

Semiotics of guilt in two Lithuanian literary texts

Loreta Mačianskaitė

Institute of the Lithuanian Literature and Folklore
Antakalnio Str. 6, 2055 Vilnius, Lithuania
e-mail: loryte@takas.lt

Abstract. The idea of the article was suggested by Lotman's theory about two basic mechanisms of social behaviour — fear and shame. The presented paper aims at highlighting two other mechanisms of such kind — guilt and repentance. The novella *Isaac* (1960–61) by Antanas Škëma, the Lithuanian writer in exile, is about a Lithuanian patriot who kills a Jew called Isaac during the years of German occupation. The author's fundamental conception implies that the real perpetrator of crime is not a separate individual but the crowd representing the values of the society. Škëma's interpretation of history demystifies the moral system in the inter-war Lithuania and proves it to be a collection of futile signs that fail to prevent society from falling into mass psychosis and following primitive impulses. The other Lithuanian novel, Leonardas Gutas' *Šešėliai* (*Shadows*) written in 2000, focuses on the tense relationships between Lithuanians and Russians, suggesting that there are several moral systems determining the concepts of guilt-repentance. The Christian agricultural society embodies the ethics of individual responsibility. The domination of the Russian ethic code is associated with the separation of Churches and the strengthening of the Orthodox Church. A moral system based on harmony and aiming to reconcile the guilty and the innocent comes across as a sought ideal. Both novels discussed exemplify different modes of a liberating society. The first one is an account of the society's effort to become free of the guilt complex and rethink its history. The second one articulates the guilt of the Russian nation against Lithuanians and fights russophobia at the same time.

Juri Lotman has pointed out that the analysis of a society at the time of crisis is one of the most convenient ways of throwing light on the non-critical (natural) invariant of its structure (Lotman 1998: 63). He regarded fear and shame as the principal mechanisms harmonising

social relations. We, in turn believe that it is relevant to consider the critical consciousness in terms of the mechanism of guilt and repentance embracing the universal opposition *own – alien*.

The Lithuanian sociologist of culture Vytautas Kavolis (1996: 73) considered the attitude towards Jews to be one of the main means to indicate the cultural level of a society. Lithuanians and the Jews had lived together for eight hundred years, and, according to historians, at the times of Lithuania's prosperity the Jewish people were protected and treated justly. Although during the periods of crises anti-Semitic tendencies would intensify, there were no pogroms either at the end of the 19th century nor in 1905. Furthermore, in the period of Lithuanian democracy, the issue of Jewish autonomy was settled in probably one of the best ways in Europe, although it is true that the two communities lived in separate worlds that had little to do with each other. Anti-Semitic tendencies in Lithuanian literature were not strong and took the form of kind-hearted mocking at the oddities of an alien culture, or showing distrust of Jewish merchants. Therefore, there was no more friction between Lithuanians and the Jews than in the Lithuanians' relationships with other minorities. The poet and cultural scholar Tomas Venclova (1996: 73) is convinced that the surge of anti-Semitism in Lithuania at the beginning of the World War II, in 1941, that is, the June pogroms and the infamous massacre in a Kaunas garage where hundreds of Jews were slashed to death by Lithuanians in front of Germans, while the latter did not take part in the massacre directly, contradict the whole Lithuanian historic tradition. This topic was did not get thorough consideration in literature: from the Soviet point of view, there is a distinct tendency to turn away from those who have stained their hands with the Jewish blood to the extent that they were expelled from the Lithuanian nation. This standpoint was associated with censorship and the ideological canon of the time. Exile literature would avoid the theme of the Lithuanian guilt before the Jews altogether.

Antanas Škėma's novella *Isaac (Izaokas)* written in 1960–1961 is of a special importance. Not only does it portray the fact of Lithuanians being present in the killing of the Jews but it also reveals the further existence of a murdered that turns into hell. Using the results of the semiotic analysis that will not be elaborated on in this paper, an attempt will be made to exhibit the profound conception of guilt in the novella and its cultural code.

