

# THE GREAT WAR IN LITHUANIAN LITERATURE AND MEMOIRS

Eugenijus Žmuida

## ABSTRACT

Works of fiction and memoirs relating to the First World War written in the Lithuanian language or by Lithuanian authors have so far not been a preoccupation of Lithuanian literary scholars. Due to the breadth of the topic, the analysis in this article is limited to the most important works of fiction and witnesses' memories of the Great War. The first fictional and documentary works analysed in the article were written during the war itself, the last at the beginning of the Second World War. There is quite a large and very varied (from the point of view of artistic quality) amount of this kind of literature. Using methods of narratology and comparison, the author sets out to analyse the main themes, plots and possible influences, while placing the writings in the history of Lithuanian literature.

KEY WORDS: First World War, Lithuanian literature, military fiction, war memoirs.

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## ANOTACIJA

Lietuvos autorių ir / ar lietuvių kalba sukurta grožinė literatūra bei memuarai, susiję su Pirmuoju pasauliniu karu, iki šiol buvo likę anapus lietuvių literatūros tyrinėtojų akiračio. Dėl temos platumo šiame straipsnyje apsiribojama tik svarbiausiais lietuvių grožinės literatūros kūriniais ir liudininkų atsiminimais, susijusiais su Didžiuoju karu. Pirmieji grožiniai ir dokumentiniai kūriniai, nagrinėjami straipsnyje, buvo parašyti dar karo metais, o paskutiniai – jau prasidėjus Antrajam pasauliniam karui. Šios literatūros kiekis gana didelis, meninės kokybės požiūriu ji yra nepaprastai įvairi. Taikydamas naratologijos ir lyginamąjį metodus, autorius kelia tikslą atskleisti pagrindines temas, siužetus ir galimus poveikius, kartu nagrinėdamas šių kūrinių menines savybes ir aiškindamasis jų svarbą Lietuvos literatūros istorijoje.

PAGRINDINIAI ŽODŽIAI: Pirmasis pasaulinis karas, lietuvių literatūra, karo grožinė literatūra, karo atsiminimai.

Eugenijus Žmuida, dr., research fellow, Institute of Lithuanian Literature and Folklore, Department of Modern Literature, Antakalnio g. 6, LT-10308 Vilnius, Lithuania. E-mail: eugen.zmuida@gmail.com.

## Foreword

Until now, very little attention has been paid to the theme of the First World War in the history of Lithuanian literature. Why has this subject missed scholars' attention? There are two clear reasons. The first is that for many Lithuanian soldiers and politicians, the struggle during the First World War turned into a subsequent struggle for independence, where among others, the enemies were the Bolsheviks. Therefore, the theme was not allowed in the Soviet period (all publications from the period 1918 to 1940 were kept in special funds), and then almost forgotten. The new occupation in 1940, the mass deportations in 1941, and the beginning of the Second World War, and then the struggle to rebuild independence after the beginning of the Second World War, and the later deportations, the mass exodus of the Lithuanians to countries of the West: all these traumatic events produced massive literature which overshadowed fiction and memoirs from the First World War. Only a few fictional works about the First World War by classic writers, such as Antanas Žukauskas Vienuolis, Juozas Tumas Vaižgantas, Gabrielė Petkevičaitė-Bitė and Ieva Simonaitytė, were known to educated people.

The purpose of this article is to show the importance of First World War stories in Lithuanian literature, to analyse the style of writing, and to discuss the quality of this literature and memoirs. Therefore, I try to pay attention to important literary works, without which all of Lithuanian literature from the first half of the 20th century would be poorer.

## The war and literature: the historical and cultural background

War and literature have always been close: we often count European literature as starting from Homer's *Iliad*, an impressive depiction of a broad (it lasted ten years, according to Homer) and enormous clash between many extremes. The masterpiece attributed to Homer inspired many authors, who tried to portray scenes in human lives during war and peace. Leo Tolstoy, for example, in his epic novel *War and Peace* (1869), drew parallels between Helena, one of the principal characters in the novel, and a central beauty at the Russian court, and Agamemnon's raped wife Elena. Tolstoy's novel, which is one of the best examples of literature on war, was also a parody of war literature: we cannot imagine a serious war without Helena, says Tolstoy by this parallel.<sup>1</sup> No doubt, the Russian 'golden' prose of the second half of the 19th century had a huge impact on European literature, including, of course, Lithuanian literature, which at the end of the 19th century had just started a continuous process of development. Before

<sup>1</sup> In turn, Tolstoy's great novel was also parodied in First World War novels, such as Jaroslav Hašek's *The Good Soldier Švejk*.

the beginning of the First World War, there were some examples of writing on war (the Russo-Japanese War of 1904–1905). At least two authors whose works are already included in the canon of Lithuanian literature should be mentioned: the novel *Blūdas* (The Tumble) by the priest Julijonas Lindė-Dobilas (1872–1934),<sup>2</sup> and the short story by Marija Pečkauskaitė (ps. Šatrijos Ragana, 1877–1930) *Sulaukė* (She had Attained).<sup>3</sup> Both works explore the inner experience of protagonists who do not take part in the events of the war, but whose minds are quite disturbed by the uncertainty and fear.

At the beginning of the First World War, Lithuania was still a country under Russian imperial rule (since 1795), and for many Europeans it was an almost forgotten and unknown land. Local Lithuanian speakers, distinguishing themselves clearly from Russians and other national groups, were almost indifferent as to who was going to win the war. Thousands of Lithuanians were called up and forced to fight on the Russian side, and some for the Germans (mostly citizens of Prussian Lithuania, which belonged to East Prussia). Therefore, in the turbulent years of 1914 to 1918, many Lithuanians fought each other on different sides.<sup>4</sup> The February revolution and the Bolshevik revolution in October 1917, as well as subsequent civil war inside Russia had crucial impact on Lithuania, as it weakened oppression, and many nations in the western parts of the former Imperial Russia declared their independence. Thousands of soldiers from the Russian army, seeing themselves as Lithuanians, joined the national army which had just been organised, and fought for their country against various different enemies alongside new volunteers.

