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FROM BARANOWSKI TO BARANAUSKAS, FROM JAMES TO NGŪGĪ: POST-COLONIAL ASPECTS OF LINGUISTIC SWITCH¹

Abstract

The article attempts to perform a comparative study of the phenomenon of the so-called linguistic switch, i.e., a change of languages in which the writer creates his/her works. One side of the analysis focuses on nineteenth-century Lithuanian poets, represented mainly by Antanas Baranauskas, and the other on the contemporary Kenyan prose writer Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o. The juxtaposition of such extremely distant authors: 1. allows a better understanding of the specificity of multilingualism in both eighteenth-century Lithuanian literature and contemporary fiction; 2. proves once again the universality of postcolonial sensitivity; 3. constitutes an attempt at comparative thinking in the context of world literature.

Keywords: Antanas Baranauskas, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, multilingualism, literature and collective identity, *comparatisme quand même*, world literature

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1.

For a contemporary literary scholar, multilingualism means primarily a feature of a specific work. There are different names for it in different languages. German scholars, for example, call it *multilinguale Literatur*, *heterolinguales Schreiben*, *Sprachmischung*, *literarische Polyphonie*, etc.² Such terms always refer to the same thing: using more than one language in a literary text, mostly in fiction. This hybridity should be regarded as a special and radical instance of polyphony described by Mikhail Bakhtin on the example of Fyodor Dostoevsky's novels.³ They are polyphonic and yet monolingual, which basically means that they were written only in Russian. However, different ways of speaking and thinking which constitute a literary work (a novel) do not have to be registered in only one language (e.g., in Russian). On the contrary, literature (not only modern literature) is full of works which demonstrate this multiplicity. They do this not only by using more than one voice (discourse) but also by using more than one literary language or by opting for pidgin and creole languages, dialects, and sociolects. This phenomenon has multiple long-lasting and far-reaching aesthetic and political consequences. Among other things, it leads to a symbolic appreciation of borderlands and strips rigid norms of linguistic correctness and identity paradigms of their peremptoriness.

It is multilingualism understood in this way that serves as a classic theme in contemporary literary studies. Publications devoted to, e.g., latino/a literature (and the terms "chicano" and "Spanglish", which are related to it)⁴ or Jamaican literature (and the notion of "patois")⁵ constitute an extremely thick nexus of methodological studies, factual findings, and terminological or interpretative proposals, the amount of which is truly overwhelming. This "internal" multilingualism is also

² R. Makarska, *Tekstowa wielojęzyczność jako zapisywanie miejsca. Regionalizm, polikulturowość i wielojęzyczność nowej literatury z Europy Środkowej*, "Wielogłos" 2016, nr 2, pp. 83–87.

³ M. Bahtin, *Problemy poetiki Dostoevskogo*, Sankt-Peterburg 2016, pp. 150–406.

⁴ *The Routledge Companion to Latino/a Literature*, ed. by S. Bost, F. R. Aparicio, London–New York 2013.

⁵ *The Routledge Companion to Anglophone Caribbean Literature*, ed. by M. A. Bucknor, A. Donnell, London–New York 2011.

addressed by literary scholars who publish their works in other international languages of the humanities, such as German⁶ and French⁷, as well as in other national languages, including of course Polish⁸.

There is also another type of literary multilingualism, which cannot be observed at the level of a specific text. In fact, it cannot be seen until one takes into account a given writer's output as a whole. In that sense, Adam Mickiewicz or Samuel Beckett can serve as examples of multilingual writers. The former wrote the majority of his poetry in Polish, most of his prose (journalistic texts, lectures) in French, and sometimes used other languages in writing (for instance, he wrote poems in Latin). The latter wrote his drama texts in English and French, and then translated them himself from French into English. Therefore, this type of multilingualism is not visible if one is dealing with one specific text, for example while reading *Pan Tadeusz* or *La Tribune des Peuples*, *En attendant Godot* or *Waiting for Godot*. In order to notice it, it is necessary to look at both texts, which co-create a given pair simultaneously, and discover the intertextual relationship between them⁹ – the relationship whose textual sign is the same external subject, that is the author.¹⁰ It seems that this variety of literary bi- or multilingualism is of no particular interest to contemporary literary science, yet this article is devoted to it.¹¹ By juxtaposing two seemingly

⁶ A. Horn, *Ästhetische Funktionen der Sprachmischung in der Literatur*, "Arcadia – Internationale Zeitschrift für Literaturwissenschaft / International Journal for Literary Studies" 1981, vol. 16, no. 1–3, pp. 225–241.

⁷ G. Deleuze, F. Guattari, *Kafka: Ku literaturze mniejszej*, tłum. A. Z. Jaksender, K. M. Jaksender, Kraków 2016, pp. 83–123.

⁸ R. Makarska, „Kochanka Norwida” i „Krooa, krooa”. *Hybrydyczna twórczość pisarzy wielojęzycznych (Eugeniusz Tkaczyszyn-Dycki i Radek Fridrich)*, [in:] *Region a tożsamości transgraniczne: Literatura, miejsca, translokacje*, red. D. Zawadzka, M. Mikołajczak, K. Sawicka-Mierzyńska, Kraków 2016, pp. 504–516.

⁹ The classic typology of Genette does not include this relationship. See: G. Genette, *Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree*, transl. by Ch. Newman, C. Doubinsky, Lincoln–London 1997, pp. 1–7.

¹⁰ Regardless of whether his/her name was revealed in the text or not.

¹¹ There are, however, some Polish studies on this matter. See: E. Balcerzan, *Styl i poetyka twórczości dwujęzycznej Brunona Jasińskiego: Z zagadnień teorii przekładu*, Wrocław 1968; K. Łuczynski, *Dwujęzyczna twórczość Stanisława Przybyszewskiego 1892–1900*, Kielce 1982;

incomparable cases, very distant in time and space, as well as diametrically opposed in terms of culture, I am going to not only broaden the scope of contemporary literary reflection on multilingualism but also formulate a conclusion about national language which might seem surprising, at least from the perspective of those representations of multilingualism which prevail in literary theory.

2.

