

# LITUANUS

THE LITHUANIAN QUARTERLY

VOLUME 64:1 (2018)

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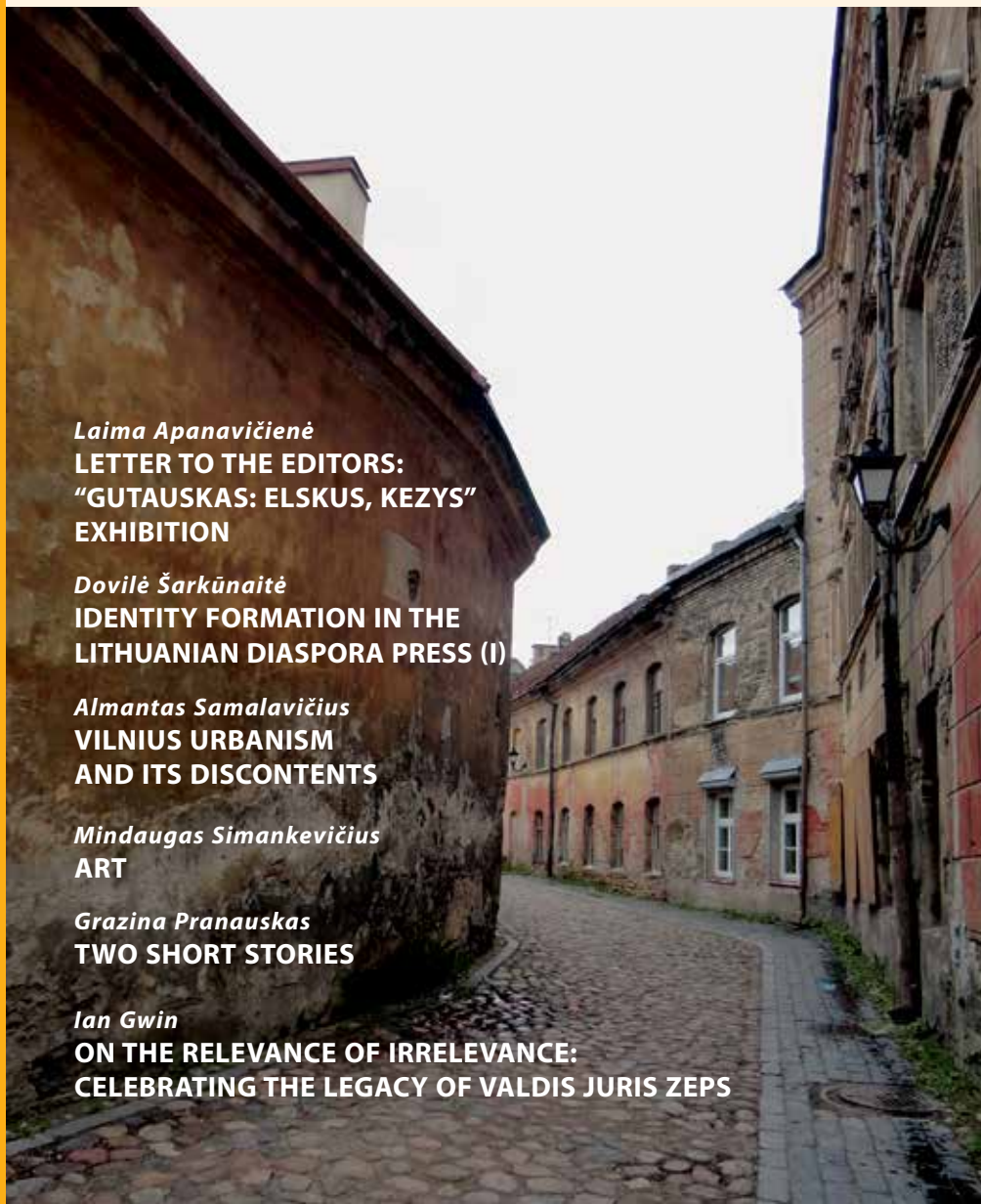
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# LITUANUS

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THE LITHUANIAN QUARTERLY JOURNAL OF ARTS AND SCIENCES

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VOLUME 64:1, Spring 2018



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**Lituanus: The Lithuanian Quarterly** (published since 1954) is a multi-disciplinary academic journal presenting and examining various aspects of Lithuanian culture and history. Authors are invited to submit scholarly articles, *belles lettres*, and art work. Manuscripts will be reviewed. Books are accepted for review purposes.

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**Editorial Office:** editor@lituanus.org  
**Administration:** admin@lituanus.org  
**Publisher:** Lituanus Foundation, Inc., Giedrius Subačius, President  
**Address:** 47 West Polk Street, Suite 100–300, Chicago, IL 60605–2000  
Phone/Fax 312/945-0697

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Articles are archived and accessible at **www.lituanus.org** and in microform from University Microfilms ([www.proquest.com/brand/umi.shtml](http://www.proquest.com/brand/umi.shtml)). They are indexed in: MLA International Bibliography; PAIS International; International Political Science Abstracts; Historical Abstracts (EBSCO); Linguistic Bibliography (Netherlands); Linguistics and Language Behavior Abstracts; RILM Abstracts of Music Literature; Bibliography of the History of Art; OCLC Article First.

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Worldwide circulation per issue – 1,550 copies.

Individual subscriptions \$30.00. Seniors/students \$20.00.

Institutional print subscriptions \$40.00. Electronic copy only \$20.00.

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Printed by Kingery Printing Company, Henry Division, Henry, IL

Cover Design by Vincas Lukas.

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Periodical non-profit postage paid at Chicago, IL and other locations.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to LITUANUS, 47 West Polk Street, Suite 100-300, Chicago, IL 60605-2000

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*Urban paradoxes.  
Bicycle route on the pavement in Vilnius.  
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## Letter to the Editors

### **“Gutauskas: Elskus, Kezys” Exhibition**

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LAIMA APANAVIČIENĖ

One of the main centers of Lithuanian Americans in Chicago is a massive building called the Youth Center. It is in Gage Park, a neighborhood between Brighton Park and Marquette Park. The Youth Center was designed by architect Jonas Kovaš-Kovalskis and built in 1957. Originally, two buildings were built: the Youth Center and the monastery. In 1971, architects Jonas and Rimas Mulokas joined both buildings into one. The facade of the wall that connects the two buildings is adorned with a stylized Vytis, Lithuania's coat of arms. It was designed by Jonas Mulokas who was inspired by the painting of Mykolas Konstantinas Čiurlionis. Jonas Mulokas assembled this piece himself using 6,000 colored tiles.

2017 marks the sixtieth anniversary of the Youth Center. The exhibition “Gutauskas: Elskus, Kezys” is dedicated to this anniversary and to the person whose enthusiasm, diligence, and cleverness enabled the construction of the buildings that Lithuanians of Chicago have been using and enjoying for sixty years.

If you simply look chronologically, it appears that the construction of the Youth Center was a straight forward project. Unfortunately, that was not the case. As it usually is, lack of money was the biggest obstacle to the construction. Fundraising events were held. Various organizations tried to support the construction of the Youth Center in any way they could. However, when we look into the history of the construction, we see that Father Vaclovas Gutauskas, SJ (1913–2003) did the greatest amount of work in raising funds.

He understood that living on this side of the Atlantic, Lithuanians would soon lose their nationality if they did not come together, have joint activities, and teach Lithuanian to children. To make this happen, the idea of building a large building for children and adolescents took root. After the funds were raised, the building was completed and called the Youth Center.

The Jesuits appointed Father Vaclovas Gutauskas, SJ to do the hard work of fundraising. Father Gutauskas was said to be a priest on wheels. This was not because he was driving for his own pleasure. He drove extensively, every day, to raise funds from potential donors. Looking for good-hearted and generous donors, Father Gutauskas traveled around the United States for 18 years. It is said that during those years he used up 18 cars. Respected by donors, and through their generosity, he collected 90% of the funds needed for the construction of the Youth Center, the monastery, the chapel and the connection between the two buildings.

When he could no longer drive, Father Gutauskas continued working for the benefit of the Youth Center. In 1980, together with others, he set up a fund named after Jesuit Father Bronius Krištanavičius. The fund was intended to raise money for re-establishing the Jesuit province in Lithuania. This fund was active until 1993.

Vaclovas Gutauskas was born on August 15, 1913 in Didžioji Trakiškė village, Antanavas County, Marijampolė District. Twenty years later, on that same day of August he entered the Society of Jesus. The young man needed a lot of patience, strength, and resolve until he became a priest in Gallarate, Italy. He studied philosophy at the Aloysius Institute and completed his theological studies at the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome, in 1946.

After he was ordained, Father Vaclovas worked with parishioners in Rome. He celebrated Holy Mass, listened to confessions, and gave sermons. After World War II, together with Father Bruzikas, he worked in refugee camps in Köln, Germany and elsewhere, organizing spiritual retreats for children, adolescents



*Father Vaclovas Gutauskas, SJ while raising funds for the Youth Center. Photo by Algimantas Kezys*

and adults, and spreading the Good News. After arriving in the United States in 1952, he worked for three years as the Chaplain of the Crucifixion Jesus Sisters in Elmhurst, PA where he oversaw the spiritual congregation, gave sermons, and listened to confessions. While living in Chicago, he worked for the benefit of the Youth Center as long as his health allowed.

He expressed his extensive pastoral experience in a popular religious booklet "Who Looks and Does Not See". Many of his articles were published in "Letters to Lithuanians", "Star" and other Lithuanian publications.

Father Gutauskas died in Chicago and on November 26, 2003, he was buried in St. Casimir's Cemetery in Chicago.



The exhibition includes 26 photographs taken in refugee camps in Germany by the famous artist Albinas Bielskis-Elskus (born in Kaunas on August 21, 1926, died in New York on February 8, 2007). In his photographs, the artist captured Father Gutauskas as a young man. We believe that the photographs by the famous artist Elskus are being shown for the first time.

A well-known photographer Algimantas Kezys (born on October 28, 1928 in Vištytis, Vilkaviškis County, died in Boston, USA on February 23, 2015) captured the life of Father Gutauskas in Chicago. In the seven photos that are shown in the exhibit, we see Father Vaclovas sitting behind his work desk and in one of his cars.

All of the photos were selected from the holdings of the Lithuanian Research and Studies Center, and edited and printed by the curator of the exhibition, Dr. Audrius Plioplys. Father Gutauskas was Dr. Plioplys' uncle.

*Translated by Dr. AUDRIUS PLIOPLYS*

# Identity Formation in the Lithuanian Diaspora Press (I)

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DOVILĖ ŠARKŪNAITĖ

## Introduction

Emigration is one of the most powerful forces affecting contemporary Lithuania. It influences almost every facet of the nation's life: from its economy to politics, from culture to mass media. In a way it is both a loss of social capital as well as an opportunity for Lithuania to develop as an integral part of the Western world. However, perhaps the most significant way in which emigration affects the nation's conception of selfhood is by shaping the concept of Lithuanian national identity: emigration both furthers the more nationalistic, patriotic conception of Lithuania as a unique country that is incomparable to others for people who oppose emigration or feel unsatisfied with their own life in the diaspora, and it also helps to spread the ideology of globalism that is appealing to those who see emigration as a bridge to the Western world. Either way, it is clear that regardless of whether people have left the country or remain in Lithuania, emigration has a huge influence on Lithuanians and their relationships to their homeland as well as their conceptions of their national identity.

This article aims to examine the ways in which Lithuanian emigrants who live in the United Kingdom and the United States construct their identities in highly international and globalized environments. In this piece of comparative research, cultural identity establishment in a diaspora setting was explored through

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the lens of media, namely newspapers that have emigrants as their primary audience and serve as a tool of disseminating the ideology of *Lithuanianess*, in other words, Lithuanian national identity.<sup>1</sup> Other than spreading an ideology that aids in maintaining a sense of ethnic and national identities, media intended for an emigrant audience also serves a community-building function: by invoking highly idealized national symbols, diaspora media triggers the process of “imagining in the form of symbolic geography, the mechanism through which a community sees itself in relation to others on a symbolic map, reproduces journey narratives, and constantly reworks identity”.<sup>2</sup> As such, both spoken and written media play an important role in the lives of emigrants since “we feel ourselves to belong to groups and communities which are constituted in part through the media”, which is why representations of the emigration experience in media is an important aspect of diasporic community building.<sup>3</sup>

In order to examine the ways in which cultural and ethnic identity is constructed and disseminated through media that is aimed primarily at Lithuanian emigrants who live in the UK and the USA, the method of thematic analysis was employed to analyze the UK-based newspapers *Info Ekspresas* and *Tiesa*, and USA-based newspapers *Čikagos Aidas* and *Draugas* that were published in 2014, 2015 and 2016. This particular timeframe was selected because the focus of the present study is current emigration and identity trends rather than the development of diasporic communities across a longer period of time.

The reason why newspapers were chosen as the source of data is the fact that they serve the function of “encouraging their readers to see the world in general in specifically national terms, ‘reminding them of their own nation in particular and helping them to think in patriotic terms about it’”.<sup>4</sup> Newspapers play an import-

<sup>1</sup> See Čiubrinskas and Kuznecovienė, *Lietuviškojo identiteto trajektorijos*.

<sup>2</sup> Trandafoiu, “The Whole Greater Than the Sum of Its Parts,” 102.

<sup>3</sup> Thompson, *The Media and Modernity*, 35.

<sup>4</sup> Rosie et al., “Nation Speaking Unto Nation? Newspapers and National Identity in the Devolved UK,” 347.

ant role in constructing national identities and disseminating national agendas, which makes them a tool of identity building that can also reveal the needs and intentions of their publishers and audiences. *Tiesa*, *Info Ekspresas*, *Čikagos Aidas* and *Draugas* are aimed at an emigrant audience that seeks a daily news source that presents the information from a perspective that is easily digestible by an emigrant who looks for general information rather than news about narrower, primarily expert-oriented areas of interest such as art, religion or international politics. Because all of the newspapers in question are community-funded, they serve as a good representation of the emigrants' general opinions and interests. When choosing which articles to analyze, it was decided to focus on those that deal with cultural events that involve the diasporic communities, Lithuanian politics, opinion articles submitted to the newspapers by the readers, interviews with emigrants and famous Lithuanians, and articles that deal with the history of Lithuania. In total, 144 articles from *Info Ekspresas*, 150 articles from *Tiesa*, 135 articles from *Draugas*, and 167 articles from *Čikagos Aidas* were analyzed.

## Diasporic Media

Another factor that is important to consider when discussing the concept of diasporic identity is diasporic media. Ulf Hannerz has claimed that media can be an important element in community-building because it can serve as a substitute for actual human interaction when it comes to establishing a sense of belonging: it makes people aware of their predecessors as well as people who “are living at the same time” and about whom “we make assumptions and whom we might influence in some ways” despite having never met them in person.<sup>5</sup> Consumption and creation of media that is intended for people whom one considers to belong to the same “imagined community” as themselves can be said to

<sup>5</sup> Hannerz, *Cultural Complexity*, 30.

be an act of performing a national identity. As Hall puts it, we should treat identity as a “production, which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation”.<sup>6</sup> Therefore, emigrants who are “taken away from the territorial bases of their local culture” but still try to “encapsulate themselves within some approximation of it” often engage in the performing of their national identities through celebrating their national traditions and consuming media that is created with an emigrant audience in mind.<sup>7</sup> Having a common culture is essential in the formation of a national ideology because it is “the set of common understandings and aspirations, sentiments and ideas” that binds a population together.<sup>8</sup>

Newspapers have always played an important role in Lithuanian diasporas. Diasporic publications, such as the British-Lithuanian “*Vienybė lietuvininkų*”, have kept Lithuanian culture alive during the period of the Lithuanian press ban during Tsarist Russian occupation, and the role of the press in maintaining cultural awareness was also important during the period of the Soviet invasion. For instance, newspapers such as “*Santarvė*”, “*Metmenys*”, “*Budėkime*”, or “*Europos lietuvis*” were prominent sources of news about occupied Lithuania as well as Lithuanian culture in the world Lithuanian community during the second half of the twentieth century.<sup>9</sup> Back then, newspapers served the function of sharing information about the emigrants’ homeland, protecting and nurturing their Lithuanian national identity, and uniting Lithuanians from all over the world in order to preserve their *Lithuanianess* while the country itself was being subjugated by foreign forces. Naturally, now that Lithuania is a free country again, the function of the diasporic press has also changed. Because the Lithuanians who live in Lithuania can freely embrace their national identities now, and emigrants themselves can easily interact with people in Lithuania and quickly access infor-

<sup>6</sup> Hall, “Cultural Identity and Diaspora,” 222.

