

# EARLY MODERNISM: LITERARY IMAGE OF A WOMAN IN LITHUANIAN AND LATVIAN LITERATURE

Gabija Bankauskaitė<sup>1</sup> and Alina Romanovska<sup>2\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Kaunas Faculty, Vilnius University, Lithuania

<sup>2</sup> Institute of the Humanities and Social Sciences, Daugavpils University, Latvia

## ABSTRACT

**\*Corresponding author:**

Alina Romanovska  
[alina.romanovska@du.lv](mailto:alina.romanovska@du.lv)

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During the period of early Modernism, a woman was perceived by the subconsciousness of a creator as an all-encompassing symbol of nature inherent to vitalism, erotica, and death. The mystery of love depicted by early modernists is usually portrayed as a passion and power struggle between a man and a woman which is initially associated with gender polarity, flâneur's ambition to separate from civilisation, and aesthete's desire to overcome nature and femininity. The emerging hero, as a witness to nature's idyll, grapples with the overwhelming presence of the feministic femme fatale, who is currently in control of the game of the masculine world. The aim of the research is to analyse the image of a woman in Lithuanian and Latvian literature identifying potential parallels and possible sources of influence. To narrow the scope of the research, emphasis is placed on the images created by male writers, as the views of female and male authors, in this case, reveal significant differences. The analysis of women's images employs comparative (primarily imagology), semiotic, and structural approaches. Modernist tendencies entered Lithuanian and Latvian culture during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, accompanied by a rapid assimilation of European cultural experience. This led to the development of intellectual dialogue in a broader cultural context, adopting the most vivid images and major topics of world culture and adapting them to the features of national cultures. The images of women created in Lithuanian and Latvian literature during this period accumulate the core ideas of foreign modernism while being firmly rooted in national values extending them and engaging in a dialogue with them.

**Keywords:** Early Modernism; literary image; woman; Latvian literature; Lithuanian literature

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Modernist literature brought forth a new image of a woman as one of its most important novelties. These changes relate to the political and social situation as well as the trends of cultural development. The late 19th and early 20th centuries witnessed the emancipation of women, driven by the growing popularity of liberal ideology. This ideology championed individual freedom, equality, rationalism, and competition, greatly advancing the cause of women's liberation. The views of the social democrats on statehood, citizenship, democracy, as well as marriage, and family relations between the genders were also to some extent based on

the ideology of liberalism. The First World War, which devastated Europe, not merely brought about profound political, economic, and social consequences, but also changed the previously stable structure of society. The turn of the century granted women greater freedom and autonomy, while the war made them realise that men were no longer the sole guarantors of a secure life. Consequently, women began to work more in industry, demanded equal rights, and achieved financial independence without relying on men. In Lithuania and Latvia during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, there emerged a trend of strengthening women's identity in culture and literature. The desire to assert themselves as active public subjects, as independent individuals, became intertwined with moral and public concerns. Women felt personally obliged to contribute to the well-being and education of society and therefore tried to get involved in the work of constructing a modern national community. In the independent states of Lithuania and Latvia, women obtained civil rights, including the right to vote, granted in 1918. However, the conservative attitudes prevailing in society and the system of elections devised by political parties made it challenging for women to fully exercise these rights. With the advent of independent states, women became one of the social groups that they also tried to make a subject of manipulation.

The image of women in literature was also influenced by the construction of national identity, which became the most fundamental political and cultural principle of that era. The Latvian and Lithuanian middle class held traditional gender roles, where men were engaged in work and active in the public sphere, while women were tasked with tending to the household. Consequently, a distinct division between the public and private spheres emerged, accompanied by a clear understanding of how women and men should behave within them and what their roles should entail. This division was perceived as the right approach to the model of an ideal society, subsequently propagated through various political parties and their ideals influencing the development of parliamentary democracy.

Although the processes of women's emancipation were very controversial, it is noteworthy that in the early decades of the 20th century, women made significant efforts to establish themselves in a male-dominated culture. They consciously reflected on women's status, rights, and culture, leading to the emergence of an image of an equal, politically engaged, nationally active women. In 1920, six women out of 152 deputies were elected to the first parliament in Latvia. In Lithuania, in 1922, restrictions on women's right to inherit property were lifted, and women were given the opportunity to study at university and to choose their desired profession. In 1926, during the election of the third president of Lithuania, two women ran for the post of president. Between 1930 and 1940, women's cultural activities became particularly active, with women beginning to dominate art, theatre, and music.

