

World Literature and Mythology: Guarantees of Freedom of Man and Nation in Sigitas Geda's Poetry

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Abstract. In this article¹, the author uses the theory of intertextuality (Julia Kristeva, Gérard Genette, Marco Juvan) to analyse reflections on the openness of cultural identity and Europeanness in Sigitas Geda's (1943–2008) poetry and his commentaries. The objective is to discuss how resistance to Soviet ideology could be constructed in mythological and world-literary contexts. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's vision of the universality of World Literature has remained important in Geda's work. The Lithuanian poet adopted and applied it in his work by creating a mythological foundation as a unifying universal, a synthesis of Lithuanian and various national cultures. In this way, he conveyed a deeper sense of European identity, coming from the intertexts of modern World Literature (especially the poetry of François Villon, Johannes Bobrowski, Rainer Maria Rilke, and Paul Celan). Geda freed the imagination of a reader constrained by the Soviet occupation and directed it towards the universal world.

Keywords: cultural identity; intertextuality; mythology; World Literature; Sigitas Geda

Introduction

The 1960s in Soviet-occupied Lithuania were marked by an intense search for cultural identity, expressed most clearly in the modernist poetics of Lithuanian poetry. Lithuanian poets such as Sigitas Geda, Marcelijus Martinaitis, Judita Vaičiūnaitė, Jonas Juškaitis and others of their generation were opposed to *homo sovieticus* culture and continued the romantic tradition of the national bards. They were looking for a more authentic relationship with the history

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of the nation, mythology, and World Literature, transcending the boundaries set by socialist realism and Soviet control. Even under Soviet censorship, their poetry was widely published and established a vital Aesopic language, which was a kind of “communicative situation typical of the literary field, in which the political control and censorship of art that intervene between the writer and the reader, play a unique role”. (Satkauskytė 2019: 268) This communicative situation came into force when the reader was able to decipher the writer’s hidden meanings, which often had political overtones, criticised or ridiculed the Soviet reality, or talked about ideas of the survival of the nation or statehood, the armed anti-Soviet resistance in Lithuania of 1944–1953, etc. The socio-historical context was crucial for the emergence of an Aesopic language, which depended “on the dominant ideological discourse, uses its language and imagery in one way or another as cover, while the ambivalence of the artistic text allows it to be interpreted ‘according to the situation’”. (Satkauskytė 2019: 271) This discourse educated the free-thinking reader and thus created an alternative to the Communist Party’s daily newspaper *Pravda* (1918–1991), which was produced in large print runs.

Compared with the works of other Lithuanian authors of that time, the poetry of Sigitas Geda (1943–2008) was exceptional in inheriting the intertextuality of World Literature from the wide range of foreign literature which he read at that time. He entered the field of poetry in 1966 with his first poetry collection *Pėdos* (Footprints) and published more than 17 books for adults and children during the Soviet occupation of Lithuania. Among them, the most important were *Strazdas* (The Thrush, 1967), *26 rudens ir vasaros giesmės*, (Twenty-six Songs of Summer and Winter, 1972), *Mėnulio žiedai* (Blossom of the Moon, 1977), *Žydinti slyva Snaigyno ežere* (The Flowering Plum Tree in Snaigynas Lake, 1981), *Mamutų tėvynė* (The Homeland of the Mammoths, 1985), *Žalio gintaro vėriniai* (Strings of Green Amber, 1988). From the very beginning he was a provocative or even shocking poet who modernised Lithuanian literature by using irony and the grotesque, various archaic and mythological sources as well as World Literature. He was not only a successful poet (even though he was criticised by the Communist regime in Soviet-occupied Lithuania), but also a playwright, essayist, translator of Charles Baudelaire, François Villon, Johannes Bobrowski, Paul Celan, Georg Trakl, Rainer Marie Rilke, “The Song of Songs”, and many others. In addition, Geda’s works were influenced by the modernist poetry of the Lithuanian diaspora (Alfonsas Nyka-Niliūnas, Kazys Bradūnas and, generally speaking, the generation of Lithuanian exile poets called *žemininkai*), as well as by the journal of literature, art, sociology and politics *Metmenys* (Patterns, 1959–2006) published in Chicago. Geda’s explorations were aided by the official

praise and recognition given to the modernist works of the very popular Lithuanian poet Eduardas Mieželaitis, who was the pioneer of modern Soviet poetry and created the impression of free poetic language within the context of the Soviet regime. Mieželaitis became so successful that he even won the Lenin Prize for literature in 1962, thus creating more freedom for the experiments of his colleagues. Geda's poetry reoriented this inheritance from communist ideology to mythology:

During these ... years, many myths have faded away on which hopes for the renewal of poetry were pinned. Only one thing remains: the longing for the true spirituality of poetry. Isn't that why we have so often (sometimes even unnecessarily) turned to the past, to tradition, to the experience of World Literature? We have given up believing that technical progress or the conquest of space can have a decisive effect on our souls. (Geda 1984: 26)

He sought a basis of archetypal meanings and images that could liberate the occupied Lithuanian identity and integrate it with other cultures.

