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## KRISTIJONAS DONELAITIS – A LITHUANIAN HOMER?

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**Schlüsselwörter:** Litauische Literatur, Litauische Sprache, XVIII Jahrhundert, Preußisch Litauen, Dichter

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Donelaitis' decision to write in Lithuanian was well thought out. „K. Donelaitis' Lithuanianness was a matter of his heart, and simultaneously his conscious stance”, says Lithuanian literature historian Albinas Jovaišas<sup>1</sup>. In 1747, the first historical study on the Lithuanian language was published, written by the poet's friend Phillip Ruhig (1675–1749)<sup>2</sup>. In it, Ruhig compared nearly four hundred similar lexical units of Lithuanian and ancient Greek and, based on the similarity of their vocabulary, claimed that the Lithuanian language had originated from ancient Greek. As testified by Franz Oskar Tetzner (1863–1919), the first biographer of Donelaitis, the latter was interested in Ruhig's research and had the study in his personal library<sup>3</sup>. The ideas developed by Ruhig could have encouraged Donelaitis to experiment with the opportunities of creating poetry in Lithuanian, equal to the honourable Greek language in terms of age, and at the same time as if to repeat Homer's creative act and to produce the first epic of the Lithuanian nation. The idea to test the suitability of the verse of the Antiquity epics – hexameter – for the native language was promoted by the general creative atmosphere of the epoch and the programmes of the theory of poetry at the University. Thus, in the textbook

<sup>1</sup> A. Jovaišas, „Kristijonas Donelaitis“, [in:] E. Ulčinaite, A. Jovaišas, *Lietuvių literatūros istorija. XIII–XVIII amžiai*, Vilnius 2003, p. 441.

<sup>2</sup> Philipp Ruhig wrote a treatise *Meletema sistems lingvam lituanicam* in Latin in 1708. Later he translated it into German, supplemented, edited, and published in 1747 under the title *Betrachtung der Littauischen Sprache, in ihrem Ursprunge, Wesen und Eigenschaften (Lietuvių kalbos kilmės, būdo ir savybių tyrimas, Königsberg)*. For more details, see: P. Ruigys, *Lietuvių kalbos kilmės, būdo ir savybių tyrinėjimas*, ed. by V. Jurgutis, V. Vilnonytė, Vilnius 1986.

<sup>3</sup> *Dainos* [1897], 28. See also: Kaunas 2016, p. 95.

by professor Daniel Heinrich Arnold (1706–1775) in the University of Königsberg (1732), used by Donelaitis for his studies of the theory of poetry, doubts were still expressed about the possibility of writing mature German poetry in hexameter<sup>4</sup>, while in 1748, a hexameter poem *Der Messias* (The Messiah) by Friedrich Gottlieb Klopstock (1724–1803) was already published. In 1749, another hexameter poem *Der Frühling* (Spring) by Ewald Christian von Kleist (1715–1759) appeared.

As Donelaitis resolved to create in Lithuanian, he consciously took up the challenge not only of the language and verse, but also of the mode of speaking – to narrate a story in a way that a Lithuanian peasant would, coarse and simple. Such a poetic decision, original in the context of European literature, could have been influenced by the very situation of the Lithuanian language: in the early 18th century, the divide between the written and spoken Lithuanian language had not formed yet, and in the opinion of Donelaitis' contemporaries, one had to write in Lithuanian in the way spoken by a Lithuanian peasant.

Kristijonas Donelaitis, born into a family of free Lithuanian peasants, was six when his father died (1720). According to Johann Bernhardt Wach (1769–1819), provider of the genealogical knowledge about the poet, after his father's death, his mother sent the future poet to a school for the poor in Königsberg<sup>5</sup>. Thus, he must have gone to Königsberg in his childhood or early adolescence. In about 1731, he was already a pupil at Kneiphof School in Königsberg.

In the city, Donelaitis got immersed in the environment of the German and Latin languages. He may have used his native Lithuanian for communication with his elder brother Friedrich, also living in Königsberg, and with one or two Lithuanian friends; he heard it in the liturgy and may have sung Lithuanian hymns. However, he no longer had a daily direct contact with the Lithuanian peasants' dialect thriving in the countryside. Thus, for a decade, in the years of the most intense personality maturation, Donelaitis lived and formed under the influence of a German environment. It would seem that, due to that, the opportunity of returning to the native language provided by the seminar of Lithuanian Studies in the University of Königsberg was especially important for him<sup>6</sup>.

<sup>4</sup> Arnold's textbook highlighted the need to create poetry of the Christian content, while the issues of poetic expression were discussed with constant references to the Antiquity tradition. Incidentally, Arnoldt noted that „several years ago, Gustav Heräus[evidently meaning the work *Versuch einer neuen deutschen Reimart* by Heräus published in 1713 – Ž. S.] tried to put the German language on the feet of pentameter and hexameter, however, he did not have any followers, probably because it became clear that the said verse did not provide German poetry with any special advantages”. [D. H. Arnoldt], *Versuch einer Systematischen Anleitung zur Deutschen Poesie*, Königsberg 1732, p. 45.

