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Editor of this Issue  
Patrick Chura

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The Board of Directors of LITUANUS regretfully announce the retirement of Dr. Violeta Kelertas and Dr. Gražina Slavėnas from their respective positions as Chief Editor and Associate Editor of the journal. Dr. Kelertas began her contribution to LITUANUS with her first article in 1977. She joined the Editorial Board in 1990 and became Chief Editor in 2000. Dr. Slavėnas began writing for the journal in 1979 and later became a member of the Editorial Board and Associate Editor. We are very grateful for their contributions to LITUANUS and their efforts to make LITUANUS interesting and relevant to a diverse audience. We wish them success in their future endeavors and count on their continued support.

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Mikalojus Konstantinas Čiurlionis,  
*Sonata No. 2, (Spring), Scherzo*. Tempera on pasteboard, 1907.

# Toward a Biography of Algirdas Julius Greimas (1917-1992)

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THOMAS F. BRODEN

Algirdas Julius Greimas was a member of the Lithuanian equivalent of the “Greatest Generation,” men and women called upon to exert decisive efforts during the Second World War.<sup>1</sup> The years were all the more challenging in Lithuania in that, along with Latvia, Estonia, Ukraine, Belarus, and parts of Poland and Western Russia, the country lay in the swath of East Central Europe that Timothy Snyder has dubbed the “bloodlands,” subjected to mass violence engineered by both Stalin and Hitler during the war years.<sup>2</sup> Whereas the spirit of the USA’s “Greatest Generation” was marked by the preceding hardships of the Great Depression, the social event that made the greatest impact on its Lithuanian counterparts was perhaps the Act of February 16. Greimas and his contemporaries formed part of the first generation to grow up in an independent Lithuania since the Middle Ages—and the last such generation until the end of the Twentieth Century.

For Lithuanians of his day, A. J. Greimas was an internationally celebrated scholar and an active participant in Lithuanian public life. The renown earned by his research in French linguistics and the prestigious academic position he held in

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<sup>1</sup> Brokaw, *The Greatest Generation*, 1998.

<sup>2</sup> Snyder, *Bloodlands*, 2010.

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THOMAS F. BRODEN, Ph.D., is an Associate Professor of French and Comparative Literature at Purdue University. The author of numerous scholarly articles on semiotics and French literature and culture, he edited Greimas’ previously unpublished Sorbonne dissertations in 2000 with the Presses Universitaires de France. In 1981-82 he studied with Greimas and his research group in Paris.

Paris put him in an elite category among intellectuals from his country. Greimas is one of only three individuals born in the last century to which a 2000 collective work on modern Lithuanian philosophy devotes an entire chapter.<sup>3</sup> His twelve monographs on semantics and semiotics investigate the foundations of meaning, especially in language and texts, and have come out in translation in many languages. To date, his landmark first book, *Sémantique structurale (Structural Semantics)* has been translated into Italian, German, Spanish, Portuguese, Finnish, English, Japanese, Chinese, Russian, and Lithuanian. He taught for twenty years at the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, the most illustrious and dynamic degree-granting institution of higher learning in France. Even Lithuanian Communist Party apparatchiks tacitly considered him and his scholarship a national treasure to be conserved and championed.<sup>4</sup>

Virtually unbeknownst to those of us who worked with him in French semiotics, Greimas also took an active role in Lithuanian public affairs. He held leadership positions in the anti-Nazi and anti-Soviet resistance, published extensively in the liberal émigré press throughout his life, participated in Santara-Šviesa, and produced important scholarship on Lithuanian heritage that played a prominent role in the revival of the country's culture during the latter part of the Soviet period. In the mold of Lithuanian liberalism, Greimas's fidelity to his native land did not countenance complacency, parochialism, or xenophobia, but demanded critical thinking, excellence, and goals valid for all of humankind. Upon his death, the Lithuanian embassy in France published an official announcement regretting the loss of a man "Faithful to his native country's language and actively supportive of its Renaissance,"<sup>5</sup> and the newly independent Lithuanian Republic commemorated the return of his ashes with an official state ceremony addressed by President Vytautas Landsbergis.

