

BOOKS FROM LITHUANIA

2021—2022

FICTION and NON-FICTION

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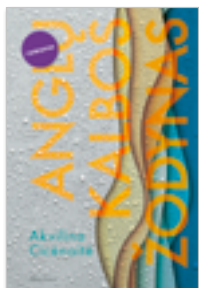
12 fiction + 7 non-fiction = 19 Lithuanian books published within a year since autumn 2021 and featured in this publication. These books are defined by their metaphorical titles and themes: artists' residencies and writers' everyday life as creators; life in foreign countries and cultures; the difficulties of the pandemic; creators and their fates; history and the past; the search for truth. The books, published in the first six months from September 2021, have attempted to respond to what seemed, at the time, to be the most challenging issues – quarantine, and the isolation and loneliness of the pandemic. But it all changed dramatically on the morning of 24 February 2022 when Russia launched a full-scale war against Ukraine. Then everyone found themselves stricken by the impossibility of believing that war could break out in Europe in the 21st century, and by the purest, most paralysing fear – we Lithuanians know all too painfully what it means to oppose Russia and to have lived under its occupation for 50 years. The last six months of living with a war happening nearby have revealed how much war is present in texts, especially in memoirs from the twentieth century, which, when read, bring back old questions: what have they done to us and why? Questions that Ukrainians, who are now fighting for their freedom and that of Europe as a whole, are asking and will continue to ask. Ukraine is far from absent from this list of books, which helps us to understand what led to the present situation and what is being fought for on the battlefield. So, all these introductory presentations of Lithuanian fiction and non-fiction books are secretly imbued with the anxiety of the present and the utmost support – together to victory! Slava Ukraini!

FICTION

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## A Dictionary of the English Language

*We are migrating to an unfamiliar territory, we are bound to be eternal migrants, unable to recognize the land we live in. We are all on the trajectory of the same migration. It is just the beginning. Is it possible to rewrite the dictionary, to create more capacious words, to rewrite ourselves, is it possible to reclaim a home? (p. 241)*

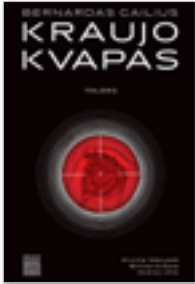
A dictionary, a road novel, autofiction, a reflection on contemporaneity and a CV of the present – such is the multidimensionality of this novel by Akvilina Cicėnaitė. a subtle, meditative, sensitive and personal narrative about migration, memory, longing and melancholy, the never-ending search for a sense of home, solastalgia and nostalgia, writing and translation, the word and the world, the woman and the man. Travelling from Sydney to Broken Hill with her spouse, the narrator ploughs not only through the Australian landscape but also through the mines of her own memory, where the stories unearthed are structured by her personal 26-word dictionary of English. What does it mean for a northern European woman from Vilnius married to a French-speaking Canadian to live in Sydney? Why does living in English feel different from living in Lithuanian? And why is a non-native English tongue so deceptively (un)simple? How does another language shape our identity and memories, and why does speaking it serve as a constant painful reminder that the North is indelible? Untranslatability – of experiences, feelings, the past, womanhood – is one of the novel's core thematic threads, as is the search for a unique vocabulary, realising full well that married life is nothing other than the creation of a common vocabulary.

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AKVILINA CICĖNAITĖ – writer and literary translator. Having grown up in Vilnius, she graduated with an MA in Literary Theory and worked as a copywriter in advertising agencies before moving to the other side of the world. She obtained a PhD in Religious Studies in New Zealand and has been living in Sydney, Australia, since 2012. She has published eight books, including six novels for young adults, and won multiple awards for her work. “Anglų kalbos žodynas” (A Dictionary of the English Language, 2022) is her second novel for adult readers.

**KEYWORDS:** autofiction; dictionary; journey; migration; southern heat and the longing for the North; melancholy; memory; homesickness; intimacy.

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## The Smell of Blood

*The first thriller about the Lithuanian partisan war – the fierce armed resistance to the Soviet occupation of Lithuania in 1944–1953. This story is a poignant reminder that the war against tyranny and against the drive to subjugate the other is far from being a thing of the past; everything is repeating itself almost analogously, today, in Ukraine and in its struggle against Russia, which seeks to wipe it from the world map.*

“The explosion prevented her from finishing the poem. Or so the legends later claimed.” Beginning with an explosion in a partisan bunker at 4am on the night of 15 November 1949, Bernardas Gailius’ spy thriller immediately plunges the reader into a tense battlefield, where Andrius Karnauskas-Drakonas, the leader of the partisans of the Venta *tėvūnija* (detachment), and his men are up against the Soviet security agents who seek to destroy them. The struggle – in the name of Lithuania, freedom, and life – is fierce, as they strive to outwit and defeat their deadly enemy. This narrative by Gailius testifies to a couple of important points. Firstly, in 1949, the Second World War was not yet over in Lithuania – Lithuanian partisans, fighting fearlessly for a free Lithuania in its forests, were determined to regain the country they had lost at the beginning of the war. Secondly, five years of armed resistance against the invaders increasingly diminished any hope of victory. The weight of despair and helplessness was felt by the partisan commander, Drakonas, who, after much hesitation, finally resolved to look for a way to save his soldiers. “The Smell of Blood” shows in a compelling, literary way, with historical accuracy and detail, what the partisan war against the Soviet repression machine, against communism, looked like, and against what kind of murderers the Lithuanian intelligentsia of that time, having embarked on resistance and driven by self-sacrifice and idealism, had to fight. Reading this thriller in the context of Russia’s war against Ukraine is like reciting prayers: there are no light or easy paths in war, and war touches absolutely everyone.

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BERNARDAS GAILIUS – historian and journalist. In his doctoral thesis and his first book “Partizanai tada ir šiandien” (Partisans Then and Today, 2006), he studied the Lithuanian partisan war and its legal, political and cultural consequences. He dedicated his book “Nusikaltimai prie Smetonos” (Crimes Under Smetona, 2008) to the history of crime and the intelligence services. His studies of the thriller genre are summarized in the book “Džeimsas Bondas. Mitas ir politika” (James Bond. Myth and Politics, 2017). “Kraujo kvapas” (The Smell of Blood, 2022) is his first novel.