Despite the fact that Lithuanian literature had just become a permanent process and had only had a short time to achieve artistic quality, the growth of Lithuanian culture at the beginning of the 20th century was astonishing. In the first two decades of the 20th century, several talented young authors made their debut (Vincas Krėvė-Mickevičius, Vincas Mykolaitis-Putinas, Juozas Tumas Vaižgantas, Ignas Šeinius, Wilhelm Storosta Vydūnas, Liudas Gira, Julius Janonis, and others), whose names belong to the 'golden' list. Therefore, by this time, Lithuanian literature was able to suitably reflect the war and the struggles for independence. Also, we should point out that most fictional works dealing with the First World War were written in the 1930s, when there was a great boom in novel writing. As we can see, this process almost coincided with Western literature, where the most popular novels about the First World War were written at the turn of the 1920s and 1930s.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>2</sup> [LINDĖ, Julijonas] DOBILAS, J. *Bludas arba Lietuva buvusios Rusijos revoliucijos mete: romanas*. Tilžė, 1912.

<sup>3</sup> [PEČKAUSKAITĖ, Marija] ŠATRIJOS RAGANA. *Iš daktaro pasakojimu. Rudens diena. Sulauke*. Shenandoah, PA, 1907.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. JOKUBAUSKAS, Vytautas. *Didysis karas: diskursai ir atminimo praktika tarpukario Lietuvoje*. *Lituanistica*, 2016, t. 62, nr. 4 (106), p. 241–242.

<sup>5</sup> *The Case of Sergeant Grisha* (1927) by Arnold Zweig, *The War* (1928) by Ludwig Renn, *All Quiet on the Western Front* (1929) by Erich Maria Remarque, *Death of a Hero* (1929) by Richard Aldington, *A Farewell to Arms* (1929) by Ernest Hemingway, *Journey to the End of the Night* (1932) by Louis-Ferdinand Céline, and others.

## The beginning of the war and fictional works about war

Reading Lithuanian novels, dramas, short stories and memoirs about the First World War, we can see clearly two different types of beginning used by the authors. We might call them original and schematic. Let us start with the first.

Although Germany declared war against Russia on 1 August 1914, and no military action took place at the time in Lithuania, Juozas Tumas Vaižgantas (1869–1933), an active publisher who was starting out as a writer, created one of the most impressive visions of the coming war, called *Karo Slibinas* (The Dragon of War).<sup>6</sup> In it, he describes the Dragon of War as a mythical monster, which from time to time crawls out of the depths of the oceans and out of the darkest recesses of man's heart, and eats man's bodies: the more it eats the hungrier it becomes, its body grows, and its heads multiply, devouring thousands of soldiers and entire peaceful nations. Many kings and saints have fought against it over the centuries, but no one could defeat it; only a miracle can halt its terrible bloody work. This allegorical vision, written in blank verse and later used as the beginning for his book of short stories *Karo vaizdai* (Views of War),<sup>7</sup> is interesting for predicting the oncoming disaster, and for the folksy nature of the image, despite the fact that the writer was a Catholic priest.<sup>8</sup> The best short story in the book is *Rimai ir Nerimai* (the names of two families).<sup>9</sup> The story has a humorous beginning (as the title shows): two neighbouring families constantly compete to have more children, more animals, and so on. But the war begins, and sons from both families are called up, serve in the same regiment, eat the same food, and even write one letter to their relatives. The deaths of both sons on the same day, and the joint funeral, join the families forever.

We also find an allegorical, and therefore unusual, depiction of war in the drama *Pasaulio gaisras* (World Fire, written in 1922 and published six years later<sup>10</sup>) by Vydūnas (Wilhelm Storosta, 1868–1953), a philosopher from Prussian Lithuania (East Prussia), who was influenced by Hindu mythology, which he found reflected in the Lithuanian world-view. In the foreword to his play, Vydūnas announced that he based it on a real event, but in the work, all the heroes and events have a symbolic meaning. The main hero of the tragedy is a woman, Magė, who stays at home when occupying forces enter the country, in order to protect the home and all the human values it symbolises. The peaceful spiritual strength that arises from womanhood and motherhood is

<sup>6</sup> TUMAS, J[uožas]. *Karo Slibinas. Vairas*, 1914-08-30, nr. 14, p. 3–4.

<sup>7</sup> TUMAS-VAIŠGANTAS, Juozas. *Karo Vaizdai. Karo Slibinas. Antimilitarininkas. Rimai ir Nerimai. Ponas Direktorius. Eik su velniais obuoliauti... Pabėgėliai*. Ryga, 1915.

<sup>8</sup> It should be pointed out that the writer's pseudonym Vaižgantas is taken from Lithuanian mythology.

<sup>9</sup> For the first publication, see [TUMAS, Juozas] VAIŠGANTAS. *Rimai ir Nerimai. Vairas*, 1914-11-15, nr. 15, p. 5–7.

<sup>10</sup> [STOROSTA, Vilius] VĪDŪNAS. *Pasaulio gaisras. Penkių veiksnių Tragaidė su leiga ir Išeiga*. Tiltzė, 1928.

contrasted with the brutal mechanical force that manhood embodies. At the end of the drama, Magė burns herself, protesting and demonstrating for spiritual freedom.<sup>11</sup>

The novel *Keturi Angelai* (Four Angels) by Jurgis F. Jonaitis (1880–1963)<sup>12</sup> also has a distinctive beginning. Two Lithuanian-born Americans<sup>13</sup> talk about the First World War, when they fought in Europe, and one of them names four Angels, so important at the front: a military chaplain, a doctor, a Red Cross nurse, and a nun.

We see an unusual picture at the beginning of the story in the novel *Senos pilies paslaptis* (Mystery of an Old Castle) by Adomas Bytautas (1891–1982).<sup>14</sup> The action takes place in eastern Austria, where a regiment of the Russian army is stationed, and the doctor Rymantas, the protagonist of the novel, sees an abandoned castle in the mist where the main events of the novel take place.

The schematic beginning is typical of works of fiction where the action begins in Lithuania. It is presented as a stark contrast with the idyllic and peaceful rural life of the Christian peasants, and the brutal and shocking chaos that military forces bring to this summery dreamlike life: the men are called up, all the horses are taken, women and children cry, crops are trampled, and nothing is certain any more. Very often, descriptions of dark presumptions, forebodings, bad dreams and beliefs that arise from the subconscious of country people before big events follow this kind of beginning. As a contrast, the diary written by a witness of the war, Gabrielė Petkevičaitė-Bitė (1861–1943), should be mentioned, which begins with the recollection of the fact that for a long time she could not believe the war was coming.

