

LOST IN FREEDOM:
COMPETING HISTORICAL GRAND NARRATIVES
IN POST-SOVIET LITHUANIA

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SUMMARY. The article analyzes changes in Lithuanian historiography, public space, and political decisions which occurred after 1990 and the restoration of independence. Freedom for History and the Humanities meant diverse opinions and the extension of limits of academic self-expression. After the existence of a single compulsory version of the grand narrative imposed for the Lithuanians by the Soviet occupiers “from the top”, cultural memory space became filled with competing new narratives. The liberalization of academic historians and cultural researchers appeared to be often at odds with the broad masses’ and politicians’ interests of nationalism. Academic and popular discourses diverged and the control of political power in shaping the Lithuanian memory gradually increased. These changes are worth particular attention and reflection.

KEYWORDS: grand narratives, politics of memory, historiography, nationalism.

INTRODUCTION

The fall of the Berlin Wall caused drastic changes about which quite a bit has already been written both in the current historiography of Central and Eastern Europe and in works investigating collective memory from the viewpoint of social science.¹ However, these changes on the political map of Europe have not immediately and uniformly altered either the politics of history or collective historical memory. The consciousness of European nations is still littered with the ruins of former separation. Perhaps the most progress has been made in research on the politics of memory. Recently Lithuanian readers got a chance to put their hands on a collective mono-

¹ The article is written according to the research project “Central and Eastern European Region: Research of the Construction of National Narratives and Politics of Memory (1989-2011)” – VP1-3.1- MM-07-K-02-024 – sponsored by the Programme for Human Resources Development for 2007-2013 “Support to Research Activities of Scientists and Other Researchers (Global Grant)”.

graph² edited by Alvydas Nikžentaitis and devoted to elucidating the Lithuanian case. This book is a good example of this type of research on a problem in the interdisciplinary field of political science, history, and philosophy. The *use of history for political purposes is something that has always existed*; it just wasn't identified in these terms. As Christoph Klessmann writes, although manipulating historical facts was primarily a dictators' hobby, *democratic politicians too sought to make sure that their successful (or not so successful) deeds show up in the best light*.³ Keeping this perspective in mind researchers concentrate on how new or reborn nations endeavor to reconstruct historical narratives and to fulfill orders made for the purpose of turning young people passing through compulsory education into the sort of conscientious citizens that the ruling elite would like to see for the country's future. The politics of memory and history cannot dispense with historiography in the strict sense – it participates in it but does not identify with it.

The issue of general national narratives is similarly tied to projects of state power. This first of all concerns official versions of history and history textbooks that are required by a specific political regime. On the other hand, this opens up the way for narratology, a separate branch of the humanities mixing traditions and methods of history together with those of literary thought. Today Lithuanian historians strongly tend towards the view that all historiographic texts are narratives; and there are good theoretical reasons for this view. On the other hand, it is recognized there are differences between narrative historiography (usually pre-scientific, i.e., created before the beginning of the 19th century) and analytic historiography, which is held to be an achievement of modernity. The just-mentioned view contains a contradiction: on the one hand all historical texts are narratives; on the other, only some works of historians are to be regarded as narratives *par excellence*.

This essay is not about external projects of politics and power but about forms of national narratology (forms not necessarily dependent on ministerial authority to declare what is historical truth) that have changed and developed ever since Lithuania regained independence in 1990. Here the biggest obstacles lie in the formal recognition of something as the national narrative itself and in the doubtful ability of the discipline of history to separate academic historiography as a whole from specifically literary historical tales which in fact do constitute the complex essence of the national narrative. Problems also arise in distinguishing the meta-narrative attitude towards the national memory, on the one hand, and the viewpoint of consciously constructed and responsibly authorized general courses or syntheses

² Nikžentaitis, Alvydas (editor). *Nuo Basanavičiaus, Vytauto Didžiojo iki Molotovo ir Ribbentropo. Atmintis ir atminties kultūrų transformacijos XX–XXI a.* Vilnius, 2011.

³ Klessmann, Christoph. *Istorijos politika ir kolektyvinis atminimas: sąvokos, problemos ir istoriniai pavyzdžiai.* In Nikžentaitis, Alvydas. *Nuo Basanavičiaus ir Vytauto Didžiojo iki Molotovo ir Ribbentropo...*, p. 25.

of Lithuanian history, on the other. Thus, to put it briefly, our concern will be not with relations of power but with theoretical interdisciplinary intersections between historiography and literature.

1. THE PROBLEM

In a fateful happenstance the processes of postmodernization in the humanities and the fall of the Soviet Union together with the liberation of Central East European nations coincided. After World War II, due to the influence of vulgar Marxism and Soviet domination, this area saw the creation and authorization of national historical narratives aimed at telling the national stories in such a way that the utopian Communist future became the only vision it was possible to entertain. But liberation from Communist rule or the red-flag-waving occupier (in the case of the Baltics) opened the gates of freedom not only for political life but for the entire humanities, which turned away from the dictates of a *unitary truth* toward an open investigation of sundry uncertainties.

The rhetoric of postmodernity, whose din also included shouting out the *end of history*, caught the nations of Central East Europe and their historians quite unprepared. Lithuania, with its tales of a millennial history so significant in the trenches of defending its national identity and ideas of liberty, became a vivid specimen of these changes. First, because the version of the *grand narrative* imposed for nearly a half-century by Soviet occupiers and their doctrinaires was conceived, by broader circles of educated Lithuanians, as a means of taking over and colonizing the memory, so that political liberation and resuscitation of an independent state meant regaining the right to tell one's own stories unencumbered by foreign or domestic despots. It was hoped that in place of the deformed, unreal, and obligatory forms of historical memory it would now be permitted to create a new narrative constrained only by the sagacity of home-grown historians of a free Lithuania.

