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## RECONCEPTUALISATION OF LITHUANIAN NATIONAL IDENTITY BEFORE THE ROMANTICISM PERIOD IN K. SABALIAUSKAITE'S *SILVA RERUM*

*Lithuanian literature has to reconsider the concept of national identity regarding history, which was enriched with the established structure of the Statehood. One of the most famous writers is Dr Kristina Sabaliauskaitė (born 1974), an art historian, cultural researcher and writer, who managed to rediscover the concept of Lithuanian mentality and concentrated on the lives and work of Lithuanian nobility. Family histories of the nobles of the XVIII century are described in her four books *Silva rerum I-IV* (lat. *Forest of Things*) in a literary style which fascinates contemporary society. She adopts a flamboyant but genteel classical style, which becomes very relevant after the emptiness left by postmodernism and post-romanticism, after frustration with humanity and ideas of Enlightenment. Particularly, it relates to the Baltic states with their experience of historical injustice and enforced ideologies by numerous occupations. K. Sabaliauskaitė's *Silva rerum* (written in 2008-2016) leads to a reformation of the concept of Lithuanian identity, and her turn from romantic ethnocentrism to baroque has enriched the versatility of European culture.*

**Key words:** nationality, identity, baroque, statehood, reconceptualise.

**Statehood in historical context.** Lithuanian national identity is conceptualised by raising ideas of romanticism (freedom, great past, old castles, Vilnius baroque), which led to the national movement in literature, music and political history in the second half of the XIX century. The mentality of the oldest European language is the most important issue for Lithuanian self and fundamental for the origin of nationality. The Lithuanian language was banned (1864-1904) in Tsarist Russia after the Uprising for freedom in the former Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in 1863. After 40 years of a press ban, the Lithuanian language acquired and preserved very important and almost sacred values, contributing to contemporary Lithuanian identity. In the first half of the XX century, the Lithuanian self was based on the defence of the Lithuanian language and the resurrection of statehood. It was affected by relations with Poland, especially after Poland occupied Vilnius, the historical capital of Lithuania, which was the symbol of long-lasting statehood. It filled the pre-war Lithuanian mentality with a strong emotional rage against Poland, concentrated on the political problem of the state, how to safeguard Vilnius, and set aside the obvious danger from Russia before it was too late. Progressive ideas of national romanticism were confused, misled and torn apart by the Soviet occupation. Many literary artists became lost in an historical sense because of the compromise which betrayed their State («bringing in the sun of Stalin»). The expression the wrong light became a long-lasting metaphor of eternal darkness. Some, who chose to

be free, emigrated to the Western world. Others, who remained, mysteriously died during the decades of the long-lasting occupation in the late XX century. These events stigmatised the concept of national identity and shifted it towards ethnocentrism or catastrophic modernism.

The forgotten alternative for national romanticism was hidden behind Christianity, the phenomenon of Pagan avant-garde. National identity was suddenly brightened with this description and a «Lithuanisation of the world» (Geda, Andrijauskas, 2010). It is based on the works by Sigitas Geda (1943–2008), the most important Lithuanian poet, who remained uncompromised by the Soviet ideology, and he heavily influenced the contemporary composer B. Kutavičius (1932) to create the phenomenon of processual dramaturgy, where the music is motivated by the cultural movement for freedom («Last Pagan Rites», 1978), which led to political changes in time [10, p. 71].

Here the actual alternative archetypes of European Lithuanian identity emerge in contemporary literature as the statehood symbols of the Republic of Two Nations (Lithuanian and Poland Union, 1, p. 450) based on Christianity. Nowadays it is very important to reconsider and reconceptualise the ethnocentric point of view—the basis for the national identity. This significant alternative to the literary archetype of national romanticism was uncovered by a contemporary Lithuanian writer and art historian, doctor Kristina Sabaliauskaitė (1974). Her stories are related mostly to Vilnius and narrated in the style of baroque with