## Main themes, constructions of plots, writing style and quality

### *Literature during the war*

There are several important approaches to discussing First World War fiction. One of them divides what was written during the war from what was written several years afterwards. This point of view distinguishes a level of quality: only very talented authors were able to write immediately and competently (Vienuolis, Vaižgantas, Maironis).

<sup>11</sup> As Rimvydas Šilbajoris noted, fire has a double meaning in drama: it can be perceived as a sacrifice, and as the chaos of war; see ŠILBAJORIS, Rimvydas. *Netekties ženklai: lietuvių literatūra namuose ir svetur*. Vilnius, 1992, p. 75.

<sup>12</sup> JONAITIS, J[urgis] F. *Keturi angelai. Pasakojimai iš Didžiojo Karo meto*. Kaunas, 1927.

<sup>13</sup> Emigration from Lithuania to the USA was very high in the period between the 1863 uprising and the First World War. According to documents from Lithuanian-American organisations now held in the Lithuanian Central State Archives, there were 'more than 800,000 Lithuanian immigrants' in the USA before the First World War, wrote Abelis Stražas in STRAŽAS, A. S. From Auszra to the Great War. The Emergence of the Lithuanian Nation. *Lituanus*, 1996, vol. 42, no. 4, p. 58.

<sup>14</sup> BYTAUTAS, Adomas. *Senos pilies paslaptis: romanas*. Kaunas, 1937.

The most talented, young, but already skilful writer was Antanas Žukauskas Vienuolis (1882–1957), a master of the short story,<sup>15</sup> who published three stories during the war: *Karas*, subsequently called *Didysis karas* (The Great War),<sup>16</sup> *Mirtinai sužeistas* (Mortally Wounded),<sup>17</sup> and *Karžygys* (The Hero).<sup>18</sup> All the stories are very different in their plots, but what is common to them is the concentration on one person's experience, and their psychological authenticity.

The first short story describes the confusion of an ordinary peasant who hears the news of the war one morning, and is called up the same day, leaves the family and the structured working day, and goes nowhere, together with other shocked men, like a flock of animals, seeing the meaningless chaos around them.

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The second story is about a student who is writing his doctoral thesis 'The Ideals of Mankind'. As an able student, he gets a rare opportunity to write it in Germany, the centre of philosophical thought. He is absolutely happy until one day when a librarian comes in with a policeman, and points out the student, saying '*Dieser russisch*' (This is a Russian). After several months of imprisonment, the student returns home, but his mind is mortally wounded: he ends up in hospital with a split personality. In this short story by Vienuolis, we can see the possible influence of Fyodor Dostoevsky's novel *The Brothers Karamazov*, where Dmitri argues existential questions in two different voices.

The third story 'The Hero' is about a Lithuanian officer called up into the Russian army. He receives bad orders from headquarters on the front line, and has to carry them out, knowing that he is sending soldiers to a meaningless death. We can find similar points in Tolstoy's *Sevastopol Sketches* and *War and Peace*.

Juozas Tumas-Vaižgantas published the book *Karo vaizdai* (Views of War), which included the already-discussed stories 'The Dragon of War' and 'Rimai ir Nerimai' (1914). Written in a tragi-comic style typical of this witty author, the latter story is included in the canon of Lithuanian literature.<sup>19</sup>

Jonas Mačiulis Maironis (1862–1932), who achieved huge recognition as the first national poet even in the years of the press ban, stayed in Lithuania during the First World War (he was rector of a Catholic seminary), and wrote the poem *Mūsų vargai* (Our Troubles),<sup>20</sup> his only work of that genre on the theme of the First World War. Maironis regarded poetry as an important genre, and wrote many poems. They all

<sup>15</sup> Scholars often stress the influence of Anton Chekhov and Guy de Maupassant on Vienuolis.

<sup>16</sup> [ŽUKAUSKAS] VIENUOLIS, A[ntanas]. *Karas*. *Lietuvos žinios*, 1914-12-24 (1915-01-06), nr. 196, p. 3–6.

<sup>17</sup> [ŽUKAUSKAS] VIENUOLIS, A[ntanas]. *Mirtinai sužeistas*. *Lietuvos žinios*, 1915-03-20 (04-20), nr. 33, p. 5–6.

<sup>18</sup> [ŽUKAUSKAS] VIENUOLIS, A[ntanas]. *Karžygys*. *Vytis: jaunimo kalendorius 1919*. I metai. Red. Liūdas GIRA. Vilnius, [1918], p. 34–44.

<sup>19</sup> The didactic tradition of the 19th century by mostly writer priests is also seen in this work by Vaižgantas.

<sup>20</sup> [MAČIULIS, Jonas] MAIRONIS-MAČIULIS. *Mūsų Vargai: poëma penkiuose dalyse*. Kaunas, 1920.

sought to be topical, depicted the present time and expressed the main problems and struggles of the nation through individual characters, but these poems were never popular with his readers. The lack of strong plots, vivid characters and drama, and the literary clichés, are common failings with them all. But *Mūsų vargai* is interesting for its wide scope. Maironis mixes fictional and historical characters, and depicts the vast panorama of the war's events, involving them in the development of the poem. The poem reflects the mood and the hopes for independence of all advanced Lithuanian society. At the end of the poem, Brazda, one of the main characters, has an audience with the Pope in the Vatican, who informs him of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, and welcomes Lithuania as an independent state which now has a chance to join the free world and to flourish culturally.<sup>21</sup> The epic vision of the events of the First World War, the rendering of historical and personal events in an accessible form, and the positive ending are the main values of this work.

### *Literature after the war*

In the first decade after the First World War, only two aforesaid artistic works that are worthy of mention were written: the novel *Keturi angelai* by Jurgis F. Jonaitis,<sup>22</sup> and the drama *Pasaulio gaisras* by Vydūnas.<sup>23</sup>

Most fiction on the theme of the war was written in the second decade after the First World War. That was when novels by Antanas Skripkauskas (1904–1941), Juozas Paukštelis (1899–1981), Stasys Keblas (1896–1979), Antanas Krasauskas (1884–1968), Adomas Bytautas, Petronėlė Rūtelionienė (1893–1985) and Ieva Simonaitytė (1897–1978) were written.