The euphoria of freedom of the early 1990s fit in well with images of a *return to Europe*. A quick access to rapidly gushing currents of Western historiography clashed head-on with the following paradoxical sensation: on the one hand, a liberated nation sought to fill in the *blank spots* of history and once again undertake the (re) creation of a grand narrative while, on the other, the sheer variety of Western historiography, its scepticism, criticism, and doubts about the possibility of a uniquely true narrative, its dismissal of *national narratives* approved by political power centers as well as many other intellectually unusual phenomena caused real mental confusion. The sceptical evaluation, prevalent in Western, especially Anglo-Saxon

historiography, of the nationalism of Central Eastern European nations *reconceiving themselves ever anew* also contributed to an inner intellectual conflict. After directly experiencing the perils of the colonization and Sovietization of historical memory we returned to the individualism of Europe, a post-modern chaos, and the free world buffeted by winds of globalization. In the heat of the *singing revolution* the more perspicuous Lithuanian theorists soon grasped the sharp contradiction inherent in that *return*, since the post-modern Western world *has allegedly overcome history and is trying to justify itself by consciously structuring the vast field of freedom opening up "beyond" history*.⁴

During the early years of regained Lithuanian independence the intellectual press reflected sentiments of historical chaos and even absurdity when the need for a new grand national narrative was felt together with the realization that it was impossible to construct it while being on the road towards internalizing something like Western mentality. But it wasn't hard to deconstruct the historical narrative formed during Soviet times as one began recognizing the topics and interpretations imposed by the regime at the same time as one started to tell what, in anticipation of later Latvian documentary creators, could have been called the *Soviet story*.

The strength of the hope in a uniquely true history and in true justice constantly depended on society's moods shifting against a background of dramatic changes in Lithuania's system of governance. Each reaction to an upheaval was accompanied by distinct narratives and apologies. It was hardest to accept things already learned in late modernity – namely, that grand national narratives and analytical historiographical objectivity can become mutually opposed forms of consciousness. The long-for freedom of untrammelled investigation into the past did not mean any quick breakthrough toward a convincing narrative about one's own nation. Historians who even in the trenches of positivism had more or less honorably survived the attacks of Soviet ideology were hard pressed to find their bearings amidst returning doubts that scientific research and analysis do not directly guarantee successful narration. That which one finds out about the past in the course of scholarly procedures can be shaped into history only thanks to a qualified narration. Top be sure, during the first years of independence it was believed that introducing history texts representing Western mentality could rapidly affect ongoing processes. But even the noblest theoretical radiances⁵ could not quickly change the thinking of historians.

⁴ Rubavičius, Vytautas. *Postmodernizmas ir postkomunizmas: nubūtintas pasaulis*. In *Miestelėnai* (edited by Eugenijus Ališanka). Vilnius: Taura, 1995, p. 49.

⁵ We might mention the works of Jorn Rusen and Hayden White which were presented to the community of Lithuanian historians with the best intentions and hopes. But these works, especially the latter's *Metahistory*, were in large part poorly understood or not accepted. Perhaps the reason for this was the attitude of irony

The more forms of consciousness and professional habits have been accustomed to fictitious, forcibly imposed, and intuitively implausible Marxist-Leninist theories, the harder it is to change them fundamentally. Hence the treacherousness of the situation as it dragged down the mental transformations of post-Communist society. “Objectivity” was such an overworked shell in Lithuanian history that it was exceedingly hard to fill it once more with meaningful content. But the “narrativity” of history itself was left un-reflected upon, perhaps in part even demeaned and forgotten thanks to a remaining trace of Positivist enthusiasm. Perhaps that’s why Rusen’s point, directed to broader segments of Lithuania’s historians, that *the category of narrativity brings historical thinking, and with it historical scholarship, closer to literature*, was not picked up. As long as one firmly believes that the literature of history has disappeared into the past along with the texts of Simonas Daukantas, Teodoras Narbutas, and other 19th century romanticists, one will fail to understand messages *about the literary nature of historiography and about the linguistic processes and principles that constitute “history” as a meaningful and significant representation of the past in the cultural practice of historical memory*. This failure on the part of the Lithuanian academic community was reflected in an abnormally large gap between two disciplines: that of history and that of literature, a gap that has not diminished throughout the 20-plus years of current independence.

Much stronger were the hopes for an objectivity that would indicate the *proper* way of knowing history by applying scientifically confirmed and collegially recognized research methods leading to generally *recognized results and blocking the way to arbitrary opinion*.⁶ However, a postmodernist historiographic discourse began to suspect that this outlook, which in the 20th century became traditional, had fallen too much under the spell of the natural sciences and was nurturing a misleading consciousness because emphasizing the rationality and objectivity of historical knowledge meant forgetting the linguistic process of storytelling, which process determines the uniqueness of history as a mental construction.

The challenges of Lithuanian freedom and the clashes of postcommunism and

mixed with a Romantic sensibility: *It may not go unnoticed that this book is itself cast in an Ironic mode. But the Irony which informs it is a conscious one, and it therefore represents a turning of the Ironic consciousness against Irony itself. If it succeeds in establishing that the skepticism and pessimism of so much of contemporary historical thinking have their origins in an Ironic frame of mind, and that this frame of mind in turn is merely one of a number of possible postures that one may assume before the historical record, it will have provided some of the grounds for the rejections of the Irony itself. And the way will have been partially cleared for the reconstitution of history as a form of intellectual activity which is at once poetic, scientific, and philosophical in its concerns- as it was during history’s golden age in the nineteenth century.* White, Hayden. *Metahistory. The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe*. Baltimore&London: The John Hopkins University Press, 1990 (seventh printing), p. XII.

