

# BOOKS FROM LITHUANIA

2022–2023

FICTION and NON-FICTION



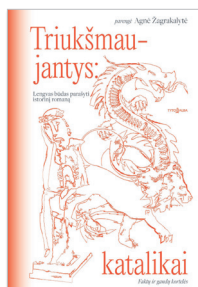
What was the previous year of Lithuanian fiction and non-fiction like? It was a year of endless history lessons, painfully reminding us that we must not cease to learn from the past, especially considering that, in our present, Russia's war in Ukraine has been going on for over 600 days.

2022-2023 has seen a further surge of historical narratives in Lithuanian fiction. The highlight this time is that the fiction books featured in this catalogue are all written by women: strong, brilliant and skilled Lithuanian fiction writers. Their pens cover epic family histories, as different as they are similar, which pulsate with narrative life and the frenzy of language. Their historical contours span right across the catastrophic 20th century. And this can only mean one thing: these narratives, albeit filled with life's playfulness and vitality, are not lacking in sad storylines or historical pain. The latter also permeates non-fiction books which bring the Soviet era back into the spotlight with aspects of sexuality and family life that have not yet been explored. And research into the lives and creative legacies of artists and architects once again reminds us of the dust of time, the silence of memory, and the power, as well as necessity, of reclaiming stories.



FICTION





## Noise Makers: Catholics

*We don't have time for long stories anymore. So I cut out some of that time for you, of what I found beautiful. In your own time you will pick what is yours. (p. 9)*

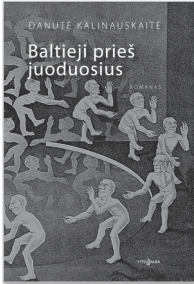
This book combining literature and documentary consists of fact and rumour cards, clippings of quotations, which chronologically lay out the playful and interesting stories of wine, the church, language and war, and that *never-ending sadness* that unfolded from the late 16th century to January 1949 in China, Belgium and Lithuania. The book is teeming with memorable characters who have made their mark on the pages of history, most notably Lu Zhengxiang, the former Chinese prime minister who, after the death of his beloved wife, became... a Benedictine monk. In this contemporary book, Žagrakalytė shows how skilfully one can recreate past epochs, not by writing an epic narrative overloaded with descriptions, but rather by piecing it together from all kinds of details, footnotes and curiosities: fragments of letters and biographies, cited passages from documents, as well as testimonies and incidents. To read this book is to scroll through a timeline of historical curiosities, or, as the author puts it, to hop across boxes of information.

AGNĖ ŽAGRAKALYTĖ is a poet and prose writer based in Belgium, author of four books of poetry and three books of prose, and winner of twelve literary prizes. "Triukšmaujantys: katalikai" (*Noise Makers: Catholics*) is Žagrakalytė's third book of prose, testifying to a decade of painstaking work, a keen eye for interesting stories, and a sparkling curiosity for small fragments of facts.

**Awards:** Grigory Kanovich Republican Literary Prize (2023)

KEYWORDS: contemporary approaches to history; hopping across information boxes; history of war, church and wine; power and beauty of fragments; museum of curiosities; gallery of historical heroes; joy of reading.

DANUTĖ KALINAUSKAITĖ | BALTIEJI PRIEŠ JUODUOSIUS  
Novel, Vilnius: Tyto alba, 2023, 201 p.



## The White Against the Black

*Connections are forged only little by little. Moving through time. Through history. From 'branch' to 'branch'. It's not that simple – history cannot be rushed. Besides, you have no idea what snares might be planted here. Or what traps laid... (p. 166)*

This novel is the journey of a daughter and her mother (whose memory is fading) through their family tree and time, prompted by the unexpected news of an inheritance in Luxembourg. The family tree, which is needed for lawyers and for an affidavit, forces the narrator to piece together the historical episodes of her own tribe, spanning from the nineteenth century to the present day, and to bring to life the people she is destined to *jostle with in this life*. This is the struggle of memory – deliberately concealed, silenced, obliterated and adjusted to historical circumstances – against oblivion. Through one family's story, the history of the whole of Lithuania shines through, and Kalinauskaitė skilfully transcribes both of them with memorable language, a rich vocabulary and endless cascades of nouns. This is a book of people, things and language, telling the story of life's most important chess matches, of memory and oblivion, of a human being's enigmatic inscrutability and legacy: what kind of family histories and legends is it made from?