<sup>5</sup> See: A. Schleicher, *Christian Donaleitis Litauische Dichtungen*, ed. by A. Schleicher, St. Petersburg 1865, p. 20.

<sup>6</sup> The fact that, in the years of his studies, Donelaitis attended a seminar of Lithuanian Studies was testified by Martin Ludwig Rhesa (1776–1840) in the foreword to the first edition of *The Seasons*. See: L. J. Rhesa, *Das Jahr in vier Gesängen, ein ländliches Epos aus dem Litthauischen des Christian Doneleitius, genannt Donalitiuis*, in

When after his studies Donelaitis was sent to work in parishes with a relatively large number of Lithuanian population, he had to learn to hear his own mother tongue anew, and partially also to learn its rural version anew<sup>7</sup>. A perfect ear of Donelaitis, that enabled him to hear and live in the sounds and themes of the world around him, was evidenced by his Lithuanian poetry, while the identification with the *būrai* (Lithuanian peasants of Lithuania Minor) and their dialect in his works „gave prominence not so much to the physical, horizontal socialness, but rather to the vertical, sacred community.”<sup>8</sup> Simultaneously, the choice of the Lithuanian language for his creation ensured the exclusivity of the creator: there was no other talent in the environment who would have thought that „creation in the Lithuanian language was worth his life.”<sup>9</sup> Meanwhile, Donelaitis, who perceived the divine origin of talent, appreciated the singular ability to sing in an inborn, unique, and special voice. The allegory for a God-rewarded artist of that kind was the nightingale described in *The Spring's Joys*.<sup>10</sup>

**Between modernity and conservatism.** Kristijonas Donelaitis studied at the University of Königsberg at the time when the tension between two groups of the academic staff, the supporters of Pietism and the proponents of the Orthodox Church, reached its highest point<sup>11</sup>. Moreover, in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century, Königsberg was reached by the ideas of the so-called radical Enlightenment which strongly shook the foundations of the traditional religion.<sup>12</sup> In all that confusion, Donelaitis tried to stay quiet and took a straight-out stance of a faith-postulating believer.<sup>13</sup>

*gleichem Versmaß ins Deutsche übertragen von D. L. J. Rhesa, Prof. d. Theol., Königsberg 1818, p. VIII.* As speculated by researcher on the history of the seminar Liucija Citavičiūtė, Donelaitis did not only attend the seminar of Lithuanian Studies, but also, as a student with a good knowledge of Lithuanian, he must have taught in it. See: L. Citavičiūtė, *Karaliaučiaus universiteto Lietuvių kalbos seminaras. Istorija ir reikšmė lietuvių kultūrai*, Vilnius 2004, pp. 207–208.

<sup>7</sup> Domas Kaunas, historian of the books of Prussian Lithuania, also argued that, upon returning to work in the Lithuanian parishes, Donelaitis had to learn his native language anew. See: Kaunas 2016, p. 65.

<sup>8</sup> M. Šidlauskas, *Donelaičio žodžio skalsa*, [in:] *Kristijono Donelaičio reikšmės*, ed. by M. Vaicekauskas, Vilnius 2016, p. 20.

<sup>9</sup> I. Lukšaitė, *Lietuvininkai, Kristijonas Donelaitis ir Lietuvos kultūros branda*, [in:] *Ibidem*, p. 45.

<sup>10</sup> Ž. Sidabraitė, *Iš menkų daiktų daugysk dyvai pasidaro, arba kaip menka tampa didžiu*, *Acta Historica Universitatis Klaipedensis*, vol. XXVI: *Kristijono Donelaičio epochos kultūrinės inovacijos*, Klaipėda 2013, pp. 34–35.

<sup>11</sup> For more details, see: K. Daugirdas, *Karaliaučiaus universiteto Teologijos fakultetas Donelaičio studijų metais*, (*Acta Historica Universitatis Klaipedensis*, vol. XXVI: *Kristijono Donelaičio epochos kultūrinės inovacijos*, Klaipėda 2013, pp. 55–64.

<sup>12</sup> For more details about the penetration of free-thinking ideas of the so-called radical Enlightenment into Prussia in the first half of the 18th century, see: J. Israel, *Democratic Enlightenment: philosophy, revolution, and human rights 1750–1790*, Oxford 2012, pp. 172–195.