**KEYWORDS:** espionage thriller; Lithuanian partisan war; quest for freedom; struggle against communism; self-sacrifice; idealism; human weaknesses and strengths.

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## Roses and Potatoes

*A bilingual, free-flowing yet fractured collage of ideas, “a tapeworm of thoughts and associations”, and an ironic study of emotions, concerning over-hyped attempts, in our times, to seek happiness, and (not necessarily) find it.*

Deivis, this book’s Canada-based protagonist, has been commissioned, in the same way as this book’s author, observer of contemporaneity Vaiva Grainytė, to write a book about the search for happiness that pervades present times. Speaking of the impossibility of such a task with a light touch of irony, the author nonetheless creates a novel in which the outline of the fictional plot is rather fragile and affected by the realities of quarantine, while its content makes it a lightly metaliterary Frankenstein’s creature of texts and, at the same time, a summary paper promoting scientific research. What is happiness, or what is it not? Can happiness exist at all? Does one have to feel it, and what if one is not destined to feel happy? What does the happiness index measure, and how is it determined by geography, climate and political circumstances? Juggling these societal imperatives, Grainytė gracefully shows life’s other, murkier side where, balancing between opposite poles, trying not to lose their heads and not to deviate from their inner spine, people are drowning in fears, struggling with anxiety, despair, and where the cult of productivity promises not happiness but rather a quick burnout. Why roses and potatoes, one may wonder? Because potatoes, growing alongside roses, increase the latter’s flowering, strengthening the plant in general, and because life, too, springs from the stimulation of different things, of fast and slow time, as this text by Grainytė proves, which can also be read as a 21st-century version of *Weltschmerz*.

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VAIVA GRAINYTĖ – writer, poet, playwright, 2019 winner of the Golden Lion of the Venice Biennale of Contemporary Art for the opera-performance “Sun and Sea”, and recipient of the Lithuanian National Prize for Culture and Arts. Her books – the book of essays “Pekino dienoraščiai” (Beijing Diaries, 2012) and the poetry collection “Gorilos archyvai” (Gorilla’s Archives, 2019) – were nominated for the Book of the Year award and included in the list of the Twelve Most Creative Books of the Year in Lithuania. The author’s work has been translated into over ten languages. “Roses and Potatoes” is Grainytė’s first novel, wherein she continues the exploration and critical reflection on the present that she had begun in her playwriting.

**KEYWORDS:** bilingual novel; collage text; research on emotion; happiness challenge; feeling of happiness; life stimulations; the *Weltschmerz* of the present; hedonistic adaptation.



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## A Night in Berlin

*Four different stories, set in different cities at different times, with characters who may be fictional but are recognisable, and the coincidences are not accidental.*

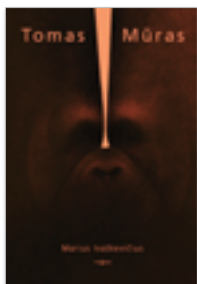
With this book, Laurynas Katkus dusts off the novella genre, which was once Lithuanian prose's strength and uniqueness, and tells four stories, described by those who have read them as stories that are impossible to tell. Perhaps this is the secret of non-novelistic prose: just an outline of a plot, but inside one finds the seeds and the keys to life, a drop or two of dreaminess, and time, that recognizable epoch, in this case: the end of the late Soviet era, the first years of independence, and travels abroad as well as feelings and the desire to avoid appearing before the world as *homo sovieticus* by dint of otherness or provinciality. "A Night in Berlin", the story that gives the collection its name, features a matryoshka as a symbol of the whole process of hatching from one epoch to another, from the Soviet Vilnius to free Berlin. Katkus attempts to tell the untellable – the harmony of time and place, mood, atmosphere, and stances, experiences and the search for identity undertaken by the generation whose adult life started with the restoration of Lithuania's independence.

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LAURYNAS KATKUS – writer, essayist, and translator. His books of poetry "Nardymo pamokos" (Diving Lessons, 2003), "Už 7 gatvių" (Behind 7 Streets, 2009) and the collection of essays "The Basement" (Sklepas, 2011) were included in the list of the Twelve Most Creative Books of the Year in Lithuania. In 2012, the novel "Judantys šešėliai" (Moving Shadows) was published. Five books by Katkus have been published in English and German.

**KEYWORDS:** novella; life in-between the East and the West, between dream and reality; matryoshka metaphor; experiences of the beginning of freedom; narrative of a generation.

Excerpt here ↴



## Thomas Moore

*A story about a veteran of artistic residencies, the famous writer Thomas Moore, which turns into an examination of the artist's ego and the creative crisis he is experiencing.*

After twenty years of playwriting, the most renowned contemporary Lithuanian playwright Marius Ivaškevičius returns to the Lithuanian prose scene with his third novel “Thomas Moore”. It is a story unfolding in the near future about a famous writer’s daily life and battles in an artistic residency. “This is a Residency – not a playground.” So begins the novel and, as it will turn out later, the artist’s notes, or the jumble of his thoughts. The writer with an “unpronounceable name”, who hides his true identity under the pen name Thomas Moore, is going through a creative crisis, which is exacerbated by the fact that his life in the residency – or, as Moore puts it, the cage – is exposed to the public eye, hindering the progress of inner battles with his demons. With a light-hearted touch of irony directed at the residency phenomenon itself, which has greatly influenced the contemporary art and culture scene, Ivaškevičius creates a portrait of an old-school, instinct-driven, machoistic artist (and, of course, a genius), which unpacks nearly all existing myths about artists and includes an obligatorily fiery love story, whose perfection is undermined by crude, repulsive carnality and spiteful, raging sex. Its rudeness competes with the artist’s desperate fatigue, the burden of ageing, the quest for freedom and the search for meaning – all of which makes for a surprisingly unexpected finale.