DANUTĖ KALINAUSKAITĖ is one of Lithuania's finest short prose writers, a recipient of the National Prize for Culture and Arts (2017). An author of three books of fiction. "Baltieji prieš juoduosius" (*The White Against the Black*) is Kalinauskaitė's first and long-awaited novel. In this novel, as in her short prose, Kalinauskaitė remains attentive to the brush strokes of history and life as well as the precision and beauty of language. As befits a master of detail, Kalinauskaitė knows how to *install the world in a splinter, to inhabit a shard just like a home*.

KEYWORDS: tribe's history; the white against the black; memory against oblivion; legacy of nostalgia and grievances; pain of stories; beauty and persuasiveness of language; the brief glimmers of life's minutiae in metaphors.





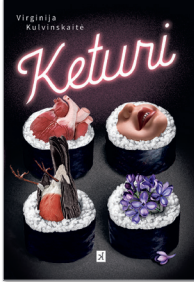
## The Newborns

*It took a long swim before she realised she didn't want to just watch. She desperately needed to break some of the chains of cause and effect that were unfolding out there. (p. 6)*

Beginning in a mythological and magical primordial world, Tumasonytė's *The Newborns* is a novel made up of 19 novellas that tell the story of life-creating chains of beginnings and endings, causes and effects. The stories begin with Anicetas Dulkys, who falls off the roof before his wedding and visits the afterlife. Later, the witch of feminine spells, a kind of 20th century fairy, Elžbieta, appears with her daughter Paulina, and thus a circle of stories, not lacking in elements of magical realism and folklore, begins to unfold, forming a coherent story of a single family and a single town, winding its way through the entire twentieth century and into the near future. Drawing on the genres of fairy tales and family legends, combining shadows of the past, nightmares and beautiful dreams, Tumasonytė narrates situations, creating each novella as if it were a moving snapshot of individual fates and different epochs (the interwar period, the war, Soviet occupation, and independence).

JURGA TUMASONYTĖ is a prose writer and interviewer who has conducted interviews with numerous artists. Author of two books of novellas and two novels, and winner of three literary prizes. "Naujagimiai" (*The Newborns*) is her best book to date, amalgamating all the strengths of her previous work: narrative talent, surreal and fairy-like elements, light irony, and the integration of a short but powerful story into the form of a novel.

KEYWORDS: cyclical nature of life; episodic nature of existence; the dead become newborns; from past to future; chain of plot and intrigue; personal dramas; pain of the twentieth century.



## Four

*There is always another side', Nora believed. You can smell the dust of construction sites and the urine of dogs marking the bushes, or the blossoms pulsating with passion to bloom. (p. 93)*

Four short stories, four seasons and four narratives – different and dissimilar at first glance, but once you read them, it becomes clear that they are linked by the other, non-façade and dark side of existence, where one finds fear, self-destruction, inner schisms and screams that do not break through to the surface. All four stories take place in an unnamed port city. Lukas Garšva, a fashionable writer of the younger generation, experiences an unexpected and surprising reading of his work at a seaside reading club, as if questioning his entire success. Divorced Inga spends her days attempting to disconnect from her own self, to let everything that doesn't matter fade away. Marius, a lonely seventh-grader, will become a professional assassin in the future, but in the meantime, there is nothing but a bleak and lonely everyday life, both at school and with his family. Forty-six-year-old Nora is stuck in a vicious circle – she is in love with a drug addict, Denis, and keeps hoping that this time will be the last. All of Kulvinskaitė's characters, each in their own way self-trapped in their own worlds, testify, through these stories of loneliness, sadness, and the proximity of death, that *man is a stranger to the world*.

