Colloquia, 54, 2024, p. 89–109
ISSN 1822-3737, eISSN 2783-6819
DOI: https://doi.org/10.51554/Coll.24.54.06

The Four Winds and The Avant-Garde Apocalypse of War

Avangardinė „Keturių vėjų“ karo apokalipsė

GITANA VANAGAITĖ
Institute of Lithuanian Literature and Folklore
https://ror.org/050gfgn67
gtnvanagaite@gmail.com
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6985-4413

Abstract: War and its experience is an important theme in the early twentieth-century avant-garde literature. Among Lithuanian writers, this theme was more prevalent in works by the Four Winds group rather than the Third Front. The theme of war and the avant-garde depictions of war have not been widely researched in Lithuanian literary scholarship, which is the principal goal of this paper.

The futurist movement officially began in 1909, when the French daily *Le Figaro* published the *Manifesto del Futurismo* (*Manifesto of Futurism*) by Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, who glorified "war—the only true hygiene of the world—militarism, patriotism, the destructive gesture of anarchists, the beautiful Ideas which kill, and the scorn of woman." Italian futurists urged for Italy's involvement in the First World War, and some even joined the Lombard Battalion of Volunteer Cyclists and Motorists. German expressionists eagerly awaited the war, which they believed would oust their self-satisfied government and the materialism it advocated. Meanwhile, Russian futurists called for revolutionary violence.

The avant-garde in Lithuania began later as compared to Western Europe—after the First World War and the Lithuanian struggle for independence, at a time when the European avant-garde had entered its second stage and began to be associated with surrealism and dadaism. Because of this, Lithuanian avant-garde writers did not treat war in the same way as European artists did: their work does not contain the enthusiasm one commonly finds in the European prewar avant-garde, instead placing emphasis on disillusionment, the destruction and the horrors of war, like

Received: 18/11/2024. **Accepted**: 12/12/2024.

the postwar avant-gardists did. This paper is not concerned with the aesthetic revolution in depicting war by European and Lithuanian avant-gardists, as it has been extensively analyzed in Lithuanian scholarship.

This paper considers depictions of the First World War by European avant-garde writers in the early twentieth century as a cultural-literary background important for understanding the relationship between war and the avant-garde, but not necessarily as a direct influence on the works produced by the Lithuanian avant-garde writer collective known as the Four Winds. This background helps us understand the significance that those experiences of war and armed struggle for independence had for the Four Winds, as well as the meaning carried in their aesthetic reflections of those experiences.

Keywords: war, avant-garde, expressionism, futurism, the Four Winds.

Santrauka: Karas ir jo lemta patirtis – svarbi XX a. pradžios literatūrinio avangardo tema. Lietuvoje ši tema buvo svarbesnė avangardiniuose *Keturių vėjų*, o ne *Trečio fronto* grupės kūriniuose. Karo tema ir su ja susijęs avangardinis karo vaizdinys lietuvių literatūros moksle nėra detaliau aptarti, todėl šiame straipsnyje ir bus siekiama tai padaryti.

Jau 1909 m. prancūzų dienraštyje *Le Figaro* paskelbtame futurizmo manifeste, kuris žymėjo oficialią avangardo pradžią, jo autorius Filippo Tomaso Marinetti šlovino „militarizmą, patriotizmą, griaunamąjį anarchistų gestą, gražias idėjas, dėl kurių miršta, ir panieką moteriai.“ Prasidėjus I pasauliniam karui, italų futuristai pasisakė už dalyvavimą kare, o kai kurie jų stojo savanoriais į paruošiamąjį Lombardijos dviratininkų ir automobilistų batalioną. Vokietijos ekspresionistai entuziastingai laukė karo, turėjusio nuversti savimi patenkintą valdžią ir jos propaguojamą materializmą, o Rusijos futuristai propagavo revoliucinį smurtą.

Avangardas Lietuvoje, palyginti su Vakarų Europa, prasidėjo vėliau: jau po I pasaulinio karo ir kovų už nepriklausomybę, kuomet europietiškasis avangardas perėjo į antrąjį savo raidos etapą, siejamą su siurrealizmu ir dadaizmu. Todėl karo vaizdinys lietuviškame literatūros avangarde yra kitoks nei Vakarų Europos šalyse: jam nebūdingas prieškario Europos avangardo entuziazmas, o svarbesnės pokariniame avangarde išryškėjusios apokaliptinės karo siaubo ir nusivylimu juo reikšmės. Estetinio perversmo (karo) tema Europos ir Lietuvos avangarde šiame straipsnyje nebus analizuojama kaip jau ne kartą lietuvių mokslinėje literatūroje aptarta.

Straipsnyje bendrosios I pasaulinio karo vaizdinio XX a. pradžios Europos avangardinėje literatūroje tendencijos bus pristatomos daugiau kaip to meto kultūrinis-literatūrinis fonas, nebūtinai tiesiogiai veikęs *Keturių vėjų* grupės kūrybą, bet svarbus bendram supratimui apie avangardo santykį su karu. Šis fonas yra reikšmingas bandant suprasti, kokią vietą lietuviškojo avangardo grupės *Keturi vėjai* kūryboje užėmė karo ir kovos už nepriklausomybę patirtys ir kokios karo reikšmės ryškinamos estetinėje tos patirties refleksijoje.

Raktažodžiai: karas, avangardas, ekspresionizmas, futurizmas, *Keturi vėjai*.