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MARIUS IVAŠKEVIČIUS – prose writer, internationally acclaimed playwright, author of the cult plays “Madagaskaras” (Madagascar, 2003), “Mistras” (The Master, 2010), “Išvarymas” (Expulsion, 2011), “Miegantys” (Sleepers, 2021), recipient of numerous theatrical awards, and winner of the National Prize for Culture and Arts. “Thomas Moore” is his third novel.

**KEYWORDS:** artist’s confession; everyday life in artists’ residencies; competition; mythic nature of genius; male animalism; writers’ demons; crisis and fatigue; artistic freedom.

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## Prose

*I have dedicated my life to images. To the images I write down in my poetry which I make out of words; and to the images I capture in the “real” world with my cinema camera.*

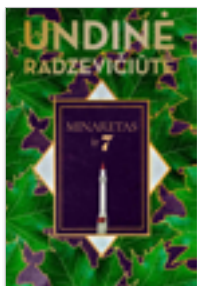
The second volume of written works by Jonas Mekas, the filmmaker, godfather of the American avant-garde and perhaps the most renowned Lithuanian of the 20th century, is dedicated to his prose. It marks the first time that Mekas’s prose, written in English and in Lithuanian, is being published almost in its entirety in a single book, dedicated to Mekas’s centenary. The first part of the prose volume includes “Žmogus prie lyjančio lango” (Man at a Raining Window), a book of texts written between 1946 and 1956, in which, employing a variety of genres, the author portrays post-war Europe, a devastated land, and a man who has no fatherland or self and is forced to live his life with his “head bowed and humiliated”. These are short stories of the moment, capturing not only the greatest sweep of time, but also the kernels of the most painful experiences. The second part of the collection contains unpublished texts written in both Lithuanian and English, including also perhaps the very first text by Mekas, written in 1942. This book spans 50 years of Mekas’s short prose, which shows how his work evolved (thanks to the texts’ chronological presentation), how his Lithuanian texts differ from his English ones, and how Mekas’s written works are permeated by images that intertwine post-war Europe, life in America, an eternal longing for home and his native Semeniškės, and his unique poetics. This collection is Mekas’s journey through life, told in prose writings, and proves once again that Mekas was a filmmaker who saw the world through the eye of a camera. Whether this worldview is presented in the form of a film or a book, it has an inherently cinematic structure, characteristic of Mekas’s style.

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JONAS MEKAS (1922–2019) – pioneer of diary films, poet, film critic, curator, philosopher. As a writer and critic, he is recognized worldwide as one of the most influential proponents of avant-garde, poetic cinema. His own films – more than 92 works – have been screened widely on six continents and at every major film festival in the world. His wartime diaries and Lithuanian-language poetry have been translated into over 15 languages, giving voice to the refugee and exile experience. In 1970 he founded Anthology Film Archives, one of the world’s most important repositories of experimental and classic film, with over 30,000 films in their collection, which works to preserve and present the essential cinematic works of our age.

**KEYWORDS:** short stories; Jonas Mekas centenary; longing for home; cinematography; post-war Europe; post-war America; diary of a life; film in text.

Excerpt here ↴



## Minaret and 7

*“You come here to write a book about the beauty and evil of the Weimar Republic and spend a month lying in bed coughing; at night you’re woken up by Arabic music, in the morning by the sawing of bricks, and in addition to all that you must also deal with picketers and attend concerts. As one of the characters of my books says: it is as though I were living in medieval times. New dangers every day.” (p. 73)*

An ironic autofiction by one of Lithuania’s finest prose writers, revealing what it means to be a writer (“to live for several years in my head in an unfinished world”) and showing the creative behind-the-scenes of Radzevičiūtė’s novel “Grožio ir blogio biblioteka” (The Library of Beauty and Evil), credited with being the Most Creative Book of 2022. Almost the entire book is set in the baroque palace in Bamberg, where Radzevičiūtė is invited to join the artists’ residency for eleven months. The author lays out her story of the residency and her creative work as a story of noise, in which the whole world seems to conspire in order to prevent her from creating the architecture of her novel, and even from writing it at all. At the same time, this book is Radzevičiūtė’s unique account of her own work – the author, who has always avoided talking about herself, opens up and talks about how she writes and how she lives while writing, why her works are almost devoid of descriptions, but dialogues play such an important role, how she builds a novel’s architecture, what obstacles she encounters, and what helps her to think. For the first time, Radzevičiūtė openly formulates the postulates of her creative work, discusses, almost as if she were a literary critic, the distinctive features of her work, and reminds us of how much in life can be determined by the foremost fairy tale of our childhood, especially if it is about Minaret and the Seven Dwarfs.

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UNDINĖ RADZEVIČIŪTĖ – internationally acclaimed author of seven novels and a collection of short stories. Her books have been shortlisted for the Most Creative Book of the Year on seven occasions, an accolade which she has won once, and her books have been nominated for Best Lithuanian Book of the Year on four occasions. In 2015 the novel “Žuvys ir drakonai” (Fishes and Dragons, 2013) was awarded the European Union Prize for Literature and is cited as one of the best books of the decade. Radzevičiūtė is also one of the most widely translated Lithuanian authors.

**KEYWORDS:** autofiction; Bamberg; reception of Undinė Radzevičiūtė’s work; being a writer; inner conflicts; interfering surroundings; searching for silence; story of an anti-hero.

TOMAS VAISETA | CH.

A novel, Vilnius: Baltos lankos, 2021, 240 p.