VIRGINIJA KULVINSKAITĖ (CIBARAUSKĖ) is a poet and literary critic. Her first book was a poetry collection "Antrininkė" (*Doppelgänger*) in 2017. Her first novel, entitled "Kai aš buvau malalietka" (*When I was Malalietka*), was published in 2019 and was included in the lists of the best books of the year. "Keturi" (*Four*) is her second book of prose fiction, showcasing a polished laconic style and strangely intertwined stories and characters.

KEYWORDS: four short stories; stories of loneliness and sadness; what does fear breed?; proximity of death; internal fractures; man is a stranger to the world; different versions of unhappiness.

GINA VILIŪNĖ | MIRTINAS ARKEBUZOS ŠŪVIS

Crime novel of olden-day Vilnius, Vilnius: Tyto alba, 2022, 253 p.



## Deadly Arquebus Shot

*It's a dirty business and going to get ugly. In a week or two, the ruler will return to the city with the voivodes of Vilnius and Trakai. A scandal will break out. Szlachtas have already been raising their voices. I won't be able to avoid the blow, and the whole city of Vilnius will be disgraced forever. (p. 14)*

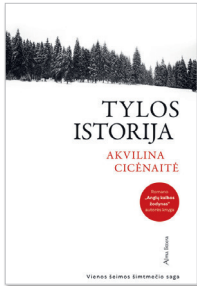
The summer of the 1559th year of our Lord was rainy and unsettled in Vilnius: a new war was approaching in Livonia, which brought szlachtas from all over the Grand Duchy of Lithuania to the Vilnius sejm. For one of them, indulging in the life of the capital came to an unfortunate end: he was found shot dead in an arquebus in the courtyard of the city's parish church, and the weapon of the crime was found at the bedside of the respected Doctor of Law, Petras Roizijus. Not surprisingly, Roizijus's friend, the Vilnius vogt Augustus Rotunda, faces a huge headache and, witnessing the failure of the official investigation and under pressure from the nobility, turns to Adas, the Vilnius executioner's apprentice, for help. He is assisted in the investigation of this statehood-saving case not only by his old mates, Motis (the town hall's watchman), and Benigna (the maid), but also by Andrius Volanas (secretary of Mokalojus Radvila, the voivode of Trakai). This is Adas's last and most important case, and one that will undoubtedly change his fate.

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 10 books. In 2021, Viliūnė embarked on a crime trilogy set in olden-day Vilnius, dedicated to the city's 700-year anniversary. “Mirtinas arkebuzos šūvis” (*Deadly Arquebus Shot*) is the trilogy's last and final novel.

KEYWORDS: crime novel of olden-day Vilnius; daily life in 16th century Vilnius; life of the nobility; dawn of the Livonian War; Muscovite conspiracy; power of personal revenge.

AKVILINA CICĖNAITĖ | TYLOS ISTORIJA

Novel, Vilnius: Alma littera, 2023, 271 p.



## A History of Silence

*Perhaps silence is the best response to history's unrelenting pace.  
Perhaps silence itself is the best story. (p. 254)*

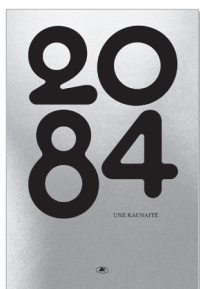
It is a moving women's saga, told in an empathetic way, depicting the fate of one family's four generations of women from one family – Elžbieta, Veronika, Teresa and Nika. Bound together for life by blood, they inevitably share similar inner attitudes, loves and sins, and above all, telling silences. In the novel's three parts, Cicėnaitė unpacks different notions of silence: silence as the language of love and life (Elžbieta and Aurelianas), silence as the alphabet of death (Veronika, Augustinas and Teresa), silence as an attempt to protect and forget, as a veil covering 20th century history's abysses and crimes against humanity (a subtly personalised trace of the Holocaust). And although the scripts of the characters' lives and happinesses are different, they face confronting the meaning of life as a reconciliation with the past, where the novel's most important questions emerge: to what extent are there silence and silences in every family that has survived the 20th century? How many unhappy people are around us, living and doing things not out of love but following all the *musts* and ceaselessly trying to please others but not themselves?