Undoubtedly, from the point of view of contemporary post-colonial research, the most interesting example of a writer who has abandoned one language for another is the Kenyan novelist and renowned intellectual¹² who used to be known as James Ngugi, but then **has returned** to his **real** name – Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o. He was born in 1938 in Limuru in central Kenya (Kiambu County), studied English Studies in Uganda and in Great Britain, and then started teaching literature, firstly at African universities, then in the West, mostly in the USA, where he lives to this day.¹³

Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o writes mostly novels and dramatic plays, but he also authored essays devoted to literary and social themes. At the beginning of his career as a novelist, he used English, but then he switched to his native language, Gikũyũ.¹⁴ The book that could probably be regarded as his most famous one is *A Grain of Wheat*, published in English and then translated into many world languages, including

E. Kraskowska, *Twórczość Stefana Themersona: Dwujęzyczność a literatura*, Wrocław 1989; M. Ruta, *Pomiędzy dwoma światami: O Kalmanie Sagalu*, Kraków 2003; B. Tarnowska, *Między światami: Dwujęzyczna twórczość poetów grupy „Kontynenty”*, Olsztyn 2004; V. Narušienė, *Józef Albin Herbaczewski: Pisarz polsko-litewski*, Kraków 2007; P. Bukowiec, *Dwujęzyczne początki nowoczesnej literatury litewskiej: Rzecz z pogranicza polonistyki*, Kraków 2008; B. Kałęba, *Rozdroże: Literatura polska w kręgu litewskiego odrodzenia narodowego*, Kraków 2016.

¹² O. Lovesey, *The Postcolonial Intellectual: Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o in Context*, London–New York 2016, pp. 173–193.

¹³ S. Gikandi, *Ngugi wa Thiong’o*, Cambridge 2000, pp. xi–xii.

¹⁴ I adopted the name that is the most widespread in English literature. In studies written in other languages, “Kikuyu” is also popular.

Polish,¹⁵ but several other of his works have also enjoyed great international popularity.¹⁶ When it comes to his debut novel, *Weep Not, Child*, its Lithuanian translation was published in Soviet Vilnius.¹⁷

In the same year *Petals of blood* were published. It was his fifth and last novel written in English.¹⁸ His subsequent novels that came out in English are translations or self-translations of works that had originally been published in Gĩkũyũ. *Devil on the Cross* is, in fact, a self-translation of the book entitled *Caitaani mũtharaba-inĩ*, which was published two years before;¹⁹ *Matigari*²⁰ is a translation of the novel entitled *Matigari ma Njirũũngũ*,²¹ whereas *Wizard of the Crow*²² is a translation of *Mũrogi wa Kagogo*.²³

Therefore, we can see that at the turn of the 1980s, the Kenyan writer has undergone a profound transformation, which manifested itself in abandoning novel (and script) writing in English and continuing it in his native Gĩkũyũ. Taking into account the unique and central status of the novel as the most important genre in contemporary literature, one could venture a statement that abandoning English for Gĩkũyũ concerns the very foundation of the Kenyan writer's creative output.

A readable sign of the discussed transformation is also the evolution in the spelling of the writer's name, which appears on the covers and title pages of his books, not only novels. It was after 1977 that the name "James", which evidently started to be regarded not as a name but rather a stigma of colonial oppression that had been imposed on the writer at his baptism, has stopped appearing in his books, whereas the name

¹⁵ J. Ngugi, *A Grain of Wheat*, London 1967; J. Ngugi, *Ziarno pszeniczne*, tłum. M. Skibniewska, Warszawa 1972.

¹⁶ E.g.: N. wa Thiong'o, *Devil on the Cross*, transl. by the author, London 1982.

¹⁷ J. Ngugi, *Weep Not, Child*, London 1964; Dž. Ngugis, *Neverk, vaike*, vertimas R. Gentvainytė, Vilnius 1977.

¹⁸ N. wa Thiong'o, *Petals of Blood*, London 1977.

¹⁹ N. wa Thiong'o, *Caitaani mũtharaba-inĩ*, Nairobi 1980.

²⁰ N. wa Thiong'o, *Matigari*, transl. by W. wa Goro, Oxford 1989.

²¹ N. wa Thiong'o, *Matigari ma Njirũũngũ*, Nairobi 1986.

²² N. wa Thiong'o, *Wizard of the Crow*, transl. by the author, London 2006.

²³ N. wa Thiong'o, *Mũrogi wa Kagogo*, Nairobi 2004.

“Ngugi” began to be spelled as “Ngūgī”.²⁴ Wa Thiong’o himself is keen to comment (also in English) on the fact that he abandoned English, that is the language of his first novels. In his essay “On Writing in Gikūyū”, which is the key to the discussed problem, he refers to the motivation behind his decision and the circumstances surrounding it. When it comes to his motivation, he writes as follows:

An African writer should write in a language that will allow him to communicate effectively with peasants and workers in Africa – in other words, he should write in an African language.²⁵

Therefore, choosing the language turns out to be choosing the reader (the type of discourse used in this justification also points to a clear political declaration). Instead of writing in the language of the colonisers, who had been defeated over a decade before²⁶ – which is tantamount to repeating, or perhaps even strengthening, their gestures that indicated the symbolic and real expropriation of native African cultures – an African writer should communicate in a native language of “peasants and workers”. This would contribute not only to increasing the level of literacy and standardisation of the literary language,²⁷ which is rather

²⁴ Gikūyū alphabet has twenty letters. Eighteen of those are standard Latin signs, whereas two remaining ones are specific vowels, modified by the addition of diacritics (see: R. Englebretson, *A Basic Sketch Grammar of Gikūyū*, “Rice Working Papers in Linguistics” 2015, vol. VI, special issue, p. xi, <http://www.ruf.rice.edu/~reng/kik/sketch.pdf> (access: 20.08.2019)). It so happens that both are present in the writer’s name. I did not manage to capture the discussed changes in spelling with the maximum level of precision, even though I analysed records from online catalogues of international libraries and two European special libraries. It is because their authors do not pay enough attention to the semantic potential of spelling changes in the names of postcolonial writers! The analysis of relevant records at worldcat.org, as well as in online catalogues of the British Library, the Library of Congress, BULAC, and SOAS Library only makes it possible to determine a general tendency; a detailed description of this phenomenon would require one to examine *de visu* all the editions and their versions.

²⁵ N. wa Thiong’o, *On Writing in Gikūyū*, “Research in African Literatures” 1985, vol. 16, no. 2, p. 151.