As opposed to Soviet writers, the author who is an emigrant does not depict the murderer as a degenerate and a sadist but a sensitive artist like himself who in some ways can represent the youngest generation of Lithuanian intellectuals. The protagonist Andrius Gluosnis slashes a Jew called Isaac with a little shovel at the beginning of the war in the garage *Lietūkis* in Kaunas (this episode based on real facts is presented in the *Forward* of the novella). Ten years later, the protagonist, who is living in the United States, receives a letter with a single word "Isaac" in it and starts searching for his former victim and executor who used to prick him under his nails in the prisons of the NKVD. The protagonist is characterised by the passion of guilt that is generated by, first, the desire to meet Isaac and, second, the fear of punishment that is reinforced by the realisation of its inevitability. He is also haunted by a suspicion that Isaac might have survived and be living in the States at that moment in time. The guilt complex grows into a prosecution mania. Trying to get rid of it Gluosnis voluntarily commits himself to a mental institution that reminds of a prison. The grey sirs make Gluosnis and Isaac, whom he eventually meets in the asylum are made to, recreate violent actions of the past. They are not able to remember the exact details of the torture and murder. Finally, they refuse to perform somebody else's will, thus, kill the guard and fall into each other's embrace in the spell of brotherly love.

The episodes recounted before the scenes at the asylum keeps at least a small relation with possible reality. Starting with the eighth chapter the everyday logic is no longer valid and what happens between Gluosnis and Isaac should be understood as the theatre of the protagonist's mind. Isaac, who is a hallucination, represents the part of Gluosnis' personality that he lost twenty years ago, at the time of killing the Jew. The two parts of his personality, the present and the lost one, reunite when the guard of the asylum, who symbolises evil incarnate or Cain that hides inside every person, is murdered. The finale of the novella is imbued with irony, as the victory against evil is possible only in an asylum and the fate of its staff suggests even more. The mentally disturbed Gluosnis does not realise that by killing the guard he repeats Cain's story.

The victory that the protagonist gains over the universal evil, which to him is represented by a black guard, is demystified by the racist isotope, drawn in the previous chapters. Before Gluosnis finds himself in the asylum, his personality is gradually destroyed by the

suffering caused by his betrayed love and anger towards his lover Živilė for her having an affair with a black man. The ambiguous finale contains a moment of Gluosnis' repressed jealousy and revenge to Živilė's lover that turns into a farce both the possible escape from the dead-end of the victim-executioner situation and the final scene of brotherly (homosexual) love, into a farce.

In the semantic universe created by Škėma, the opposition *own – alien* is valid not only within the limits of a national culture distancing itself from the alien Jewish tradition. It applies for the whole modern multicultural world in which the whites tend to demonise the blacks who, in their own turn, hate the former and so on.

The figures that repeatedly emerge in the scenes at the institution and the *Forward* make it possible to grasp the idea of the work. For example, the black guard doubles the senior member of the SS that appears in the *Forward*: they are both called higher rank creatures, polished shoes are emphasised as a detail common to both of them, the patients of the asylum are figuratively associated with the Jews crawling in the yard of the garage portrayed in the *Forward*. According to the author's conception, human existence is as pointless, or, to put it more precisely, mad, in Europe possessed by the totalitarian demons of the war, as in the USA, comfortable in its peace. On the other hand, the world was equally incomprehensible in its violence at its beginning, when Cain, repudiated by God, killed his brother, or Abraham raised a knife against his beloved son.

Škėma does not emphasise the ideological or psychological reasons for people's disagreements; the protagonist's passion of guilt is characterised by the cognitive dimension. The author is rather looking for the primal root of evil, which is to be found in the very nature of humanity, that is bodily existence and sexuality. The elements of revenge and violence that can reach the level of hatred and fierce fight are found even in cases of strongest love between a man and a woman. The isotopes of love for Živilė and search for Isaac constantly overlap and blend in the episode at the asylum. When a young Jewish doctor asks Gluosnis whether he wants to kill Isaac, the latter admits: "The question wasn't unexpected. While thinking about Živilė, I may have pondered Isaac's fate" (Škėma 2001: 60).