Literary critics or readers variously described Geda's poetry as mythological (Andrijauskas 2010; Kmita 2009; Balionienė 1996; Peluritytė 1993), archaic (Notrimaitė 2010), having links to folklore, creating a pagan avant-gardism (Daujotyte 2010), or as a renewed "modern subject of poetic discourse (or speaker) and innovative textual practice" (Jevsejevas 2020: 155). However, few studies look closely at his search for the mythological origins that might integrate this cultural identity, or seek to analyse the intertexts that form and represent it.

This article examines why the shift away from the stylisation of folklore towards a mythological context was significant for Geda, and what it meant in his poetic works created during the Soviet occupation of Lithuania. For Geda, it was important to create a relationship with the censored history of the nation and to (re)create the mythical symbols. This is why water, especially the lake, became the beginning of the creation of the world, while the figures of Prometheus, Christ, and the Lithuanian poet Antanas Strazdas were transformed into a human being-centaur-bird. Nature was embodied in the goddess of Autumn, and eternity was represented by the cosmic egg, the oval, the circle, the spiral in his poetry. Thus, to discuss how the intertextuality of Geda's poetry was anchored in European democratic values, this article uses a modernised approach to comparative literature (following the ideas of Marko Juvan, Jola Škulj). Moreover, it includes a short representation of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's idea of *Weltliteratur* and its connection to intertextuality (following the ideas of Julia Kristeva, Gérard Genette) and cultural identity. Finally, the analysis shows the effect of World Literature and

mythology on the construction of national and European cultural identities and their images in Lithuanian poetry during the second half of the 20th century.

How World Literature and Intertextuality Created a Universal Cultural Identity

In a letter to Johann Peter Eckermann in 1827, Goethe spoke of the inadequacy of national literature and the need to build a relationship with the wider literature of the world:

I am more and more convinced ... that poetry is the universal possession of mankind. ... I therefore like to look about me in foreign nations, and advise everyone to do the same. National literature is now rather an unmeaning term; the epoch of World-literature is at hand, and everyone must strive to hasten its approach. (Goethe 2013: 19–20)

The literary scholar Hendrik Birus has argued that by raising the importance of *Weltliteratur*, Goethe was not seeking “the replacement of national literatures by World Literature, but the rapid blossoming of a multitude of European and non-European literatures and the simultaneous emergence of a world literature (mostly in English translations) as two aspects of one and the same process”. (Birus 2000) The German writer believed that whenever national literatures enter the arena of World Literature, they can cross national boundaries and become united by a common human nature. According to literary scholar Marko Juvan, Goethe’s “aesthetic perception of works from foreign languages and distant civilisations enabled the self-reflection of the modern European individual, while interliterary traffic and the cooperation of intellectuals in a literary republic was the path to intercultural understanding and durable peace between nations”. (Juvan 2019: 9–10) This is why Goethe focused not only on the literature and languages of German, but also French, Greek, Italian, English, Scottish, Serbian, Chinese and Persian. In doing so, he opened the way for so-called peripheral cultures, even oral traditions, to join the world stage. According to Juvan, “the idea of world literature was instrumental not only in rectifying Goethe’s intercultural intertextuality and his social networking in the international *respublica litterarum*, but also in his self-canonizing efforts to become a German classic”. (Juvan 2019: 3) But most importantly, in taking this position Goethe transformed World Literature into his poetic principle, leading to a globalised imagination and world intertextuality. (Juvan 2011: 274)

Intertextuality in this case is perceived in two ways. Firstly, we draw on Julia Kristeva’s idea of a dialogical relationship between text and culture and

look at the text as a mosaic of quotations. Intertextuality was interested in the individual reader's reactions, which were not possible without the reader's varied context. Kristeva's idea of the historical, social coordinates of the reading of a text has been accurately captured by the literary scholar Graham Allen: "... we must give up the notion that texts present a unified meaning and begin to view them as the combination and compilation of sections of the social text. As such, texts have no unity or unified meaning on their own, they are thoroughly connected to on-going cultural and social processes". (Allen 2000: 37) Therefore, political and ideological aspects are also relevant to the intertextuality theory. Kristeva noted: "The text is a practice that could be compared to political revolution: the one brings about in the subject what the other introduces into society". (Kristeva 1984: 17) Secondly, Gérard Genette's classification of intertextual relations or transtextuality (*transtextualité*) is also important for us as it brings to light an important strategy for reading and interpreting the text: "all that sets the text in relationship, whether obvious or concealed with other texts". (Genette 1992: 83–84) Through the use of various artistic tools (quotations, allusions, plagiarism), the author's literary voice is dispersed, creating an individual literary perception. The reader who recognises these tools can enter the same cultural space, value scale, or historical time as the author who encoded them and thus can experience a certain sense of commonality. In this way, even small or ideologically isolated literatures, including Geda's poetry, could be allowed to become part of World Literature and emerge from geographical isolation. Usually, it is translations and interpretations that make a writer international. Presumably, the poet, living in circumstances of repression and with little possibility of being translated or reaching beyond the Iron Curtain, could, by creating intertexts, not only import World Literature into the national reading, but also more easily enter the arena of World Literature. Readers could observe and appreciate the writer's transnational openings by recognising allusions to other texts and incorporating them into the text as a whole, and any intertextual literary context was also determined by historical and social circumstances, which too became part of the text. (Bagdonė 2022: 120) However, the interchange of texts allows us to reflect on the discourse of opening and changing cultural identity.