AKVILINA CICĖNAITĖ – writer and literary translator, who has been living in Sydney, Australia, since 2012. She has published nine books, including six novels for young adults and a book for children, and has won multiple awards for her work. “Tylos istorija” (*A History of Silence*) is her first novel for adult readers, first published in 2017. This is a revised second edition.

KEYWORDS: centuries-long history; the fates of one family's women; unfathomable silences; mysterious flames of passion; loves hushed up; lives endured.

UNĖ KAUNAITĖ | 2084

Novel, Vilnius: Lithuanian Writers' Union Publishing House, 2023, 278 pp.



## 2084

*How could they have thought it would be better? It should have been obvious that those who own artificial intelligence would take it all. (p. 116)*

The novel takes us into the year 2084: the world has changed after the Great Pandemic; there has been drastic climate change; virtual reality has replaced the real one, with human identities being hidden behind avatars; and almost everything is run by robots, who print food, and take care of their hosts' health and daily life. The novel's protagonist, Kajus, a former e-football star, works as a psychologist and every day tries to dissuade people from committing suicide. A special bond he develops with one of his clients becomes perhaps the central novel's story, raising the question of whether technological breakthroughs can alter human feelings and emotions. Kaunaitė transfers the anxiety of the present to the near future, the vision of which is being created by ChatGPT, VR, and clouds of memories, among which the soft shadow of Neo from the Matrix also floats by. This novel asks how reality and virtual reality exist, what they are, what constitutes human qualities and will they, as well as feelings, be taken over by robots?

UNĖ KAUNAITĖ is a young writer, author of three books, and education expert. The novel "2084" (2084) is her fourth book and her first dystopia, inviting us to reflect on the present in a vision of the near future.

KEYWORDS: reality vs virtual reality; everything is a placebo; the Universe and the Bubble; avatars; dystopia; love and grief.



NON-FICTION





KAROLINA JAKAITĖ | ANTANAS KAZAKAUSKAS: VISKAS UŽPROGRAMUOTA  
Research study [translated by Laima Bezginaitė], Vilnius: Vilnius Graphic Art Centre,  
2022, 271 pp.



## Antanas Kazakauskas: everything is programmed

*Nothing depended on a person, [...] all was programmed,  
so said one of the most mysterious and silent creators of  
Lithuanian graphic design history.*

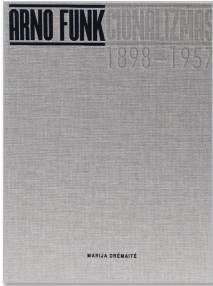
The first comprehensive study of the biography and work of Antanas Kazakauskas (1937–2019), Lithuania's first advertising graphic artist who also specialised in industrial graphical design, opening another page in the history of Lithuanian design. Reconstructing Kazakauskas's creative trajectory, design historian Karolina Jakaitė embarked on detective research, looking for associations, visual quotations and appropriation, thus highlighting the artist's creative method: composing, combining and (re)using what others have already created, rather than creating something anew. The research into Kazakauskas's work covers all areas of his oeuvre which are evaluated here in the broader field of visual culture at the time and include advertising posters, book design and unique book series, collages and graphic abstractions, and his long-term work as an art editor at the magazine "Mūsų gamta" (*Our Nature*). This book is richly illustrated and includes a block of memoirs about Kazakauskas and a photographic documentation of his retrospective exhibition organised in autumn 2021.

KAROLINA JAKAITĖ is a design history researcher, and a lecturer at the Vilnius Academy of Arts. Her research focuses on Soviet Lithuanian design. She is interested in artefacts and the stories of their makers; the processes of contemporary design; everyday culture; and the activities of design institutions. As a curator, she has organised exhibitions and conferences, carried out design history projects, and given public lectures in Lithuania and abroad. She is a co-founder of 'The Design Foundation' – a research initiative dedicated to Lithuanian design history.

KEYWORDS: Antanas Kazakauskas; everything is programmed; Lithuanian design history; book design; the power of the colour black; clean image; biographical silence.

MARIJA DRĒMAITĒ | ARNO FUNKCIONALIZMAS. ARCHITEKTO ARNO FUNKO  
(1898–1957) GYVENIMAS

Research study, Kaunas: M. K. Čiurlionis National Museum of Art, 2022, 223 p.