Excerpt here ↴



## Ch.

*With words, we approach and recede, merge and separate, bypass and aim at the very centre, leap to dizzying heights and dive to terrifying depths, step to the side and prepare to defend ourselves against the blows. I shudder to think how many movements we make with words – and, I would guess, anyone would shudder to realize that words are not tools, means or ways, not, as it is sometimes said, bridges, homing pigeons or carrier rockets, but the movement itself. (p. 20)*

“It was my duty to tidy up the stage after the play,” this is how the narrator Charles addresses the reader in Tomas Vaiseta’s second novel “Ch.” He is a stagehand, an annoying rambler, a librarian by profession and experience, a juggler of words, and sometimes frustrating to this book’s gracious reader – his ramblings are at times prolonged, at times cutting to the very core of the heart, as Charles tells us of the untellable – the end of life and the moment of death which occurs on the stage that he is managing. Vaiseta places his chattering Charles in the *theatrum mundi* – the only real theatre because it ends with death, where the reader is guided through the backstage nooks and crannies not only by Charles but also by cats, human beings’ feline masters (their literarization is no less compelling than that of E. T. A. Hoffman’s Murr). “Ch.” is a multi-layered novel of ideas, demanding slow reading, whose theatrical, labyrinthine quality blends with a much longed-for literary purity, providing respite from the reflections of present-day concerns that have engulfed modern day literature. Surely, they can also be found in “Ch.,” but here they are subtly and artistically transformed into metaphors and a hermetic fictional world.

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TOMAS VAISETA – writer, historian and associate professor at the Faculty of History of Vilnius University. His debut collection of short stories “Paukščių miegas” (The Sleep of Birds) was published in 2014, his first novel “Orfėjas, kelionė pirmyn ir atgal” (Orpheus: A Journey There and Back) in 2016. Both fiction books were critically acclaimed. Vaiseta has also written two historical monographs: “Nuobodulio visuomenė” (The Society of Boredom, 2014) and “Vasarnamis” (Summerhouse, 2018). He is a recipient of the Kazimieras Barėnas Literary Prize and the Jurgis Kunčinas Literary Prize.

**KEYWORDS:** novel of ideas; aesthetic labyrinth; slow reading; *theatrum mundi*; human beings’ feline masters; fragility of life; theatricality, beauty and grandeur of death.

**AWARDS:** Jurga Ivanauskaitė Literary Prize, 2022.

Nominee for the European Union Prize for Literature, 2022.

Excerpt here ↴



## Fallen from the Moon: A Dream about Oscar Milosz and Other Birds

**OSCAR:** *Wait! I forgot the most important thing!*

*Oscar runs to the manor. Soon he returns, carrying the blue room. In the room, there is a mirror with a picture of a girl, the eye of a peacock feather, his grandmother in a locket, a pinch of his grandfather's tobacco, the slick end of a grey moustache, maps of the northern islands, a jar with glass pieces... (p. 197)*

In this two-part cinematic play of dreams and visions, which Jurga Vilė arranges in a *montage parallèle* style, two histories and personalities, separated by a century, meet. Felicia, born in 1977, whose mother was obsessed with Oscar Milosz, and Oscar Milosz himself, born in 1877, a French poet, diplomat, translator and mystic of Lithuanian origin. In her story, Vilė allows the characters to dream with their eyes wide open, to see Milosz's blue room and carry it with them. It is a story in which chronological boundaries are blurred, time does not exist, the characters are tormented by an incomprehensible longing for something they have not yet experienced, or perhaps have already forgotten, and if they feel unable to remember something, they make it up as they go along. Felicia's grey Soviet-era Kaunas contrasts with Oscar's childhood Chereya. Archival footage of Lithuania's history is intercut with meetings between Milosz and Oscar Wilde in the Parisian café "Les Deux Magots". These dreams are like the shining glass pieces of a kaleidoscope, which allow us to meet many real historical personalities, as well as dreamt-up ones. One cannot help wishing that all the readers of this book would go on to revisit or discover Oscar Milosz's poetry, letters and visions too. And for those who get lost among the dreams, here's a little whisper: they are summarized in the illustrations by Ula Rugevičiūtė Rugytė, some of which are true works of art, begging to be hung on a wall.

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JURGA VILĖ – graduate in French Philology, studied fine arts, film archiving and restoration in Paris. She has worked as a coordinator of film and theatre festivals, translated films and written for cultural publications. For some time, she lived in Spain, where she wrote about her family history, which later became her first book "Sibiro haiku" (Siberian Haiku, 2017). To date, Jurga has authored five books.

ULA RUGEVIČIŪTĖ RUGYTĖ – illustrator. Born and raised in Kaunas. She is currently completing her bachelor's degree in illustration in Strasbourg. Ula enjoys creating poetic graphic stories.

**KEYWORDS:** cinematographic play; historical dreams; somnambulism; reconstruction of Oscar Milosz's life; colourful birds of life; society of dreamers.

Excerpt here ↴



## Breathing Others

*To hear footsteps in the stairwell in the morning. To feel the guilt imposed, uninvited. To curl up in a bathrobe, soaked in the loathsome smell of home. To remember mother Ina. Fear, the shame of a wasted career, of the empty days haunting by silence, to be so vulnerable, so weak. To depend on a man, on the other. To observe constantly. To be, to breathe others. (p. 129)*

Vita Vilimaitė Lefebvre Delattre's debut novel introduces into Lithuanian prose the nerve of life's painful loneliness hidden beneath the façade of fashionable elegance. This is Elena Picard's life story: born and raised in Eastern Europe, she meets Vadim, a Frenchman, in Saigon, marries him and moves to France, where raising her daughter turns into a story of finding one's place in a new country and a new culture. "Who the hell am I here?" Elena asks herself, constantly tormented by an inner balancing act: to be liked and to please others, to learn to live with the French and their rules, to be a good wife and a good mother, all the while forgetting her own self and succumbing to other people's mirages (which is how she becomes fatally infatuated with her neighbour Céline). This book draws the lineage of modern motherhood into Lithuanian literature – painful, pulsating, disquieting but unsentimental, poetic but not sugar-coated, at times even cynical. Although Paris is where most of the novel is set, the portrayal of the city, as well as of life's surfaces and mise-en-scène, are anything but postcard-like – the writer characterizes them in precise but sparing descriptive strokes, chopped up into short, often syncopated, sentences, capturing not only Elena's disquiet, but also the incessant thrum of the metropolis.

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VITA VILIMAITĖ LEFEBVRE DELATTRE – Paris-based writer and journalist. She has been a contributor to major Lithuanian magazines for over twenty years. In 2015, she published "Šešeri metai Saigone. Nepamiršamas gyvenimas Vietname" (Six Years in Saigon. An unforgettable life in Vietnam), a non-fiction book about her life in Saigon. "Kvėpuoti kitais" (Breathing Others) is her first novel.

