that we never spoke of our entire lives, not even one word, not when it happened, and never afterwards... Not you, not me. No one.

Maybe there is no need? Maybe?

We lived on the land. In Lieporai. Not far from the Latvian border. We didn't have much. We had too much. We had enough. We had clothing. And food. And candy. We even had chocolate-covered Zephyrs that your brother, Uncle Joseph, would bring over from Jūrmala. But I do not know if we had enough love. As far back as I remember, I was searching for love. I feel as though I have spent my entire life searching for love, and it always seems that there was never enough. Never enough...

Why? What made it that way? How did it happen?

A few incidents have seared their way into my soul.

The first is the theft in the collective farm offices. The offices we (you, me and my older sisters) cleaned in the evenings. That time you blamed me. You said that I stole the calculator.

I was so ashamed. Insanely ashamed. Only, I don't know if I was ashamed of myself or of you. Me, a teenager, I was called into the principal's office. I was called in to confess to a theft I did

not commit. Did I tell the truth? Did I dare tell them that you were the actual thief?

Can you imagine: I don't remember. I have blocked out the details. I have erased them. Only one truth remained – you had betrayed me. You betrayed my love for you. I wanted to kill myself. I wanted to stab myself. I remember that I even wrote out my will…

The other incident occurred when I was a student. I was in my first year, and it was the beginning of summer. I had an appendicitis operation in Klaipėda. We were separated by 200 kilometers. I did not want to worry you, Mama. I didn't even tell you. Or perhaps, in those days, it wasn't so easy to contact you? Or maybe we didn't share a bond anymore? When I returned to our farm for the summer solstice, I knew only one thing, that I would not be able to do physical work. Nobody was home. The neighbor hurried over to tell me that I had to haul the hay out of the barn and set up the haystacks immediately, so that the hay would dry by evening – he was going to cart it away for us. That is how I ended up working out in the fields. Maybe I wanted to do something heroic? It wasn't easy, but I stacked all the hay and dried it. Then, it so happened, that you came home and angrily told me to drag that hay right back into the barn because for some reason (and I don't remember why) we could not cart it away that evening…

Gritting my teeth (and my soul) I was determined to get the job done, although it was already growing dark and seemed impossible. I don't know how, but my sister Lolita (my guardian angel) came to my rescue. The two of us worked hard until we dragged all the hay back into the barn. Until it was pitch black night. Until we had not an ounce of strength left to blame anyone, to feel sorry, or to love…

I miss you, Mama. I love you anyway. I have written about my two (and your two) life events. How many years have gone by before I was strong enough today to write to you about all this? How many years have had to go by for me to be able (here and now) to say the words: "I forgive you, Mama…"

Your little one

The powerful feelings that come through in this simple letter – the lack of love, the search for love, finding love – emotions that this woman had held at bay for several decades, all came spilling forth the moment she bit into the candy that

reminded her of the hurt of those long-buried feelings she could no longer hide from her mother. With encouragement from the group, on the second day of the workshop she was able to shape the raw emotion of her freewrite into this letter and finally find peace for the injustices that had happened decades ago, back in the days of the Soviet Union, when life in the collective farm communities consisted of hard work and a good dash of bitterness in order to survive. After reading her letter to her mother, this woman cried, and we all cried along with her. She said that she felt as though a heavy burden had been lifted from her shoulders the moment she had been able to finally forgive her mother. All that wrapped up in a single square of candy!

Like the woman who had a painful relationship with her mother, several participants associated a specific taste with traumatic life events. Here is an example from the Klaipėda writers' group:

> I chose the tangerine, but in my heart I wished it to be an orange. I carry an orange inside of me all the time. Now, you can buy them anywhere at any time, but when I was growing up, they were something rare and to be treasured, a treat you might or might not receive for Christmas. I grew up without a father. I grew up alone with my grandparents in a small wooden house on the edge of the forest. My childhood was lonely. I never knew my father. I saw him only once in my life. It was dark, around Christmastime. I was sitting by the stove when this man came into the house and my grandmother told me it was my father. He handed me an orange – an incredible treat back then. I'd never seen or tasted an orange. It was a tremendous gift. He told me that he always loved me, that he thought of me every day. Then he turned and walked back out into the snowstorm. He died two weeks later. I know now that he was not a good man. He committed crimes. But he did love me. When I taste an orange, I remember his love. I carry that orange around with me in my soul wherever I go. Whenever I go to the supermarket now, I visit with the oranges, and I remember my father.

The woman who wrote the above paragraph, and who was painfully shy, expressed to me that she had been shocked

by the bare honesty of her long-suppressed memory when it burst forth in her freewrite.

Another strong theme that emerged in the freewrites was that of then versus now. The following excerpt is a good example of this dichotomy:

> Ah well, it is my childhood flavor that is in my mouth... When my sister and I were little, even these Pineapple candies were a scarcity. We only tasted candy on holidays. But now... What's there to say? Every day we are tempted by flashy, tasty candies. We are surrounded by all sorts of tasty treats – you just need to have enough money and you can buy whatever you like. Maybe that is why children today don't appreciate holidays the way we did when we were children. It's always like this. When you have too much of something, you don't appreciate it; it doesn't make you happy; and you don't think about what it means to you or to someone else. Even something like a comfortable apartment or a car has become bland and ordinary. You couldn't even imagine your life anymore without these basic comforts. Oh, but my parents, my grandparents, their lives were completely different. When I hear their stories... In our times... Then even I become nostalgic and begin to mourn what they felt for each other, how dear they were to each other...

I was surprised that some participants, writing spontaneously and in a fixed amount of time, wrote essays that were of a sociological nature. The following piece was written without revision by a teacher at the school in Domeikava, a suburb of Kaunas:

> The Polar Bear in the North candy in my mouth smells like nuts, tastes like chocolate, and has a crunchy texture when you bite into it. The candy reminds me of the Soviet era. This type of candy was the tastiest of them all. Often they were hard to find. I lived with my family – my mother and two sisters – in a small wooden house in a small town. I tasted this candy only a few times in my life back then. The wrapper was different back then, too. The wrapper was blue and paper, not cellophane like this one. The picture was much simpler – just a polar bear set against a blue background. Recently one of my students, a heavy-set girl in my ninth grade class, told me that Polar Bear in the North is

her favorite candy and she can polish off a kilo or two in one sitting. Just before Christmas, she brought in a bag of these candies and walked around the classroom, parceling out two apiece to each student. Of course, we all ate the candy. Meanwhile, she told us about how her family was traveling to Tunisia for the Christmas holidays and about how it would be their third trip to Tunisia. There were young people in that class who had never even traveled beyond the city limits of Kaunas! And here they were now, subjected to this self-confident rich girl's narration about her travels. I also began to dream about going somewhere warm for winter vacation. I felt like that polar bear in the north. Outside the classroom window it was cold and dark. Oh well, I thought, the winter vacation will pass quickly, just like this candy quickly melting in my mouth. This candy, which, for some reason, no longer tasted good.

After the teacher read this freewrite, the other teachers launched into an animated discussion of the social inequalities they've all had to endure since independence. They pointed out a link between the material poverty of the writer's childhood during the Soviet era and the continuing poverty of some children in her class; only the poor students' poverty was more painful now because they were subjected to wealthier children flaunting their privileges. Back in the days of the Soviet Union, the teachers explained, we were all in it together. I found it interesting that, by the time she reached the end of her meditation on the candy and on social inequalities, the taste of the candy in her mouth literally changed and no longer tasted good. The nature of this teacher's memories and present association with the memory changed her perception of the candy in her mouth.