The theme of an ideological confrontation between the Lithuanian patriot and the NKVD member is not developed in the novella. According to Škėma's concept, it is not ideas, but the body that instigates the murder (when the blood does not generate the desire to

revenge, killing becomes impossible). Although the classical body and soul dichotomy refers to the structure of Christian values, the position of the God is empty. The world after the two World Wars does not believe in the idea of a God expiating guilt any more; and the latter remains an eternal debt [*debt* is another meaning of the word *guilt* in Lithuanian] that can only be paid by emancipation from bodily oppression. Therefore, in Škëma's ironic interpretation, hell may be overcome only by way of a blissful madness, by freeing the pure spirit that is opposed by the bodily reality dividing people into their own personalities and the alien, white and black, Lithuanian and Jewish, men and women.

A phenomenologist Paul Ricoeur (2001: 114–116) believes that the most archaic symbolism of evil is the symbolism of a stain that defiles from the outside, while subjective guilt suggests self-control, self-accusation and self-condemnation of a double consciousness. Škëma's character is disfigured by guilt. The destruction of his body manifests the situation where the existential basis is eradicated, physical impotence metaphorises the spiritual state of the people in exile. The highlighted reference to the protagonist's big belly becomes a straightforward metaphor of the weight on his conscience. Gluosnis' notes reveal the signs of badly injured masculine identity: constant tears and crying for mother brings him close to the negative female stereotype or raises associations with a child who has not reached sexual maturity. In the context of the semiotic square, the fluctuation of the protagonist's sexual values would correspond with the movements in the *poles mediators* of the square, i.e. on the axis not-man vs not-woman.

Gluosnis cannot and does not want to be a traditional strong man, as he associates manhood with war and killing. In the Modern Art Museum, Gluosnis threatens to cut off his genitals as a sacrifice to the statute of an Etruscan God. This sort of eccentric behaviour is caused by the memory of the murdered Isaac. The refusal of the genitals in this case means his wish to become free from guilt and responsibility; guilt and manhood are overcome in the final scene, when Gluosnis is reciting the lyrics of *Song of Songs*, attributed to the female lover, to Isaac. Gluosnis also feels guilty for not having been able to defend his motherland and family as a real man. His daughter stayed in Lithuania and, according to the assumption of the former NKVD prisoner, *she has probably studied Marx seriously* (Škëma 2001: 25). Gluosnis who

has denounced his daughter is the opposite of Abraham, who, as we know, is considered to be the father of the chosen people.

Škėma uses interpretative possibilities of the Abraham-Isaac story in an original way. Gluosnis' portrait embodies characteristics opposite to the biblical Abraham: the murder of the Jewish NKVD member is his way to fulfil his own desire for revenge that he identifies with God's will. The character's secret desire is voiced by the kerchiefed little old lady, featured as a fairytale character, who enters the scene in the *Forward*. A semiotician Algirdas Julius Greimas (1989: 378–379) writes that revenge as the narrative programme of the subject takes form after the emergence of a possibility to act. The act of granting this competence creates the sender-judge and turns revenge into justice.

The kerchiefed little old lady functions in the novella as a sender who instigates and judges the actions of the protagonist. She tempts the main character to kill, then, recognises him to be unworthy of Živilė's love, appears in Gluosnis' mind when he is suffering and trying to find answers to his damned questions and announces the end of revenge in the final scene: ““Well, now you've gotten your revenge, sonny,” the kerchiefed little old lady was happy and didn't need to ask any more” (Škėma 2001: 87).