⁶ Rusenas, Jurnas. *Istorijos mokslo naratyvumas ir objektyvumas*. In *Istoriografija ir atvira visuomenė*. Vilnius, 1998, p. 36.

postmodernism made life difficult for both society and the community of historians. On the one hand, postmodern impulses just had to nurture the seeds of narrative historiography after decades of compulsory indoctrination into universal Marxist laws. On the other hand, by readmitting the value of historical narration postmodernism knocked out the theoretical foundations of those who had hoped for an orderly return to the road of the sole true national narrative. Instead postmodern freedom offered several distinct narratives of equal value: stories reflecting the experiences and aspirations of different segments of Lithuanian society. It was not easy for the contemporary Western historiographic attitude to sink into the Lithuanian consciousness; the attitude, namely, that a text of history emerges from the needs of its audience and therefore it is – it has to be – intended for that audience. Only the living who create their present and future can understand *what sort of past the future requires*.⁷

Now the dispute could move on to the question of the state's authority to decide what is right and what is not. Furthermore, in opposition to the grand narrative, there gradually came to the fore phenomena of collective memory, sometimes also called petite narratives. Slowly the realization dawned that yes, there could be written a universally state-enforced version of the national narrative simplified in textbook-fashion, but at the same time collective memory could testify to other, if not totally opposed, then at least significantly different remembrances of the past.

The narratology of the post-Communist period still lacks deeper traditions of research. There are sporadic discussions and preachy monologues, but these do not suffice, for they often betray categories that have not yet firmly settled, obscure starting positions, and nearly inevitable misunderstandings. Investigations of memory politics are already well on their way; however, the theoretical fields of academic historiography and collective memory are still shrouded in fog, and explications of the politics of history and the processes of collective memory do not readily yield to procedures of strict thought. In this area, the boundaries and border areas of their respective disciplines often turn scholars of politics and scholars of history into adversaries who find it difficult to talk to each other.

There is even more confusion surrounding the intersection of historiography and narratology. If the theories of historiography no longer provoke fierce disputes, if it's already accepted that under conditions of freedom one can avoid the domination of *one true theory*, then the conflict between analytical, positivist historiography and literary or narrative history has in fact been barely reflected upon.

⁷ This is how the Polish historian Tomasz Stryjek titled his excellent book devoted to contemporary Ukrainian historical consciousness: *Jakiej przeszłości potrzebuje przyszłość? Interpretacja dziejów narodowych w historiografii i debacie publicznej na Ukrainie 1991-2004*. Warszawa: Instytut studiów politycznych PAN, 2007, 852 p.

There is even less mutual understanding between historians, on the one side, and literary scholars looking at historical texts as literary creations, on the other. The idea that any historian's text can be regarded as a narrative of a certain kind is hardly disputable. Yet the modernist tendency to criticize narrative history, to oppose it to an analytic and rationalist approach, is still dominant. Thus, in one case, the entire creative output of historians may be held to consist of national narratives (even if most historians would not call themselves writers or narrators). In the other, the point is to emphasize the difference between scholarly historical research as a whole and the corpus of national narratives that is subject to very specific literary rules. General national history courses or syntheses, including schoolbooks of history as well as popular biographies of heroes whose deeds shaped national identity, would constitute the space of historical narratology. In it, as historians of literature urge, tales of *how everything was in fact* should go hand-in-hand with myths of the past and literary fancies that influenced the national community's identity.

Those who investigate changes in national narratives constantly emphasize the importance of the differences between ways of narration and methods of researching scholarly history. A scholarly investigation is held to be so different from the literary qualities of a historical narrative that nothing ties them together. No wonder then that today it is more often literary scholars rather than historians who call for enriching and supplementing the national narrative and its heroes. This is a gauntlet thrown down to historians, and a stimulus for this paper. We will try to review the recent process by which tasks set many decades ago were reborn,⁸ what roads were taken by the new history-tellers, and what problems were raised by the competition between ideas, values, subject matters, ways of thinking, and the historians themselves. Some of these problems were associated not so much with the evolution of *pure* historical scholarship as with the condition of Lithuanian nationalism both immediately prior to the Soviet occupation in 1940 and after the liberation from Soviet rule in 1990. The grand Lithuanian narrative is a sign of a self-reflective nation without which no community of common memory can collect itself. At the same time a description of the transformations that national narratives underwent raises problems of its own. The narrative itself, the narrative sources, and the stimuli of narratology compelled historians not only to analyze but also to recite the narratives competing under conditions of liberty in order to become grand narratives. It is possible to analyze rationally the grand narratives but in trying to understand them a researcher must dare to recite them himself.

⁸ Zenonas Ivinskis, the famous mid-20th century Lithuanian historian, in a paper much commented upon in the late 1930s and titled *Lietuvių istoriografija romantizmo metu ir dabar* (*Lithuanian Historiography During the Age of Romanticism and Now*) had urged fellow historians to fashion *a common course or synthesis of Lithuanian history* in order to counteract the dependence on narratives imposed by larger neighbors.

This is too big a task for one article, so let us try to unravel just a few subject threads that in our opinion best reveal the nature of the transformations that have started but not ended.