In France and other Romance countries, Greimas and his

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<sup>3</sup> Baranova, ed. *Lithuanian Philosophy*; the other two are Vytautas Kavolis and Arvydas Šliogeris.

<sup>4</sup> Tomas Venclova, letter to the author 24 August 2010.

<sup>5</sup> *Le Monde*, Thursday 5 March 1992, 18.

scholarship remain well known today. But younger generations of Lithuanians are not necessarily familiar with his work or his person. As one of his Lithuanian friends and contemporaries put it in 2011, “Everybody that was anybody in my generation knew Greimas personally or heard of his work. But there are not many of us left. The generation of our children or even grandchildren may not be informed.”<sup>6</sup>

The author was fortunate enough to study with Greimas and his research group for a year in Paris and to collaborate with them ever since. The present article represents a draft of the first chapter in an intellectual biography in preparation on Greimas. To the extent feasible, the book project endeavors to communicate faithfully both events and what it was like to live through them, both *history* and *experience*. History requires an “objective” account grounded in documents recognized as authoritative. Experience demands a “subjective” contact found in personal witness, such as one may encounter in direct exchanges, interviews, and letters.

This liminal text recounts the years that Greimas lived in Lithuania, before fleeing the second Soviet occupation in 1944 and pursuing his career in the Francophone world. This part of his life remains a work in progress at the moment, since a number of important points await further confirmation and development by historical sources. The main lines already stand out clearly, however. The author, a French professor, would like to recognize the members of the Lithuanian community whose research and whose generous collaboration provided much of the information on “Lithuanian Greimas” for the project,<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Aleksandra Kašuba e-mail to the author 3 September 2011.

<sup>7</sup> Prof. Karolis Rimtautas Kašponis has researched Greimas’s childhood and his parents, and Leonas Peleckis-Kaktavičius interviewed fellow Šiauliai residents who knew him in the early 1940s. For other biographical and bibliographical information used in this article and for invaluable translations, I especially thank Vytautas Virkau, Julija Korostenskaja and Raymond Viskanta, as well as Asta Balkutė, Irena Kriauciūnienė, Aldas Kriauciūnas, Aleksandra Kašuba, Kęstutis Nastopka, Enata Skrupskelis, Julija Šukys, Henrietta Vepštas, and Purdue colleagues Rebekah Klein-Pejšová, Michael G. Smith, and Whitney Walton.

and welcomes any additional comments or information. The project would like to contribute to the task of composing and passing on the story of a significant figure from the last century for the benefit of his compatriots, kindred human spirits, and historical memory.



**A**lgirdas Julius Greimas was born on 9 March 1917, the second child of Julius Greimas (1882-1942), a teacher and public school inspector, and of Konstancija Mickevičiūtė-Greimienė (1886-1956), a secretary. Both of his parents were ethnic Lithuanians and spoke Lithuanian. His father came from a village near Marijampolė in Suvalkija, not far from the current border with Poland.<sup>8</sup> Algirdas's mother and her family had lived for a number of years in Suvalkija as well, in Kalvarija, although they were originally from sizable towns in the area south of present-day Lithuania, in the region historically under Polish control.

Algirdas came into the world in the industrial city of Tula in Russia, where his parents had fled as refugees during World War I. After the armistice, the family returned to newly independent Lithuania, to the hamlet in Aukštaitija where Julius had been teaching before the war. In 1919, they moved to the nearby village of Kupiškis, where they would live for eight years, until Algirdas was ten years old. Algirdas and his sister Gražina got a younger brother Romualdas. In addition to his classroom duties, Julius Greimas formed a local *Aušrininkai* group to foster Lithuanian identity and autonomy and was elected secretary of the town council.<sup>9</sup> Algirdas always harbored fond memories of growing up in the bucolic, forested Aukštaitian region and working on a farm during the summer months: "Kupiškis means a lot to me... my beautiful walks, my contact with the people in our village—and my love of folklore."<sup>10</sup> Algirdas began

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<sup>8</sup> This and most of the following specifics about Greimas' parents and childhood are found in Kašponis, *Algirdas Julius Greimas ir jo semiotika*.