Until the 19th century, a woman was portrayed in literature mainly in a patriarchal environment as a moral, often fragile creature who is subject to a man and whose most important social function is related to the family. As a result of emancipation and democratization processes, a woman gradually began to acquire new social functions. Over time, since the French Revolution, women started to strengthen their active political position. This resulted in the gender relations crisis in the 19th century, highlighting the controversy between the idealized image of a woman and reality. Offering a saint as a didactic model for modern women creates unrealistic standards of behaviour. Women become more independent, although men are not always ready to accept this change (Facos, 2009). According to Leonarda Jekentaitė-Kuzmickienė (2006), in these conditions:

the view is turned to the woman, her impact on a man and connection with life; in her natural non-transitivity, vitality, her body, in the way of thinking the impulses of renewal are found. In the works of male writers, the greater focus on woman erotica appears, the voice of women themselves gets stronger, feminism draws attention to itself. (p. 138)

The new images of women that emerged in culture and literature invite a re-evaluation of their societal roles. The most vivid images that show the previously undiscovered nature of a woman appear in the works by decadents and symbolists. Women are depicted as desirable seductresses as well as evil, selfish, and greedy beings. The social independence of a woman manifests itself in the art of that time as a demonization of the image of a woman; the *femme fatale* becomes one of the brightest images (Facos, 2009). A woman is often depicted as an ambivalent creature who, with her beauty and eroticism, can either save a man or destroy him. A woman often reveals herself to be dangerous, powerful, and seductive at the same time. This image appears particularly vivid in symbolist works, where mythological and biblical images, such as Salome, Medea, Lilith, Judith, Sphinx, siren, etc., are used to reveal the nature of a woman.

The aim of this research is to analyse the image of a woman created by male authors in Lithuanian and Latvian literature identifying parallels and potential sources of influence. Modernism entered Lithuanian and Latvian culture at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries alongside the accelerated acquisition of European cultural experiences. This fostered intellectual dialogues in a broader cultural context, adopting the most vivid images and significant themes from the global culture and adapting them to the features of national cultures.

The images of women created in Lithuanian and Latvian literature from that period encapsulated the main ideas of foreign modernism. Nevertheless, they are based on national values, extending them as well as establishing a dialogue with them.

The analysis of poetry, prose, and drama, considering the basic trends and changes in cultural paradigms, serves as a methodological basis for the research. In the analysis of women's images, the findings of semiotics and structuralism were used. Based on the approach proposed by R. Barthes (2013), the authors relied on the empirical analysis of texts, assigning an important role to the interpretation of images and considering the plot and the place of particular images in them as one of the central objects of the analysis. Guided by the principles of structural semiotics, the images are analysed not only within the scope of literature but also within the cultural context. The text is viewed as a cohesive structure analysing both the images themselves and the peculiarities of their representation. (Lotman, 2009)

Today, the image of women in culture is commonly analysed using the concepts of feminist theorists (see: Jurėnienė, 2006; Kirss, 2003; Meškova, 2003; Bankauskaitė-Sereikienė & Statkevičiūtė, 2017, etc.). In the given study, it was decided to look at it in a neutral way, drawing attention to the diversity of cultural trends of the time and emphasizing the interdisciplinarity of the study. The advantage of this approach is that it grounds the interpretations on evidence from the text (Asl, 2019, Ying et al., 2021), while also emphasizing the importance of the overall cultural context.

The understanding of Modernism and Modernity in the article is based on the ideas offered by Postmodern theorists (Michael Foucault, Anthony Giddens, Fredric Jameson, and Peter Childs), on the conclusions drawn by national (Latvian and Lithuanian) literary scholars (Benedikts Kalnačs, Ieva Kalniņa, Maija Burima, Ausma Cimdina, Ojārs Lāms, Rima Pociūtė, Eugenijus Žmuida, Rita Tūtlytė, Eglė Keturakienė, Joana Tabor, and Virginija Šimkutė), and the ideas of early 20th century authors (Jānis Jansons (Brauns), Teodors Zeiferts, Edvards Virza, Vincas Mykolaitis-Putinas, Balys Sruoga, Sofija Kymantaitė-Čiurlionienė, Juozapas Albinas Herbciauskas, etc.) on literature and cultural processes of their time.

