

The Late Lithuanian Greimas: Intentions and Reception

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Abstract. The main research material consists of Algirdas Julius Greimas's texts written during the transition period, when Lithuania was parting with Soviet rule (1989–1991), mainly his "Baltos lankos" column in *Literatūra ir menas* weekly periodical as well as various texts by other authors on Greimas's texts along with memoirs, letters and obituaries. The study has two aims: 1) to find a conceptual approach for analyzing Lithuanian texts by the late Greimas, 2) to identify points of change in the semiosphere of Lithuanian culture. Greimas's own semiotic method, namely, a structure of four Senders is used to describe his texts. The theoretical context of Juri Lotman's cultural semiotics is a more permanent intellectual context for this study, and some of the terms are useful in more than one aspect. The readers' attitudes towards Greimas's texts highlight how the core and periphery change in the semiosphere: the period of cultural activity and openness and the internal cultural barriers appearing at the same time, the gradual passivation of culture and cases of sporadic creative relationships.

Keywords: Greimas, Lotman, four types of Senders, semiosphere, Post-Soviet Lithuania.

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Foreword

“In the beginning was Lotman”¹ – such a formula would describe the intellectual trajectory of Lithuanian semioticians. The poet and literary scholar Tomas Venclova was the first to discover Juri Lotman’s method in 1966 as an alternative to non-academic literary studies, and he saw Lotman himself as a well-meaning colleague who supported the idea of a semiotics circle in Vilnius. In 1966, Algirdas Julius Greimas, having learned that a Lithuanian engaged in semiotics in Tartu, wrote a letter to Venclova, asking him to prepare a review of the lectures for summer school (see Venclova 1967). Their correspondence began from that time. Yet, after emigrating to the USA in 1977, Venclova distanced himself professionally from Greimas, though retaining the “Lotmanian component” of his work (Venclova 2017: 586). In contrast, literary scholars Kęstutis Nastopka and Saulius Žukas were both inspired by Lotman’s ideas at different times early in their academic careers, growing to prefer Greimas’s semiotics. They became Greimas’s most loyal followers in Lithuania.

Greimas was interested in Lotman and appreciated his idea of the relationship between meaning and changing contexts (Greimas 1991: 84). However, he doubted Lotman’s opposition between culture and barbarism, which Greimas learned about from a Russian dissident (Greimas 1990: 21–22). Greimas’s formula, born from an indirect discussion with Lotman, was that the difference between a member of Russian “intelligentsia” and a Western intellectual is not that the latter is “smarter”, but that he/she feels morally engaged (Greimas 2009: 182). This has proven an important stimulus for this research.

This study will focus on these works by Greimas, particularly on his texts from 1989–1992, published in Lithuanian periodicals,

¹ “In the beginning there was Greimas” was the title of one of Greimas’s obituaries (Savukynas 1992: 14). This title repeated a previous title, namely, of an interview with Philippe Manière, “Au commencement était Greimas”, *Le Quotidien de Paris*, 1986.

especially those in his “Baltos lankos” (“White Fields”) column in *Literatūra ir menas*, a weekly cultural newspaper (republished in 2009).

The aim of this research is more than identifying the value system that emerged in Greimas’s texts. It includes an aim to investigate changes in Lithuanian consciousness. Therefore this study not only includes Greimas’s texts published in Lithuania during the transition period but also his cultural publications and literary critique from the press in emigration, which were hardly accessible during Lithuania’s Soviet times and which were first published in Lithuania in the book *Iš arti ir iš toli* (*From near and far*). Greimas’s texts on politics remain outside the scope of this study. An important part of the study is Greimas’s letters, memories of him and other materials of Greimas’s reception from various genres and periods.

The instruments borrowed for this study are from Greimas’s own theory, since the idea of using an author’s own instruments to understand his life is intriguing. This research approach was partly driven by the question that Eric Landowski raised in his article on Greimas:

Can we claim (and to what extent) that similarly to Don Quixote (a figure very dear to Greimas), Greimas lived his life as a novel about knights, in a world, as if it was a narrative universe that corresponded to the grammar he constructed? (Landowski 2017: 496)

The question seems particularly interesting when applied to Lithuanian Greimas, especially to the late period of his life, which was very closely connected with Lithuania as it was coming out of sovietism. The title of the article by Kęstutis Nastopka and Heidi Toebe, “Greimas – mano lėmėjas” (“Greimas, my Sender”) (Nastopka, Toebe 2017), was also of particular importance for this research, which led to attention on the scheme of four types of senders – Sender, Anti-sender, Non-sender, and Non-anti-sender (Greimas, Courtés 1982: 15; Greimas 1988: 45). Such would be a suitable instrument for researching Greimas’s intentions and the

impact of his texts. *Semiotics and Language*, the analytical dictionary by Greimas and Joseph Courtés describes the concept of the Sender in two following cases:

1. Enunciator the implicit sender of the enunciation. (Greimas, Courtés 1982: 105).
2. In the narrative syntax the Sender (*Destanateur*) is the one who communicates to the subject-Receiver not only the elements of modal competence but also the set of values at stake. The manipulatory Sender (the initial Sender) can be opposed to the judicatory Sender (the final Sender). Given the polemical structure of the narrative, the presence of a subject and an anti-subject presupposes the existence of a Sender and of an anti-Sender. This axis of contraries can produce two new actantial positions as contradictories: the position of non-Sender is, on the cognitive dimension, the passive Sender (receiving the knowledge about the subject-Receiver's doing and sanctioning it) and thus belongs to the negative deixis. In such a case the active Sender is inchoate, promoting movement and action. (Greimas, Courtés 1982: 294)

The problem of understanding the position of non-Sender and non-anti-Sender in a semiotic square leads to Jean Petitot's idea that negation does not exist in a dynamic sense. It corresponds to the disappearance or genesis of the determination in question (Petitot 2018: 610). A hypothetical supposition is that the non-Sender position will correlate with the disappearance of the Sender's activity and deterioration of its collection of values, which become apparent in the Receiver's perspective. (Receiver does not operate according to the program a Sender initiates, since its values belong to a different axiological context.) Meanwhile, in the case of non-anti-Sender, a Receiver contradicts the Initial Sender's values in order to search for new axiology, therefore, the Initial Sender again becomes an active (reactive) Sender.