The basis of cultural identity is the relationship between the individual and the world (group), which is linked to social, racial, sexual, religious, political, historical and other contexts. Issues of cultural identity are primarily related to a specific literary identity and appear in national culture. However, Jola Škulj also criticised the linking of cultural identity to national literature alone, emphasising the closed and finite nature of identity, an outdated remnant of the 19th century's Romanticism-influenced perception of the subject. Cultural

identity is not unitary, coherent or stable. Although shared historical or cultural codes bind it, cultural identity is in a constant state of paradigmatic flux. It “is not merely a constant ‘reliving’ of the past that gives a nation a sense of meaning” (Žukauskienė 2014: 54), it also creates a dynamic and dialogical relationship with the Other. This is where the relationship between intertextuality and cultural identity becomes very important, as Škulj says: “Our cultural identity is our intertext. ... Forming itself and existing through cross-cultural interactions, cultural identity exposes its inevitable intertextual character”. (Škulj 2000) This is further elaborated by Juvan when he states that “cultural identity is in process of constant historical self-defining and permanent reinterpretation: on the one hand it rearticulates itself through influences and ever-changing (intertextual) relations with distant, adjacent or interfering cultural spaces, on the other hand it develops with the help of the self-referential reshaping of its own memory”. (Juvan 2008: 61) Intertextuality in this case also functions as a principle for the formation of one’s own cultural identity, where the aim is to find one’s own place in the dialogue with other literatures. (Juvan 2012: 173)

The Connection of Literatures in Geda’s Non-fiction Works with Poetry: Universal Humanism and the Defence of the Nation

During the Soviet occupation, Geda adopted Goethe’s model of universality in his work, creating a synthesis of Lithuanian and international cultures: “We are not a nation that creates in an empty space. With us there is the literature from the Vedas, from the Greeks, from Egypt, from pagan Lithuania, from the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, from the present and the future”². (Šiandieninė lietuvių poezija: tendencijos ir problemos 1984: 5) Lithuanian poetry of the time, he affirmed, actively drew inspiration from a tradition spanning millennia (Geda 1981: 259–260) and he openly acknowledged his own sources of creativity:

I would dare to count myself among those poets who looked for inspiration in the work of others. If not inspiration, then encouragement, support. I did not use poetic names as symbols or emblems but sought an inner poetic convention. Yes, I have read many poets, not all of them influenced me, but the ones that I have translated have had a particular influence on me. Especially Bobrowski, Celan, Trakl, Rilke, Latvian folk songs, the “Song of Songs” and the *Epic of Gilgamesh*. (Geda 1989: 180)

² All translations of Geda’s non-fiction works are mine.

It was essential for Geda to emphasise the common cultural foundation of humanity. His search for and creation of non-fiction works and poetry became an opportunity to transcend national identity, search for links with European and World Literatures, and thus create poetry imbued with universal democratic values³. Geda primarily searched for archetypal meanings, universal imagery and a basis for integration with other cultures – all of which would help create a new identity for occupied Lithuania more open to the world.

Lithuanian critic Vytautas Kubilius has metaphorically called Lithuanian literature the nation's defensive wall, emphasising its mission of resistance to occupation, which had been going on since the Russian empire banned the Lithuanian press in the nineteenth century. Geda took up this mission in his search for an alternative to the propaganda of the USSR's "friendship of nations", the imperial policy of the russification of minorities, and the construction of a communist industry. He linked his creative mission to the defence of the nation and the search for its roots:

So, like mice trapped with a broom, we had to defend ourselves, and we decided to defend ourselves using, as far as our strength allowed, all the old wisdom of Europe and Asia, the experience and advice of older people, their living example. ...Everywhere we tried to bale out the lifeboat, to find a more solid place to anchor ourselves. (Geda 1990: 20)