In *Keturi angelai*, the author chooses an original (in the Lithuanian context) retrospective to depict the events of the war through the reminiscences of two former soldiers on the Western front. Eugenijus Stulgaitis (the narrator) and John Upelionis, two Lithuanian-born American volunteers, are wounded in Europe and meet in hospital. Eugenijus reads letters for John, who has been blinded, and knows his love story. John saw Lucy kiss a sailor, and broke off his engagement. In the hospital in Europe, they are cared for by two charming blue-eyed sisters (volunteers). One of them is Lucy, but blind John cannot be sure, although her voice is so similar. The novel has a happy ending: the two lucky couples can share their war memories. And two veterans agree: as well as the soldiers and officers, there are four angels on the front line (an army chaplain, a doctor, a nun, and a volunteer nurse). The novel is

<sup>21</sup> The idea of culture flourishing and the realisation of the national spirit through culture was the main idea in Maironis' work. By this idea, he managed to revert the totally elegiac view of the history of Lithuania, which dominated throughout the 19th century, to optimism.

<sup>22</sup> JONAITIS, J. F. Op. cit.

<sup>23</sup> [STOROSTA, V.] Op. cit.

exceptional in its approach to the war, completely contrary to the 'Lost Generation' view. It is full of respect for people who have to be cruel in the war on the front line. This is a heroic mode of writing, quite rare in Western 20th-century fiction.

Vydūnas uses the same mode of writing in his drama *Pasaulio gaisras*, which has already been discussed.

Some (weaker) authors used a melodramatic style, which had its roots in folk tales and hagiography. Thus, Rūtelionienė in her novel *Klaikuma* (Chaos)<sup>24</sup> describes the sad adventures of the main heroine levutė in Russia after she has left her idyllic homeland. levutė suffers in the disorder and chaos in Russia, has an unhappy love affair, and gives birth to a daughter, and is finally accidentally shot dead on the way home in 1919, just on the Lithuanian border. This sentimental and schematically constructed, overwritten story is an illustration of the ritual recognition of virtues. The focal point of the novel, as in canonical melodramatic writing, is admiration of the virtue<sup>25</sup> of the main heroine.

The novel *Senos pilies paslaptis* by Adomas Bytautas<sup>26</sup> resembles a folk tale. The main character Bytautas-Rymantas, a doctor on the Russian side, falls in love with an Austrian count's granddaughter called Dora (the family hides in an old castle). The count adopts Rymantas, and gives him his title (his son Modesto was killed in battle). The plot recalls the stepdaughter's story, and the main character is idealised and is not convincing, but the narrative has momentum and is quite intense.

The weak novel *Pasauliniam fronte... Ekstra telegrama!* (At the World Front... Extra Telegram!) by Stasys Keblas<sup>27</sup> drowns in stereotypes in trying to depict the Russians in war. The story is vague: it is unclear what places and sometimes even what time is being described. The author tries to mock the Russians: the Russian army is badly organised, it constantly lacks information, orders are delayed, Russian officers are often drunk, they are corrupt, and it is easy to bribe them to get a better place during mobilisation. This kind of stereotype comes from the Russian satirical tradition (Gogol, Dostoevsky), and also from the Lithuanian writer Kudirka, who wrote satires about the Russians at the end of the 19th century, but Keblas teeters on the limits of graphomania.

<sup>24</sup> RŪTELIONIENĖ, P[etronėlė]. *Klaikuma. Iš Didžiojo Karo laikų ir tremtinių gyvenimo: romanas*. T. I–IV. Kaunas, Klaipėda, 1930–1932.

<sup>25</sup> BROOKS, Peter. *The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama and the Mode of Excess*. New Haven and London, 1976, p. 25.

<sup>26</sup> BYTAUTAS, A. Op. cit.

<sup>27</sup> KEBLAS, Stasys – PTOU, M. *Pasauliniam fronte... Ekstra telegrama!* [T. I:] *Mobilizacija 1914 metų: romanas*. Kaunas, 1935; KEBLAS, Stasys – PTOU, M. *Pasaulinis karas* [romano „Pasauliniam fronte... Ekstra telegrama!“ T. II]. Kaunas, 1936.



The war is described more realistically in the novel *Mirtis už fronto* (Death behind the Front Line) by Antanas Krassauskas.<sup>28</sup> The narrator depicts the events of 1914: the Russians pushed the Germans back to Königsberg and deep into Poland, but they later suffered a huge defeat at Tannenberg, where thousands of Russians were killed or captured. Antanas, the main hero, spends three long years as a prisoner in Germany. During that time, he sees a lot, reflects on the atrocities of the war and the fate of the Lithuanians, and finally gets a good job at a post office, and sees how many Lithuanians have been killed behind the front line. The novel has a love interest, but Antanas refuses to stay in Germany; he wants to return to his country, where, as he has heard, it is struggling for independence.

Two other novels, undoubtedly strong literary works, are also considered to be based on authentic autobiographical material: *Našlės vaikas* (The Widow's Child) by Juozas Paukštelis,<sup>29</sup> and *Romanas be moters* (A Novel without a Woman) by Antanas Skripkauskas.<sup>30</sup> These two stories are about the main characters growing up during the war (approximately five years). Both witness the German occupation and then become refugees, both are taken to work in Germany, both feel the absurdity of the war, and both ask the same questions: why this massacre of people, this endless suffering, and reversion to an animal state? In the first novel (*Našlės vaikas*), the protagonist Leonas is strongly motivated to experience hard times, because he wants to learn, to be educated, to see works of art, and to learn about the world. In his debut novel, Paukštelis creates a strong and compelling character, and uses vivid language. In the second novel (*Romanas be moters*), the protagonist is blinded by feelings of humiliation and revenge. After he and some friends escape from a German prisoner-of-war camp, they become bandits, killing peaceful people in order to survive; and the looting continues when they return home, condemning them to a life outside the law. The novel has an unconventional plot, involves all kinds of sex and violence, and uses bad language, slang and obscene words. All this was new in Lithuanian literature. Skripkauskas is not a strong writer, but in the novel, he manages to imitate a thriller, and to keep up the intensity and the psychological tension. All the events have logical consequences. The main character is deep enough to feel his unenviable situation, and the rumour that the Lithuanian army has been established gives him hope for rebirth.