<sup>7</sup> Hannerz, “Cosmopolitans and Locals in World Culture,” 249.

<sup>8</sup> Hutchinson, “Ethnicity and Modern Nations,” 11.

<sup>9</sup> See Dapkutė, *Didžiosios Britanijos lietuvių bendruomenė*.

mation about the country on the internet, contemporary publications have mostly lost their ideological nature and serve a more pragmatic function now. Newspapers such as those that are analyzed in the present paper primarily focus on Lithuanian and world news, advertisement, and specific community issues that do not necessarily have anything to do with the cause of preserving the Lithuanian national identity in the diaspora. While publications from earlier periods of Lithuanian history undoubtedly contain fascinating insights into the formation of the concept of *Lithuanianess* as we know it, the decision to only take into account newspapers from the past three years was made in order to get a picture of emigrant identity that is more relevant to contemporary Lithuanian issues. The following section of the paper describes the results of performing a thematic analysis on four contemporary Lithuanian emigrant newspapers.

## **Themes in the UK Newspapers**

The themes that were identified in *Info Ekspresas* and *Tiesa* stress the fact that contrary to popular belief, emigration does not solve social and economic problems. The analyzed data was categorized into twelve themes: refusal to integrate, successful integration/globalization, community in diaspora, anti-Russian sentiments, re-emigration, disillusionment with the UK, economic factors, preserving traditions, loyalty to Lithuania, criticism of Lithuania, anti-emigrant/emigration sentiments, and keeping ties with Lithuania. Generally speaking, the Lithuanian emigrants' tendency to lean towards ghettoization is viewed in a negative light, while integration into life in the UK by adopting a more tolerant worldview that is devoid of racism and homophobia is presented more positively. It can be inferred that the newspapers aim to make their readership more open-minded when it comes to interacting with people from other cultural backgrounds. The following section of the paper describes each theme in detail and provides significant representative samples of the codes, or phrases or sentences that served to characterize them.

***Refusal to Integrate:*** This theme reveals that many working-class Lithuanian emigrants tend to prefer ghettoization to integration. For instance, one article shows that Lithuanians tend to surround themselves by other Lithuanians who live in “emigrant” neighborhoods because of the emigrants’ xenophobic perceptions of people from other cultures:

Our countrymen hold negative opinions about neighbors with big Muslim or black populations. Lithuanians not only feel reluctant to share a home with foreigners, they also avoid neighborhoods where non-white people are present. They believe that black people are dangerous and unpredictable and dislike the Muslims for their different lifestyles: “The women are wrapped in scarves, the men are wearing skirts and carrying seven children. Who knows, perhaps they are carrying bombs underneath all their chadors”.<sup>10</sup>

Emigrants in the UK generally appear to display a strong negative perception of people who are neither Lithuanians nor belong to the upper social class (e.g. native-born British people who represent superiority), such as Muslims, ethnic minorities, or even other Eastern European emigrants from countries like Poland:

Living in England forces one to ignore or tolerate many unusual things. However, it appears the Lithuanians have a hard time getting used to a new environment and the “others” that inhabit it. They are bothered by homosexuals, Muslims, *crude* Poles, *idiotic* Brits, Africans and even their own “hussy slatterns”, or Lithuanian women. Lithuanians often badmouth everyone who is not like them.<sup>11</sup>

Moreover, some emigrants proclaim that they do not care about following the news of either Lithuania or the UK because that which happens in those countries does not directly involve the immigrants themselves. The author of one article asked a

<sup>10</sup> Tiesa, 2014-02.

<sup>11</sup> Tiesa, 2014-11.

respondent about their opinion about the 2016 elections in Lithuania and received the following answer:

Elections? In Lithuania? Oh, I don't know anything about that, I don't care about politics. I don't even live in the country, which is why I do not know anything about it.<sup>12</sup>

Other emigrants appear to be completely content to live in Britain without attempting to learn English:

We respect the British culture, but there are simply so many Lithuanians here that we do not ever get homesick. 85 percent of my neighbors are immigrants. Two of my sisters also live here and we are planning to bring our mother here as well. We like living here; it is just like Lithuania. We do not even need to know English.<sup>13</sup>

The emigrants' pervasive xenophobia, apathy, and tendency to limit their circle of acquaintances to fellow Lithuanians reveal a strong sense of growing ghettoization among the UK emigrant community, and the newspapers tend to take a critical position regarding this phenomena.

***Integration/Globalization:*** While anti-integration sentiments are frequently expressed by emigrant interviewees whose opinions are published in the newspapers, it appears that the newspaper writers themselves subscribe to the multicultural agenda instead. For instance, the journalists point out that many Lithuanian people still hold very conservative views and criticize this trend:

Lithuania is too small for a person to limit themselves to it. I believe that despite the isolation of the Soviet Union, many Lithuanians nevertheless had to interact with people from different cultures back then. Today, the average Lithuanian has to seek different experiences outside themselves because despite globalization, our country retains a rather conservative way of thinking.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Tiesa, 2016-10.

<sup>13</sup> Tiesa, 2016-09.

<sup>14</sup> Tiesa, 2014-01.



Perhaps because of their awareness of the limitations of the average Lithuanian, the newspapers are rife with life stories about people who have found personal fulfillment via integration. Moreover, advertisements of seminars that help emigrants integrate are frequently promoted, and cultural exchange via marriage or friendship with people who come from different cultures are generally seen in a positive light.

Moreover, the newspapers appear to take a sympathetic view of Middle Eastern refugees, going as far as to compare their situation with Lithuanian migration:

Perhaps some of the Syrian refugees will return to their countries after the war ends, but most of the people who hold anti-immigrant sentiments believe that most of them will stay in Europe. People are afraid that the refugees who seek economic well-being and safety for themselves and their children are going to stay in Europe. However, can we really blame the people who seek a better life? After all, we Lithuanians who live in the UK are also economic migrants. Thousands of our countrymen, as well as thousands of Poles or Hungarians, came to the UK illegally even before our countries became a part of the EU. We know very well that most emigrants do not return to their homeland.<sup>15</sup>

Furthermore, in some articles, living in multicultural England is said to have an effect of promoting tolerance of sexual minorities:

It is apparent that people who are raised in an environment that is characterized by the presence of diverse sexual identities gradually become more and more tolerant. By seeing same sex marriages become legalized and being taught at school that love exists not only between a man and a woman, people gradually get used to homosexuality. Many emigrants discover that they have a homosexual in their circle of friends and become less likely to make homophobic jokes and become more understanding of and open to diverse friendships.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>15</sup> *Info Ekspresas*, 2015-10.

<sup>16</sup> *Info Ekspresas*, 2015-07.

All in all, it is rather clear that the newspapers promote a liberal, open-minded approach to life in the UK, one that is perhaps bolder in its acceptance of diversity than the average Lithuanian newspaper published in Lithuania would allow itself to be.

***Community in Diaspora:*** While this theme has some overlap with the issues of integration and ghettoization that are also discussed in other themes, it differs from them in that it is about describing emigrants' activities rather than their opinions about different issues. Naturally, a sense of ghettoization is frequent in descriptions of the diasporic community that are given by the emigrants themselves. For example, one article explains that

Lithuanian communities seem to hold the opinion that you can relax and feel at home in Lithuanian establishments. If one works in an environment where only English is used, it is nice to meet other Lithuanians while listening to well-known Lithuanian songs. Moreover, the older generation that has grown up with "Russian" humor does not understand local English entertainment. In case an emigrant wants to visit the theater, only classic plays are an option because contemporary theater deals with "British" issues that are not relevant to Lithuanians.<sup>17</sup>

Moreover, articles that serve to advertise Lithuanian businesses are also rather frequent. Many of them stress the fact that these establishments can provide the emigrants with an authentic Lithuanian experience that also involves interaction with other Lithuanians:

This May, it is going to be six years since the restaurant "Krantas" opened in Walthamstow, East London. Even though it is not big, this restaurant is very cozy and won the customers' affection ever since it was opened. It attracts new admirers every year and even has regular customers. People return here not only to enjoy tasty cuisine, but also to have enjoyable interactions as well as to listen to Lithuanian music.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Tiesa, 2014-05.

<sup>18</sup> Info Ekspresas, 2015-02.

Other articles promote various business opportunities in the UK as well as describe successful interactions of emigrants and various Lithuanian politicians and scholars, indicating that the newspapers are engaged in promoting a vision of a united emigrant community that is both integrated in the business sphere of the UK and actively participating in the economic, political, and social life in Lithuania itself.

***Anti-Russian Sentiments:*** While the threat that Russia and Putin's policies pose to Lithuania in the light of the Crimean crisis is not as frequently discussed in the UK as it is in the USA, this theme is still rather prominent. For instance, one article discusses the importance of the euro for Lithuania's security:

Having a shared currency across the entire European Union means an increase in security. Lithuania is already a member of NATO and the EU, but sharing the currency with other European countries might guarantee our safety even further. In case the Baltic States used the euro and Russia threatened them, it would create financial problems for all the countries that belong to the Eurozone, which is why they would feel compelled to protect European Union territory. After all, if Ukraine tried join the EU during its period of independence like Lithuania did, perhaps they would have avoided the current situation: the war, the loss of territory and an uncertain future, all of which affect the common citizen first and foremost.<sup>19</sup>

The existence of this theme shows that a negative perception of Russia's policies as well as a concern for Lithuania's safety are uniting elements in both of the Lithuanian diasporic communities analyzed in this paper.

***Re-emigration:*** while this theme is not as prominent as *integration*, promoting re-emigration to Lithuania appears to be on the agenda of the newspapers. This theme shows acknowledgement of the fact that rapid emigration is one of the most pressing social issues in Lithuania at the moment and that it is the emi-

<sup>19</sup> *Info Ekspresas*, 2015-01.

grants themselves who contributed in making it worse. Many articles stress the fact that the cultural capital that emigrants gain in the UK might be successfully utilized in starting a business or finding employment in Lithuania:

When we asked Užkalnis why he chose to re-emigrate, he claimed that his life entered a stage where it started to seem that life in Lithuania offered more opportunities for self-realization: "I left Lithuania when I was twenty-four, and it seemed that I would have more opportunities in England back then. However, nothing is constant: people change, and so do other circumstances. Now I can enjoy being well-known in Lithuania and be my own boss: I do not have to work in a blue-collar job and can make a living by writing and lecturing instead".<sup>20</sup>

Nevertheless, people who reject the idea of re-emigration are also represented in the newspapers:

A lot of emigrants from Lithuania feel a huge sense of disappointment with their country and claim that they simply see no way of re-emigrating. Others also admitted that even though they sometimes feel nostalgic, it would be too difficult to leave the homes, businesses and lives they have created here. It appears that Brexit only affected the emigrants who were already considering re-emigration before.<sup>21</sup>

It appears that like many other themes in newspapers from the UK, re-emigration is characterized by both a sense of responsibility to Lithuania that is mostly expressed by the journalists, and a sense of bitter disappointment that the emigrants feel towards their country.

***Disillusionment With the UK:*** Based on the published interviews and sections dedicated to reader opinions, it appears that quite a lot of emigrants have a hard time adapting to life in the UK. Some emigrants are troubled by the discrimination they have received from British people after Brexit, many feel unsatisfied

<sup>20</sup> Tiesa, 2014-04.

<sup>21</sup> Tiesa, 2016-11.

with the conditions in which they have to work, and there is also a sense of feeling unhappy with various elements of life in the UK. For instance, there exists a widely-held belief that British doctors are unreliable in the Lithuanian emigrant community:

We often hear emigrants complain about general practitioner doctors who apparently lack competence and knowledge.<sup>22</sup>

The existence of the confrontational attitudes that are represented in this theme might be a manifestation of the bitterness that emigrants feel towards British people for not accepting them, and it might also explain the tendency of emigrants in the UK to reject integration into the new culture.

Moreover, it is interesting to note that the sense of disillusionment with emigrant life is not directed only at external factors. The psychological well-being of emigrants themselves as well as their lack of a feeling of inner peace are also frequent topics in the newspapers:

Many people who move into another country and look for happiness are disappointed because they cannot find that which they are looking for. After emigrating, they again face the daily routine that cannot be avoided regardless of whether you are in a tropical island, in a metropolis, your homeland or another country. It is impossible to escape yourself.<sup>23</sup>

All in all, this theme reveals that many emigrants feel dissatisfied with their lives in the UK, both because of the culture clash and psychological reasons.

**Economic Factors:** Given the fact that most Lithuanian emigrants in the UK chose this country in order to seek economic well-being, it is not surprising that money and finances are a pressing issue in the emigrant communities. The poverty of Lithuania is frequently named as the reason for emigration, and Britain is seen as appealing because of its economic stability. For

<sup>22</sup> Tiesa, 2016-02.

<sup>23</sup> Info Ekspresas, 2016-12.

instance, one article questions Lithuania's decision to change its national currency into the euro because it would not improve the country's economic situation:

According to experts, countries that keep their national currencies have better opportunities to take charge of their economies. As soon as the EU economy gets even the slightest misbalance, Lithuania will still remain the poorest member of the euro-block. Therefore, the politicians' desire to replace litas with the euro makes it seem like the euro is some sort of panacea for the country. However, as soon as an economic crisis happens, powerful countries make the decisions while insignificant ones like ours remain silent. Unlike in the UK, Lithuania did not even hold a referendum for the introduction of the euro.<sup>24</sup>

In many cases, criticisms of Lithuania's poor economic situation go hand in hand with complaints about the Lithuanian government, highlighting the strong sense of animosity that many emigrants appear to feel towards Lithuanian politicians.

Furthermore, one of the articles reveals that the influence of Lithuania's poverty is so great it even leads emigrants to social degradation:

In 2013, the TV show "Emigrants" visited the abandoned former London retirement home, which is now called the "Pentagon", where Lithuanian beggars tend to stay. Even though they live in horrific conditions, the homeless people do not intend to return to Lithuania because they claim that beggars in the UK live better than the people in Lithuania who earn the minimum wage. These beggars receive government support and do not wish to look for regular employment.<sup>25</sup>

This example illustrates that Lithuania's poverty and inability to provide a living standard that is comparable to that of more developed countries is one of the driving forces behind the average emigrant's intense dislike of their homeland.

<sup>24</sup> *Info Ekspresas*, 2015-01.

<sup>25</sup> *Info Ekspresas*, 2015-03.

***Preserving Traditions:*** This theme includes elements such as stressing the importance of teaching emigrant children the Lithuanian language, a feeling of nostalgia for symbols of Lithuania like traditional cuisine or pop-culture, and articles about basketball, which is seen not merely as a sport, but also as an object of reverence. Traditions are seen as providing the emigrant with a sense of uniqueness in a country that is characterized by different customs:

We hope that *Vėlinės* remains a very important day for us even in the diaspora. It is a day to remember those who are no longer with us, to show that we have not forgotten them: according to the Baltic conception of life, death is not monstrous, and our traditions show that death is only a transformation from one state of being to another. Therefore, unlike the Celts from whom Halloween stems, Lithuanians try to honor the dead rather than chasing them away by wearing scary masks. Naturally, we surprise foreigners by our refusal to fear death. This unique tradition is still alive now, which is why we visit cemeteries on the first of November. However, it is disconcerting to think that these traditions might not survive in the younger generation, and it is up to us to teach them to our children and grandchildren.<sup>26</sup>

The newspaper's focus on celebrating traditions and focusing on feelings of nostalgia for Lithuania might have a community-building function: as Trandafoiu puts it, "the feeling of loss, the nostalgia and uprooting that come with the journey, real or imagined, fuel the establishing of a shelter which is culturally mobile and necessarily cosmopolitan in nature"<sup>27</sup>. Therefore, feeling a longing for Lithuanian Christmas Eve celebrations, might encourage the emigrants to celebrate this day with fellow emigrants, and missing Lithuanian basketball might influence the establishment of emigrant basketball teams, and so on.

***Criticisms of Lithuania:*** Many interviews with emigrants as well as articles that contain opinions of the newspapers' readers

<sup>26</sup> *Info Ekspresas*, 2014-11.