The protagonist of Škėma's novella might be considered to be a tragic character who is guilty without guilt. Gluosnis is a kind of pseudo Abraham who has sinned, having taken *vox populi* for the will of the God. The author does not aim his accusations at the exhausted intellectual but at the 'choir' of spectators watching the execution of the Jews with great amusement, common Lithuanian passers-by, the kerchiefed little old lady mentioned above, or street boys, beating the rhythm of the SS soldiers' march with their feet.

Škėma deconstructs the myth of the inter-war Lithuanian society by interpreting it as immature, trying to control natural impulses. In the asylum, Gluosnis is characterised as a Lithuanian nationalist whose nationalism, he believes, goes back to the times of the Grand Duke of Lithuania Vytautas and allows opting for Nazism. At this point, it is worthwhile to remember the privilege that Vytautas granted to the Lithuanian Jews in 1388, according to which each Christian Lithuanian who did not help his or her Jewish neighbour in need, was to be severely punished. The scene of the massacre in the Kaunas garage depicted by Škėma illustrates a situation defined in Vytautas'

decree. However, in case of psychoses neither Christian moral values nor regard for Vytautas' authority or other national symbols work.

In the *Forward* chapter of the novella, the blood hunter crowd of spectators is ironically paralleled with the view of a cemetery on the other side of the road. The national heroes Darius and Girėnas who flew over the Atlantic in 1938 and were shot down by Germans, are buried in that cemetery.

And next to the cemetery fence, memorials to dead pilots, stone monuments decorated with propellers. The propellers were stuck into the ground like crosses and draped with withered flowers. The flowers had been timidly replaced during the Bolshevik era, but now, during the German invasion, they were forgotten. (Škėma 2001: 17)

According to Škėma's ironic interpretation of the tragedy, watching of the killing of the Jews was also a betrayal of the Lithuanian nation, an insult to the Lithuanian identity and self-esteem. This was so because in the Lithuanian national mentality the death of the two heroes has always been associated with the fault of Germans (the word fault also means guilt in Lithuanian). Lithuanian patriotism proves to be a childish system of symbols devoid of a historic self-consciousness and personal as well as moral sense of responsibility.

Škėma's novella written 40 years ago was a powerful sign testifying to the important changes taking place in the Lithuanian self-consciousness, getting away from the mythological interpretation of history and the comfortable theory of the two cases of genocide — putting a mark of equality between the holocaust and the Soviet terror — thus eliminating the guilt. As it is obvious from media coverage, this theory is popular in Lithuania today. It has been repeatedly revived by a chain of court procedures and the image of a Lithuanian Jew killer escalated in the world. Therefore, the novella remains important not only because of its artistic quality, the ambitious attempt to penetrate the transcendental remnants of crime (Venclova 1991: 147), but also because of the topicality of its theme. To put it in Hegel's terms, in this ironical novella laughter loaded with contempt gives more freedom to the spirit.

The novel *Šešėliai* (Shadows) by the winner of the last year's Lithuanian National Award Leonardas Gutauskas published in 2000, focuses on an even more complicated issue of the relationships between Russians and Lithuanians. The plot consists mainly of the

conversations carried out between a dying Lithuanian, a former prisoner of a deportee camp in Siberia, and the ghost of a murdered soldier. Both characters have no names and are devoid of any individual features. They function as symbolic figures representing the values of their respective nations.

The continuous tension is retained by the opposition *own – alien*. The mechanism of repentance is geared to dissolve the opposition by way of finding a common basis in terms of values. The author looks for it in childhood that is portrayed as an heaven on earth. The two characters who both grew up on banks of different rivers share their memories about the childhood fishing and hunting experiences, reliving the sacredness of the nature. Nature is interpreted as a space common to everyone, in the background of which the common essence of all human beings that does not depend on a socio-cultural context becomes evident. Nevertheless, both characters display culturally marked attitudes towards nature. In this case, however, culture is something that unites rather than divides the representatives of the two nations. The common cultural code is Christianity and the Holy Scripture, as the grand narrative legitimising the world order. “Fish has united us, says the Russian, Water that, according to the Holy Scripture, gave birth to everything. There was water and the Spirit of God floating over the waters” (Gutauskas 2001: 62). The nature represents the holy order that embraces the world of a human being and abides by the principles of harmony. The example of such a harmonious co-existence of a human being with nature in Gutauskas’ novel is the agricultural community who observes Christian traditions. In this community, the human being is considered to be the creation of God responsible for the nature entrusted him, rather than its master. For example, the Lithuanian remembers the sense of guilt he experienced having killed a small animal and the metaphysical fear that someone or something invisible can punish him. The frozen animal eyes become a metaphor for conscience, a reference to the supreme addresser that can determine the concept of human guilt.