The most talented writer on the theme of war was Ieva Simonaitytė. Her novel *Vilius Karalius* (1939 part 1,<sup>31</sup> 1956 part 2) is the best example of the good influence of Tolstoy's *War and Peace*: the multiplex and flexible composition allows for the har-

<sup>28</sup> KRASAUSKAS, Antanas. *Mirtis už fronto: Didžiojo karo metu žuvusiems draugams paminėti*. Romanas. Kaunas, 1935.

<sup>29</sup> PAUKŠTELIS, Juozas. *Našlės vaikas: romanas*. Kaunas, 1932.

<sup>30</sup> SKRIPKAUSKAS, A[ntanas]. *Romanas be moters: epizodas iš Didžiojo karo laiky*. Šiauliai, 1932.

<sup>31</sup> SIMONAITYTĖ, Ieva. *Vilius Karalius: romanas*. I dalis. Kaunas, [1939].

monisation of actual personal experience and the feelings of individual characters, and a panoramic view. The dominant fictional language in the novel is an internal monologue, which allows the author to convey the spiritual shock and the sense of meaninglessness that Martynas Karalius feels, the brother, the one who took part in the Battle of Verdun. According to the author, the experience of the First World War crippled and destroyed a whole generation of Lithuanians from Prussian Lithuania. It led to despair, loss of identity, and the decline of the nation.

## The First World War in memoirs

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Two capable storytellers wrote diaries during the war: Gabrielė Petkevičaitė-Bitė and Pranciškus Žadeikis (1869–1933). Both stayed in Lithuania during the war. Gabrielė Petkevičaitė-Bitė was a well-known public figure, a pioneer of Lithuanian prose, and chairman of the first Lithuanian Women's Congress (in 1907). She lived in her ancestral home at Puziniškis in the Joniškėlis region in northern Lithuania, where she created a centre for spiritual life for Lithuanian peasants and citizens of the small town, renewing her father's doctor's practice. Her *Karo meto dienoraštis* (Diary of the War)<sup>32</sup> was written during the war,<sup>33</sup> and this sensitively told view of everyday life became a very important document of the wartime reality in the region. The main character in the story is, of course, the author herself. She carefully fixes and reflects historical events, and, what is more important, the lives of ordinary people. Born a hunchback, Petkevičaitė-Bitė remained a spinster, and raised five adopted children. She was very active in political and social life. The war limited her activities, but she gave up her time for other people, spreading news and explaining it, and finding good words for everybody. Her positive mindset and her democratic attitude are valued even today. She was very proud and happy to be of use to other people. Her role in life brings her near to the fictional women heroes in the stories by Šatrijos Ragana, where a young noble lady works for poor village people, helping them to write letters or fill in a document, teaching children, and knowing everyone's problems. She had many notable thoughts and remarks on the war and the situation.

Fr Pranciškus Žadeikis lived and worked in Skuodas in northwest Lithuania, worked and wrote during the war, and later published a book in two volumes *Didžiojo karo užrašai* (Notes on the Great War).<sup>34</sup> His memoirs are different to Petkevičaitė-Bitė's.

<sup>32</sup> PETKEVIČAITĖ, G[abrielė]. *Karo meto dienoraštis*. [I dalis.] Kaunas, 1925; II dalis: *1915–1916 metų okupacija*. Kaunas, 1931.

<sup>33</sup> She was always short of paper for her diary, and wrote on all kinds of scraps of paper: to sort out the notes took years for Petkevičaitė-Bitė.

<sup>34</sup> ŽADEIKIS, Pr[anciškus]. *Didžiojo karo užrašai*. I dalis: *1914–1915–1916 metai*. Klaipėda, 1921; II dalis: *1917–1918–1919 metai*. Klaipėda, 1925.

He was involved in the events of the war. Although he did not take part in the fighting, he puts the stories of real witnesses into his memoirs, such as those of his brother for example, who marched to Königsberg as a Russian soldier in 1914. Žadeikis describes all the main events chronologically, and discusses the difference between the wartime propaganda and the reality. He knew German, and expected better behaviour from the Germans, who occupied the country for three years; but like many citizens, he was disappointed, although the Germans treated him respectfully. German officers and officials were very strict and pedantic, and constantly demanded more and more from the local people, whom they disdained,<sup>35</sup> and Žadeikis spent his time and energy in those years reducing the demands, in order to save lives and the possibility for Lithuanians to survive. He was later one of the most important people to explain the idea of independence to the local people, denouncing the Bolsheviks, and creating a Lithuanian gymnasium. Žadeikis' memoirs are very authentic (he often puts a whole document into his memoirs, or cites it), and he is able to summarise and see all things clearly. His book is a worthy authentic witness of the First World War, and the time when Lithuania became a free republic.

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The work *Mano patyrimai Didžiojo karėj* (My Experience in the Great War)<sup>36</sup> by above-mentioned Jurgis F. Jonaitis occupies a peculiar place among memoirs. Jonaitis was sent to the Western front as a chaplain with the American army. Sixteen boats (with 5,000 to 6,000 soldiers each) reached Liverpool, where they were met by King George's grateful letter, and several days later the 102nd Regiment in which he served moved to Chateau Thierry in France. Jonaitis does not describe taking part in historical events with the soldiers, but just the usual life of the war, which is unknown to those who were not on the front line. The chaplain and the soldiers shared the same conditions: they slept and ate together, suffered the dirt, hunger and lice,

