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Meaning Twist: National Images in Lithuanian Poetry of the Late Soviet Period

Nozīmes pavērsiens: nacionālie tēli lietuviešu dzejā padomju laiku beigās

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Summary This article analyzes the changes in poetic meanings in the late Soviet period in Lithuania. The author is looking at the homeland (*tėvynė*) images which were created by poets and which had become a popular content of the so-called "mass culture" (radio and television broadcasts, newspapers, choral music, poetry readings). There is widespread agreement that, although nationalism and Marxism were ideologically incompatible, Soviet ideology used certain aspects of nationalism to assert Soviet era patriotism. This article considers the significance of poetic images in the context of the political and sociocultural changes in the last decades of the Soviet occupation in Lithuania, raising the question of how national poetic images responded to and opposed Soviet ideology. It is argued, through the application of Juri Lotman's insights on culture, that poetry during the Soviet era was able to simultaneously address two audiences: one corresponding to the Soviet ideology, the other cherishing the memory of independent Lithuania and the hope of freedom.

Kopsavilkums Šajā rakstā analizētas poētisko nozīmju pārmaiņas Lietuvā padomju laiku beigās. Autore aplūko dzejnieku radītos tēvzemes tēlus, kas bija kļuvuši par iecienītu saturu tā saucamajā "masu kultūrā" (radio un televīzijas pārraidēs, avīzēs, kormūzikā, dzejas lasījumos). Pastāv viedoklis, ka, lai gan nacionālisms un marksisms bija ideoloģiski nesavienojami, padomju ideoloģija tomēr izmantoja dažus nacionālisma aspektus, lai stiprinātu padomju patriotismu. Šis raksts aplūko poētisko tēlu nozīmi to politisko un sociokulturālo pārmaiņu kontekstā, kuras norisinājās Lietuvā padomju okupācijas pēdējās desmitgadēs. Tiek meklēta atbilde uz jautājumu, kā nacionālie poētiskie tēli reaģēja uz padomju ideoloģiju un kā pretojās tai. Atsaucoties uz Jurija Lotmana vērojumiem par kultūru, tiek piedāvāts viedoklis, ka padomju laiku dzeja spēja vienlaikus uzrunāt divas auditorijas - vienu, kas pieņēma padomju ideoloģiju, un otru, kas loloja atmiņas par neatkarīgo Lietuvu un cerības atgūt brīvību.

> "As a matter of self-criticism," Iakovlev told Hedrick Smith in 1990, "one has to admit that we underestimated the forces of nationalism and separatism that were hidden deep within our system." (Senn 1995: xv)

Introduction

According to the common opinion, "Lithuania," "the land," and "homeland" were among the most important themes in Lithuanian poetry in the second half of the 20th century. This is true for the works of each of the two predominant types of poets – those supported by the Communist Party and those who, with their choices and creations, remained in the opposition. The authorities' attitudes towards nationalism and national images were ambiguous. According to historian Vilius Ivanauskas (1979–2018), the issue of nationality in the Soviet system became one of the most important part of politics and was promoted primarily through rhetorical means. Newspapers and radio broadcasts during the occupation were flooded with pseudo-patriotic propaganda discourse that was intended to motivate socialist citizens to be loyal to the state; as an editorial in the newspaper *Pravda* put it in 1941, "many poets, though far from all, have found words and images needed by our people" (Ivanauskas 2013: 132). This is where discussion about the Lithuanian poetry (as well as Latvian, Estonian, Ukrainian, Belarusian, and other Soviet countries' poetry) of the second half of the 20th century begins, bearing in mind the duality of creative imagination under the totalitarian conditions of the Soviet regime.

In this article, I review the images of Lithuania and the homeland that circulated in Lithuanian poetic discourse – including choral music, pop songs, and poems broadcast on radio and television – during the periods of the so-called Stagnation (1964–1985) and *perestroika* (1985–1990). It is important to understand that in the Soviet state "mass culture" operated differently than in the commercialized world of the free market – because, under the conditions of the Soviet regime, the content of officially published works of art (poetry books, for example) had to correspond with the one and only official ideology. According to philosopher Nerija Putinaitė (b. 1971), in the Soviet state an addressee or audience member theoretically had to receive ideologically unified content from both poetry and mass media: "[T]he same slogans and stereotypical images had to be engraved in the memory of recipients and to displace the[ir] ability to judge reality independently" (Putinaitė 2007: 45). (The epithet

"engineers of the soul," coined by Stalin to denote writers and poets, is adequate for this specific capability of literature to convey ideology in a suggestive way.) However, literature and art cannot work precisely as planned by the propagators of ideology: according to Juri Lotman, art is another level of reality, characterized by the exceptional ability to transgress the limits of ordinary perception. Therefore, "from the point of view of reality, art is the territory of freedom" (Lotman 2009: 150). This means that, even under the conditions of the totalitarianism, art and poetry (if they are genuinely artistically valuable texts and not a straight propaganda) inevitably offer more diverse interpretations of the reality than official ideology can predict.

The period of the late Soviet era has been chosen for this study because, starting from around 1965, one can now perceive a peculiar interplay between two mutually hostile trends: on the one hand, society was still affected by the drive for a relatively more liberal intellectual life by virtue of the Thaw (Sandle 2002: 137–138); on the other hand, at that time the conservative communist policy and ideological control intensified sharply in different fields of life. As for the liberal drive associated with the Thaw, the young generation of Lithuanian poets who debuted in the 1970s (e.g. Gintaras Patackas, Almis Grybauskas, Antanas A. Jonynas) greatly expanded aesthetic boundaries. The 1970s and 1980s in Lithuania, in terms of literary and artistic creativity, are sometimes compared to the cultural bloom time of the young, emerging Lithuanian state of the pre-war 1930s (Platelis 1991: 261). However, Brezhnev's ambitions to restore real communism, to strengthen the society's international and patriotic indoctrination, and to create a "Soviet nation" by not as much uniting as uniforming all peoples in the Soviet Union, partly revived the spirit of Stalinism and meant the beginning of a new Russification campaign (Ivanauskas 2007: 107). During the implementation of this policy, artists were encouraged to thematize Soviet internationalism and the "friendship of nations" by applying principles of Socialist Realism; the development of a patriotic motif in artistic creation resulted in the ambiguity of the poetic meaning of the "homeland" ("homeland" could seem to refer both to the USSR and to the local/ Lithuanian nation).