<sup>27</sup> Trandafoiu, "The Whole Greater than the Sum," 104.

express a negative perception of Lithuania. Politicians and their real or perceived corruption as well as the wide-spread poverty are the usual targets. For instance, one woman who chose to re-emigrate to Lithuania criticized Lithuanian politicians for their lack of regard for the common man:

Sometimes I still want to emigrate because Lithuania is plagued by nepotism which makes it hard to control corruption among the politicians. There is a lack of respect for people in Lithuania, and every Lithuanian has to change the way they perceive life in this country starting from themselves.<sup>28</sup>

Politicians are not the only target of disapproval. The negative “Lithuanian character” that is commonly claimed to characterize Lithuanians is also cited as one of the reasons for choosing a life outside of the country:

According to Algirdas Kaušpėdas, the leader of “Antis” and the presenter in the World Lithuanian Youth meeting, “in Lithuania, people value knowledge and the ability to reason rather than emotional intelligence and empathy”. According to him, a need of communication is one of the reasons people choose to emigrate because they find warmer, more respectful relationships in other countries. He claims that “the main thing that is missing in Lithuania is respect and the sense of communion. People are generally angry, individualistic. Interpersonal relationships tend to be cold. After they move to a different country and see warm relationships based on respect, people no longer want to return to Lithuania because they want to live in an environment that gives them a sense of psychological comfort”.<sup>29</sup>

In general, the idea that there is a fundamental lack of respect for a human being in Lithuania is mentioned very frequently in the newspapers. It creates an interesting paradox if the emigrants’ racism is considered in the light of their simultaneous yearning for respect: if taken together, the themes might seem to be an implicit criticism of some of the emigrants’ hypocrisy.

<sup>28</sup> *Info Ekspresas*, 2016-08.

<sup>29</sup> *Info Ekspresas*, 2016-07.



***Loyalty to Lithuania:*** While this theme is not as prominent as *Criticism of Lithuania*, it is nevertheless rather frequent in the newspapers. Most of the pro-Lithuanian sentiments are expressed by the writing staff rather than respondents, showing that the newspaper writers might be trying to create a positive view of Lithuania to challenge the negative one that many emigrants seem to hold. For example, the following inspirational quote by the Lithuanian ambassador in the USA and Mexico Žygimantas Pavilionis is imbued with patriotism:

I consider *Lithuanianess* to be my calling – we received this gift from God, we are unique in the world and we have to understand that it is not for naught. It is our calling which we will have to discover sooner or later because otherwise we will become sad and lonely, like a branch of a grape vine that eventually withers. Like I mentioned, it is important to love Lithuania; to quote Kennedy, a former president of the USA, to not ask what the country can do for you, but what you can do for it. We should simply love Lithuania with all our hearts whenever we are and whatever we do, and time and destiny will lead us to where we should be. I am certain that the upcoming twenty-five years are going to be a creative period for Lithuania, and the current downfall is merely a hitch. Let us create a Lithuania which our children and their children can be proud of. Lithuania is not going to change by itself, and it should not be taken for granted, because it is a product of our hard work and sacrifices.<sup>30</sup>

The excerpt represents a rather idealistic take on Lithuania's future, but most importantly, the decision to quote an important politician's positive view of facilitating a relationship between emigrants and Lithuania has a strategic significance because his status imbues the quote with a compelling ethos.

***Anti-emigrant Sentiments:*** This theme involves negative perceptions of emigrants expressed both by the emigrants themselves, and by the newspaper writers. In case of interviews with

<sup>30</sup> *Info Ekspresas*, 2015-12.

upwardly-mobile emigrants who have moved out of the so-called emigrant ghettos, fellow emigrants are criticized for their intolerance to other cultures and promoting a negative view of Lithuania through their racism, homophobia, and Islamophobia. It appears that there exists a hierarchy of emigrants, with upwardly-mobile emigrants who are integrated into the multicultural British life treating working-class emigrants who are less-open minded with a certain sense of disdain:

Lithuanians interact with their neighbors, friends of their friends, acquaintances of acquaintances and everyone else despite the fact that none of them have anything in common. I asked one fellow who was spending his time with someone he obviously disliked and he retorted that it is better than being by himself. Couples start relationships without even understanding whether they like one another, or because all that matters to them is to have someone Lithuanian to go to the movies with. Then they start living together in order to save some money and eventually realize that they do not like their partner, but continue to stay in the relationship because “who else could you find in England, I do not want to date a Muslim or a black person”. It is becoming clear that Lithuanians only flock together thanks to their shared nationality. Hey, emigrants! Do you actually like the people you call your friends?<sup>31</sup>

Moreover, lower class economic emigrants who primarily choose the UK as their new home because of government benefits are criticized for being opportunistic and lowering Lithuania’s prestige in the eyes of the host country:

Many people seem to believe that you can come to the UK and live on government benefits even if you have to commit a crime by forging documents to do so. I will never understand the people who act like that and then brag about it as if breaking the law is something to be proud of. Incidents like that influence the intolerance for immigrants and cast a shadow on those would like to create their future in the UK by honest means. The only

<sup>31</sup> *Tiesa*, 2014-02.

thing I can say is that as long as you are sincere, the UK is not a paradise of government benefits and the living conditions in Lithuania are better in many ways.<sup>32</sup>

Despite the rather strong wording in the quotes presented above, most of the writers express their opinions in a more diplomatic way, focusing on the harm that emigration does to Lithuania rather than outright criticizing the emigrants. For example, the following quote was found in an article that subtly criticizes young Lithuanian males' reluctance to undergo mandatory training in the army:

National identity represents the person's intuitive attachment to a group of people that is united by shared national, ethnic and religious interests. If emigrants still consider themselves to be Lithuanian, why would they feel reluctant to serve in the Lithuanian army? An internal conflict arises in those who either have a weak concept of their identity or do not realize who they really are.<sup>33</sup>

Nevertheless, it is clear that certain less-than-positive traits of the Lithuanian diaspora in the UK are put on display and scathingly criticized for the purpose of instilling the readership with a greater sense of self-awareness.

***Keeping Ties With Lithuania:*** the final theme found in the newspapers directly deals with the issue of transnationalism. It entails enjoying Lithuanian media while in the diaspora, meetings with various Lithuanian politicians in the UK, and generally keeping ties with the country. For example, an interview with one emigrant directly touches upon Anderson's concept of *imagined communities*:

As a writer, I feel connected to Lithuania through the Lithuanian language. I also feel a connection through the people and the culture because even though we sometimes curse the stereotypical pessimistic personality of Lithuanians, studying social anthropology made me realize that I could never know another

<sup>32</sup> Tiesa, 2014-02.

<sup>33</sup> Tiesa, 2015-05.

culture as well as I know Lithuania. I could never understand other people as well as I understand a grandmother in a back-water Lithuanian village.<sup>34</sup>

Nevertheless, the relationship between Lithuania and the emigrants is not always portrayed in a positive way. For instance, the following ironic article scathingly criticizes both Lithuanians who oppose emigration, and emigrants who feel bitter towards Lithuania:

Eventually I realized that the people who remain in Lithuania and act aggressive towards the emigrants are actually jealous because the emigrants earn more through their hard work. On the other hand, the emigrants are jealous because they cannot earn as much in Lithuania and stay near their relatives. It is because of jealousy that the two opposing sides get called traitors of the country and slaves who work for next to nothing in the press.<sup>35</sup>

Either way, it is clear that a strong emotional connection still exists between Lithuania and the Lithuanian diaspora in the UK, which is something that appears to be already lost in the USA. The following section will outline the themes from the other emigrant community analyzed in this article and discuss this difference further.

## **Conclusions on the Lithuanian Press in UK**

According to Appadurai, because of its past resistance to the Soviet ideology, many countries from Eastern Europe possess a sense of nationalism that he calls “tribalism writ large”.<sup>36</sup> In other words, it is due to Lithuania’s recent past that many people are subconsciously wary of and threatened by anyone who is not a Lithuanian, which would explain the difficulties that many emigrants face when it comes to accepting people who are rad-

<sup>34</sup> Tiesa, 2015-09.

<sup>35</sup> Appadurai, *Modernity at Large*, 20.

<sup>36</sup> Thussu, *Media on The Move*, 31.

ically different from them. It appears that many first-generation Lithuanian emigrants in the UK subscribe to the so-called tribal nationalism: the data shows that many of them tend to flock to ghetto-like communities and distance themselves from both British people and other emigrants who hail from different countries. Nevertheless, it is apparent that the newspapers from the UK both document the emigrants' tendency to form Lithuanian ghettos by rejecting people who have different cultural backgrounds, and express a rather critical opinion about this sort of behavior. Indeed, even though objective descriptions of the increasingly isolated Lithuanian emigrant life are common, they are almost always followed up by an implicit or explicit judgment of the average emigrant's narrow-mindedness. Therefore, readers of the newspapers are encouraged to become acquainted with people from different cultural backgrounds, become more accepting of sexual minorities, and in the most recent articles, to show compassion for the Middle Eastern refugees who are fleeing the war in Syria. However, the multicultural ideology that appears to permeate the articles does not imply that the emigrants should abandon their Lithuanian identity and assimilate into the new country: articles that deal with issues like promoting re-emigration as well as appreciating what Lithuania has to offer despite its shortcomings are also common. Therefore, it could be said that one of the ideological aims of the newspapers is to teach the readers to be more tolerant and accepting of the multicultural values that are present in Western Europe without losing their Lithuanian identities.

Another interesting point that can be raised after closely examining the themes in the UK newspapers is that many of the articles point out the hypocrisy of the average emigrant. It seems that emigrants who are quoted in the articles both feel a very strong sense of animosity towards *others* who have a different cultural and/or ethnic background, and cite the lack of respect for a human being in Lithuania as one of the primary reasons for their own decision to emigrate. In a way, reading the newspapers makes it apparent that the average emigrant is stuck in

a cycle of vicious hatred, passing the contempt that they believe they have received in Lithuania from other common Lithuanians or the politicians onto others. Even though many of the emigrants are no longer in touch with the homeland that has supposedly wronged them, they still feel bitter about their former lives. Perhaps the attempt to reconcile the emigrants' internal conflict between their remaining sense of *Lithuanianess* and their dislike of various aspects of Lithuania might explain the presence of numerous articles that express feelings of intense patriotism, nostalgia for the homeland, and an attachment to various Lithuanian traditions. When considering the implications of the findings, it is important to once again take into account the ideology and agenda-building functions of news media: diasporic media in particular are involved in the "development of ideologies and representations" that might not be represented in major national forms of media and are thus largely overlooked or ignored by the mainstream press.<sup>37</sup> In the light of the discovered themes, the newspapers appear to serve the function of guiding their readership towards both integration into the multicultural environment that they are now living in, and a sense of accepting their *Lithuanianess* without being hindered by internalized self-loathing. After all, many post-soviet Lithuanians, both those who remain in Lithuania and the economic emigrants who provide the data for this section of the paper, are said to suffer from an inferiority complex that stems from their Lithuanian background, which in turn creates many identity-related issues.<sup>38</sup> Because of that, the emigrants' psychological state might be said to reveal an insight into Lithuanian society as a whole.

All in all, it appears that two general lines of thought characterize the attempts at identity shaping that are expressed in the UK-based newspapers: first, a feeling of frustration with the emigrants' xenophobia and reluctance to use their emigration as an opportunity to mature emotionally and intellectually, and

<sup>37</sup> Thussu, *Media on the Move*, 31.

<sup>38</sup> Aleksandravičius, "Globalizacijos iššūkiai lietuvių išeivijos švietimui," 15.

second, a sense of hope that the emigrants can learn how to use the diaspora experience to work out their complicated relationship with Lithuania and build a more wholesome, less negative perception of themselves, their native country, and the diverse people that inhabit the world in general. Moreover, issues such as promoting tolerance of people from different cultures as well as discussing re-emigration as a way to overcome the feeling of dissatisfaction that the emigrants apparently feel in the diaspora, appear quite prominently in the newspapers. The presence of those themes suggests that while a sense of *transnationalism* that would drive the emigrants towards accepting a sense of responsibility for the country that they have left behind is perhaps not very strong in the UK-Lithuanian diaspora yet, the diasporic press is actively engaged in encouraging the emigrants to be more proactive in the matters of their homeland. Moreover, the newspapers also acknowledge that completely stopping emigration at this point is an impossible notion because that would make many Lithuanians lose the opportunities that they can take advantage of now. Therefore, the newspapers suggest that emigration should not be stigmatized and that it could actually be transformed into a positive force for Lithuania as long as a feedback channel could be established between Lithuania and its emigrants.

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# Vilnius Urbanism and Its Discontents

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ALMANTAS SAMALAVIČIUS

Cities change constantly – whatever their virtues and their faults. That is the only certain thing we can learn from the cities of the past. The speed of change has been on the increase over the last century and a half and it is accelerating even more as globalization affects the whole of the urban fabric. We must therefore assume that our cities are malleable, and that we – citizen, administrators, architects, planners – can do something to make our preferences clear, and that we have only ourselves to blame if things get worse rather than better.

Joseph Rykwert, *The Seduction of a Place*, 2009

A couple of years ago, giving an interview to the local media, a well-known Lithuanian architect Gintaras Čaikauskas while being asked what public urban spaces he finds most acceptable in Vilnius replied that he feels most comfortable at the town-hall square – one of the oldest historical public spaces of Vilnius city. There are, of course, more public urban spaces in the historical part of Lithuania's capital and even far more located in its central parts; however, many people capable of judging the structural and aesthetic qualities of Vilnius' public spaces would perhaps agree on this issue with Čaikauskas. Nevertheless even if one accepts this sound judgment, there are further important questions to be addressed while discussing the issue of public spaces in Lithuania's capital. For example, why so many squares and other urban public spaces in Vilnius can hardly be compared with the town-hall square as far as their structure, configuration, semantics and aesthetics is concerned? One could continue asking what has happened to the ambitions of urban designers that a relatively tiny, compact, some would say flawlessly shaped

historical square that had acquired its configuration a number of centuries ago, to this very day surpasses most of the public spaces designed by professional architects after World War II? And why despite the abundance of modern technical means as well as large numbers of professional urban designers and planners – that Vilnius can boast today unlike in any other historical periods – so many of its urban public spaces can be described not only as “frozen”, or “semi-dead” as they were labelled in other publications of the present author,<sup>1</sup> but they can equally and rightfully be said to be unable to perform their immediate functions, and thus they remain unattractive for urban dwellers, occasional visitors and tourists, and more often than not recall deserted semi-urbanized industrialized areas one should expect to be found on the outskirts of contemporary overgrown cities? It might be a strange paradox of our present urban culture but many public spaces in many parts of Vilnius can be perhaps more or less adequately described by borrowing a term of “non-place places” from the vocabulary of perceptive urban sociologist Sharon Zukin,<sup>2</sup> who chose it to describe contemporary urban areas that are devoid of character, satisfactory aesthetic qualities, and human uses. At the same time it can be observed that paradoxically some of the unplanned urban areas in the center of the city – like for example, the area on the bank of the river Neris stretching from the Green Bridge to the White (Pedestrian) Bridge function fairly well, attracting large numbers of city dwellers during the warm season when people are desperately craving for out-door activities. From the end of spring to early autumn this large waterfront territory covered by a green lawn becomes a spontaneous recreational area equally enjoyed by different age groups despite the fact that there is no official public beach on the banks of Neris river. And though some observers occasionally suggest that professional architects could add some touch to the vicinity, most users seem to be fully satisfied with the

<sup>1</sup> See Samalavičius, *“Placeless and Faceless.”*

<sup>2</sup> Sharon Zukin, *The Landscapes of Power*, 20.



*View of Neris River*

present shape of this largely unplanned, sort of semi-wild but no less attractive embankment area. The insightful remark of an urban theorist Alexander R. Cuthbert notes that “The public realm in many cities represents the last remaining undeveloped open space, and, hence, a continually and unremittingly under development pressure”,<sup>3</sup> seems to be particularly apt in describing the present state of this central embankment area of Vilnius city that is constantly being threatened by development; moreover so, since its vicinity has already become an expanding building site of new high-rise buildings, including a notorious tower recently designed by *starchitect* Daniel Libeskind whose projects seems to have gained currency in other Eastern European countries, especially in Poland where he designed a sky-scraper in the very center of Warsaw.