<sup>13</sup> That is witnessed by his poem *Der Gott der Finsterniß* in German (acc to: K. Donelaitis, *Raštai*, ed. by: K. Korsakas, K. Doveika, L. Gineitis, J. Kabelka, K. Ulvydas, Vilnius 1977, p. 266):

Der Gott der Finsterniß, der abgefeimte Teufel,  
Erbauet gern den Thor durch eingehauchte Zweifel,  
Und dieser ranzt sogleich den Unflath in ein Buch;  
Zum Leyd der Redlichen, und seinem eignem Fluch.

A conservative rural community, unaffected by the city's atmosphere, could have seemed to him to be particularly favorable soil for his educational and saving mission. Būrai could be taught „as it was necessary” and be protected from harmful, profane new sciences. Donelaitis probably saw that as the meaning of his mission as a priest.

What did Donelaitis propose and what kind of a programme did he draft for his community of *Lietuvninkai* (Lithuanians of Lithuania Minor) in an intensely modernising world? Not to set foot out of the village, to patiently suffer serfdom, to maintain the hermeticity of the subsistence economy (to wear self-made bast shoes, home-woven and sewn clothes, and eat the usual food), not to learn languages, and not to have anything to do with colonists living in the neighborhood, i.e. to live a secluded honest life in order to preserve the primeval morals of the community as long as possible. Vytautas Kavolis, as he referred to Donelaitis' looking back at the past, said in the programme *Trajectories of Consciousness* that the poet „did not know anything good about the future – about modern culture”.<sup>14</sup> Indeed, all the Lithuanian works of Donelaitis were permeated by the melancholy of the presentiment of extinction: the traditional model of the Lithuanian community in the long run was destined to decline, change, and lose its sacred authenticity, i.e. to experience the „end of the world”. It was Dalia Dilytė who noticed that message, indirectly conveyed by the works of Donelaitis, and aptly compared the struggle of the *Lietuvninkai* for their identity to the sieged Troy.<sup>15</sup> As we know, the sieged Troy held out for more than a decade, yet it moved to eternity in the unmatched poems of Homer. Donelaitis deliberately embarked on creating a myth of a disappearing community.

**The intersections of creation and the life experience.** Donelaitis was intensely contemplating the relationship of the daily life with poetry, as testified by one of his surviving letters: „Should he (Virgil) live in our times as an enlightened man and a true Christian, how much his *Iliad* would change,<sup>16</sup> and in what sorrowful lamentations his *Bucolics* would sound, the gentle tones intermingling with the dissonant ones, as music scholars call them.”<sup>17</sup> On the one hand, Donelaitis apparently saw the possibility of linking Lithuanian poetry through hexameter to the

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Die Hölle freuet sich bey diesen Kindesnöthen,  
Und jauchzet, wenn sie sieht den Trost des Glaubens tödten,  
Drauf fährt die Pestilenz, mit der verdammten Schrift,  
Aus des Verlegers Hand in alle Welt wie Gift.

<sup>14</sup> V. Kavolis, *Sąmoningumo trajektorijos. Lietuvių kultūros modernėjimo aspektai*, Chicago 1986, pp. 134–136.

<sup>15</sup> D. Dilytė, *Kristijonas Donelaitis ir Antika*, Vilnius 2005, p. 210.

<sup>16</sup> „Und lebete er [Vergilijus] noch zu unserer Zeit als ein erleuchteter wahrer Christ; wie würde sich seine Iliade verändern, und seine Bucolica in tono molli mit untermischten Tonbrüchen, wie dir Musicverständigen sich ausdrücken, lementieren!“, quot.: K. Donelaitis, op. cit., p. 274. Leonas Gineitis had assumed that Donelaitis „was more closely related to the intermediate reality of life than to the literature of his epoch.” See: L. Gineitis, *Klasizmas ir lietuvių literatūra*, Vilnius 1972, pp. 161–162.

<sup>17</sup> Frhr. G. W. von Leibniz, *Theodicy. Essays on the Goodness of God, the Freedom of Man and the Origin of*

peaks of the classical poetry, on the other hand, he was very clear about the need not to imitate classics by creating idyllic rural images (as was customary in Europe at that time), but to respond to the changing reality of life by a living word.

Donelaitis perceived the dramatic character of his lifetime and searched for the matching expression, and he constructed his story with constant references to the narratives of the Old Testament about the Righteous Father of all and everyone. Based on the example of the most authoritative Antiquity writers, Donelaitis undertook the perpetuating of a little known and the most impoverished, ignorant, and socially deprived ethnic group of the Kingdom of Prussia – the *Lietuvininkai būrai* – in their own language, arranged in the forms of classical literature. Because there were no small or insignificant things in his world: everything came from, and was to return back to, God. From that point of view, Donelaitis depicted a model of a harmonious world. The world of the *būrai* created by him was to a large extent consistent with the conception formulated by Gottfried Wilhelm von Leibniz of the „best of all possible” harmonious world<sup>18</sup>.