<sup>35</sup> For more on the German-Lithuanian contacts in Ober Ost, see: GIMŽAUSKAS, Edmundas. Vokiečių karinės okupacijos poveikis Lietuvos visuomenei ir besiformuojančiam valstybingumui 1915–1919 m. *Karo archyvas*, 2010, t. XXV, p. 98–123; GRIFFANTE, Andrea. A New Master and a New Serfdom: Understanding the Compulsory Labour Experience of Lithuanians During the German Occupation, 1915–1918. *Res Balticae: miscellanea di studi baltistici*, 2013, vol. 12, pp. 91–105; GRIFFANTE, Andrea. We and Homeland: German Occupation, Lithuanian Discourse, and War Experience in Ober Ost. In *Other Fronts, Other Wars? First World War Studies on the Eve of the Centennial* (History of Warfare, Vol. 100). Ed. by Joachim BÜRGSCHWENTNER, Matthias EGGGER, Gunda BARTH-SCALMANI. Leiden, Boston, MA, 2014, pp. 237–255; RICHTER, Klaus. 'Go with the hare's ticket' mobility and territorial policies in Ober Ost (1915–1918). *First World War Studies*, 2015, vol. 6, no. 2, pp. 151–170; VAREIKIS, Vyngantas. Reflections of the First World War and the German occupation in Lithuania between the Wars: Transformation of Perspectives. *Lituanus*, 2016, no. 64 (4), pp. 15–16. For more on the German view on the Lithuanians, see: LIULEVICIUS, Vejas Gabriel. *War Land on the Eastern Front. Culture, National Identity, and German Occupation in World War I* (Studies in the Social and Cultural History of Modern Warfare, 9). Cambridge, 2000; NELSON, Robert L. "Unsere Frage ist der Osten". Representations of the Occupied East in German Soldier Newspapers, 1914–1918. *Zeitschrift für Ostmitteleuropa-Forschung*, 2002, Bd. 51, Nr. 4, S. 500–528; TAUBER, Joachim. Wild East: German Impressions on Lithuania, 1915–1918. In *Empires and Nationalisms in the Great War: Interactions in East-Central Europe* (Acta Historica Universitatis Klaipedensis, vol. XXXI). Ed. by Vasilijus SAFRONOVAS, Česlovas LAURINAVIČIUS. Klaipėda, 2015, pp. 171–184.

<sup>36</sup> JONAITIS, J[urgis] F. *Mano Patyrimai Didžiojo Karėj 1918 ir 1919 metais*. Boston, MA, 1920.

and the deaths of their friends. They went into battle together, and gathered the wounded. The chaplain tried to calm soldiers, said Mass, administered the last rites, and buried them or only parts of them. His experience was no easier than the soldiers' experience. He was injured twice, and attained the rank of major. He understood the inner world of humans, and he was genuinely proud of his vocation to provide spiritual help. All the soldiers facing death, he tells us, believed in an eternal spiritual life. We should note that no one in Lithuanian literature has portrayed the reality of the First World War front and the soldier's view, from direct impressions and such a close perspective, more precisely than Jonaitis in his book *Mano patyrimai Didžiojo karė*.

The Russian naval officer Teodoras Reingardas (1883–1947) left similarly authentic memoirs. In his memoirs *Jūrininkas, karininkas, pasmerktasis* (The Seaman, the Officer, the Condemned)<sup>37</sup> he declares that the cause of the First World War lay in the naval conflict between England and Germany. Reingardas was fascinated by old aristocratic Russia, and regularly accused the Bolsheviks of destroying the whole country and destroying its traditions. He shows directly his antipathy for the Bolsheviks, and even suggests that the 'export of revolution' (the politics of Soviet Russia) inspired fascism in Italy and Germany. His memoirs (half of them are about the events of the First World War and post-revolutionary Russia) are interesting from the point of view of the Russian officer, and the brave thoughts and clear position of this truly exceptional person.

The Lithuanian-born Russian Aleksandr Uspenskii (1872–1951) left an exceptional example of writing by an officer in the Russian army.<sup>38</sup> He was a genuine participant in the Russian offensive on the front line in East Prussia in 1914, where a famous victory was won over the Germans near Gumbinnen;<sup>39</sup> but then in the winter of 1914–1915, the Russians were beaten, and, as one of the few lucky surviving officers, the author was imprisoned.<sup>40</sup> Uspenskii's memoirs are characterised by his warm vivid language and his fascinating descriptions of events. The book could be regarded as a novel, although the author himself called it a memoir. It has the structure of a novel: the main hero, the sensitive plot, and the clear and detailed descriptions, are

<sup>37</sup> The memoirs were published only recently: REINGARDAS, Teodoras. *Jūrininkas, karininkas, mirtininkas. Prisiminimai*. Sud. Juozas KARVELIS. Šiauliai, 2000.

<sup>38</sup> УСПЕНСКИЙ, А[лександръ]. *На войнѣ. Восточная Пруссия – Литва. 1914–1915 г.г.* Воспоминания. Каунасъ, 1932. Expanded edition in Lithuanian language: USPENSKIS, Aleksandras. *Didžiąjame kare. Lietuva–Rytų Prūsija 1914–1915 m.* Kaunas, 1935.

<sup>39</sup> Uspenskii describes this battle in particular (USPENSKIS, A. Op. cit., p. 40–61), and returns to it again at the end of his book (p. 226), where he underlines the fact that the victory was achieved mostly by Lithuanian-born soldiers, and that the French knew this: in 1921, one of the biggest newspapers *Le Petit Parisien* allegedly thanked the Lithuanians in the name of the French nation.

<sup>40</sup> Uspenskii describes this period of his life in his next book, the two-part *V Plenu* (In Captivity), which was written in Russian but never translated into Lithuanian: УСПЕНСКИЙ, А[лександръ]. *Въ плѣну*. Ч. I–II. Kaunas, 1933.

always accompanied by general thoughts. Even the theme of love (for the family, the homeland, the soldiers in his regiment) is quite sufficient for a novel. Some of the main questions that arise for this author are: 'How can the presence of God be reconciled with the fact of war? How can a religious man go and kill other people?' It is not surprising that this well-written book was translated into several languages.

Martynas Yčas (1885–1941), one of the most influential Lithuanians during the war and afterwards, saw the war from a completely different point of view. Elected as a representative of the Kaunas province to the Russian State Duma from 1912, he organised the Lithuanian War Relief Committee, and using his connections, he managed to procure large amounts of money from the foundation of Princess Tatyana and other organisations. Thanks to him, Lithuanian victims of the war were better organised, and had gymnasiums and other schools in Petrograd and Voronezh. During the time of his important status in Russia, he raised the question of Lithuania's independence, visited Pope Benedict XV in 1916 to seek support for Lithuania's independence, and achieved a lot in forming the economic foundations of the young country. In his memoirs,<sup>41</sup> Yčas recalls a conversation with the future president of Lithuania Antanas Smetona, who, considering which occupiers would be more damaging to Lithuania, noted that neither would grant independence. 'In that case, they must both lose,' Yčas answered. This outspoken wit at the beginning of the war reveals the secret desire of many occupied nations.

During the interwar period, Lithuania was an independent country. For the first time in the nation's history, literature of all kinds flourished in the national language. Among other topics, several novels, short stories, dramas and memoirs of the First World War were written. However, after the Soviet occupation in 1940, it lost its independence again, and many works of fiction dealing with the First World War period and the Wars of Independence (1919–1920) were banned by the Soviet censors.