²⁶ Kenya proclaimed independence on 12.12.1963.

²⁷ This process is connected with the activity of Christian (Protestant – i.e., British, and Catholic – i.e., Italian) missions; the first Bible translation into Gikūyū was published in 1926 – New Testament – and in 1951 – Old Testament. See: A. Biersteker, *Gikuyū Literature*:

obvious, but also to strengthening or enriching social ties that give rise to the collective identity of the biggest Kenyan ethnic group.

Therefore, for a contemporary researcher of literary multilingualism, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o is an absolutely unique writer. There is no other classic author of postcolonial literature in the world who would give so much meaning and publicity to her or his gesture of rejecting the language of the colonial hegemon. From this perspective, his continuing creative activity in English should not be regarded as a paradox, the lack of consequence, or duplicity; on the contrary, it is worth regarding it as a strategic strengthening of his ostentatious comeback to the language of his childhood, which has taken place after the publishing of *Petals of Blood*. Given the choice between a hegemonic language, in which hundreds of millions of people communicate, and a vernacular language, understood by about 7 million Gĩkũyũ people, he chose the latter, but at the same time, he made sure that the echoes of this unique decision are heard in the former language, which had in the meantime become global.

Although at a certain point in his literary career wa Thiong'o started writing his novels in Gĩkũyũ, he continues writing in English, or rather translates his own works, reminisces about the past, and comments on the reality, which includes, in particular, remarks on his writing in Gĩkũyũ. Thanks to the fact that he has continued writing in English, his output and his decision to write in Gĩkũyũ are available also to me, a slavacist who deals with nineteenth-century Lithuanian literature. From an external perspective, or a Central European perspective to be more precise, reading an English book translated from Gĩkũyũ is, after all, a completely different experience than reading a book written in English by a writer born in Kenya (whereas reading a book in Gĩkũyũ is an experience that is simply unavailable). The former experience is mediated by the contemporary **common speech** and, much more than the latter, consists of an exposure to a fascinatingly foreign literary **world**, which on the *pars pro toto* principle becomes a sign of an irreducible richness and multiplicity of human cultures. The latter experience, on

the other hand, means coming into contact with the so-called world literature.²⁸

Obviously, the linguistic strategy adopted by wa Thiong'o (writing novels in his native language, which used to have only oral literature) is not the only strategy that can nowadays be used to defend literary localness against hegemonic imperial pressure. For example, Chinua Achebe protects the interest of his **world** in the global literary market in a completely different way. I would call his strategy "discursive". It is because English-language novels of this Nigerian writer give readers a unique, multi-faceted insight into African thinking constructs. In fact, he recreates the mentality and worldview characteristic of the Igbo people (and evident also in their speech), simulating their existence in the English language.²⁹ The linguistic strategy used by wa Thiong'o is much more interesting to me not because it seems to be more effective (in fact, it is not more effective at all), but because of its surprising similarity to literary processes which took place in a completely different place and time, that is in Samogitia and Vilnius Region in the nineteenth century.

3.

For a literary scholar dealing with bilingual Lithuanian and Polish writers of that time, the analogy between Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o and poets such as Antoni Baranowski (or Antanas Baranauskas), mentioned in the title of this article, is just striking. Baranauskas, who was born in 1835 in Anykščiai near Utena (in today's north-eastern Lithuania) and died in 1902 in Sejny (in today's north-eastern Poland), spent almost all his life in the Russian Empire (mostly in Lithuania, but also in Saint Petersburg). Similarly to Ngũgĩ, he studied in Europe, at universities in Munich,

²⁸ World literature is a utopian idea that aims to order the literature of the whole world through systematic reflection, treating it as a "system of systems". Unfortunately, in practice it is a Western-centric and violence-oriented project. It is the most striking in Moretti's reflections. See: F. Moretti, *Conjectures on World Literature*, [in:] idem, *Distant Reading*, London–New York 2013, pp. 43–62.

²⁹ Ch. Achebe, *Arrow of God*, London 1964.

Innsbruck, Leuven, and Rome, but unlike the Kenyan novelist, he did not live to see the fall of the Empire. In stark contrast to wa Thiong'o, who received Protestant baptism and then leaned towards communism, Baranauskas was a Catholic priest and in 1897 became the bishop of the provincial town of Sejny.³⁰

Baranauskas did not write and publish only literary texts. In his bibliography there are also research papers on linguistics,³¹ philosophy, and mathematics,³² church documents, sermons, pastoral letters, and a Bible translation.³³ Moreover, in some papers discovered posthumously there was a very interesting journal written in Polish, which was not published until many years after his death.³⁴ The literary legacy of Baranauskas consists of lyrical poetry, epic poems, and religious songs.³⁵ With hindsight, the short poem entitled "Anykščių šilelis", ("The Forest of Anykščiai") is rightly considered to be the most outstanding artistic achievement of the poet. It was first published in 1860 in Vilnius,³⁶

³⁰ R. Mikšytė, *Antanas Baranauskas*, [in:] *Lietuvių literatūros istorija: XIX amžius*, red. J. Girdzijauskas, Vilnius 2001, pp. 707–726; E. Aleksandravičius, *Giesmininko kelias: Monografija*, Vilnius 2003.

³¹ [A. Baranauskas], *Kalbmokslis lietuviškos kalbos*, Tilžėje 1896; A. Baranovskii, *Zametki o litovskom tazyke i slovare*, Sanktpeterburg 1898.

³² A. Baranowski, *O wzorach służących do obliczenia liczby liczb pierwszych nie przekraczających danej granicy*, "Rozprawy Wydziału Matematyczno-Przyrodniczego Akademii Umiejętności w Krakowie" 1895, vol. 28, pp. 192–210; A. Baranowski, *O progresji transcendentalnej oraz o skali i siłach umysłu ludzkiego. Studium matematyczno-filozoficzne*, Warszawa 1897.

³³ A. Baranowski, *Directorium Divini Officii ad usum universi cleri saecularis Dioecesis Sejnensis seu Augustoviensis*, Varsaviae 1897; A. Baranowski, [sermon letter in Polish], [Suwałki] 1897; A. Baranauskas, *Piemeniškas laiszkas Seinų vyskupo, apėmus rundyjimą diecezijos*, "Tėvynės Sargas" 1899, no. 6, pp. 3–10; A. Baranauskas, *Homiletika, arba Mokslas šventosios iškabos*, red. M. Daškus, [in:] A. Baranauskas, *Raštai*, vol. 4, Vilnius 2005; A. Baranauskas, *Sventojo Rašto vertimas*, red. M. Vaicekauskas et al., [in:] A. Baranauskas, *Raštai*, vol. 5.1–2, Vilnius 2008–2014.