Despite certain compositional inconsistencies, we see *The Seasons* as a homogeneous work, because the cultural universe of Donelaitis was homogeneous, and the poem was „permeated by a complex dialectics of the „divine ideal” and the „reality””. In all works of Donelaitis, one can feel „the poet’s passion to tell about the world as it should be in the light of God and as it was in the shadow of a moral fall.”<sup>19</sup>

Donelaitis’ relations with the great ones of the world were apparently not unambiguous. The poet–priest saw in life, and argued in his works, that the sheep obedient to God were much more frequently met in the lower social strata. Donelaitis, educator and moralist, independently reflected on each individual depicted situation of the *būrai* life. He also verified the authorities–issued instructions regulating the life of the *būrai* through the reality and divine dimensions. He agreed with some of the bans or demands (e.g., not to drink hard, not to steal, to be careful with fire, and to preserve forests), while he debated on other ones in a demonstrative manner.

**Bast-shoe and the *Lietuvininkas*.** As early as in 1724, the Prussian authorities issued a decree, also in Lithuanian, promoting crafts, therefore highly educative, by which the *būrai* were strictly prohibited from wearing bast–shoes (the disobedient were to be flogged). Instead of bast–shoes, every resident had to buy shoes made in Prussia.<sup>20</sup>

*Evil*, <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/17147/17147-h/17147-h.htm#page123>, pp. 128–129 (update 03.10.2017).

<sup>18</sup> V. Šeferis, *Kristijono Donelaičio „Metų“ kompozicijos problemos, Literatūra*, vol. 54(1), 2012, pp. 52–53; Idem, *Kristijono Donelaičio Metų rišlumas*, Vilnius 2014, p. 53.

<sup>19</sup> Idem, *Kristijono Donelaičio „Metų“ kompozicijos problemos*, pp. 52–53; Idem, *Kristijono Donelaičio Metų rišlumas*, p. 53.

<sup>20</sup> *Prūsijos valdžios gromatos, pagraudenimai ir apsakymai lietuviams valstiečiams* (see as: Gromatos), ed. by P. Pakarklis, Vilnius 1960, pp. 83–86.

Donelaitis undoubtedly knew the decree and, when working on *The Seasons*, deliberately confronted it. Jonas Kabelka found that Donelaitis had used the form *vyžos* ‘bast shoes’ 17 times in his works, *vyžėlė* ‘a small bast–shoe’ once, and the adjective *vyžotas* ‘shod in bast shoes’, five times;<sup>21</sup> moreover, the *būrai* of *The Seasons*, as is known, lived in the village of *Vyžlaukis* ‘the field of bast–shoes’. Wearing bast shoes was, one might say, a special characteristic of the *būrai*, distinguishing them from others: „We luckless bast–shoe Lithuanians ...” (*ST* 29)<sup>22</sup> („*Mes, lietuvininkai vyžoti, mes, nabagėliai...*“, *VD* 29)<sup>23</sup>, “We filthy wretched peasants in bast shoes” (*AB* 312) („*Mes, suskretę būrai, mes, vyžoti nabagai...*“, *RG* 312), „we wretches in bast shoes ...” (*AB*, 440) („... *mes, vyžoti nabagai...*“ *RG* 440). Once it was pronounced on behalf of the author (although the monologue belonged to Selmas): „Oh you poor folk, you poor folk in bast shoes....” (*WC*, 496) („*O jūs vargdienėliai, jūs vyžoti nabagai...*“, *ŽR* 496).

The insistent promotion of the bast shoe as part of the *Lietuvninkai* identity was both socially provocative and simultaneously related to the deep–rooted issues of the Lithuanian worldview. The bast shoe was positioned as a symbol of the identity of the ethnic group: that was a kind of footwear made with the hands of the *būrai* themselves, moreover, recognized and appreciated by other nationals. The close link of the *Lietuvninkai* with the bast shoe, and simultaneously its „firm endurance” and functionality, was testified by the text of German author Teodor Lepner,<sup>24</sup> which focused on the bast shoe and distinguished it from among other items of the *Lietuvninkai* clothing: „Now I will talk about the bast shoe: it is made from the torn off bark of lime trees that they call *plaušas* [*Plauszius*](bast), from the word *pleszti*, „plėšti” (to tear off), as the bast has to be torn off the tree. They can weave the bast very neatly, like a basket, and tie it with thin cords or straps to their feet, tightly wrapped up in foot–cloths, and the bast shoes keep tight and are very comfortable to walk in, and also keep the feet safe from cold and dirt. [...] Every Lithuanian, even small boys, can make this handicraft item, the Lithuanian shoe called a bast shoe [*Pareskai*]. [...] It is, therefore, rightly said that His Highness Kurfürst of Brandenburg rules a land inhabited solely by shoemakers. And that footwear is very convenient, it costs little or nothing at all, while protecting them from the cold and providing heat. It is good

<sup>21</sup> J. Kabelka, *Kristijono Donelaičio raštų leksika*, Vilnius 1964, p. 261.