What makes Proust a genius is that he did not simply stop and indulge himself in the unexpected childhood memories that the cookie brought to mind, but according to Lehrer "... once Proust began to remember his past, he lost all interest in the taste of the madeleine. Instead, he became obsessed with how he *felt* about the cookie, with what the cookie *meant* to him. What else would these crumbs teach him about his past?

What other memories could emerge from these magic mouthfuls of flour and butter?"[10]

In the two-day workshop I taught in the port city of Klaipėda, most of the participants, who were either working writers or working seriously on developing the craft of writing, took the extra time to shape the raw memories the candy had elicited and develop them into art. The images in the poem below – women waiting on a queue for candy, pregnancy, birds, silence – seem disjointed, linked loosely by the poet's subconscious. What is interesting about Proust's memories evoked by the madeleine is that they lead to other memories that seem random and disjointed, but in Proust's inner logic, they are somehow connected:

> In this Proustian vision, the cookie is worthy of philosophy because, in the mind, everything is connected. As a result, a madeleine can easily become a revelation. And while some of Proust's ensuing mental associations are logical (for example, the taste of the madeleine and the memory of Combray), others feel oddly random.[11]

We see this same random work of the unconscious in this poem, written by the Klaipėda poet Sondra Simane. Sondra bit into the Milk of the Birds candy and remembered standing on food lines back in the days of the Soviet deficit economy. But, rather than remain firmly rooted in that particular concrete memory, the poet allows herself to free associate, linking together seemingly random images and emotions, arriving at her own fears of giving birth, which she must soon live through. Similarly, Lehrer observes:

> Why does the cookie also bring to mind "the game wherein the Japanese amuse themselves by filling a porcelain bowl with water and steeping it in little pieces of paper"? And why does a starchy napkin remind him of the Atlantic Ocean, which "swells in blue and blossomy undulations"? An honest chronicler of his own brain, Proust embraced such strange associations precisely because he couldn't explain them. He understood

[10] Lehrer, 81.
[11] Ibid.

that idiosyncrasy was the essence of personality. Only by meticulously retracing the loom of our neural connections – however nonsensical these connections may be – can we understand ourselves, *for we are our loom*. Proust gleaned all of this wisdom from an afternoon tea.[12]

Sondra allows herself to free associate her random memories as they come to her, circling back always to the central memory evoked by the taste of the candy.

Eilėje prie Paukščių pieno

Paukščių pieno, sako aukšta moteris brunetei,
Ir juda link manęs.
Dar keturios ir aš.
Kartoju: paukščių pieno ir imu aptrupėjusią plytelę.
Putojantis baltas šerbetas, –
Rembranto potėpis Saskijos šlauny,
Juodi saldūs trupiniai
Saskijos plaukuose.
Suleidžiu dantis ir laukiu.
Laukiuosi,
Primenu sau taip tyliai,
Kad girdėti tik laivų stiebai,
Svyrantys nuo sienų,
Ir afrikietiškos kaukės,
Miegančios gilyn į trečiąją akį....

O paukščiai išskleidžia saldžius sparnus
Ir spiria į paširdžius.
Laukite, sakau moterims,
Eilėje prie paukščių pieno,
Laukite net tuomet, kai
Paukščiai tyli,
Snapais į karstą
Kaldami.

Standing in line to buy Milk of the Birds candies

Milk of the Birds, the tall woman says to the brunette
And moves closer to me.

[12] Ibid.

There are four ahead of me.
I repeat: Milk of the Birds and reach for a crumbling square.
White milky sherbert –
Rembrandt's brush stroke, Saskia's thigh.
Sweet black crumbs
In Saskia's hair.
I sink my teeth into the candy, and I wait.
You are pregnant,
I remind myself so quietly
That all I hear are boat masts,
Tumbling down from the walls,
And the African masks,
Sleeping deep in the third eye.

And the birds spread their sweet wings
And kick me just beneath my heart.
Wait, I say to the women,
In the queue for Milk of the Birds,
Wait even then, when
Quietly the birds
Peck with their beaks
Into my coffin.

Please note that in Lithuanian the verb *laukti* can mean both to wait or await and to be pregnant, as in the English euphemism: "She's expecting." When questioned by the group about the last three lines of her poem, Sondra, who is forty-five and pregnant with her sixth child, explained that, when giving birth, the risk of death is always present.

The idea that people have more material wealth and access to goods now than they ever did, but that they are unhappier for it, came up in all the workshops. Participants had emotionally overwhelming experiences of nostalgia for simpler times, when there was less choice, less opportunity, less material wealth, but a good deal more warmth between people. These emotions are present in this spontaneous freewrite by a library worker from Klaipėda. The following unedited freewriting sample expresses these warm comradely feelings and the sense of despair over having lost them:

> The taste of Milk of the Birds candy reminds me of the Soviet era and my job in the Botanical Institute Library. We library workers offered everyone who came in a piece of candy. "Where did you get it?" people would ask. A Jewish man had opened up his own candy shop inside the institute. The administration rented him a laboratory space... Those were the days of the first cooperative shops. They made all sorts of candy in the lab – yellow candy with red inside – unheard of candy in terms of taste and appearance. They made Milk of the Birds. You could buy the candy cheaply if you bought it by the kilo and without a box, and if you didn't mind if the candy was a little lopsided. He sold it all for kopeks. It didn't matter, the taste wasn't any worse for his cheap prices. Antanina took our orders for measured kilograms of candy: "Get some for me – I don't care if they're lopsided." It's funny and sad and sweet all at the same time... Now I'm preparing for a trip abroad, and I am going out of my mind trying to come up with ideas as to what to bring with me as a gift. Twenty years have gone by, and now we have everything. I walk inside any common grocery store now and I am overwhelmed with a feeling of hopelessness. When there is so much of everything, I want nothing. I feel sick to my stomach from that feeling of not wanting anything. After all, everywhere everyone has too much of everything. Who needs the knickknacks I will bring them? They won't have anywhere to put them. I long for the days when every one of us was overjoyed when someone offered us a candy, and you knew that the candy was offered from the heart. It was so easy to surprise people and make them happy. It was easier to feel happy. It is a strange feeling, this having too much of everything. It brings all these psychological problems along with it.
>
> Something must be left from those days? Only what? It was so pleasant then to enjoy tasting a candy that was offered to you; to savor the candy's taste, to feel how, with the movement of your hand reaching out for that candy, your thoughts would begin to flow of their own accord.

As expressed in this piece, simple pleasures, such as offering someone, or being offered, a piece of candy, were appreciated.

When teaching in remote Siesikai and remembering *Goodbye Lenin*, I decided to add pickles into the food-memory mix.