The model of three long epistemes of cultural development (Classical, Modernist, Postmodernist), indicated by Fredric Jameson (1988), is adopted here. The beginning of the Modernist episteme is assigned to the 18th century Enlightenment and Romanticism, which took over the Classical episteme based on taxonomy and mimesis. It ended in the seventh decade of the 20th century giving way to the new post-industrialist literature and Postmodernism. Theoreticians of Postmodernism view literary Modernism not as a narrow immanent trend, but as an extensive part of the episteme of modern culture, wherein the idea of creative and aesthetic power of a subject gained its ground.

## 2. DEVELOPMENT OF THE LATE 19TH CENTURY—EARLY 20TH CENTURY LATVIAN AND LITHUANIAN LITERATURE

As Peter Childs (2000) pointed out, *A Survey of Modernist Poetry* (1927) by Robert Graves and Laura Riding offers the distribution of literary Modernism into two stages. The first stage continued into the second part of the 19th century; it is otherwise called Fin-de-siècle Modernism. Its beginning is associated with the works of Charles Baudelaire and Gustave Flaubert, and its ending with the creative heritage of Stephane Mallarmé. The second stage corresponds to the Avant-garde movement of the 20th century. The typological model of early Modernism including Symbolism, Impressionism, Neo-Romanticism, Secession, Aestheticism, and Decadence finds its prominence in the works of August Strindberg, Henrik Ibsen, Knut Hamsun, Oscar Wilde, Charles Baudelaire, etc. It is stylistically heterogeneous Modernism enjoying strong ties with Romanticism. It has a characteristic feature of internalisation of action and world perception when the perception of reality is emphasised rather than the objective reality itself. These foreign authors also significantly influenced the development of Lithuanian and Latvian literature, offering a new world perception and new concepts of a human (a woman and a man). Given that Modernism emerged later in Latvian and Lithuanian literature compared to foreign literature, it is difficult to distinguish distinct stages of early Modernism in these contexts, and there are no clearly defined authors who developed its specific features. Nevertheless, it is necessary to dwell on the authors who were idolised by Latvian and Lithuanian writers during that period, as they exerted a significant influence on the creation of a new image of women.

During the latter half of the 19th century, the ideas surrounding the establishment of a national state turned especially relevant. One could observe the emergence of numerous public groups and associations. Political ideas were emphasized and there was a gradual increase in the number of periodicals issued at that time, which contributed to the spread of these ideas. Arguments in favour of forming a nation were predominantly rooted in the principles expressed by National Romanticism. They dwell upon the significance of traditional national material and non-material values for further development (Kalnačs, 2011). Therefore, a special emphasis was put on the study of folklore, as folklore texts provide evidence of the harmonious ideal

past—the golden era when the nation was united. These forms of historical unity and togetherness were considered the basis for the formation of states and nations (Bula, 2000). While the 1905 revolution represented the political climax of the processes described, the establishment of national states in 1918 served as their logical conclusion. These political events also had a significant impact on the development of literature and culture.

In the late 19th century–early 20th century, alongside the traditional values and virtues rooted in traditional experience, the trends of foreign culture started to play an important role; the process of rapid Europeanization began. Latvian culture has become open to new foreign trends (Romanovska, 2020). The situation in Latvia at that time was specific: the whole of European cultural heritage entered the Latvian culture. At the same time, the Latvian cultural consciousness was absorbed in the processes of cognition, compilation, and analysis (acceptance or non-acceptance) of this heritage (Tabūns, 2003). In the early 20th century, young artists appeared who tended to overcome the Positivism traditions and highlight individualism in their lives and work. Gradually, the features of Decadence and Symbolism entered the literature.

In the territory of Lithuania, the situation was complicated by the press ban, which was in force until the beginning of the 20th century. The Russian Empire sought to hinder the natural development of Lithuanian nationalism and to implement the Russification policy with the ban on the press in 1864–1904. Lithuanians, encouraged by the intelligentsia, massively opposed the ban. Lithuanians were taught to read and write secretly by school teachers and literate family members. The prohibition on the press caused much harm to Lithuanian culture and literature—the number of Lithuanian publications published previously reached its former level only ten years later. After the abolition of the press ban, the addressee of literature became more intellectual in Lithuania; art trends (art, music, theatre) developed, and periodicals increased. In 1907, the first almanack of Lithuanian literature, *Gabija*, was published in Krakow, where the Neoromantic movement of *Young Poland* was concentrated. The literature published in the almanack had manifestations of Modernism (works of S. Kymantaitė-Čiurlionienė, J. A. Herbačiauskas). Neoromantic Modernism was developed in *Vaivorykštė* (1913–1914), the first Lithuanian literary and art magazine, and *Pirmasai baras* (1915), in Vilnius, in which B. Sruoga, I. Šeinius, F. Kirša, V. Mykolaitis-Putinas, K. Jurgelionis K. Binkis, Z. Gėlė, E. Steponaitis, V. Krėvė, Vaižgantas, A. Vienuolis published their writings. The writers combined various styles – Realistic, Romantic, Impressionistic, Symbolic, and Avant-garde, to supplement the general model of European Modernism with national motifs. A type of Romantic Modernist was formed, expressing the pursuit of tradition and innovation, organic integrity, and self-reflection. A human being was perceived as an infinite mystery, not confined to ideological and moral frames.