³ Of course, the concept of World Literature, albeit modified and changing, was discussed in Karl Marx's *The Communist Manifesto* (*Manifest der Kommunistischen Partei*, 1848), and later developed by the Leninist-Marxists. In 1918 Maxim Gorky founded the Всемирная литература (World Literature) Publishing House, while in 1932 Институт мировой литературы им. А. М. Горького РАН (The Gorky Institute of World Literature) was founded. However, during the Soviet occupation, the conception of World Literature and of the West in general differed considerably from the one on the other side of the Iron Curtain. Eleonory Gilburd, in her book *To See Paris and Die: The Soviet Lives of Western Culture* (2018), sees the interest in Western culture, literature and life as not only a desirable place to explore, but above all as an example of liberation (especially after the death of Stalin and the beginning of the Thaw). However, she stresses that people's interpretation of European literature during the Soviet period may have differed not only from that of the West, but also from the official version presented by the Communist Party. This was a small but important expression of freedom for readers and writers. The Lithuanian poet Tomas Venclova has repeatedly said in various meetings and articles that Stalin's fundamental mistake was to ban only a part of classical literature, because "[a]ll world literature of good quality, under any conditions, develops an anti-political consciousness". (Venclova 2016: 402)

These words express how important it was for the poet to find a factual geographical, cultural and value basis for his work connected with a pan-European identity. Geda created an escape from the closed Soviet regime, an encounter of equals with other cultures through the intense intertextuality of his writing. He reinforced Lithuania's commonality with Europe through intertextual connections with different discourses of ancient and modern literature, mythology, history and geography. For example the poem "Moteris" ("Woman", in the collection *Strazdas*, The Thrush, 1966) created an intertextual connection with the Greek myth of the origin of Europe, presented by transforming the intertext of Ovid's "μεταμορφώσεις" ("Metamorphoses"); as well as poems like "Eilėraštis Garsijai Lorcai" ("Poem to García Lorca", in the collection *Žydinti slyva Snaigyno ežere*, Flowering Plum in Snaigynas Lake, 1981) and many others created intertextual connections with specific historical personalities of different nations, especially artists, presented in the titles. In this case, we can draw a parallel with the creative works of Czesław Miłosz, as Geda himself noted about the famous Polish writer: "an old poet can touch his own land and the land of his ancestors, Serbs, Poles, Lithuanians, and we can smell with him what is the immortal, reborn *Gentes lithuanus*". (Geda 1992: 1)

Returning to the Origins of the Myth: Reconstructing Cultural Links Geda apprehended mythology both as a constant continuum, a link with other cultures and literatures, and a means to connect and get closer to the world beyond the Iron Curtain. This connection was, for him, important and strong as he believed that modernist literature inevitably incorporated the old, mythical stories, which became a natural and organic part of this literature: "Gabriel García Márquez, the world-famous author of *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, boldly admits that he has done nothing in this novel but written down his grandmother's stories as she herself told them to him, and was surprised when educated people saw all the features of modern literature in it..." (Geda 1976: 7) The mythological imagination was almost indistinguishable from that of literature. In this way, "figurative reserves are witnesses of a common national 'memory'". (Greimas 2005: 46) Furthermore, mythology, especially Baltic mythology, allowed Geda to escape from the aesthetics that prevailed during the Soviet period, to resist the ideology declared by the Soviets and its cliché-ridden, stereotype-filled poetry. In this regard we may recall Lithuanian scholar Povilas Aleksandravičius's pertinent assessment of the relationship between an open society and mythology: "As a source of openness, the mythological layer of thinking was also the mental support of the most closed totalitarian societies, whether Hitlerian or Stalinist". (Aleksandravičius 2019: 103) But we must not forget that during the Soviet occupation national heritage was allowed or in a certain extent even encouraged: as the Lithuanian scholar Nerija Putinaitė noted, Lithuanian songs, dances, costumes (especially song

and dance festivals), literary imagery, etc., were used to create a Soviet national identity (Putnaitė 2019). This Soviet national identity was controlled and standardised by the Soviet ideologues, who decided what was appropriate for mass use, but at the same time allowed people to feel that it was some kind of 'true' Lithuanian ethnicity or heritage.

Most importantly, Geda saw mythology as a possibility way to universalise literature and culture. Whether he was reviewing César Vallejo's collection of poetry, *España, Aparta de Mí Este Cáliz* (Spain, Take This Cup from Me, 1939) during the Soviet era or, once Lithuania regained independence, was expounding the importance of mythology, he continued to see mythology as a way of talking about universal things: "In one way or another, it is only by reflecting on mythology that the world becomes universal, alive, juicy, vital". (Geda 1990: 22) Many ideas also stimulated his interest in mythology, for example reading works written by the Lithuanian folklorist and religious scholar Norbertas Vėlius, who was the most prominent researcher of Lithuanian mythology in occupied Lithuania, and works by the famous Lithuanian-French semiotician and mythologist Algirdas Julius Greimas, as well as Lithuanian-American archaeologist and anthropologist Marija Gimbutienė, who were working in exile, along with the artistic works of Petras Repšys and Viktoras Petravičius and the music of the composer Bronius Kutavičius. He was also interested in the ideas of Georges Dumézil, Claude Lévi-Strauss, and Carl Gustav Jung at that time. (Geda 2003: 662)