rich and multifaceted language. They are exceptional because of their deep immersion in the past, using special old-fashioned rhetoric, analogies to the baroque as an example of musical polyphony, filled with monologic-style reconsiderations and refrains-ritornellos of memory. Her four books, named *Silva rerum* (I-IV), are about the history of noble families of Lithuania. These writings opened unresearched sources of the Lithuanian identity, penetrating deep into family stories of the golden pre-romantic age and personal matters of the nobles, who sought active education. Here the language of «the great soul of Europe» [3, p. 5] looks for the roots of Jesuit and Lithuanian royalty. This forgotten pre-romanticism, rich with mysteries, is tightly connected to Vilnius baroque architecture. Kristina Sabaliauskaitė's *Silva rerum* (I-IV) unexpectedly opens treasures of Polish-Lithuanian relations, and matters which are important to Lithuanian statehood and Lithuanian identity. With these books she presents herself as a researcher, looking for the great ages of royal souls and their connections to Europe.

#### **Baroque and Lithuanian identity in music.**

These published books became very popular in Poland, Latvia and other countries, which could feel Lithuanian history. It is a great source for transformation, especially in music. Lithuanian composers created music, which returned to a baroque style aiming to reach the space of eternal structures. Several contemporary composers, such as Algirdas Martinaitis (1950), Onutė Narbutaitė (1956), Vidmantas Bartulis (1954), Mindaugas Urbaitis (1952) can be mentioned here, who explored the polyphony of baroque and «eternal melody» [17, p. 132] as an infinite return of the great soul of Europe, a saviour of peace and axis of time in contemporary romanticism, which is «torn apart» to cells and pieces after the times of modernism and postmodernism. The idea of the paradigm of baroque after the postmodern age in music becomes evident to Narbutaitė, who can convey how to use the «eternal melody», which can be compared to the style of baroque from the eternal past». So does Martinaitis, who tries to integrate the Baltic self and archetypes of identity as the primaeval voices of birds and rhythms as continuous steps of the gruelling dark ages. The contemporary writer Sabaliauskaitė in her creative work echoes the background of such music as «the archaeology of minds», memories of life and educational issues of the great statehood leaders, exploring the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth, known as the Republic of the Two Nations, which is common-

ly referred as *Rzeczpospolita* in the sense of cultural history. Dr Sabaliauskaitė researched real documents from that era in the archives of Kraków, Warsaw and Vilnius, notably in the family books where governing nobles registered data about their personal lives and educational achievements. The statesmen possibly could not speak Lithuanian at all or could use it in a very limited sense because the official language was Polish and Latin, the latter of which was used in documents and as a church language. The importance of the national language inspired a national movement in romanticism; it was integrated into Lithuanian self-awareness in the early part of the XX century. The loss occurred, when baroque and Lithuanian-Polish nobles were excluded from the national identity, and the harm was realised only in present times. The question of the identity of Lithuanian statehood, reaching back into the past two centuries and the Union with Poland, is a very important part of rediscovered Lithuanian contemporary political identity [5, p. 84].

Dr K. Sabaliauskaitė's books have opened deeply hidden treasures of the Lithuanian soul, longing for ancient times more related to Europe than romanticism itself. Composer A. Martinaitis searches for a renaissance in Palestrina's choir music with his «Cantus ad Futurum» (1982) and «Cantus Relictus Vilnensis» (2015). His «Messenger from Heaven» (2014) and Sabaliauskaitė reopen a source of forgotten similar literary connections to European cultural centres. This structural road of Lithuanian music is very connected with images of Vilnius, which excited Lithuanian creators of all times—from national romanticism (Maironis, 1882-1932) to the contemporary era, filled with ideas existential to modern Lithuanians: O. Narbutaitė's (1956) «Centones Meae Urbi», 1998, V. Barkauskas's (1931) «Gloria Urbi», 1975, A. Martinaitis's (1950) «Cantus Relictus Vilnensis», 2015, B. Kutavičius's (1932) «Epithaphium Temporum Perenti», 1998, etc.