When Latvian literature embraced latest trends of world literature, which at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries was largely associated with the ethical and aesthetical beliefs of Symbolism and Decadence, it became crucial to align them with the works by other authors. There are works based on dialogues, intertextual citations and reminiscence links. A new literary paradigm is created and implemented by such authors as E. Virza, J. Akuraters, P. Grūzna, L. Laicens, E. Vulfs, V. Dambergs, V. Eglītis, H. Eldgasts, Fallijs, and others, known as Decadent and/or Symbolists in the history of Latvian literature. Open and conscious use of artistic facts from other cultures, the inclusion of cultural citations and reminiscences in texts, as well as demonstrative reference to the author of the borrowed text are characteristic features of Latvian Decadence and Symbolism (Vāvere, 1999). However, the excessive use of citations often negatively affects the artistic quality of the texts and impedes comprehension.

Despite the rapid entry of foreign literary trends, it should be noted that it is a tradition rather than an experiment that prevails both in Latvian and Lithuanian literature in the early 20th century. Researchers admit that this situation was determined by the fact that literature in these countries was very young and could not afford to be in opposition to the old, as the aesthetic structures which were considered traditional, and the traditional literary paradigms had yet to be established (Vecgrāvis, 1998; Berelis, 1999).

At the turn of the century, Lithuanian and Latvian cultures were closely related to Russian culture, due to the socio-political situation, and economic and cultural connections. Many young Lithuanian and Latvian writers including J. Baltrušaitis, V. Mykolaitis-Putinas, B. Sruoga, J. Savickis, V. Eglītis, P. Gruzna, and Fallijs studied and lived in St. Petersburg during the early 20th century. They established close contacts with the Russian Symbolists. They were actively involved in the creative activities organized by Russian intelligentsia and attended numerous events. At that time, both typological similarity and genetic contacts (influences and borrowings) united Lithuanian, Latvian and Russian cultures. These cultures, at the turn of the century, were in a situation where they were ready to adopt the European cultural heritage. German, English, French, Polish, and Scandinavian literature provided a significant source of inspiration. Both cultures established Modernism paradigms, taking the experience of European culture as a model; moreover, the sources that Lithuanian, Latvian, and Russian authors address and refer to are similar. Not only the geographic proximity of the countries and their common national status determined the parallel development of the three kinds of literature—Lithuanian, Latvian and Russian—but mainly, it was a great interest in the aesthetic phenomenon

of the turn of the century. Authors exhibited a particular interest in the philosophical ideas of Neocantianism and concepts put forth by A. Schopenhauer, F. Nietzsche, A. Bergson, and others. They naturally incorporated problems, themes, and motives of such representatives of Symbolist literature as A. Edgar Poe, Ch. Baudelaire, P. Verlaine, A. Rimbaud, M. Maeterlinck, S. Mallarmé, S. George, H. Ibsen, K. Hamsun, S. Pshibishevsky, A. Strindberg, and more. These influences became integral to the areas of their interests (Sproģe & Vāvere, 2002; Sereikiene, 2006).

The concepts and images of world culture were often entering Lithuanian and Latvian literature through Russian culture. For example, at that time, texts by many popular authors became known to Lithuanian and Latvian readers in the translations by Russian authors K. Balmont, A. Bely, A. Blok, V. Bryusov, Z. Gippius, V. Ivanov, D. Merezhkovsky, F. Sologub, A. Akhmatova, N. Gumilyov, and O. Mandelshtam, which determined the specific character of the perception of relevant works and images in the Lithuanian and Latvian culture. For example, a Lithuanian poet J. Baltrušaitis together with K. Balmont and V. Poliakov founded the publishing house *Skorpion* in 1899, which published the most important periodicals of Russian symbolists—the almanack *Severnye cvety* (1901–1903) and the magazine *Vesy* (1904–1909). J. Baltrušaitis (collections of the *Žemiškos pakopos / Zemnye stupeni*, 1910, *Kalnų takas / Gornaja tropa*, 1911), who wrote symbolistic poems in Russian, had a significant influence on Lithuanian symbolism.