2. HOW LONG WILL WE GO ON RECOUNTING THE STORY OF LITHUANIA AS IT WAS TOLD IN THE RUSSIAN IMPERIAL COURT?

This paradoxically sounding question was rhetorically raised several years after the 1990s, when Lithuania was already standing strongly on its own independent feet and was a member of NATO and the EU to boot. The question was asked by Darius Kuolys, the historian of literature and historical rhetoric, at the beginning of his book *Res Lituana. Kunigaikštystės bendrija*. Alert listeners are still waiting for a more detailed explanation of what might be the most important marks of the Lithuanian narrative which appeared in the Russian court at the end of the 18th and the beginning of the 19th century, but their general features are already obvious. Asking *why Lithuanians are still telling their children the story concocted in St. Petersburg*, the author by way of an answer cites a book from which Lithuanian history is taught to schoolchildren today. Here is an essential quotation founded on an attitude promoted by late 18th century Russian conquerors and inculcated to Lithuanians and the rest of the world: the grand Duchy of Lithuania was a *real republic of the nobles. They boasted of their freedoms which they themselves called “golden liberties.” They could pass laws and oppose their ruler by force of arms. This abuse of their liberties weakened the state immensely. Thus it was overwhelmed by its neighbors: in 1795 Lithuania became incorporated into the Russian empire.*⁹

The critic reads this statement as a direct continuation of what the new administrator of Lithuania, Nikolai Repnin, declared on behalf of the conquerors: the army of Catherine II conquered *your unhappy country only to save from horror and anarchy a land in which a spirit of rebellion drove out any sense of respect and in which a universal dissoluteness has taken over all estates and the order of political action has been totally destroyed.*¹⁰ Yet a tolerant reader could find a sophisticated way of defending this statement. For Lithuanian children are not being told directly that the Russians were not conquerors but instead saviors of Lithuanians from the boyars' arbitrary decisions and chaos. Rather this was a transfer, very convenient to early advocates of Russian memory politics, of statements from Polish and Lithuanian monarchist historiography. A Republican spirit and the civic freedoms of boyars

⁹ Quoted from: Kuolys, Darius. *Res Lituana. Kunigaikštystės bendrija*. Book One: *Respublikos steigimas*, p. 8.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*.

were an evil, thus the Lithuanian political elite were their state's gravediggers, and the conquerors nothing other than saviors.

At the time the Lithuanian Grand Duchy and the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth were partitioned, their new governors first of all had to justify the act of conquest itself. But eventually this map of Lithuania's road in history came to be covered by broader and deeper interpretive accretions. In the Lithuanian narrative fabricated in 18th century St. Petersburg, the most important aim was to discredit (as a political handicap) the Lithuanian political tradition of gentry democracy and Republicanism; while the contemporary assertion in the Lithuanian history textbook just continues it without attempting to present the positive Republican idea which once was very ambitiously expounded on by the historian of Lithuania and Poland, Joachim Lelewel. The essential drift of this idea came to the fore in the view that the Commonwealth was weakened not by an excess of the Republican spirit but by its shortage. Hence it was not monarchist aspirations but the return, to the whole nation, of rights up to now exercised exclusively by the nobles that, according to Lelewel, embodied the hope of future strength and renewal. Turning the Republic of Noblemen into a universal Republic in a period when winds from the French Revolution were shaking the kingdoms of the ancient continent was an idea that then appeared as the brightest guiding star.

Be that as it may, in disputes about the nuances of the textbook interpretation of the general narrative, the diagnosis offered by Darius Kuolys is essentially right. However, it is not enough to explain that Russian imperial expansion to the West was always accompanied by a self-serving version of history with Russians as *saviors*. Nor is it enough to add that the Soviets used the same rhetoric (some still use it today) to justify the occupation of the Republic of Lithuania in 1940. It is more important to stress that often Lithuanians themselves adopted the attitudes imposed on them by the occupiers in lieu of elements of the Republican narrative such as the charming and positive qualities of a civic nation, traits of the self-government of the nobility, and the rule of law created by the Lithuanian Statute. None of the latter became worthy of Lithuanian attention during the National Rebirth, thereby either consigning to oblivion the most important objectives of a historically fortified, self-sufficient political existence, the strongest arguments for Lithuania's civilizational capacities, or else leaving them to be credited largely to the civilizational heritage of Poland. In this way Lithuania's past came to be neglected and *was allowed to be conquered*, while the captives themselves began to look at themselves through their conquerors' eyes. There was nothing especially unique in this; rather, it illustrated the general logic of the way the strong gain ascendancy and take over. Toward the end of the 19th century Russian Imperial doctrinaires

could already allow themselves to tell the history of the *North-Western Krai* (and put into textbooks) in such a way that nothing remained of Lithuania as a separate fact of political civilization. It's even more remarkable that the story of Lithuania, in the historical texts of the late 19th century National Rebirth, likewise avoided mentioning the values of noblemen democracy while willingly recounting its negative features; moreover, the heroes of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania's political community had difficulty finding their way even into the textbooks of the First Republic.

It's important to emphasize that it was not in the environment of historians and theorists of history but in that of Lithuanian literature and literary history that the fate of the national narrative after 1990 as well as the changes and signs of confusion therein were first loudly discussed and commented upon. Thus in the fall of 2013 Darius Kuolys published the following observations in *Bernardinai.lt*, an intellectual portal:

... if we wish to survive as a national community in an open contemporary space, we need a "grand narrative" which would join different texts, different personalities, and different images, ideas, and ensembles of significance into a meaningful whole. This narrative would help to grow roots, to resist the venality of postcolonial consumerist reality, and to supply the culture of Lithuania with a dimension of depth. We need a narrative that would tie together free Lithuanians into one independent community and that would give our community a trustworthy foundation for communicating and creating a common future.¹¹

In this way the author recalls the similar reflections that Meilė Lukšienė, a historian of education and culture, voiced in the early 1990s. These reflections were meant to suggest the strategic aims that a national community embarking on the road of freedom might adopt. In the course of arguing for a new conception of education she observed that

it is unclear where the current fragmentation in all areas, the *rejection of a grand narrative* (my emphasis – E. A.) might lead. What is rejected is a certain consistency, originality, and coherence of culture, a grand narrative which is inherent in every culture and which constitutes its uniqueness. . . . Proceeding this way results in life being impoverished. Forms do change and must change, but do we have to discard their deeper meanings, their connections and the search for meaning embodied in the grand narratives?¹²

What is important for us here is not so much the testimony showing that in the two decades after the early 1990s the situation hasn't changed much as the fact

¹¹ Kuolys, Darius. *Apie junges, iššaknijimą ir mokyklinę lituanistiką*; <www.Bernardinai.lt/straipsnis/-/109318/2013-10-29>.

