

Personality and the Symbol

Summary

Different researchers have testified to the great importance of symbols in creative work. They indicated that thinking and knowledge of the world were based on the feature of human symbolisation. Without symbols people would be unable to define objective reality, express and share knowledge about the world surrounding them. Empirical impulses, impressions, emotions to objectivise become symbols.

In order to understand the nation's culture, it is important to study symbols.

Prominent philosopher Antanas Maceina revealed the symbolic nature of Lithuanian culture. He stated that an idea, a thought or a feeling has naturally been expressed through symbols in our culture since olden times – beginning with folk art, customs and ending with professional (or high) culture – art and science. Antanas Maceina regarded the Lithuanian painter and composer Mikalojus Konstantinas Čiurlionis as the author who created clear and potent symbols.

The aim of the monograph is to study symbols in the history of Lithuanian culture from the 16th century to the present day. Creators whose works are of great significance and had an impact on Lithuanian culture were chosen for the analysis. The world view and the epoch in which the creator lived determined the meaning of the symbols. Therefore, the book deals with the cultural context and the views which contributed to the meaning of symbols.

Chapter One *Symbols in the Works by Pioneers of Lithuanian Culture in the 16th - the 19th Centuries* investigates symbols of the initiators of professional culture who are considered pillars of our culture.

These are symbols found in the works by Motiejus Strijkovskis (Maciej Strykowski) who lived in the 16th century. He was a Polish historian, writer and poet and understood the needs of the citizens of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania at that time. In 1582, he published the first history of Lithuania known in short as *Kronika* [Chronicle]. Due to the contents of both *Kronika* and his earlier historical work *Dorybės šauklys* [Herald of Virtue] (1574), he is to be regarded as the herald of social awareness of the citizens of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania – the proclaimer of historical identity for a long time as there was no other published history of Lithuania for a long period until 1650, 1669 when the history of Lithuania by Albertas Vijiūkas-Kojalavičius in Latin was issued. Even in the 19th century, when *Kronika* by Maciej Strykowski was repeatedly published, its symbols influenced the activists of the national liberation movement of that century.

As a historian, Strykowski represented the history of Lithuania in symbols, which were based on mythical images of ancient Greece and Rome. The symbolic thing is that in his rhymed autobiography presented at the beginning of his *Kronika*, he represented the Greek Goddess of Creativity as his Muse who helped him. In this way, Maciej Strykowski begins the history of Lithuania with Muse, i.e., with God's inspiration, similarly to what Homer did in *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. According to Strykowski, the mission of writing history can be carried out only after a special ceremony of consecration has been performed, after a historian has been bathed (christened) in a special clear spring that had been located on Mount Helicon, the mountain of the Muses, and God Apollo has presented the author with a symbolic instrument of creation – the lyre. Besides, he takes a drink from the Castalian Spring that had been located on the slope of Mount Parnassus in the vicinity of Delphi Sanctuary and acquires the abilities necessary for writing history, in the understanding of that time – a gift of a poet and a prophet.

The author uses the twilight symbol, which had not been investigated before him, in characterising the object of history and adapts the same symbol to define ancient written sources that he had discovered (chronicles and annals) and relied on: like the entire history of Lithuania, they were unknown – shrouded in dusk and night. He compared his own writing of history to hard labour of a ploughman

who tilled uncultivated land. Historian Maciej Strykowski described the ancient Prussian sacred place Ramovė. He portrayed the sacred place separately from the primary source according to his own imagination. He compared some Gods to Roman Gods, applying the so-called principle of *Interpretatio Romana*. Therefore, the Prussian sacred place can be regarded as the symbol of distant paganism of the Balts.

Kristijonas Donelaitis, the author of the first classic Lithuanian language poem *The Seasons* (Lithuanian: *Metai*) lived in East Prussia in the 18th century, the Lithuanian land occupied by German colonists. His poem exerted a great influence on later Lithuanian writers and poets. Donelaitis has become the symbol of resistance to occupation and oppression by means of creative work. He clearly perceived the purpose of his existence related to the calling of a Lutheran pastor – to help and teach his parishioners. He wrote poetry basing himself on the texts of the Bible, and he contemplated deeply the psalms that he sang. In his poem *The Seasons* he followed particularly Psalm 104 whose aim is to glorify the Creator and his creations, to describe in verses a wonderful world order established by God. Donelaitis did that by reflecting seasonal prevalence according to the ancient European tradition, depicting the seasons and the way of life of peasants and their work that was closely bound up with the cycles of nature. Portraying this seasonal prevalence according to the old European tradition, Donelaitis glorified Lithuanian nature and works, as well as customs, of Lithuanian country-people in the course of one year. Old customs of the local people mirror pre-Christian offering of a rooster at weddings, mention idols of Lithuanian ancestors, which are raised into trees and fastened by ropes. It is assumed that fastening the idol to a tree can be associated with archaic symbolism of a knot.

When after the Third Partition of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth Lithuania lost the features of its Statehood, the first author, who wrote history and other education books in the Lithuanian language in the denationalised environment, was Simonas Daukantas. Writing his works in the environment that was linguistically alien to him, Simonas Daukantas himself became the symbol of Lithuanianism. In historical works written in the Lithuanian language, he created

the symbol of a forest in winter. This is a sight of a forest whose trees and bushes are without any greenery or life – mere dry stalks jutting out of snow. This image of the forests represents the Lithuanian nation occupied in the first half of the 19th century, whereas the described powerful lush forest symbolised free life of ancient Lithuanians with original social and ethnographic customs signifying the identity. The plant of a red bilberry which grows in that forest and remains green even in winter and is resistant to cold, symbolised the archaic Lithuanian language that has been preserved for centuries. Daukantas also assigned the meaning to the picture of a Lithuanian mother: industrious, brave, noble – with a white married woman's headdress on her head; she has preserved and handed on the Lithuanian language to her children from generation to generation. The historian regards the ruins of the old Lithuanian castles which have survived to the 19th century and had witnessed honourable olden times, fights of the ancestors in defending their Motherland's freedom, as symbols of Freedom. Retrospectively, basing himself on different written historical sources, Daukantas depicted the pagan Lithuanian cult. He classified offerings to Gods according to the purpose of the offering, the mass character of the participants and the rank of the prophet who was in charge of the act of offering.