### 3. PECULIARITIES OF THE IMAGE OF A WOMAN IN LATVIAN AND LITHUANIAN LITERATURE IN THE EARLY 20TH CENTURY

In Latvian literature, the new image of a woman resonates both with the brightest images offered by European modernists, national features and traditional perceptions of the world. At that time, the image of a woman was not only reconsidered, it also gained much more attention from male authors. As the titles of the texts demonstrate, a number of authors (E. Virza, K. Jēkabsons, A. Eglītis, A. Upītis) gave the name “Woman” or “Women” for their poetry and prose, as well as the collections of their works; the titles also included female names and names of female mythological creatures. In Latvian literature, passionate and demonic images of women are presented more vividly in poetry, for example, in the works by E. Virza, V. Eglītis, Fallijs, J. Akuraters, etc.

In E. Virza's books of poems *Bīķeris* and *Dievišķīgās rotaļas*, the image of a woman is associated with the motive of passion. He is one of the first authors in Latvian literature to use erotic images and is therefore considered the founder of Latvian erotic poetry. In E. Virza's poetry, a woman is the one who dominates the protagonist and is the embodiment of bodily temptation. She is very beautiful, but this beauty is often destructive. In search of pleasure, the protagonist cannot resist the woman and is destroyed. Therefore, passion in E. Virza's poetry is associated with death. It is important that once the protagonist experiences the passion, they are unable to resist it. He regularly succumbs to passion, and, as a result, he dies. S. Kušnere believes that death in E. Virza's poetry is the culmination of love, passion, and pleasure (Kušnere, 2011, pp. 89–91). E. Virza aspires to reveal woman's sensuality by creating images that are common in everyday life, with less application of mythological motifs. Among all mythological and biblical images peculiar to Symbolists, the ancient Egyptian and Greek mythological image of Sphinx, which symbolizes destruction, appeals to E. Virza the most. In E. Virza's poetry, there are no men who could resist the attraction, wisdom, and evil of the Sphinx. In comparison to a woman, the protagonist turns out to be weaker.

Other Latvian decadents and symbolists also define the image of a woman in a new way. Observing serious changes in the social environment, they tend to symbolically and poetically reflect these shifts in their works. Viktors Eglītis, one of the most prominent and militant Latvian decadents and symbolists, emphasizes mythological images in his texts following the theoretical paradigms of Symbolism. The image of Sphinx is one of the mythological female images, which he shows a predisposition to in his poetry, for example, in the poem *Sfinksas smaids* (Eglītis, 1915), as well as in his prose, for example, in the collection of short stories *Vērtības pārvērtējot* (Eglītis, 1911). However, this image in V. Eglītis's works does not acquire these special symbolic interpretations as it is in the works of foreign authors such as O. Wilde or Russian symbolists. In contrast, it functions like a bridge or a signal that forms a necessary intertextual link between the foreign and Latvian symbolists. It creates a sense of belonging to a certain cultural movement.

It is also important that Sphinx and other mythological characters are a sign of another exotic world. Turning to exotic, oriental motifs are another characteristic feature of that time's literature. Emphasising exotic motifs, V. Eglītis as well as other representatives of early Latvian Modernism juxtapose the grey daily routine with the beautiful world of fantasy created with the help of mythological images. Everyday life is monotonous, grey, full of concerns, and dominated by formal rules and limitations that prevent an individual from being fully expressed. In contrast, the world of exotic fantasy symbolises freedom, beauty, the ability to realise Dionysian nature, and sexual energy. The incompatibility of these two worlds is tragic. The relation between men and

women also symbolises it: when a man from the real world craves an exotic woman symbolised by a mythological image (Sphinx, Salome, Judith, etc.), he is doomed to death. However, the exotic world is also tempting and, to some extent, essential.

It should be noted that in Latvian and Lithuanian early Modernism literature, mythological and biblical images of women are relatively rare. These images tend to have functions in the storyline which are rather formal or nominative and the symbolic and metaphorical levels are commonly not expanded. The focus lies on the creation of a new image of a woman within the national cultural tradition, which holds greater importance.