³⁴ A. Baranauskas, *Dienoraštis. Laiškai įvairiems adresatams*, vertimas R. Mikšytė, [in:] A. Baranauskas, *Raštai*, vol. 7.1, Vilnius 2003; A. Baranauskas, *Dienoraštis*, vertimas R. Mikšytė, Vilnius 2008.

³⁵ A. Baranauskas, *Poesija*, red. R. Mikšytė, M. Daškus, B. Stundžia, [in:] A. Baranauskas, *Raštai*, vol. 1, Vilnius 1995.

³⁶ Jurrksztas Smalausis [A. Baranauskas], *Aniškščiu šitelis* [verses 1–176], [in:] *Kalendorius arba metkajtilus ukiszkasis nuog užgimima Wieszpatis 1860 metu pribuviniui, turenčium 366 dienas, paraszitas par L. Iwiński*, Wilniuje 1860, p. 61; Jurrksztas Smalausis, *Aniškščiu šitelis* [verses 177–322], [in:] *Kalendorius ukiszkasis nuog užgimima Wieszpatis 1861 metu paprastunju, turenčium 365 dienas, paraszitas par L. Iwiński*, Wilniuje 1860, pp. 59–60.

whereas in the twentieth century it was translated into several languages, including English³⁷ and Polish³⁸.

Therefore, in the title of this article, I juxtaposed a provincial poet from Eastern Europe, whose literary output is inaccessible from the global point of view and important only for Lithuanians, whereas scarce translations into procedural languages do not weaken the extreme nature of this regional limitation and subjection, with an outstanding African novelist, who has gained worldwide recognition during his life.

There is nothing to suggest that Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o has ever come across any work written by Baranauskas, or even his name. Therefore, there is no biographical nor bibliographical fact that would methodologically justify my exotic comparative project. In the book collection of the Kenyan writer, I did not find a copy of the Lithuanian writer's poems, and I did not hear even a faint echo of Baranauskas's poetry in any novel by wa Thiong'o. However, there is something that connects these two writers and justifies comparing them to each other. At some point of their careers, independently of each other, they both decided to abandon the language of their first texts (Polish and English, respectively) and to start writing in their native and vernacular language (Lithuanian and Gikũyũ, respectively).

Antanas Baranauskas had his debut in 1857, when one of his poems came out in the Polish magazine *Teka Wileńska*. The piece was entitled "Wiersz młodego poety Baranowskiego do Karoliny P[roniewskiej]" ("Young Poet Baranowski's Poem to Karolina P[roniewska]") by the editorial team. It is the only Polish text on the list of twenty poetry publications that came out during his life.³⁹ All other poems were

³⁷ A. Baranauskas, *The forest of Anykščiai = Anykščių šilelis*, transl. by N. Rastenis, ed. by J. Tininis, Baltimore 1956; A. Baranauskas, *The forest of Anykščiai = Anykščių šilelis*, transl. by P. Tempest, ed. by L. Pažūsis, Vilnius 1981.

³⁸ A. Baranowski, *Borek oniksztyński*, tłum. S. Jabłońska, Wilno 1909; A. Baranowski, *Borek Oniksztyński = Anykščių šilelis*, tłum. J. J. Rojek, J. Wajna, red. M. Jackiewicz, Białystok–Olsztyn 1987.

³⁹ [A.] Baranowski, *Wiersz młodego poety Baranowskiego do Karoliny P[roniewskiej]*, "Teka Wileńska" 1857, no. 2, p. 62; Jurksztas Smalaušis, *Anikszcziu šilelis*, op. cit.; Jurksztas Smalaušis [A. Baranauskas], *Dievo rikšzte ir malone*, [in:] *Kalendorius ukiszkas nuog užgimima Wieszpates 1861 metu...*, p. 51; Jurksztas Smalaušis [A. Baranauskas], *Suwejga girtoklu*, [in:] *Kalendorius ukiszkas nuog užgimima Wieszpates 1861 metu...*, pp. 51–58; [A. Baranauskas],

written in Lithuanian, but numerous Polish juvenilia were discovered in his manuscripts. However, they did not come to light until many years after the author's death.⁴⁰ Anyway, we could assume that his turn towards the Lithuanian language as a poetic medium took place shortly before 1860, almost hundred and thirty years before a similar switch in the literary activity of Ngūgĩ wa Thiong'o. According to the findings of Lithuanian literary scholars, Karolina Proniewska (1828–1859),⁴¹ a fond friend of the poet who was referred to in the title of his above-mentioned Polish poem, played a vital role in this transformation. In fact, she convinced the young priest to write poems in Lithuanian. Simply put, it could be said that she was the one who (posthumously) turned Baranowski into Baranauskas (it is a change analogous to the transformation from James Ngugi to Ngūgĩ wa Thiong'o).