Introductory Remarks

In 1922, a group of Lithuanian avant-gardists published their manifesto titled *Keturių vėjų pranašas* (The Prophet of the Four Winds), which called for an aesthetic and ideological renewal in culture and society. At that time the group consisted of Kazys Binkis, Petras Tarulis, Salys Šemerys, Juozas Žlabys-Žengė, and Butkų Juzė. The war that its members had declared on the urban way of life, as well as on the older generation of writers and their creative style, has received comprehensive scholarly attention: Vytautas Galinis in *Naujos kryptys lietuvių literatūroje* (New Directions in Lithuanian Literature), a monograph published in 1974, discussed Lithuanian avant–garde within the context of the German and Russian avant-garde and established chronological and ideological parallels between the movements in Lithuania and Latvia. Janina Žėkaitė's 1977 study *Impresionizmas ir ekspresionizmas lietuvių prozoje* (Impressionism and Expressionism in Lithuanian Prose) views the avant-garde movement among Lithuanian writers not as an influence borrowed from other countries, but as a natural demand that arose within the artistic community calling for a change in style and form. Vytautas Kubilius (1983) sought analogies and possible influences by analyzing Lithuanian avant–garde through the angle of German expressionism. Dalia Striogaitė (1998) discussed the Lithuanian avant-garde program and its poetic manifestations by mostly focusing on aspects of form and expression in her monograph *Avangardizmo sūkuryje* (In the Whirlwind of Avant–Garde). Meanwhile, Christoph Zürcher did not only discuss the cultural impact of the avant-garde movement in Lithuania, but provided a comprehensive analysis of the poetry by Kazys Binkis, Juozas Tysliava, and Juozas Žlabys-Žengė in his work *Lietuvių avangardo pavasaryje* (In the Spring of Lithuania's Avant-Garde, published in Lithuanian in 1998). Saulius Keturakis (2003) in his monograph *Avangardizmas XX amžiaus lietuvių poezijoje* (Avant–Garde in Twentieth-Century Lithuanian Poetry) discussed the early avant-garde program, its ties to German and Russian movements, and how the movement was continued by Soviet Lithuanian as well as Lithuanian expat writers. In addition to these studies and monographs, various notable papers on Lithuanian avant–garde can be mentioned here: Giedrius Viliūnas (2003) in his paper "Keturvėjininkų poetinės programos sandara" (The Structure of The Four Winds' Poetic Program) analyzed the program of the Four Winds as a combination of different European

avant-garde movements. Rimvydas Šilbajoris (1992) considered creative avant–garde manifestations as forms or expressions of independent thought in Soviet Lithuanian poetry. Bronius Vaškelis (1982) studied the ties between the members of the Third Front and the Communist Party and the consequences of those ties.

Although these books and papers often emphasize the influence of German expressionism and Russian futurism on the aesthetic and societal values embraced by the Four Winds, they mostly omit the impact of the First World War, which began during the heydays of Europe's avant-garde and influenced the whole movement, on the Lithuanian avant–garde collective. The most comprehensive discussion on the relationship between German expressionists and the Four Winds was given by Kubilius in his paper "Lietuvių literatūros kontaktai ir paralelės su vokiečių ekspresionizmu" (Parallels and Connections between Lithuanian Literature and German Expressionism). However, in his study of the German cultural panorama, the author focuses more on postwar culture and does not distinguish between German prewar and postwar expressionism. Kubilius does mention the "pressure of death, doom, and alienation that the German expressionists brought back from the trenches" that was "absolutely foreign to the explosive" thought of the Four Winds (Kubilius 1983: 122). In fact, members of the Four Winds did not participate in WWI because the majority of them were too young to be conscripted into the Russian Imperial Army, or even the German Army when its forces had occupied Lithuanian territory. WWI, which ended with the collapse of four empires, resulted in millions of soldier and civilian casualties, widespread hunger, and outbreaks of disease. On the other hand, the war allowed many states to declare independence and redefine the political map of Europe. The postwar armed struggles for independence devolved into lasting conflicts whose violence, according to Tomas Balkelis, was as savage as that of the war, meanwhile "in Lithuania, the protracted, nine-year war (1914–1923) resulted in violence becoming an increasingly acceptable form of conflict resolution" (Balkelis 2019: 28).

From the members of the Four Winds, Šemerys wrote the most poetry about war. Some war-themed poems were also written by Pranas Morkūnas, Kazys Binkis, Butkų Juzė, and Žlabys-Žengė. There are a few avant-garde short stories by Jurgis Savickis that refer to WWI realia, but they will not be analyzed in this paper because their author was not a member of the Four Winds. The poet Tysliava had participated in the Lithuanian Wars of Independence, but he did not reference those experiences in his poems.

The European Avant-Garde and War

Currently the most prevalent understanding is that the avant-garde in the early twentieth century was not only a movement in art, but a radical movement in itself that offered alternative suggestions for how the world worked and society lived. This understanding was greatly influenced by Peter Bürger's seminal 1974 work *Theorie der Avantgarde* (Theory of the Avant-Garde). In this book, based on the neo-Marxist theory of the Frankfurt School, the early twentieth-century avant-garde is analyzed not as a style or a perspective[1] but rather as a socially and historically determined movement. Bürger's views are based on the premise that art developed as an autonomous practice in the late nineteenth century, not only liberating itself from social spheres like politics or religion and their utilitarian demands but also becoming "detached from the praxis of life" (Bürger 1984: 26). Bürger describes symbolism and the fin de siècle period (authors like Mallarmé, Valéry, Hofmannsthal; Bürger 1984: 27) as the stage of Aestheticism, as it established the doctrine of art for art's sake and introduced the concept of art as a self-referential phenomenon. Therefore, Bürger views the revolutionary and ideological nature of the avant-garde as an attack against artistic autonomy. This offensive attitude was informed by revolutionary attempts to "reintegrate art into the praxis of life" (Bürger 1984: 22) or to direct aesthetic experience "toward the practical" (Bürger 1984: 34). According to Bürger, the radical criticism that avant-gardists directed against the institution of art cannot be treated only in terms of disputing stylistic conventions or challenging tradition. In the most general sense, avant–garde protested the bad order by projecting upon it the image of a better order (Bürger 1984: 50), which, in Bürger's opinion, was never achieved in reality. After all, it is true that many of the radical, subversive ideas conveyed in the avant-garde manifestos were never realized either in the artistic or social dimensions.