## Conclusions

For witnesses of the First World War and the struggles for independence during the war and afterwards, independence was the biggest event in their life. Hundreds of Lithuanians left memoirs. The most valuable works of fiction and memoirs from that period have been presented briefly in this article. The world changed dramatically after the First World War, and this had an impact on art everywhere. The tempo of the new times forced people to look to the future, and to modernise artistic language. This was easier in poetry. Prose seeks to form a comprehensive picture, and needs

<sup>41</sup> YČAS, Martynas. *Atsiminimai. Nepriklausomybės kelias*. T. 1–3. Kaunas, 1935–1936.

distance to reflect on past events. Therefore, the novels on the theme of the First World War were written later, mostly in the 1930s. The more talented authors find a suitable language for this particular kind novel: an internal monologue (Simonaitytė), or disciplined and precise narration (Jonaitis, Skripkauskas). They raised direct questions, showed the relativity of Christian moral values, depicted shocking episodes in the war, and employed unusual and crude language. Besides the totally new subject of the war, all this was new, and enriched Lithuanian literature. Some weaker authors (Rūtelionienė, Keblas) failed to overcome the inertia of the oral tradition.

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## DIDYSIS KARAS LIETUVIŲ LITERATŪROJE IR ATSIMINIMUOSE

Eugenijus Žmuida

## Santrauka

Karo tema literatūroje siekia Homerą, tad pasaulio literatūros šia tema tradicija – nepaprastai turtinga ir įvairi. Lietuvių rašytojams didžiausią įtaką darė klasikinė XIX a. rusų literatūra, kurioje karas ir su juo susiję reiškiniai užima svarbią vietą. Tiesa, literatūroje lietuvių kalba karo patirties irgi būta – Lindės Dobilo romanas „Blūdas“, Šatrijos Raganos novelės. Vis dėlto su Didžiuoju karu prasidėjo (ir tęsėsi iki pat 1940 m.) visiškai naujas, gausus ir įvairus literatūros karo tema etapas.

Aptariant lietuvių grožinius kūrinius Didžiojo karo tema, iš karto verta pažymėti didelius meninės vertės skirtumus ir tam tikras schemas, kurios išryškėja iš šio pobūdžio literatūros visumos. Karas daugumą užklupo panašiu būdu, taigi kūrinių pradžios, ypač silpnųjų autorių, dažnai rašomos lyg pagal trafaretą: idilišką vasaros ramybę sutrikdo netikėta karo žinia; ją lydi vyrų mobilizacija, šeimos narių verksmai, paliekami pradėti darbai, derliumi vešantys laukai, netrukus trypiami arklių ir vežimų. Prasta carinės biurokratijos organizacija ir prasidėjęs chaosas stiprina beprasmybės ir net absurdo jausmą, kuris vėliau dažnai svarbiausią personažą lydi iki kūrinio pabaigos. Tokia kontrasto principu konstruojama kūrinių pradžia yra logiška, tik norisi pabrėžti nevienodą jos įtaigumą. Stiprus autorius (pvz., Antanas Vienuolis novelėje „Didysis karas“, 1914) ją perteikia sukrečiančiai, silpnas (pvz., Stasys Keblas dviejų dalių romane „Pasauliniam fronte... Ekstra telegrama“, 1935–1936) – neįtikinamai.

Pažymėtina, kad talentingi rašytojai sugebėjo grožiniais kūrinių reaguoti spontaniškai – rašė karui vos prasidėjus, jam tebesitęsiant, nelaukdami laiko perspektyvos. Toks buvo Vaižgantas: jo „Karo vaizduose“ (1916) ypač išskirtinos novelės „Karo slibinas“, „Rimai ir Nerimai“; Antanas Vienuolis: visos trys jo novelės šia tema – „Didysis karas“ (1914), „Mirtinai sužeistas“ (1915), „Karžygyss“ (1919) – yra meniškai stiprios; Maironis, karo metu rašęs ir 1920 m. paskelbęs poemą „Mūsų vargai“, pasižyminčią epiniu platumu, įdomia intriga ir išskirtine lietuvių patrioto audiencijos pas popiežių Benediktą XV scena.

Pirmasis pokario dešimtmetis nepasižymėjo grožinių kūrinių gausa. Vis dėlto išskirtinio paminėjimo nusipelnė Jurgio Jonaičio romanas „Keturi angelai“ (1927) ir Vydūno drama „Pasaulio gaisras“ (1928). Autobiografiniame romane „Keturi angelai“ autorius retrospektyvia maniera – dviem karo veteranams besišnekučiuojant prie židinio – perteikė Amerikos lietuvių savanorių nutikimus Vakarų fronte, kur jie abu buvo sužeisti ir susipažino ligoninėje, savanorėms sesutėms juos slaugant. Ten Jonas Upelionis, dujų apakintas, palatos kaimynui prisipažįsta, jog į frontą atvyko iš keršto sužadėtoinei Liucei, tačiau ilgai nesuprato esąs slaugomas tos pačios Liucės, tapusios medicinos sesele. Visa istorija baigiasi laimingai, nors romane daug dėmesio tenka karo realybei perteikti ir ypač stengiamasi išaukštinti tuos nematomus, bet nepaprastai svarbius dvasios ir kūno tarnus (jie ir vadinami keturiais angelais), be kurių neįsivaizduojamas kario gyvenimas – gydytojas, kapelionas, medicinos seselė, vienuolė. Vydūnas drama „Pasaulio gaisras“ perteikia savo pacifistinę idėją moters Magės, pasiliekančios priešų vokiečių užgrobtuose namuose sau-



goti šeimos židinio, lūpomis ir savanoriška savižudybe, simbolizuojančia moters ištikimybę taikai ir protestą prieš vyrų žiaurų ir beprasmį naikinimo ir grobimo instinktą.