¹² Ibidem.

that it wasn't the historians themselves but rather the theoreticians of literature and education who brought up the subject of the grand narratives. Of course, both Lukšienė and Kuolys pretty much stopped at this important doorstep and did not develop the understanding of this narratology problem much further. Obviously, both talked about a phenomenon that some theoreticians would assign to the area of meta-narrative problems; an area dominated by non-systematically conceived, but poetically mobilizing images of the national path together with expository texts belonging not just to scholars of history, but to students of literature, culture, philosophy, and art as well. Specific investigations of scientific historiography (and history of literature) connect only through various associations with that meta-narrative level, which up to now has been researched only sporadically.

In deconstructing that Russian-Soviet version of the Lithuanian national narrative it was and is not difficult to recognize the elements that were imposed by distorting well-established facts of history. An example is the martial valor, fetishized by the Soviets, of the Smolensk regiments in the Battle of Tannenberg. The army of multinational Lithuania was multinational as well. In the Soviet narrative, the fulfilling of a vassal's duty to the Lithuanian Grand Duke Vytautas was turned into an icon of friendship between the great Russian nation and the Lithuanians. During the Soviet occupation such adjustments of the historical narrative were recognized and rendered harmless in society's consciousness behind the scenes. It was not difficult also to recognize comments about the allegedly useful consequences of the Russian take-over at the very end of the 18th century: the merging into a larger market, the end of chaos, etc. The didactic sub-text of this theme was widely understood: to show the alleged economic benefits of the Soviet occupation of the Republic of Lithuania. Since these features of the official Lithuanian narrative were already evident during the years of Soviet rule, their removal from the textbooks after 1990 came quickly and without any intellectual exertion.

The major themes of a colonized and Russified Lithuanian narrative had already been removed or reconstituted prior to World War II. In the late 1930s, during the twilight of the First Lithuanian Republic, a group of young historians under the direction of Adolfas Apoka wrote a textbook for Lithuanian pupils in which there was no trace of what the history created in the Russian Imperial Court had laid into the very foundations: everything in the old Lithuanian Grand Duchy was Russian – the elite, the culture, the writings, the political order; while after the treaties with the Kingdom of Poland and the adoption of the Catholic faith, the Lithuanians for some strange reason receded from the Russians and became victims of Polonization; and finally, after centuries of boyar anarchy and multiple losses in the spheres of economy, politics, and war, great Russia re-takes the territories of the Lithuanian

Grand Duchy and turns the local peasants into Lithuanian-speaking Russians (not *ruskij*, but *rosijanin*) loyal to the Empire. In the then new apoka account, the narrative of the early Lithuanian Grand Duchy was restored and reconquered, and the Lithuanian narrative regained the themes which the Lithuanian Chronicles and the histories of Maciej Strykowski and Albert Vijuk-Koialowicz had made famous.

After 1990 the early Lithuanian narrative was drawn into a real maelstrom of interpretations thanks to the national *Lithuanian Millenium* program, which, with a zeal characteristic of a newly freed nation, sought to highlight the importance of the first mention of Lithuania and Lithuanians in historical sources. Even though the year 1009, when St. Bruno was killed on the outskirts of Lithuania, does not testify to the beginnings of the Lithuanian state but rather can be seen as a significant symbol of the approach of Western Christianity to pagan Lithuania, this does not hinder the discernment of the start of history and the earliest signs of a millennial nation. The inducements of a national program and the coalescing of an official politics of memory with the interests of the community of historians significantly expanded research of early Lithuanian Grand Duchy history. A multi-volume Lithuanian history (or rather, a series of academic monographs rather than a tightly conceptualized grand narrative) began to be published, and old historiographic obstacles were pushed aside – obstacles that had made it difficult to look at the Grand Duchy of Lithuania as a continuing project of Lithuanian political civilization that was destined, in one form or another, to be resurrected in the 20th century.

In the predawn mists of millennial history two storylines competed. One of them developed in the historians' guild; the other belonged to the non-standard pen of the literary historian Algimantas Bučys.¹³ The first, as mentioned, emphasized the earliest reference, by name, to Lithuania in the context of Western Christianity's mission. The second brought forth a broad version of an early Lithuanian narrative, directing attention to the Orthodox context of 13th century Lithuania during the time of King Mindaugas. The author concerned himself with what he calls the oldest Lithuanian literature or what historians of the 19th c. Russian Empire called writings of western Rus', stretching from the Chronicles to the hagiographic literature on the Orthodox saints. Bučys attempted to insert into the general Lithuanian narrative items *that had never been included in it nor investigated before: canonical*

¹³ Bučys, Algimantas. *Seniausioji lietuvių literatūra. Mindaugo epocha. Poliparadigminė viduramžių kultūrinių konfliktų studija*. Vilnius, Lietuvos rašytojų sąjungos leidykla, 2009. An earlier book of his was devoted to the place of Orthodox heroes in the Lithuanian narrative: Algimantas Bučys. *Barbarai vice versa klasikai*. Vilnius: Lietuvos rašytojų sąjungos leidykla, 2008.