For this research, the points of view must change by moving from the sender's to receiver's perspective and vice versa. Such doubling of gaze creates certain theoretical difficulties but it is necessary for dynamically understanding Greimas's place in Lithuanian culture.

The theoretical context of Lotman's cultural semiotics will be a more permanent intellectual context for this study, and some of the terms will be useful in more than one aspect.

Greimas as Sender

An established opinion in the interpretation of the history of semiotics is that, for Greimas and his school, "reality might well exist, but is not semiotically relevant" (Leone 2017: 72). Thus it is natural that many, especially in the West, imagined Greimas as an armchair scholar, who hardly had any interest in historical events, particularly in an "unfamiliar" and distant country such as Lithuania. However, this is not really the case. Greimas had returned from Grenoble in 1939 to serve in the Lithuanian Army and afterward, always actively participated in political events – first against Nazis in Lithuania and against Soviets in the West (see Broden 2011). The latter was especially important in the Soviet era. Greimas's friends who lived in Soviet Lithuania had mentioned that, in 1971, when Greimas arrived in his homeland, many people went to meet with him, not as a scientist but rather as a legend of anti-Soviet resistance (Savukynas 1992: 14). During the years of movement from Soviet to independent Lithuania, Greimas wanted to participate in the life of the country's resurrection as actively as possible. His space of action contained writing about public and cultural life. Interest in issues of public life, books and periodicals written by authors in emigration increased significantly during the discussed period. Greimas can be considered a well-known author in Lithuania at that time. Then the weekly periodical *Literatūra ir menas*, where Greimas wrote his own "Baltos lankos" column in 1991, had a circulation of around 70 000 issues. His book *Iš arti ir iš toli* could also be considered to have had a large circulation with 12 000 copies.

Greimas first addressed readers in the diaspora before finding his Lithuanian audience in Lithuania. He tried to initiate a movement while, at the same time, reflecting on the position of social activist, which he found unusual:

However, I raise it [the question: “What to do?” – L. M.] addressing not the people, as prophets like to do, but the readers and writers of *Akiračiai*; can we, the so-called “liberal wing”, consider our mission accomplished or vice versa. In this extraordinary crisis situation, we still have something to say to our brothers who become liberated at the side of our unexpectedly lively, energetic youth. (Greimas 1991a: 10)

Greimas was critical to many emigrants and had described their favorite role as “being a hero of the past who fulfilled his duty to Lithuania and now welcomes his tired relatives” (Greimas 1991a: 10). It is not surprising that he found new readers outside the diaspora in developing Lithuania. Greimas forecast its future by maintaining hope that the relicts of Sovietism will be defeated by youthful cultural activity, which needs to be encouraged.² “Why do our students, our youth not demonstrate and revolt? After all, Saint-Just was twenty one during the revolution, and Robespierre was twenty eight” (Greimas 2009: 189).

Greimas’s main readers in Lithuania were not the youth, but those in their forties-fifties. They could not start the revolution that Greimas expected but valued and even admired Greimas’s book *Iš arti ir iš toli*, which reprinted his most spectacular articles from emigration, as well as analyses of Lithuanian poetry, reviews, interviews, and thoughts about culture. For example, in his review of Greimas’s book, poet Sigitas Geda enthusiastically appreciates the effect of his texts. He hopes Greimas’s influence on Lithuanian culture will provide more chances to enter a new level of civilization:

Before A. J. Greimas, we hardly knew what healthy criticism and intellectual courage was. He brought along the real, living, unadorned European culture and wisdom, the France after Camus, Sartre, and

² Greimas’s trust in the youth reminds of his position towards the revolting Paris students at the end of 1960s (see his article “Jaunimas ir XX amžiaus revoliucija” (“The Youth and the 20th Century Revolution”) (Greimas 1969: 116)).

Dumézil to Lithuania. [...] to many people A. J. Greimas was and still is an extramural Lithuanian professor, a man who is not afraid to tell the truth, even to celebrities. Let that truth sometimes lash like a whip. More spirit of Voltaire – and Lithuanians will be saved! (Geda 1991: 178)

It is interesting that, at this time, Greimas's contemplations about literature were relevant to people of various educational levels, which is confirmed by a letter from an unknown reader. The given case confirms the enunciator status of Greimas's texts as an initiating sender. In his *Literatūra ir menas* column, Greimas quotes:

I received a letter from an anonymous Lithuanian woman who claims to know neither the secrets of poetry nor the breadth of literature, a "technocrat-engineer". She thanks me for my previous book, which she read in one go, like listening to a symphonic concert. Compliments are nice for everyone, even the hardened ones. However, I want to publicly thank my "technocrat" – this is a remuneration for my nightly writings, all the time dedicated to the Lithuanians of Lithuania. (Greimas 2009: 177)

In 1989–1992, Greimas no longer wrote literary criticism but commentaries about the works of other critics and attempted "to introduce a new genre into Lithuanian literary criticism (2017: 365) – an essay". According to him, the essay engages an author with the discourse and aims for the greatest possible effect by understanding that feelings and thoughts transmitted in figurative language stick with the reader better than abstract teachings. Admitting that a literary critic should adhere to the principle of coherent reading, he also disapproved of pretensions to "scholarship" and called for the abandonment of the Prussian seriousness inherited from the 19th century (Nastopka 2017: 534).

Eventually a question arises on the origin of Greimas's desire for literary criticism to represent a type of rationality different than scientific, and why he prioritized figurative literary critique, which fascinated and amazed Lithuanian readers newly emerged from Soviet times.