Some of the first to begin the avant-garde assault, as Bürger described, "on the autonomous status of art in modern bourgeois society, the repudiation of tradition, and emphasis on formal innovation that would characterize modernist movements for decades to follow" (Bowler 1991: 763) were the Italian futurists. It is through their efforts that this assault had a lasting effect on the whole European

1 This is the difference between Peter Bürger's *Theorie der Avantgarde* and Renato Poggioli's (1962) monograph *Teoria dell'arte d'avanguardia*, which traces the avant-garde back to Romanticism as its principal influence.

avant-garde movement. This effect was not only limited to the West but had also found its way to Central and Eastern European countries. So, when Marinetti published his *Manifesto del Futurismo* in the French daily *Le Figaro*, where he professed that futurist art shall have an incendiary effect and cultivate novel values of speed, destruction, and violence that are necessary for a new age of Italian national greatness, his ideas spread far and wide. For example, a Russian translation of this manifesto was published in a St. Petersburg newspaper *Вечер* (Evening) on March 8 of the same year (Michailova 2017: 92). It is likely that Lithuanian avant-gardists became acquainted with Italian futurism and its ideas "through Russian, Polish, French, or Germans sources" (Galinis 1974: 247), unlike, for example, the Estonian avant-garde pioneers Richard Roht and Henrik Visnapuu, who personally attended Marinetti's lectures during his stay in Russia. The origins of Russian futurism can be traced to several competing avant-garde collectives; the first Russian manifesto, titled *A Slap in the Face of Public Taste*, was published in 1912, but it reflected a cultural attitude which had been spreading among the artistic circles of Moscow and St. Petersburg for some time.[2] Although the Russian and Italian futurisms both sought to erase the boundary between life and art (Glisic 2012: 340) and expressed a seemingly identical martial attitude regarding the past and the future, the artists themselves did not get along. Marinetti visited Russia in January 26, 1914.

Three months prior to his visit, Vladimir Mayakovsky delivered a speech in Moscow titled "The Achievements of Futurism" where he emphasized the independence of Russian futurist thought and distanced himself from the Italian movement, underscoring that its aggressiveness is unacceptable for Russian avant-gardists (Michailova 2017: 93). Mayakovsky reiterated these ideas almost ten years after Marinetti's visit, in a discussion that took place on April 1923:

> Russian and Italian futurism does and does not have things in common. Russian futurism maintains the following objectives: (1) the formal development of material, (2) the application of this formally developed material to practical use. In terms of formal methods there exists some similarity between Italian and Russian futurism. [...] Ideologically we have nothing in common with Italian futurism. Similarities exist only in the formal development of material. (quoted from Michailova 2017: 94)[3]

2 For example, Velimir Khlebnikov published his first futurist poems in 1909.

3 Между русским и итальянским футуризмом и существует общее, и нет. Русский футуризм ставит своими задачами: 1) формальную разработку материала, 2) применение

Aleksei Kruchyonykh shared a similar view of Italian futurism, expressed in his article "Новые пути слова" (New Means of the Word) (1913): "disputes (dissonances) are permitted in art, but there can be no harshness, cynicism, or audacity (which the Italian futurists promote), because war and battle cannot be mixed with art" (quoted from Michailova 2017: 94). Even Marinetti himself, upon returning from Russia to Rome, called the Russian innovators "pseudo-futurists who use futurism to distort the true meaning of the great global religion of renewal" (Michailova 2017: 115). Lithuanian avant-gardists, too, openly distanced themselves from Italian futurists because of their alliance with Benito Mussolini's fascist politics: "And now nobody will want to associate with this kind of company, especially the F. Winds" ("Keturių..." 1928: 11).

The European avant-gardists treated the theme of war in a twofold way. On the one hand, they declared an ideological (or aesthetic) war on the whole tradition of classical art, but on the other hand, they relied on imagery of actual military war. The avant-gardists of the great European states saw war as a way to liberate themselves from the old world and develop national and technological superiority. Here an especially important role was played by the manifestos, whose foremost author was Marinetti. He personally authored sixty, turning the manifesto into the "principal genre of futurism." Marinetti also encouraged other futurists to write their manifestos and often edited their manuscripts. He even devised a set of rules for writing them, including lists of words and terms that ought to be used, calling it *arte di far manifesti*, the art of making manifestos (Salaris 1996: 73). With Marinetti, the manifesto ceased to be merely a tool of agitation or propaganda and became, in Martin Pucher's words, a weapon of war, urging the reader to carry out actual military actions (Pucher 2006: 75). Marinetti and other Italian futurists did not see war as a purely aesthetic endeavor or an exercise in writing. They believed war would fuel evolution; Italian futurists wrote technical manifestos encouraging society to "imitate the automobile and the train, imitate the rhythm of the machines, listen to the engines," prioritized the world of speed and technology, and demanded that the world be rid of its archaic past. The force responsible for this, according to

---

этого формально обработанного материала для практических нужд. В области формальных методов сходство между итальянским и русским футуризмом есть. [...] Идеологически мы с итальянским футуризмом ничего общего не имеем. Общее есть лишь в формальной обработке материала.

Marinetti, would have to be war, which he praised as the pinnacle of hygiene and festivity (*guerra-festa*) and the begetter of a "new man," free from all moral shackles and the negative consequences of modernity, such as materialism, the softening of bodies and souls, and the love of a calm life. Marinetti even encouraged Italy's colonial intervention in Libya, calling it "the great hour of the futurists." The German expressionists had a similar attitude and, like many Western European modernists, viewed war as "the opportunity for liberation and renewal" (Germani 2019: 19). Just like the Italian futurists, German expressionists "encouraged a war or revolution that would destroy the old and rotten world so that a new world and a new human could emerge" (Gentile 2011: 259). However, the enthusiasm of the artists was short-lived: the reality of war soon shattered their belief "in the war as a salutary, life-renewing crisis," while "modern technology, far from accomplishing the triumph of humanity and civilization, had been the very agent of their demise" (Germani 2019: 22). So when the possibility of war as renewal had vanished, it left the sensation of an apocalypse that was different from the culturally established image of the biblical collapse, which promises transcendence. The modern apocalypse rejected transcendence and confronted humans with the horror of their own inventions. Even though the pioneers of Lithuanian avant–garde did not establish direct contact with Italian futurist thought, it functioned as a cultural context of their time. Early twentieth-century Lithuania, like the rest of the Russian Empire, had been experiencing an economic and political upswing and the development of modern political consciousness.