<sup>9</sup> Peleckis-Kaktavičius, "Prasmių paieškos," 10.

<sup>10</sup> Greimas, letter to Kupiškis elementary school classmate Povilas Zulonas, 1971, quoted in Kašponis, *Algirdo Greimo vaikystė*.



elementary school when he was seven, skipped a couple of grades, and entered secondary school (*vidurinė mokykla*) at the age of nine. He and his siblings were part of the first generation to be schooled in Lithuanian. Like other children of parents in the liberal professions, they followed a traditional humanistic curriculum taught by university-trained instructors; Algirdas recalls studying Latin, Greek, and German.

In those days, a family like the Greimasas, including the children, would have been bilingual, speaking both the cultivated language Polish, and Lithuanian, traditionally the language of peasants. Algirdas recalls that “my mother forbade her daughter to speak Lithuanian,” just as his mother had been forbidden to speak Lithuanian by her own mother:<sup>11</sup> educated women who wanted their daughters to enjoy good marriage prospects trained them to imitate the landed gentry in the area and not the rural commoners. On the other hand, Greimas had a photo, which was taken in 1905, that shows a young Konstancija Mickevičiūtė and her girlfriends dressed in the traditional national costume and standing in front of an inscription in Lithuanian that says they’re going to an evening dance at a neighbor’s.<sup>12</sup> Algirdas himself never acknowledged competence in Polish on his *curricula vitae*, and like many of his compatriots, considered Poland to be Lithuania’s rival and adversary.<sup>13</sup>

Algirdas felt particularly close to his father, was thankful to him for opportunities he made available, and saw himself as following in his footsteps in significant ways. He later reminisced about moments they shared: “My father practiced instruction by silence. We would take walks in the forest, just the two of us. It was a great lesson: two people together, without having

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<sup>11</sup> Greimas, 5 January and 15 January 1991 letters to Žibuntas Mikšys, who translated the passages into French and quoted them in a letter to the author 23 August 2010. Cf. Balkelis, *The Making of Modern Lithuania*, 6-7.

<sup>12</sup> Greimas letter to Žibuntas Mikšys 15 January 1991.

<sup>13</sup> Žibuntas Mikšys telephone conversation with the author 12 November 2010.

to say anything."<sup>14</sup> Extended family members recall that, as a young man, Algirdas physically resembled Julius and wore a moustache trimmed in similar fashion.<sup>15</sup>

In 1927, Julius was transferred to Šiauliai, an industrial center and Lithuania's fourth largest city. Four years later, the family moved to Marijampolė, to Julius's native area. The relocation allowed Algirdas to finish his secondary education in one of the finest high schools in the country, the German-style *gymnasium* Rygiškių Jonas, celebrated for educating leaders of the Lithuanian national rebirth, including Jonas Basanavičius, Kazys Grinius, Vincas Kudirka, and Jonas Jablonskis. Greimas took a wide array of mathematics courses and studied history, religion, philosophy, and literature from teachers whose principal references were Germanic. He met and became life-long friends with schoolmate Aleksys Churginas, who would go on to publish poetry and authoritative translations. He recalls making many intellectual discoveries thanks to a reading group that he and classmates formed in order to teach themselves foreign languages and gain access to world literature unavailable in translation: Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, and Ilya Ehrenburg; Oscar Wilde and Edgar Allan Poe; the French poets Charles Baudelaire and Paul Verlaine.<sup>16</sup> In charge of German, Algirdas picked selections from the philosophers Friedrich Nietzsche and Arthur Schopenhauer. He later summarized these years, "Looking back it seems now that I was a normal youth and high school student of my Lithuanian-speaking generation. Like everyone else, I wanted to overthrow Smetona and liberate Vilnius. I dreamed about and looked for the love which does not exist."<sup>17</sup> Later in life, Greimas identified himself specifically as a Suvalkian, a native of Suvalkai, where he graduated high school and where his father was from.