Here is an example of a freewrite in which a woman associates pickles with her childhood and finds a link between the past and the present:

> Unexpectedly, I bit into a pickle and, without even realizing it, I returned to my childhood. I remembered summer vacations at Grandmother's house. I see in front of me the huge barrel of pickles down in the root cellar. There is a large wooden cover on top, held in place with a stone. I see myself as a little girl, picking cherries, blackberries, running towards Grandmother, who is working in the garden. Those were good times. Even now, I like to can pickles. I cook and boil all sorts of combinations of vegetables and pickles. I feel happy when spring comes and the earth is warm. I drop those little cucumber seeds into the earth, and then I wait for the yellow blossoms and then, later in the summer, the green cucumbers. Then the hunt for recipes begins, the conversations with neighbors over canning and spices, the exchange of expertise. I am so happy when my pickles turn out good and when I offer them to friends and family and neighbors to enjoy they all smile and tell me how good they taste. Then, I grow tired of new recipes and my mind bends back to Grandmother's pickle barrel.

In Vilnius, there were teachers in my workshop who had flashbulb memories of working in the local candy factory as teenagers. In the Soviet era, high school and college students had to volunteer a certain amount of time working for the State. These women had unique memories associated with the candies:

> This candy tastes good. However, I like candy in general, but I like good quality candy, like Rafaela from Italy. I like marmalade candy, but I don't eat it that often. The smell of chocolate always brings back certain associations and memories.
>
> I remember when I was (no, I don't remember what class I was in then) we had to fulfill our work quota at the Pergalė chocolate factory. I can't remember the exact name they called the chocolate factory back then.
>
> On the very first day I arrived at the chocolate factory, I was delighted by the wonderful scent of chocolate. We kids had to pack the New Year's Eve boxes. In the corner there were sacks of nuts. We were allowed to eat our fill. The only rule was that we couldn't leave the factory with any candy or nuts. We could

only eat it while we were there. And eat we did. We crammed our faces full. They took us on a tour of the factory and showed us how candy was made. We saw how they made the Milk of the Birds and other candies. After we worked there a few days, none of us could stand the sight of candy any longer. I would throw up as soon as I approached the vicinity of the candy factory. All of us were saying to each other: I've eaten enough candy for a lifetime. When I went home after work, I happily ate cabbage soup or pickles. These days, whenever I drive past the chocolate factory, the smell makes me sick.

Lithuania is a small northern country, a member of NATO and the European Union. Lithuania's neighbor, Russia, is often politically at odds with the Baltic States. A little more than twenty years ago, Lithuania and Russia were the same country – two Soviet states within the Soviet Union. Soviet chocolates were uniform from the Urals to the Baltic. Therefore, I found it interesting to find a reference to the Polar Bear in the North chocolates in a personal essay in *The New Yorker* blog by formerly Russian, now Canadian, writer Mikhail Iossel. This particular candy serves as the catalyst to reunite two old high school friends in a chance meeting at Strand Books in New York City:

Someone I hadn't seen in forty years recognized me the other afternoon at the Strand Book Store. In middle and high school back in Leningrad, he had been one of my closest friends. He was buying a coffee-table album of New York pictures (something along the lines of "To See New York and Die," for his mother-in-law, he told me, winking), and I'd stopped by on my way to a friend's house in the neighborhood.

A burly, broad-shouldered, handsome man of vaguely Levantine aspect – a cross, of sorts, between Hitchcock and ... oh well, those crosses and parallels tend to make nothing more vivid; a cross between Alfred Hitchcock and Angelina Jolie: how's that? – he hailed me good-naturedly, in Russian, as I was passing by the cash register: "M! M! Is that you? ... Is Mishka already up north?"

That was an old running high-school joke between us. "Mishka up north" had been one of the most popular brands of chocolate bar in the Soviet Union. Its wrapper pictured a dignified-looking polar bear strolling along a massive floe of Arctic

ice. Mishka is the common loving diminutive for any kind of bear, in Russian – be it black or polar. Mishka, of course, is also the diminutive, highly irreverent, and child-like form of Misha, which itself is the diminutive of Mikhail, which is my name. For someone to be "up north," in the general Soviet parlance, meant his having been arrested and sent off to one of the gulag destinations for his political activities – or, more likely and pertinently, the looseness of his lips, the pointless frivolity of his speeches.

The Polar Bear in the North candy takes on a different meaning in the banter between two old friends, a meaning that has a distinctly shaded Russian nuance, which is different from the mostly sentimental associations the candy held for the Lithuanian schoolteachers and fledgling writers who participated in my candy experiments. Two distinct worlds, united under one political system, associated the same candy with a different kind of memory.

Psychologist Barry Schwartz in his TED talk "The Paradox of Choice" discusses how increasingly more and more choices make us more and more miserable. Under the Soviet system, one had little to no choice. Now, as members of the European Union and a greater Europe, Lithuanians are overwhelmed by choices and opportunities. These newfound opportunities create stress for people. In the six locations where I conducted my candy experiments, I listened as person after person spoke and wrote with great nostalgia about the good-old Soviet days. Although one's first thought might be that these people are politically naïve and pine for a Big Brother figure, a Stalin or a Brezhnev, this is not the case. Contemporary post-Soviet people would never seriously condone returning to life as it was under the Soviets. They are appreciative of the privileges of democracy, independence, and capitalism. What they do long for with great nostalgia are simpler days. They mourn the loss of the psychological simplicity of living a life in which they are absolved of the complications of having to choose, even if it is the matter of a choice between two good options. The following essay by a young Lithuanian woman who now works as an English teacher after having lived in England for five years is a good example:

The basket filled with treats is coming closer to me. From afar I see the yellow wrapper of the Pineapple candy. At least once in my life I know quite firmly what I will choose. But then again, when I see the selection from up close, I waver. Maybe I should take Milk of the Birds? It looks so tantalizing with its wrapper removed, ah, chocolate. I freeze. Perhaps I can have them both? Time slows down. The others are growing impatient with me. I can't believe I'm tormented by having to make a choice – over candy?! It's always like this with me! All these choices are killing me! Why can I never have both at the same time? Why can't I walk two roads at once? Why can't I live in Vilnius and in Klaipėda? Vilnius is the capital, but the sea is here. My mother is there, but my friends are here. Should I emigrate abroad or live in my own country? Should I worry about money or my health? Should I dedicate myself to raising happy children or having a career? Should I live in an apartment in the center or in a house in the suburbs? Should I have a third baby or take some time for myself? Should I have tea or coffee? With sugar or without? Should I have a Pineapple candy or Milk of the Birds? It is always eating away at me, would the other path have been better? How will I ever know? Can I live here and there? Can I make my decision after I've tried both? Then I start blaming the Soviets. I blame the Soviet daycare, where I was forced to be just like everyone else and to fear authority and listen to directions. I have grown children already, and I still want someone to lead me by the hand. So, which candy shall it be?

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Kęstutis Navakas: Four Lyrical Essays

The Ordinary Person

Once upon a time, in one of the most ordinary cities in the center of Europe, there lived an ordinary person.

This sentence would be enough, for it contains all one needs to know of the ordinary person, all of his body and soul. Nevertheless, an essay of one sentence is obviously too short, so come on, ordinary person, get up out of bed and get under our microscope! For you are microscopic – the smallest particle of nature that exists is your soul.

Heinrich Heine once wrote that under every memorial stone lies the history of the world. In so writing, he forgot the ordinary person, under whose gravestone there lies an important piece of the world's demographic. Essentially, this person lives under a gravestone, without many signs to show that he still exists at all – doing something somewhere, sitting in a corner on a stool, invisible to the naked eye. He surfaces only when someone is run over. But even then no one comes to identify the remains, and he lies alone under the mortician's chainsaw. Life goes on: outside the window children play nice games of jump rope and "My Father Drank Today."