<sup>22</sup> Here and afterwards, *The Seasons* (with following abbreviations: *SJ* – *Spring Joys*, *ST* – *Summer Toil*, *AB* – *Autumn Boons*, *WC* – *Winter Cares*), are quoted by indicating the part and the line number after: K. Donelaitis, *The Seasons*, translated by Peter Tempest, Vilnius 1985.

<sup>23</sup> Here and afterwards, „*Metai“ ir pasakėčios* (with following abbreviations: *PL* – *Pavasario linksmybės*, *VD* – *Vasaros darbai*, *RG* – *Rudenio gėrybės*, *ŽR* – *Žiemos rūpesčiai*), are quoted by indicating the part and the line number after: K. Donelaitis, „*Metai“ ir pasakėčios*, Vilnius 1994.

<sup>24</sup> Theodor Lepner (1633–1691) in 1655 was appointed as the first German and Lithuanian priest of the Budwethen parish. There in 1690 he wrote a book *Prūsų lietuvis* (*Der Preusche Littau*) on the lifestyle and customs of Prussian Lithuanians. It was published as late as in 1744. Lepner’s book was apparently known to Donelaitis.

to wear, and people wearing it do not stumble, as I happened to see in my youth in Denmark, in Falster, where it's hard for poor people to walk in wooden carved clogs. However, our Lithuanians also have top-boots and shoes made for them by a shoemaker. Yet they save them very much.”<sup>25</sup>

As we see, Lepner, a non-sentimental foreigner, testified that the bast shoes of *Lietuvninkai* were comfortable, functional, and cheap footwear, the footwear which has grown together with the soul of the *Lietuvninkas*. The bast shoe was made from a sacred to Lithuanians lime tree, a „soft” tree growing close to their households, to their homes (lime trees usually grew in yards, the lime blossom was healing, bees were buzzing in them, many household items were made by Lithuanians from the lime tree, ultimately, in Lithuanian folk songs, daughters were often called „young lime trees”, etc.).

When referring to *Lietuvninkai būrai* as „wretches in bast shoes”, Donelaitis simultaneously as if testified to the fragility of that community doomed to extinction, just as the traditional way of life was doomed to wither away in the draughts of the new life and changes. The daunting ghost of the secularized, capitalist/consumer life was already standing at the gate of the *Lietuvninkai* yard.

Thus, the skillfully made bast shoes in Donelaitis' texts were not merely an item of the *Lietuvninkai* clothing, a mark of their identity, but also part of the disappearing authentic world. Not for nothing in *The Seasons* of Donelaitis, an increasingly popular myth of success of the Enlighteners was set off against the sad life story of Didvyžys (the name of Krizas in the first version of *The Seasons*).<sup>26</sup> The life story of Krizas (Didvyžys) in *The Seasons* presented a component of Donelaitis' melancholic debate with the epoch of Enlightenment. Among other things, it was a pretext for the reconsideration of the issue of begging.

**The physics and metaphysics of begging.** Begging was strictly prohibited by the Prussian authorities, and it was struggled against by means of severe sanctions, as well as by organizing the structures of social support and by obligating communities.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>25</sup> „Ich komme nun auf ihre Schue, diese sind von gerissenen Rinden der lindenen Bäume, welche sie *Plaužius* nennen von *pležti* reißen, weil der Bast von den Linden muß gerissen werden; Diesen Bast wissen sie artig wie die Körbe zusammen zu flechten auch mit schmalen Strängen oder Riemen auf ihre mit Tüchern dicht bewunden Füße an den Beinen zubefestigen, daß sie gar woll halten, bequem zum gehen sind, auch vor den Frost und Koth sie woll bewahren. [...] Dieses Handwerck, solche Littausche Schue, welcher Nahme *Perejkai* ist, kann ein Jedweder Littau, ja auch die Junge Knaben [...] Und zwar es ist vor Sie eine gar bequeme Tracht, welche ihnen wenig oder auch gar kein Geld kostert, und dennoch die Füße in der stärcksten Kälte vor den Frost wolbewahren und warm halten kann. Sie sind auch bequem zum gehen, und geben darin keine Hinderniß, wie ich in der Jugend in Dennmarck in der Falster gesehen, daß den armen Pauers–Leuthen ihre auß Holtz gemachte und außgehöbelte Schlorren Beschwerde und Hindernuß verursachen. Doch haben unsere Littauer auch Schue und Stieffel, welche ihnen ein Schuster nähert. Allein diese werden sehr beschonet, die *Parefzken* müßen am meisten her halten...” – quot.: T. Lepner, *Der Preusche Littau*, ed. by V. Gerulaitienė, Vilnius 2011, pp. 79–80.