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<sup>14</sup> Greimas radio interview with Francesca Piolot broadcast on "France Culture" 14 February 1989.

<sup>15</sup> Oškinaitė-Būtėnienė, "Dialogo monologai," 59.

<sup>16</sup> Greimas, "Intelektualinės autobiografijos bandymas" I, 12.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 11.

Greimas joined the Boys Scouts and became a group leader, opting to work with sons of workers in the sugar factory and students in the trade school. He became friends with Vytautas Kašuba, a member of the troop who would gain international recognition as a sculptor. Decades later, Vytautas remembered Algirdas “as a leader with dictatorial discipline,” a characterization which Greimas accepted, allowing that at the time, “I was somewhat fascistically and socialistically inclined.”<sup>18</sup> In the 1930s, far-right and far-left movements throughout Europe called for dramatic action and radical social reform, with the extremes meeting and overlapping in curious ways.<sup>19</sup> Greimas later recalled the sociopolitical atmosphere of his high school and college days:

Today, it is impossible to grasp that intoxication, that craze which in the third decade of the Twentieth Century embraced all the youth of Europe. It was as if they were responding to an unholy need to take action, which haunted everyone and urged them to action by any means, to do something, no matter what, to break something at any price... A young person would become a Fascist or a Communist solely due to their environment or circumstances.<sup>20</sup>

In his eight years of middle school and high school, Algirdas achieved superior results: he took at least nineteen subjects, earning nine 4s and nine 5s, the highest, infrequently given grade in the Lithuanian system.<sup>21</sup> He apparently was not a gifted vocalist, for Music and Singing provided him his only 3! In

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<sup>18</sup> Aleksandra Kašuba letter to Greimas 25 October 1989 and Greimas letter to Kašuba 5 November 1989, in *Greimas and Kašuba, Algirdo Juliaus Greimo*, 90-91.

<sup>19</sup> Certain prominent activists even rapidly migrated from one pole to the other without traversing the middle, such as Jacques Doriot in France.

<sup>20</sup> Greimas, “Intelektualinės autobiografijos bandymas” I, 15.

<sup>21</sup> Certified 15 October 1936 French translation of Greimas’s 22 June 1934 certificate from Rygiškių Jonas High School, provided to the University of Grenoble; Archives du département de l’Isère, Grenoble, Fonds du rectorat de Grenoble, sous-série 20T non coté, Greimas file.

June 1934, he passed the comprehensive national high school exams and received the recommendation to continue his studies at university. His father recognized the achievement by presenting him with the works of Nietzsche in the original.<sup>22</sup>

In the fall of 1934, Algirdas enrolled at the Law School of Vytautas Magnus University in Kaunas, the capital of Lithuania between the two world wars, located only thirty miles from Marijampolė. Greimas describes Kaunas as a cosmopolitan city, where he first fraternized with a smarter, somewhat snobby crowd returned from foreign metropolitan centers, including some in England and America. He took classes from a number of professors who were distinguished scholars and prominent public figures, including university Rector Mykolas Römeris, the founder of Lithuanian constitutional law and justice of the Supreme Court; Vladas Jurgutis, former chairman of the Bank of Lithuania and Foreign Minister; and the eminent philosopher Vosylius Sezemanas.<sup>23</sup> However, the figure who made the greatest impression on him was Lev P. Karsavin, a historian of religious philosophy. Karsavin's lectures on medieval Christian philosophy instilled in Algirdas an enduring love for the Middle Ages and inspired him by their elegant mastery of Lithuanian: "I was fascinated by his beautiful, cultivated language. I hadn't known that it was possible to speak so finely in Lithuanian about wise matters."<sup>24</sup> Karsavin and the other faculty named had all studied in St. Petersburg as well as in Germany or France, and they educated Greimas in Slavic intellectual traditions.