There are three other things that pull the ordinary person out into daylight: parliamentary elections, TV game shows, and – in pathological cases – love. He is rarely seen

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in elections either, but rather felt – after the fact, when the results are added up. The results are surprising not just to us, but to the political forecasters too. It appears our predictions and conscientious efforts went quietly to the dogs, and we elected the wrong government. This is the best evidence that the ordinary person still exists, still has a voice (doubtfully, in a musical sense), and that he is inclined to give it to the first collective-farm manager he meets. He is an ordinary person – you can't tell him anything.

This giving is a generous act, for the voice is often the only real wealth of the ordinary person, and also because he usually gets nothing in exchange for it. In fact, he can't get anything. But there are places where he can – lotteries and game shows.

Here one can get all kinds of things – from a Škoda Felicia[1] to a greasy fig.[2] The latter he owns himself, and pays attention to the aforementioned collective manager in order to orient it towards the greatest return. The ordinary person squirms about on camera, mumbles something or other, and look – he wins. You see, his competitors are even more ordinary; for them, just to be on screen is a significant event. They will talk about the experience for a long time, pointing at the screen: "I was there," they will say.

For others, it suffices to see the ordinary person on TV, for the whole world's ordinariness and all the ordinary people fit into one ordinary person. When one wins, all of them (potentially) win. They clap their hands, switch the channel, and watch *Maria Celeste*[3], who is also like them because she cries for absolutely unambiguous reasons.

The most interesting phenomenon of all is the ordinary person's love. It is often accidental. He falls in love with whoever is on hand; commonly, that would be neighbors, nurses or service workers. If such a love falls to a bookstore clerk, the ordinary person will loiter by her counter, ask about the turnover, try

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1 A car made in the Czech Republic.

2 "taukuota špyga": literally, "greasy fig," an insulting hand gesture common to parts of eastern and southern Europe.

3 A popular soap opera of the mid-90s from Venezuela.

to discuss some writer, most likely Marcinkevičius; and when she goes to hide in the storeroom, he will make a fist of his giant twelve-litas potential and ask her out for coffee. She will refuse; she is not ordinary; she sells books. In those books, she read about the danger of accidental connections, so she would only go for coffee with a non-ordinary person: the Dalai Lama, Stallone, Juocevičius. But the ordinary person will loiter by the counter the next day as well. And the next – until he finally wears a hole in the floor. In his eyes, whole libraries will be sold out.

The bookstore clerk is the Blue Dream of the ordinary person. Individuals of lesser imagination generally flirt with food staff. Themes for conversation are laid out here as well, on the other side of the refrigerated glass. Once the themes have been discussed, it's possible to acquire them, take them home and then unequivocally become one with them. The next day, relations with the clerk will be on a more practical level, and she respects that. And the twelve litai squeezed in the fist can turn out well.

In the same way that tele-game shows can result in the ordinary person becoming tele-rich, so too, love can sometimes help him turn from ordinary to un-ordinary, crossing class boundaries, changing the chemical makeup. He even begins to write letters, carrying at all times on his tongue a postage stamp for local mail. The word "love" in his letters is written calligraphically and underlined with a ruler.

Nevertheless, love for such a person rarely ends well; the letter gets stuck in the middle of the page, and the pen and ruler travel along more usual roads – filling out utility bills. The utility inspector moves into the ordinary person's dreams, knowing everything about him: address, telephone, gas and electric usage, and so on. The utilities inspector is to the ordinary person what the wolf was to Little Red Riding Hood. Sometimes he dreams that he lives inside his inspector's shaggy belly.

Artists also take an interest in the phenomenon of the ordinary person; they travel through the countryside, where Birutė's song resounds, through towns where there is the song

of Džordana,[4] stubbornly looking for that person; and when they find someone similar, they fall to writing, photographing, and carving wood. Nevertheless, it is difficult to find the ordinary person; he is a virtuoso of mimicry, melding so well with his environment that, apparently, even the air blocks our sight of him. Thus, in creative works we see the ordinary person's diluted surrogate. Acorn coffee.

The historical mission of the ordinary person in the computer age is not at all clear. There are those who still think the ordinary person is an absolute double of life, who sits for decades on the same bench. In this way, he generously returns us to the original meanings of words, to the feeling of the importance of elementary phenomena. On his lips, words (not only "table," "bottle," "galoshes," "Vycka-Ecka,"[5] and so on) have least distanced themselves from the objects they describe, and they are the best guarantee of the continuation of civilization, showing that the world is still strongly supported on its foundations, that our homes are not yet hanging in the air, that they have not sailed off among the clouds. They are only just intending to rise and sail away.

The Universe of Things

Clothes make the man, according to the well-known saying. Clothes mark a person's economic and social status, origin and class, taste or lack thereof. In clothes we see the wearer's mood or reflections of disappointments, his daily aura, even his view of the rest of the world – of what is not him, what is full of other people and other clothes. That world was made not by God or Darwin, but by Benetton, Levi-Strauss, and Christian Dior. Clothes live in that world. They sleep in closets like forgotten lovers, and sometimes they climb off their hangers and walk the avenues, wearing their people.

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4 Džordana Butkutė was a pop singer popular in the 1990s.

5 "Vycka" and "Ecka" are used as names of characters in various jokes and anecdotes.

People are not important to clothes. The only features of concern to clothes are height, the length of arms, the circumference of the neck and chest, and so on. Clothes are indifferent to us, like nature itself. Sometimes it seems as if they are a piece of nature, that they grow on trees.

This assertion is not just something taken down from the rafters, because the forefather of all clothes was the fig leaf. Two fig leaves once covered the strategically important areas of the bodies of Adam and Eve. And when they began the line of humanity, there weren't any pants or skirts by the side of the bed, but two fig leaves. By morning, they had already managed to wither, whereas pants and skirts don't wither. Maybe that's why they took leaves out of circulation. When is the last time you wore a fig leaf, dear reader? The day before, you say? Well, speak, then speak...

Clothes are obvious, far more obvious than people. People hide in them, like water in a faucet. Clothes know how to sacrifice themselves, hiding people's defects while revealing their own at the same time. Seemingly, they hide nothing from us, except for the lining, the labels, and ourselves. Nevertheless, a passerby goes and drops a handkerchief. Then the whole illusion of the candor of clothes falls apart. After all – whence that handkerchief?

It turns out that clothes have their secret life and carry it in their pockets. The clothing is just the viewable part of the iceberg: everything else goes into the pockets. Whatever we want can hide in pockets, from the keys to a Mercedes to a greasy fig. Speaking to a person with many pockets, you feel like you're reading a book from which censors have cut three-quarters of the text.

It's a good thing that the number of pockets isn't infinite, otherwise people would stuff the whole world into them. What percentage of the world is already inside pockets? No one has counted, though that research direction has strategic promise. Industry is already turning towards the pocket format. There are already not only photographs, books, and currency carried in pockets, but telephones, video cameras, and dogs.

It's naive to think that telephones should sit on a table, books on shelves, and dogs by the doghouse. Everything in your pockets! Even a thousand-some shoemakers in a factory sit in their boss's pockets. Granted, he doesn't carry them around: the pocket is a broad concept.