<sup>26</sup> Due to that, it is particularly difficult to agree with Darius Kuolys about *The Seasons* being „a text of a political nature”. D. Kuolys, *Apie Kristijono Donelaičio Metus*, [in:] *Kristijonas Donelaitis Metai*, ed. by: G. Vaškelis, Vilnius 2013, p. 16.

<sup>27</sup> The surviving Lithuanian version of the Decree of 28 April 1748, which repeated a number of others previously issued on the subject, sounded very sternly. Beggars were absolutely prohibited to publicly collect alms.

The lexeme *ubagas* ‘beggar’ was used in Donelaitis’ works 17, and a collocation *ubagais eiti* ‘to go begging’, another 6 times.<sup>28</sup> True, the noun „beggar” in Donelaitis’ work did not necessarily mean a beggar in the direct sense of the word; it could also mean a poor, hard-working man, and sometimes just *būras*. However, the metaphysical theme of begging was the most striking one in *The Seasons*. The aforementioned generous Krizas in the poem of Donelaitis was indirectly correlated with the biblical Job. In childhood, Krizas was collecting alms with his mother. As he grew up and began to serve, he distinguished himself by extraordinary cleverness and hard work, and later he became well off and an owner of a large farm. In *The Autumn Boons*, in his daughter’s wedding, Krizas was generously entertaining every guest. However, in *The Winter Cares* we learn that

...the villainous Dočys

Burned down good Krizas’ home and barns (WC 255–256)<sup>29</sup>

and that he again was walking collecting alms. The unexplainable fate of God’s righteous people: a path from the abundance and honorable position to complete poverty and neglect. By the story of Krizas, Donelaitis seemed to verify the myth of deserved earthly success, particularly popular in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>30</sup> Krizas created his own welfare through his own cleverness and hard work (the state under an enlightened monarch’s rule made it possible for one to become well-off), however, he lost everything in one night, and neither he nor the state-created social system could change anything. There was a divine plan and His blessing, or not blessing, „hand” (WC 672). In *The Spring Joys*, Lauras warned Kasparas’ servant Milkus who put on airs:

„Shut up, young fool!

Soon maybe you’ll have to resume your stride

And, if God punishes you, beg and cry.” (SJ 291–293)<sup>31</sup>

Peasant communities had to form their own treasuries to give beggars financial aid. Six months after the Decree had been announced the King’s counsellors had to check whether such treasuries existed everywhere. In case no treasury was found, relevant officials were to be punished due to the violation of the royal law. The local authorities had to report to the counsellors within a six-week period the number of beggars in certain places and whether all the beggars could be sustained by the local treasuries. The local authorities were promised support from the centre in case the local treasury was not able to support all the beggars. The parents whose children were begging were to be punished. Moreover, without the consent of the King, no official or priest could issue a permit to an individual to beg, even if his property had been destroyed by the fire. Both the beggar catchers and all the residents were promised rewards for every beggar, brought to the office of the local authority. See: Gromatos, pp. 191–198.

<sup>28</sup> J. Kabelka, op. cit., 243–244.

<sup>29</sup> „... mūsų mylimą Krizą

Pernai neprietelius Dočys susvilio visą“: Kristijonas Donelaitis, Žiemos rūpesčiai, [in:] „Metai“ ir pa-sakėčios, Vilnius 1994 (see as: ŽR), verses: 255–256.

<sup>30</sup> Let us remember *Candide* by Voltaire, published in 1759, which Donelaitis was likely to have read.

<sup>31</sup> Tič tiktai, ponat! mažu vėl teks žingine žengti,

Ir, kad Dievas koravos, dar verkdams ubagais eisi. (PL 292–293)

Fire as the most common cause of destroying people's welfare and making them go begging was perceived by Donelaitis in *The Seasons* in a dual way. He identified as if „two-level” causes of fire: the direct ones, related to the household issues (uncleaned chimneys, careless wood drying on the stove, smoking on the hay (in that way, Dočys burnt down the house of Krizas), or shooting in the yard (Plaučiūnas' servant Durakas, ordered by his master to shoot crows, set his neighbours' homesteads on fire), and the metaphysical ones, i.e. human sins. The great Königsberg, as retold in *The Seasons*, burned twice due to its people's promiscuity and grave sins (WC 241), therefore Pričkus, having set out the whole „fire prevention programme” and remembering the fate of Krizas, summarized:

God help us, what befell him on that night

Could happen any day to one of us

If, as some Germans do, we shun the Lord

And don't renounce deception, theft and fraud. (WC 275–278)<sup>32</sup>

Begging acquired a metaphysical meaning of unpredictable fate and of eternal earthly anxiety in the part of *The Autumn Boons*, in a phantasmagoric episode of Dočys' threshing. During the threshing, each year Dočys felled woods, ruined hills, and tore down houses... Apparently, there, as often happened in Donelaitis' works, the realism of the story cracked, and the action was transferred to another, mythical reality, mythical time, and mythical repetition: that happened every year. The destructions caused by the sounds of Dočys' threshing turned numbers of *būrai* into homeless beggars (AB 673–675).