According to the model of three moral systems: freedom, order and harmony, proposed by an Anglo–Austrian anthropologist Christoph von Fürer-Haimendorf (1995), the authentic Christian community can be considered to be the system of freedom, because each individual makes a personal decision on the extent of his or her moral obligations, whereas the concept of sin implies a voluntary approval of evil. This theory suggests that the moral structure of freedom is

opposed by a system of rules that focuses on a community rather than on an individual, the individual guilt, included (Kavolis 1996: 224–226). In the novel under consideration, the system of rules and the whole alien reality is represented by the Cossack cultural tradition. The Russian proudly tells the Lithuanian about his family descending from the free Cossacks, who followed Yermak to Siberia later on and thus retained the dynasty of warriors.

The Lithuanian, however, keeps asking questions deconstructing the Cossack myth. Having looked at the conquering of Siberia through the eyes of the representative of a small nation, the Russian takes on the collective guilt.

Apologising for what I have done, I would like to apologise in the name of all the Cossacks, I tell you, we really didn't know what we were doing, we slashed without even thinking [...] no matter where the Czar would send us. (Gutauskas 2001: 102)

The two characters do not blame each other personally for the tragedy that took place thirty-five years ago. On the contrary, they keep asking each other for forgiveness. They both admit that Stalin is the one to blame together with the totalitarian system he created, the roots of which may be traced in the Russian history, that is, in the Cossack raids that implemented the Great Russian chauvinist politics as well as in the Soviet occupation of Lithuania. The same power structure based on the principle of blind submission to an earthly authority is recognised in the Gulag in Siberia.

The beginning of this principle as well as system in which rules dominate is reconstructed in Gutauskas' interpretation and is identified with the split of the Russian Orthodox Church in the seventeenth century. The Holy Russia and its loyalty to the heavenly order is represented by the moral value system of the Old Believers (the Russian word *Staroobriacy* is used in the text). The Lithuanian Staroobriacy village embodies the above-mentioned value system. Sukiniai is called the proper Russian village, maybe even more so than any other village in Siberia, as the latter are all Orthodox (*pravoslavy*), already (Gutauskas 2001: 72).

The way Lithuanians and the Staroobriacy live side by side is presented as an ideal model for different cultures to co-exist. The uniqueness of the two cultures is preserved and there is no reason for tension or guilt to emerge between them. Lithuanian literature usually portrays the Staroobriacy in a positive perspective. However, their

culture is often identified with the alien realm, especially in the texts reflecting childhood experiences. Gutauskas' novel does not interpret Staroobriacy community as alien, furthermore, they are rendered as an example of solidarity and morality that surpasses even the idealised Catholic Lithuanians whose peacefulness is constantly opposed to the interests of the expansively minded Orthodox monarchy.