The Russian avant-garde is closely related to the political revolutions of its time, beginning WWI, which laid a foundation for the February Revolution as well as the subsequent Bolshevik coup and the Russian Civil War. Russian avant-garde writers did not reflect much on WWI; there was no so-called "poetry from the trenches," as not many of the great Russian avant-gardists participated in the war themselves (Glisic 2012: 357). The 1917 Bolshevik revolution and ensuing civil war put the avant-gardists at the forefront of a new life and utilized their art "to establish a new creative practice, both to forge a new Communist environment (and subsequently a Communist consciousness), and to protect the future of the Bolshevik project by annihilating old cultural formats, which were representative of an obsolete mentality" (ibid. 356). This continued right up until April 1932, when the Central Committee of

the CPSU passed the resolution "On the Restructuring of Literary-Artistic Organizations," which permitted socialist realism as the only official style of art. The activities of all avant-garde movements were ceased, and many of its members were persecuted.

The Four Winds and War

The origins of the Lithuanian avant-garde movement can be traced back to the period of 1920–1921, after the end of WWI, but still during the Lithuanian Freedom Struggles, which "despite the official armistice continued right up until May 1923" (Balkelis 2019: 18). It is during this period that Kazys Binkis, Butkų Juzė, Faustas Kirša, Salys Šemerys, and Petras Tarulis began publishing their first texts in the magazine *Karys* (Soldier) and the Sunday supplement of the daily *Lietuva* called *Sekmoji diena* (The Seventh Day), edited by Šemerys and later by Kirša.

The sunken value of the German mark after the war gave many young Baltic artists, including Lithuanians, the opportunity to pursue higher education or publish their books in Berlin, as the quality of publishing in Lithuania was still poor. Lithuanian authors published in Berlin included Savickis, Žlabys-Žengė, Butkų Juzė, Šemerys, and Binkis. Kazys Binkis's collection of avant-garde poetry *100 pavasarių* (One Hundred Springs) was stopped from release and its whole print run destroyed when the author failed to pay his publishers on time (Gudaitis 1998: 85). Almost all of these young men could speak and read German (the German language was *lingua franca* in the Baltic States) and thus were able to adopt avant-garde motives, vocabulary, and themes. German expressionism began well before the war, with the first exhibition of Dresden-based artist group Die Brücke. According to Italian historian Emilio Gentile, at the start of WWI, Europe's apocalyptic imagination was terrified of the war's permanent destruction yet also anticipated its potential to break the continent free from the old world order. But this anticipation was soon replaced by utter disappointment. The war turned out to be not some purification as the artists or philosophers had imagined (a "Nietzsche's war") but true horror, dirt, and degradation (Gentile 2008: 184). Thus, prewar expressionist attitudes were very unlike those in postwar times. Postwar expressionism caught the attention of

Binkis in 1920, who had been attending lectures and engaged in publishing in Berlin and Leipzig. But the articles or poems he wrote during that period do not refer to the war, while the occasional militaristic vocabulary (front, blood, barricades, cannonades) is linked to the aesthetic program of the Four Winds, which had distanced itself from the older generation of writers and their style. Likewise, the *Keturių vėjų pranašas* of 1922 does not mention the actual war. In *100 pavasarių* Binkis uses militaristic vocabulary only as a call for aesthetic or ideological change. On the other hand, his pre-avant-garde collection of poetry *Eilėraščiai* (Poems) is concluded with a military-themed poem "Gyviesiem" (To The Living).

This was not the only poem Binkis wrote on the war: there are several other song-poems by Binkis that deal with the armed struggle against Poland, which at that time had temporarily occupied Vilnius. Even though Binkis wrote these song-poems after becoming acquainted with avant-garde literature, first in Bolshevik-occupied Vilnius and later in Berlin and Leipzig, his style is closer to the pre-avant-garde collection *Eilėraščiai*, occasionally marked by a humorous tone that was to be further developed by the Four Winds in their newspaper *Mūsų rytojus* (Our Tomorrow) and in the humorous poetry it published. During the war, the poet first joined the Iron Wolf Regiment, but was soon dismissed and assigned to a group of artists, together with Stasys Šimkus, Kipras Petrauskas, and Antanas Sodeika, whose task was to "lift the soldiers' spirits by artistic means" (Juršėnas 1999: XXXVII). From 1919 to 1920 Binkis published his war songs ("Ei, kareivi!", "Geležinio vilko maršas", "Ech, čiumo!", "Žiba mums kardai prie šonų") in various periodicals; these were not included in his subsequent poetry collections most likely because of their low literary value. These song-poems are full of violent, military vocabulary (bullet, sword, rivers of blood, shooting, battles) and verbs that denote danger (clash, rumble, march, attack, explode), but the hostilities themselves are quite abstract. This is because the poet had focused more on the patriotic and agitational aspects, as was expected of him. The impression of agitation is further intensified by the future tense, which creates a distance to death, while the humorous sing-along tone erases the tragic nature of war: "When the chief sends us to war [...] / We will first capture a bar" (Binkis 1999: 78). Even the tragedy of injury and death is seemingly reduced by means of a leisure style: "When we left—a hundred men, / The returnee's one in ten. / Some lost legs, and some lost heads / In the trenches that we kept" (ibid. 82).

From this period of song-poems linked to Binkis's short-lived involvement with the volunteer artist battalion, a standout text is his poem "Kareivio gromata" (The Soldier's Letter) that he published in the newspaper *Trimitas* (The Bugle) on December 24, 1920. The poem, following the logic of a letter, begins with a familiar address of the Lithuanian people ("Uncles, aunts, and aunties!") and is concluded with "Godspeed!" Again, because of its humor, informal language, and easy rhyme the poem reads like leisure literature, but it does contain references to the soldier's routine as different from that of a civilian: "I will say it with a whisper / You don't know it, mister / Our lives are not alike." Soldiers' lives are based on a different set of values, and the humor used to express it conceals their tragic predicament: "Our politics are simple: / Being strong and being bold, / If the enemy advances—we make sure he has no chances / Thus our journey also ends. / The weak don't get to make amends. / You sit and wait and gawk." The ruthless logic of war ("Stay or perish, such is war") permeates Binkis's optimistic promise to defeat the current enemy, metonymically associated with Polish statesman Józef Piłsudski: "We crushed the Prussian, crushed the Russkie, / Now it's time to crush Pilsudski" (ibid. 80–81).