Though it would be very easy, simply to blame the Lithuanian architects and urban designers for their inability to deal with the

<sup>3</sup> Alexander R. Cuthbert, *Understanding Cities*, 99.

embankment of the Neris river during the last three decades as well as their older colleagues who were equally unable to offer any acceptable solutions for a potentially attractive central area especially on the left bank of the Neris (former *Šnipiškės* and *Žvejai* historical suburbs), one should not forget the insightful remark made by renowned architectural writer Witold Rybczynski, who insisted that “Waterfronts are almost entirely absent in the big ideas of twentieth-century planning.”<sup>4</sup> It is well known that Le Corbusier who not only inflicted his disastrous ideas of urbanism on fellow-members of the *Congres Internationaux d’Architecture Moderne* (known by its acronym CIAM), but largely shaped the vision of several generations of modern urban designers all over the globe found no place to include a river in his notorious model-city for the modern era; and his famous adversary Camillo Sitte, who offered a more sound and perhaps a far more prospective approach to planning and designing of modern urbanism, did not take issues of waterfront seriously either. Though in this respect the legacy of modern urbanism and its supporting theories are hardly helpful, it is worthwhile to go back into history and revisit how waterfronts were used and enjoyed in earlier epochs before the advent of modernity. This can be applied to Vilnius history as well, because water routes and their culture were more developed in medieval and the early modern period than in the last century (and especially its second half) when paradigms of modernist planning were embraced in both Western and Eastern Europe.

Witold Rybczynski, an architect and one of America’s most well-known architectural writers pondered in one of his books on a question given to him by a woman who happened to be his guest: why our cities are different? What she had in mind was obviously the differences between the celebrated European historical cities that managed to preserve their aura, and the overgrown, overdeveloped American cities plagued by overcrowding, large densities, traffic congestion and the like. Though Vilnius

<sup>4</sup> Rybczynski, *Makeshift Metropolis*, 114.

as well as other large Lithuanian cities make up a part of the European urban legacy (and they are different from their American counterparts), the largest of them, including Vilnius, lost much of their former character during the second half of the last century and especially during the recent decades of independence when concentration of capital and the rise of real estate business triggered a previously unprecedented level of urban growth. The situation of Lithuania's capital has become troublesome for a number of reasons. One of them is the enormous expansion of suburbia due to development of former "collective gardens" that mushroomed in the city's environs during the Soviet era and were eventually privatized by their owners and converted into suburban living quarters, often without adequate communications. Another, the proliferation of new types of suburban clusters that might be described as gated communities occupied by the wealthy. Besides, as Rybczynski has insightfully emphasized, "Transportation remains one of the most important external forces that influences the shape of cities."<sup>5</sup> Vilnius in this sense is hardly an exception, as large business and entertainment centers, erected in the central, peripheral and semi-peripheral parts of the city as well as continuously growing numbers of private automobiles at the expense of the flawed municipal policy of public transportation, makes the city with less than half a million inhabitants a hostage to regular traffic jams especially during the rush hours. Meanwhile, municipal policies dealing with these problems have spectacularly failed during recent decades despite their sometimes unreasonable ambitions.<sup>6</sup>

Fortunately, more and more architectural professionals are starting to understand the complexity of problems directly associated with urban development as well as the power of financial institutions responsible for the controversies they have already caused. Architect Gintaras Čaikauskas who has authored

<sup>5</sup> Rybczynski, *Makeshift Metropolis*, 181.

<sup>6</sup> For reflections on this issue see my article "Vilnius City: Urbanism Driven by Consumption."

a number of recent design projects in Vilnius, has commented on the situation. According to Čaikauskas

Under the guidance of the ideas of modern planning after World War II, projects of future cities were designed, future needs were forecast, and the search for optimal solutions began to take place and thus the behavior was hasty: new industrial complexes came into being, large residential quarters were built. Traditional urban development as well as traditional architectural expression was neglected, the modern thinking was reflected by free composition of spaces and functionalist aesthetics that rejected any decorative aspects of historical buildings.<sup>7</sup>

The architect further discussed his attitude toward the controversial legacy of modern urbanism in one of his later interviews, where he emphasized that there is a wide gap between the course of urban development in the West and Lithuania. According to the Lithuanian architect:

Urban development in Lithuania cannot be called a truly Western one. The processes of urban development are conformed not to the common strategy but instead are “tightened up” according to someone’s (private – A.S.) interests according to who has acquired the property rights to some particular piece of land where business is flourishing. In the planned territories of Vilnius city where the height of the buildings should be lower, high-rise structures presently tend to mushroom and in those places where the height could be potentially almost unlimited – small buildings are being erected instead... And then some (institutions – A.S.) are blamed because they do not allow the erection of high-rise buildings, and other (private owners – A.S.) are treated as evil because they aspire to build high-rise structures. Thus conflicts, the interests contradict each other and there we face continuous is no final results after all.<sup>8</sup>

Of course, these are just some remarks of a successful practicing architect, and yet his remarks ought to be taken seriously

<sup>7</sup> Čaikauskas, “Centralizuotai planuojamų miestų raidą įgyvendinti tikrai nelengva”.

<sup>8</sup> *Sapere aude*, 26–27.



*Konstitucijos Avenue – the new city center*

as he has considerable experience in providing numerous designs for urban developments in recent decades. These critical remarks provide some hints about the current situation in the urban development of Vilnius city that remain at least as controversial as they were a few decades ago when Lithuania's capital faced new challenges from being burdened by the legacy of Soviet planning and urban design.

Lewis Mumford – one of the greatest minds of the last century who reflected on the origins and historical transformations and the expansion and development of the megalopolis, interpreted it as the making of a new phenomenon he labelled as the formation of the Anti-city. According to Mumford, the Anti-city came into being during the modern period because of the unlimited expansion of standardized highways, standardized service, and equally standardized living quarters that devoured land to such a degree that the former functions of a city became impossible to perform.<sup>9</sup> In his monumental volume on city his-

<sup>9</sup> Mumford, *The Urban Prospect*, 132.

tory, discussing the global tendencies of urban development of the last century, Mumford insisted that

Urban land, too, now became a mere commodity, like labor: its market value expressed its only value. Being conceived as a purely physical agglomerate of rentable buildings, the town planned on these lines could sprawl in any direction, limited only by gross physical obstacles and the need of rapid public transportation. Every street might become a traffic street; every section might become a business section.<sup>10</sup>

This is especially true talking about the current urban development of Vilnius: the city that has hardly more than half a million inhabitants has expanded enormously during the last three decades. Numerous new “appendixes” have been added to its sprawling body and most of these new locations are experiencing communication problems that have urged some authors to speak about the kinship between problems of urban sprawl in Vilnius and Mozambique.<sup>11</sup>

The phenomenon of urban sprawl is hardly new: both in the USA and Europe it was closely related to an industrialization that reached its peak in the nineteenth century and triggered unprecedented urbanization as well as urban sprawl. The development of suburbanization in Europe was related to the growing amount of automobile transportation. In the US, however, urban sprawl became especially manifest in the first decades of the last century; it was further accelerated by the growing level of automobile transportation and the expansion of metropolitan railroad systems. Because of the sprawl, the urbanized land or speaking in more simple terms, the urban mass, expanded by 181 percent during the period of 1950–1990.<sup>12</sup> It was further enhanced by the growth of automobile and railroad transportation. Analogous processes took place in Europe and of course, its Eastern part as

<sup>10</sup> Mumford, *The City in History*, 422.

<sup>11</sup> See for e.g., the recent article of a well-known Lithuanian urban theorist prof. Jurgis Vanagas “Vilniui – Mozambiko lemtis?”

<sup>12</sup> See *Urban Sprawl: Landscapes, Land-use Change and Policy*, 7.





*A view from Tauras Hill*

well. During the second half of the last century, the suburbanization in Eastern Europe was further speeded up by the course of a planned economy; however, until 1985 it was far less significant in comparison to the capitalist countries of the Western hemisphere.<sup>13</sup> Suburbanization in the Eastern part of Europe and Vilnius in particular, became more dominant after 1990 when the former socialist countries embraced the market economy as well as patterns of economic growth that also significantly affected the development of urban regions.

The causes responsible for the urban sprawl and suburbanization of Vilnius are numerous and thus can hardly be treated

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 103.

in depth in any single article; however, the ongoing course of the sprawl was triggered by fast economic and social changes triggered by the reestablishment of Lithuania's independence and its move toward a market economy. It should be mentioned, though, that Vilnius as well as other larger urban centers, inherited a certain legacy from the Soviet era – i.e. areas around the cities that were known as “collective gardens” – small plots of land given to city dwellers to cultivate agricultural products directly, for personal use during leisure time. The collective gardens were eventually privatized by their owners and within a few decades developed into suburban residential areas without an organized supply of water, heating, or transportation routes. Besides this, new living quarters around Vilnius were built by the expanding real estate business where the *nouveau riche* chose to move for the cultivation of more private ways of life. These areas were converted into residential quarters by rival developers, and they were largely unplanned, chaotic, and consequently they contributed to the growth of problems associated with the urban sprawl. More recently, these areas have been characterized by a growing social segregation which so far has been inadequately researched and documented by urban sociologists – a profession that seems to be still in the making in post-Soviet Lithuania despite the fact that the stratification of suburban areas on the basis of income and social status is becoming a pressing problem.

There is no doubt that a large number of the problems of urban growth and sprawl are generated by the proliferation of the private automobile and the lack of a balanced public transportation system. Instead of investing into reshaping the present system of public transportation and developing new strategies in this field, Vilnius municipality seems to be satisfied with the present policy and thus urban dwellers often choose a private automobile instead of public transportation. Besides, Vilnius as well as other large Lithuania cities, suffers from the legacy of Soviet modernist planning that relied heavily on zoning as most other Western countries did in the second half of the last century. Because of these policies, Lithuania's capital was divided into

largely separated residential, industrial, and recreational areas. Most of suburban residential areas were labeled as “sleeping quarters” and their main functions did not change significantly during the last decades. Thus people navigate through the city to work, back home, and for entertainment now and then, contributing to traffic congestion, and remaining the victims of the flawed, modernist planning strategies – the legacy of which continues to dominate the urban structure of Vilnius. It is hardly a secret that the urban planners of Vilnius during the Soviet period were forced to follow the strategies developed and adopted by Moscow, and little room was left for any criticism or revision of official policies in urbanism. More recently, as it was already mentioned, the persistent problems inherited from the past became subject to the interests of big business in creating new large shopping and entertainment malls in various parts of the city, which in turn contributes to permanent traffic congestion as well as to a variety of social problems. Both transport engineers and municipal policy makers of Vilnius city have obviously failed because they are like their American counterparts of decades ago that according to Mumford

lack both historical insight and social memory: accordingly, they have been repeating with the audacity of confident ignorance, all the mistakes in urban planning committed by their predecessors who designed our railroads. The wide swaths of land devoted to cloverleaves, and even more complicated multi-level interchanges, to expressways, parking lots, and parking garages, in the very heart of the city, butcher up precious urban space in exactly the same way that freight yards and marshalling yards did when the railroads dumped their passengers and freight inside the city. These new arteries choke off the natural routes of circulation and limit the use of abutting properties, while at the points where they disgorge their traffic they create inevitable clots of congestion, which effectively cancel out such speed as they achieve in approaching these bottlenecks.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Mumford, *The Highway and the City*, 248–249.



*Cityscape viewed from Kalvarijų Street. Photos by the author of the article*

What Lewis Mumford said about urban developments in the US, largely can be applied to Europe and its Eastern part and in this sense Vilnius is no exception. In order to understand the pressing problems that urbanization of Vilnius is facing these days, it is important to consider the ambiguous legacy of Soviet planning. Though the Soviet regime adopted an ideology hostile to Modernism, and during the Cold War period its attitude to modern movement was largely hostile, at the same time it subscribed to the idea of progress and accordingly adopted the essential modernist paradigm of urban planning, moreover so that it enabled the Soviet system to reject the legacy of the past. The concepts of Le Corbusier – who despised the urban development of the previous epochs and called for ahistorical view toward planning of modern cities – were very much close to the Communist ideology that claimed that the new world had to come into being. Le Corbusier's radical ideas of urbanism were hardly a success before WW II – his development plan for Moscow was rejected by the Soviet authorities as anti-historical; however,

they gained currency immediately after the war in many parts of the world largely due to the successful propaganda activities launched by the most active members of CIAM and their growing leagues of supporters. Moreover, Le Corbusier welcomed the arrival of the automobile – which according to him was the symbol of progress and the modern era – and he firmly believed that the development of contemporary cities should be based on the acknowledgement of this undeniable fact. Thus, the old urban centers had to be destroyed to give way to the symbols of the future – high-rise buildings surrounded by parks and greenery. However, finally these open areas ironically became parking lots rather than green spaces meant for recreation and the plan for them to function as “urban lungs”. It must be added that while Le Corbusier’s ideas of a modern city made their way throughout the world, being adopted by adversary regimes professing democratic liberalism and totalitarian Communism – a more prospective and in many ways far more thoughtful and equally modest concept for the possible development of a modern city was offered by Austrian architect and theorist Camillo Sitte. But it was largely neglected. It is no surprise that this modern turn ended with pitiful results and as a well-known analyst of contemporary urbanism has observed, modernism remained “only at home on clean slate sites, and is unable to make a common cause with the remnants of previous urban orders. Its organizing schemes are sweeping abstractions that set a crushing urban scale unworkable except for very large cities. None of this was helpful for the historic towns of Europe which needed a gentler and more intimate touch. So pragmatic formula developed without much theorizing.”<sup>15</sup>

It can be concluded that the ideas of Camillo Sitte – ironically equally modern but far more subtle and conscious about urban history – were largely ignored by the West and likewise the East throughout the last century during which so much of urban de-

<sup>15</sup> Kostof, *The City Assembled*, 264.

struction has happened because of numerous reasons – a naive belief in progress, an emphasis on the automobile and oil as well as the flawed ideas of headless, ahistorical planning and urban design. And thus a potential for urban renewal was lost for the last century. In the meantime, a destructive program was equally and enthusiastically applied by the adversaries of the Cold War. Lithuanian urbanism of the Soviet era fell prey to this modernist ideology that disregarded any alternatives. It is no wonder that the evil of the legacy of Le Corbusier as well as the ambiguities of Soviet-style planning resulted in creating a dangerous urban mixture that continues to burden many cities all over the globe. Unfortunately, the Lithuanian capital is no exception.

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## Mindaugas Simankevičius

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Australian artist Mindaugas Simankevičius uses photographs as a starting point in his digital computer manipulations to activate his compositions. To paraphrase his words,

My work is about finding a way of expressing the *shift of time and place* in one singular two dimensional image... By using a camera to collect my “paint”, I am not concerned with taking one single image, I am more interested in taking *many varying images* of that one scene and then working them back together... Each combination contributing to the uncovering of a completely new dialogue...

Being surrounded by my parents’ love of Lithuania whilst a child at home has left influences of heritage [...] from the forms in woodblock prints to the organized graphic patterns of traditional weaving and Easter egg decoration, these influences reside behind much of my work without having to manifest themselves into representations: photographic image weaving, carving of positive/negative space of shadows, they sit inside virtually every new image created.”

Simankevičius’ studies include Printmaking and Drawing at Prahran Art College, Electronic Music at Melbourne University School of Music, and Film and Television at Melbourne State College. He has been a finalist for the Olive Cotton Awards Exhibition, a biennial national award for excellence in photographic portraiture, selected from entrants across Australia. In addition he has received Bronze and Silver Awards from the Epson International Pano Awards, which showcases the work of panoramic photographers worldwide and is the largest competition for panoramic photography. His work can be seen in numerous corporate boardrooms and is included in corporate collections including AustralianSuper, Leydin Freyer, Doquille Perret Meade, and Dental Hygiene Centre, to name a few.

Simankevičius was born in Melbourne of Lithuanian born parents who immigrated to Australia after WWII in 1949.