The author seems to suggest that Russians should return to their spiritual roots by way of abandoning the system of rules in favour of the morality of freedom. The start of this turning point would be a reconsideration of history and conscious acknowledgement of guilt. The third model of moral value system is created at the end of the novel, that is the morality of harmony when the attempt is made not to find the guilty or the innocent, but to reconcile. The expression marking reconciliation is a cross erected by the Lithuanian in memory of the murdered Russian and his own suffering in Siberia. The wooden cross combines the realms of nature and culture, with emphasis on the cultural code common to both nations. The cross is decorated with one of the most powerful Lithuanian religious symbols, a copy of the Gate of Dawn Madonna, which is further decorated with blue, white and red flowers, reflecting the colours of the Russian flag. In order to expiate guilt, repentance is not enough, there has to be a ritual recreating the world order. Erecting the cross and the creation of the cosmogony myth in the *Epilogue* perform the function of this sort of ritual. The main ideas of the novel are repeated in a condensed way in the story about a fight between man and a dragon. The role of the cultural hero is played by a boy from the Lithuanian Staroobriacy village, while his mother's voice crying *Vasia Vosiliok* reunites the Lithuanian and Russian banks that had been symbolically divided by the river of blood.

The novel under consideration refers to the archaising tendency of culture modernisation. According to the culture theoretician Kavolis (1996: 243), archaic thinking seeks to revive the sense of community and is based on the concept of the whole in which everything has its own meaning. Both the modernising and archaising tendencies blend in the common realm of humanisation. Gutauskas' archaism is a positive phenomenon signifying that Russo-phobia and the complex of eternally oppressed nation are being gradually defeated. Škėma's novella may be related to the trajectory of modernisation in a different way. The processes of conscious guilt acknowledgement and forgiveness undertaken from different directions are necessary for personal and cultural emancipation.

Both analysed novels came as a surprise in the context of the Lithuanian prose. Škėma, who lived in exile, in an environment protecting national innocence, where the topic of guilt against Jews was considered to be a strict taboo, had the courage to take up the topic. Gutauskas touches upon a ‘delayed action mine’, one of the most painful issues in the Lithuanian history, the guilt of the Russian people. He offers a way of forgiveness, which might be interpreted as an insult to the suffering of the Lithuanian people. In conclusion, let me refer to Lotman’s (1992: 122) idea that unpredictability of art is both the cause and effect of unpredictability of life.

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Семиотика вины

(на основе анализа двух текстов литовской литературы)

Идея статьи навеяна теорией Ю. М. Лотмана о двух семиотических механизмах: страхе и стыде. Публикуемая статья основана на анализе двух литовских литературных текстов, в которых обнажены механизмы вины и покаяния.

Повесть “Исаак” (Izaokas), созданная писателем литовской эмиграции Антанасом Шкемой, раскрывает трагедию литовца-интеллектуала, страдающего от комплекса вины, возникшего по той причине, что во время войны он убил еврея. Покаяние не приводит протагониста к внутреннему очищению, а напротив, превращается в

манию преследования, из-за чего он становится пациентом психиатрической клиники и совершает новое убийство. Анализ основных фигуративных изотопий в дискурсе позволяет автору статьи воссоздать скрытую концепцию повести. Истинной причиной убийства оказываются не противоречия идеологического или культурного плана, а двойственность самой человеческой природы, которая в кризисных ситуациях становится неподконтрольной силам социума. Ответственными за убийства евреев являются не отдельные индивиды, а анонимная масса наблюдателей, в присутствии которых разыгрывается трагедия в каунасском гараже “Летукис”. Создавшаяся ситуация и побудила бывших жертв НКВД к мести в то время, когда они случайно оказались в кровожадной толпе и узнали своих палачей среди пленных евреев. Шкема демистифицирует “золотой век”, который якобы существовал в культуре независимой Литвы в 1918–1940 гг., обнажая в ней систему пустых знаков, неспособных защитить от массового психоза.

В романе Леонардаса Гутаускаса “Тени” (*Šešėliai*) рассматриваются сложные взаимоотношения между русским и литовским народом. Основной сюжета для автора стал диалог умирающего литовца с убитым им двадцать лет назад советским офицером. Оба персонажа действуют как символические фигуры, олицетворяющие ценности, свойственные двум культурам. Постоянная напряженность в дискурсе создается оппозицией “свой”/“чужой”, в которой природа и христианские заповеди являются объединяющим партнеров разговора звеном, а имперская политика России и Советского Союза рассматривается как неизбежная причина их смертельного конфликта. Анализ текста выявляет три нравственные системы, которые представлены в романе.