**KEYWORDS:** story of a lost woman; complicated integration into French culture; desire to please; self-searching; Paris from a different angle; unglamorous image of motherhood; dangerous desire to find a female friend.

Excerpt here ↴



## Trap for the Merchant's Killer

*“When Luka was found collapsed on the table, a commotion broke out and I rushed over immediately. Luka Lukičius had been dining alone, a bowl full of soup still standing on the table beside him. I couldn’t help noticing that it was mushroom soup. And I know perfectly well that Luka Lukičius couldn’t stand mushrooms of any kind and never ate any.” (p. 12)*

Adas, the apprentice of Vilnius executioner Ignacas, and a familiar figure from “A Murder in the Cobbler’s Workshop”, the first crime story of olden-day Vilnius, is summoned by the bookseller Andrius for a chat and a pint on the first October Tuesday of the Lord’s Year 1558, he learns of Andrius’s suspicions about the death of his good friend, colleague and neighbour, the spice merchant Luka Lukičius – he is said to have died while eating mushroom soup, when he hated mushrooms and never ate any! Little by little, Adas discovers that the Lukičius family, considered to be exemplary, was by no means as fond of the family’s patriarch as had been widely assumed, and this surprise is compounded by the disappearance of Andrius’s own wife’s maid Mortelė. So Adas, once again, with the help of his dear friends Motis, the town’s watchman, and Benigna, the maid, sets out to snoop around and investigate the circumstances of the merchant’s death, which is far more interesting than learning how to cut off a cabbage’s head with a sword. In this crime story, 16th-century Vilnius is not the only city described – recounting the journey of the merchant Andrius on the Neris and the Nemunas, the author depicts the Kaunas of that time (where Adas and the executioner of Vilnius stay for a memorable twist in the plot), and Memel, which is present-day Klaipėda. The circumstances and peculiarities of the merchants’ lives, their business trips and everyday life in Vilnius are this novel’s highlights. And surely, when the situation reaches its dramatic peak, Vilnius *vogt* Augustinas Rotundas steps onto the scene once more to help uncover the truth, just as he did in the first case of this crime story from olden-day Vilnius.

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GINA VILIŪNĖ – historical novelist. She has spent many years studying the history of Lithuania and her native Vilnius. Her debut novel in 2012 was a historical thriller “Karūna be karaliaus” (A Crown Without a King). She is currently the author of 9 books. In 2021, Viliūnė embarked on a crime trilogy set in olden-day Vilnius, dedicated to the city’s 700-year anniversary. “Trap for the Merchant’s Killer” is the trilogy’s second book.

**KEYWORDS:** life in Vilnius, Kaunas and Klaipėda in the 16th century; murder investigation; executioner’s craft; fashions and passions; first love; everyday life in a merchant’s guild.



JUSTINAS ŽILINSKAS, ŪLA ŠVEIKAUSKAITĖ | BĖGLIAI. Jūrų keliais į Ameriką  
An illustrated novel, Vilnius: Aukso žuvys and Lithuanian Sea Museum, 2022, 375 p.

Excerpt here ↴



## Refugees. By Sea to America

*“Let’s flee to America? When now?”*

*“Yes, right now.”*

*“Hmm... And how shall we flee to America?”*

*“We’ll run away from here, get on a boat, sail off, and land in America”, he explained simply. She chuckled in her mind.*

*“And what will we do when we land in America?”, she squinted.*

*“In America, we’ll get married.”*

*“Get married?” Her eyes widened. “Well, that’s ambitious!” (p. 37)*

Written by Justinas Žilinskas and illustrated by Ūla Šveikauskaitė, this historical adventure novel tells the story of Lithuanian emigration to the US at the beginning of the 20th century, before the First World War. The idea for this book is the brainchild of Daumantas Kiulkys, a historian at the Lithuanian Sea Museum, who, while working on an exhibition about the ocean liners on which Lithuanians emigrated to the US, realized that there was no literary work that covered this turn of history – the circumstances and the journey of the hundreds of thousands of Lithuanians who emigrated to America at the beginning of the 20th century. Justinas Žilinskas, famous for his captivating stories for children and young people, has taken up the task of writing such a book, recreating the novel’s historical setting based on authentic research, archival data, and press from the time. In 1912, Jokūbas, who longs for a free Lithuania and is hiding from the gendarmes and the army of the Russian Empire, and Veronika, the daughter of an impoverished landlord, decide to flee to America – across Europe and the Atlantic. The journey is arduous and long, and Ellis Island is not exactly easily or effortlessly accessible. How many roadblocks and bureaucratic twists and turns will Jokūbas and Veronika have to navigate? Will first love and nascent feelings stand up to daunting challenges? Is America truly worthy of the big dream? The story’s appeal is also fuelled by its visual execution, balancing on the borderline between comic strip and illustration.

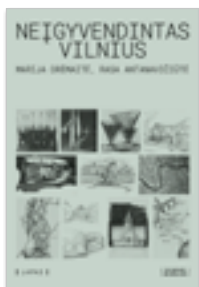
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JUSTINAS ŽILINSKAS – writer, lawyer, lecturer and father of three. Author of seven books. He writes for children, teens and adults, and his books have received several literary awards.

ŪLA ŠVEIKAUSKAITĖ – artist and designer. Lives and works in Vienna. Illustrates books and magazines for The Wall Street Journal, Foreign Policy, World Positive.

**KEYWORDS:** novel; graphic novel; Lithuanian emigration before the First World War; first love; plight of refugees; dreams of America.