*Albert Tower*

Digitally manipulated photograph

Photo: M. Simankevičius



*Structure3*

Digitally manipulated photograph

Photo: M. Simankevičius



*CamberwellJunction*

Digitally manipulated photograph. Photo: M. Simankevičius





*ELMinShrine*

Digitally manipulated photograph

Photo: M. Simankevičius





*ExplodingOak-Ivanhoe*

Digitally manipulated photograph

Photo: M. Simankevičius



*Docklands Panorama*

Digitally manipulated photograph. Photo: M. Simankevičius







*MelbourneCity*

Digitally manipulated photograph. Photo: M. Simankevičius

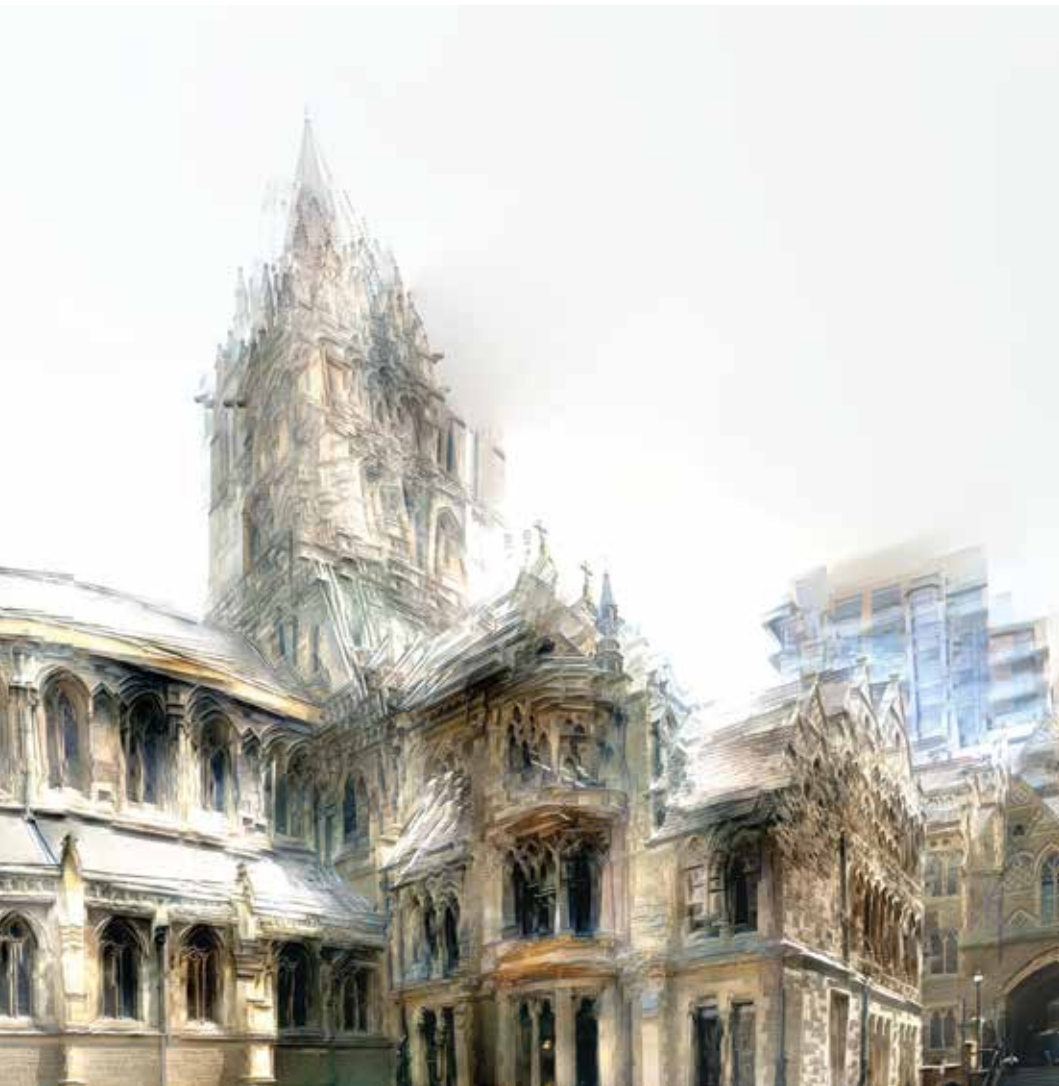






*StPauls*

Digitally manipulated photograph. Photo: M. Simankevičius





*Moving Tree-Upwards*

Digitally manipulated photograph

Photo: M. Simankevičius



*TreeNearTeKootiFarm*

Digitally manipulated photograph

Photo: M. Simankevičius





*explodingWheelIBU*

Digitally manipulated photograph

Photo: M. Simankevičius





## Two Short Stories

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GRAZINA PRANAUSKAS

### Army and Sex

As I turn the narrow street corner in the old town of Klaipėda, I bump into a young man. We apologize to each other and keep talking about how pleasant it is to walk on cold cobblestones on a summer afternoon. Edgars introduces himself as a Latvian, from Riga, serving in the Soviet Army in Klaipėda. I joke that at least he is only 200 kilometers away from home. I say I know a woman, Rima, whose sons are both serving in Afghanistan, fighting in the Soviet-Afghan war. Edgars lifts his green eyes to the sky and thanks God he isn't there. He has heard whoever goes to Afghanistan either dies or comes home injured. He repeats my name Audra twice and is surprised that it means storm. He tells me I'm the most beautiful woman he has ever met and compares my eyes to cornflowers. We speak Russian, regretting Lithuanians and Latvians can't speak each other's languages. Edgars invites me to a café near-by with weatherboard shutters and polished floorboards. A solidly-built woman stands near the entry. She looks us up and down with her muddy grey eyes, and her face grows angry. Her heavy make-up, more suitable for the evening, is smudged, and traces of her red lipstick mark the cigarette she is holding between her thick fingers.

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Edgars follows me to the table and we sit down facing each other. We order two glasses of hot sweet wine, boiled with cinnamon sticks and orange peel. Once it arrives, we sip it through straws. Glancing towards the bar, Edgars tells me about prostitution in Moscow. There prostitutes work in full view of the platforms at large suburban train stations. They sit with their legs stretched out and their prices written on the soles of their shoes. I'm shocked hearing these details and how he talks about these women so openly. It's semi-dark in the café and I hope he can't see my face redden.

"It's disgusting," I say but he assures me that only a few men approach prostitutes during the day. It's too conspicuous. They wait for nightfall. I suggest that something similar could be going on in this café. We observe how the woman we met at the door swings with the bar stool from side to side. How she adjusts her straight, bleached hair and flirts with a man in uniform. So eye-catching is his hat, that I decide he must be the captain of a ship. Edgars confirms it, and I turn my attention to the other women at the bar, all dolled-up, wearing high heel shoes, their bright lips uttering stiff German phrases. The one we already met, keeps glancing towards our table, and eventually comes over. She suggests we should get out of this place as it's for foreigners only. As she looks at us, she leans forward, purposefully scratching the surface of our table top with her fingernails. She puts her elbows on our table. Her huge breasts are hardly covered by a pink blouse with a few top buttons undone. When Edgars points out he is Latvian, she burst into a harsh laugh, and replies that he is not a Westerner and should take me elsewhere. We watch her making her way to the bar, purposely moving her shoulders forward and backward. She is wearing stilettos to make her legs look longer and her leather skirt is hardly covering her bottom.

As soon as our bill is paid, we leave. I want to laugh but I can't. Edgars wants to kiss me but I'm too upset. For the first time in my life I saw real prostitutes, operating right under my nose. I used to cross the cobbled street of the old town unaware

of what was going on in this café! We cross the road as the post office clock strikes eleven. Edgars needs to return to his base and sneaks through the hole under the brick fence, which enables soldiers like him to get in and out during their time off. He assures me the commanders have no idea that once outside the army base, soldiers hide their uniforms under the trees and change to civilian clothes before going to the heart of the city. We decide to meet in two weeks in the same spot we bumped into each other. He asks me if I have a girlfriend to bring along as he wants to introduce us to his army friend Juris.



On the weekend, I visit my girlfriend Nida to tell her what's happened. After learning of our upcoming double date with Edgars and Juris, she waltzes around the room. She looks in her wardrobe for a suitable outfit. It takes about ten minutes before she finally settles on a floral dress. With her long lashes covering her light-blue eyes, she moves her perfect body to the rhythm of a tango, parading in her dress. She is surprised that, at the age of twenty, Edgars is well-informed about sex. I agree. We are the same age as him but never heard about prostitution in Moscow or Klaipėda until now. We never talked about sex at school. Nida wonders whether we have an operating prostitution ring because Klaipėda is a port where foreign ships dock. We are most curious about the shady activities happening in the old town. As we dip dry bagels into our sweet tea, we contemplate a plan. We need a male companion to execute it, so we decide to call our mutual friend Kęstas.

The following evening, three of us enter the same café Edgars and I went to. We order coffee. It seems that the chatting at the bar hasn't stopped. This time the Spanish sailors are conversing in English with brightly-dressed, heavily-accessorized women with stylish hairdos, obviously impressing the men who, sitting in close-proximity, pat their backs and touch their legs.

The waiter returns with our coffee. As we're just about to drink it, a middle-aged man approaches, asking if he could join

us as there are no free seats left. We nod. He introduces himself in Russian as Volodia and takes a place next to Kęstas. He orders his meal. Then he gazes sadly towards the bar. I ask him whether he is alright and he points at a young, dark-haired woman in a yellow dress. He says he loves her but as far as I can see she's enjoying the company of a group of Spanish men. He says they were lovers, but she's too pricy. The foreigners pay better and in US dollars. She doesn't want his rubles. We are surprised to learn from Volodia how the *café clientele* operates under the name of the "Sixteenth Division". He explains that during and after the war there was a Lithuanian division with such a name formed to fight against the Nazis. They were brave fighters, but the division is no more. So, the local prostitutes adopted the name. Kęstas offers to buy some wine but Volodia grabs the waiter's attention and orders Soviet champagne. He says he wants to thank us for sharing our table. We offer a toast of champagne to his better luck in the future. His eyes remain glued on Nadia—a Russian beauty born and bred in Klaipėda. Observing how women sit with their legs apart, struggling to articulate foreign words in their tipsy voices, makes me shiver.



Two weeks later, I feel at ease meeting Edgars and Juris as they are extremely polite. Juris is taller than Edgars, but Edgars has broad shoulders and speaks with more confidence. Nida is wearing her floral dress while my white top and pants are contrasted by blue earrings and beads. Our friends are dressed in creased t-shirts and shorts. We venture around the old town and settle for a bar in a two-story building. The entry is well lit and the waiter leads us to a table for four. We order hot wine. Juris and Nida talk about their relatives and friends. Edgars and I are consciously looking around for unexpected surprises. I spot Rima sitting in a corner table and excuse myself to have a chat with her. She is alone and her 'hello' gives away her trembling voice. Her wine glass sits in front of her untouched. She is hiding her

tears into an already soaked hanky. She tells me that her second son has been killed in Afghanistan. She buried him in the same grave as her first son, who was returned in a sealed coffin last year. How can one woman take so much? Why is she here? Does her ex-husband provide her with any support? She tells me she hasn't seen the bodies of either son because opening the bolted steel coffins is forbidden by Soviet authorities. This was explained in the official letter glued to each coffin. Each felt so light. She suspects there were no bodies, just bits and pieces—could've been anyone's clothing and bones in there. I pat her hand and we sob. Edgars comes over and joins us. He introduces himself as a soldier in the Soviet Army and Rima looks at him with pity. She repeats her story. This time her eyes are dry and her voice doesn't tremble. She spits her words automatically as if she is firing bullets from a Kalashnikov—so loud that soon those around us turn their heads, listening to her grief. Juris and Nida appear behind us. We take Rima home.



Rima's flat is full of sympathy cards, flowers and open albums. I help her into the kitchen to make tea while she gathers cups and saucers, and finds some biscuits. Sitting around her dinner table, we listen to her speak about her sons dying in Afghanistan—one in 1982 and another in 1983.

"Stepas and Aras were enlisted in the Soviet Army and assigned to Afghanistan," she says.

Juris checks if the war started in 1979, and she nods.

"But why did my sons, my Lithuanian boys have to die for nothing?" she says, taking a deep breath, pausing for a few seconds. "Just because the Russians decided to interfere in another country's politics?" she continues. "In the meantime, how many more young men come back in sealed coffins? I search and search for answers but in vain."

While I pour the tea into our cups in complete silence, Edgars points to a photo asking who it is.

"It's Stepas, the older one," says Rima. I observe his open face and his light curly hair. She flicks through pages as the slim figure of a sun-tanned Stepas is left behind. "Here they are—Aras, eighteen, and Stepas, nineteen," she says. Seriously posing for an official black and white photo, they stand erect like oak trees, trustingly staring into the camera with their wide-open eyes. As we try to comfort her, her body shakes out of control. I hold her hand until she stops shaking and agrees to sip some tea. After the tea pot is empty and biscuits disappear one by one, I ask Rima if she wants us to stay. She shakes her head, adjusts her scarf around her tiny shoulders and straightens herself into the same pose as if preparing to fire from a Kalashnikov.

We say our goodbyes and run down the stairs. We wander the streets of Klaipėda, annoyed by drunken voices coming from the near-by flats. We agree how spooky the unlit alleys feel tonight. Before our friends catch the bus to their quarters, they are curious how I know Rima. I tell them she was my accordion teacher for five years. Edgars kisses me on the cheek and Juris politely shakes Nida's hand. It's their first date, and they probably had no time to get to know each other. We return from the bus stop and pass the city bridge where I spot a cluster of uneven ripples in the murky water of Dangė. Nida admits Juris is not her type. She suggests we don't show-up at our next date, but I feel the opposite. If I don't go, I'd never see Edgars again.



Weeks fly by and I tremble waiting at the corner of the cobbled street of the old town. In the distance Edgars' figure appears. He is alone. It seems like Nida and Juris' feelings are mutual. Edgars embraces me around my firm waist and presses his lips to mine. I can feel a pleasant gust of wind slightly rippling my cream, knee-height dress. We stand in the middle of the street and a group of cyclists pass us with cheers. I am in love. I know he is also serious. He has written to his parents about us. He tells me his father is a factory worker and his mother is a nurse. Both of

his older sisters are married. I tell him about my sister, a night club singer, married to a Ukrainian drummer, and that my parents are teachers. I'm lulled by his deep, resonant voice. Edgars opens his backpack and presents me with a slightly wilted bouquet of field flowers he gathered on the way. I kiss him on the cheek. He kisses me back. We don't go to any café and just sit on a bench and chat. We hold hands. Passers-by gently smile at us. The leaves of the birch tree rustling above our heads create the impression of melancholy. We talk until he needs to go.

The next time we meet at the post office to call his parents. We wait our turn in a long queue to pre-pay for his eight-minute conversation to Latvia. Soon afterwards, a pleasant female voice announces that Edgars Jansons' connection to Riga is ready in phone box five. He emerges from the phone box with a sweet smile. Once outside the building, he tells me his time in the army is coming to an end and he'll be leaving in six weeks. The rhythm of *six weeks, six weeks, six weeks* echoes in my steps—flowers, kisses, hopes and desires of a budding romance—all left to the wind to scatter!

Edgars doesn't want me to walk with him to his bus stop. It's our last evening together. We circle around the sculpture park near-by, reading the names of works created by local artists. One of them is a horse made of steel. He jumps on the saddle and sits in a majestic pose. His oval face glows with satisfaction as he watches me from above. He makes noises with his tightly closed lips, imitating the gallop of the horse, and swings the invisible whip in the air. His light short hair shines in the sun.

"Freedom, freedom, freedom," he repeats under his breath, bursting into a careless laugh. The evening fades away. Our heads touching, we look up to the sky absorbing purplish rays of the late summer sunset. He slides his hand down my heart-shaped face, then draws two big hearts with his index finger in the air. We promise to write to each other. We part at the bridge. I lift myself on my toes to see the top of his spiky head disappearing into the distance. His backpack meaninglessly moves to and fro like the words *I love you* that remain unsaid.



When the first two months pass, I become worried that Edgars has lost my address. Instead of writing to him myself, I wait another two months before making the decision to call him. I find a piece of paper with a phone number he gave me upon departure. At the local post office, I wait in a queue, pre-pay for my five-minute phone call and sit down. Some twenty minutes later a high-pitched female voice announces: "Audra Viskontaitė! Rīga, Rīga, connection to Rīga phone box six". I force myself into a narrow space, conscious people are looking at me. My cheeks are burning and a sense of shame overwhelms me. I shouldn't be chasing my boyfriend. Hearing Edgars' calm, reassuring voice, I bury my pride. We talk as if nothing happened, as if he just left. He invites me to come to visit him and I agree to do so the following month. I hang-up the receiver with his words "I'll always love you" ringing in my ear.