*works of medieval literature and sacred texts that in the 13th century could have been created and presented . . . by none other than Lithuanians.*¹⁴

In contrast to the imperial Russian historians, Bučys makes all of this inheritance from the past part of the Lithuanian narrative rather than leaving it in Russian history. He is also unstinting in his criticism of Lithuanian historiography, which systematically ignored the phenomena he investigated although most of them had long been well-known to historical scholarship. His assertions are both logical and worldview-motivated, as may be seen from the following quotation:

Only the presence of a cult of political history in Lithuanian historiography can explain the paradox that such a fundamental cultural event as the founding, by Mindaugas's son Vai vilkas (d. 1268), of the first monastery in Lithuanian history was only marginally attended to by Lithuanian historians. As if that weren't enough, the figure of the first Lithuanian monk, Vai vilkas, was minimalized and denigrated for centuries by historians committed to Catholicism and Eurocentrism simply because he, the oldest son of Lithuania's king, took the sacrament of baptism in the Greek rite and transferred the throne of Lithuania to his sister's husband varnas, a Ruthenian who also was a Greek-rite Christian.¹⁵

What themes and groups of medieval heroes offered themselves to Lithuanian history? Bučys elevates the tribal-dynastic element above that of religion, and he sees the aristocracy of pagan Lithuania actively expanding its powers and conquering the Eastern Slavic space. This goal is served by the Orthodox religion. The science of history more or less knows about this, but here the question turns on the place of Orthodoxy in the general Lithuanian narrative. The author has no doubts either about the Lithuanianness of these topics, or about their importance and right to receive greater attention in historical syntheses.

It is remarkable that Bučys's work has received no academic reaction whatsoever except silence on the part of reviewers. *Catholic-oriented Eurocentrists*, who, according to him, make up the bulk of Lithuania's historians, have stayed totally voiceless and have not labelled the views of Bučys as expressing a *position committed to Orthodoxy and the Eurasian idea*. In the post-Soviet academic realm conscious silence is also a certain form of deadly reaction. When there no longer (or almost no longer) is any doubt about academic freedom and the right of every researcher to expound his own viewpoint and when somebody advances interpretations that a majority of academics find shocking, then instead of polemics total silence sets in. This, so it seems, is what happened to Bučys's book. At the same time, in 2009, generously supported by state funds, a number of *narratives of millennial history* saw

¹⁴ Bučys, Algimantas. *Seniausioji lietuvių literatūra. Mindaugo epocha*, p. 11.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 12.

the light of day without provoking any significant scholarly disputes. Thus a large group of historians produced the 701-page book *Lietuva 1009-2009*,¹⁶ the readers of which *were meant*, according to its creators, *to have it as a family or, even more broadly, a Motherland's album*. But in this book there are marked dissonances with the medieval image projected by Bučys. The historian Artūras Dubonis, for example, views Lithuania through a Western European prism concerned with the fate of Christianity and finds that after the assassination of Mindaugas *the Lithuania kingdom has been captured by pagans and scismatics*,¹⁷ as if illustrating the position unflinchingly attacked by Bučys. Thus we have two opposed narratives of Lithuania, depending on their (contemporary) authors' differences in religious outlook and on their evaluations of Eastern and Western European civilizations. At the same time Dubonis's text itself is filled with passages in which Lithuanian pagans, Orthodox, and Catholics work together in various configurations and proportions, depending on the political goals. And in the same book pretending to be a Motherland's album Darius Baronas describes the evolution of Lithuania's Orthodox in a way that rationally explains phenomena of attraction, separation, and marginalization¹⁸ and thereby should reveal both the limits of Bučys's understanding of Lithuanian historiography and the multi-layered nature of the influence of historical science on the general narrative.

Even the grand Lithuanian narrative of the epoch of nationalism, that of the First Lithuanian Republic, had not fully emancipated itself from the spell of the St. Petersburg version. Both the Russian-inculcated principles of self-appraisal and of cultural memory and the Lithuanian textbook narrative of the 1930s, heavily dependent on anti-Polish attitudes, could not resolutely go much beyond a basically negative evaluation of the Lithuanian Grand Duchy's political system, identified as it was with the chaos produced by the nobility's liberties. Then there also were the perceived positive aspects of the Russian imperial order imposed together with the Commonwealth's partitioning at the end of the 18th century. Russification was undoubtedly seen as an evil brought by the conquerors, but the anti-Polish policies of the Russian administration, the *De-Polonization of Lithuania*, was essentially depicted in colors favorable to the Lithuanian National Rebirth project. These oppositions co-existed in a single narrative, including its most popular version, that of the apoka group.

In that narrative, however, the evolution of Lithuanian statehood after the Union of Lublin and the *rule of law* created by the Lithuanian Statute were shrouded

¹⁶ Butrimas, Adomas et al. (editors). *Lietuva 1009-2009*. Vilnius: Vilniaus dailės akademijos leidykla, 2009.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 58.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 327-333.

in a mist of doubts; and the values and virtues of gentry democracy were also insufficiently brought out: they remained obscure, even bereft of value, or else suspect and alien because allegedly Polish. Such a self-contradictory attitude towards the Lithuanian Grand Duchy's development after Lublin prepared the ground for an even more conflict-ridden interpretation of 19th-century history. An especially important episode of the grand national narrative, namely, the 19th century with its Russian domination, allowed the apoka textbook to depict even the Vilnius Governor-General Count Mikhail Muravyov, denounced as *Hangman* by Lithuanians and Poles after the 1863 Insurrection, as a man who somehow guarded Lithuanian peasants from the ravages inflicted by Polish landlords. This conception, along with the whole chapter of what was then the most popular textbook of Lithuanian history, caused great dissatisfaction among many older Lithuanian academics and veterans of the Lithuanian national movement who, along with Professors Augustinas Janulaitis and Vaclovas Biržiška, almost publicly protested and wondered out-loud whether such textbooks were needed by Lithuanians at all. A few decades later, in Soviet syntheses of Lithuanian history, this motif disappeared, but not because the Polish-speaking political traditions and the nobility of the Lithuanian Grand Duchy began to be valued more but because now the Russian imperial government and its local representatives no longer enjoyed any rights to positive depiction.