Geda's interest in pre-history and archaic cultures coincided with the artistic trends of the second half of the 20th century, present in the works of his favourite authors. Guillaume Apollinaire had been fascinated by Latin American and African cultures, Rainer Maria Rilke focused on Egypt and early Greece, while Johannes Bobrowski was interested in Babylonian myths and epics, as well as Baltic and Prussian heritage. (Katkus 2010: 88) According to Laurynas Katkus, these artists were "motivated by a critical attitude towards industrial civilisation, exacerbated by the destructiveness of war, a sense of the end of the European tradition, and a desire, in Ezra Pound's words, to 'renew everything'". (Katkus 2010: 88) The rapid industrialisation of the USSR, with all the absurdities of socialism and the future of the world projected by scientific communism, was also perceived as the destruction of the sacred national rural culture, which was essential to cultural identity and needed to be defended and preserved.

Geda created his version of the emergence of civilisation, combining the intertexts of national and European culture. Thus two models of cultural identity could be said to be present in Geda's poetry. On the one hand, there is an archaic version of a return to the beginning of time, as evidenced in his poem "Stačios akys medinių dievukų" ("Steepest Eyes of Wooden Gods", in

the collection *Pėdos*, Footprints, 1966). On the other hand, a more modern cultural identity is seen in the poem “Eilėraštis Dionizui Poškai” (“Poem to Dionizas Poška”, in the collection *Žydinti slyva Snaigyno ežere*, Flowering Plum in Snaigynas Lake, 1981). The comparison and analysis of these two works enable us to discuss the self-creation of identity and the effect of modern World Literature on the intertextuality of these poems.

The first of these poems, “Stačios akys medinių dievukų”, develops an important intertext in Geda’s famous motif of footsteps⁴, which refers to folklore⁵ and, through it, to modern World Literature (compare Paul Celan’s poem “Vom Blau” (*Mohn und Gedächtnis*, 1952) and Johannes Bobrowski’s poem “Gegenlicht” (1959)). The beginning of Geda’s poem⁶ echoes the eye-foot connection in Celan’s work⁷, emphasising the self-identification of the lyrical subject. However, this need for self-identification is replaced by a longing for ancestral proximity and a desire to regain one’s former identity. It is noticeable that the identity of Celan’s subject is shattered and mourned, whereas Geda’s subject believes that he is the only one capable of preserving it: “Į mane kaip į žemę suėję” (Geda 1966: 14) (“Gathered within me as if in the ground”, translated by Jonas Zdanys 1978: 315) Geda conveys the reunification of all things, the return to the primeval, as the gift of language, which functions both as the “last fortress” (Geda 1991: 86–89) and as a mediator of individual and universal experiences. Language creates a metatextual link to a much wider field of cultural meanings.

A repetition in the second and sixth lines of Geda’s poem exposes the intertext⁸ of Bobrowski’s poem “Gegenlicht”⁹. In the German poet’s work, the

⁴ According to Kmita, “the title of Geda’s first collection of poems [*Pėdos* [*Footprints* – K. B.] is precisely indicative of this effort to follow in the footsteps of others, to search for one’s own path by looking into the past, into the traces already left behind, and to create a new language”. (Kmita 2009: 78)

⁵ “Gerkit. / Melskitės. / Melskitės. / Gerkit – / Į mane kaip į žemę suėję ...” (Geda 1966: 14) (“Drink. / Pray. / Pray. / Drink – / Gathered within me as if in the ground ...”. (Translated by Jonas Zdanys 1978: 315)

⁶ “Stačios akys medinių dievukų – / Ar ne mano, / Ne tavo akys? / Kaip arti jūs, / Protėviai mano! ...” (Geda 1966: 13) (“The erect eyes of wooden gods – / Aren’t they mine, / Aren’t they yours? / How close you are, / My ancestors! ...” (Translated by Jonas Zdanys 1978: 315)

⁷ “VOM Blau, das noch sein Auge sucht, trink ich als erster. / Aus deiner Fußspur trink ich und ich seh ...” (Celan: 1962: 46)

⁸ “... Kaip arti jūs, / Protėviai mano! ...” (Geda 1966: 13) (“... How close you are / My forefathers! ...” (Translated by Jonas Zdanys 1978: 315).