Artoju giesmes szwentos, [in:] Kantyczkas, arba Kninga giesmiu, par Moteju Wołonczewski Żemajcziu Wiskupa parwejzieta ir isznauje iszpausta, Wilniuj 1862, pp. 695–712; [A.] Baranauskis, Giesme padekawones už blajwisti. Sweika Marija, danguj iszauksztinta, [in:] Kalendorius ukiszzkasis nuog užgimima Wieszpatis 1863 metu paprastunju, turenčziun 365 dienas, parašzitas par Ł. Iwĩnski, Wilniuje 1862, pp. 30–31; A. Baranowski, Anykszcziu szilelis, [in:] Litauische Studien. Auswahl aus den ältesten denkmälern, dialectische beispiele, lexikalische und sprachwissenschaftliche beiträge, Prag 1875, pp. 40–48; A. Baranowski, Anykszcziū szilėlyš, [in:] Ostlitausische Texte mit einleitungen und anmerkungen, herausgegeben von A. Baranowski, H. Weber, Weimar 1882, pp. 2–23; A. B[aranauskas], Kogi spaudze man szirdiale, "Lietuwiszka ceitunga" 1882, no. 25, p. 3; A. B[aranauskas], Lietuwos senowės paminejimas, "Auszra. Laikrasztis iszleidžiamas Lietuvos milėtoju" 1883, no. 1, pp. 8–10; [A. Baranauskas], Su Diev' Lietwa, "Szwiesa. Laikrasztis Žemacziu ir Lietuvos mylėtoju iszleidžiamas" 1887, no. 1, pp. 42–43; [A. Baranauskas], Paskutinis pamokslas wienu žemajcziu kuniga priesz smerti, [Plymouth, Pa.] 1889; A. Baranauskas, Anykszcziū szilėlis, "Vienybė Lietuvinikų. Literaturos, mokslo ir polytikos nedėlinis laikrasztis" 1892, vol. 7, pp. 168, 181, 192, 229, 240; [A. Baranauskas], Tezymiszkos giesmes, Wilniuje 1892; A. B[aranauskas], Sudiev' Lietwa, [in:] Lietuvos kanklės, Tilžėje 1892, pp. 60–61; A. B[aranauskas], Szirdies jausmai, "Žemaczių ir Lietuvos apžvalga" 1892, no. 20, p. 157; A. Baran[auskas], Anykszcziū szilelis, [in:] Lietuwiszkos dainos isz visur surinktos, Plymouth, Pa. 1893, pp. 144–154; [A. Baranauskas], Pasikalbėjimas giesmininko su Lietwa, "Žemaczių ir Lietuvos apžvalga" 1895, no. 12, pp. 90–91; [A. Baranauskas], Graudųš werkmai ir kitos naujosios giesmės žinotinos žmonėms katalikams, ypacziai-gi iszdavėjams maldakningiu, [Tilžė] 1899.

⁴⁰ A. Baranauskas, *Raštai*, red. K. Korsakas, vol. 1, Vilnius 1970, pp. 141–402.

⁴¹ She used to write and publish poems in Polish (K. Proniewska, *Festyna Wielkiej Kalwaryi na Żmudzi*, Wilno 1856; K. Proniewska, *Piosneczki Bogu na chwale, na pamiątkę przyjacielom*, Wilno 1858). When it comes to the Lithuanian language, she published only one, yet very valuable, translation ([K. Praniauskaitė], *Dajnas. Zalcio motė, [in:] Kalendorius ukiszzkasis nuog užgimima Wieszpatis 1859 metu paprastunju, turenčziun 365 dienas, parašzitas par Ł. Iwĩnski*, Wilniuje 1859, pp. 50–56).

However, Antoni Baranowski, who turned into Antanas Baranauskas, was not an exception in the Lithuanian literature of that time. On the contrary, he should be regarded as a representative of a tendency characteristic of the whole nineteenth-century Lithuanian literature. Polish and Lithuanian (or rather Samogitian⁴²) bilingualism is a typical feature in the biographies of Lithuanian poets of that time, especially those older than Baranowski. The moment of moving from one language to another cannot always be pinpointed as precisely as in the case of those who wrote *Anykščių šilelis* or *Caitani mūtharaba-inī*. First of all, this difficulty may be caused by our lack of knowledge regarding the chronology of works written for example by Silvestras Teofilis Valiūnas (1789–1831)⁴³ or Dionizas Poška (1764–1830)⁴⁴; secondly, it may be caused by a slow and gradual rejection of the Polish language, which was the case with extensive literary legacy of Antanas Klementas (1753–1823), whose works are still available mostly in manuscript form.⁴⁵ There were also some poets, both older and younger than Baranowski, who used Polish occasionally. This was the case with the greatest Lithuanian lyrical poets from the nineteenth century: Antanas Strazdas or Antoni Drozdowski (1760–1833; we know one Polish poem written by him, entitled “Kant na pochwałę miasta Rygi” (“A Song to Praise the City of Riga”), published for the first time long after its author’s death, probably in 1908⁴⁶) and Maironis, who also wrote one poem in Polish⁴⁷.

⁴² Before 1830, bilingual writers considered themselves to be Samogitians. They made an unsuccessful attempt to create a standardised variety of Lithuanian, based on its Samogitian dialect. In the end, a general literary variety of Lithuanian was formed at the end of the nineteenth century, based on the Aukštaitijan dialect (G. Subačius, *Žemaičių bendrinės kalbos idėjos: XIX amžiaus pradžia*, Vilnius 1998).

⁴³ S. T. Valiūnas, [poems], [in:] *Žemaičių šlovė = Starwa Żmudzynów. Antologia dwujęzycznej poezji litewsko-polskiej z lat 1794–1830*, red. P. Bukowiec, Kraków 2012, pp. 88–160, notes pp. 221–249.

⁴⁴ D. Poška, [poems], [in:] *Žemaičių šlovė...*, op. cit., notes 46–68, pp. 178–203.

⁴⁵ A. Klementt, *Dzielko moje własnoręcznie wierszem, a w malej częście prozą napisane*, Lietuvių literatūros ir tautosakos instituto biblioteka, sign. F1 2156, F1 2157, F1 2158.

⁴⁶ A. Strazdas, *Kant na pochwałę miasta Rygi*, [in:] *Žemaičių šlovė...*, op. cit., pp. 84–85, notes p. 221.

⁴⁷ Maironis, *Znad Biruty*, [in:] Maironis, *Raštai*, vol. 2: *Poemos*, Vilnius 1988, pp. 272–289, notes pp. 498–500. First print as: Halina z Połagi [Maironis], *Znad Połagi: poemat*, Brooklyn, N.Y. 1904.