Supposedly, answers should be sought in Greimas's article "La parabole: Une forme de vie", which proves that the parable, which denounces didactics and moves responsibility to the perceiver, is similar to the maieutic (gr. *maieutikē technē* – midwife method) method of Socrates. It allows a person to find truths for oneself, by answering questions (Greimas 2000: 80).

Greimas constantly engages with provocations in periodicals of the transition period that break away from stereotypical thinking. The very first text published in the "Baltos lankos" column began with the slogan: "Let's learn while laughing" (Greimas 2009: 156). Greimas postulates the worldview of combining cheerful and serious attitudes as a semiotic necessity, without which any understanding of life would be incomplete or convoluted. It was with great joy that he encountered words by Ottawa University Professor Antanas Paplauskas that Greimas is not only a great scholar but a humorist as well and realized that he had a double calling in life. Greimas also claims:

It is possible, and worthy, to laugh at anything, of course, provided that you start laughing at yourself first: this, they say, is the English definition of irony, English humor. I try myself, and I constantly advise my students, who one after another climb to the heights of professors and rectors: just don't take yourself too seriously, just don't feel like professors, and especially philosophers! (Greimas 2009: 162)

To better understand Greimas's concept of humor, it is worthy to recall the ideas found in Greimas's French texts, first in his analysis of the short story "Two friends" by Guy de Maupassant:

This cheeky Parisian humor resembles eighteenth century "French wit", also of an antiphrastic nature, consisting of attributing no importance to serious things and, inversely, importance to trivial ones. [...] Humor is the best antidote against fear, and it also has a precise function: in negating the contrary hypostatized wanting, it restores S1 initial / wanting to do/, his desire to continue the quest. (Greimas 1988: 95-96)

Such cheeky humor, the French wit opposes Prussian seriousness and is a characteristic of Greimas's own Lithuanian texts – first, it is in the values of life, which can be seen not only on the plane of content but on the plane of expression, i. e., style.

Greimas's style embodying freedom, charm, lightness and youth (see Martinaitienė 2017) was both an opposition to Sovietism and proof that it is possible to write about serious topics of Lithuanian culture in an authentic way, without fervor and exaltation, i. e., in a western way. Of course, *Westernness* was not only a sign of style but, first of all, the topic that ran in many of Greimas's texts at that time.

It was no accident that the paraphrased Lithuanian parable, "If you're afraid of Greimas, don't go to the West"³, was selected as the title of the intellectual discussion in the weekly cultural magazine *Literatūra ir menas* in commemoration of Greimas's seventy-fifth birthday (see Žukas 1992: 5). In his texts written on topical issues of Lithuanian public life in the transition period, Greimas pointed clearly to Europe as the symbolic space in which all criteria and value systems are laid out: "Europe was also a collective person, both the sender and the judge, without whom any discussion about Lithuania culture would be meaningless" (Greimas 1990: 18). Greimas associated himself as a delegate subject of Sender (Europe) willing to take on the work of interpreter of political issues, for instance, explaining rather banal politic concepts that were obvious to Westerners such as position and opposition; or right, left and centre. He discussed why the institution of presidency was necessary and why it was unacceptable for the parliament of the newly independent Lithuania to continue to call itself a Supreme Council, as was the case during Soviet times. Although many readers at that time thought it was meaningless to discuss titles, Greimas, who never stopped being a semiotician, insisted that "things become what they are called" (Greimas 2009: 164). The question of titles became especially important when interpreting letters from Western countries. According to Greimas, "We need

³ Originally it would be: "If you're afraid of a wolf, don't go to the forest".

to learn to read letters – not just what they say but especially what they don't say" (Greimas 2009: 168). The question of titles became especially important when interpreting letters from Western countries, the communicative code of which was unknown to Lithuanians. Greimas assumes the role of an expounder of the Western diplomatic speech by giving the following example:

Draugas, a Lithuanian daily newspaper, placed a copy of the British Prime Minister's letter of thanks on its front page. It added a photograph of the British Prime Minister with the following comment: John Major, who wrote in his own handwriting, "Dear Professor Landsbergis". The *Draugas* editorial staff was delighted: look, the Prime Minister himself has written the address "by hand", i. e., making such an effort. What an honor! Unfortunately, such enthusiasm shows a complete lack of "political culture": the letter is addressed to a private individual, Professor Landsbergis, not to the President of the Republic, from whom he had received the greeting. This means that England will continue to avoid even the slightest signal of recognition of Lithuania's sovereignty. (Greimas 2009: 168)

In explaining differences between Lithuanian and European cultural perspectives, Greimas's dual identity emerged, especially in his "Baltos lankos" column, where his point of view changes – sometimes Greimas speaks from the position of "me, as Lithuanian" and sometimes, from the position of "we, the French".

What looks inconsistent from an everyday life perspective shows its hidden meaning when looking from the point of view of cultural semiotics, particularly the concept of border. According to Lotman's theory:

The border of semiotic space is the most important functional and structural position, giving substance to its semiotic mechanism. The border is a bilingual mechanism, translating external communications into the internal language of the semiosphere and vice versa. Thus, only with the help of the boundary is the semiosphere able to establish contact with non-semiotic and extra-semiotic spaces. (Lotman 2005: 210)

Greimas being “a person of border” in his late Lithuanian texts precisely fulfilled the role of such a semiotic translator, which was creating a space of cultural bilingualism and guaranteed a semiotic contact between the two worlds (Lotman 2005: 211)⁴.

In this case, it is important to remember Lotman’s idea from his book *Culture and Explosion* that the radical change in relations between Eastern and Western Europe, which was taking place as the Soviet system fell, provided Eastern Europe with an opportunity to pass into a ternary, Pan-European system (Lotman 2009: 174).

Thus Greimas’s texts of that time can be considered a search to realize the need for Lithuanian culture to have a third dimension, which would allow Lithuania to open up to Europe, learn the language of its culture without losing itself but also being able to see the self in the eyes of the other.