**Contemporary «baroque» in literature.** It is represented by K. Sabaliauskaitė's *Silva rerum*. Not just the content, but an exceptional literary style makes reading feel like diving into the rhetorical polyphony of baroque and rhythms of developing lines of thoughts and memory roads, which can be conscious or unconscious. It can be compared to browsing through the old treasure chest when reflective thoughts reach all the secret corners, dreams and memories. These baroque lines, which are interrupted and connected again in the original literary style, are almost visual and are as believable as the architecture

of Vilnius and the musical as the polyphony of the baroque, leading to blocked areas of the unexplored soul of Lithuanian identity. Renewed cultural signs filled *Silva rerum*, the refreshing life of Lithuanian self, which now was more adapted for XIX century problems because of the diversity and necessity for tolerance, democracy, freedom and its special space in the world. Sabaliauskaitė awards this literary ritornello with the touch of eternal sunset and dawn of statehood, the nostalgia for getting lost, and the lack of honesty, greatness and magnificence of the universe. The soul of the Republic, which constantly loses the image of a progressive State, is transferred to the future–romanticism of the arriving XIX century.

**Music as a structural field.** The first level—the space, connecting all verbal lines of thoughts, extends into the universe of memories, unravelling exceptional culture and embracing lives exclusively dedicated to statehood. There is the completer appearance of traces of this magnificent statehood and its vulnerability as well. The «music» of memories in *Silva rerum* turns around the centre of statehood in ritornello with all its complexity about spiritual treasures of the past ages, still unknown aspects, and possibly taking the prospective line towards the future.

Here Sabaliauskaitė touches the living artery of Lithuanian mentality, which still bleeds and becomes aware of the self-establishment. There is a presentation of multicultural symbols, symbiosis, gestures, impulses, breaks, sighs and prayers, which precious rhetoric calls for forgiveness. The first level of language is filled with the emptiness of late XX century postmodernism with archetypes and images from the XVIII century, with the language of history, speaking about a sunset of magnificent ages of the Republic of Two Nations [12, p. 446]. It is located behind romanticism, and it is more structural in the musical field and in architecture to avoid vulnerability.

**Reconceptualisation of identity using features of old Lithuanian statehood.** There are three most important aspects of contemporary Lithuanian identity, which is revived in *Silva rerum*. The first aspect is the visual baroque and images of Vilnius architecture as the magnificence of the state. The second one is the eternal structures of musical rhetoric, which are expressed in rhythms and ritornellos of baroque, old-fashioned figures of speech, streaming into each other, filling up the memories and central points of existence, leading to the complex contemporary mentality. The third one is the psychological agenda of awakened archetypes, describing great dimensional

spaces, origins of statehood and issues of the human soul, including Christianity. Jesuits dominated educational structures and European connections in aristocratic life in many different ways [14, p. 103]. It is a pivotal compilation with a strong idea, giving a good opportunity and an alternative to previous occupations which emptied, tore apart and disappointed more recent ages of romanticism, re-established the concept of national identity as an old treasure with traces reaching into the times of Enlightenment in the Republic of Two Nations, even in its «sunset» years. The longing for all this was extraordinarily deep, hidden like an unspoken new Lithuanian identity, reopening psychological space for awakened impulses, cries and signs of forgotten humanity in a Christian soul.

Prayers, cries and fascination with memories refilled «the void» of postmodernism. This special postcolonial emptiness can be interpreted, completed with rich Baroque images and its sources, which reach behind romanticism, penetrating the minds of the late XVIII century. They are Christians, educated Jesuits, who actually ruled Lithuania in the XVI century and established it as a highly meaningful European State, in the end adopting the democratic Constitution of 3 May, 1791, the second one in the world, soon after the signing of the Constitution of the United States in 1787 [6, p. 132]. These values, which Lithuania fights for even now, and which were lost later during the following century, gradually came back with the new evaluation. The conception of Lithuanian identity by contemporary writers looks very intensely into this issue as an obvious source for particular examples of how to rebuild Lithuania as a European State, and it can be comparable to Vilnius architecture and Christian existential idealism with the «call from the depths» to Resurrection. *Silva rerum* makes this road refreshing in a modern way and is magnificent in its historical approach.