The ambivalent female images in the works of the Latvian authors also symbolize the ambivalence of men, sometimes revealing it at the poetic level as two different entities of the protagonist, or two sides of him (for example, V. Eglītis's poem *Abām*, J. A. Herbačiauskas's essay *XIII kapinynų simfonija*). These two entities yearn for something of their own. The controversial nature of the protagonist is demonstrated as a craving for two different women, as well as a craving for other opposing aspects of the world (the sun and the sea, life and death, spring and winter, etc.). In this way, the inconsistency of the modern world and the inconsistency of the human perception of the world are presented. In this new world, the protagonist is unable to commit to a single direction and is forced to exist in a state of permanent inconsistency. This state is also demonstrated by the female images that embody life and eroticism, as well as struggle and death at the same time.

In Lithuanian literature until the 20th century, the depiction of love and a woman were closely related to the folklore tradition, strongly influenced by the national movement. However, the re-evaluation of values after the recovery of the press paved the way for a different image, marked by the city culture, impressionism, and expressionism. The texts of V. Mykolaitis-Putinas, B. Sruoga, J. A. Herbačiauskas, I. Šeinius, A. Vaičiulaitis, J. Savickis present a very diverse picture of a woman—from archetypal and platonic to demonic.

E. Žmuida, Vincas Mykolaitis-Putinas's poetry (collection *Tarp dviejų aušrų*, 1927) conveys the vision of a woman (virgin) as a star, which has connections to the cult of the Holy Virgin and the Neoplatonic ideal of “eternal femininity”, entrenched in European poetry since J. W. Goethe's times (Žmuida, 2007). Very often in the texts of this author, love is also treated and narrated through the image of the earth-mother-lover. It is considered an essential component of the creator's worldview: the woman in the poems is Mother Nature herself, Mother-Goddess. The most picturesque earth-mother-lover myth is conveyed in the poem *Žemei*. The epithets *beautiful, powerful, and sinful* are a clear allusion to the biblical myth and the tradition of treating a woman's corporeality as a sin, but the mood in the poem is exalting rather than condemning. The sinful earth, eternal Eve, is disobedient to the dry commandments of heaven, as it is through *sin* that life truly commences. The mythical act of love is conveyed between the lover-earth and the speaker, who seems to have turned into a giant, or the earth, which has apparently turned into a lover. As E. Žmuida points out, when reading, we see the intercourse of two specific bodies and the union between two abstract, archetypal (male and female) beginnings. Natural metaphors convey the culmination of intimacy: the red colour of poppies, the descending clouds, the stillness of celestial bodies like stars and the moon. Only a man who has grown into an earth-woman through lust is capable of life and creativity (Žmuida, 2013).

Balys Sruoga's poems about love (collections *Saulė ir smiltys*, 1920, *Dievų takais*, 1922) manifest his most personal and intimate poetic language. Most of the texts are for *the sister, the white swan, the beloved of the sun, the lover of the city, and the innocent guest*. The intricate image of the earth-beloved-mother in B. Sruoga's poetry embodies the features of an ancient love archetype: love is a divine force associated with the fertility of the earth and the primordial mysteries of nature, the passionate transformation of life and its destruction. However, in the expressionist poem *Miestas* (Sruoga, 1996), the traditional subjugated or overly idealized image of a woman is supplanted by the type of a modern woman influenced by the Freudian psychoanalytic approach. The woman, disguised with an artificial luxury exterior, is depicted in the bustling street within a cold, metal, mechanical environment. She becomes an object of consumer consciousness onto which frivolous entertainment, frank instinct and carnal hunger are projected. In the horizontal realm of the city, the woman loses the vertical organizing principle of eternal femininity and acts solely within the realm of Dionysian sensuality. The fresh-faced swan transforms into a woman who commodifies her body.

The work of Juozapas Albinas Herbačiauskas, a representative of Modern Romanticism, magic, and occultism, and a visionary of Surrealism who wrote in Polish and Lithuanian, drastically postulates the new femininity. It is necessary to point out Herbačiauskas's association with early modernism. He was an active member of the *Młoda Polska* movement in Krakow. This movement nurtured Herbačiauskas development as a creator, encouraging him to disseminate the ideas of modern curating in Lithuania. At the heart of this movement was Stanisław Przybyszewski, a Polish novelist, dramatist, and poet of the decadent naturalistic school. Przybyszewski, who delved into the writings of Spencer, Darwin, Zola, Ibsen, Nietzsche, and Schopenhauer, was the soul and leader of this artistic phenomenon. Essays based on Nietzsche's writings and his own studies in neurophysiology, earned him recognition within the German-Scandinavian bohemian circle in Berlin. Through his marriage to the Norwegian Dagny Juel, a central figure in Berlin's avant-garde of the 1890s and the muse of

the city's Schwarze Ferkel artist's circle, painted by Edvard Munch, and a model for characters of August Strindberg, Przybyszewski became acquainted with influential cultural figures and innovators of the early 20th century. Both Herbačiauskas and Przybyszewski used shared artistic means that were characteristic of the entire context of *Młoda Polska* and the early 20th century. While each author maintained their originality, they enriched this context with their highly individual literary style (Vaitkevičiūtė, 2005).