Greimas as anti-Sender

To understand Greimas’s anti-Sender position, it is important to identify the values represented by his opponents, which were especially prominent in the diaspora’s discussions between liberals (including Greimas) and the conservative wing, which happened already in the early period of emigration from Lithuania (1944–1954), and later, in its own way, repeated in the press as Lithuania was regaining independence (1989–1991). The division of values in the diaspora, or in the Lithuanian transition, remains outside the scope of our study. At this time, it is only important to record that Greimas assumed the role of anti-Sender described in the formula: “Freedom is not tolerance anymore, but the struggle for truth, truth for oneself and others” (Šmitienė 2017: 215). In a public letter

⁴ Landowski testified that the semiotic translation also went another way: “When he [Greimas] stayed with me, and on other occasions, we talked all evening, and he taught me a completely new way of looking at Europe. We had seen everything from a Western perspective, but he made me discover history from an Eastern European perspective. The explanation was completely understandable but unexpected” (Sverdiolas 2017).

published in *Dirva* newspaper in 1954 as a response to the leader of liberal Lithuanian intellectuals (later an international sociologist) Vytautas Kavolis, who appreciated Greimas's critical articles on the Lithuanian language (Greimas 1949) and historical thinking (Greimas 1953) that raised readers' emotions, Greimas admits:

Those few of my articles are only fragments of a common plan that the generation of young Lithuanians should form in order to declare a modern Crusade against social myths, against that global mythomania, which is the greatest enemy of a free person and a Lithuanian. (Šmitienė 2017: 215)

The myths that hinder the development of Lithuanian culture mentioned by Greimas – the stories of great dukes, rural culture, the nation's unity, a virtuous Lithuanian, especially the myth of the antiquity of the Lithuanian language – were considered by many that emigrated to be the pillars of Lithuanian identity, so questioning these things seemed impossible, and the one who raised questions was seen as a dangerous liberal.

Greimas's actions of fighting are most clearly seen in two directions: 1) a struggle against the conservatism of Lithuanian language and theoretical closeness of linguistics and 2) a struggle against the deepening primitivism and domination of Lithuanian Catholicism.

The attitudes of a large part of the diaspora to Greimas's publications were rather typically expressed by expatriate ethnologist Jonas Balys in his private letter (December 4, 1954) to Greimas, where Balys, not daring to discuss these issues in the press, wrote:

Spreading such thoughts among our studying youth who are already at a great risk of denationalization is the same as bringing a simple wax candle outside in a raging hurricane and thinking – let's see what will happen now... (Šmitienė 2017: 217)

Forty years later, a "scandalous" Greimas article, "Lietuvių kalbos senumas ir jaunatvė" ("The youth and old age of the Lithuanian language", first published in the diaspora in 1949), was reiterated in Lithuania (Greimas 1991: 341–352).

Unexpectedly, his thoughts appeared paradoxically fresh. As observed by philosopher Arūnas Sverdiolas, “Greimas’s claims of the time that it is necessary to abandon linguistic conservatism and become oriented towards the future, thinking about language as a tool for thinking, even now, would challenge linguists, if they read Greimas’s texts” (Sverdiolas 2020: 84).

Although linguists might not have read the old texts by Greimas, an unmistakable testimony was discovered that they read his contemplations in the *Literatūra ir menas* weekly from 1991. These angered the majority of linguists in Lithuania, and the anger has not subsided to this day.

Greimas did not express much admiration for the multivolume *History of the Lithuanian Language* in his July 13, 1991 publication. He evaluated the 4th volume, which had already been published at that time, somewhat ironically calling it another brick in the heritage of the language’s history (Greimas 2009: 172). Meanwhile, Greimas’s words about the *Dictionary of the Lithuanian Language*, an object of pride in Lithuania and the result of 50 years of work⁵ as well as a symbol of opposition to the Soviets and their russification policies, were fairly cruel:

It is a skyscraper in a darkened sky. However, it cannot withstand criticism. This work was written at the level of a high school teacher, as was its author, who loved the job more than the language. (Greimas 2009: 172)

Greimas’s diagnoses regarding the state of Lithuanian linguistics were very unfavorable towards the researchers who worked in the Soviet era:

⁵ The dictionary was issued in 1941, with 20 volumes in total. At the time, when Greimas wrote his column, i. e., in 1991, the 15th volume issued. The author of the first volumes, Juozas Balčikonis, had been an acquaintance of Greimas since the end of the 1930s, and Greimas always evaluated his linguistic competencies negatively.

In spite of the abundant numbers of Lithuanian linguists during those fifty years, Lithuania had not managed to develop linguistics as a theoretical, methodological, academic field. “We have overlooked the 20th century, and it is not clear how the 21st century will be met. (Greimas 2009: 172–173)

Greimas’s statements knocked out Lithuanian linguists. Their initial reaction was silence, but a little later, memoir-type texts began including unsubstantiated phrases like “Sometimes even celebrities say some nonsense” (Paulauskienė 2014: 213). More than 15 years later after Greimas’s critical publication, linguists still respond to Greimas by appealing to the story of a suffering nation and by creating a new myth, for instance:

We did not create general linguistics, but we did not miss the 20th century. [...] in spite of wars, occupations and all kinds of restrictions, this was the golden age of the Lithuanian language, linguistics, literature and national culture. However, we have met the 21st century very poorly – by betraying our native language and nation. (Paulauskienė 2017)

In another paragraph of the quoted text, the anger over the insulted professional honor of post-Soviet linguists is transferred to Greimas’s persona itself, by browsing his collections for “failed” sentences. A fragment of one text by Greimas (“Pirmasis intelektualinės autobiografijos bandymas” (“First Attempt of Intellectual Autobiography”)) is qualified as written by a suicidal author, rather than by a semiotician who believed in human life and the world’s meaning (Paulauskienė 2017).