According to Juri Lotman, any text, and a literary text especially, contains a "picture of the audience" that affects the real audience and becomes a particular "normative code" for that audience: "This is imposed on the consciousness of the audience and becomes the norm for its own image of itself, being transferred from the text into the sphere of the real behavior of the cultural collective" (Lotman 2009: 150). Lotman's insights make it possible to explain one effect of text, i.e., when the identity of an audience is formed with the help of the images reproduced in that text. On the other hand, Lotman argues that the relationship between a text and its audience is not one-sided, but an active, dialogic process. A prerequisite for such a dialogue is the

"common memory" of a speaker and their addressee: the less common memory (cultural, national) they share, the less adequately the text will be decoded. (With this in mind, the efforts of the Soviet authorities to destroy certain places of national memory and to form a new historical memory are understandable.) Thus, in this article, on the basis of Juri Lotman's cultural semiotics I articulate the sources for popular poetic images of the homeland during the Soviet era, demonstrating when and under what sociopolitical circumstances their poetic meanings changed, and indicating how the exact words may have acquired new content and thus possibly created a specific social effect.

Images of Lithuania and the "homeland" abound in the poetic discourse of the Stagnation and the later *perestroika*. Nerija Putinaitė claims that almost all manifestations of nationalism in those times were simply products of Soviet indoctrination: the word "Lithuania," widely used in artistic creations, did not refer to any specific thing that existed in reality, but was instead based on a meaning confirmed throughout the Soviet era, filled with a content favorable to the regime's ideology (Putinaitė 2007: 136). Putinaitė identifies the sly strategy of the Soviets to weave fragments of Lithuanian history or certain nationalistic and religious sentiments into Soviet ideology, thus leading to the internalization of Soviet values by the society. From this point of view, she deconstructs the creative works by one of the most famous Lithuanian poets of the 20th century: Justinas Marcinkevičius (1930–2011).[1] The metaphors of homeland, land, mother, and native language developed in his texts – which in turn awakened national feelings in the society and inspired many creative followers – are, according to Putinaitė, simply the tools of a sentimentality and sensuality necessary for the Soviet ideology to deepen its society's faith in the communist vision (Putinaitė 2007: 132).

In contrast, Viktorija Daujotytė suggests that, starting from the 1970s and especially at the time of independence, a phenomenological-essentialist interpretation of Lithuanian literature is needed. Indeed, in the works of some Lithuanian writers of the Soviet era she sees the continuation of an "authentic ethnocentric tradition" – "essential images of the nation's worldview," as she puts it, which are much more important than temporary historical-political conditions (Daujotytė 1990). It can be said that what Daujotytė considers the "deep moral supports of the Lithuanian nation" (sentiments such as respect for the national history and the romanticization of its archaic worldview and agricultural lifestyle), Putinaitė identifies as "decorations

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1 Marcinkevičius was awarded many significant prizes by both communist authorities and later those of independent Lithuania. His work and life is analyzed in various monographs (Pakalniškis 1984; Daujotytė-Pakerienė 2003; Daujotytė 2012; Daujotytė-Pakerienė 2016; Putinaitė 2019).

of communist ideology" – an artificial Soviet nationalism. According to Putinaitė, the exploitation of feelings in Soviet-era poetry only "distanced people from the categorical logic, entangling them in the snares of compromise considerations" (Putinaitė 2007: 139) in favor of the Soviet system.

Thus, prompted by this debate about the implicit content of the poetic images of Lithuania and the homeland in the late Soviet era – namely, whether they constitute implied regime ideology or authentic Lithuanian cultural traditions – I analyze the meanings of the concepts of Lithuania and the homeland within the popular Lithuanian poetic discourse of the 1970–1990s. Based on textual analysis as well as on previously conducted historical and literary investigations, this article aims to determine the meanings of national poetic images in the late Soviet period within the frame of changing socio-political circumstances. The research problem arises from the complications of the concept of nationalism in the context of Soviet ideology, since the very idea of "nationalism" was considered the greatest threat to the Soviet regime (the term "bourgeois nationalism", associated with the pre-war independent state of Lithuania, was used disparagingly). Nevertheless, Soviet patriotism, i.e., the loyalty of individual nations to the Soviet state, was actively promoted (Grybkauskas 2013: 205–224). It may be said that the theme of Soviet patriotism in poetry (and art more generally) encouraged and partially legitimized national feelings – in other words, fostering intimate discourse about the native land, love for the homeland, and freedom. Therefore, a significant question arises: what was the content of the poetic image of "homeland" as created in the late Soviet period, and how did its meaning change?

Several profiles of the image of the homeland

Today, readers may be surprised by the abundance of patriotic (in a certain sense) content in the artworks of the Soviet era. In the Soviet Union, the term "patriotic" was widespread since the "patriotic war" (World War II) and essentially meant loyalty to the regime (Dobrenko 2011: 165–169, 174). The annual anthology *Poezijos pavasaris* (Poetry Spring), published in Lithuania since 1965 and presenting a panorama of each year's poetry, printed poems evoking "patriotic" feelings in almost every issue – especially when commemorating various anniversaries (e.g., the founding of the Soviet Union, the October Revolution, the anniversary of Lenin's birth, etc.) (Geda 1976: 169). The theme of the homeland is deeply rooted in Soviet poetry because of its relation to one of the principles of Socialist Realism – *narodnost*, which, as Hans Günther puts it, among many other connotations (such as comprehensibility, simplicity, anti-elitism, traditionalism, folklore-based creativity) also meant loyalty to "great and powerful

Soviet Motherland" (Günther 2011: 104). In 1934 at the All-Union Congress of Soviet Writers, a new conception of "Motherland" was presented: "Motherland! Only seventeen years ago, this was just a false etymological concept, a tool for deceiving and dulling the working people. Today this word represents all that the working class and the working peasantry attained in the revolution. It is her, our Motherland, that unites the multinational assembly of writers in one family" (Günther 2011: 104). During Word War II, the popular ideological discourse was enriched with new "humanized" vocabulary (e. g. brothers, sisters, fatherland) (Dobrenko 2011: 163). The artistic image of the motherland/homeland was elaborated throughout the whole Soviet era with different mutations of it in national literatures. In the Lithuanian poetic discourse from the 1970s to the 1990s, different developments of the poetic image of the homeland and Lithuania emerged.