The woman in Herbačiauskas's work is multi-faceted and multi-sensual, like a myth that cannot be fully embraced. Her image embodies the expression of various cultures, such as Salome or the goddess Fatum: "You are the Ballerina of the Cosmos—you are Fatum dancing with the Comets among the ruins of the worlds!" (Herbačiauskas, 1992). The woman represents the focal point of the eternal circle of existence, similar to the white elephant among the seven that uphold the world. She is the daughter of the goddess Kali and the huntress Diana, Isis, and Eve, forever burdened with the taste of an apple for a thousand years. Her sole purpose is the genius of procreation, endowing her with the power to divide and improve the world. In the essay collection *Erškėčių vainikas* (1908), as well as in the works *Gyvenimo artistas*, *XIII kapinyų simfonija*, *Meilė ir neapykanta*, the biblical tale of Salome is conveyed as an authentic vision of the creator in the context of alchemical love. V. Šimkutė highlights that the union between man and woman is treated as an alchemical marriage, striving for rebirth as a perfect androgynous (Šimkutė, 2006). In Salome's monologue, where she is called "sister" and "mother", the tragic longing for love intertwines with the thirst for physical intimacy. Metaphysical longing becomes the basis of true, transcendental love. Following the metaphors of longing, erotic, sensual love unfolds: seductive, longing moans and lyrical speaking bring Salome closer to the fiancée of the *Song of Songs*. Motifs of Baltic folklore, including grass snakes, etc., connect the feminine origin and the mythologem of the world tree. At the same time, a demonic, aggressive, passionate femininity is being conveyed: not only the beloved Salome, the "mother of Satans", but also the frantic "Madonna tenebrarum", killing with refined lust, is triumphing with her corporeality, turning into a dancing Woman-Cobra. Her dance, featuring cannibalistic elements and psychoanalytically valued as the transformation of sadistic fantasies, conveys a literary vision of drastic femininity. The Woman-Cobra occupies an active vertical axis, usurps the masculine energy, and becomes a "lightning-seed". The snake symbolizes universal power, symbolising eternity. J. A. Herbačiauskas's serpentine Salome is called the "Head of the Medusa", thus combining opposites—real femininity and active male sexual energy.

Jurgis Savickis, who studied in Krakow and St. Petersburg, and served as a diplomat in Denmark, Sweden, Norway, the Netherlands, and Finland, stands out from the majority of Lithuanian authors of the first half of the 20th century by adopting an anti-traditional approach. Instead of characters, there are symbolic figures turning into puppets by an invisible director. Instead of clarity, his narratives incorporate secondary storylines reminiscent of a puzzle, which can only be deciphered by prior knowledge of the author's views and methods. In the collections of short stories *Šventadienio sonetai*, *Ties aukštu sostu* (both 1922), he depicts characters exhibiting somnambulistic qualities rather than characters that were obsessed with the idea of getting rich and living above the possibilities.

According to E. Keturakienė, the beauty of a woman's body is portrayed in an expressionist style. It belongs not to love, but to the sphere of passion and flirtation, and it is used as a weapon to achieve pragmatic objectives. "There is no harmony between a man and a woman: similar to the dramas of Ibsen or Strindberg, the supposed "connection" between the two genders is based on a secret struggle ..." (Keturakienė, 2017).

In most of J. Savickis' short stories, women are described using animal and plant metaphors and the constant change between human and natural form acquires the aspect of acting: woman flirtatiously "came as close as a cat" (Savickis, 1990, p. 45). In her interactions with the priest who loves her, "the cat spread its claws and crawled to him", and when surrounded by suitors, "she sat—'a rose among thorns'—and dreamt" (Ibid). The protagonist of the short story *Susitikimas* calls women "graceful roe deer" (Ibid). Additionally, Savickis creates the image of the woman-snake, stating "I have a picture of this little woman, only grown up and as cunning as a snake" (Ibid). The protagonists of the short stories *Ponia de Savigny* and *Kleivienė* are compared to the mythical creature the Sphinx. These metaphors are often used ironically, to alter reality, to transcend the banal, to mock the desire to see an embellished image (Tabor, 2010). These metaphors may be transformed several times within the same work.