After my overnight Klaipėda-Rīga bus journey, Edgars embraces me with his long arms and gives me a bouquet of roses. He turns me around and passionately kisses me on the lips. Then we travel on a local bus to his dwelling. A young tall woman opens the door and he introduces her as Inga. I feel her cat-like brown eyes following me around. She gathers her wavy chestnut hair into a pony tail and invites me to be seated at the coffee table. She finds a vase and carefully arranges the flowers asking if I like them. I reply that I do. She tells me she is a photographer and shows me an album full of her client's photos. I hear banging of pots and pans in the kitchen until Edgars brings us coffee and cake. I wonder who is Inga and what is she doing here.

"We are gathered here today to celebrate Inga and Edgars' union," he says, keeping his straight face, passing the cups and plates with pieces of cake. I laugh, inhaling a faint aroma of the beautiful roses he gave me just an hour back. *What a joker*, I think to myself, spotting identical gold rings on their fingers. As we drink our coffee, Inga beats him to the answer and says they just got married, proudly showing her belly. I hadn't noticed it before



as she's wearing a loose jumper. I hadn't noticed Edgars' wedding ring at the station either. Inga bends her left hand fingers one by one, counting to five—this is how long they've been together! I can't sense anything from Edgars' blank face, trying to deal with the realization that after returning to Riga he didn't waste any time. As our relationship had been limited to kissing, I had no idea he would hop into bed with a stranger... a Latvian stranger. I was mistaken by thinking he was a serious young man. His knowledge about prostitution in Moscow now sounds suspicious. He has been there to explore his sexual desires in person for sure! Buried in my thoughts, I don't see him appearing at my side and taking a seat close to me.

"It's alright," he says, when I jump and move away. "Inga is in the toilet, and I want to apologize for what I've done. Apparently, I got her pregnant at the party at my friend's place, on the very night I returned from Klaipėda. I was so upset leaving you behind. I must've been drunk.

"I see," I say, lifting my narrow eyebrows.

"I have a blurred vision of us sitting on a sofa, laughing, then burying myself in your open cleavage and calling your name."

"I wish it was me."

"Me too, Audra. Honestly, a drunken slip-up has destroyed my life. My father, finding out about Inga's pregnancy, forced me into marriage. It's all my fault, forgive me."

I shrug my shoulders and give him a questioning look. "What am I doing here then?" I ask. As he opens his mouth to reply, Inga walks in with a bottle of Soviet champagne in one hand and four glass flutes in the other. She has a cynical look on her face complimented by a fake smile. We drink to their happiness in silence.



Inga and I are standing in her darkroom where she shows me how she develops her black and white photos. Probably sensing my nervousness, she assures me that she knows about our romance, suspecting Edgars still has feelings for me. She wanted

to meet me and to straighten things out. So, my call to Edgars and his invitation to visit him was something she approved. She dips film into a chemical solution and hangs the already developed photos on a piece of string. When we come out of the dark room, I look at her and wonder what their life would be without love. I haven't seen them cuddling, holding hands nor whispering into each other's ear like Edgars and I did. I want to bring them side by side, shake them by their shoulders, and ask: *Do you know what are you doing? Why? Why? Why?* But I continue to sit on a squeaking chair, holding my tears back, biting my thick lips, watching her work.

When Inga leaves to buy some food, Edgars and I are finally alone. All I want to do is to sob in his arms. All he wants to do is to be with me. He wishes the drunken encounter with Inga never took place. He says my cornflower eyes have been waking him up at night. He caresses my freckled face and gently plants kisses on my slim neck. Slowly pulling myself away from the heavenly pleasure of his touch, I dig my fingers into my curls, and beg him to leave Inga. We cuddle and kiss until we hear the noise of the rattling keys in the door.

The next morning, Edgars, Inga and I travel on a local bus towards the main terminal. People pass us in the aisle, shuffling their bags and counting their change. Inga is reading and Edgars looking out the window. He sits opposite me. Our knees don't touch. I see his worried face framed in glass. I put my finger to my lips and touch the contour of his lips on the window. The sun shines in my eyes and as the bus pulls away, I can't quite make out his face.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS. The author wishes to thank Janina Adelhardt, Nimity James and Sarah Hall for valuable comments, advice, and moral support.

## The Forger

Gedas glued his broad shoulders to his seat, gazing out the window. It was 10 am and he had half an hour to get to the heart of Klaipėda where his client was waiting. The bus stopping every few hundred meters made him fidget with the zip of his new black coat. Finally, he got off at the alley of oak trees overlooking the town square, walking the rest of the way to the prestigious hotel *Klaipėda*. Seated in a red plush chair at the table for two, he amused himself with an attractive brunette while she jotted his order. Standing in front of him in shiny stilettos, she wore nude-colored stockings, designed to make her full ankles appear more delicate. Placing her pencil and paper in her oval apron pocket, she slowly lowered her fake lashes. Turning on the tips of her pointy shoes, she stirred Gedas' imagination with what it would be like to be kissed by her—her plump lips leaving their mark all over his body. Sweat dampened his armpits. Gently swaying her narrow hips, she maintained her model walk, not once needing to adjust the heavily-starched napkin hanging over her right hand. He had an extraordinary memory for faces and names, and she was no exception. To him, the waitress may've been working in the hotel as a KGB informer.

Glancing over at the gold-plated wall clock above the bar—the hands frozen at 11 o'clock, he checked his own watch, repeating under his breath “все будет хорошо”—“all will be fine”. He contemplated reassuring his client with the words “all will be fine” or “viskas bus gerai”, but wasn't sure whether he knew English or Lithuanian. Piotr had spoken Russian on the phone and Gedas made up his mind to stick to the first phrase. He finished his orange juice at the same time as a well-built, middle-aged man approached with the greeting “Good morning Doctor.” Gedas discretely pointed his thumb across the table where Piotr lowered himself heavily into a soft chair. Veronika, the waitress, balanced her weight from one foot to the other, patiently waiting for Piotr as his hand flicked through the menu, eventually settling for a glass of Georgian wine.

"What have you got for me?"

The man handed Gedas a manila folder containing a number of hand-written reports, signed and dated by the prominent neurologist Vilius Vilkaitis.

"How did you manage to get them?" asked Gedas, flicking through the confidential patient files. Piotr replied that the cleaner had done it for him. He followed up by pointing out the use of a black fountain pen throughout documentation, Gedas expression turned thunderous and his client rushed to apologize.

"I've done this hundreds of times!" Gedas said, snapping his fingers in front of Piotr's long nose. "My work is that of a surgeon."

"Oh, I've heard you operate your magic pen with the same precision," whispered a red-faced Piotr, wiping sweat from his stocky face with the sleeve of his overly-tight jacket. Before replying, Gedas took a mental note of the unevenness of his eyebrows, sitting as they did too close to his slanted eyes.

"The secret to a successful operation is using the right blade, or pen in my case, at the right time. But there is always a risk."

"Yes. Of course. How much?" Piotr asked.

"Fifty rubles." Before Piotr had a chance to say anything, Gedas acknowledged the sizable amount, given many workers were paid less than 100 rubles per month.

"Comrade, six weeks working in the black market would surely cover the expenses?"

"I hope so," Piotr said, obviously surprised by Gedas' straightforward monologue. It worked every time! He knew how to talk his clients around to *his* prices.

"We're talking about a medical certificate with possible extensions, are we not?"

"Regardless of the quantity, the price will remain the same—50 rubles each—half at the start and the rest when the job is done."

The men finished their drinks, settling on the time and date of their next meeting. They shook hands with closed-lipped smiles. Squeezing his long fingers around the 25 ruble banknote of the bearded revolutionary leader Vladimir Ilich Lenin, Gedas added "все будет хорошо!"—"all will be fine!"



The forger walked towards the giant stature of Lenin, which decorated the town square, its marble hand pointing directly at the red brick building of the Cultural Center across the road. Stopping in front of the Center, Gedas observed passengers getting on and off the overcrowded Hungarian-made *Ikaruses*. Time after time, he'd witnessed how the pairs of yellow buses, joined in the middle by the rubbery accordion bellows, maneuvered through the ice-damaged roads. Once, while on a bus, Gedas had had the chance to enjoy the skills of a Charlie Chaplin impersonator. A professional actor, balancing in the middle of the joining platform, had drawn a circle around himself with his walking stick. Then, hugging his arms around himself, he had offered passengers his stick for support, eliciting a storm of giggles. Standing on the rotating platform, listening to the earthy noises of the rubber bellows expanding, twisting, and folding into thick strips, Gedas admired the driver's 'figure-skating' skills. But such entertainment was only possible on a semi-empty bus. Most times passengers who tried to push themselves into the expandable bellows, either couldn't or once on, struggled to squeeze back out at their destination, leaving with missing buttons and wigs, ripped stockings and broken heels. Gedas rarely used public transport, instead choosing to travel by taxi or on foot.

He wasn't a stranger to the Cultural Center where the library was a preferred meeting place of his clients. While waiting, he read the newspaper *Pravda*—*The Truth* full of articles about the diligence of the Soviet system. The impression left from reading the daily news was that citizens of the fifteen Soviet republics, sturdily governed by Moscow, were thriving from building missiles for the last forty years, showing off heavy ammunition during the yearly May parades. As far as Moscow was concerned, the impressive size of tanks, rockets and technologically-advanced war planes, kept the Soviet Union the most powerful country in the world. Such deadly devices came at the cost of half-empty food stores. Meat and poultry were always in great demand while fruit such as bananas or pineapples were almost

non-existent. Such a desire to frighten the world with ever-expanding weaponry, came at the cost of basic necessities, toilet paper and kitchen appliances people struggled to find.

Newspapers aside, to Gedas, the cozy library was a place to escape into, the stillness of the shelved, ready-to-borrow publications soothed him. He would read Michail Bulgakov, Maxim Gorky, Juozas Baltušis, especially enjoying a rare translation of Stendhal for a precise analysis of his characters' psychology. He kept the notes from Dale Carnegie's *How to Win Friends and Influence People* by his bedside. The library was Gedas' observatory. He envied those having time to fully immerse themselves in biographies, short stories, novels, or who were capable of getting lost between the pages of academic writing. He surveyed the entrance by listening to the opening and closing of the door. He heard the staff talking to the borrowers returning or checking out publications. He tuned into the subdued whisperings of personal affairs. He had developed methods in spotting, identifying and distinguishing those he could and couldn't trust. He knew how quickly people could turn against each other.

Settling down to work at his friend's hideaway, Gedas contemplated his life. Running a hand down a muscular thigh he paused to gaze at his long manicured fingers. Due to the delicate nature of the job, he required smooth, flawless hands. A manual job was absolutely out of the question. The skill of being ambidextrous was one he had cultivated from childhood and it now stood him in good stead. His heart responded to each carefully-crafted word with a joyful beat. As he worked into the night, he couldn't help thinking of his efforts to manipulate the Soviet rules. At the end of each completed forgery, he felt as if he climbed over the Iron Curtain to taste the sweetness of personal freedom. The jail bars, keeping him from the outside world until 1983, left him well exposed to the weaknesses of the Soviet system. *Why don't I stop? I've already been in jail. But then, why should I? This occupation allows me to live as I please. I own my own flat, furniture, piano, aquarium. Any girl I desire is mine for the taking.*

Gedas withdrew into his own world of words. His own tiny writing transformed, blossoming into large, medium, narrow, broad, straight or uneven letters, whatever was required—all achieved with strokes from his Parker pen. The created texts looked indistinguishable from the original writing samples. Exhausted and drawn out from working all night, he slipped off his chair and laid down on the piece of shabby carpet covering the room's floor.



Sitting at the base of the Lenin monument, Gedas reflexively checked his wristwatch. There was another hour before his next appointment. He walked up and down the main street, following beautiful women with a longing gaze, pausing to chat to a passing acquaintance, reading and rereading the newspaper *Komjaunimo tiesa*. In the *Truth of Komsomol* he learned the names of the Klaipėda region schools whose pupils were taken by buses to the *kolkhozes*, or collective farms, to help with vegetable harvesting. He covered his mouth so as not to laugh out loud, recalling how nearly twenty years back, in form 10, he too had dug dirty potatoes from the muddy fields with his bare hands. The farm he worked at was one of the 26,000 existing throughout the Soviet Union belonging to the government. In reality, the government property was regarded as people's property. So, Gedas and his classmates filled their burlap sacks with potatoes while one of the parents, waiting in his 1970s *Žiguli* close-by, loaded the stock into his car and drove off to the fresh produce market. Later the boys were rewarded 5 rubles each. Reading the article, "Potato harvesting success", Gedas had no doubt that out of 100 sacks of collected vegetables, some had ended up at the market, just like every other autumn.

Today Gedas expected his second encounter with the rabbit-like man. The already familiar short Arūnas' figure, contrasted by his large ears and protruding top teeth, appeared from the other side of the Lenin's monument. Tiny goose-bump-like pimples sat around his squashed nose. At the bottom of the concrete

steps, carrying skywards the gigantic immortal revolutionary leader, constantly blinking, Arūnas paid for his second extension of a newly-forged medical certificate. After they parted, Gedas went through his mental diary for the following week's appointments: Monday 2 pm—creating Moscow Lomonosov University degree certificate, Wednesday 4 pm—faking Leningrad Conservatory academic transcripts, Friday 10 am—dealing with falsification of a medical certificate. Since being caught, Gedas preferred working alone, not having to share his profits, his trusty companion from the past still remained behind bars. "Jail is a place for criminals, not for fraudulent copiers," he was told by wardens. Forgers like him were a rarity, and, even in jail, he'd had to do favors for both staff and outsiders. Once he had forged a divorce certificate for a prominent army officer to show to his lover who had wanted permanency in their relationship. Now both women were content. In such moments Gedas considered whether he was a genius or a crook, whether he fulfilled or ruined people's goals, dreams and aspirations. In jail he hadn't expected to keep doing the very tasks that had sent him there in the first place!

Upon Gedas' release, even though he decided to never return to forgery, demand for his 'art work' soon reached a peak. Admiring his almond-shaped fingernails, he had no regrets for not pursuing his dream of becoming a great pianist. His four-year *Music Diploma of Srednevo Specialnovo Obrazovanie* proved most beneficial in this line of work! Knowing what solfeggio, polyphony and score reading entailed, helped in forging the transcripts. Clients gave him the freedom of inserting incomplete subjects or adjusting failed marks. Knowing that polyphony was the most difficult subject to pass, he changed the result from 2 to 3 on a grading scale of 1 to 5, and gave the highest mark for score reading. As part of his own Music Diploma, in order to pass a political subject, he'd gone to great length to memorize the concepts of Marxism-Leninism. Today, he diligently followed the aim of the communist society's principle "from each according to his ability, to each according to his needs". He had been utilizing his ability to work "to the greatest benefit of the people" already!





Gedas warmed a tin of tomato soup in a small pot on a gas cooker and ate it with two pieces of thickly-buttered bread. Then, sitting in front of his huge aquarium, fondly watched his six goldfish sucking in flakes and pallet, gulping fresh water, and showing their appreciation by letting out various-sized bubbles to float to the tank surface. He admired his fish for their inquisitive nature in exploring everything inside and outside the tank with their eyes—pink, white and black-shaded buttons that never looked right at him. Brushing their placid fins against the gravel, rocks and dark-green underwater garden, they reminded him of his own lifestyle. He caught himself leading a life both on the surface and beneath. In his surface life, he existed by following Carnegie's teachings on how to build self-confidence. In his other life, it felt as if he was trapped in the body of a slippery eel hiding in the stagnant waters. He had no illusion that even as an invisible eel, he was really protected from the government's radar. At times the touch of the 'dirty' rubles, earned through forgery, colored his body with puss. The names and faces of those Gedas falsified documents for, bothered him. Once he had a dream that the waitress Veronika, who had served him juice and coffee at the restaurant, was the lover of the Lieutenant with the forged divorce certificate. Gedas woke up before the Lieutenant's wife choked Veronika with the chain of her diamond necklace...