The wretches straying in the cold autumn fields were reminiscent of the situation of the first people after the fall: they were in desperation after the loss of a safe existence, anxious, and uncertain. An eternal theme of a suffering from anxiety human wanderer emerged. The typical of Donelaitis agrarian settled way of life and its clarity cracked and were replaced by the draught of anxiety: man was tossed around and had no place to lay his head. The bitterness of divine fate as the autumn chill permeated the bones. The reason for that, incomprehensible to human mind and having no logical explanation, was not clear to him. That was a metaphor for the *Lietuvninkai būrai*, a home losing, driven away and vanishing community.

At the end of this episode, Donelaitis smiled a bitter smile: „good farmers”, having lost their homes, took their frustrations and grief over the allegedly Dočys-caused harm to the „high judges” in Königsberg (AB 676–677). We see the apparent discrepancy between realities – the mythical and the earthly: the appeal to the

<sup>32</sup> Nės kas naktyj jam, žėlėk Dieve! pasidarė,  
Tai mums per pietus kasdien dar gal nusiduoti,  
Kad mes, kaip tūls vokiėtis, prastodami Dievą,  
Šelmystes padaryt, klastuot ir vogt nesiliausim“ (ŽR, verses: 276–278)

earthly court against fate can hardly be expected to bring any result. Thus, the farm owners in *The Seasons* by Donelaitis „got no satisfaction from the court” (AB 678) („provos vertos kaip reik nesulaukė“, RG 678). Still, Donelaitis’ bitterness about the immorality of his lifetime was so great as to make it possible to return to the specific time and to painfully summarise:

We know how with a smile this age will tread,  
Merciful God, upon the tears we shed. (AB 679–680)<sup>33</sup>

As proved by the surviving documents of Donelaitis, the poet had been more than once painfully disappointed both with the morals of the ruling elite and the justice of the courts. The last two lines sounded as the reproach to his own epoch, relying solely on reason, that trusted merely rational orders, instructions, court sentences, etc., while forgetting about another, stronger and all-governing reality, however, incomprehensible to human mind. Therefore, one should not forget about humility, sympathy, or support in one’s daily practice. When one’s neighbour suffered a blow of divine fate, it was necessary to share his pain. In such cases, a human being was helpless to change things; all he could do was to feel solidarity with a sufferer. A human being, a *būras*, a prisoner of the time of an imperfect world had no other choice than to obey the fate designated by the divine hand. In the poem, man was a „wretch”, a „poor wretch”, an orphan”, a „sinful orphan”, weak, and never great, just moral (“viežlybas”). Thus, despite the negligibility of the earthly existence and limitations in view of God’s omnipotence, one had to be God-fearing, honourable, and virtuous, i.e. be guided by other values than of those of the earthly world.

**Intersection of temporality and eternity.** A spinning circle of life invited the *būrai* to forget the sorrows and find comfort in the family and the barns. The old people could tell the „beardless foolish youth” (WC 583) that the awaiting circle of misery was going to spin as fast for them as it did for their parents. The uniquely transformed so-called *dance macabre* in *The Summer Toil* was associated with a dynamic episode of haymaking: the place of each fallen leave of grass was taken by a new one; with one life gone, no emptiness was left, it was filled with a new life. Ultimately, true values were to be restored in eternity, and the lives of the small *būrai* were to be exalted by merit:

God, as he promised, shall each case review  
And shall to each man give requital due. (WC 515–516)<sup>34</sup>

The personal time of man in *The Seasons* was included in the common circle of natural life. The distance necessary for a myth was created through the texts of the

<sup>33</sup> Žinom, juk, žėlėk Dieve! kaip mūsų gadynė  
Ašaras išverktas po kojų mydama šypsos. (RG 679–680)

<sup>34</sup> Dievs kiekvieną kartą ras, kaip yr pažadėjęs,

Old Testament: Book of Genesis, Book of Ecclesiastes, Psalms of David, Book of Job, Book of Sirach, etc. In Christian writing, the religious worldview was predominantly expressed through the reflection on God's Son Christ, the merciful Redeemer. In the case of Donelaitis, it was different: the faith of the *būrai* was based rather on the feeling of the parental care of the omniscient and omnipotent God the Father (in *The Seasons*, Christ was mentioned only once: line 862 of *The Autumn Boons*, in the context of the end of the world). For the act of myth creation, the wrathful communality must have suited better than the individuality of Christianity or the tearful experience of Christ's suffering, which, incidentally, was typical of the then popular pietist hymn. Donelaitis' orientation towards communality was also confirmed by the frequency of use of the personal pronouns *I* and *we*: the plural form appeared in the text almost three times more frequently than the singular one.<sup>35</sup>