In the second half of the 19th century, when occupied Lithuania suffered oppression of Imperial Russia, in the epoch when seeking to Russify the Lithuanians, the publications of Lithuanian books in Roman alphabet were prohibited, publishing of the newspaper *Aušra* stopped, Vincas Kudirka, together with his fellow men, founded another newspaper titled *Varpas* which awakened the nation and brought it out of its lethargy. He was its Editor-in-Chief. Due to his great dedication, his personality became symbolic: Kudirka is considered the symbol of the national rebirth and freedom of Lithuanians, its attribute in historiography and art is the bell of freedom. Such symbols as the sower, soil, the sun and the snake are often found in his poetry. These symbols are used to create a spacious image of the native land.

Chapter two of the monograph titled *Symbols in Lithuanian Art in the 20th - 21st Centuries* reveals the symbols created by prominent creators of that period

whose works belong to the treasure trove of the nation. This is original meaningful painting. Čiurlionis' personality has a symbolic representative importance. His name and works represent our country abroad. Born into a family of an organist, brought up as a religious man, he regarded the mission of art as serving God. Motifs of his paintings are inspired by the Bible.

Šarūnas Sauka and Nomeda Saukienė are Lithuanian high-calibre painters enjoying immense prestige. In creating modern art, they continue the best traditions of European painting. In his intriguing canvases, which require knowledge of world literature if one wants to understand them, Šarūnas Sauka meditates upon the concepts of faith, humanness, freedom, the value of real – professional art. For this purpose, Sauka creates new forms of expression originally arranging symbolic dramatical narratives of figures of naked people or their groups, often the image of himself, supplementing it with the images of household articles. Ethic purposefulness of symbolic canvases is directed against evil: dehumanisation, violence, substituting spiritual values for material ones.

The investigation revealed individual symbolism in Nomeda Saukienė's pictures. Her great compositional and stylistic achievement is as follows: correlation between two different spaces – one of a human being and the other of lush wild plants (adding flowers that grow in the garden or inside, usually aloes). Parallels drawn between a human being and a plant in a picture create symbolic meanings of eternal growth and renewal. Another means is laying a mirror under the still life. In this way the image of a plant growing next to water is created. With the help of colours, painter Nomeda Saukienė creates a shine effect, opens light, conveys joy in her pictures. For a believer this is associated with the religious effect of the Holy Spirit. Successfully combining the creative rudiment with her duties to the family, Nomeda Saukienė is a symbol of a female artist in Lithuanian culture.

Guided by enormous talent, Eimuntas Nekrošius staged performances which embodied the greatest achievements of the modern theatre. Therefore, the name of the producer is to be considered the symbol of artistic value of the current Lithuanian theatre. When producing the most complicated works of world's

classics in the Lithuanian theatre, he created original symbols for which he used authentic everyday objects. He adopted for stage colloquial expressions, adapted movements and gestures of children's and young people's games in rural areas. Each performance had central and peripheral symbols-actions and objects. The central symbol is props that penetrate the entire material of the performance, define (forecast) the future events. For example, a round saw hung in Shakespeare's *Hamlet* in Elsinore Castle instead of lighting symbolises a threat of death for failure to stick to moral principles in society; in *Macbeth* by the same author, a cast iron cauldron represents the ethic trap for the usurper King and his subordinates; turning a log round and round on stage in Goethe's *Faust* symbolises the axis of the whole world and the performance; tying a knot on a rope means Faust's deal with the Devil; the blacksmith's anvil in *The Song of Songs* according to the Bible embodies the characters' resistance to obstacles, the strength of their belief and so on. Such symbolic actions as actors' speaking with their heads bend down, walking with their eyes closed and hands stretched out, performing a somersault and creating similar original symbols helped the producer to reveal existential dramas.

Two researchers are chosen as examples in Chapter Three *Unveiling the Symbols in Researchers' Works*.

Nijolės Laurinkienė's works help us better understand richness of the symbolism of the Thunder, the Sun, the Moon and the Earth in Lithuanian folklore including them into a unified system of Lithuanian traditional customs. With the help of analogies with religions of the ancient world dating back to the archaic Indo-European past, the symbols under investigation acquire additional meanings and are concretised. Their researcher Nijolė Laurinkienė, who resembles a hard-working ant, and is dedicated to science and family, who manages to combine these two spheres in her life, can be regarded as a symbol of a female-scientist.

Historian Antanas Tyla, who has taken an active part in historical science for 63 years, is a researcher of the Statehood of Lithuania. On the basis of his historical analyses, it is possible to perceive that the figure on the State emblem of Lithuania – a rider on horseback does not only signify the native land but

also a defender of the State, therefore it is the symbol of social awareness. Of great importance to symbolism is the parallel that the researcher drew between book smugglers in the 19th century and the resistance fight against the Soviet occupying regime that started during the Second World War and continued after it, sacrality of a forest related to that, as well as symbols of moving from darkness to light. Antanas Tyla himself is a strong personality, his name carries a symbolic meaning of an honest scientist-historian.