Divine authority Among the many poems in the Soviet period that reproduced images of the homeland corresponding to Soviet ideology which had become clichés, one of the most popular stands out: the notion of the homeland as a state of bliss or a patronizing, supreme authority. Such conception straightforwardly corresponds to the early poetics of Socialist Realism, particularly of the Stalinist era, when "revolutionary romanticism" became mandatory (Günther 2011: 103). According to Hans Günther, in the 1930s "[r]evolutionary romanticism was promoted simultaneously with the rehabilitation of mythology and mythological thinking", which served as "the unrealized and unattainable revolutionary utopia" (Günther 2011: 103). Throughout the Soviet era, symbolic exaggeration was a preferred stylistic tool to create the poetic myth of the socialist ideal. For example, in one characteristic poem of 1965, the speaker professes complete loyalty and subordination to the homeland, to which he must eventually show his deeds. However, such accountability does not cause negative feelings for the speaker in question; on the contrary, he, clinging to his homeland, listens to her tales of happiness (notably, he does not experience prosperity, but only receives narratives about a better life): "It seems I knew everything about you, Homeland. / [..] / When must I show my works, / And when, clinging to you, / Listen to tales about happiness"[2] (Graibus 1976: 138). In some poems, the homeland is considered an omnipresent absolute, thus constituting an alternative to ideologically unacceptable religious experiences, as in the following lines: "You are in the blossoming of flowers / And in the frost, / In the waving of the rye / And in the baby's

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2 Literal translation of: "*Atrodo, viską žinojau apie tave, Tėvyne. / [..] / Kada savo darbus parodyt privalau / Ir kada, prie tavęs prigludus, / Klausytis apie laimę sakmės.*"

cry, / In the reflection of the lakes / And in the eyes of a friend, / In the first kiss / And in the clattering of the storks, / You are in every hour / And in the last one / that I never wait for"[3] (Jakubauskas 1976a: 158). In this poem, the homeland takes on the form of a monotheistic God and appears as the only pillar of human existence. It is not by chance that the homeland is marked by a capital letter in such exalted confessions: "Every day / From the sun / From the day / And because of the great love / The only one / I lean on **You** only / With my shoulders / With my heart / Every day"[4] (emphasis mine) (Jakubauskas 1976b: 160). Compared to the pre-Soviet (e.g., Maironis) or post-Soviet (e.g., Brazdžionis) poetry of Lithuanian patriotic romanticism, Soviet romanticism features the speaker's absolute loyalty to authority. In the lyrical tradition of national patriotic romanticism, the speaker is more individual and exposes a variety of different feelings, including grief, longing, sadness, which were considered "degeneration" (Günther 2011: 103) in the doctrine of Socialist Realism.

A Large, Unbreakable Country In popular culture, a generalized image of the homeland as a great and powerful country, which corresponded to Soviet ideology, was actively developed (obviously referring to the Soviet Union). Motherland Lithuania and the Soviet homeland in such texts become synonymous concepts, indicating a large, unified country of the Soviets. For example, in one popular choral song of the early 1980s (its lyrics written by Juozas Nekrošius, a poet loyal to the regime) it is said:

[..] *Ošia vėl ąžuolai ant gimtinės kalnelių,* *Nepalaužt ąžuolų, mūs Tėvynės sūnelių.* *Nuo Nemuno, Volgos, nuo Dubysos krantų* *Mes – Tarybiniai žmonės, visada mes kartu.*	[..] The oaks are rustling again on the hills of their homeland, Do not break the oaks, our sons of the homeland. From the Nemunas, the Volga, from the banks of the Dubysa We are Soviet people; we are always together.
(Nekrošius 1980: 28)	(Literal translation)

In this stanza, traditional symbols from Lithuanian folklore are connected with the greatness of the Soviet Union: unbreakable "Sons of the Motherland" are identified

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3 Literal translation of: "*Tu – gėlių žydėjime / Ir šerkšne, / Rugių bangavime / Ir kūdikio riksme, / Ežerų atspindy / Ir draugo akyse, / Pirmam bučiny / Ir gandrų kleketavime, / Tu – kiekvienoj valandoj / Ir paskutinėje/ Kurios niekada nelaukiu.*"

4 Literal translation of: "*Kasdien / Iš saulės / Iš dienos / Ir meilės didelės / Vienos / Aš į Tave tiktai remiuos / Pečiais / Širdim / Kasdien.*"

with "Soviet people," and the geography of the homeland is expanded by inserting the name of the main river of Russia (the Volga) between the rivers of Lithuania (the Nemunas and the Dubysa), thus creating a poetic image of a large and united ("we are always together") homeland. Meanwhile, in the more romantic Lithuanian poetry of the 1960s–1980s, the image of the homeland is stylistically minimized and fragile.

Bright landscapes Enjoying the landscape is a popular motif in texts about Lithuania, characteristic of both the romantic and neo-romantic poetry of independent Lithuania and of Soviet texts. Perhaps that is why the late 19th century poem "*Lietuva brangi*" ("Dear Lithuania"), written by Maironis (1862–1932), a poet of the Lithuanian national revival, was not banned during the Soviet era and was even considered the unofficial anthem of the occupied Lithuania. From the very first lines of the poem, a contemporary landscape is linked with Lithuania's glorious past ("You are beautiful, my dear homeland, / the country where heroes sleep in their graves"[5]).

By comparison, the poetics of Soviet landscapes is characterized by an emphasis on optimism and an orientation towards the future. In socialist realist paintings and poems, landscapes are bright and sunny, as in the following example:

Mano tėviškė – mėlyno Nemuno vingis,
Gintariniai krantai ir sena Palanga.
Supa vilnį ramiai drungnas vėjas aptingęs,
Smėly plakas pavargusi marių banga.
[..]

Bet labiausiai ilgiuosi tavęs, mano liaudie!
Skamba tavo kalba nuostabi ausyse,
Ilgesinga daina gaudžia vėl man kaip gaudė,-
Vėl išvargusi kyla lyg žiedas dvasia.
[..]