Vocabulary associated with war and battle can be found in poems by Butkų Juzė, although he does not directly write about the war. Leonas Gudaitis has referred to Butkų Juzė as "an earlier expressionist than other Lithuanian poets" (Gudaitis 1986: 16)—from 1919 to 1924 he studied at the universities of Berlin and Jena, publishing his first collection of poetry *Žemės liepsna* (The Fire of Earth) in Berlin (1920) and his second book *Verkiančios rožės* (Weeping Roses) in Leipzig (1921). In his extensive article and what is perhaps one of the first Lithuanian texts on expressionism, published in the periodical *Draugija* in 1921, Adomas Jakštas discusses Butkų Juzė's first poetry collection and considers him to be a typical expressionist because of the poet's subjective views on poetry as well as his scorn of rhythm and rhyme. Jakštas states that Butkų Juzė's poems present a thematic novelty because "their object is the fellow peasant, the fellow worker," meaning that the poet, in the critic's words, is "not concerned with beauty and art as much as with revolutionary ideals and inciting revolutionary spirit" (Jakštas 1921: 105–107). This inciting of "revolutionary spirit" is expressed using a militaristic vocabulary, thus bringing to mind images of actual war, not an aesthetic or social one. The imagery is full of blood, battle, and bones: "earth is only an arena for battle" (Butkų Juzė 1928: 14), "the world's eyes bespattered

with blood" (ibid. 13), "our hearts thus shining with blood" (ibid. 15), "cruel winds haunt it still, / our brothers are turned into bone" (ibid. 34). Butkų Juzė published a collection of poems in Riga in 1928 titled *Darbai ir prakaitas* (Labor and Sweat), the cover of which was designed by eminent Latvian avant-gardist Niklāvs Strunke. In its foreword, the poet retrospectively explains his assumed obligation to call the working person to fight for their rights and freedoms, as they can become "the mouth of those who drown in the wastes of injustice and poverty without a voice of their own" (Butkų Juzė 1928: 5).

Yet the most intense examples of war imagery are found in poems by Salys Šemerys, who was 16 years old when WWI began and who spent the war years in Voronezh. Šemerys was an active member of the Four Winds and in 1924 published his collection of poetry *Granata krūtinėj* (A Grenade in the Chest), with many of its poems dealing with the image of the city and the apocalyptic horrors of war. These horrors are usually expressed through the eyes of a horrified individual who sees their world devoured by destruction and fire, as it is shown in the poem "Žaižaruojantieji žibintai" (The Flaming Lanterns):

The world blazes and burns	Pasaulis dega ir liepsnoja
In all its nooks and crannies	Visuos kampuos ir visose užunarvėse
Trapped dynamite	Užspęsti dinamitai
Catches the flame	Liepsnos pagauti
And explodes,	Susprogsta,
Tearing the earth, heavens and voids.	Suplėšydami žemę, dangų ir erdves.
See the sky scattered by shrapnel	Ir štai dangus skeveldrų išnešiotas
And the earth torn into shreds	Ir sudraskyta žemė į skutus
After the blast floating and drifting	Po sproginių išskaidytas ertmes
In the residual abyss of the chaos	Chaotiškai plevena plaukioja
Searching for haven,	Ir ieško uostų,
Seeking comfort and care,	Kur prisiglaustų, pasiguostų,
A place to nurse themselves back...	Kad išsigydžius nuo žaizdų...
We are like worms	Mes lyg sliekai
Shaken by the explosions	Sprogimų gąsdinami
Utterly sightless and deaf	Apkurtę ir apakę visiškai
Crawling in the darkness	Ir tamsoje
Amid the casings shed by grenades	Po išnaras granatų landžiojam
Trying to see... (Šemerys 1924: 14)	Ir žiūrim į visus kraštus... (Šemerys 1924: 14)

The three-part poem "Baladė" (Ballad) shows war as chaos that upturns the order on earth, and in that chaos, "in the deluge of blood / machine-guns bang, bang, bang, bang, bang, bang! / Cannon throats howl, howl!" (Šemerys 1924: 5). Kubilius has noted that the signature irony of the Four Winds "did not develop into the grotesque, a main feature of expressionist works" (Kubilius 1983: 134); however, the second part of "Baladė" contains striking examples of grotesque imagery. Almost twenty years later, these lines served as inspiration for poet Vincas Mykolaitis-Putinas who, now writing about the horrors of the Second World War, produced the poem "Marche Macabre." Both texts, through their depictions of an irrevocable, unstoppable force of ruin, are reminiscent of the medieval Danse Macabre tradition. Šemerys addresses the injured and even the dead, calling them to fall into formation:

Tootle, tootle, tootle!
Tootle! tootle! toot!
Tootle! toot! toot!
I salute
Those of all wars
Global frontlines
And theaters of battle
The armless and the arm-more!
The legless and the legmore!
The headless and the headmore!
Fa–a–a–a–a–a–a–a–ll in!...
The victorymore!
And aweary!
Upright or prone,
Column o–o–o–of twos!...
Double ti–i–i–me march!
Frigid marching
In the perversely mournful procession
Legless, keep up with the feet!
Armless, don't sway your hands!
Headless, keep your chins raised!
Advance!
The legmore,
The headmore,
Go braver! (Šemerys 1924: 6).

Trū, trū, trū!
Trū! trū! tū!
Trū! tū! tū!
Visų
Karų
Pasaulinių frontų
Kautynių teatrų
Berankiai ir rankingi!
Bekojai ir kojingi!
Begalviai ir galvingi!
Ri–i–i–i–i–i–i–i–kiuok!...
Nugalėtojingi!
Nuingę!
Sugulę ar sustoję,
Gretas dve–e–e–ejuok!...
Lėkte–e–e–e marš!
Žvarbios žygiuotės
Gašliai gedulingam marše
Bekojai, taikyti į kojį!
Berankiai, rankom nemosuoti!
Begalviai, pasmakres aukštyn!
Pirmyn gi!
Kojingi,
Galvingi,
Drasyn! (Šemerys 1924: 6).