Систему индивидуальной вины осуществляет архаический агрокультурный социум, парадигматической моделью которого является старообрядческая нравственная традиция. Переход к коллективной ответственности происходит во времена раскола Русской Христианской Церкви, в котором автор усматривает начало нравственной катастрофы. В конце романа создается утопический проект третьей системы, системы гармонии, объединяющей человеческие ценности со знаковостью.

Оба произведения раскрывают два механизма попытки освобождения от вины путем покаяния и осмысления исторических ошибок и иллюзий, бытующих в культуре. Вместе с тем они обнажают и основные болевые точки в литовском самосознании.

Süü semiootika (kahe leedu kirjandusteksti analüüs)

Artikli idee sündis Juri Lotmani teooriast kahe semiootilise mehhanismi — häbi ja hirmu — kohta. Analüüsitakse kahte leedu kirjandusteksti, kus paljastuvad süü ja patukahetsuse mehhanismid.

Jutustus “Isaak” (Izaakas), autoriks leedu emigrandist kirjanik Antanas Škema, avab leedulasest intellektuaali tragöödia, kes kannatab süükompleksi all, kuna sõja ajal tappis ta juudi. Kahetsus ei too endaga kaasa sisemist puhastumist, vaid vastupidi, muutub tagakiusamismaaniaks, temast saab psühhiaatrihaiglas patsient ja ta sooritab uue mõrva. Diskursuse erinevate figuratiivsete isotoopide analüüs võimaldab artikli autoril välja tuua jutustuse varjatud kontseptsiooni. Tõeliseks mõrva-põhjuseks osutuvad mitte ideoloogilised või kultuurilised vastuolud, vaid inimolemuse enda kahelikus, mis kriisisituatsioonides väljub sootsiumi kontrolli alt. Juutide tapmise eest on vastutavad mitte üksikindviidid, vaid anonüümne pealtvaatajaskond, kelle juuresolekul toimub tragöödia Kaunase garaažis. Škema demüstifitseerib nn “kuldaega” (iseseisva Leedu riigi ajal aastatel 1918–1940), paljastades massipsühhoosi ees võimetute tühjade märkide süsteemi.

Leonardas Gutauskase romaanis “Varjud” vaadeldakse keerulisi suhteid leedu ja vene rahva vahel. Süžee aluseks on sureva leedulase dialoog tema poolt 20 aastat tagasi tapetud nõukogude ohvitseriga. Mõlemad tegelased tegutsevad sümboolsete figuuridena, kehastades väärtusi, mis on omased kahele erinevale kultuurile. Diskursuses luuakse pidev pinge opositsiooni “oma”/“võõras” pinnal, kusjuures loodus ja kristlikud tõed on vestluspartnereid ühendavaks lüliliks, aga Venemaa ja Nõukogude Liidu impeeriumipoliitikat vaadeldakse kui konflikti vältimatut põhjust. Teksti-analüüs toob välja kolm romaanis esindatud väärtussüsteemi.

Individuaalse süü süsteemi teostab arhailine agrokultuuriline ühiskond, mille paradigmaatiliseks mudeliks on vanausuliste moraaliprintsiibid. Üleminek kollektiivsele vastutusele toimub Vene Õigusekiriku lõhenemise ajal, milles autor näeb kõlbelise katastroofi algust. Romaani lõpus antakse kolmanda süsteemi utoopiline projekt — see on harmooniline süsteem, mis ühendab inimlikud väärtused märgilisusega.

Mõlemad vaadeldud teosed avavad kaks võimalikku süüst vabanemise mehhanismi: kahetsus ja ajalooliste vigade ning kultuuris eksisteerivate illusioonide mõtestamine. Ühtlasi paljastavad nad ka leedu eneseteadvuse valupunkte.