The word "pocket" is exemplified in the *Contemporary Lithuanian Dictionary* by the phrase: "He lives out of his father's pocket." We can imagine how the father comes home from the shoe factory and hangs his coat on the chairback. Then, said person, as described in the dictionary, sneaks up, sticks his hand in the pocket and – lives. There would have to be Social Security payments aplenty in the pocket to ensure such a life. The dictionary guarantees it.

How many pockets does the average Lithuanian citizen have? Probably around fifty. So, at the end of the twentieth century in Lithuania, there are about 200 million pockets. There is something put into every one of them, or there was, or there will be. A staggering potential, like the Donets Basin mines or the Berlin supermarket KaDeWe.

"Buying pockets": a perfect ad in the city newspaper, showing that the buyer has lots of little things. Exactly those kinds of people are usually interesting to talk to, to invite home for tea. Attention to little things reveals a high level of education and subtle tastes. For a person of truly subtle taste there will never be enough pockets.

The bliss of using pockets is sometimes sullied by various troubles, of which there are three: geographical, criminal, and rebellious. In the geographical sense, pockets can be as disorienting as the Kalahari Desert. The more we have of them, the more likely we are to lose things in them, like keys or 50 USD. Search all you want. You're just making the dogs bark, according to the dictionary. The *Atlas of all Pockets* would help, but without it, one is left to follow one's intuition: don't start looking for a wrench in your smoking jacket or for a revolver in your jeans. Intuition whispers they are not there.

There is only one criminal enemy of pockets – the pickpocket. In Lithuania, a couple of hundred wallets are pulled

out per month. A pickpocket only needs three seconds to perform this act. When we multiply these numbers, we see that a pickpocket keeps his hands in our pockets for ten minutes a month. Too long, obviously too long. Municipalities should ponder this problem, create pickpocket police units, and the representatives of such units should periodically check citizens' pockets – just in case someone has managed to pull something out of them already.

The final and greatest enemies of pockets are the little things themselves. They are mobile, dynamic, and easily bored with lying still. They take up a quiet resistance and slowly unravel the totalitarian structure of pockets. They unravel a hole and spill into the lining. Then you can look till doomsday for your ring with the fake diamond or a desperately needed girl's telephone number written down on an orange rind. They are gone, escaped to freedom. The world has already forgotten them. After that, Granny Lionė comes by with a needle sticking out of a spool of gray thread and sews up the hole like some light at the end of the tunnel.

Nevertheless, an empty pocket is a sad sight, like an empty bottle of wine. It calls out for new content. It has nothing but form, place, emptiness. Without its little things, it is without a soul. So, all the more quickly, I'll wind up this essay, fold it, and put it in my pocket. Let the pocket read. Let it live.

The Solitude of Cafes

Fortunetellers like the ace of hearts. When they work with dreams, they prefer the dream book of Greater Egypt. In a similar manner, fortunetellers who work with coffee grounds prefer Turkish coffee. It has the grounds, the fate: happiness or ruin. Ruddy runes cover JIESIA porcelain.

I never liked the Turkish way of making coffee. It is mute; and sitting with your back to the bar, nothing will reveal the birth of a new cup of coffee. A new customer: a new serving

of coffee diluted with loneliness. Older machines, sputtering and wheezing, immediately force you to prick up your ears. How many servings? Two promise a comfortable cooing at a neighboring table, three – the lively tone of spinsters' laughter, for whom life has already been fully tasted and filled, and who have learned to spend lunch breaks with zest. The apparatus's long series of spurting sounds promises a youth in jeans who has nowhere to sit; he will chirp about that, as you yourself chirped a decade and a half ago, and every passerby on the avenue will look like Proust, carrying lost time.

Still, there is one more kind of sputtering that is like the cut of a sword, under which the head of a solitary person at the next table will fall. You will rise before it rolls away, and the corners of your eyes will meet the corners of his eyes. Yes, you are both emigrants; yearning has destroyed your homes, but even here you are not two. You are one, and he is one. The coffee machine gifts you with a thousand seconds of merely offhand neighborliness.

Coffee is not a drink. Coffee is a ritual, one of our cosmopolitan features. In its gregarious meaning it is conversation, the eventual touching of fingers on the table's horizontal, the last gulp of fear before the conversation ends. An invitation to coffee is an invitation to a micro-model of Paris. It is the possibility that an awaited miracle will take place. You will go for coffee and read to each other for a long time, sharing the poets who've amazed you, or you will kiss until five in the morning with "Shocking Blue" on the stereo. After that, you will be surprised to feel fatally in love, yet the invitation to coffee will never come again.

This will mean that while, for the other person, half a cup was enough, you went and dove to the bottom, getting lost in the grounds. The coffee of solitude will remain, where we found you at the beginning of this essay.

To this cup, people come from different sides. From one side come those seeking a brief escape from telephones, wives, neighborhood girls, and dogs, from overstretched habits like bottomless bags. These are the reasons people go fishing, fix

cars, and dig up gardens. They want to experience contraband, forbidden (in the home) solitude, solitude strengthened fourfold by all the colors and smells of their escape. That kind of person, with the last gulp of coffee in his mouth, is chased home by the clock, whose long directional arrows turn over his head. Without any special warning, his door shuts.

From the other side of the cup, the pure products of nature come to drink. Sumerians died out thousands of years ago; the Jotvingian swamps swallowed the armies of the Crusaders; and later on, the forms of civilization changed with ever-shorter intervals. Yet cuneiform writing, shouted from the primordial mouth, still pursues the solitary person in the street. Cities are not built for the lonely, and they wait for the city's reflections to turn over in the cup. The cup of coffee situates a person like that – his time and place of wandering become concrete. He can stop and look around.

"Give me a place to stand, and I will move the world," said Archimedes. The coffee cup is a place to stand, and the world really does begin to move, tearing off its anonymity like a pharaoh's mummy slowly unwound. Fragments of conversation, glances from neighboring tables, details of clothing – all of them are signs showing that the world still exists and that somewhere within it there will be a place for you. You drink the atmosphere, becoming more and more possible – not anyone's dream – until finally, you feel like Jean-Baptiste Grenouille from the novel *Perfume*: you have gathered all the possible perfumes except for one – your own. It is impossible to get to know you: a substitute for coffee steam. Your yearning lacks concrete characteristics. If you would unbutton your shirt, there would be yawning emptiness underneath. A great shard of emptiness.

Palaver. This is all a lot of pointless chatter you think up while pushing your coffee around the table. You used to collect stamps, dreaming of traveling to those multicolored countries – to all of them at once! Now you collect your palaver, wanting it to dissolve you, trying to distance duty and responsibility. And that coffee – yet another means of avoiding

action, an attempt to take Eve's apple away so that the world would remain un-begun. And if I have guessed this all correctly – you pay for my coffee; if not – I'll get out of here in time. Though, I've never managed to get out in time.

So grab your cup and come sit close by: I see your fortune in the grounds of your eyes.

You once dreamed at night that you were not there, that not one finger could touch you under the sheet, that not one candle could illuminate your face. You are doomed to a bodiless wandering in the city streets, looking for the smallest sign that you have been here before. Your number is not in a single address book. Not one book writes anything important for you. And just as it seems you have found something, in the slightest context of actual life, you disappear again like a shadow in sun. Only in the coffee cup do you find your face, and from it you blow yourself up like a giant bubble. Solitary. Yes. Nevertheless.