Some twenty years later Mykolaitis-Putinas will address the dying and the dead using similar words: "Creeping out of holes and tombs / Flocks of relatives and grooms: / One's lost an arm, one's lost a leg, / And that one's lost his head..." (Putinas 1989: 355).

According to Gudaitis, Šemerys wrote "Baladė" in the summer of 1920, after attending a concert of Frédéric Chopin's "Karo maršas"[4] performed by Professor I. Prielgauskas of the Warsaw Conservatory: "I couldn't get the motifs of that piece out of my head. 'Tam ta tam! Tam ta tam!' That night I composed my 'Ballad' about the First World War" (Gudaitis 198: 77–78). The ballad uses ideophones, onomatopoeias, neologisms, and grotesque images to (re)create the all-destructive rhythm of war, imbued, like in the poem by Mykolaitis-Putinas, with a powerful vigor that reinforces the impression of the horror of military apocalypse.

A striking display of grotesque, phantasmagoric imagery that gravitates toward a logic of surrealism can be found in Šemerys's dramatic mystery play *Mirties mirtis* (The Death of Death) published in the first issue of the *Four Winds* journal (Gudaitis notes that J. Petrėnas and S. Šemerys were very productive, filling 21 pages each, or two-thirds of the issue, with their own material (Gudaitis 1986: 73)). In discussing the development of the modern drama in the first half of the twentieth century, Aušra Martišiūtė analyzed this surrealist work as a "set of problems regarding the art of war as it was perfected by civilization," which upon further development brought the novelty of "play characters and stage elements evolving into surrealist imagery" (Martišiūtė 2004: 22). Striogaitė understood the presence of war and other themes of modern life as a part of Šemerys's visionary style (Striogaitė 1998: 85). In the most general sense, *Mirties mirtis* paints a very condensed view of WWI, associating its apocalyptic tragedy with modern technology and advances in science. Šemerys places emphasis on the weaponization of various poisonous gases, which were used in the battles of WWI.

The mystery play begins with a scene of Death in its workshop, where it "runs a test for a gas solution." This "newborn gas" is a very powerful agent—"one cubic millimeter is enough to exterminate a whole cubic kilometer." Plague visits Death's workshop and expresses surprise at its "novelties," as

4 It is not clear which work is being referred to: the so-called *Militairy Polonaise* (Polonaises Op. 40) or *Funeral March* (Piano Sonata No. 2)

Death can kill effortlessly without using any tools. Death chides Plague for its "savage behavior" and explains that it is acting "based on scientific discoveries and technical rules." Death states that diplomacy and culture approve of its ideas, adding, "I respect all institutions of culture in the world. Because they are courteous to me. With their palaces. Ceremonies. It is a beautiful thing to see their solemn funerals with torches, burial shrouds, liveries, dress suits, and cylinder hats. By looking at them, one might think that people enjoy dying" (Šemerys 1924: 34).

When he paints the battle scene in the "Field of Fire" part of the play, Šemerys projects a sensation of fear and panic as he uses grotesque images of deformed and scattered body parts in a way that feels similar to "Baladė." The Headless Man and the Legless Man converse with Death, offering to trade heads and complaining how difficult it is to maintain balance. Their grotesque dialogue is complemented by a depiction of body parts assembling into a super-mass: "A swarm of body parts, separate and federated with joints, gathers all around Death into a heap of ribs, shins, ears, chins, eyes, noses, loins, thighs, shoulders, breasts, arms, knuckles, fingers, palms" (ibid. 37). Here Šemerys shows how death turns from a character into an agent of its own fate: it loads a dispersing weapon for the gas it invented, but the device slips out of its hands and begins spinning out of control, annihilating everything in its trajectory, until finally "it runs out of targets to hit and turns its raging crosshair on triumphing DEATH" (ibid.).

Šemerys's mystery play depicts war in terms of its dependence on modern technology, emphasizing the murderous power of explosives and poisonous gases and reflecting the common experience of the war. Thus, it contributes to the image of war as an automatized apocalypse—an image also developed by other European avant-gardists.

Perhaps it is no coincidence that the penultimate poem in Šemerys's *Granata krūtinėj* is titled "Litanija" (Litany)—an expressionist poetic prayer pleading earth to purify and to repair itself, to rise from the dead:

Earth, carved by grenades,	Žeme, granatų tašoma,
We ask you—take pity on us.	Pasigailėk mūs, tavęs prašome.
World, the tower of our shelter,	Pasauli, mūsų prieglaudos bokšte,
We call you—protect us!	Kad apgintum mus, tavęs šaukiamės!

[...]	[...]
Because you	Nes
Were sucked dry	Visus tavo syvus
By the terrible horror	Iščiulpęs
Which holds us in thrall	Klaikumo siaubas
Barely alive!	Mus vos gyvus
Earth, cover yourself in new soil	Laiko apgaubęs!
Stronger than ever!	Žeme, apsižemiuok nauja žeme
World, rip from yourself	Už save smarkesne!
A new flesh!	Pasauli,
Be pure!	Kurs save iš savęs išsirauni,
Earth, be bright!	Būk grynas!
And to the built turbines of solemnity	Žeme, skaistėk!
Take flight! (Šemerys 1924: 28–29)	Ir į nutiestas rimties turbinas
	Lėk! (Šemerys 1924: 28–29)

Tadeuz Peiper, editor of the Polish avant-garde magazine *Zwrotnica* (The Switch), wrote an article on Spanish poetry; an excerpt of it was translated from Polish by Šemerys and published in the first issue of the *Four Winds* magazine. It is hard to say why this particular fragment caught the attention of the Lithuanian avant-gardists; however, Peiper's insights about the autonomous literary reality, based not on description but on the power of suggestion, relate to how Šemerys portrayed the war:

> The cult of the sentence is the most characteristic trait of this poetry. Here it becomes widely autonomous in relation to reality. The sentence is concerned with itself, not reality. Therefore, there can be no talk of describing a "thing." Sometimes the sentence severs any connection it has to the real world; then, images emerge that have nothing real happen to them, but which contain some power of suggestion. Things that have nothing in common are tied into new compounds, distances disappear, time becomes instant. This is how a new reality is formed—a literary reality. (Peiper 1924: 62)

The themes of war, battle, poverty, death, as well as occupied Vilnius are prominent in another collection of poetry by Šemerys published in 1926, titled *Liepsnosvaidis širdims deginti* (A Flamethrower for Burning Hearts). Here the poet uses a vocabulary similar to his earlier work: blood, guns, cannons,

grenades, slaughter. These nouns are charged with verbs also associated with military action and danger: warring, fighting, trembling, infiltrating, breaking through, assaulting, burning, shattering, dying, etc. Some poems are written with the plural "we," expressing the subject's solidarity with the unfree, the abused, and the suffering, echoing Butkų Juzė's imperative obligation to be the voice of those who cannot speak about their mistreatment. The poems in this book: "Nuostabūs nuotykiai" (Wonderful Adventures), "Savarankiškumo maršas" (March of Independence), "Lietuvos sargyba" (Lithuania's Guard) and others, often resonate a patriotic determination to fight for independence at all costs. A good example can be found in a passage from the poem "Skriaudžiamųjų šauksmas" (The Cry of the Abused):

Unbothered and composed
We will spend our dying breath
Against the strongest might
For the right to be and live
We shall fight and fight.
Even through the largest slaughter—
We'll let our country
Reach its bloom. (Šemerys 1926: 19)

Nežiūrėdami, nenusigandę nieko
Mes iš paskutinio savo vieko
Su galybėmis nors ir stipriausiomis
Mes gyventi ir būti
Kausimės ir kausimės.
Nors per didžiausias skerdynes ir piūtis –
Leisime pražysti
Mūsų šaliai. (Šemerys 1926: 19)

Alongside the determined voice of struggle, this collection contains poems that focus on the thriving force of destruction that is war. The poem "Rūpestis" (Care) combines apocalyptic imagery with an ominous and violent vocabulary:

Raging darkness fills the air,
Famine seeps into the soil with vigor
Like packs of steaming wolves...
The slaughterhouse on earth grows
bigger.

Rigid rollers rumble down
The frenzied ridges of the void
The reaper's blade is still the crown
Of every raucous roar of joy... [...]
(Šemerys 1926: 52)

Aplinkui siautėja tamsybė,
Aplinkui nertėja sausra
Ir kaip tvanki vilkų gausybė...
Mūs žemė skerdykla tikra.

Ir rūstūs ritasi ristuvai
Įbingusių erdvės vilnių;
Ir klypsta giltinės skriestuvai
Tarp laimės gaudesių žvainių... [...]
(Šemerys 1926: 52)

Another notable poem by Šemerys—"Gedint" (In Mourning)—narrates every stage of the Wars of Independence and tells the story through the pain of a Lithuanian mother who lost three of her sons to the war. The style here is more solemn and contained, but does lean toward the avant-garde through its expressive tone: "she had three children / all of them gone"—one killed by the Bolsheviks, another by the Bermontians, and the third perished while "containing Żeligowski's mutiny." Its conclusion is a partial catharsis, affirming that peace can be found after suffering:

But her soul is calm, she sees
In the rippling shadows of the clouds
The fallen warriors as saints
Standing watch beneath our state.
(Šemerys 1926: 23)

Bet jos siela jau rami, išvydus
Debesų alsuojančiuos šešėliuos
Karžygių šventųjų vėles
Stovint mūs šalies sargyboj.
(Šemerys 1926: 23)

Liepsnosvaidis širdims deginti contains many poems that speak about the end of hostilities ("Life has vanquished death") or laud the Constituent Assembly for legally establishing the Independence of Lithuania. Here, too, the avant-garde approach of twisted or upturned reality is used to speak of change and lingering danger: ghost, adventure, mirage, fairytale. Occasionally transformation signals hope: "Yesterday we dreamed of things / That seem real today" (Šemerys 1926: 11).

Similarly to Šemerys, a visionary-apocalyptic perspective is conveyed in Pranas Morkūnas's poem "Bandito troškimas" (A Bandit's Desire), which presents, in Gudaitis's words, "the perspective of a former soldier—a self-deprecating butcher of people" (Morkūnas 1993: 44). However, Morkūnas can only partly be associated with the Four Winds collective and its aesthetic values. Upon returning to Kaunas after the Freedom Struggles, where he participated as a Lithuanian Army volunteer, and later, as chief of the Riflemen's district in Panevėžys, Morkūnas quite quickly embraced the political left and joined the Third Front. In "Bandito troškimas" he uses compound words and neologisms to paint an apocalyptic picture of the war. The subject feels responsible for the killing, saying that "Death labors in its rage," so "now I'm a bandit / drenched / in slaughter" and "I tell you / come and puke into my soul" (ibid. 11).

Among the writers of the Four Winds, Žlabys-Žengė was the only professional soldier, a lieutenant who served in the Lithuanian Freedom Struggles. His military

poetry is different—it does not contain the apocalyptic worldview of Šemerys or the patriotic agitation of Binkis. Žlabys-Žengė's poems were published in the magazine *Karys* and other periodicals. It is hard to say whether these could have been included in the poetry book that Žlabys-Žengė had been planning to publish in 1930, but which never came out. However, in an anthology edited by Gudaitis and published in 1992, *Pavasarių gramatikos* (The Grammars of Spring), these poems were included under the section "The Iron Wolf." Žlabys-Žengė, "one of the most original and novel poets of the Lithuanian avant-garde" (Zürcher 1998: 103), stood out because of his bold phonetic experiments, wordplay, and deconstructions of reality. These attributes can also be traced in his military poems, albeit in a less condensed form. For example, the poem "Pliumpis" (Plumpie) tells the story of a "plumpie" from Telšiai named Jonas Krumplis using all sorts of phonic variations: "plump plump the plumpie's plumping" (Žlabys-Žengė 1992: 177). The occasional phonic experiment can be found in other poems too, but there it does not contain any semantic aspects.