Remembering Greimas’s study *On Anger*, the Lithuanian linguist’s memoir about Greimas could be treated as a narrative program of vengeance, realized once the ability to do so emerged, which aimed at punishing the offender and morally compensating the offended party (Greimas 1987: 160). Of course, the attempt to reestablish equilibrium has to follow a new axiology, therefore, it should be natural that the ending of the examined text highlights Justinas Marcinkevičius, the national poet who emerged in Soviet

times and who embodied the myth of the unique value of Lithuanian language that the speaker identifies with, as the real sender who opposes Greimas.

Another topic that moved the readers of Greimas's *Literatūra ir menas* column and sparked a storm of emotions, although not intensive enough not to eventually fade away, was Greimas's view of the unfortunate Lithuanian Catholicism. To Greimas, the expression of external piety and worship of religious objects were foreign. His style of religion was more similar to Protestantism, and his relation with Christianity was described in a letter to a friend as follows: "Being a Christian is not worshiping Saints and walking in processions but living as a Christian" (Greimas 2017: 450).

In his view, in the period of newly-gained independence, Lithuania experienced a transition from the authority of the Communist party to that of the Church, and as public politics became intertwined with the religious sphere, Catholicism became almost obligatory (Greimas 1991: 10). "Even the head of state [Vytautas Landsbergis - L. M.] kept a statue of Mary on his desk" (Greimas 2009: 187). However, the most scandalous was Greimas's comment on a request to write a biography of Casimir (1458-1484), the Grand Duke of Lithuania and King of Poland, a man notorious for his asceticism and piety, and to make it suitable for the sensibilities of French Catholics:

Can you imagine me presenting Saint Casimir, distinguished for his chastity, to the French? The most serious Catholics will burst out laughing. At the end of the 20th century, chastity is not a virtue but a vice, maybe even a sin. (Greimas 2009: 165)

The appearance of this text caused a chain of outrageous reactions. In his letters, Greimas even wrote that it threatened his *Literatūra ir menas* column: "The censors rose up to defend St. Casimir, and my chronicle may soon disappear" (Greimas 2017: 449). It is doubtful that this type of censorship operated in Lithuania at that time, but poet Geda was not completely wrong in his review of Greimas's book: "Lithuanians are vengeful people. I don't know

if anyone will forgive Professor for tearing off St. Casimir's crown" (Geda 1991: 177). This was obviously a semiotic conflict and started from a clash of different cultural contexts: the French liberal and the Lithuanian post-Soviet post-atheistic.⁶ This time, Greimas clearly underestimated the specifics of his Lithuanian audience that was trying to break free from its Soviet past. He crossed a certain threshold of readers' personal sensitivity, so his intellectual provocation on the "strangeness" of Lithuanian Catholicism failed.

Misunderstood and called an atheist, he later wrote a special essay on that subject (this text was published in *Literatūra ir menas* on June 25, 1992, after Greimas's death), proving his competence in the field of theology. Probably this text was the only occasion for readers to learn that Greimas started his university career by translating the life of St. Douceline from Provençal to French and after becoming a professor, he supervised works by PhD students about the 17th-century mystic St. Evdokimos, as well as about the great teachers of the Church, St. Therese Lisieux and St. Teresa of Ávila (Greimas 2009: 190).

Defending Christianity from the ignorant and intolerant, in the said text, Greimas presents two examples of an authentic relationship with religion: 1) philosopher Paul Ricœur, who believed in God, but did not mention the Holy name even once in his ten volumes, which Greimas considered the best way to glorify God and 2) Michel de Certeau, a semiotician and French Jesuit who, when asked if he believed in God, answered: "I'm sorry, but that's a personal question". Greimas explained, "You see, there are such forms of faith as well and such ways of expressing love for God. These people are called liberals, though not in Lithuania, of course" (Greimas 2009: 198–192). Greimas's additional explanation of the religious question did not receive any comments, and the interpretation of Saint Casimir was hardly relevant to anyone in

⁶ The reasons for the conflict are somewhat explained by two historical matters: in 1966 St. Casimir's Church in Vilnius operated as an atheism museum. It was returned to church-goers, de jure in 1988, and de facto in 1991.

Lithuania; the anger of the Catholic readers of Greimas's column defused until it dissipated completely, unlike that of the linguists who had been annoyed for years, because Greimas's criticism had offended them personally as unappreciated specialists.

Interestingly half a year after Greimas's text about Saint Casimir in *Literatūra ir menas*, he returned to this dispute in a French interview for *Le Monde* on October 22, 1991 (Greimas 1993c). Here Greimas explained his view on this story as a description of neighboring Poland and the Polish Pope and expressed hope that "Lithuania will avoid colonization in the religious field" (Greimas, Kajman, Lesnes 2017: 168). Hence it becomes clear that the role of a fighter against the primitivism of religion was more complex. It was also supplemented with the intention to fight off cultural colonization.

Greimas's active position as an anti-Sender that was expressed as a struggle against static myths and obsolete forms of religion, linguistics, and other spheres not discussed here. Viewed from one side, it was not so much a denial but an aim to re-semanticize stereotypical views, and from another side – an initiation of a search program of individual values.

Greimas as non-anti-Sender

The concept of non-anti-Sender in semiotics remains rather vague, so in this study, semiotic specifics will not be broached. The term non-anti-sender will be used rather technically to support the logic of this analysis.