Donelaitis felt, and was able to recreate, the correspondence between the almost primeval existence of the *būrai* and their rich language. He aimed, and was perhaps in a hurry, at perpetuating the harmony of the daily existence, which was disappearing before his very eyes, when almost everything that was needed was created, made with people's own hands and when people lived in a rhythm dictated by nature and in harmony with it. Following the example of the most authoritative Antiquity authors, Donelaitis undertook the task of perpetuating a little known and the most impoverished, ignorant, and socially deprived ethnic group in the Kingdom of Prussia – the *Lietuvninkai būrai* – through their own word, arranged in the forms of classical literature. He undertook the task and succeeded. Donelaitis created for a number of years, he willingly shared the outcomes with his friends in meetings and some of the outcomes, with the *Lietuvninkai* peasants during the sermons: primarily, as in the case of the Antiquity poets, the sharing was done not in writing, but with the living word, by reciting.

#### Žavinta Sidabraitė, *Christian Donelaitis – litewski Homer?*

##### Streszczenie

Decyzja Donelaitisa o tym by pisać w języku litewskim była dobrze przemyślana. Dojrzewająca już od XVIII wieku idea, jakoby język litewski miał swoje źródła w starożytnej Grecji, mogła ośmielić go do zadania sobie trudu podjęcia eksperymentu tworzenia poezji w języku litewskim, dorównującej szlachetnym, antycznym dziełom Hellenów i biorąc za wzór twórczość Homera inspirowała ku temu, by spisać pierwsze, litewskie narodowe poematy. Podejmując się tworzenia literackiego języka litewskiego, Donelaitis zwracał uwagę nie tylko na jego konstrukcję, ale także na sposób wypowiedzi – w taki sposób, by narracja odzwierciedlała język litewskich chłopów, potoczny i niewyszukany. Decyzja ta, oryginalna w kontekście literatury europejskiej, mogła być podyktowana specyfiką ówczesnego języka litewskiego. Podział na język pisany i mówiony jeszcze nie był zbyt wyraźny, co implikowało konieczność tworzenia literatury w oparciu o dobrany odpowiednio materiał leksykalny bazujący

Ir kožnam atlygys, kaip jis yr nusipelnęs. (ŽR 515–516)

<sup>35</sup> J. Kabelka, op. cit, pp. 53–54.

na mowie litewskich wieśniaków. Stawiało to Donelaitisa, jako twórcę, w ekskluzywnej sytuacji. Nie miał on równego sobie w owym czasie, który sam byłby w stanie poświęcić życie dla twórczości w języku litewskim. Podążając za przykładem najznamienitszych autorów starożytności, Donelaitis podjął się zadania utrwalenia prostego języka litewskich chłopów poprzez sprowadzenie go do formy klasycznej literatury. Jak się okazuje – z sukcesem.

Tłumaczenie Seweryn Szczepański

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#### Zusammenfassung

Die Entscheidung von Donelaitis, in litauischer Sprache zu schreiben, war sehr gut überlegt. Die seit dem 18. Jh. reifende Idee, Litauisch hätte seine Quellen im antiken Griechenland gehabt, dürfte ihn zum Experiment bewegt haben, litauische Gedichte zu schreiben, die mit den erhabenen antiken Werken der Hellenen gleich gesetzt werden konnten. Homers Vorbild inspirierte ihn, die ersten litauischen Nationaldichtungen niederzuschreiben. Im Prozess des Schaffens der litauischen Literatursprache lenkte Donelaitis seine Aufmerksamkeit nicht nur auf ihre Struktur, sondern auch auf ihre Ausdrucksweise – die Erzählstruktur sollte die Sprache der litauischen Bauern, eine einfache Alltagssprache, widerspiegeln. Diese im europäischen Kontext originelle Entscheidung konnte durch die Spezifik der damaligen litauischen Sprache bedingt werden. Die Teilung in die geschriebene und gesprochene Sprache war damals noch nicht deutlich, was eine Notwendigkeit implizierte, die Literatur auf der Grundlage des ausgewählten Wortschatzes der litauischen Bauern zu schaffen. Das verschaffte Donelaitis als Autor eine hervorragende Stellung. Es gab keinen anderen, der sich mit ihm messen konnte, der sein Leben allein dem Schaffen in litauischer Sprache widmen konnte. Dem Beispiel der hervorragendsten Autoren des Altertums folgend, hielt Donelaitis die einfache Sprache der litauischen Bauern in der Form der klassischen Literatur fest. Darin liegt sein Erfolg.

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