Those two over there, cooing at the next table. They are drowning in each other's habits. They are, to each other, illusions that they eat up with large bites. One without the other, they are equally alone – even lonelier, because then they have no alternative context.

The three spinsters have nothing but their work and fleeting informational themes over the table: "and she says..." Their solitude is sublimated: they don't even want to take a vacation. Wherever would they go?

And the youth in jeans, pouring himself a birthday champagne under the table? In mood and demeanor he feigns depth, but his words never manage to convey it. After every phrase there is either emptiness or simulation.

And your "Shocking Blue" girl, to whom you were the paragon of chivalry? That episode was nothing but a mirror reflecting your eternal yearning for the feminine, the blink of an eye that blinded you because it was just a bit brighter than the others. Will you sacrifice an army of trouble to conquer your mirage?

It's not strange to see you get up and leave with that smile. Letting romance run makes the world comfortably real. And everything becomes possible. Even a second cup of coffee late on Christmas Eve, there, where you really want it. As for what is left on the table, I will have to pay.

In Defense of Tables, or The Table: An Apologia

Floors. They are, in this instance, of utmost importance. Without them, we wouldn't get into the room; without them, we would fall through somewhere into the depths, into Gothic basements or root cellars, into a Soviet hideaway or a Nazi bunker, maybe even into Hades, where Eurydice escaped from Orpheus. There is almost nothing down there. You read in books about corpses under the floor, a box of thalers, and you peel back the boards – nothing of the kind. A grey, moldy, mouse-infested park. So – the boards back in their place, a path of rugs over them, and on the path – a table.

A room with a table and two stools is called a minimalist interior, or a friend-of-port-wine interior. You will find such a sight most often in the kitchen, but in another room there will always be additional detail. A glassed-in section, an axe without a haft, a wedding photo on the wall (all grooms on walls, with their doubtful mustaches, are alike). Nevertheless, a table is the indubitable center. Let us ponder how furniture might be differentiated in terms of a throne and its greater or lesser periphery. From this point of view, a table for a Chinese vase will be a total backwater, while the true table of real, live communication will be backed by the sky, waiting for the president to take his seat.

In the absence of the president, or of any of life's passers-by, objects of the room like to lie on the table – little things, we might add, those fated to migrate, to clamber over horizontal planes, changing their places of dislocation, forcing us to search for them. Where is that Klimt album now, or the little box with

the wolf-tooth necklace? Where are those two things for which our searching never ends: keys and eyeglasses? You put them right here, yet they emigrated and the room covered up their tracks. They will wander a while longer, no doubt, then emerge onto the table like a float on the water's surface. If we lined up all the things that had once been on a table, their chain would wind three times around the earth. By their orientation, Columbus could discover America three times over.

The table takes part in all of our festivities: it marries us, seats us, and lifts up our birthday plates. It does away with us. Numerous losers died by their own tables. A few shot themselves and fell on their tables with holes in their heads. I heard about one knavish artist from Šiauliai who tried to use his table to scare his wife. He would cut a hole in it and stick his head through the hole, and he stuck his tongue out through his teeth. He would pour something red around his neck, and when his wife came home she would faint, run to the law courts, and he changed one for another, like the leaves of a calendar. The table doesn't comprehend our guile: its soul is naive and benevolent.

The table generously hides our mischief. Under it, during a meeting, you can give the finger to your boss, or caress his secretary's knee. You can even take off your shoes beneath it, and this fact will more likely be given away by the emanation from your socks than by any impatience on the table's part. After all, the table is also barefoot, like most quadrupeds. At that same meeting, the table is our support and our meaning. If at first we place our palms on it, later we pile on our elbows and then take to resting even our chests and shoulders. Try at such a time to pull the table to the side – the chairs will certainly not attempt to hold their sitters. Chairs are just the unassuming vassals of the table.

What is there more of in the world: people or tables? The numbers are probably similar. And they multiply with similar speed; nevertheless, the origin of tables will never be blamed on faulty contraception. The origin of the table is always conceived and awaited because the world piles up enough junk to

put on it. Has anyone ever calculated the percentage of things in the world that lie on tables? Under tables? In the drawers of tables? What is the rate per minute of writing literature on tables, of drinking vodka, or of drawing up plans to rob banks? Until scientists discover all there is to know about these things, the universal idea of the table will keep them in bread.

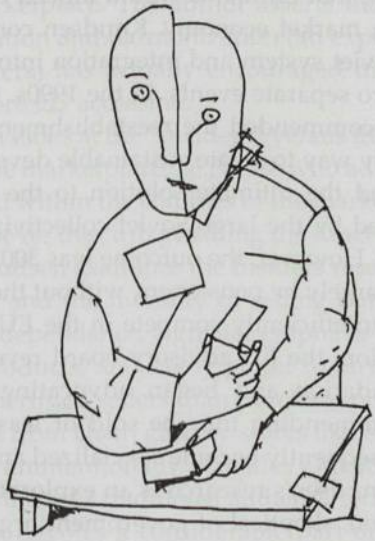
Doubtless, tables are various, individual, with different intellects and temperaments. Some are even marked by a nine-year-old child's stubbornness and won't easily let their drawers be opened. So much the greater pleasure in opening them! Still, tables can be sorted into kinds by means of their most salient dispositions, in the way that we separate Indo-Europeans from even-toed ungulates. The most fundamental and widespread of them can be grouped into two types: dinner (meeting) tables and magazine (coffee) tables. Dinner tables are especially universal. On them, one not only eats and drinks, but sometimes sleeps or dances a striptease (in bad novels). Civilization has made mountains of accessories for them, beginning with tablecloths the size of Columbus's sails, finishing with six-foot vases into which it is possible to soak a thuja with its garden-bed. An empty, naked dinner table is a sorry sight, even foreboding, as if everyone had forgotten you, or there was a war on, a famine, a plague. Then you become worried about your fate and go deal out a fifteen-deck game of solitaire on top of it. You avoid looking at the sad faces of the Jacks.

A coffee table is an island of peculiar intimacy. How pleasant it is to sit shoulder to shoulder with a pretty girl, browsing through some magazine. A coffee table guarantees that there will be few witnesses nearby – and many sofas. And it can happen that, at just the right time, you will both gently let the journal go from your hands. Hands will find hands sufficient, and the table will faithfully hold your candle, champagne, and an understanding rose turning itself away. Later, the day will separate you, and after some time, you will be sitting at the table with a letter in your hand. "I remember your room," she (he) will write. "I remember your coffee table."

There are also other tables, but to take a woman to see the bedside table is not very subtle and rarely ends well. There are also card and chess tables, kitchen tables, moonlight-kissed writing tables, and so on, and so forth. People of other countries are usually people of other tables. The Japanese, for instance, are often people of lower height, so they don't go about insulting their size by means of table-height. They cut off the legs of tables, so that their tables are barely higher than their sea.

It is a common scene as the curtain rises: there is a balcony center-stage, and beyond it, a Japanese sea: in the foreground of the sea, two chairs and a TABLE. It doesn't matter who will enter here from backstage, what and how they will act. The table stands like a soulful symbol of serenity. It simply is. It is not acting.

Translated by Rimas Uzgiris



BOOK REVIEWS

New Lithuania in Old Hands. Ida Harboe Knudsen. New York: Anthem Press, 2012. ISBN: 978-1783080472.