Searching for a relationship with Greimas as a non-anti-sender in the works of Lithuanian researchers, it is worthy to pay attention to the few texts, where Greimas's thoughts are developed and refined in spite of disagreeing with them. For example, in her book dedicated to Eduardas Mieželaitis, a Soviet poet and laureate of the 1963 Lenin Prize, Lithuanian critic Elena Baliutytė considers Greimas's article "Apie Eduardą Mieželaitį ir jo Paryžių" ("About Eduardas Mieželaitis and his Paris", 1963) as rather irrelevant,

especially when addressing the demystification of the simulacra of Frenchness. However, she sticks to Greimas's remark that Mieželaitis's poetry returned him to his youth and reminded him of "the system of values that arrived through Russia and nourished the first generation of writers of Independent Lithuania" (Baliutyte 2019: 178). Unlike Greimas, Baliutyte thinks that the way Mieželaitis, who was a peer of Greimas, "in 1962 returned Lithuanian poetry to 1926", was "not a new discovery of America" but a step forward from the point of "stopped time" into which Lithuanian poetry was brought by "Stalinist socialist realism, which is conceptually counter-modernist" (Baliutyte 2019: 179). This historical loop in the trajectory of Lithuanian modernization could only be seen after a contradictory reconsideration of Greimas's opinion, which was detached from the context of writing and understanding the poetry in question but acted as an intellectual stimulant, when related to development models discovered by researchers of Soviet culture.

Another example of a relationship with Greimas as a non-anti-sender is the article "Teksto kurtuazija: 'Ašara dar tau anksti'" ("Text courtesy: 'Tear, it is too soon for you'") by another Lithuanian scholar Aušra Jurgutienė with a declared aim to deconstruct Greimas's canonical semiotic analysis of one of Marcelijus Martinaitis's poems (Greimas 1980)⁷, while at the same time, stating that it does not intend to radically challenge the reading of the poem proposed by Greimas. The scholar suggests other ways to read this poem, first of all, by activating the historical context of the Soviet era, which Greimas ignores, and "recognizing the semantically ambiguous Aesopian language" (Jurgutienė 2010: 317). This way the field of interpretation of the poet in question is expanded, but her ambition is greater – contrasting the immanence, coherence

⁷ Greimas's article "Ašara ir poezija" ("Tear and Poetry"), dedicated to Martinaitis's poem "Ašara dar tau anksti" is the only detailed analysis of a poetic text written by Greimas. The text became a sort of teaching material for students of philology, considered a paradigmatic semiotics text.

and relevance desired by semiotics with the ambivalence of deconstruction. By showing that Greimas's analysis is not without objections, exposing that the interpreter himself is using not only scientific arguments but also various means of persuasion and involves the reader's imagination. The author of the paper uncovers the special creativity of Greimas and his method rather than its limitations that were criticized. So, in spite of her declarations, she does not contrast semiotics and deconstruction but shows a sort of commonality between them.

An invitation to critically reconsider rather than blindly take over values and method and provocation to thinking would probably best describe the non-anti-sender position of the enunciator in Greimas's texts, which rarely received an adequate response among Lithuanian readers.

Greimas as non-Sender

The position of non-sender is perhaps the most difficult to discuss because this actantial role does not function in the public texts of the speaker himself (at least it seems so in Greimas's case) and can be recognized mainly through reception texts and to some extent, in private correspondence.

1.

First, let's consider some cases of Greimas's reception in the diaspora. The gap between Greimas and the generation of younger Lithuanian literary critics living in the USA was most clearly witnessed by Lithuanian scholar Violeta Kelertienė in 1996. In her opinion, the first circumstance was that "his fundamental texts were translated into English rather recently and unfortunately, by that time, the critics' attention had already shifted elsewhere" (Kelertienė 2006: 284). However, there were other circumstances. As Kelertienė states:

Greimas failed to attract Lithuanian expatriates. Probably because we did not have a chance to attend his seminars in Paris. Also, even in 1976, when I met that attractive and likeable scientist Greimas (I had read his texts in French), we were already too independent and did not want to obey the dictatorship of a single method. As an American colleague explained it to me with a psychoanalytic insight, in Freudian terms, we did not want to obey the “father”, and so we had to kill him and commit to our methodology. (Kelertienė 2006: 284)

In her analysis of the Lithuanian literary critique in diaspora, Kelertienė concludes that Greimas’s literary critique essays were difficult even for the intellectual émigré journals like *Literatūros lankai* or *Metmenys*. (Greimas had published here since 1960.) Kelertienė claims, “The myth that Greimas is a first-rate semiotician but God forbid, not a critic, is still being formed even today” (Kelertienė 1980: 106).

The beginning of such a view was Greimas’s article “Tomo Venclovos beveik beprasmė poezija” (“The Almost Meaningless Poetry of Tomas Venclova”) (Greimas 1972) that studied several poems from the book *Kalbos ženklas* (*The Sign of Language*) published in Lithuania in 1972 and sent to Greimas by the poet himself five years before emigrating to the West. Greimas enthusiastically acknowledged this poetry as being on a European level, corresponding to the epistemological turn of the 20th century, and discussed the theme of the relationship between existential meaning and poetic language using means unfamiliar to the diaspora of Lithuanian readers. He did so namely by exposing the correlation of the planes of sound expression and content (Greimas 1972). Diaspora readers completely misunderstood Greimas’s text, as they probably also misunderstood Venclova’s poetry that was, at that time, little known in the diaspora and only later gained international recognition and was considered a contender for the Nobel prize.

The negative image of Greimas as a literary critic was mainly created by Shakespearean scholar Delija Valiukėnaitė, who appreciated Venclova’s poetry but read it in a different way than Greimas did. In her article “Išėjimo lietuvių literatūros kritika iš

anglų-amerikiečių perspektyvos pažvelgus“ (“Criticism of Lithuanian literature in the diaspora from an Anglo-American perspective”), Valiukėnaitė admits Greimas’s academic sophistication and philosophical maturity but called his “tours into the émigré critique of modern poetry” naïve, comparing them to the Anglo-American tradition, which is her point of reference (Valiukėnaitė 1978: 67–68).

At the same time, early-stage ethnologist Eglė Viktorija Žygaitė, in her critical review of Greimas’s mythological study *Apie dievus ir žmones (Of Gods and Men)*, published in Chicago in 1979, compares Greimas’s research with a book by a Soviet-time, Lithuanian ethnologist Norbertas Vėlius. She clearly preferred the latter’s positivism, which she considers to be real science, whereas, according to her, Greimas’s hypotheses “are poetic and the method of approach, as stated by himself, is similar to solving crosswords” (Žygaitė 1980: 183).