(Venclova (1942) 1969: 14)

My homeland is the bend of the blue Nemunas [river],
Amber banks and old Palanga [seaside town].
A calm, lukewarm wind sways the billow,
A tired wave of the lagoon beats on the sand.
[..]
But most of all I long for you, my people!
Your speech sounds wonderful to my ears,
The longing song catches me again like it used to catch me,
Again, the tired spirit rises like a flower.
[..]

(Literal translation)

In texts such as this one, the speaking subject rejoices in Lithuania, experiencing harmony by admiring the landscape and the present moment, and thereby encourages patriotic feelings while implying complete satisfaction with the existing order. The poem just quoted was written in 1942 by Antanas Venclova (1906–1971), also known as the author of the anthem of the Socialist Soviet Republic of Lithuania; the

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5 Literal translation of: "*Graži tu mano, brangi tėvyne, / šalis, kur miega kapuos didvyriai.*"

speaker's feelings, as befits the Stalin era, are directed towards Stalin, the party, the homeland and/or the working people. The poem ends with the speaker confessing his true identity to the people (the word used is not "nation," but the ideologically charged concept of "people"): "I was born in you [my people]. / I have grown in you. / One flesh and blood. You are me; I am you. / I grew up with you as roots and branches,– / We will fight together and win together."[6] (Venclova (1942) 1969: 14). This small twist in the poetic plot – the speaker's attention and feelings turning from the landscape dear to the Lithuanian heart directly to its people, and the poem's ecstatic identification with the ideological structure (as he puts it: "One flesh and blood. You are me; I am you.") – corresponded to the desire of the regime to develop public loyalty to the state order as if this were the natural identity of every Lithuanian. Although the poem is sentimentally entitled "Motherland," the text exemplifies a condition of loyalty and that of attachment to the great homeland.

For comparison and contrast, one can remember the meaning of a complete (even physical) identification with the homeland in Marcelijus Martinaitis' (1936–2013) poem *"Sutartinė"* (this term denotes a folk polyphonic song), written around 1989. In Martinaitis's poem we read: "[W]here my blood will drip – / there the stone will sprout. / [..] / Into your blood / I will sink / as if being poured out / from my only heart. / [..] / I will expose every wound to you / while falling next to the horse / in the morning light. / I will absorb you / with the air"[7] (Martinaitis 1990: 33). The poetic plot is almost identical to what we read in the aforementioned text of Venclova (the speaker's total confluence with the poetic interlocutor). However, the object of such interiorization is different: Venclova's verse refers to a notion of "people" (*liaudis*), motivated by the Soviet ideology; whereas in Martinaitis's poem, the reader may sense that the most desirable object of the speaker's identification is the precious homeland, the very land that the speaker promises to defend with his own blood.

Homeland as Mother The culturally universal metaphor of the homeland as mother is also filled with Lithuanian national cultural memory. At the end of the 19th century, for example, the poem by the priest-poet Antanas Baranauskas (1835–1902)

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6 Literal translation of: "*Bet labiausiai ilgiuos tavęs, mano liaudie! / [..] / Aš gimiau tavyje. Tavyje aš išaugau. / Vienas kūnas ir kraujas. Tu – aš, aš – tai tu. / Su tavim šaknimis, šakomis aš suaugau,– / Mes kovosim drauge ir laimėsim kartu.*"

7 Literal translation of: "*Kur lašės man kraujas – / ten akmuo išdygs. / ... / Aš krauju į tavo / kraują susigersiu, / visas išsiliejęs iš savos širdies. / [..] / Ir žaizda kiekviena / tau aš atsiversiu, / šalia žirgo kritęs / rytmečio šviesoj. / Aš tave su oru / į save sugersiu.*"

entitled "*Tu Lietuva, tu mieliausia mūsų motinėlė*" ("You, Lithuania, You Are Our Dearest Mother") was offered as the Lithuanian national anthem. In Vincas Kudirka's (1858–1899) 1889 poem "*Tautiška giesmė*" (The National Song), later (in 1919) chosen as the national anthem of the Republic of Lithuania, the sense of Lithuania as a mother to its children is also implied ("From the past your sons / here draw strength. // Let your children go / on the paths of virtue only"[8]).

The culturally "thick" image of the homeland as mother was also exploited by Soviet ideology. In Staliniana, for example, the Russian people are the older brothers of the other peoples of socialist countries; Stalin is their father, and the homeland their mother (Dobrenko 2019: 10). Of course, in the years of the Thaw the ideological schemes of artistic images became less straightforward. Creative principles such as "the multisidedness of artistic form", "the creative individuality of the writer" became legal within Socialist Realism after the Third Congress of the Union of Soviet Writers in April 1959 (Dobrenko, Kalinin 2011: 189). According to Putinaitė, artistic images that seemed "authentic" and closer to personal human experience but did not fundamentally violate the ideological structure, were intended to create a more attractive version of socialism and to promote a more sincere public belief in the communist vision. However, artistically suggestive images, due to the tendency of art to create polysemy, could establish alternative meanings besides those officially sanctioned. It is important to note that it is those texts about the homeland that were open to ethnonationalistic interpretations, became the most popular in society during the Stagnation and *perestroika* era and have remained relevant until today.

In the images of the homeland found in the works of the aforementioned Justinas Marcinkevičius (considered the "poet of the Lithuanian nation"), it is possible to see both the layer of nationalist sentiments and that of ideological schemes – which is why his poems of the Soviet era were suitable for both loyal communists and that part of society that cherished hopes for Lithuanian independence. According to literary scholar Paulius V. Subačius, who analyzes the ambivalence of Marcinkevičius's work, the latter's success was determined by the fact that he, like no other Lithuanian writer, dared to use all the possible symbolic resources made available by traditions alien to the Soviets (i.e., religion, nationality) in order to exalt the new order and to "trigger" in a moderate way Lithuanians' degraded patriotic feelings (Subačius 2011: 381–382). For example, in the poem "*Tai gražiai mane augino...*" (I was kindly raised..., 1974), which quickly became a popular song that is being sung to this day, the speaker names the objects and details of the landscape that raised him as a child:

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8 Literal translation of: "*Iš praeities tavo sūnūs / te stiprybę semia. // Tegul tavo vaikai eina / vien takais dorybių*".