Gedas' conversations with himself or his fish were often accompanied by music. As a student, he had experienced how playing or listening to the music helped in invoking a positive attitude and unlocking hidden emotions. But today he was no longer willing to share anything with others. He put on a tape of his favorite pop group *Hiperbolè*, stretching out on his plush couch. The reassuring male singer's voice encouraged him to keep looking for love. Gedas' body stirred. He yearned for true love—having a woman for sex didn't count. Available women reminded him of his goldfish. Each one had a unique appearance, but, like his colorful friends, were easily replaceable. For a long time now Gedas had ached to feel the warmth of a woman who wished to

be with him. If he trusted her enough, he hoped that she would embrace his secrets. Ideally, he wanted to shed the tough, ugly skin of the eel, to surface from the muddy pond, and look into her eyes as a new man. If Carnegie managed to reach the heights of his career by teaching what he believed in, so Gedas still had a chance to become a prominent performer! He had no doubt he would easily pass the entrance exams to continue his studies at the Vilnius Conservatory of Music. Just to prove this to himself, he opened the dusty lid of his second-hand piano, warming up his fingers by running through a few scales, and then selecting *Nocturne in E Flat Major, Op. 9, No. 2* to match his melancholic mood. He'd begun to play the piano at the age of seven, attending the government music school twice a week for seven years. He was twenty, when he performed this particular Frédéric Chopin's *Nocturne* during his piano exam, impressing the academic panel with his sensitivity in projecting the desperate composer's love for the pianist Marie Pleyer. Sitting at his upright piano, he wondered why the yearning for true love hadn't faded away since the composer wrote his piece in the early 1830s.

The joy of being able to play his favorite pieces by heart, inspired Gedas to get up, shower, wash and dry his thick hair, brushing and styling it back with gel. Later that night, dressed in designer jeans, matching shirt, dark-blue shoes and coat, he caught a taxi to *Vėtrungė*. The foreign sailors, delivering cargo to the port of Klaipėda, regarded *The Weathercock* as a most appropriate name for this night club. Gedas was led to a table for four and soon his companions were seated around him—two mature women and a young man. After sipping his wine, Gedas left the table. He wasn't interested in the affectionate ramblings of grandmother, mother and son. He hadn't seen his own parents nor grandparents since he was jailed. They had rejected him because a family member in jail was regarded a disgrace. Afraid of losing their jobs or neighbors' respect, they had disassociated themselves from their son—the fallen musician.

Reaching the end of the venue where people were standing or chatting between dances, Gedas leaned on the panel of a see-

through partition. He overheard a woman's voice on the other side saying that if in the next 10 minutes nobody invited her to dance, she was going home!

"I don't want to keep standing here like an object of humiliation, begging for men's attention."

Gedas smiled listening to her companions attempt to calm her down.

"Snieguolė, how else will we find suitable husbands?" one voice asked.

"Going out is the only way," assured the other.

Snieguolė sipped her cocktail through a straw, watching the dancing couples, and adjusting her glasses. There was something about her that caught Gedas' interest. *It must be her femininity*, he decided. Peering through the gap in the partition, he eyed her straight, skinny legs, exposed by her brief red mini dress and complimented by matching heels. She finished her drink, bent down to leave her glass on the floor, and said goodbye to her female companions.

Gedas caught her by surprise.

"Would you care to dance?"

"Sure," she said, giving him a quick glance with her soft blue eyes. Walking towards the dance floor, they introduced themselves. The band was playing fast rock. Snieguolė, leaning backwards with each new sequence of beats, elegantly waved her bare arms in the air. So impressed with her moves, he kept count in his head so as not to miss a beat. Oh, how he wanted to kiss her long neck, daringly exposed by the low-cut dress. *Snieguolė—the Snow-Maiden* with her bright cheeks and white arms—he couldn't believe she was real. But she was! Each time he opened his eyes, there she was, vigorously shaking her lithe body.

She removed her oversized glasses, letting him in on her little secret—she only wore them to look older. He thought it a very clever trick, but deep down was pleased as young women with glasses were considered slightly damaged goods. As they continued to move, the whole room appeared to spin out of control and the chandeliers seemed to come lower and lower,

down towards his head. Counting how many glasses of wine he had consumed, he stopped at three. But then remembered he'd consumed half a bottle of red before coming out that night. Steadying himself on his feet, he pulled himself upright. He didn't want her to find him unattractive just because he'd had a few drinks. Thoughts such as, *she's a delicate elk and I have to tread carefully not to frighten her off*, circled in his mind.

They remained on the dance floor for hours, only returning to their seats to finish their meals. Before the end of the night, Gedas had moved to Snieguolė's table, ordering champagne for her and her friends. He offered to take them all home but her friends didn't want to leave. In the taxi, he asked Snieguolė if she would like to finish the evening with more champagne and strawberries at his place. She shook her head saying it was far too late for such things at 2 o'clock in the morning. Sitting close to her on the back seat, he tried to kiss her but she gently pulled away. *Such a jumpy elk*, he thought, taking her small hand into his. In her presence he felt an imperfect, clumsy giant. Once they reached her dwelling, a block of multistoried buildings, he asked if he could walk her to the door to make sure she was safe. Standing under the street light, she found her keys, dismissing his suggestion. He wrote his phone number on a piece of paper and attempted to pass it to her. She didn't take it, justifying her decision by not having a phone. She suggested he could seek her out between the shelves of the Children's Library on the other side of the city where she worked. In turn he proposed a proper date for the following Saturday, meeting at the entrance of the Central Post Office, in full view of the stature of Lenin. Giggling, she replied she was going away for a week. To Gedas' delight, she wrote her girlfriend's phone number in case she wasn't back by Saturday.



Gedas caught himself analyzing Snieguolė's character, but even his extensive knowledge of psychology, hadn't prepared him for love. He simply couldn't find the right words to describe her, his first glance of her had made him seek her out. Reason

had no control over his budding feelings for this serious young woman. He calculated he was eleven years older than her, and hoped the age gap wouldn't be an obstacle. Receiving compliments at the gym for his perfect form, regularly cutting his hair in the latest fashion, made him appear younger than his age. Her unwillingness to be trapped by his charms, her decision not to hop into his bed at the first invitation, had completely disarmed him. Finding her surrounded by mystery, he had to remind himself to be patient.

The following week, while working on a series of complex forgeries, he struggled to concentrate. He strove to push Snieguolė out of his mind during the day, but at night, her childish face, her lilting voice along with her feminine manners made him yearn for her embrace. He fantasized of spending their winter vacations in the Mountains of Caucasus, relaxing at the top resorts of Palanga and Yalta, Sochi and Batumi together. Lying in bed, he contemplated Snieguolė was not an elk but a fragile gazelle, one with ringed horns that she was ready to use. Gentle yet stubborn and ready to defend herself. He couldn't wait for the end of the week where he planned to spoil her with an array of carefully planned entertainment as well as a simple gift.

On Saturday Gedas paced up and down in front of the Post Office, but Snieguolė didn't show. He placed a call to Kaunas and discovered she had not yet returned having suffered a broken arm. He memorized the details of the hospital she had been admitted to. After leaving the public phone booth, he rested against the red brick building wall, blood rushing to his worried face. That night he caught the train to Kaunas, arriving at the hospital around 11 am, carrying a bouquet of tulips in his hands. Snieguolė, half sitting in her narrow iron bed, dressed in the flimsy, oversized hospital gown, greeted him with a faint smile. She explained how she had gone to a disco with her friend Aldona, and had slipped, falling on the pavement on their way home. Gripped by strong pain during the night, she hadn't actually realized she'd broken the bone. Gedas touched her swollen elbow, surprised it wasn't in plaster. She whispered she didn't

have the 25 rubles the surgeon wanted for plastering. They both wondered why this wasn't done for free. As they spoke, she appeared in great discomfort, pulling at her brown fringe with anxious fingers—she hadn't been given any painkillers either. Gedas tightened his fists, politely excusing himself. At the reception he discovered that on Sundays no doctors were present on the ward, except the visiting doctor who popped in and out from another floor. He learned the name of the head nurse and the location of her office. Before charging there, he quickly ran down the stairs to buy some flowers. Then after knocking on the door, presented her with three long-stemmed roses. After a smooth conversation, she found a doctor and finally, Snieguolė, signing her release form, was free to dress and leave.

Meeting her at the reception, where he adjusted her slipping floral scarf and buttoned-up her dark coat, Gedas led her into the lift by her uninjured elbow, carrying her medication and belongings in his other hand.

"I will take you to Klaipėda," he said. "My surgeon friend can see you as soon as we arrive." Realizing there were still eight hours to wait for a train, they caught a taxi to her childhood friend's place. Bubbly, fair-haired Aldona wore a striped apron while cooking them some pancakes, followed by cups and cups of tea. Gedas was taken aback that as sick as she was, Snieguolė appeared so entertaining. She recalled stories from working in the library and spoke of personal belongings being left behind.

"When scarfs, gloves, jumpers and hats get mixed up, parents return demanding their child's rightful belongings. I find it funny how they tend to forget that style and color of clothing is very much the same in every shop!"

Aldona agreed, putting down her knitting which she'd been occupied with since their arrival. She joked it would be hard to claim her black scarf if she'd lost it as most people wore black! By the time they had to go, tall, vivid-eyed Aldona presented Gedas with a completed scarf, expressing her gratitude in caring for her best friend. This touching gesture tightened his throat, he tried to thank her in a harsh, dry voice. He felt honored to be in the com-

pany of these selfless women. Joking of forgetting his own scarf in the library, led to a wave of laughter, shared by the trio.

The taxi driver let them out in the heart of the city. Waiting for their train, Gedas and Snieguolė had coffee in the old town of Kaunas. She remarked the name of the restaurant, *Tulpė*, coincided with the name of flowers he had given her at the hospital. After swallowing some painkillers, she admitted his tulips, neatly gathered in a ceramic vase on their table, made her ordeal more bearable. Remembering the gift he had intended to surprise her with on their first date, he reached into his shirt pocket. She smiled, instantly recognizing her own silhouette, well-executed in a neat ink drawing. She admitted being overwhelmed by his endless attention: taking her around by taxis, paying for her meals, entertaining her and her friends with champagne. She couldn't help wondering why he was so kind, regarding his gesture of racing to rescue her after her accident as too generous. After all, Kaunas was 200 kilometers away from Klaipėda! He kept reassuring he was doing all this because he wanted them to be friends. Watching her biting her tiny pursed lips, he wanted to kiss them into submission. Their conversation flowed easily and he decided to tell her of his musical aspirations and his temporary occupation in order to save money for his further studies. She reacted calmly to his occupation and afterwards, she held his shaking hands while he struggled to find words to overcome years of self-imposed silence. Throughout his monologue, she nodded her head encouraging him to continue, attentively looking into his dark, glinting eyes. Injecting emotions into his confession, eased his internal suffering, the sense of being trapped by his loneliness. After telling her all he could, he leaned back in his chair, not sure whether to laugh or cry when she asked him to add his silhouette to his gift. He withdrew his magic pen and within seconds had added the right side of his face. In exchange, she promised to knit him warm winter socks, and once again they started laughing, just like at Aldona's place.

Gedas and Snieguolė boarded their night train, sharing the joy of having a carriage all to themselves. Disappointingly, a

passing-by attendant warned more passengers were boarding at the next station. While helping Snieguolė to take off her coat, he admired her slim figure clothed in another mini dress. He then knelt on both knees to assist in removing her boots. He took the upper bunk but listening to her soft moans coming from below, he decided to come down. He inhaled the freshness of his tulips, sitting in a glass jar on a small table, then opened the curtain and blankly stared into the night. Holding Snieguolė's cold fingers in complete darkness, he wasn't pleased when the new passengers turned the light on upon entering their cabin. Once the elderly couple settled down, and turned the light off, he shut his eyes, cursing and swearing to himself about corrupt doctors wishing to rip off their patients. The deceiving communism principle to work "to the greatest benefit of the people" echoed in his head until he wanted to scream. *My gazelle, you should've charged at the Kaunas hospital medical staff with your curled horns, knocking them over for not looking after you! I'll look after you and protect you, always,* he promised to himself, slowly releasing her fingers and tucking them under the blanket. Once again, he climbed up to his bunk, drifting in and out of the bad dreams coming down before dawn had broken. He sat on the edge of her bunk until she opened her eyes. Kissing her on her forehead, he whispered "I love you." Still sleepy and obviously in pain, she whispered "Thank you for everything."

At 6 am they made their way to the Klaipėda's hospital, a short walk from the station. Within the hour, the doctor had completed his examination of Snieguolė's X-rays and plastered half of her arm. Gedas took her home by taxi. Her parents, already informed of everything, were worried but most grateful to him. He walked home trying not to think about her, at least for a while. Though he was puzzled spotting a telephone sitting on a small stool in the hallway. Her father gave him the number. Gedas placed the number in his coat pocket and walked the forty-five minute journey home. A forty-five minutes—that's how far apart their dwellings were. Forty-five minutes between embraces. Forty-five minutes away from holding her close and never letting



go. Moving up the stairs, he memorized and discarded her number. He wanted to call her the moment he reached his flat.



The door of the Gedas' flat was already ajar, two uniformed officers obstructing the entry. It was too late to escape another officer, coming up the stairs, pushing him inside.

"Comrade *Doctor*?" asked a tall officer whose gray hair protruded from under his hat adorned with the red star.

"The same," Gedas said. He was certain there was nothing they could pin on him—no traces of documents, stamps, fountain pens, concealing powder, absorbing paper, bottles of inks nor chemical solutions. Having a small storage room five blocks away at his disposal, he never worked from home. He constantly changed his route to the place, travelling at different times and had never noticed anyone following.

Gedas was given half an hour to pack under guarded supervision, and they then locked and sealed his flat, keeping the key. He was questioned at the police station, his interrogator being amazed by Gedas' ability to forge confidential papers in such quantities. The Special Bodies were proud of finding his secret hideaway with some of the highly sought after forgeries still in progress. He was told that the KGB never failed. Confused and disorientated after repeated questioning, he stared at the dirty cell ceiling, seeing the faces of his clients in a long row, staring at him, pointing fingers at each other—*it was her, it was him, all of us were responsible for your arrest*. But another voice in his head told him *you are the victim of the system*. As the trusted owner of the room he utilized was at sea, and those, possessing his forgeries, would've been foolish to speak out, there was no other possible explanation!

The following week, after returning from questioning, Gedas sat in his cell, sighing heavily and shaking his head. Apparently, being too valuable to be put behind bars again, he'd be relocated to Novosibirsk—a far-reaching dot on a Soviet Union map. He would be there on assignment to continue with his current line

of work. He had walked on hot coals covered by the red flag, decorated with hammer and sickle, and finally had burned his feet. Before his departure to the Siberian town, some 4,500 kilometers distance from Klaipėda, Gedas wished to write a private letter. A letter to Snieguolė. A letter of regret of not being able to play her his favorite Chopin's piece to properly express his emotions. Of course, they'd allowed him to write his letter, surely sharing it around afterwards, mocking his graceful gazelle, laughing their heads off, and once everybody read it, hiding it away. But not before copying it. Not before creating a fresh, Snieguolė's file, and putting a copy of his letter there. Not before marking the original letter as 'supplementary material' and placing it into his file.

The police vehicle arrived at the train station, two accompanying officers boarding the Klaipėda-Vilnius train with him. As the train began to move, Gedas narrowed his eyes, following the rows and rows of identical red brick blocks of flats. He observed weary passengers trying to board overcrowded *Ikaruses*, slipping and sliding in the late autumn mud. Curling his tingling lips, biting down to stop the tears, he kept memorizing the dark streets and alleys of his home town. He imagined a policeman he'd done a favor for once, posting a letter on his behalf. He imagined Snieguolė opening and reading his letter. He imagined her holding it with both hands close to her big wide eyes, filled with raindrop-size tears. He imagined her admiring his neat handwriting, then finding and kissing the drawing of their silhouettes. He imagined her gracefully packing her belongings, including hand-knitted winter socks for him, and following him in a few months.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS. The author wishes to thank Janina Adelhardt, Nimity James and Carina Claff for valuable comments, advice, and moral support.

# On the Relevance of Irrelevance: Celebrating the Legacy of Valdis Juris Zeps

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IAN GWIN

May 29th, 2017 marks the 85th anniversary of the birth of linguist and academic Valdis Juris Zeps. Zeps has left a wide linguistic legacy equal parts historical, topological, morphological, phonological, metrical, poetical, musical, computational, and more. This is apparent even at first blush; his linguistic bibliography begins in 1958 with a publication applying electronic computer research to psycholinguistics, and over the course of the next thirty two years covers everything from a lexicon for the Hocak language, to studies in the Old Prussian language, to the toponymy of east Latgalian lakes.<sup>1</sup> But this is only a small portion of the story. In these works we can only get a glimpse of the comical, the ironical, the cerebral or the symbolical, the mythological, allegorical, extralogical or even illogical dimensions of someone remembered by his former teachers, colleagues and students as not just a linguist and colleague, but as one who really knew how to have a good time.