⁹ “... Himmel umarmt hielt, / hörten wir Singen / im Wälderschatten. Der Ahn / ging verwachsenen Gräben nach. ...” (Bobrowski 1998: 32).

ancestor follows traces and signs of prehistory, and it is very important for the lyrical subject not to lose touch with the earlier world. According to Katkus, “the imagery of prehistory in Bobrowski’s lyrics is not an end in itself: it does not express the modernist’s admiration for primordial forms and powers, but allegorically conveys the actual experience of the loss of one’s homeland”. (Katkus 2010: 83) On the other hand, Geda has a dual view of the ancestors, both as a lost world and as an integral part of the contemporary world. The ancestors and the tracing of their footsteps take on a universal meaning, one which is linked to memory and the permanence of one’s identity. For him, it is essential to build on the foundations of his nation. It is also important to seek communion with others, with literary collaborators, whom he hails as “fellows of the secret society of souls”¹⁰. (Geda 1983: 142)

The significance of this communion is reinforced if we see not only a model of an archaic but also of an open modern identity in Geda’s poetry. The uniqueness of his poetry becomes apparent in comparison to the poetry of the so-called Lithuanian national bard, the Roman Catholic priest Maironis (Jonas Mačiulis, 1862–1932). According to Lithuanian literary scholar Vanda Zaborskaitė, for Maironis, “the nation is the basic category of world history”. (Zaborskaitė 2001: 743) On the other hand, in Geda’s work, nationality is much more complicated, influenced by the cosmopolitanism of modernism and postmodernism: “For me, poetry is as if without nationality. There is language. And if there is a substance in it, the author is like a brother to me. It does not matter that he speaks another language. We have drunk from our own and foreign sources”. (Geda 1994: 202) This insurmountable tension between the substance of language and the universality of culture, the smallness of the particular and the limitlessness of the universe, is harmonised to the full in his poetry. This bond of communion – of what is one’s own, and the Other – is visible in many of Geda’s poems and is their distinctive feature. A piece of art becomes one of the common identity lines or bridges connecting different peoples and different creators.

Geda’s poem “Eilėraštis Dionizui Poškai” illustrates these intertextual connections, with its references to specific historical personalities of different nations, especially creators and artists. Lithuanian literary scholar Kęstutis Nastopka, who reviewed this poetry collection, noted its multidimensionality as it equates the Lithuania of Maironis and Lithuanian poet Vytautas Mačernis

¹⁰ Geda used the emblematic metaphor of “fellows of the secret society of souls” when discussing the connections made in his work: “In poetry, cultural connections are obscure, secret, they are the deep conversations of our souls for the sake of the eternal values”. (Geda 1983: 142)

with the homeland of Spanish poetry (“Keturiuos rapsodijos ir epilogas”, Four Rhapsodies and an Epilogue, Nastopka 1982: 5); Bosch’s paintings ‘talk’ to the 19th-century poet, historian and lexicographer Dionizas Poška and the famous Lithuanian painter and composer Mikalojus Konstantinas Čiurlionis (“Eilėraštis Jeronimui Boschui”, Poem to Hieronymus Bosch), and Rembrandt appears in Lithuanian lands during the Napoleonic Wars at Eastertime (“Ekologinis eilėraštis”, Ecological Poem). Geda’s poem may be said to balance between a parody of the ode genre and an elegy to a lost land, and it is created using the collage technique.

A game of dedications can be found in this poem, the language becoming somewhat Aesopic. Geda does not create biographical or historical portraits but rather engages in a creative dialogue, using these portraits to speak about himself, his nation, its history and culture. The creative dialogue is also very important because we will not find a fear of influence in either Geda’s poems or in his public statements in the Soviet and independent Lithuanian press. On the contrary, Geda constantly stressed the importance of literary connections, wondered at and criticised the desire of other poets to conceal their creative inspirations, and recorded his admiration for Harold Bloom’s “The Anxiety of Influence” in his diary from the time of Lithuanian independence: “At last! The best (and closest to me) thing I’ve heard about poetry in 50 years!” (Geda 2003: 446) As the Lithuanian scholar Rimantas Kmita noted, it is difficult to trace where Geda learned about Bloom’s “The Anxiety of Influence”, but the poet was no stranger to the ideas of this literary scholar because he was always interested in the dialogue between different writers, in the peculiar rewriting, reworking, and transformation of their ideas or images. (Kmita 2022: 78–79)

The intertext of the dedication found in the first stanza of Geda’s poem, and its title¹¹, imitates and transforms Dionizas Poška’s poetic tradition by using a comedic element derived from François Villon. The French poet used dedications (to various friends, noblewomen, courtiers, Parisian women, France’s enemies, important events or facts of his life (Kašeliionienė 2010: 274)) as a mask to reinforce the impression of autobiographical verisimilitude. In Geda’s poem Poška, the ideologue of the Samogitian cultural movement, who stressed the importance of historical and political identity, is encouraged to kiss Adam Mickiewicz, the eminent Polish-Lithuanian poet of the 19th century and classic of Polish literature. Geda satirises an ode written in the classical style by using an element of comedy and parody. There is no longer an authoritative