## **ARNO's FUNKtionalism. The Life and Works of Arno Funkas (1898–1957)**

[translated by the translation agency 'E-vertimai']

## **ARNOs FUNKtionalismus. Leben und Werk des Architekten Arno Funkas (1898–1957)**

[Deutsche Übersetzung Saskia Drude]

*A study of the life and work of one of the most interesting architects of interwar Kaunas, coded in the remarkable coincidence of the architect's surname and architectural style – Arno Funk(tionalism).*

The research study by architecture historian Marija Drėmaitė focuses on the private and creative life of Arno Funkas (1898–1957), architect from the first inter-war generation. His biography is reconstructed purely from his professional records, because Funkas’s personal archive and ego-documents have not yet been found, and may not have survived the Second World War. But something that has survived is the entire body of his architectural works from 1929–1942, ranging from residential houses and interiors designed for the Kaunas elite to public and industrial buildings. These buildings’ stories are encapsulated in their condensed yet revealing CVs. The book is trilingual and richly illustrated with drawings, archival documents, and photographs from the past and present. This architectural history study tells the story of the style of Arno Funkas, who was educated in Berlin and adapted the language of international modernist architecture in Kaunas – that well-proportioned modernist style with original details and the ability to elegantly combine functionality with luxury. At the same time, it is also a story about Lithuanian society in the interwar period, including its development, customs and daily life.

MARIJA DRĖMAITĖ – 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, and is co-author of several Lithuanian architecture guides and co-editor of the series “Architekstai” (*Architexts*).

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**Awards:** National Architecture Award for theory and dissemination of architecture (2023).

KEYWORDS: ARNO’s FUNKtionalism; interwar modernism; optimism architecture; buildings’ *curricula vitae*; life in interwar Kaunas; societal modernisation.

VALDEMARAS KLUMBYS, TOMAS VAISETA | MAŽASIS O: SEKSUALUMO KULTŪRA  
SOVIETŲ LIETUVOJE

Monograph, Vilnius: Baltos lankos, 2022, 399 p.



## The Little O: The Culture of Sexuality in Soviet Lithuania

*A long-awaited study of the culture of sexuality in Soviet Lithuania, which has become perhaps the first scholarly book in Lithuania to be marked with 'adult content'.*

Historians Valdemaras Klumbys and Tomas Vaiseta undertake a historical research study into the culture of sexuality in Soviet Lithuania, analysing the range of visual and discursive norms of sexuality and its practice operating during the entire period of Soviet occupation (1944–1990). This monograph examines these norms in a threefold way: through publicly published images, sex education and texts on the topics of sexuality, and society's everyday sexual behaviour. Drawing on press, diaries, memoirs, archives and interviews from the time, historians demonstrate how discourses around sexuality changed, however slowly, as well as when and how talk of sex life and the issue of women's sexual dissatisfaction (*the little o*) emerged. In Soviet culture, everything to do with sexuality was downplayed and overshadowed by talk of love and family. (It is no coincidence that the full unabridged legendary phrase reads as follows: 'In the USSR there is no sex, but there is love.') Beginning their study with the dictatorship of love inherent in the Soviet system, the historians show that while it succeeded in suppressing the incipient sexual revolution (*the big O*), this suppression eventually turned into a sexual civil war.

VALDEMARAS KLUMBYS is a historian who works at the Lithuanian Institute of History and teaches at Vilnius University. For two decades he has been researching the social and cultural history of resistance during the Soviet period and Soviet Lithuania. He is the author of the monograph "Stovėję po medžiu? Lietuvių inteligentijos elgesio strategijos sovietmečiu" (*Standing Under a Tree? Behavioural Strategies of the Lithuanian Intelligentsia in the Soviet Era*, 2021).

TOMAS VAISETA is a writer, historian and lecturer at Vilnius University. Author of a collection of short stories and two novels. For fifteen years, he has been researching the history of everyday life, psychiatry, memory, and sexuality in Soviet Lithuania, and is the author of the monographs "Nuobodulio visuomenė" (*The Society of Boredom*, 2014) and "Vasarnamis" (*Summerhouse*, 2018).