Tai gražiai mane augino *Laukas, pieva, kelias, upė,* *Tai gražiai už rankos vedė* *Vasaros diena ilga.*	I was kindly raised by A field, a meadow, a road, a stream, I was kindly lead by hand By a long summer's day.
Tai gražiai lingavo girios, *Uogų ir gegučių pilnos,* *Tai gražiai saulutė leidos,* *Atilsėlį nešdama.*	Forests kindly beckoned Full of berries and cuckoos, Sunset kindly lowered Bringing a repose.
Tai gražiai skambėjo žodžiai: *Laukas, pieva, kelias, upė.* *Tai gražiai iš jų išaugo* *Vienas žodis – LIETUVA!*	Those were kindest ringing words: a field, a pasture, a road, a stream. They were kindly growing To a single word: LITHUANIA
(Marcinkevičius 1975: 270)	(Literal translation quoted from: Brūzgienė 2020).

As can be seen, the poem hews closely to the previously discussed trope of the homeland as a serene landscape. Here, the things named are perceived as beautiful and idyllic: a field, a meadow, a road, and swaying woods full of birds and berries. (Interestingly, this poem is an almost direct replica of the poem "*Peizažas*" (Paysage, 1929) written in the independent Lithuania by the poet Jonas Aistis (1904–1973); only the cross is missing from the poetic landscape by Marcinkevičius[9].) In his text, the motherland is depicted through personification of the landscape: "A long summer day" patronizingly leads the speaker by the hand. And words themselves, those of the mother tongue, likewise contribute to the speaker's upbringing. At the end of the poem, however, the images of the mothering birthplace (homeland) and the speaker-as-child seem to be reversed: the speaker, having been raised by the homeland, then raises Lithuania itself – it grows out of his spoken words.

The poem's ideological message is twofold. On the one hand, the image system corresponds to the principles of Socialist Realism: the mood of the poem is serene, the environment is bright, and the homeland is depicted as being nurturing and reliable as a mother; on the other hand, the nationalistic sentiments of the reading community could have been triggered by the poem's emphasis on the native language and its naming of Lithuania without the epithet "Soviet", which was mandatory in the official discourse of that era ("Those were kindest ringing **words** / [..] / [The native words] were kindly growing / To a single word: **LITHUANIA**." – [emphasis mine]).

9 The first line of the poem by Jonas Aistis: "A field, a road, a meadow, a cross."

Significantly, at that time (i.e., since the beginning of the 1970s), the use of the Russian language was expanded in Lithuania by the decision of the Central Committee of the USSR (On the further situation of Russian language... 1978). Thus, while Marcinkevičius's poem corresponded to the principles of Socialist Realism and could seem, to an addressee who did not share with him a "common memory", like a pure expression of socialist ideology, it could equally, to an audience possessing a "common memory" (cultural and national), activate meanings hostile to the regime and thereby promote nationalistic self-awareness.

Homeland on a reduced scale During the period of the Thaw, which saw the popularization of the "humanized" version of socialism, the trope of the "great homeland" seems to "shrink" to the scale of the "little man." Through the logic of metonymy, it can be assumed that the poeticization of a personal subject's relationship with their individually native (i.e., local) places could imply an analogically intimate, personally significant, and essentially positive relationship with the entire homeland and its order. For example, in Marcinkevičius's poem "*O tėviške*" (Oh Native Land, 1974), which would become a popular song, we can see the stylistic reduction of the homeland: the speaker addresses a motherland that no longer exists beyond memory, but is metonymically invoked through various household items of a poor farmer:

O tėviške, laukų drugeli margas! *jau tavo pieva – mano atmintis,* *kur tu skraidai skambi, lengva, spalvinga,* *kaip atlaidų skarelė parugėm.*	Oh motherland, you the motley butterfly of the fields! Your meadow is just memory, Where you are flying resounding, being light, colorful, As a scarf of the saints' feast days above the rye field.
O tėviške, nuvirtęs vartų stulpe. *[..]*	Oh motherland, you the fallen goal post, [..]
O tėviške, suskilus tėvo klumpe, *[..]*	Oh motherland, the father's split clog, [..]
O tėviške, sudžiūvus duonos rieke, *ligonio kosuly nakties tamsoj,* *nutrūkęs panti, šiltas karvės snuki,* *komunija, prilipus gomury.*	Oh motherland, the dried slice of bread, The sick cough in the dark of night, The broken leash, the warm muzzle of a cow, The communion wafer, sticking to the palate.
O tėviške, aprūkęs lempos stikle. *[..]*	Oh motherland, the smoky glass of a lamp, [..]
O tėviške, drugeli mano margas! *Po tavo sutrūnijusiu slenksčiu* *lig šiol dar guli stebuklingi žodžiai,* *kurių, turbūt, jau niekam neprireiks.*	Oh motherland, my motley butterfly! Beneath your rotten threshold, Your magical words still lie, But, probably, no one will need them anymore.
(Marcinkevičius 1974: 310–311)	(Literal translation)

This poem's emotional tone (that of nostalgia and pity) could elicit the emotional solidarity of its readers, since most of the Lithuanian population in the 1980s were of agricultural origin and had been moved to the cities from homesteads that the government destroyed as part of its land amelioration and collectivization program (due to Soviet reforms in Lithuanian rural areas, between 1951 and 1990 almost a million people moved out from their homesteads (Stanaitis 2010; Stanaitis 2004). In addition, the nationalistic sentiments of the interpretative community could be incited by the specified childhood memories, such as the elementorium (an alphabet book), the prayer book, and "the communion wafer, sticking to the palate" – signs of a religious piety (Subačius 2011: 386) that was forbidden in the Soviet era. The mention of the mother tongue in the last stanza ("Your magical words still rest, / But, probably, no one will need them anymore") could have activated a collective memory of the 19th century – namely, the banning of the Lithuanian press by Russian Tsarist rule, an event that echoed in the pro-Russian language policies of the mid-1970s, opposed even by those Lithuanian poets who were at the top of the Soviet prestige hierarchy, such as Eduardas Mieželaitis (Baliutytė 2019: 216).