Didžioji grožinės literatūros karo tema dalis buvo parašyta ir publikuota XX a. 4-ajame dešimtmetyje. Tai, beje, visuotinis reiškiny – tiek Europos, tiek Amerikos autoriai garsiausius romanus sukūrė praėjus po karo geram dešimtmečiui. Lietuvių literatūroje tas dešimtmetis – romano suklestėjimo metas. Buvo sukurta daug stiprių ir daug silpnų kūrinių. Silpniesiems kūriniams karo tema būdingas melodramatizmas, religinių (šventųjų gyvenimo) pasakojimų ir folklorinės pasakos įtaka (Petronėlės Rūtelionienės keturių dalių romanas „Klaikuma“, 1930–1932; Adomo Bytauto romanas „Senos pilies paslaptis“, 1937; Antano Krasausko „Mirtis už fronto“, 1935); satyrinio vaizdavimo trafaretškumas ir nevykusi kalbos folklorizacija (Stasio Keblo-Ptou minėtas romanas „Pasauliniam fronte... Ekstra telegrama“, 1935–1936).

Gana brandžiais debiutais galima laikyti du paauglius kare vaizduojančius romanus – Juozo Paukštelio „Našlės vaiką“ (1932) ir Antano Skripkausko „Romaną be moters“ (1932). J. Paukštelio romano veikėjas Leonas ilgisi mokslo, šviesaus ir takaus gyvenimo, dega troškimu pažinti pasaulį, aplankyti garsiausius muziejus ir panašiai – šis troškimas padeda jam išverti karo negandas, žeminantį buvimą nelaisvėje, subrandinti savo charakterį.

Pirmuoju asmeniu papasakotas A. Skripkausko romanas perteikia visiškai kitokią karo patirtį. Čia pagrindinis personažas, vokiečiams nukankinus ir nužudžius tėvą šeimos akyse, motinai išprotėjęs ir nusiskandinus ežere, iš paklusnaus ir religingo vaiko pamažu virsta žvėrimi. Žinojimas, kas išdavė vokiečiams tėvą, vokiečių žiaurumas, nežmoniškos sąlygos priverstinių darbų kalėjime ir nelaisvėje užgrūdina protagonistą, kuris, su keliais bendrais ištrūkęs iš belaisvių stovyklos Vokietijoje, tampa plėšikų gaujos vadu, plėšiančiu ir žudančiu žmones pakeliui į gimtinę, o ten tebesivadovaujančiu keršto jausmu, gyvenančiu už įstatymo ribų. Romanas įdomus ne tik originaliu siužetu, bet ir svarbus daugelio lietuvių literatūros tabu sulaužymu (sekso, prievartos scenos, necenzūrinių žodžių vartojimas ir pan.).

Ieva Simonaitytė, jau pripažinta prozos klasikė, 1939 m. publikavo didelio romano „Vilius Karalius“ pirmąją dalį (antroji publikuota 1956 m.). Šį romaną galima laikyti lietuvių grožinės literatūros karo tema viršūne, nors paties karo vaizdų romane beveik nėra. Išskirtinį jį daro būtent pasakojimo technika, gerai įvaldyta I. Simonaitytės. Romanas įdomus kaip Mažosios Lietuvos lietuvių charakterio, etnografinių papročių, karo nuotaikų registratorius, tačiau meniškai vertingiausias jo elementas yra sugebėjimas paraleliai perteikti keleto personažų žiūros, dvasinio gyvenimo perspektyvas (tai, be abejo, brandžiausias Levo Tolstojaus „Karo ir taikos“ įtakos lietuvių literatūrai pavyzdys).

Atsiminimų žanrui lietuvių literatūroje atstovauja ne mažiau gausi ir ne mažiau įdomi tiesioginių ar netiesioginių karo dalyvių palikta memuarinė medžiaga. Plačiausiai žinomas Gabrielės Petkevičaitės-Bitės „Karo meto dienoraštis“ (1 d. – 1925 m., 2 d. – 1931 m.), rašytas karo metu, pateikiantis plačią šiaurės rytų Lietuvos eilinių žmonių gyvenimo panoramą. Gyvenusi savo dvare Puziniškyje, atsiminimų autorė, tęsdama tėvo gydytojo tradiciją, buvo tapusi to krašto gyventojų dvasine motina, globėja ir patarėja. Ne mažiau globėjiskasis santykis su vietiniais siejo ir kitą vertingų atsiminimų autorių – kunigą Praną Žadeikį, gyvenusį kitame Lietuvos kampe (Skuodo apylinkėse) ir „Didžiojo karo užrašuose“ (1 d. – 1921 m., 2 d. – 1925 m.) įtikinamai perteikusį nežmoniškas vokiečių okupacijos sąlygas,



kurias jis, būdamas gerai išsilavinęs, mokėdamas vokiečių kalbą ir okupantų gerbiamas, visaip stengėsi sušvelninti.

Artimi grožinei literatūrai – nuotykių ir filosofiniam romanui vienu metu – yra Aleksandro Uspensio atsiminimai. A. Uspensio „Kare“ (1931 m., liet. 1935 m.) kuriamas jaudinantis pasakojimas, perteikiantis mobilizacijos ir mūšių vaizdus, patriotizmą ir meilę žmogui, kariui, gilius karo realybės ir tikėjimo tiesų apmąstymus. Jurgio Jonaičio, savanoriu tarnavusio JAV kariuomenėje kapelionu, „Mano patyrimai Didžiojoje karėje“ (1920) yra pats plačiausias lietuvių liudijimas iš Vakarų fronto. Tiesiogiai dalyvavęs mūšiuose, kartu su kariais valgęs, miegojęs, kentęs šaltį ir nepriteklus, du kartus sužeistas J. Jonaitis parašė nepaprastai vertingą puslapį lietuvių karo literatūroje. Ne mažiau egzotiški atrodo Rusijos imperatoriškojo karinio jūrų laivyno karininko Teodoro Reingardo prisiminimai „Jūrininkas, karininkas, mirtininkas“, išleisti tik po autoriaus mirties (2000). T. Reingardas deklaruoja savo žavėjimąsi aristokratiškąja Rusija ir atvirai išsako neapykantą bolševikams, pavertusiems šią galingą šalį chaoso židiniu.

Karo laikotarpio plačius atsiminimus yra palikęs Martynas Yčas, viena ryškiausių politinių to meto figūrų, Rusijos Dūmų narys, dėl nepaprastų diplomatinių sugebėjimų asmeniškai suartėjęs su daugeliu įtakingų aukščiausių Rusijos valdininkų. Jo „Atsiminimuose“ (1935–1936 m., 3 dalys) dominuoja platus panoraminis žvilgsnis, o daugelis situacijų ir net pokalbių perteikta labai konkrečiai ir realistiškai.