**Awards:** Journalism and Documentary Book of the Year (2022).

KEYWORDS: study of the Soviet era; research on sexuality; visual imagery; erotic texts; everyday sexual behaviour; the little o vs the big O; sexual civil war instead of sexual revolution.



## Unplanned Life: Family in Soviet Lithuania

*This research study is like a time machine taking us back to Soviet-era daily family life – which has never been placed under a magnifying glass but which has always quietly been in operation affecting several generations – including its internal relations and external façades.*

The author was prompted to explore the institution of the family by interviews conducted for previous research, when it emerged that the women interviewed had only vague recollections of their married life. Why are the family-related memories of women who experienced the Soviet era so faint, fragmented and hardly individualised? What was the everyday life of an ordinary family like and how was it affected by Soviet family policy and ideology? Leinartė uses documentary sources and authentic testimonies to find answers to these questions. The image of the Soviet family is portrayed through its components: marriage, love, home, interpersonal relations between women and men, parents and children, and divorce. The past daily lives of so many families, inseparable from the lack of privacy as well as from poverty, alcohol and the violence caused by it, and from devastating historical circumstances, come to the fore in this book. Leinartė's research also shows how Soviet family policy still functions in the present where there is no shortage of difficult-to-transform norms and those Soviet family stereotypes, which today, fortunately, only affect the private lives of just a minority.

DALIA LEINARTĖ is a historian, journalist, and member (and former Chair) of the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). In 2018, Apolitical named her one of the 100 most influential people in gender politics worldwide. She is the author of "Prijaukintos kasdienybės. Autobiografiniai moterų interviu, 1945–1970 m." (*Adopting and Remembering Soviet Reality: Life Stories of Lithuanian Women, 1945–1970*) and "Vedusiųjų visuomenė. Santuoka ir skyrybos Lietuvoje XIX amžiuje – XX amžiaus pradžioje" (*The Lithuanian Family in its European Context, 1800–1914: Marriage, Divorce and Flexible Communities*).

KEYWORDS: life of a typical family in the Soviet era; Soviet family policy; absurdities of ideology; inequality of rights; research on women's position in society; difficult day-to-day life; legacy of Soviet norms and stereotypes.



## Sketches of a Wandering Artist

*A sketch is the beginning of an artwork. Or it may also remain on the piece of paper that you just happened to have at hand. Ideally in a sketchbook. I sketch in the theatre, the cinema, museums, cafes. I leave my drawing on a tablecloth, on an airplane ticket, on sand, on a frosted window, on the railing of the wooden bridge of Trakai Castle, on a white jacket, on shoes, shirts, gloves, socks, on an umbrella, on the dial of a watch. (p. 299)*

This book consists of texts and *written sketches* (compiled from a range of small storylines) by the world-renowned artist Stasys Eidrigevičius, which provide an insight into Stasys's mind and the visual world he creates, as well as his concept of multi-genre work. It is the testimony of a visual artist who also writes, recounting what happened to Stasys, when and how. The 32 texts presented in the book are like reports from Eidrigevičius's life, his wanderings and artistic journeys, which unleash creative energy and curiosity. They are stories about important people and significant encounters, museums visited or works of art remembered. These stories are complemented by Stasys's alphabet, created especially for this book, which explains 172 keywords that are important for the understanding of the artist himself and his work. The book is illustrated with pages from Eidrigevičius's sketchbooks and visual chronicles, published here for the first time.

STASYS EIDRIGEVICIUS is a world-renowned graphic artist, painter, poster artist, illustrator, creator of face theatre and master of visual metaphor. Winner of the Lithuanian National Prize for Culture and Art (2001) and numerous international prizes, he has held numerous exhibitions over 50 years of his creative activity. Since 1980, he has lived in Warsaw and travelled extensively around the world.

KEYWORDS: visual artist who writes; sketches of a wandering artist; *so you know how it went?*; the question of metaphor; small autobiographical storylines; Stasys's alphabet; sketchbooks and visual chronicles.



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