What seems to be extremely rare is a situation when a writer uses two languages concurrently and at the same time writes texts in Lithuanian and in Polish.⁴⁸ I make cautious presumptions (“seems to be”) because our knowledge of nineteenth-century Lithuanian literature, especially from the first half of the century, is very fragmented. This was determined by the fact that in the culture of that time there were no efficient mechanisms that could be used to create, collect, disseminate, and store texts written in Lithuanian. The language of literature and high culture in Lithuania was Polish, the language of science was Latin, and the language of the authorities was Russian. With time, this situation has changed in favour of the Lithuanian language and literature. Paradoxically, Lithuanian literature had its heyday after the fall of the January Uprising, when it was prohibited in Russia to print Lithuanian texts in the Latin alphabet.⁴⁹

When the history of nineteenth-century Lithuanian literature is observed from an appropriate distance, that is when it is analysed through the so-called “distant reading”, we can see a very clear developmental tendency. The point of departure is the literary output of the above-mentioned Samogitian nobleman, Antoni Klementt (Antanas Klementas). He wrote mostly Polish poems, his first Lithuanian text appeared at the end of the eighteenth century. With time, there were more and more of such texts, but they remain on the margins of his writing. The finishing point is the activity of Lithuanian nationalistic writers who were members of the intelligentsia and wrote in the second half and at the end of the long nineteenth century. Thanks to them, independent Lithuania entered the twentieth century as a nation state (even though it was still quite ethnically diverse) with monolingual national literature, which was quite diverse from the point of view of genology and for which the most important and fundamental value was the mother tongue.

⁴⁸ An example of such an author could be Józef Milewski – Juozapas Miliauskas-Miglovara. See: B. Kalęba, „*Chociaż w obczyźnie czasem nieźle żyłem, lecz o mieścinie swojej wciąż marzyłem*”: *Polskojęzyczna twórczość Juozapasa Miliauskasa-Miglovary w kontekście polskiego późnego romantyzmu i litewskiego odrodzenia*, “*Perspectives of Baltic Philology*” 2011, no. 2, pp. 57–70.

⁴⁹ See: M. Niemojewski, *Epoka zakazu druku jako geneza litewskiej nowoczesności – zarys perspektywy*, “*Studia Interkulturowe Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej*” 2018, vol. 11, pp. 255–280.

4.

The most important concordance between Antanas Baranauskas (treated as a representative of an entire multigenerational group of Lithuanian writers from the nineteenth century) and Ngūgĩ wa Thiong’o, based on an analogy of these two writers’ decision to change the language in which they used to write, lies in the comparable position of Lithuanian and Gĩkũyũ. Both writers decided to write in a language which at the time did not have a continuous written tradition (Lithuanian) or did not have such a tradition at all (Gĩkũyũ). In those moments of their history which are of interest to me, both tongues were under long-term and institutionalised pressure of hegemonic languages (Polish and Russian or English and Swahili, respectively). In both cases, their texts played important social roles: they were conducive to forming a general variety of a given language and stabilising the rules of linguistic correctness. They also strengthened identity ties within nations which regarded their language, subjected to colonial oppression, as one of the most important native values. In both cases, their writing could be described as “centripetal”, centralising, conducive to building the norm (linguistic, social, etc.) with a defined level of generality. In the case of writers of the Baranauskas type, the “event horizon” turned out to be the nation and its country, in the case of wa Thiong’o, it was literature in one of the vernacular languages present in his multilingual and multinational country, that is the Republic of Kenya in the post-colonial period of its history. It is worth adding that the potential of hybrid texts is usually quite the opposite: “centrifugal”, decentralising, destabilising, and characteristic of a borderland. It seems that this is precisely why there were scarcely any such texts in nineteenth-century Lithuanian literature and why Ngūgĩ wa Thiong’o is such a unique figure for contemporary world literature.

Another fascinating similarity are the circumstances of the linguistic switch. Ngūgĩ wa Thiong’o emphasised that in his case, it was not a consciously made decision, but rather the sum of life circumstances related to his involvement in cultural activity.⁵⁰ Similar conclusions

⁵⁰ “It was not really a conscious decision on my part”; N. wa Thiong’o, *On Writing in Gĩkũyũ...*, op. cit., p. 152.

come from my research on bilingual Lithuanian literature in the nineteenth century, especially in its first half.⁵¹ Nineteenth-century poets older than Baranauskas did not make the effort to write poems in Lithuanian because they felt that they were Lithuanians, so their motives cannot be called nationalistic (even though this explanation emerges as seemingly the most obvious one). Some of them discovered their patriotism precisely because they started writing in Lithuanian (therefore, the alleged cause turns out to be the consequence); others became Lithuanians (in today's sense of the word) posthumously, because their Lithuanian literary output was interpreted as a demonstration of patriotism by their successors, who consciously constructed cultural roots of their nation.

Therefore, juxtaposing bilingual Lithuanian and Polish writers with Ngūgĩ wa Thiong'o, regardless of huge differences between them, makes it possible to more fully understand the deceptive potential of the misunderstanding which stems from the grammatical structure of the following simple sentence: "Writer X started writing in language Y". The grammatical privilege granted to X seems to suggest that this subject is not linguistically or culturally entangled and makes a conscious decision regarding his/her activity in the sphere of a (new) language. In fact, it is more often a decision made under the influence of multiple other social factors. Essentially, it is not the new language that the writer is after but rather new recipients, who have not previously been seen as potential members of the socially or politically privileged caste of target readers. The subversive potential of both described linguistic switches could probably be expressed more accurately by formulating a different sentence: "Language X started producing written literature". In fact, it is somewhat natural that the very first authors of a given tongue are those who have already had some creative experience in another language, a language whose literary tradition is long and continuous.

⁵¹ P. Bukowiec, *Dwujęzyczne początki...*, op. cit., pp. 243–260.

5.

Obviously, there are a number of inalienable differences between the two discussed linguistic switches: between the situation of wa Thiong'o, who rejected English, and the situation of Baranauskas, who turned to Lithuanian. Most of these differences result from more general historical, aesthetic, and political divergencies between the Kenyan writer active in the second half of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first century and the Lithuanian poet from the second half of the nineteenth century.

The attitude towards the language is what sets apart the two writers the most. For Antanas Baranauskas, as well as the group of the nineteenth-century Lithuanian poets that he represents, language is a value indigenous, absolutely fundamental, and inextricably linked to Lithuania and the Lithuanians' state of mind. In Baranauskas's short poem "Pasikalbėjimas giesminyko su Lietuva" ("Conversation of the Poet with Lithuania", original edition 1859), Lithuania says:

Mylimieji mano vaikeliai lietuviai
Nebeklauso mano balso ir žabangos lenda.
Meta mano kalbą, è svetimų tverias,
Meta mano nešenėlę, è vokiškai puošias.⁵²

Lithuania has one language – naturally Lithuanian – and its rejection, that is – communicating in other languages, turns out to threaten directly the collective and individual identity of the Lithuanians. But such a viewpoint obviously has nothing to do with historical facts: neither had Lithuania ever been a monolingual country in its history,⁵³ nor was the nineteenth century a time when people abandoned the Lithuanian language (on the contrary, the overwhelming majority of the inhabitants

⁵² "My beloved children, Lithuanians / They do not listen to my voice and fall into traps. / They abandon me and adopt other tongues, / They strip themselves my robes, putting on German clothes"; A. Baranauskas, *Pasikalbėjimas giesminyko su Lietuva*, [in:] A. Baranauskas, *Raštai*, red. K. Korsakas, vol. 1, Vilnius 1970, p. 40.