Another example of the homeland on a reduced scale can be found in Janina Degutytė's (1928–1990) poem "*Lietuva*" (Lithuania, 1965), very famous at the time and, to this day, memorized by many at school. In this text, Lithuania is alternately depicted as a piece of amber small enough to fit in the palm of a hand, a small patch on the globe, and a slice of daily bread:

Tu mažutė, tu telpi visa	You are so tiny, you fit
Į Čiurlionio karalių delnus.	Into the palms of the kings painted by Čiurlionis.
Tu – riekelė duonos kasdieninės	You are a slice of daily bread
Ant pasaulio vaišių pilno stalo...	On one of the tables of the world's feasts...
[..]	[..]
Žalias rytas ant pilkų arimų,	Green morning on the gray ploughed field,
Spindulių lietus aikštės erdvėj.	Rain of rays in the space of the square.
Tu – ant gaublio – padūmavęs gintaras	You are – on the globe – a smoky amber
Su pušies kvapu ir kraujo atšvaitu...	With the smell of pine and the reflection of blood...
Tiktai mūsų meilėj – tu didžiulė.	Only in our love, you are huge.
Mūsų delnuose – tu nesudeginama.	In our hands, you are unburnable.
Mūsų ilgesy – brangiausia pasaka.	In our longing, you are the most precious fairy tale.
Mūsų akyse tu – saulės kraštas.	In our eyes, you are the land of the sun.
(Degutyte (1964) 1965: 7)	(Literal translation)

Here, the speaker's relationship with the homeland is based on care and empathy for the weaker beings ("You are so tiny, you fit / Into the palms [..]"). The poem

ends with an exalted expression of the speaker's feelings – a declaration of love for the Lithuanian homeland as for the "most precious fairy tale" and the "land of the sun". The sun was a popular symbol of the (Soviet) homeland in socialist realist imagery. Nevertheless, as the scholar Jurgita Raškevičiūtė (b. 1983) observes, Janina Degutyte's poetry creates an emblematic picture of Lithuania that consists of elements from the ethno-national poetic tradition rather than that of the Soviets (Raškevičiūtė 2011: 107). The image of Lithuania in Degutyte's poem is marked by signs of national culture (e.g., the work of the famous Lithuanian symbolist Čiurlionis (1875–1911), who was ideologically banned up until the Thaw). Thus, while the poem partly contains a rhetoric typical of Soviet ideology (i.e., the bright and sunny image of the homeland), the speaker's solidarity with small objects and related signs of national culture suggest an anti-imperialist concept of Lithuania as a country that is small, overshadowed, rejected, oppressed, and silenced by its bigger neighbors ("You are – on the globe – the smoky amber / With the smell of pine and the reflection of blood…"). Such stylistics of a reduced scale was a significant novelty in the discourse of Soviet-imperialistic gigantism and optimism.

Alternative meanings During the Thaw, the accelerated modernization of art and poetry encouraged polysemous interpretations of reality – meanings in many cases hostile to the official ideological system. Brezhnev's cultural policy was tightened again in response to public outcry against the Soviet regime (e.g., the Prague Spring, the riots after Lithuanian Romas Kalanta's protest by public self-immolation[10]). Literary functionaries made efforts to restore the standard of Socialist Realism so that creative works would not contain any moods hostile to Soviet ideology. In one plenum of the Communist Party, the following "dangerous characteristics" of Lithuanian literary activity were identified:

> "In the works of some writers published by "Vaga" publishing house, there is a tendency to idealize the patriarchal village, an effort to contrast old moral norms to modern civilization. In addition, the works that appeared in [other media, e.g.,] in the periodicals, feature [the] subjective moods of disappointment, pessimism, disbelief in human social and moral progress. In these works, absurd and senseless situations and collisions usually prevail."[11] (Streikus, Bagušauskas 2005: 384)

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10 On May 14, 1972, a 19-year-old Lithuanian high school student Romas Kalanta self-immolated publicly, protesting against Soviet regime in Lithuania. This event provoked the largest post-war riots in the country, when thousands of people took to the streets shouting: "Freedom for Lithuania!"

11 Excerpt from the speech of Lithuanian Communist Party (LCP) Central Committee secretary A. Barkauskas at the LCP Central Committee plenum about dangerous characteristics in cultural life, July 3, 1972.

Here, the secretary of the Central Committee of the LCP (Lithuanian Communist Party) speaks of the works of famous modernist poets (i.e., those who debuted in the 1960s and 1970s – Sigitas Geda, Marcelijus Martinaitis, Judita Vaičiūnaitė, Vladas Šimkus, Vytautas Bložė) which contained a melancholic, tragic, and sometimes even grotesque image of reality. In the poetry of Sigitas Geda (1943–2008), one of the era's most original authors and an opponent of lyrical and harmonious aesthetics, the image of Lithuania is not monumental, as was the standard of the socialist realist art, but constructed in an apparently spontaneous, surrealistic way, involving objects uncharacteristic of the canonical representation of the homeland. Examples of homeland-related images in Geda's poetry include singing fish, a crab, and unhappy landscapes:

Ištiško geltona Šviesa danguje, Ir plaukia giedodamos Žuvys į ją.	The yellow light has splashed In the sky, And the singing fish Swim into it.
Raudonas ir žalias, Kuprotas kaip krabas Pašoka į viršų Lietuviškas kraštas.	Red and green, And humpbacked like a crab, The Lithuanian land Jumps up.
Kol rūstūs peizažai Apanka erdve, Kol medžiai žalia Apsitraukia žieve,	While harsh landscapes Are blinded by the space, While the trees get wrapped In green bark,
Žemelė po šviesuliu Šildo pečius Iš išveda šviečiančius Jūrų paukščius.	The earth under the light Warms its shoulders up And leads out The shining sea birds.
(Geda (1962) 1966: 6)	(Literal translation)

As literary scholar Paulius Jevsejevas (b. 1985) points out, it is possible in this poem to decode the signs of the flag of independent Lithuania – through the play of the colors yellow, green, and red which continues throughout (Jevsejevas 2015: 39) – which was banned during the Soviet occupation. In view of Soviet pressures, poets and painters who sought creative freedom and searched for an aesthetic language adequate to their experience, mastered an Aesopian language. This, as literary scholar Dalia Satkauskytė (b. 1966) describes it, was a complex phenomenon conditioned by the interfering of political power with the field of literature, whereby poetics is rendered inseparable from the possible receptions, whereas aesthetics as such is

rooted in historically established communicative situations (Satkauskytė 2019: 20). This means that a poem as if creates a double meaning: one meaning of a poetic plot is literal and formal; the other can be like a secret message, understandable only to an addressee with specific knowledge who knows the nuances of the poem's historical and political context. For example, the modernist poet Marcelijus Martinaitis (1936–2013) created the poetic character Kukutis (the first poems of the "*Kukučio baladės*" (Kukutis Ballads) cycle appeared in 1974), which seemed to correspond to the principles of Socialist Realism but was able (due to the apparently peasant origin, frivolous manner, and "folk" humor of Kukutis) to feature grotesque content that implicitly criticized the socio-political order of the time[12] – e.g., "And when they hanged me, / I immediately sobered up" (Martinaitis 1974: 210).