Take for example Zeps' novel, *Kēves dēls Kurbads*, written under the pseudonym Jānis Turbads.<sup>2</sup> While initially sparking con-

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<sup>1</sup> Zeps, *Bibliography of Valdis Juris Zeps*, 160–171.

<sup>2</sup> Turbads, J. *Kēves dēls Kurbads: Pasaka*, 1974, 2007.

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troversty in the Latvian exile community through the publication of excerpts in the literary magazine *Jauna Gaita* in 1959, Zeps' folktale has an impressive tale all its own, having been reprinted by Jauna Daugava in 2007 and adapted into the libretto for B. Rubess' and Dace Aperāne's musical *Varoņdarbi*.<sup>3</sup> Written during a "sudden attack of irreverence," *Mare's Son Kurbads* tells the story of Kurbads ("Hungerwhere"), a Quixotic five year old hero who literally (or literarily) takes up the shawl and staff of another Kurbads, the folk character who, as the story goes, is born of a mare and eats magic fish intended to give the mayor's wife children. In Zeps' Joycean resetting, Kurbads is the mayor's illegitimate son. Following the call to the world heard in the fairy tale, young Kurbads leaves home. From the streets of postwar Latvia, Kurbads happens upon the world of myth, a dimension of story from which the heroes and heroines of Latvian mythology obliquely encounter physical reality.<sup>4</sup> Thence befalls on Kurbads a series of epic misadventures, in what Valdars Nollendorfs describes as "a satirical treatment of the entire mythologization process in Latvian life and literature during the last 100 years."<sup>5</sup> For his tomfoolery, Hungerwhere is finally banished from the realm of myth, and sentenced "to live" in the quotidian world of the real.

In his novel, Zeps was "concerned with the discrepancy between tradition and the demands of reality."<sup>6</sup> Through the looking glass of Kurbad's journey, Zeps addressed the living tradition of Latvian national myths, history, and literature, by setting characters, events, and ideas together through his linguistic mainstay, the play of words. Just as Kurbads is inspired by the parallelism of his name with his character's, the relation of sign (myth) and the signified (reality) are thrown off balance by the

<sup>3</sup> Nollendorfs, Reviewed Work: *Kēves dēls Kurbads* by Jānis Turbads, 171; Zeps, "Hungerwhere", *Son of a Mare*, 1–5.

<sup>4</sup> Nollendorfs, "The Demythologization of Latvian Literature," 664–674, Correspondence with Author, 2017; Zeps, "Hungerwhere", *Son of a Mare*, 1–5.

<sup>5</sup> Nollendorfs, *ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

jest of their peaceful coexistence. And though the premises are humorous, the consequences are serious for the figures of mythology, who are dehumanized by regulation and unreasonable expectations, and also for young Kurbads, who carries his parents' legacy in his father's cane and mother's shawl.

The book is printed with the weight of Zeps' deep scholarship as well, and would have to bear many scholarly notes if printed in his own (currently unpublished) English translation.<sup>7</sup> Though some kind of loss in translation would certainly have amused the author of the Latvian language textbook *Speak You Latvian*, first published in his self-edited dittoed journal *Vecais Pažarnieks*, otherwise known as *Melnraksts* or *Nokavējušajies Draņķis, Elles Kaķis, Jaunais Mēlnesis, The Ambidextrous Epicene, Pehdajais Schihberis, A Related Journal, Trokais Īnaidņiks, The Latgalian Maroon, The Semigallian Blasoun, or The Semigallian Blazoon*.<sup>8</sup> This also from the author of the Journal of Baltic Studies shortest ever titled article: *Fish*.<sup>9</sup>

But what would drive a linguist and scholar such as Zeps to write a novel in the first place? Perhaps we can take the author for more or less than his word when we understand the importance of *irrelevance*, not as a cuff of the sleeve trick, but as a kind of methodological principle. Irrelevance shows us, as humor, a break in the path of our expectations, and thus the structure of knowledge, social, historical, and importantly, linguistic.

The transformation of a misnomer into a nominal, the wayward ways of orthography, the unexpected friendliness of distant morphemes, a confused collision of languages and its ensuing paradoxes: these themes are also some of the motivating factors of Zeps' scholarly work. Part of his doctoral work for Indiana University, traces the semantic schemes of Finnic borrowings into Latvian, showing in a series of detailed maps the sudden transformations of meaning over social, cultural, and linguistic boundaries.<sup>10</sup> Twenty two years later, Zeps published his mon-

<sup>7</sup> Nollendorfs, Correspondence with Author, *ibid*.

<sup>8</sup> Zeps, *Bibliography of Valdis Juris Zeps*, 160–17.

<sup>9</sup> Nollendorfs, Correspondence with Author, 2017.

<sup>10</sup> Zeps, *Latvian and Finnic Linguistic Convergences*, 1962.

umental dictionary of East Latvian toponyms, containing 65,000 attestations for over 20,000 places, the product of twenty years of work recording the pronunciation of place names by émigrés who had come from Southern Latvia to the US, Canada, and elsewhere.<sup>11</sup> While in his fiction Zeps was bringing figures of history into fantasy, here he had brought, from vanishing sources, phonetic facts back into history.

Once at a conference for the Association of Baltic Studies, Zeps gave an open demonstration of the linguistic laws behind the century-long changes undergone by these place names. Hosting a party in his hotel room, Zeps asked if there weren't any Baltic sources for the Latvian word *asaka* ("fishbone"). The Lithuanians chipped in with *ašaka*, but the Estonians had nothing close, only *kalaluu* (lit., "fish-bone"). As they insisted, Zeps broke into a version of a familiar Christmas song:

Sidrabiņa lietiņš lija,  
Kalaluu, kalaluu!  
Ziemassvētku vakarāi,  
kalaluu, kalaluu!<sup>12</sup>

Looking at the joke as an academic, one might ask: what was the message, exactly? Two rights don't make a right? Replace Latvian nonsense (*kaladū*) with Estonian sense (*kalaluu*) and get the same phonetic answer regardless? Or was it the failed search for cognates when there were none which was itself funny?

One does not need to split hairs to say that even at the level of the word, the context of speaker, audience, and language, really matters. Once in Rīga, Zeps and Professor Trevor Fennel had returned to their hotel to take a walk around the block. Zeps dutifully noted the armbands on the police patrolling the district, which read *Patrulis*. These he counter-interpreted as reading *patruls* (quite stupid).<sup>13</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Zeps, *The Placenames of Latgola: A Dictionary of East Latvian Toponyms*.

<sup>12</sup> Smidchenš, Interview with Author, 2017.

<sup>13</sup> Fennel, Correspondence with Author, 2017.

This brings another focus of Zeps' scholarship to mind: the use of language to identify and describe. According to the Lithuanian historian Egidijus Aleksandravičius, whom Zeps invited to stay at his home in the Fall semester of 1991, (and ended up staying for four months), Zeps was thinking deeply then about "the role of language for identity."<sup>14</sup> He had earlier been involved with the discovery and publication of the Basil epigram, and was then following updates in the construction of Old Prussian, a language which survived only until the colonization by Russian speakers and later German Crusaders.<sup>15</sup> This research, taking place a continent away and focusing on a language extinct for hundreds of years, had been an inspiration for Zeps to help restore the Hocak language, of which he had begun work on a bilingual dictionary with Phillip Mike at the University of Wisconsin-Madison and had represented for the Foundation of Endangered Languages.<sup>16</sup> In contrast to the then popular attention on creating a theory abstract enough to represent the universals of all human languages, Zeps had found a deep personal connection between the story of a deceased language, part of his Baltic experience and past, with that of a living but endangered language in North America.

Important and relevant for Zeps at that time, was also the question of Latvian, Lithuanian, and Estonian independence as it related to Baltic émigré families abroad. While interactions with the West had begun to open during the thaw under Khrushchev, the separation of families across the space of an ocean had taken place for over a few decades, some of which, such as during the Nixon administration, seemed precarious for the independence of the Baltic states. The question for Zeps, as well as for the younger Balts who visited his home and attended his courses, was whether or not to return to the place of their parents and ancestors, and "how and what [they] would bring back" to the Baltics.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Aleksandravičius, Interview with Author, 2017.

<sup>15</sup> Breidaks, "Obituary: Valdis Juris Zeps, 1932–1996," 223–224.

<sup>16</sup> Zeps, *Bibliography of Valdis Juris Zeps*, 160–171; Ostler, "Foundation for Endangered Languages. Newsletter No 5: 1997," 11.

<sup>17</sup> Aleksandravičius, Interview with Author, 2017.

Not only were Latvian myths on Zeps' mind, but the Latvian language, its cultivation rather than its preservation, are pervasive in his scholarship. Zeps was throughout his career active in Latvian dialects, morphology, as well as its grammatical history. In a 1972 article on Latvian folk meter in poetry, Zeps uses his analyses as support for an aesthetic position on the way in which the folk meter ought to be taught.<sup>18</sup> The question of meter for Zeps is not an abstract concern fit for the creation of an ideal theory of language; the conclusion of his article points to Latvian elementary and high schools, and advocates for the sustained practice of the native folk art verse of Latvia. While discussing the use of folk verse in Latvian poetry, Zeps cites the use of a folk meter in the middle of Andrejs Eglītis' "Thy Land, O God, Is in Flames," where:

His switching to a folk meter here is rather akin to switching back to one's native language in order to say things which cannot be expressed in an alien tongue; for that very reason, the effect is unfortunately lost in translation, and I will not attempt to illustrate this point.<sup>19</sup>

Fifteen years later, after the ascension of Gorbachev and the surprising announcement of the United States' non-recognition of the incorporation of the Baltic States into the Soviet Union by Jack Matlock in Latvia, during the year of some of the first demonstrations in Latvia, Zeps also addressed the use of Latvian in a very different context in "What's 'Instant Coffee' in Latvian?"<sup>20</sup> Far more conversational in style than the aforementioned essay, this article is an example not merely of how Latvian ought to be taught, but where and how. He begins by expounding that many people of Latvian descent speak the language poorly, or not at all. And yet,

[...] Latvian is and can continue to be the vehicle for the social, aesthetic, scientific, and practical needs of the émigré population it serves, and the embattled status of Latvian in the homeland

<sup>18</sup> Zeps, "Folk Meters and Latvian Verse," 24.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Zeps, "What's 'Instant Coffee' in Latvian?" 25–36.



makes it doubly important that the émigrés retain an active command of the language [...] Forty years of émigré Latvian literature – some of it brilliant – never did make its way into the school-books, and thus rests condemned to future obscurity – a condition created by the writers' compatriots, who bought, read and loved their works, but entrusted the young to the classics instead.<sup>21</sup>

Zeps' work proposes a small remedy for a language fit more for going to church and school than using at the American supermarket, by writing a list of modern words Latvians can use for terms such as bathrobe and deodorant, which he gathered from the Latvian diasporas in Toronto in 1970 and Kalamazoo in 1982. Whereas in *Kurbads*, Zeps gave a young Latvian a chance to speak with the gods and heroes of his fathers, here Zeps is proposing new terms for a new generation of Latvians to use in a burgeoning world of refrigerators and supermarkets. Here we can see the crossroads of Zeps' interests in sociology as well as its direct political application, that of the linguist's theoretical knowledge coming against the paradigms of belief ingrained in social life, as well as the complex political context behind the use of language. What do you call a language with no words for the everyday world? How does this or another language differ from a Native American language, he asks Latvian communities, if it is not spoken in the modern, Westernized society that seems to be developing here and abroad?

Though the political situation has changed greatly since then, these questions are still relevant today. And while other émigré linguists, such as the Liepāja born Morris Halle<sup>22</sup> have been making distinguished careers covering the large theoretical questions that have characterized American linguistics in the past century, Zeps' work stands out for its progressive social basis as well as its consistent roots in the Baltic diaspora. Its diversity, range of thought, and persistent irrelevance presents a challenge for lin-

<sup>21</sup> Zeps, "What's 'Instant Coffee' in Latvian?" 25–36.

<sup>22</sup> Halle, Zeps "A Survey of Latvian Morphophonemics," 105–113; Zeps "Latvian Folk Meters and Styles," 207–11.

guists today, who would perhaps be fraught to fit the linguists' following creation within a theory of socio-morpho-phonemics, let alone write something comparable to:

"If you swim in the creek  
And an eel bites your cheek  
That's a moray."<sup>23</sup>

While the above may not be used as a testimony of the author's knowledge of popular song, it does show when paired with his technical work a twist in the structure of linguistic barriers, a knot in the strings tying phonology with semantics, sense with meaning. Simply put, it's play. But for Zeps, work was connected to play in the same way that Proto-Indo European is related to baked goods, or field research to farming.<sup>24</sup> That is, one reflected the other through the endless perspectives bound in the use and exchange of language, a source of humor as well as a link to history, knowledge, and the lives of others. And those who work to preserve, promote, and pursue the facts of their time such as Zeps, are those who make remembering the work of other lives possible, and thus create our own.

While Zeps' biography is treated elsewhere in detail,<sup>25</sup> many of the jokes, songs, and memories of this erudite and generous man remain unwritten, and like his research deserve a second look (for example, Aleksandravičius mentioned to me that before departing the US he received an eleven volume Lithuanian dictionary printed in Boston as a gift from Zeps, "the biggest gift I ever [got] from anybody in the United States.")<sup>26</sup> The Latvian Topological dictionary for which Zeps traveled to Latvia collecting documents in 1996, to the author's knowledge, remains unfinished. While his research in the field of topology remains daunting to possibly addend, many of his interests, such as com-

<sup>23</sup> Fennel, Correspondence with Author, 2017.

<sup>24</sup> Zeps, Betty, Correspondence with Author, 2017.

<sup>25</sup> Braidaks, "Obituary: Valdis Juris Zeps, 1932–1996," 223–224; Schmaltiegs, "Valdim Jurim Zepam – 70," 73–76.

<sup>26</sup> Aleksandravičius, Correspondence with Author, 2017.

putational and psychological linguistics, have only flourished since his first publications in these fields. While only a possibility, a Festschrift (aptly etymologized as *party-writing*) would be an apt tribute to a linguist whose work though nominally linguistic, entailed folklore, literature, criticism, and just plain historical writing and research, though only those in on the joke.

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## ABSTRACTS

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DOVILĖ ŠARKŪNAITĖ

### **Identity Formation in the Lithuanian Diaspora (I)**

This article (made of two parts) aims to examine the ways in which Lithuanian emigrants who live in the United Kingdom and the United States construct their ideinities in highly internationalized and globalized environments. In this piece of comparative research, cultural identity established in diaspora setting was expressed through the lens of media, namely newspapers that have emigrants as their primary audience and serve as tool of disseminating the ideology of *Lithuanianness*. The firsts part of the article is focused on the anlysis of the UK periodicals for Lithuanians.

ALMANTAS SAMALAVIČIUS

### **Vilnius Urbanism and Its Discontents**

The urban planning ideas of Camillo Sitte were largely ignored by the West and East likewise throughout the last century during which so much of urban destruction has happened. And thus a potential for sound urban renewal was lost for the last century. In the meantime a destructive program was applied by the adversaries of the Cold War. Lithuanian urbanism of the Soviet era fell prey to this ideology of modern urbanism that disregarded any alternatives and was coined by Swiss-French architect and urban designer Le Corbusier. No wonder Vilnius urbanism followed the path that was envisioned by Le Corbusier and his followers.

IAN GWIN

**On the Relevance of Irrelevance:  
Celebrating the Legacy of Valdis Juris Zeps**

The work of Latvian linguist, author, and scholar Valdis Juris Zeps covered a bewildering variety of topics in Baltic studies, linguistics, history, and literature before his untimely death in 1996. Citing interviews, personal memories, and anecdotes in addition to Zep's own research, the author aims to unify the broad themes of Zeps' research with his personal legacy and historical context. In addition to concerns of Latvian and Baltic linguistic situations and émigré linguistic communities, Zeps' humor and self-described irrelevance, as reflected through his work on the novel *Ķēves dēls Kurbads*, significantly characterized his remarkable intellectual approach to language and culture, an inspiration and challenge to scholars of today.

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