NON-FICTION



## Unrealized Vilnius

*A register of unrealized buildings and architectural ideas; a version of the unrealized, but avidly dreamed-about history of Vilnius; and an imaginative exercise recommended by the authors: a walk around the Vilnius that has remained draft form in plans, sketches and visions.*

Written by architectural historian Marija Drėmaitė and art historian Rasa Antanavičiūtė, this book tells an alternative history of Vilnius, the capital city of Lithuania, and presents over a hundred urban, architectural, memorial, and engineering projects that were conceived and planned, yet never realized throughout the 20th century, and which, if implemented, would have given the present-day capital a very different face and skyline. The reasons behind these visions remaining in plans and papers are manifold – changes in the city’s governing bodies (during the 20th century, Vilnius’s administration changed ten times), lack of funding, disagreements and lack of consensus, unsuccessful tenders, the impact of historical circumstances or mismatched financial capabilities. Finally, it should not be forgotten that Vilnius, as a truly legendary city, still has “enchanted” places, where planned buildings or fiercely debated monuments will never take shape. The history of these “hot spots”, as the book’s authors successfully demonstrate, is one of the most consistent phenomena in 20th century Vilnius’s urban history.

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MARIJA DRĒMAITĒ – architectural historian, and professor at the Faculty of History of Vilnius University. Her research focuses on 20th century architecture, urban modernisation, industrialisation, and culture. She has authored four academic monographs and studies, is co-author of several Lithuanian architecture guides and co-editor of the series “Architekstai” (Architexts).

RASA ANTANAVIČIŪTĒ – art historian, director of the Vilnius Museum, curator of contemporary art projects, and former head of the Nida Art Colony of the Vilnius Academy of Arts. Her project “Saulė ir jūra” (Sun & Sea) won Lithuania the prestigious Golden Lion at the Venice Art Biennale in 2019. Antanavičiūtė is the author of the monograph “Menas ir politika Vilniaus viešosiose erdvėse” (Art and Politics in Vilnius Public Spaces, 2019).

**KEYWORDS:** unrealized Vilnius; unfulfilled city; urban plans; maps; visions; history of urbanism and architecture; urban utopias; imaginative exercise.

ZELIG KALMANOVICH | VILTIS STIPRESNĖ UŽ GYVYBĘ. Vilniaus geto dienoraštis  
eds. Stanislovas Stasiulis, Saulė Valiūnaitė, translated by Olga Lempert, Vilnius: Vilna  
Gaon Museum of Jewish History, 2021, 226 p.



## Hope is Stronger than Life: Vilna Ghetto Diary

*Earth will know of the murder of God's innocent people. They will be remembered everywhere in the world, their memory will be a sign for future generations, and if another tyrannical spirit wishes to rule the souls in the future, the memory of what the ruthless despot did to the people of Israel will give humanity the power to squash that evil spirit before it spreads. Great honor to those who fell while awaiting liberation. (p. 207)*

On 16 May 1942, Zelig Kalmanovich, one of the directors of the YIVO Institute, who had been living in the Vilna Ghetto for almost a year, began to write a diary in Hebrew on cut-up letter paper sheets, bound in a small blue notebook, which he later continued on a booklet of YIVO magazine subscription slips. The final diary entry is from Monday, 30 August 1943. Kalmanovich's diary from the Vilna Ghetto was hidden and preserved, after the war, with the blue notebook remaining in Lithuania, and the part written on the slips being deposited in New York at the YIVO Institute. This book therefore constitutes the first time that both parts (i.e. the entirety of Kalmanovich's Ghetto Diary, which is considered one of the most important documents testifying to the tragedy of the Vilna Ghetto) are published together. The entries provide a glimpse into everyday life in the ghetto, the political transformations and upheavals underway, Kalmanovich's daily cultural activities, his efforts to preserve the books of the Strašūnas's library and Jewish written heritage, and his striving to maintain his own humanity and endure the complexity of human existence in the face of war, trusting in God unconditionally and believing that "hope is stronger than life". In his diary, Kalmanovich also reflects on the past, present and future of the Jewish people, noting that the Jewish community of Vilnius exemplified how Jews can live and create their culture in the diaspora.

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ZELIG KALMANOVICH (1885–1944) – scholar, translator, one of the directors of YIVO, one of the spiritual leaders of the Vilna Ghetto, and referred to by many inhabitants of the ghetto as a prophet. He was educated as a traditional rabbi and later turned to secular studies. He studied Semitic Philology and History at the universities of Berlin and Königsberg. In 1929, he moved to Vilnius, where he worked at the Institute for Jewish Research (YIVO), founded in 1925, and was editor-in-chief of the journal "YIVO Bleter". After the Nazi occupation of Vilnius, Kalmanovich was imprisoned in the Vilna Ghetto together with other Vilnius Jews. When the Vilna Ghetto was liquidated in September 1943, he and his wife were sent to an extermination camp in Estonia, where they died in 1944.

**KEYWORDS:** Vilna ghetto diary; Holocaust testimony; Vilnius Jewish community; Litvak literature; everyday life in the ghetto; cultural activities in the ghetto; trust in God and hope.



## The Orange Novel: Ambassador's Notes

*The ambassador's notes, published on the first day of Russia's war against Ukraine, immediately turned into stories about the Ukraine of the past, a country that will never be the same again, and about Ukrainians who will defend their land and fight to the end.*

This is a book about the largest country in civilized Europe, in terms of area, being attacked by its barbaric neighbour Russia. These are the stories of the unyielding people of Ukraine, whose fighting spirit and bravery continue to amaze the rest of the world. This is a book about a country whose fierce struggle is also for our freedom. Algirdas Kumža became familiar with Ukraine and its people while serving as the Ambassador of the Republic of Lithuania to Ukraine. Kumža arrived in Ukraine after the Orange Revolution under the leadership of President Viktor Yushchenko. From Kiev, in February 2006, to Vilnius, in December 2009 – such is the trajectory of this book's action, time and place. If you suppose that an ambassador's notes would make for a boring and dull narrative, constrained by rules and protocols, you are quite mistaken – Kumža has a catchy and absorbing way of telling a story, which is far from boring to read, and which allows the reader to peek into the unprotocolized daily routine of diplomatic work, the unofficial backstage of official meetings. All the depicted stories and situations – both micro and macro – form a coherent and eloquent study of the Ukrainian mentality. Reading this book in the context of Russia's current war against Ukraine is like going back to the beginning, revisiting history and piecing together, as in a jigsaw puzzle, the knowledge of why things happened the way they did, and not otherwise. The ambassador's narrative both explains the complex twists and turns of Ukraine's path to Europeanisation and gives an account of Ukrainian life – with the state, the creators of its culture and art, and the few eccentrics and oligarchs, testimonies of whose behaviour lend the story a suitably Slavic flavour.