Kuolys's question, How long will we keep on telling our children the stories wrought in the Russian imperial court? first of all concerns the textbook syntheses of Lithuanian history. The rise of academic Lithuanian historiography after 1990 and its availability to a contemporary scholarly audience does open the gates ever more widely to a multiform, multiply competing story line rehabilitating the political tradition of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. The big problem is just that the new meta-narrative context of contemporary Lithuanian historiography is not directly influencing the simplified common accounts and school textbooks. And that means that the stories created by historians are not directly producing radical changes in mass memory.

3. THE DYSFUNCTIONALITY OF THE DIDACTIC LITHUANIAN NARRATIVE

Let's recall the thought that history, which every generation rewrites anew, arises out of the needs of its audience and optimally – in case of success – serves to meet those needs. This is an elementary principle of theoretical knowledge. Now let's check the transformations of the common Lithuanian narrative, putting together both what disappeared from it and what new things were added to, and stayed in,

it after 1990, and – most importantly, what hadn't been there even before 1990 and also wasn't added to it after 1990, even though the images of the new Lithuanian national consciousness and state would seem to require this. The story lines and heroes of a newly created narrative are often called up from the past: following these examples the nation can set out in a desired, imaginary direction. However, competing historical story lines and interpretations often conflict with oft-repeated visions of the future. Here we bounce up against the problem of a narrative's functionality (or dysfunctionality).

The functionality of the national narrative (especially in its textbook version) is understood very straightforwardly here. If a nation arising to an independent political life holds up the worthy ideals of freedom and democracy; if it seeks to strengthen and recreate the principles and cultural forms of Western civilization; if these principles and forms become virtually unassailable icons; if not only nationalist manifestations of a unique Lithuanian separateness from the rest of the world but also a Eurasian vision propagated by contemporary Russia get pushed to the margins, then the historical Lithuanian narrative has to correlate with these values. Then simple examples of this functionality have to turn up new topics and heroes of the historical narrative to replace or supplement those already established but perhaps losing their inspiring qualities. Usually this does not mean introducing historical fictions. We are talking about historical personages the list of which is always too long for all of them to be used by one common narrative. Since the past is unboundedly deep and wide, filled with facts and names, while a common narrative should fit into a single book or in the memory of one generation, one must select from the more or less scholarly certifiable past whatever would be attractive enough to be included in a literary historical narrative. Sometimes historical heroes, like some basketball players who've long been sitting on the bench, are thrown into the game as replacements. Those whom they replace are not necessarily thrown out of the narrative – they're just being sent to the reserve bench.

Tentatively we can discern at least three cases of dysfunctionality in Lithuania's aspirations after 1990 and in the Lithuanian historical narrative. They show how a nation setting out on the road of freedom more or less imagines its future, but the narrative of Lithuanian history it is rewriting does not really respond to it or responds only after a great delay. In other words, there are some common questions that show what fateful challenges the present throws at Lithuanians and how there is almost no reaction from the historical narrative working for the benefit of collective memory. Life is lived one way and certain values are being declared in the course of living it, while on the textbook stage entirely different storylines and even counter-exemplary heroes are being trotted out.

The first case reveals itself when we compare episodes of the common narrative with the value demands of liberal democracy and the *rule of law*. We should expect that if we agree to return to the cradle of Western democracy, we ought to newly “rediscover” and to recognize for the sake of the younger generation the values of Lithuanian gentry democracy. The level of self-government and the direct election of judicial officials would have impressed Alexis de Tocqueville in the 19th century as well as democrats in the United States today. The story of how free and democratic the noblemen of 16th-17th century Lithuania actually were should be received with open arms by contemporary Lithuanians, and they should realize how important this tradition was as shown by the fact that Lithuanian boyars had their sons baptized on the book of the Third Lithuanian Statute. Historians after 1990 have done much to throw light on these questions, but this was not picked up by the common narrative and mass opinion has not changed. What’s dominant like a historical stigma is still the picture of chaos in gentry Lithuania waiting for somebody like the Russians to come in and bring order and justice.

The second case lies in the topics reflecting the reality of the diaspora nation (or, if you will, the EU nation with the highest emigration rate); and the third in episodes of the development of civil society and of social capital. Lithuanians lost in the post-Soviet transition stage have moved to the West in hitherto unseen numbers. Even if the statistics are inaccurate, few observers doubt that the recent emigration wave has considerably surpassed half a million. Nevertheless, the textbook story pressed into the youngest generation’s collective memory almost invariably paints pictures of an exceptionally sedentary ethnolinguistic community that has lived on the shores of the Nemunas River for ages. Several dozen thousand Lithuanian children raised by their grandparents cannot find in their history textbook any explanation for the painful reality they are experiencing. They’re living one kind of life while hearing stories not having much to do with it; as a result, these stories come to be regarded as fictions of little educational value. In this respect another kind of narrative has recently been attempted,¹⁹ one according to which Lithuanians have throughout the centuries been much more mobile than we were led to imagine throughout the Soviet period and several years thereafter. It bears repeating that historical scholarship has for a long time been unfurling a giant panorama of a diaspora nation’s past, a panorama filled with facts, dates, and names. The question here is just one of deliberate choice: which things from that well-known past are to be given meaning and awarded heroic status in the textbooks of Lithuanian history written for today. In this way there is a disconnect between what is known to scholarship and what is passed over in silence in the common national narrative.

¹⁹ See Aleksandravičius, Egidijus. *Karklo diegas. Lietuvių pasaulio istorija*. Vilnius: Versus aureus, 2013.