K. Sabaliauskaitė in *Silva rerum* IV writes: «Their dining was interrupted by a shaky sound of a chair pulled away—someone drunk, dressed in a coat of Russian officer stood up from a neighbouring table, “Be quiet! Line up, attention ... to all ... let’s raise the toast for Mother Tsarina of all Russia! Vivat, let her live forever!” and Misevičius waved his hand with bitterness—here they were, worthless liberators of the dissidents; he put all contempt, as much as he had, in his proud Lithuanian soul, into the word “liberators”; liberators who forgot to leave ... even now, six years after the Radom Confederation. <...> But you know, dear Norvaiša, what is the most disgusting thing here?

These are our times, this Satan-led havoc <...> King Stanislaw also holds to this principle, and what has happened now to his noble tolerance? Russia carved us a wedge out of the faith of dissidents, which crushes our state; look how all the bright ideas of the past of ours became desecrated in front of our eyes and our tolerant king, because of such tolerance, is now raped by this armed despotic woman, who this renegade Voltaire glorifies for just the handful of gold, it is easy for him sitting far away in France, to blab about the “Empress of Light”, he would better look more closely at how crippled and mad peasants are, who flee to us from such a Russia, who lost their minds from poverty. However, you do not need to go that far looking for a sitting duck, you do not need Voltaire—look, my friend, even in this inn you’ll spot cowards and half-deranged, who will stand up for a free drink to drink to the health of the spread-out whore...» [11, p. 84].

**Jesuit education and European links.** The second level of *Silva rerum* is the education and political «behaviour» of the nobles with a European identity, who developed trusted links to Western Europe. Jesuits established the educational system in Lithuania; Vilnius University was founded by Jesuits in 1569, at first as a Jesuit Academy (College), which later became the University. It was a reaction to the Protestant Reformation by Luther, its adequate success and influence in Lithuania (Vilnius Lutheran Church was founded in 1555). The Jesuits’ «answer» to Lutherans was precisely education and the rationality of cultural influence. In *Silva rerum* readers are constantly taken by the sharp and clever intellect of the system of Jesuit education and impressed by their greatly valued European connections with Paris, London, Rome and Amsterdam, and even their criticism. All paths to European education were open and welcoming, like structures of Enlightenment, empowering the towering statehood [2, p. 50].

**The great finale of the aristocracy.** The greatness of the baroque reopens footprints of regal Italian families with Lithuania. The literary instincts in *Silva rerum* get closer to special provisions of the stories of the royal families, recognising magnificent links of unlimited existential powers and movements of scientific ideas of Enlightenment.

Such a verbal genre goes in circles about the history of statehood without approaching personal existentialism and the emotional culmination of romanticism, in extremely basic rhythms of the structural fundamentals of the past, regarding culture and edu-

cation; it is introduced and absorbed in statehood issues and searches in the «archaeology of soul». This literary style of character of statehood, as rich as a personal life, improves more and more with images of fascinating old rhetoric, which is very different from the ordinary Lithuanian literary discourse of contemporary language, and is identical to the language of old noble Lithuanians with their longing for great, universal, transcendental and everlasting structures.

This structural link is seized by Sabaliauskaitė in her *Silva rerum* as «a great soul of Europe» [3, p. 5], and extends far away from modernism and catastrophic romanticism, overwhelmed by individual existentialism, though it still encounters romanticism in some open insights, where thoughts regressively fall down towards their finale. The feeling of the passing times and their restoration, refills history as a space of termination and continuum in the completeness of language—without breaks and final points like perpetual breathing in your mind, being aware of your own soul, your unconscious personal background.

Thursday’s dinner was seen as being worthy to be illuminated by the monarch Stanislaw August Poniatowski: the feast of Apollo, Olympus of thought, with the invitees—Homer, Ovidius, Plato and Aristotle, Fiji and Praxiteles of that epoch. Unfortunately, right in its middle, footman unexpectedly brought a letter without plums: in confusion, he whispered a few urgent words into the royal ear: without delay ... Stackelberg ... the new Russian ambassador Otto von Stackelberg <...> it appeared to be one of the favourite entertainments of this ambassador, who had become a joint usurper, suddenly destroy it, interrupting one of a few royal pleasures, which were left for his majesty Stanislaw Augustus Poniatowski,—his favourite Thursday dinner.