Greimas was not indifferent towards this critique by the younger generation of scholars, although in his letter to Kelertienė (March 2, 1982), he wrote that he does not worry about it. He just admitted feeling “a little hurt” that *Metmenys* editor Kavolis asked for a review from a “gymnasium student” who does not yet know that she does not know, although this seems to be a general problem with American Lithuanian “scholars” (Greimas 2017: 285).

Still, this value divide between the French Greimas and the “American Lithuanian scholars”⁸ left a larger trace in Greimas’s choices than it might seem at first, e. g., a few years later, when asked to write an article for a joint collection about one Lithuanian prose writer, in his refusal Greimas also indicated the following reason: “I cannot write scientifically anymore – I would need whole volumes; impressionistically – Valiukėnaitė would say that it is “naïve and not serious” (Greimas 2017: 283). Feeling that his methodological approach and individual writing style system are difficult to accept even among the liberal émigré intellectuals, Greimas increasingly turned to the new generation living in

⁸ In a Lithuanian letter Greimas uses the English word ironically.

Lithuania, which he apparently recognized from several visits to Vilnius as his potential audience.

2.

To understand Greimas's reception in Lithuania, varied literary material is important: texts written at that time by Greimas and his friends and opponents, obituaries dedicated to Greimas, and memoirs that are still appearing and comprise a unique corpus revealing not only the attitudes towards Greimas but also the expectations and disappointments of Lithuania at that time.

The author of one obituary, Martinaitis marks the trajectory of Greimas's travels to Lithuania: Greimas's return starts with his myth, which was later replaced by a direct and sometimes textual acquaintance with the scholar – the most famous person of the nation and the rise of a new myth: "From mythological fogs, he [Greimas – L. M.] brings Lithuanian thought to the future, as mythical cultural heroes used to bring nations out of the captivity of monsters" (Martinaitis 1992: 14). Remembering Greimas's ideas about static and dynamic myths (Greimas 1966), image of Greimas as an omniscient leader could definitely be considered a static myth, where the nation is given the role of a passive performer, rather than an active subject.

The divide between the myth of Greimas and the real attitude of the reader, which are being deconstructed from texts, began appearing while Greimas was still alive. For example, in the discussion on his 75th birthday, Žukas states that Greimas's actions can look paradoxical (e. g., a "socialist" actively collaborates with journals published by the Vatican and follows the semiotic studies of the Bible). However, upon a deeper look, it is seen that he maintains a consistent line but as all intellectuals, he likes contradictory situations: "Unfortunately, in our place, Greimas's non-standard intellectual expression is lived rather morbidly" (Žukas 1992: 12).

The poet Geda explains the attitude of the role Greimas assumed by linking it to cultural anarchism, i. e., "the fury of demolishing

antiquities and idols, the fight against clichés and stereotypes”. However, the poet notices that such intellectual energy did not correspond to the last Lithuanian movement in 1989–1991, which did not have any newer ideas, other than restoration, i. e., regaining normal European status: “This is why our revolutionary spirit evaporated so quickly. We buried ourselves, drowned in the reprinted pre-war and émigré publications, memoirs of exile and resistance, archives of the party and security services” (Geda 1990: 177).

In spite of Greimas’s great trust in the revolutionary power of youth, he failed to awaken Lithuanian youth for an intellectual revolution. Geda explained the reason for this failure as a separation of cultural traditions:

The current youth [...] do not read him in Lithuania. Neither our punks, nor our rockers, nor our nationalists, nor our Catholics. The mind and thinking do not impress them “neither from near nor far. (Geda 1990: 179)⁹

However, the non-conjunction between Greimas and the next generation was not unique to that time. From a distance of thirty years, it would seem that, at the time of restoration, Greimas’s role of Sender continuously weakened until becoming anti-Sender, and in our time, his texts are retreating into cultural passivity. There are many examples of this. Lithuanian linguists were not interested in Greimas as a linguist, except for a few Soviet-era scholars who resented his critical assessments of the history of the language. Greimas’s theological competence as a man of science or the semiotics of the gospels did not attract any Lithuanian scholars, perhaps, except some lecturers from the A. J. Greimas Center at Vilnius University. Furthermore, according to the study *The Development of Scientific Theology in Lithuania*, by theologian Algirdas

⁹ Playing with the title of Greimas’s collection of Lithuanian articles *Iš arti ir iš toli* (*From near and far*).

Jurevičius, a Bishop since 2020, Lithuanian theologians (especially Biblicists) “show little interest in this method and do not follow the advice of the Pontifical Biblical Commission concerning the use of semiotic analysis for the interpretation of Holy Scripture” (Jurevičius 2011: 278).

Neither was any attention given to a document by Greimas named *Pro memoria. Lietuvos ateities projektavimo reikalai* (*Memo-randum. On the Matter of Designing Lithuania's Future*), which was passed on to the head¹⁰ of the restored state, Vytautas Landsbergis, in Paris in 1991, and according to a statement from Minister of Education, at that time, Darius Kuolys, copies of the document were distributed to all government members in Lithuania and brought to Landsbergis again (Greimas 2017: 600). On the occasion of Greimas's 80th year, *Baltos lankos* journal reprinted the document, and added a comment that the advices remain relevant, on the other hand, they are interesting as a work in the genre of utopia (Greimas 1997: 141).

The reception of Greimas's mythological studies in Lithuania seemed hopeful at first. His lectures on Lithuanian mythology at Vilnius University in the Soviet era were widely discussed by audiences, especially on his interpretations of the Iron Wolf, the myth of the founding of Vilnius, which strengthened the patriotic spirit and “meant more than its semiotics” (Savukynas 1992: 14).