¹¹ “Dionizai Poška, pabučiuok Adomą / Mickevičių, šaltu absurdišku bučiniu ...” (Geda 1981: 22) (“Dionizas Poška, kiss Adam / Mickiewicz, with a cold, absurd kiss ...” (Literal translation of this poem by the author of this article.)

speaker proclaiming unquestionable universal truths, instead a biting, frustrated lyrical subject emerges. Furthermore, there is no longer a historical event etched in the memory of the community, only its remnants. Alongside the intertextual relationship, we also see a critical relationship with the genre's tradition, conveyed through the collage technique mentioned earlier.

The intertext of Adam Mickiewicz is not accidental. His works were full of images of communal identity, and combined national patriotism with European tradition. Mickiewicz was also an important figure of national liberation in the 19th century. At the time of Lithuanian independence, Geda quoted his close friend Justinas Mikutis from memory in his diary, naming Mickiewicz as the first Polish-language witness to a Lithuanian becoming a human being. (Geda 1999: 334) Mickiewicz's biographical information and creative ideas function in Geda's poem to maintain the comic and absurd effect: "senas Mickevičius klūpo Paryžiuje", old Mickiewicz kneeling in Paris. (Geda 1981: 22) Intertexts become cultural masks, the creation of their own mythology conveying messages to the reader that there is a plurality, a changing cultural identity beyond the walls of the Iron Curtain. It is an appeal to both cultural heritage and its modernisation. At the same time, however, the theme of a corroded, crisis-ridden, extinct identity emerges:

<p>... Lietuvos nebėra, nebēr bičių, skraidančių vasarovidžiais viršum Marcinkonių bažnyčios, vargonininkas numirė, šalta (Geda 1981: 22)</p>	<p>... Lithuania is no more, there are no more bees flying in the summer air above Marcinkonys church, the organist has died, and it is cold</p>
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This poem of Geda's transforms the beginning of the Mickiewicz poem "Pan Tadeusz, czyli ostatni zajazd na Litwie. Historia szlachecka z roku 1811 i 1812 we dwunastu księgach wierszem pisana", *Mister Thaddeus, or the Last Foray in Lithuania: A History of the Nobility in the Years 1811 and 1812 in Twelve Books of Verse* (1834) – from "Litwo! Ojczyzno moja!", Lithuania, my homeland, to "Lietuvos nebėra", Lithuania no longer exists. (Geda 1981: 22) The swarm of bees described by the Samogitian goddess of glory ("a metaphor for the unity and harmony of society", Speičytė 2002: 83) in Poška's ode is replaced in Geda's poem by the infinite emptiness of a vanished community. These, and similar, examples, show how Geda, living under occupation, attempts to send a message to his readers by turning to various cultural sources and searching for the roots of the nation. New tools and new myths are needed to convey historical memory. The Romantic ode is therefore ironised and arranged in a collage, but the elegy is chosen where the story is painful. The abundance of intertexts also conveys the timelessness of the poem. Although specific historical

circumstances or personalities are mentioned, the situation of occupation and loss of identity is universalised. The mosaic of identity, which accommodates different historical times and contexts, breaks out of its confines.

Thus, even the identity of the extinct community is defined by specific geographical boundaries:

<p>... Nemunas, piktas ir kvailas mūsų sienų sargybinis, mūsų šunų, mūsų vaikų, mūsų vilkdalgių Lietuvos, (Geda 1981: 22)</p>	<p>... Nemunas, angry and stupid guardian of our borders, guardian of our dogs, our children, guardian of our irises in Lithuania,</p>
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The geographical reference to the Nemunas River implies an intertextual connection with Bobrowski's poem "Die Memel"¹². According to Katkus, the Nemunas River has long been considered the boundary between barbaric and civilised Europe, between German civilisation and the non-civilisation of Eastern Europe. (Katkus 2010: 77) Bobrowski's poem not only glorifies the Nemunas, but links it to memory. (Katkus 2010: 81) The reference to the Nemunas in Geda's poem functions both as a boundary and as a memory that encourages the lyrical subject to sing. It also reveals the poem's elegiac character. Singing becomes another intertextual reference in Geda's poem¹³, which leads not only to Christian poetry but also to the 3rd part of Rilke's "Die Sonette an Orpheus"¹⁴ and reinforces the elegiac nature of the poem. In a 1980 interview on translation and poetic language, Geda discusses Rilke's metaphor and its links to poetic activity:

Rilke's formula – *Gesang ist Dasein* – is particularly close to me – singing is being... [...] Singing is not writing, not putting words together, but the echoes of Orpheus. If language is the house of being, then the poet is the one who walks through that house, resurrecting things, with his voice, or with his lyre, as it was said before, turning them over into a disembodied, fluttering and resounding eternity. (Geda 1980: 12)