New Lithuania in Old Hands is an analysis of the transformation of the agricultural sector in Lithuania since EU accession in 2004. The result of Ida Harboe Knudsen's ethnographic doctoral dissertation, this research looks at how Lithuania's social, political, and economic structures limit EU policy and how EU legislation has affected the family dynamic in rural Lithuania. Knudsen asserts that EUropeanization (with uppercase "EU") has created a class of marginalized EU citizens, disconnected from the center and largely rejecting EU policy. The author's research revolves around case studies conducted between 2004 and 2006 in two villages in the rich agricultural region of southwestern Lithuania.

Knudsen begins her analysis by explaining the privatization process that occurred after independence was declared in 1990 and the speed with which it was conducted to prove to Western Europe that Lithuania would indeed be a democratic country with a market economy. Knudsen considers the collapse of the Soviet system and integration into the EU as one process, not two separate events. In the 1990s, the EU and the World Bank recommended the reestablishment of the family farm as the only way to create sustainable development in the countryside and the ultimate solution to the environmental pollution caused by the large Soviet collectivized and industrialized farms. However, the outcome was 300,000 small family farms, run largely by pensioners, without the specialization or equipment to efficiently compete in the EU market. Thus, prior to accession, the EU advisory board reversed their earlier recommendation and began advocating consolidation of farms, recommending they be sold or leased to younger farmers to consequently become specialized and modernized. The heart of Knudsen's research is an exploration of how the older population, skeptical of government organizations, has

not fully cooperated with EU resolutions, leaving Lithuanian farms small and inefficient.

In her first analytical chapter, "Paradoxes of Aging," Knudsen looks at the tenuous relationship between the state and farmers. To highlight the marginalization felt by the rural populace, Knudsen specifically uses examples from her field research, where she witnessed the proceedings of local meetings held to inform farmers of EU regulations. She obtains testimony from farmers who feel that these regulations do not pertain to them, who believe that EU mandated contracts between neighbors are too formal, illogical, and even offensive.

The following chapters examine the response and effects of specific EU programs, namely the EU Early Retirement Program and the national milk price policy. Both were aimed at reducing the number of older farmers over the age of sixty, which as of 2004 was 50 percent. (91) However, Knudsen demonstrates that these policies have largely failed, because rural farmers, distrustful of institutions and preferring the security of maintaining their own land and livestock, have not retired in great numbers. Many continue to sell illegally (without regard to EU criteria for food safety) outside the confines of the regulated marketplace. The author asserts that the EU policy of standardization and harmonization (an expensive endeavor for poor farmers) has actually encouraged more illegal sales now than before EU accession.

Knudsen looks at the "Insiders" versus the "Outsiders" in the realm of the marketplace, i.e., those who adhere to EU regulations and sell within the confines of the market hall and those who sit outside on the curb peddling the exact same goods unregulated. Knudsen examines the Insiders resentment towards the Outsiders and the morality of selling outside EU regulations. Since independence, a greater emphasis has been placed on "home" products, and many prefer to buy dairy products from local uncertified sellers than purchase preserved, plastic-wrapped food from chain grocery stores like Maxima or RIMI. Thus, the EU unintentionally provides Outsiders with a marketing niche – that of a traditional authentic local farm product.

Knudsen devotes a considerable part of her research to investigating emigration as an unintended consequence of

EUropeanization and devotes her final chapter to examining the current social dynamic on the family farm. With the lowest male life expectancy in the EU and the largest gap between male and female life expectancies (66 years for men and 78 for women), the household is typically under the supervision of older women incapable of doing much of the hard labor on their own. (137) The author illustrates the typical situation in rural Lithuania as one where the father is sick, the mother carries most of the household burden, the daughters marry and move away, and the unmarried son(s), who have chosen to work and live in the cities, return on weekends to help with hard labor on the farm. The EUropeanization of Lithuania has resulted in an "urban-rural compromise" or "circular migration," pressuring the youth with feelings of kinship obligation and parental expectation.

Knudsen has painted a thorough portrait of the consequences of EU accession and the impact of agricultural regulations on the "average" farmer in Lithuania. One can draw from her conclusions that EU membership has brought no advantage to the Lithuanian farmer and, in fact, is just another type of foreign "domination" put upon Lithuanians and thus similar to the Soviet regime. At one point, Knudsen explains that the ideologies of the Soviet Union and the European Union are different, but their goals are the same: to foster large production by fewer farms. She even refers to the time between the fall of the USSR and EU accession as Lithuania's "independent era": "In this sense, it was only in the *period of independence* that it made sense for villagers to have 2-4 cows" [my italics]. (97) Other than a lengthy section about the corruption and immorality of rural political parties, the work stays on topic and is concise. Knudsen does not offer insight into any *advantages* of European Union membership for the average farmer. The notion is nowhere addressed, and a bit of balance would have been appreciated. However, overall, *New Lithuania in Old Hands* is a highly informative read, particularly of interest to readers questioning the affects of the EU on individuals and on rural populations.

Julianne Maila

A History They Cannot Entirely Possess

Maps of Memory. Trauma, Identity and Exile in Deportation Memoirs from the Baltic States. Edited by Violeta Davoliūtė and Tomas Balkelis. Vilnius: Institute of Lithuanian Literature and Folklore, 2012. ISBN: 9786094250897.

My initial encounter with deportation memoirs, ironically enough, happened through the only newspaper for children and young adults available in Soviet Lithuania. I forget what it was called at the time, but it was the renamed successor of *The Lithuanian Pioneer*. Shortly before the restoration of Lithuania's independence, it ran a series of deportation memoirs that came in many installments; and I remember waiting for them excitedly, reading them fervently and going through intense emotions, while being extremely confused as to how to take it all in. I had the impression of being initiated into secret knowledge, learning about a forbidden truth, and finding it hard to integrate into my understanding of the world. It was only later that I learned about my own family's experiences of the Soviet repressions.

Twenty odd years later, on the occasion of the eightieth anniversary of the deportations from Lithuania, I reread the collection of former deportees' memoirs *Amžino įšalo žemėje* (In the Land of Permafrost. Vilnius: Vyturys, 1989). In 2011, the experience was every bit as moving as the earlier one; but this time around, it was not only the knowledge of the historical context that caught up with me, but also the echoes of my readings over the years in theory and literature. The combination of the altered circumstances of the reading experience meant that all the way through the text I could not shake off the idea that the deportations experienced by fellow Lithuanians all those years ago were profoundly and inextricably linked not just with the soaring suicide rates, extensive alcohol abuse, and domestic violence in contemporary Lithuania, but also with Lithuania's ever-growing emigration numbers. I could not stop thinking of Cathy Caruth, who wrote: "If PTSD

must be understood as a pathological symptom, then it is not so much a symptom of the unconscious, as it is a symptom of history. The traumatized, we might say, carry an impossible history within them, or they become themselves the symptom of a history that they cannot entirely possess." (Cathy Caruth, ed. *Trauma. Explorations in Memory.* Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995, p. 5) The experience of the Gulag is the history Lithuanians do not seem to be able to possess, no matter how many memoirs are published, read, shared, or reiterated, and no matter how many commemorative events are held. It remains overwhelming, elusive, and painful. While reading *Amžino įšalo žemėje,* I also thought of the likes of James Olney, who wrote: "Memory reaches towards the future as towards the past and balance demands a poised receptiveness in both directions." (*Memory and Narrative: The Weave of Life-Writing.* University of Chicago Press, 1998, p. 343) This suggests that trying to understand and explain the past is actually a step towards the future and societies that have not fully considered their past, nor given it an appropriate meaning, are unable to fully invest in their futures.