⁵³ See: J. Niedźwiedz, *Kultura literacka Wilna (1323–1655)*, Kraków 2012.

of Lithuania did not speak the Lithuanian language at the time,⁵⁴ and the nineteenth century proved to be a time of revival for it,⁵⁵ including also a revival of literature in Lithuanian). This fabricated history, however, can be well justified ideologically, as it is closely associated with the transformation of identity paradigms that took place in Central and Eastern Europe at the beginning of the nineteenth century⁵⁶ and with the romantic identification of a nation with a language.⁵⁷ This unique linguistic purism is characteristic of the entire group represented by Baranauskas.⁵⁸ The only hybrid passages occurring in this literature are diatribes against the pollution⁵⁹ or abandoning of the language, such as in the following fragments of a poem by Maironis, “Tautos pabėgėliams” (“To Those Who Abandoned the Nation”):

„*Oičizna*” jums kvepia, ne žemė-tėvynė,
Maitinanti storus pilvus,
Ne prosenių žemė, kurios užsigynę,
Begarbinat lenkų dievus.
.....
Kur jūsų tėvynė? Ne Vilnius? *Warszawa*?
Žinau ir suprantu dėl ko:
Tam balet, teatry, tam Corso zabawa!
O ko dar sulaukste ryto!⁶⁰

⁵⁴ For example, the most outstanding Lithuanian poet of that time, Adam Mickiewicz, wrote down two verses in Lithuanian. They were the words of a Lithuanian folk song which he had remembered. The said note, or rather the mistakes he made, prove that the poet did not speak Lithuanian. See: Z. Zinkevičius, *Lietuviškas Adomo Mickevičiaus autografas*, “Baltistica” 1983, vol. 19, no. 1, pp. 74–90.

⁵⁵ See: Z. Zinkevičius, *Lietuvių kalba XVIII–XIX a.*, Kaunas 1990; Z. Zinkevičius, *Bendrinės kalbos iškilimas*, Vilnius 1992.

⁵⁶ See: J. Bardach, *Wieloszczębłowa świadomość narodowa na ziemiach litewsko-ruskich Rzeczypospolitej w XVII–XX wieku*, [in:] *Krajowość – tradycje zgody narodów w dobie nacjonalizmu. Materiały z międzynarodowej konferencji naukowej w Instytucie Historii UAM w Poznaniu (11–12 maja 1998)*, red. J. Jurkiewicz, Poznań 1999, pp. 11–34.

⁵⁷ See: J. G. Herder, *Abhandlung über den Ursprung der Sprache*, Stuttgart 2017.

⁵⁸ See: G. Subačius, *Žemaičių bendrinės kalbos idėjos...*, op. cit.

⁵⁹ See e.g.: S. T. Valiūnas, *Pas Jo Mylistos Dionizo Poškos*, [in:] *Žemaičių šlovė...*, pp. 142–144, notes pp. 246–248, original edition 1859.

⁶⁰ “You are seduced by “*Oičizna*” that can feed your thick bellies, not by your motherland, the land of your great-grandfathers that you have abandoned to worship Polish gods [...]

The shift that poets such as Antanas Baranauskas made towards the Lithuanian language as a medium of literary creativity was therefore grounded in the romantic veneration of the local and the authentic. The community-forming potential of the language was indisputable for these writers – even if not all of them were aware that they were participating in at first spontaneous, then increasingly institutionalised process of forming a modern nation. Linguistic works, in particular usually failed attempts to compile dictionaries of the Lithuanian language, were – alongside historical and folklore studies – among the most frequent creative activities of the Lithuanian writers at that time and should in fact be considered a legitimate part of the literature of that period. Such a combination of poetry (songs), “the old”, vernacularism, and the ambivalence of the loss and rebirth is well exemplified in the following stanza of Maironis, referring to Adam Mickiewicz, which can be regarded as a kind of summary of the nineteenth-century Lithuanian attitude to poetry in the native language:

Tautos dainele, tu išlikai
 Viena, kad žuvo didžiavyriai;
 Kai slėgė sunkūs vargų laikai,
 Tu irgi daug, oi daug prityrei;
 Bet pas kaimietį ištvermingą
 Tu išlikai sveika, galinga,
 Kad žuvo didžiavyriai.⁶¹

Baranauskas and similar Lithuanian poets of the nineteenth century composed multilingual poetry (usually bilingual), the ideal of which, however, has always been monolingualism. It is considered a monologue poetry (even though it is often choral in nature), since it subjects a multitude of individual voices to one great national cause. Its linguistic

Where is your homeland? Not in Vilnius, but in *Warsaw*? I know and I can understand why: *Ballet, theaters and fun!* And a lot more to look forward to in the future!"; Maironis, *Tautos pabėgėliams*, [in:] Maironis, *Raštai*, vol. 1: *Lyrika*, Vilnius 1987, pp. 158–159, notes pp. 287–288.

⁶¹ “Oh, national song, you remained the only one when all the heroes were gone; you suffered a lot in times of slavery, but your peasant-like endurance kept you healthy and powerful when the heroes were gone”; Maironis, *Dainų šventei*, [in:] Maironis, *Raštai*, vol. 1: *Lyrika*, Vilnius 1987, p. 124, notes p. 278.

purism turns out to be part of the great and conscious desire of the nineteenth-century Lithuanian culture to codify and standardise the Lithuanian language in the manner of other European languages. What is most important, the purpose of this literature was to facilitate not so much communication between people but rather communication of people with the sphere of values. It was therefore *par excellance* religious poetry, with God replaced by three hypostases: language, nation, and history, towards which the reader was to remain faithful – but also passive. In a way, this poetry replaced the voice of the readers; it not only addressed them but above all spoke on their behalf, forming them effectively into a modern nation. In retrospect, the most interesting seem to be its self-reflexive themes: reflections on the language and national poetry woven into the poems of Lithuanian poets.

Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o represents a different stance on language. Rejection of the hegemonic language analogous to that of Baranauskas (Valiūnas, Poška, etc.) took place in a totally different ideological context. First and foremost, for wa Thiong'o literature serves communication purposes: he begins to write in Gĩkũyũ not on behalf of a more or less abstract "imagined community", but in order to communicate with a reader belonging to the peasant and worker class. Exchanging the idea of a nation for the idea of a class is not a mere change of the naming convention, although both "the nation" and "the class" are concepts highly permeated with ideology. The Marxist rhetoric of the Kenyan writer is an example of a different literary communication project in terms of quality: wa Thiong'o does not speak on behalf of his readers but rather talks to them. Language primarily serves him to communicate with the society. He mentions his linguistic switch in the following way:

Now, it did not happen that I just sat down in my room one day and said to myself: "I'm going to be very liberated: I'm going to start writing in Gĩkũyũ!" [...] I was, in fact, compelled by historical circumstances to resort to writing in Gĩkũyũ, when I became involved in cultural work at the Kamĩrĩĩthũ Community Educational and Cultural Centre near Limuru, thirty kilometres outside Nairobi. Here peasants and workers wanted to establish a self-help scheme to promote literacy, and it was decided that theater was to be central to the whole venture. The people at Kamĩrĩĩthũ would try to put on a play for the entire community. Ngũgĩ wa Mirĩĩ and I were asked to prepare the script.

It was then that we were confronted with a practical question: in what language should we write? If we were going to prepare a script for the people, what language should we use? The very fact that we had to ask ourselves such a question – the answer to which was so obvious – was a measure of how far we had come to be alienated from our people. In 1977 we could still ask ourselves “In what language should we write a play for performance in a Gīkūyū-speaking village?”⁶²

Baranauskas and other similar Lithuanian poets of the nineteenth century made use of the language of the mythical Lithuania (thanks to which the idea of the Lithuanians as a nation soon became a political and social reality), while wa Thiong’o (along with wa Mírĩĩ, a lesser known playwright) decided on the use of a language spoken by individuals personally known to them, who then played in the performance based on the script.

In this context, Gīkūyū functions not as a hypostasis of an abstract concept of homeland but as a communication tool. Attention to the linguistic correctness of the message is not, as it was in the nineteenth-century Lithuanian poetry, underlined with the metaphysics of the nation’s substance, but it stems from the need for the effectiveness of communication. What is important, also the intended recipients reflect this fact. They are no longer just passive and silent listeners, but they actively participate in the exchange of meanings:

The people in the village of course knew their language much better than we did; so they began to offer their comments on the script. They would say: “[...] An old man doesn’t speak like this; if you want him to have the dignity, he must use a different kind of speech [...].” The final script of the play was really a community product.⁶³

When both writers are arrested and imprisoned shortly after, wa Thiong’o sees one way for himself:

In prison I began to realize that the whole point of jailing a scholar or writer or theater artist was to make sure that he had no more contact with the people.

⁶² N. wa Thiong’o, *On Writing in Gīkūyū...*, op. cit., p. 152.

⁶³ Ibidem.

[...] So I thought that the best way of keeping alive in those circumstances was to resist that social disconnection by attempting to reestablish my links with the community. And the only connection I could think of now was language. I felt I had to write in that very language that was responsible for my imprisonment. [...] This is how I came to write *Caitani Mũtharaba-inĩ* [...] in Gikūyũ while I was in prison.⁶⁴

6.

The nineteenth-century linguistic switch brought not only monolingual but also monologue poetry to Lithuanian literature, where the poet – *giesminykas* – *vates* – spoke on behalf of and instead of his recipients, praising in his poems primarily three hypostases of mythical Lithuania: language, but also – this is a topic for another article – folk history, and culture. The recipient of this poetry was designed to be a silent listener with no voice. Acquiring one’s own voice and language, which Antanas Klementas – the oldest of the authors discussed here – wrote about in his poem “Donis priedero” (“The Gift of Duty”),⁶⁵ proved to be an effective nation-forming strategy: the modern Lithuania, made up back in the nineteenth century, exists in reality today.

The switch observed in the works of Ngūgĩ wa Thiong’o from around 1978 was essentially something completely different – the Kenyan writer did not have in his mind the forming of a nation but rather finding the most effective agreement with the working class. His dramatic plays and novels seem to be based on a dialogue not only in Bakhtin’s sense of polyphony but also in a supra-textual dimension – it is a voice addressed to the recipient and expecting an answer. This is one of the reasons why the nineteenth-century Lithuanian poets did not mind keeping their writing in a sock drawer, while wa Thiong’o draws great attention to “commercial viability of writing and publishing in African languages”.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ Ibidem, p. 153.

⁶⁵ A. Klementas, *Donis priedero*, [in:] *Žemaičių šlovė...*, op. cit., pp. 38–43, notes pp. 173–176. The poem, written in 1810, remained in manuscript form until 1955.

⁶⁶ N. wa Thiong’o, *On Writing in Gikūyũ...*, op. cit., p. 154–155.

Comparing writers as dissimilar as Antanas Baranauskas and Ngūgĩ wa Thiong'o could be regarded as a scientifically risky undertaking. However, I think that in the times when literary theory demonstrates global aspirations, such a **distant** (or even *quand môme*⁶⁷) comparison is justifiable. The presented Lithuanian and Kenyan parallel makes it possible for researchers of Central European nineteenth-century literatures, especially balticists and slavists (interested, e.g., in Belarusian, Slovak, Serbian, and Ukrainian literatures), to appreciate the usefulness of research questions which stem from postcolonial sensitivity. On the other hand, this parallel might serve as an opportunity for researchers of postcolonial cultures to expand their geographical atlas and step outside the limits set by the sphere of influence of the Western European imperialism. Literature has always been a tool of social oppression and a medium of group emancipation, also in the so-called Second World.

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⁶⁷ See: A. Hejmej, *Nowa komparatystyka i comparatisme quand môme*, "Rocznik Komparatystyczny – Comparative Yearbook" 2015, vol. 6, pp. 91–106.

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