Leaving Lazienki earlier than expected, Tyzenhauz asked Pranciškus Ksaveras as if stating, how he liked his majesty, or whether or not it is true that he was great and educated ruler we had not have before, so at last we were governed by the Apollonian Sun; Francis Xavier Norvaiša, without contradiction, nodded and confirmed in common phrases; and silently, completely silently, just for himself, he thought that this person, he had seen earlier today, would certainly be a great minister of arts and science; his majesty Stanislaw Augustus, born in January, under a changing and deceptive planet of Saturn, did not reach the brightness of the sun in his shine; even if he could be called the sun in the constellation of magnanimous rulers of the Commonwealth of two nations,



Pranciškus Ksaveras thought silently, that today they all saw his partial eclipse with their own eyes: a menacing shadow of Stackelberg and Russia seemed to have dined with them [11, p. 249].

This perpetual memory, breathing in one's thoughts, is like the eternal poetry of a new literary style. This style is really envisaged more as a quasi-baroque; it is possible to describe it to be more essential to the Lithuanian character than romanticism itself. It implants «baroque» as an eternal structure in contemporary Lithuanian music and into the composers' minds: Narbutaitė, Bartulis, Urbaitis, Martinaitis, and others besides called themselves the «new romantics». Pre-romanticism has an incomparable value for contemporary Lithuanian identity as the background of remaining structures, supporting the changing times, obvious in the example of K. Sabaliauskaitė's *Silva rerum*. The important turn here is the political «solar eclipse» and an attempt to embrace the sleeping époques. It returns from romanticism to contemporary scenery, regarding democracy and Enlightenment and military power as the important source of statehood, involved in the genealogy of the nobles [7, p. 23].

**The Politics. The metaphor of solar eclipse.** This precious «non-romantic» style, based more on history, opened a new front of politics in literary writings, which cannot be easily hybridised and forgotten, could be useful for political healing, and expose what literature can do more in symbiosis with politics. The change of concept of ethnocentrism into Europeanism became apparent [15, p. 179].

Then the importance of the Republic of the Two Nations has to be recognised as a new account in history. Reconceptualisation of the spiritual paradigm of Lithuanian identity is based on the experience of «crossroads» of progressive and regressive Europe [8, p. 48, 5, p. 67]. It is a tiny line, often falsely marked and constantly exposed, considered a danger to the Lithuanian State, like the road between baroque and barbarians without the space for the defence line. The last point is a metaphor created by watching the phenomenon of a «black sun» or solar eclipse, used to describe «the King of Enlightenment»–Stanislaw August Poniatowski, in *Silva rerum*. The future for Lithuania was to become one of European States or to be eliminated from the map of Europe. This paradigm follows the Lithuanian mentality and literary traditions into the XXI century [8, p. 57].

As in music, where minimalism is enriched with bird songs, ritornellos and multiple ornamental ways, literature returns to the rhetoric of historical baroque and the figuration of lines in the research.

The values of old democracy should be reopened for the non-archaic and non-romantic return of the national self, thriving in the style of baroque, full of operative powers of statehood structures and a new strategy [9, p. 25].

**The contemporary discourse and aristocracy.** XX century Marxism and radicalism excluded aristocracy from the discourse of modern society, but nowadays it is incredibly important to let aristocracy return as a founder of statehood. Here a special Lithuanian–Polish royal aristocratic identity opens up. This once excluded aristocratic soul of the XX century makes a comeback in such literary manner (in *Silva rerum*) which is surprisingly important and actual to a contemporary Lithuanian political discourse, and continuously proceeds to postmodernism. Games, media and hybridised battles on the internet rip the soul of great old aristocracy apart because it has never rejected feelings of bravery, honesty, democracy and tolerance. And so, *Silva rerum* hands back this power, extracting it from the «baroque»–architectural–musical structure of the XVII–XVIII centuries, deeply buried in literary archives, when the soul was still open and full of matters and values of a stately life and was not praying for survival under the rule of barbarians. The sources of Crown and Republic expose these times in values, still existing of architecture, archives of visual arts, the universe of culture, which cannot be simply destroyed by foreign military forces and always presents the dimension of idealism.

Lithuanian identity must be rediscovered from various points of view in the deep intelligence of history [13, p. 11]. This road of a reopened historical concept appeared in the literary work as a paradigm in Lithuanian literature, music, history, culture [16, p. 33], and as a new concept of global Lithuania.