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ALGIRDAS KUMŽA – signatory of the Act of March 11, ambassador, writer, author of four books. He has been awarded two Ukrainian Orders of Merit, two medals of merit in the Lithuanian diplomatic service, and the “Star of Lithuanian Diplomacy” honorary badge.

**KEYWORDS:** stories about Ukraine; stories of those who shape Ukraine; research on Ukrainian mentality; daily life of an ambassador; behind the scenes of diplomatic work; history of bilateral cooperation.



## The Dotted Lines of Memories

*I will write purely from memory, I will try to speak in the language of childhood, I will not add a single layer of scientific explanation, because we didn't know about such things in the village back then, and if I overheard anything about them, they were incomprehensible to me, just like so many meaningless sounds – after all, I was only six or seven years old. I will tell you what I heard, what people said, what I saw... (p. 7)*

This book by Algis Mickūnas, one of the world's most renowned Lithuanian philosophers, is unlike any of his other books. Here, Mickūnas takes a look back at himself and his life (supplemented and richly illustrated by photographs) – first and foremost, at his happy childhood “in his paradise”, which for him, in the words of philosopher Arūnas Sverdiolas, is “the eidos of life”. These childhood images take the reader to the northern Lithuanian countryside of the 1930s, to the daily life of farmers, their joys and worries, followed by the city and the frenzy of the Second World War, as occupying Russians are replaced by occupying Germans. At that time, Mickūnas was just entering the second decade of his life, marked by an exodus from paradise, involving retreating from the war, moving from Lithuania to the West, living in a war refugee camp in Kempton, Germany, and finally, as Mickūnas writes, preparing as refugees, as displaced people, to become emigrants: “We had survived the war and kept ourselves alive: maybe the so-called uncivilized America would not be so terrible?” America wasn't at all terrible, which cannot be said about the Korean War and Mickūnas's presence on the front lines of the intelligence services, until he was wounded. After the war, a new life began, which included universities and phenomenological research, lecturing all over the world, the Lithuanian activities of the “Santara-Šviesa” movement, and most importantly, the trips returning to a free Lithuania. These stories, spanning almost ninety years of Mickūnas's personal life and experiences, are for the first time laid out in a memoir text, charming in its language, in which the paradise of his childhood, words spoken in dialect, the unmistakable vitality of Aukštaitija (the Highlands), and the curiosity for life displayed by “Uncle Algis”, as he likes to be called, all shine through.

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ALGIS MICKŪNAS – professor at Ohio University (USA), one of the most prominent philosophers of the Lithuanian diaspora, internationally acclaimed scholar, phenomenologist, member of the Lithuanian Academy of Sciences, and holder of the Knight's Cross of the Order for Merits to Lithuania. His research interests include phenomenology, cosmology, social, historical, cultural and political philosophy, philosophical anthropology, and Eastern and Western civilisations. He has published dozens of books and hundreds of articles.

**KEYWORDS:** memories' dotted lines; life narrative; displaced persons; the Second World War; Korean War; scholar's path towards growth; phenomenologist's life story.



## Weekend Towns and Suburbs: The Development of Modern Resorts in Interwar Lithuania (1918–1940)

*The architectural historian's research, richly illustrated with images, postcards and drawings of buildings from that time, is embedded in a narrative showcasing the development of modern resorts in inter-war Lithuania, the expectations of modernity reflected in them, their architecture, and their socio-cultural value and significance.*

In her scholarly monograph, architectural historian Viltė Migonytė-Petrulienė examines recreational resorts – a relatively recent phenomenon in the development of Lithuanian cities, which emerged in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. She explores how changing historical, political and social circumstances influenced the formation of the environment and culture of modern leisure in interwar Lithuania and its most important resorts, in the weekend towns and suburbs of Birštonas, Palanga, Druskininkai, Likėnai and Kulautuva. “The modern resort is a distinctive architectural and urban phenomenon that embodies the transformations of 20th century urban life.” – So writes the author, as she situates the evolution of resorts within the broader context of the development of modernist architecture and the public's self-perception at the time, both in the Lithuanian and the European context, in her book. Discussing leisure culture from an architectural perspective, the author explores the birth and rebirth of Lithuanian resorts, examines resorts as spaces for entertainment and leisure, as sanatoriums and health resorts, and, finally, surveys what the architecture of private living looked like. These four main stops in Migonytė-Petrulienė's research, as outlined in the book, invite the reader to delve into interwar life, its rituals, and the elegant and aristocratic phenomenon of summer holidaying, which has been somewhat forgotten in the present day, and which is brought to life visually by the book's use of archival photographs, postcards of resorts, architectural drawings, and press clippings of the period.

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VILTĖ MIGONYTĖ-PETRULIENĖ – architectural historian, co-author of architectural guides for Neringa and Palanga, she researches the history of 20th century architecture, resortology and modern society. Currently, she is a lecturer at the Art History, Criticism and Media course programme at Vytautas Magnus University, and curator of “Modernism for the Future”, the architecture and heritage programme of “Kaunas 2022 – European Capital of Culture”.

**KEYWORDS:** inter-war Lithuania; resort phenomenon; weekend leisure culture and architecture; reconstruction of bygone life; history of architecture; modernisation of society.

JEAN-CHRISTOPHE MONČYS | MANO TĖVAS ANTAS.  
100 prisiminimų apie Antaną Mončį  
Vilnius: Aukso žuvys, 2022, 340 p.