We might try interpreting the resultant situation as follows. Facts corroborated by historical science become significant storylines in a common narrative only because of the audience, its needs, its emotional orders, and functionality. But then it's difficult to explain why in those cases in which an audience agonizing over the dilemmas of migration and identity should "place an order" for a narrative responding to its existential aspirations, such a narrative either doesn't come into being at all or arrives fatally too late, or if it does take shape in the scholarly literature it doesn't make it into the required history text books or the programs of general education. After all, neither the past itself nor the powers of analytical historiography have directly influenced the difference between the 1930s *Lietuvos istorija* (History of Lithuania) of apoka and the complex of contemporary histories. The First Republic's high school student saw the whole wide world of the Lithuanian diaspora, even though only a relatively small number of people had emigrated from that Republic. By contrast, the historical horizon of a high school student nowadays doesn't contain the diaspora at all. Here the gaps in the common narrative are filled only by works of the Lithuanian literary canon. Nowadays a course in Lithuanian literature without the *Baltoji drobulė* (White Shroud) of Antanas Škėma would be unimaginable.

The third episode touches on the theme of an independent, free, and open Lithuanian society. At least according to their Constitution, the Lithuanian people do seek to advance this society and its essential values. But if the common historical narrative must reflect the consciously enunciated values, principles, and objectives, then again, just as in the case of the Lithuanian political tradition as a whole, there should emerge from the background of the past into the front stage the proven and marvelous abilities of the Lithuanians of old to come together and to voluntarily act without remuneration in establishing clubs, societies, and social networks as well as to generate the capital that allowed people to build halls and churches and to create museums and other institutions for the common good without thinking about or depending on government clerks, taxpayer money, grants, and payoffs. It's not just the late 19th century Lithuanian intelligentsia hardened by Russian Imperial persecution and not only the Lithuanian diaspora in North America that worked such miracles of self-organization and independence. Historians will not deny even the First Republic's societal potential during the time the Smetona regime had frozen the processes of institutional democracy. Prior to World War II Lithuanians, like all citizens of the Western world, joined to form voluntary organizations, freely argued over ideas, and founded charitable, cultural, and artistic institutions by collecting one litas after another in freely given donations. Even representatives of the lowest socio-economic strata contributed to building up the social capital that allowed

the construction of homes, halls, and dining rooms for the truly destitute. The best example of this, now renovated to serve as a reminder for contemporary society, is the St. Zita Society Building in Kaunas for Catholic servant women, currently housing the Theology Faculty and *Aula Magna* of Vytautas Magnus University.

On this level it behooves us to acknowledge certain narratological differences from the two earlier episodes. Phenomena, sporadically emerging in Lithuania's past, of the so-called *third sector* central to a free civil society, not only failed to become important and meaningful elements of the common national narrative but also have not become objects of systematic research in the academic sphere. Theoretically, Lithuanian historiographic investigations of the social fabric have brought to light many new facts; and a number of studies have been written about the history of clubs, societies, and organizations formed and existing on a voluntary basis. Yet in the general picture of society all this has not been duly recognized as manifestations of a civic sector arising in the process of modernization.

This is probably because despite the openly declared values, the culture of voluntary associations or, in other words, the *third sector* of a democratic nation really does lack not only conscious democrats but also selfless workers prepared to be volunteers, activists, and civic leaders in a truly free society. But this is an assumption that deserves to be researched by historical anthropologists and social psychologists.

In any case, the transformations of national narratology and its ever more loudly voiced demands show the lack of both theoretical historiographic discussions and intellectual attempts to reflect current social consciousness. But without these things it is difficult to understand and explain the psychosocial mechanisms of changes in mentality as well as to create and maintain a harmonious community of shared memory so severely traumatized by repeated acts of force, violence, and indoctrination throughout the 20th century.

IN LIEU OF CONCLUSIONS

The flow of the historical Lithuanian narrative for more than 20 years of regained independence has largely avoided the twin repressions of state order and control of historical truth that have been observed in a Russia constrained by the regime of Vladimir Putin. The academic freedom of historians; their right to argue about, and disagree with, any and all interpretations; and even their right to remain sceptical, together with the tendency of postmodernist historiography to refuse belief in a single historical truth, was and is a key change achieved after 1990. This does

not mean that the views and needs of different ideological groups had no influence. They did; they split the community of historians into diverse groups, but up to now this was all to the benefit of a more comprehensive appraisal of the past.

Only in the last few years the situation began to change radically: journalists and social radicals, political scientists and educologists positively began demanding some sort of national historical narrative. Even the secret services started to encroach upon academic historiography and its disputes, as if national security agents could presume to know what the Lithuanian nation needs today. All of these developments testify to an unduly prolonged state of feeling thoroughly lost in liberty.

Egidijus Aleksandravičius

PASIMETĘ LAISVĖJE: KONKURUOJANTYS DIDIEJI NARATYVAI
POSOVIETINĖJE LIETUVOJE

SANTRAUKA. Straipsnyje analizuojamos po 1990-ųjų ir nepriklausomybės atkūrimo lietuvių istoriografijoje, viešojoje erdvėje ir politiniuose sprendimuose įvykusios permainos. Laisvė istorijos mokslui ir visai humanistikai reiškė nuomonių skirtingumą ir akademinės saviraiškos ribų praplėtimą. Po vienos, privalomos, lietuviams *iš viršaus* sovietų okupantų primestos didžiojo pasakojimo versijos į kultūrinės atminties erdvę prasiveržė nauji pasakojimai, kurie ėmė tarpusavyje konkuruoti. Akademių istorikų ir kultūros tyrinėtojų liberalėjimas neretai prasilenkė su platesnių masių bei politinio sluoksnio nacionalizmo interesais. Pradėjo išsiskirti akademinis ir populiarusis diskursas, o politinė valdžia ėmėsi pamažu didinti savo galias, kontroliuoti lietuvių atminties slinktį. Šios permainos yra vertos akylo tyrimo ir refleksijos.

RAKTAŽODŽIAI: didysis naratyvas, istoriografija, atminties politika, nacionalizmas.