The book *Maps of Memory. Trauma, Identity and Exile in Deportation Memoirs from the Baltic States* is a mature and, I think, successful attempt to intellectualize the trauma of the past in relation to the present and even the future. The book originated in a historical conference, entitled Maps of Memory: Trauma, Identity and Exile in Gulag Testimonies, held at the Institute of Lithuanian Literature and Folklore in Vilnius in 2012.

The introduction by Violeta Davoliūtė and Tomas Balkelis initiates the reader into the existing body of work on the Holocaust and the Soviet deportations, thus providing a theoretical and contextual background to the essays that follow. Among other things, the editors carefully explain the difference between the Holocaust and the Soviet terror: "The first was a premeditated genocide, and the second was a highly repressive and often murderous system of forced labor. Yet it is impossible to understand the trauma of Baltic societies in the cauldron of WWII without an awareness of both." (p. 14) They

thus situate the research presented in the book within the current theoretical framework and point out the uniqueness of the Lithuanian, Latvian, and Estonian experience.

In a similar way, Aldis Purs contextualizes the deportations from Latvia and, by extension, from the three Baltic States: "Essentially, Latvian historians and much of the public understand Soviet repression and deportations as part of a genocidal project against the Latvian nation. Soviet specialists disagree. They draw attention to the differences between Gulag sentences and administrative exile, and place Baltic deportations into the larger framework of Soviet terror and the forced displacement of populations that include similar actions in the USSR in the 1920s and 1930s." (p. 34-35) This point of view, if adopted widely by the contemporary societies of the three Baltic States, may help them better understand their historical situation and could even prove to have a healing effect.

The essays in the first part of the book focus on the experiences of different groups of deportees. Tomas Balkelis looks at child deportees and argues that they are a particularly interesting group because, at the time of deportation, their personalities were still emerging and the traumatic experience was instrumental in shaping their individual personas. As a group, what children and young adults experienced was quite distinct from what adults experienced, because children often attended school, learned the local language, and integrated into local society, while their parents and other members of the family were subjected to hard labor on collective farms. Balkelis concludes that lack of experience, among other things, led child deportees to adopt some survival strategies inaccessible to adults, strategies that proved to be rather subversive.

Dalia Leinartė focuses on gender roles in deportation and argues that they were transplanted from interwar Lithuania to Siberia unaltered and stayed curiously unchanged, even though women and men were often separated in their locations of imprisonment and displacement. It is striking that women as a group emerge as self-effacing and self-sacrificing, often risking their lives to save their sons and husbands, who might have

been hundreds or thousands of miles away. On the other hand, men as a group appear to be weak and fragile: "There are incomparably more frequent references to tears, eternal sorrow, and starvation in men's accounts" (p. 83), writes Leinartė. Conversely, both genders seem to have found it hardest to come to terms with a certain effacement of gender roles in the face of overwhelmingly hard labor, inhumane living conditions, and violence. Dovilė Budrytė's essay discusses the oral memories of two female resistance fighters who worked as personal assistants and messengers for resistance leaders. Their work was just as dangerous as that of male resistance fighters, but was, of course, considered much lower in rank. However, when it came to imprisonment and torture at the hands of the Soviet army officers, both women felt they suffered as much as men did.

The second part of the book features essays that bridge the temporal gap between then and now in an attempt to clarify the sway that deportation narratives still hold on the contemporary Lithuanian psyche. Violeta Davoliūtė's essay, aptly entitled "We are All Deportees," is central to the volume because it does exactly that. She focuses on the reception of deportation narratives when they were first published, read, and interpreted in Lithuania in 1988-1991 and considers them in the larger context of displacement in Lithuania during the early Soviet period, including general features of Soviet reforms, such as collectivization, land reclamation, urbanization, and mobilization. She argues that the theme of traumatizing displacement featured in deportation narratives was combined into the myth of "universal" deportation and appropriated by the Soviet Lithuanian intelligentsia. Davoliūtė's argument is well summarized here: "The myth of universal deportation and the discourse of cultural genocide were key to transcending the social divisions of Soviet Lithuanian society and to welding the people together in the heat of the popular movement, but only for a short time." (p. 109) She then goes on to paint a rather disturbing picture of the lasting legacy of the Soviet deportations and the Holocaust in Lithuania. Davoliūtė explains how Soviet

Lithuania was painfully split by the different experiences of displacement into two "nations": one, if not supported, at least created and sustained by the Soviet regime and the new life-style it imposed, and the other, crushed and persecuted by the regime during and after the actual repressions. The first took and held the position of discursive and sometimes actual power during the run-up to the restoration of independence and partly kept it thereafter, while the other was marginalized. It is a very interesting and complicated take on the lasting and accumulative effects of the Soviet occupation in Lithuania, which, I am sure, will spark a debate. Whatever its true origins, the traumatic divide still holds contemporary Lithuania in its powerful grip, contributing heavily to the negative psychological climate in the country and possibly driving thousands of Lithuanians toward not always stable and fulfilled existences elsewhere.

Eglė Rindzevičiūtė's and Aro Velmet's essays look at the deportation narratives offered by state and private museums in the three Baltic States. This is also a stimulating part of the book, especially considering that Lithuanian museums are often criticized for one-sidedness in their interpretation of history. Both authors argue that museum collections are often not shaped by nationalist or state ideology, but rather by limited resources, meager funding, lack of staff, and dependence on private donations.

The volume is closed by two beautiful and moving autobiographical pieces that provide a different kind of background to the preceding academic essays. The first one, by Modris Eksteins, recreates the circumstances of one deported family from a very personal point of view. The second one, by the writer Julija Šukys, documents her trans-Siberian, trans-generational journey into the long gone, but still unpossessed, past of her own family.

Although the essays vary in quality, and there are some spelling and editing mistakes, this is an engaging book that deserves to be widely read.

Eglė Kačkutė

ABSTRACT

Candy as Memory Catalyst

Laima Vince

Jonah Lehrer's insights in his book *Proust was a Neuroscientist*, in particular his discovery of how lost worlds could be rediscovered through taste, inspired an experiment with groups of teachers in Lithuania who believed themselves to be participating in a writing workshop. The experiment tested whether a person can be induced to experience a flashbulb memory if the hippocampus is deliberately accessed via the sense of taste.

Six writing workshops in six distinct regions of Lithuania, held in February 2013, formed the basis of the experiment, along with a two-day writing seminar and workshop for a writers' group in Klaipėda made up of professionals, artists, and teachers who wrote for their own enjoyment. My goal was to prepare a writing exercise that would have the effect of inducing the writer to produce a powerfully charged emotional piece of writing in a comparatively short period of time – during a fifteen minute freewriting period. I set up a series of test conditions in which participants tasted certain local sweets that were popular in the Soviet era and are less popular now, and then wrote about their thoughts and feelings. The results were a series of homogenous pieces that were a detailed remembrance of life during the years of the Soviet occupation, and which are presented in this article.

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