¹² "Hinter den Feldern, weit, / hinter den Wiesen / der Strom. / Von seinem Atem / aufweht die Nacht. / Über den Berg / fährt der Vogel und schreit". (Bobrowski: 1998: 67)

¹³ "... gieda Prūsija, vištos einančios mirti, / gieda Mickevičius, apleisdamas Lietuvą, / gieda akmenys, gieda ugnis, / gieda balta dilgėlė" (Geda 1981: 22) ("...Prussia sings, the hens go to die, / Mickiewicz sings, abandoning Lithuania, / stones sing, fire sings, / the white nettle sings")

¹⁴ "... Gesang, wie du ihn lehrst, ist nicht Begehrt, / nicht Werbung um ein endlich noch Erreichtes; / Gesang ist Dasein. Für den Gott ein Leichtes. / Wann aber *sind* wir? Und wann wendet er ..." (Rilke 1930: 7)

The intertext of singing as the revelation of being in language in Geda's poem transforms Rilke's interpretation. Rilke's "Gesang ist Dasein" expressed the idea that in order to become alive, one must discover the fullest expression of being. It is a poetic language that calls for openness, pain, death and leads to eternity. In Geda's poem, everything that disappears is endowed with the power of singing.

All of the intertexts cited provoke the reader's attention, encouraging him or her to transcend historical barriers, operate in a variety of contexts, and, finally, attend to the themes of exile and resistance to occupation. The common links between different historical and cultural phenomena in the poetry taught the readers, who were closed off by the Iron Curtain, to see the broader dimension of national identity and be led towards a European identity. The abundant intertextual connections revealed an open but contradictory cultural identity. Geda's poetry seeks to reconcile his own culture and its openness to the world. It would seem that there is no longer a distinction between what is one's own and the Other because "[t]he realities of the world leave marks on the consciousness of the Lithuanian, they become his or her experience, and thus we are connected to the history and culture of the world". (Balionienė 1996: 164) Moreover, the abundance of intertextual connections helps the reader understand how Geda's poem "lit l'histoire et s'insère en elle", reads history and inserts itself into it. (Kristeva 1969: 443) It would have been impossible to turn back to the roots of his endangered nation, search for its voice and maintain its vitality without the network of intertexts in Geda's poem. Although the poem does not refer to specific historical circumstances or personalities, the situation of the Soviet occupation is universalised. The mosaic nature of the cultural identity created in the poem, which accommodates different historical times and contexts, loses its temporal limits. Nothing is separate because all are united by the mythical "Lietuvos širdis", heart of Lithuania (Geda 1981: 23) and memory.

Conclusion

This article used the methodology of intertextuality to discuss how Geda's work was open to European culture, linking it to mythology and World Literature. After the analysis, we can say that, resisting the erasure of historical memory by Soviet ideologues, Geda turned to the oldest cultural sources, reinterpreting the history of the emergence of civilisation in his own way. In his research for mythical archaic forms to contain the chaos of history, his poetry moved away from the stylisation of folklore (which was popular in the Lithuanian literature at that time) towards a combination of mythology and

modern European and World literature. He also used Goethe's model of universality to create an open cultural identity that could oppose the Soviet one. My analysis showed that this shift was based on a strong intertextual connection with the poetry of Bobrowski, Celan, Rilke, Villon, Poška and Mickiewicz. Geda created his famous motif of *pėdos* (footprints) based on Bobrowski's poetical theme of prehistorical times and from Celan's eye-foot connection, which Geda made into a longing for ancestral proximity. Geda's search for a connection with prehistoric times became his crucial poetic principle, based on Rilke's *gesang ist dasen* and meaning that the task of poetry was to transfer and preserve different experiences in the written world, otherwise it could be erased by Soviet ideology and its project of a narrow Soviet identity. Moreover, Geda's poetry was characterised by a poetics of intertextual masks close to those of an artistic nature, which he developed on the basis of Villon's poetics. By creating an active dialogue with World literature, the Lithuanian poet presented a particularly vivid and open aspect of the interplay of different texts. The different contexts of national and World Literature combined in Geda's poems to create the cultural identity of a universal, open lyrical subject, expanded the horizons of readers who were enclosed by the Iron Curtain and fostered the perception of a nationhood inseparable from European and world culture.

This article tried to make a small contribution to historical studies of national literature, especially in relation to the problems of intertextuality, literary reception and the openness of cultural identity, but it is also relevant to contemporary literary processes. Today, we need to rethink the relationship between the local and the global that dominates World Literature and the concept of changing cultural identity. Thus, it is worth further exploring Geda's later work, which is outside the scope of this article and to see his concept of Europeanness and approach to World Literature and mythology shifted since Lithuania regained independence.

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