In J. Savickis's short stories, women's images are picturesque and cinematic, with a clear outward orientation intertwined with nature. According to R. Tūtlytė (2011), the image of spring promoted by Art Nouveau artists is found in the short stories. Still, it is complicated and associated not so much with the joy of life and the beauty of life forms as with irony and decorativeness. The motif of a bathing young girl and spring is being transformed. It not only expressively depicts unreflected cravings but also creates an opposition to the adjacent death, the pain represented by the old man who later appears and longs to bathe together (Tūtlytė, 2011). One of the most striking features of a woman in J. Savickis' short stories is seduction and coquettish behaviour; when the body and eyes speak, artificial erudition is also used to manipulate the status. Thus, a

woman is both an intertextual of culture and a vital numinous being. According to E. Keturakienė (2017), J. Savickis's novelism is dominated by a woman's image—a sphinx, an artist, a tempter, a seducer, a woman-prostitute, full of Dionic passions, and at the same time lust for wealth, representing the chthonic and demonic paradigms. In the short story *Koketė*, through the scenography of a woman's bodily expression, the whole simulacra life of her as a life artist and actor is unmasked: from an idyllic image of a bathing young girl, a poetic vision of femininity to a demonic image of a prostitute, a grotesque old man's mold. In the novel *Vasaros kaitros*, the intrigue and surprise, the harmony of mesmerizing poetics and beauty and demonicity is created by the metamorphosis of an elegant woman—a guild, reminiscent of the detective horror novels of Edgar Allan Poe.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

The literary female images created in the second half of the 19th century and early 20th century reveal the most important impulses of the modernity episteme, although these pieces combine different experiences and prove contradictory. They have a characteristic structure of Fin-de-siècle Modernism, where Realistic and Romantic elements are interwoven with Impressionistic, Symbolist, Neoromantic, and Decadent ones. Compared to European early Modernism, early Modernism in Latvia and Lithuania has specific features: late and extremely rapid emergence of modernist trends; absence of clearly determined artistic movements, hence the co-existence of individual trends; an important role of Russian culture both as an independent culture and intermediate one; the short development history of Latvian and Lithuanian literature; and the context of the formation of national states. These features determine that despite external attempts to adopt foreign traditions for depicting the image of women, the national context and preservation of cultural and literary traditions are more important in Latvian and Lithuanian literature. Latvian and Lithuanian literature in the early 20th century is too young to allow the previous tradition to be denied, so modernists, to some extent, continue this tradition. Therefore, there are very few decadent screaming protests in the depiction of women.

August Strindberg, Henrik Ibsen, Charles Baudelaire, Oscar Wilde, and Knut Hamsun, as well as Russian symbolists, are the most significant authors who influenced the development of the image of women in Latvian and Lithuanian literature. The brightest images created by European modernists, as well as national features and traditional perceptions of the world, are intertwined in the new image of a woman in Latvian and Lithuanian literature. At that time, the image of a woman was reconsidered and especially emphasized in a number of works. In Latvian literature, the most passionate and demonic female images seem to be more explicitly depicted in poetry, for example, in the works by E. Virza, V. Eglītis, Fallijs, and J. Akuraters. In Lithuanian literature, the most striking unconventional images of women are conveyed in essays and prose, for example, in the works by J. A. Herbačiauskas and J. Savickis. Like in the works of foreign modernists, in the works by Latvian and Lithuanian authors, a woman is depicted as an ambivalent being who, with her beauty and eroticism, can either save a man or destroy him. She is dangerous, powerful, and seductive at the same time. This image is particularly evident in the works of symbolists, where mythological and biblical images, such as Salome, Medea, Lilith, Judith, Sphinx, Gorgon, siren, female-cobra, etc. are used to discover the nature of women. However, it should be noted that the portrayal of such images is relatively rare in Latvian and Lithuanian literature, and has a nominative function. For the Latvian authors, the use of mythological and biblical images is rather a sign of their belonging to the Modernism movement, but these images do not gain a symbolic or metaphorical insight. In the works of early Lithuanian modernists, the depiction of the image of a woman, despite the influence of the city and the culture of Modernity, is characterized by a similar trend.

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