## Père Ant: 100 memories of my father, Antanas Mončys

*I don't know if I'm an artist; I don't know what an artist is...  
What I do flows out of my life... (p. 71)*

On 8 June 2021, the sculptor Antanas Mončys (1921–1993) would have turned one hundred. On this occasion, his son Jean-Christophe takes the opportunity to write down a hundred memories in the form of a tender and intimate conversation with his father, as evidenced by the affectionate names used in the family's internal communication – Père Ant and Krik – revealed to the reader. Thus, Krik writes a love letter to Père Ant, which becomes more than just one family's memories, since it is also a testimony of a bygone era, and a biography of Mončys's work delineating the contours of its reception. Born in Žemaitija (Samogitia), Mončys fled Lithuania during the war and lived for over forty years in Paris, where his three children were born and grew up, and where he quietly and remotely made his impressive sculptures. This book is unique, perhaps above all because it deconstructs the usual manner of artists' biographies, written on the occasion of important anniversaries. The reader will not find pathos here, but the light of a son's love and longing, and the painting of a character in words, with the aim of maintaining authenticity, so beloved by Mončys. The text is curious to read, like flipping through a family photo album; it suddenly catches you by surprise like the most captivating novel would. The son's recollections are often supplemented by quotations from Antanas Mončys's own diary. It all seems like a light sketch, but these dotted lines create a memorable portrait of the artist, testifying to the inseparability of creative work from the artist's life and biography. The book's textual part is complemented by photographs of Mončys's most important works and photographed episodes of his personal life. The book is a work of art in its own right – graceful, delicate, full of surprises, much to the credit of the book's designer Sigutė Chlebinskaitė.

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JEAN-CHRISTOPHE MONČYS – son of Antanas Mončys. Actor, theatre instructor, teacher of oratorical art. He resides in Paris and describes himself in French as follows: *Je suis Lituanien*.

**KEYWORDS:** Antanas Mončys; memories of my father; conversation between father and son; reception of Mončys' work; life in Paris in late 20th century.





## Poltava

*A story which teaches us, if it can teach us anything at all, that there is not the slightest reason to believe that anything that has already happened will not happen again. For there is no more permanent thing than human nature. Could it be that history is indeed the future, and the seers only feel how it rhymes? It is commonly said that history is made by human beings, but the further I go, the more it seems to me that it is the other way around. That we are what our history is. And if that is the case, then are the Russians what their history is? (p. 33)*

These are the reflections of Robertas Petrauskas in the prologue to his latest history book, as if summing up the thoughts which sprung to the minds of many when, on 24 February, Russia launched its war against Ukraine, proving once again that great tyrants learn from history and tend to repeat it. However, this book by Petrauskas is not about the present, although one cannot avoid making such associations, especially since it tries to trace the imperial beginnings of Great Russia. It is the story of one of the most important battles of the Northern War (1700–1721), the Battle of Poltava (1709), in which the Russian army defeated the Swedish army and which was not only the turning point of the war in Russia's favour, but also the beginning of long-lasting changes in the region: the Northern War hastened the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth's economic and political decline, and also led to the liquidation of its statehood, with the significant consequence being that Lithuania became a part of the Russian Tsarist Empire. The author explains that this book is a decent introduction for those interested in 18th-century history, telling the story of Russia and its Tsar Peter the Great, and of Sweden and its King Charles XII. It is also the story of the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth and, of course, Ukraine and its history, without which it is impossible to understand Russia's current war against Ukraine and the hollow concept of Russia's greatness. Petrauskas's study reminds us once again that “people 300 years ago were not so different from us. Or rather, we are not very different from them.”

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ROBERTAS PETRAUSKAS – historian, journalist, writer, sports commentator, organizer and host of trivia quizzes. He has written four history books. The first three dealt with the Second World War in Europe. “Poltava” is his fourth historical-documentary book.

**KEYWORDS:** Great Russia and its myths; The Great Northern War; The Battle of Poltava; Russia-Ukraine relations; history repeats itself; people do not change; dangers of imperialism.

## TRANSLATION GRANT PROGRAMME

The aim of the Translation Grant Programme is to promote Lithuanian literature abroad. Grants are available for the translation of fiction, nonfiction, poetry, drama, children's and young adult books, as well as the translation of other important books and publications.

There are 3 grants available: The Books Translation Grant, The Illustrated Books (Children's Picture Books and Graphic Novels) Grant and The Sample Translation Grant.

### WHO CAN APPLY?

The Translation Grant Programme is open to foreign publishers for the translation of Lithuanian literature or literary works related to Lithuania.

Sample Translation Grant is open to authors, translators and publishers living in Lithuania or abroad.

### WHEN TO APPLY?

Deadlines for the submission of applications are 1 April and 1 October.

### WHAT DOES THE GRANT COVER?

The Books Translation Grant covers up to 100% of translation costs,

The Illustrated Books (Children's Picture Books & Graphic Novels) Grant covers up to 100% of translation costs and additional publishing costs to a maximum of 1000 EUR (copyright license, illustrations, editing, design, printing, etc.),

The Sample Translation Grant covers up to 100% of translation costs.

#### WHAT MUST THE ILLUSTRATED BOOKS GRANT APPLICATION INCLUDE?

- a completed application form,
- a copy of the contract with the owner of the rights,
- a copy of the contract with the translator (if translation costs are applied for),
- the translator's qualifications (e.g. CV, previous translations) (if translation costs are applied for),
- a brief presentation of the publishing house,
- a short cover letter justifying the proposed application.

#### WHAT MUST THE BOOKS TRANSLATION GRANT APPLICATION INCLUDE?

- a completed application form,
- a copy of the contract with the owner of the rights,
- a copy of the contract with the translator,
- the translator's qualifications (e.g. CV, previous translations),
- a brief presentation of the publishing house,
- a short cover letter justifying the proposed application.

#### WHAT MUST THE SAMPLE TRANSLATION GRANT APPLICATION INCLUDE?

- a completed application form,
- a motivation letter justifying the choice of the proposed application,
- translator's (or translators') CV and list of previous translations,
- a letter of agreement from the text's author or the rights' owner (or owners) for the text to be translated.

Applications can be submitted only by e-mail.

For further information visit [www.lithuanianculture.lt](http://www.lithuanianculture.lt)

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