Žlabys-Žengė chooses to emphasize not the very image of battle, even though it is present, but the image of the soldier, whose defining trait is his masculinity: "Man shall greet the break of dawn / Only man will go to war" (ibid. 169). The soldier, who is the subject of the poem, may be a reservist or a lieutenant who is concerned about the shifts of his guard duty: "Hope I won't be like the fool / who stands watch during the yule" (ibid. 180). It seems that Žlabys-Žengė's personal experiences have influenced his decision as a poet to emphasize not the heroic aspects of duty or the horrors of war, but the daily life of the soldier, the sensation of running time, and his shifting feelings: "Here I've met and seen it all / Childish days and... Fleeting spirits" (ibid. 179).

Concluding Thoughts

The First World War, beginning in the heydays of the avant-garde movement, marks historic shifts in European culture and social life. Prewar modernist values, such as speed, transition, and technological advances, began to imply that civilization and life are doomed to collapse. The feeling of an impending apocalypse, which marked the inception of the war, became a factual experience during the hostilities and after they ended. However, unlike the

Biblical apocalypse, the catastrophe of modern civilization was devoid of any transcendental perspective, meaning that it did not go beyond the destruction humans have caused.

The avant-garde revolution was first of all supposed to be an experiment in thought, the success of which would be determined by its particular cultural context. The work of artists belonging to the Four Winds collective shows that oftentimes bold, revolutionary experiments lacked a proper cultural background and civilizational context. The Lithuanian avant-garde, which emerged after the end of WWI and the Lithuanian Wars of Independence, did not particularly focus on the image of war; but when it did, it covered the whole spectrum of that experience. However, these works are not of equal literary merit. Šemerys showed war as an apocalypse, a feral force of self-destruction; Butkų Juzė associated war and battle with the struggle for a better life; Binkis's humorous war songs were written with a practical goal—to lift the spirits of his audience; Žlabys-Žengė focused on the daily life of a soldier, be it recruit or lieutenant. Lithuanian avant-garde literature written on the theme of war employs expressive techniques and striking juxtapositions to describe the often apocalyptic image of WWI. Thus, Lithuanian avant-gardists portrayed war in a similar way to their European peers.

Translated from Lithuanian
by Markas Aurelijus Piesinas

REFERENCES

Balkelis Tomas 2019. *Lemtingi metai: Lietuva 1914–1923 m. Karas, revoliucija ir tautos gimimas*, Vilnius: Tyto alba.

Binkis Kazys 1999. *Raštai*, t. 1, Vilnius: Pradai.

Bowler Anne 1991. "Politics as art: Italian futurism and fascism," in: *Theory and Society*: 763–794.

Bürger Peter 1984. *Theory of the Avant-Garde*. Translated from German by Michael Shaw. Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press.

Galinis Vytautas 1974. *Naujos kryptys lietuvių literatūroje*, Vilnius: Vaga.

Gentile Emilio 2009. *"La nostra sfida alle stelle." Futuristi in politica*, Roma: Laterza.

Gentile Emilio 2008. *L'apocalisse della modernità. La Grande guerra per l'uomo nuovo*, Milano: Mondadori.

Germani Ian 2019. "German Expressionism in Context: The First World War and the European Avant-Garde," *Acta Universitatis Sapientiae*, 16, 11–34.

Gibelli Antonio 2007. *L'officina della guerra. La Grande Guerra e le trasformazioni del mondo mentale*, Torino: Bollati Boringhieri.

Glisic Iva 2012. "Caffeinated Avant-Garde: Futurism During the Russian Civil War 1917–1921," *Australian Journal of Politics & History*, 58 (3), 337–479. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8497.2012.01640.x

Gudaitis Leonas 1986. *Permainų vėjai*, Vilnius: Vaga.

Gudaitis Leonas 1998. *Teisybė daugiaveidė*, Kaunas: Nemunas.

Keturakis Saulius 2003. *Avangardizmas XX amžiaus lietuvių poezijoje*, Vilnius: Vilniaus universiteto leidykla.

„Keturių vėjų teismas" 1928. *Keturi vėjai*, 4, 8–12.

Kubilius Vytautas 1983. „Lietuvių literatūros kontaktai ir paralelės su vokiečių ekspresionizmu", in: Vytautas Kubilius, *Lietuvių literatūra ir pasaulinės literatūros procesas*, Vilnius: Vaga, 112–147.

Martišiūtė Aušra 2004. „Literatūros modernėjimo procesai XX a. I pusėje", *Menotyra*, 37 (4), 18–25.

Morkūnas Pranas 1993. *Dainuoja degeneratas: dadaistiški imažinistiniai eilėraščiai*, parengė L. Gudaitis, Kaunas: Nemunas.

Peiper Tadas 1924. „Naujoji ispanų poėzija", *Keturi vėjai*, 1, 61–62.

Salaris Claudia 1996. *Dizionario del futurismo*, Roma: Editori Riuniti.

Striogaitė Dalia 1998. *Avangardizmo sūkuryje: lietuvių literatūra: 3-iasis dešimtmetis*, Vilnius: Lietuvių literatūros ir tautosakos institutas.

Šemerys Salys 1924. „Mirties mirtis", *Keturi vėjai*, 1, 34–39.

Šemerys Salys 1926. *Liepsnosvaidis širdims deginti*, Kaunas, Stiklius.

Zürcher Christoph 1998. *Lietuvių avangardo pavasaris*, iš vokiečių kalbos vertė Donata Daujotytė ir Saulius Keturakis, Vilnius: Lietuvių literatūros ir tautosakos institutas.

Žlabys-Žengė Juozas 1992. *Pavasarių gramatikos*, Vilnius: Vaga.

Галина Михайлова 2017. *Ранний футуризм,* Учебное пособие к спецкурсу «Русский авангард», Vilnius: Vilniaus universiteto leidykla.