The mentioned study *Apie dievus ir žmones* (Greimas 1979) was also of great importance in Lithuania – in Soviet times this book was illegally copied and distributed by interested readers, despite the risk of being caught (Daujotyte 2009: 23). However, Greimas's mythology book *Tautos atminties beieškant* (*In Search of National Memory*), published in Lithuania in 1990, included the aforementioned study but did not attract the reactions of the younger generation that Greimas expected. In a letter to Žukauskas from March 16, 1991, Greimas wrote:

¹⁰ Greimas refers to him as President.

Is there any hope [...] not from the rebuilders of paganism, from people that would set themselves a question, how to understand the cultural history, the “science” of culture? Should this work be put aside, completely disregarded, [...], or believing (!!) that after 40 years maybe someone will read me? (Greimas 2017: 441)

However, there are also followers of Greimas among Lithuanian mythologists. One of them, Daiva Vaitkevičienė, in the article “Following the paths of Greimas’s mythological research” states that the question of the intelligibility of Greimas’s works remains to this day. According to her, this problem is related to the ignorance of the tradition of French mythological research in Lithuania:

The “Lithuanian” Greimas is read in isolation from the “French” one. In order to understand the “Lithuanian” Greimas, it is sufficient to read his mythology, religion and, in general, the meanings of the phenomena of the old Lithuanian culture, but it is not enough to continue the work Greimas started and to develop the dotted ideas of his studies. (Vaitkevičienė 2017: 235)

For a long time, the most favorable grounds for spreading Greimas’s ideas in Lithuania was, and partly still is, academic literary research, which already sounds trivial, but it is interesting to note that there were also attempts to introduce the elements of the method of semiotic analysis in secondary schools. In 2002, the literature curriculum postulated close reading as a principle of teaching literature, with the final exam task being an interpretation of a literary text or passage. This approach was too demanding for many teachers and too far removed from what they were used to in Soviet-era schools. In 2009, the literature curriculum was overhauled, moving away from the text interpretations towards the old educational paradigm with the addition of a focus on conveying the national narrative. However, although elements of Greimas’s method have disappeared from the literary curriculum, his biography has been included in the new program in the section “Personalities Representing the Epoch”.

This reversal of method and myth is quite expressive, revealing the danger to cultural modernization posed by adherence to static myths, about which Greimas has written on several occasions making it possible to diagnose Lithuania's post-Soviet culture as cyclical that is shaped by a mythological consciousness, using Lotman's terminology.

In summary, it becomes clear that for some emigrants, especially those already born in emigration, and readers in post-Soviet Lithuania, Greimas was not an interesting author, and the values communicated by the speaker of his texts could be described as non-desirable, using Greimas's term to name the modality of /not-wanting-to-be/ (Greimas 1987: 145). This position relates to the double negative modalization of the perceiver as /not- being-able-to know/ and /not-wanting-to know/ negatively describing the perceiver himself and his conservative, rather enclosed, intellectually passive cultural tradition. In the semiotic square, non-desirable contradicts desirable /wanting to be/. Such a position associates with the times of cultural opening during the restoration of independence. Desirable is in opposition to Injurious /wanting-not-to-be/, which associates with those that considered and still consider Greimas's ideas as dangerous to the nation. Non-injurious /not-wanting-not-to-be/ described separate cases of a critical and also creatively active relationship that occurs in the present.

Conclusion

At first glance, it might appear that the overview of the reception of Greimas's Lithuanian texts presented here shows his gradual decline, his transition into being culturally passive, and a transformation into a myth of the most famous Lithuanian intellectual. However, that would only be an impression arising from a static description made from a particular point in time. Describing the dynamic or the historical process of acquisition and dissemination of Greimas's intellectual heritage would show different results.

Still, such research would require a much larger study which there is no commitment at this time. This pilot study revealed:

- 1) In the years of Lithuanian revival, as established hierarchies were collapsing and a search for new value systems was underway, Greimas's texts, written in Lithuanian on the topics of culture and literature, especially his collection of Lithuanian articles *Iš arti ir iš toli* and the "Baltos lankos" column in the *Literatūra ir menas* weekly, were at the center of society's attention. Greimas had a dual position: on one hand, he belonged to a marginal zone of cultural bilingualism, where he acted as a semiotic translator; on the other hand, because of his international reputation and the developing mythology of an intellectual leader of the nation, Greimas's person was considered one of the most important symbolic figures at the core of the Lithuanian semiosphere (speaking in Lotman's terms).
- 2) As conservative tendencies strengthened and the attachment to usual models of thinking and nationalistic myths resurfaced within society, Greimas moved to the periphery. The dynamics of attitudes towards Greimas correlate with the trajectories of changes in the internal system.
- 3) The meaning of Greimas's texts sporadically rises or falls according to unpredictable cultural cycles, taking a mobile position in the intermediate zone between the core and periphery and never coinciding with either of them again.

In the thirty years of independent Lithuania, continuous internal restructuring processes have been taking place in its semiosphere. Precisely as the system of cultural codes changes, the paradigm of remembering-forgetting changes. Remembering Lotman's statements that "culture presents itself as collective intellect and collective memory, that is, a supra-individual mechanism for preserving and transmitting certain messages (texts) and producing new ones" (Lotman 2019: 133), Greimas's hidden role as a manipulating (initiating) sender becomes more evident retrospectively.

The later Greimas proves that, in the context of Eastern Europe, the understanding of culture becomes an understanding of ethics,

and the role of the fight against myths and barbarism is the most appropriate goal for a “morally engaged” intellectual.

Don Quixote, whom Greimas presented as an archetype of a hopeless hero in his first article, became the most important role of his life, to which he was committed and sought “not for happiness but for a full realization of own life, justifying and making it meaningful” (Greimas 1943: 227). He trusted instability as a value and carried out the narrative program of “being Lithuanian in the world” based on the ideal of the *beau geste*.

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