These are just a few examples of anti-Soviet modernist poetics, which was popularized by the bard and actor Vytautas Kernagis (1951–2008) who wrote music for and performed many poems by Martinaitis, Geda, the ironic poet Vladas Šimkus (1936–2004), and Juozas Erlickas (b. 1953), progenitor of postmodern Lithuanian poetics. It may be argued that these popular performances by Kernagis, in conjunction with modern poetry in general, shaped, as in Lotman's framework, the anti-Soviet audience which was related by the complementary "social energy", in Stephen Greenblatt's words (Greenblatt 1988: 6–7). Greenblatt uses the term to describe the power of text, words, and images to cause and control collective physical and mental experiences – in other words, to stimulate the audience's ability to respond to suggestions and to understand the irony of the texts, to see the absurdity of reality, and to enjoy a parody. It might be said that "social energy" which circulated between the text and the audience under the conditions of the Soviet regime, contributed a lot to the development of the alternative discourse and the mentality of independence.

The meaning twist

According to Nerija Putinaitė, "in the sunset of the Soviet era, it was enough to utter the word 'Lithuania' at artistic events to induce an ecstatic experience in the audience" (Putinaitė 2007: 136). Crowds in the rallies sung songs about Lithuania and recited poems, and when Bernardas Brazdžionis (1907–2002), the independent Lithuanian poet who emigrated to the USA in 1944 during the Soviet occupation, visited Lithuania in 1989 for the first time after

12 More on grotesque as a political and social critique in the "Kukutis Ballads" by Martinaitis see: Kmita 2009: 139–156.

45 years, crowds literally carried him on their hands as a spiritual leader of Lithuanians, the "herald" of the nation's freedom (*Poetas Bernardas Brazdžionis grįžta...* 2002: 17). Both facts – that there was a sudden popularization of texts about Lithuania in the late 1980s and that they received such an emotional a reception – can be explained by Lotman's theory about the dynamism of meaning depending on the circumstances of the actualization of the text. In 1988, after *Sąjūdis* (the organized public movement for independence) started, probably the two most popular poetic texts were turned into songs: "*Šaukiu aš tautą*" (I Call the Nation, 1941), written by the above mentioned Bernardas Brazdžionis; and the enigmatic poem "*Kaip laisvė*" (Like Freedom, 1974) by Justinas Marcinkevičius.

The popularity of Brazdžionis's poems in Lithuania can be explained, firstly, by the fact that his works, newly accessible in the *glastnost* era, had been strictly prohibited throughout the Soviet occupation (their history of being censored obviously provided the texts with additional value), and, secondly, by their poetical content (Brazdžionis's poetic language corresponded to the mass desire to hear straightforward words about Lithuania and its freedom). In the context of the *Sąjūdis*, where Lithuanians timidly cherished the hope of breaking away from the Soviet Union, the lines from the famous poem by Brazdžionis sounded especially relevant: "I am calling out to the nation, / oppressed by the GPU" (Brazdžionis 1989: 195). Here, the speaker is the spirit of the ancestors (*protėvių dvasia*) which protects the nation's memory and remembers the nation's "true" identity – its freedom. In the poem, the spirit of the ancestors appeals to the occupied and oppressed Lithuanian citizens and urges them to gather, unite, assemble, to quit slavery, and start a new life in freedom ("Come out of darkness, out of the twilight, / Light a new fire in your hearts, / Leave the eerie night of misery for the slaves! – / I call you out, I'm the spirit of your ancestors."[13]). A poem written during the first Soviet occupation in 1941 sounded all the more evocative in 1989 because both text and audience drew on a "common memory" (the occupation) that was still very much present.

By the end of the 1980s, some texts that had seemed ambivalent some 5–10 years earlier – certain poems by Justinas Marcinkevičius, in particular were now sung and recited with an unambiguous, nationalistic pathos. Such transformations in perception and reception can be characterized as "meaning twists." One illustration can be found in the poem "Like Freedom", written by Marcinkevičius in 1974 and published in the collection *Eilėraščiai. Mažosios poemos* (Strophes and Poems, 1975). Before the year of the *Sąjūdis*, this text was in no way prominent, nor did the actor

13 Literal translation of: "*Iš sutemų, iš prieblandų išeikit, / Uždekit naują ugnį širdyse, / Vergams palikit vargo naktį klaikią! – / Šaukiu aš, jūsų protėvių dvasia.*" (Ibid.)

Laimonas Noreika (1927–2007) who organized Lithuanian poetry evenings since the late 1960s and appeared on Lithuanian stages with different programs of poems, include it in his reading repertoire of Marcinkevičius. In fact, the poem was "discovered" and unexpectedly given life in 1988 by Eureka Masytė, a young employee at the Radio Factory and a student who also sang in its music band. Masytė tells how she was flipping through a poetry collection by Marcinkevičius and how the text of "Like Freedom" stuck, so she adapted the melody and the song was performed publicly for the first time in 1989 in the hall of the Radio Factory (Skučaitė 2006). There might be several reasons why Masytė's "Freedom" rendition soon became almost unimaginably popular. For one, the song was featured in a song contest held on Lithuanian Radio in 1990. Ironically, according to the singer, "the victory in the decisive stage of the competition was determined by a letter signed by 70 prisoners who voted for 'Freedom.' After this success, the song went on television" (Skučaitė 2006). For the audience of prisoners, the song was apparently significant because of the various meanings of freedom, but its lyrics which articulates a determined need to persevere and not to give up, was especially relevant to the political context of the 1990s (on March 11, 1990, the restoration of the country's independence was proclaimed).