### Conclusions

Kristina Sabaliauskaitė's books encourage a reconceptualization of the old aristocracy, which remained active in the «network» of Lithuanian statehood.

Vilnius, its people, architecture, special relations to other nations (Jews, Karaims, Tatars, Italians, French, etc.), their culture, religion and way of life reveal the great lines of tolerance and empathy, democracy and patience, and honesty during the critical times.

In Sabaliauskaitė's literary style a special value is the ability to maintain the old-fashioned aspect, which is controversial in modern ages and can be described as an eternal breathing of times in the form of very long uninterrupted sentences as well as a return to the epic verbalisation in a reader's mind, a Homeric

effort to explore the eternal memory of the state like in «turning points of the world».

This old-fashioned arch-cathedral solitude and yearning for golden times is indeed a very contemporary and mental effort by Eastern Europeans «to embrace the world». The Lithuanian writer Kristina Sabaliauskaitė made this attempt in an excellent literary and politically symbiosis, in the very Lithuanian style of «mirroring the soul of Europe». This style is not an unconscious «daydream», but on the contrary, is a factology of mainstream memories of enlightened statehood of the majestic past, leading from the secrets of a powerful past towards the future.

**The algorithm of Sabaliauskaitė's literary style** is based on a constant return to memories of Statehood.

1. The breathing of eternity.
2. The principle of unlimited syntax.
3. Peculiarities of the old-fashioned verbosity, which appear when using some words unknown to

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modern society (like «rezaliansas» stands for marriage), which are found only in old works, preserved in archives, even «wrong» letters (muzulmonė instead of musulmonė), as if the writer is not just talking, but is stuck in the past for real, appearing funny and primitive, although inspiring.

This concept exposes the old archetypical strategy of «being Lithuanian» with a desire for eternal continuity to create one's own better world. There is always a dark side, the lack of strong relations among the family members and loneliness, even among the great active people, which makes them desperate and weakened.

This balance between right and wrong in the reconceptualisation of Lithuanian identity leads to the image of patriarchal-matriarchal diversity toward romanticism. It is a good old-fashioned style versus the hybrid of contemporary postmodernism, a trustful and embracing baroque, which opposes modernity and creates a powerful dimension in literature.

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АНОТАЦІЯ

**Ю. ЛАНДСБЕРІТЄ-БЕХЕР**

**ПЕРЕОСМИСЛЕННЯ ЛИТОВСЬКОЇ НАЦІОНАЛЬНОЇ  
ІДЕНТИЧНОСТІ ДО ЕПОХИ РОМАНТИЗМУ У РОМАНІ  
КРІСТІНИ САБАЛЯУСКАЙТЕ «СИЛЬВА РЕРУМ»**

*Литовська література заново відкриває поняття національної ідентичності через огляд століть, коли державність була у єдності з європейською культурою. Відома сучасна письменниця, доктор мистецтвознавства Крістіна Сабалюскайте (н. 1974 р.) у своїх книгах розкриває «археологію» таємниць життя і діяльності шляхетних дворян і духовенства Литви. Чотири книги «Сільва рерум» I-IV (лат. Ліс речей, так звана книга сім'ї дворян Литви) демонструють старовинний, ніби «старомодний» стиль літературної мови і в той же час формують новий погляд на історію Литви як історію держави дворян, яка щільно пов'язана з державністю, що суттєво змінює етноцентричне поняття держави Литви, що набрало чинності у ХХ столітті. Старовинна універсальність та проектування різнокультурного гуманізму є особливо співзвучним з ідеями Просвіти у пустелі постмодернізму та розчарувань постромантізму. Для Балтійських країн це дуже цінний літературний шлях, відкритий літературою після їх болісного історичного досвіду нищення прав людини та народу. Роман К. Сабалюскайте Сільва рерум, написаний у 2008-2016 рр., перетворює литовську ідентичність, замість романтичного етноцентризму відкриває бароко як зріле розуміння багатства універсальності європейської культури.*

**Ключові слова:** національність, ідентичність, бароко, державність, відтворення (реконструкція).