In the poetic plot of "Like Freedom," the speaker addresses the homeland, admits to her that he is tired, that his hands are weak and that he no longer has strength and hope. In response, the homeland keeps repeating to him: "Stand as freedom stands," "go as freedom goes":

Aš jau nepakeliu	I can't stop
minčių apie tave!	thinking about you!
Kaip obelis,	Like an apple tree,
Apsunkusi nuo vaisių,	heavy with fruit,
užlaužiu tragiškai	I sharply spread my tragically
nusvirusias rankas.	drooping hands.
O tu sakai:	And you say:
– Stovėk,	– Stand,
Kaip stovi laisvė.	As freedom stands.
[..]	[..]
(Marcinkevičius (1974) 1975: 124)	(Literal translation)

In the last stanza the speaker, having lost hope and strength to persevere, appeals to the homeland, asking her to finish him off once and for all ("So shut me, / homeland, / inside yourself, / as death / shuts / a song in the throat, / as the night / shuts /

the evening"[14]), and the homeland responds that the speaker's freedom is nothing else but the very homeland itself ("And you answer me: / – I am your freedom"[15]). In other words, the homeland is a burden for the speaker, but that burden is paradoxically his freedom. Considered in the context of the time when it was written (the 1970s), when Marcinkevičius, one of the most productive Lithuanian poets, was working on his dramatic trilogy on the theme of Lithuanian cultural history (Marcinkevičius 1978), this text in question would seem to depict a citizen who does his best to work for the homeland (whether the Soviet homeland or that of ethnonational Lithuania remains uncertain; both meanings are possible); the citizen feels disappointed, depleted, and begins to doubt the meaning of his activity. Nevertheless, in the poem the homeland urges the exhausted speaker to persevere. The homeland serves as an apparently satisfactory answer to all doubts or questions about a person's activity, the meaning of life, and all of the speaker's goals and aspirations. This reading would correspond to the trope of the homeland as the highest deity, as discussed at the beginning of this article. On the other hand, as literary critic Donata Mitaitė (b. 1960) puts it, this poem does not give the final answer to what freedom is: is it the closure of oneself in the homeland, is it a departure or returning, a commitment to the homeland or creativity (Mitaitė 2021). The perceivers have to decide for themselves. However, Marcinkevičius's poem became popular only after Lithuania regained its freedom, and especially at the most critical moment – just after January 13, 1991 when the armed Soviet troops tried to re-occupy Lithuania by force. At that time, the poem-song "Like Freedom" sounded like a spiritual reinforcement for Lithuanians who fought for the restoration of their country's independence.

Thus, during the *Sąjūdis* period the audience, excited by political changes, re-actualized specific texts, giving them unambiguously relevant content that resonated with contemporary social experience – the ambiguity of their meaning was gone. Although not long before, of course, the image of the homeland offered by the very same texts could imply Soviet ideology.

Conclusions

The regime sought to develop loyalty to the Soviet state by appropriating ethnonational imagery. Soviet ideology, in order to attain this goal, promoted those poetic images of the homeland which, based partly on nationalist sentiments, could form an identity loyal to the Soviet Union.

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14 Literal translation of: "*Tai uždaryk mane, / tėvyne, / savyje, / kaip giesmę / gerklėje / mirtis uždaro, / taip, kaip uždaro / vakarą / naktis.*" (Ibid.)

15 Literal translation of: "*O tu man atsakai: / – Aš – tavo laisvė.*" (Ibid.)

The official discourse was dominated by a hybrid image of the homeland, merging symbolic images of the Soviet Union with those of the local motherland. After reviewing the poetry and popular songs of the Brezhnev Era and *perestroika* concerning the homeland, it is possible to identify several types of dominant poetic images of the homeland: a) the homeland as a divine authority; b) the homeland as a powerful, unbreakable country; c) the homeland as a sunny landscape; d) the homeland as a mother; (e) a reduced-scale homeland. Such imagery portrays the homeland as a friendly, cozy, familiar, and patronizing entity. Although these images, in some aspects, corresponded with the poetic clichés of any nationalistic/patriotic poetry created in line with the Romanticism approach, the Soviet poetics through subtle nuances (e. g. the superior position of Russian culture; the epithet "Soviet" used with the word "people"; poeticization of household items of a poor farmer as a reference to the working class; optimistic imagery of strength and unbreakability) implied the Soviet imperialistic ideology. Alternative depictions of the homeland (the modernists' fragmented, surreal, grotesque images) were developed mostly in the poetry of the younger generation.

The texts whose meanings were also open to patriotic interpretation became the most popular. The most popular texts and those that resonated best with the public moods were those that offered at least several codes of reading and which, according to Lotman's idea, inspired and formed at least two different audiences: one corresponding to the Soviet ideological scheme, and one fostering ethnonational identity and a hope for Lithuania's freedom. In other words, a poem of the late Soviet era, suggesting an image of the homeland in line with Soviet ideology, could also contain hints or cultural codes that were contradictory to that ideology (for example, references to forbidden religious piety, or sentiments for the native language). These hints did not fundamentally destroy the ideological structure of the work, but the "shared memory" (Lotman) of the audience could encourage interpretations opposed to those expected by the regime. In this way, depending on the capacity of "common memory," the audience might be theoretically divided into those for whom the meanings corresponding to the Soviet ideology were important, and those who were able to find additional arguments in the text to strengthen their national self-concept.

The regime underestimated the power of an artistic text to encourage the emancipation of the society's mentality. Although Soviet cultural policy sought to tame its audiences through the use of national symbols and sentiments, the regime did not foresee that an artistic text can help audiences remember what they did not know (Lotman 2013: 374). At least some aspects of a poetic text (e.g., images of national culture, the coded messages of Aesopian language) could have stimulated the

sensitivity of its audience to the issue of a national self-concept, even in the absence of a "common memory".

The ambivalent meaning of "homeland" in poetry and other arts could have partially prepared the soil for the breakout of national liberation. Creativity and art, as a form of "soft power," could have deepened the national self-concept of a part of the society. This national identity, latently matured through songs, poetry, and art, was fully exposed in the years of *Sąjūdis*, the independence movement, at the end of the 1980s.

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