Outside of class, lawyer-in-training Algirdas recounts a student life of nights spent drinking beer and reciting poetry with chums followed by hungover mornings devoted to reading figures such as Leon Trotsky, Oswald Spengler, and Johan Huizinga, who formed his first conceptions of history, the discipline which would provide the framework for the

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<sup>22</sup> Greimas radio interview with Francesca Piolot broadcasted on "France Culture" 17 February 1989.

<sup>23</sup> Kašponis, *Algirdas Julius Greimas*, 6.

<sup>24</sup> Greimas, "Karsavino aktualumas," 40.

first two decades of his research.<sup>25</sup> He joined Neo-Lithuania, a university student organization devoted to maintaining Lithuanian independence and protecting its interests. It and other student clubs developed leaders for the intellectual, economic, and political life of the young country.

Greimas never finished his law degree, however, and ended up studying in France, which prepared him for becoming a French citizen and pursuing his career in that country. While he allows that he was “interested in anything but law,”<sup>26</sup> he attributes the switch to global geo-politics: “How I then became French, the merit goes to Mr. Hitler. It’s Hitler who decided to blackmail Lithuania, not to accept its exports. Lithuania thus had to reform its economy and politics and turn to France... The government decided: now we’re going to create French *lycées*. But there weren’t any professors of French. So three hundred guys were sent to France with scholarships to learn French and become French professors. I was a law student. I told myself: why not go to France?”<sup>27</sup>

Greimas was sent to the University of Grenoble in the Alps, where he enrolled in the Humanities College. He took classes from Antonin Duraffour, a respected specialist in Romance dialects, who had studied in Leipzig, the intellectual capital of historical linguistics. Greimas credits this “remarkable master” with giving him a first-rate training in Romance philology, forming him in the rigorous methods of linguistic analysis, and teaching him a respect for the text.<sup>28</sup> Duraffour instructed his disciples to stay away from the aberrant novel “structural” linguistics led by the Prague phonologist Nikolai Trubetzkoy, whom the erudite and dignified professor baldly labeled an “asshole” during his lectures in the amphitheater.<sup>29</sup>

In Grenoble, Greimas hooked up with his buddy Alexis Churginas, also a first-year student at the university. He became

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<sup>25</sup> Greimas, “Intelektualinės autobiografijos bandymas” I, 12.

<sup>26</sup> Greimas, “Karsavino aktualumas,” 40.

<sup>27</sup> Greimas, “La France est gagnée par l’insignifiance,” 44. Translations from the French are by the author.

<sup>28</sup> Greimas, “Intelektualinės autobiografijos bandymas” I, 14.

<sup>29</sup> Greimas, “Entretien” in Chevalier and Encrevé, *Combats*, 122.

friends and roommates with an older compatriot and fellow new student, Jonas Kossu-Aleksandravičius (Jonas Aistis), who would go on to become a celebrated poet. After a rocky transition, Greimas adapted to his new environment. As he recalls, "The first year, I was always cursing France, for me it was a mess: 1936, the [Socialist] Popular Front, you can just imagine. Nothing worked, whereas even we Lithuanians had some sense of order. The second year, I fell in love with France."<sup>30</sup> Thanks to the new cultural context and to the Spanish Civil War, his political leanings shifted to far-left anarcho-syndicalism.<sup>31</sup>

Greimas passed exams and obtained certificates in psychology, phonetics, French philology, and French medieval studies, and was awarded the *licence ès lettres* in June 1939. The curriculum contributed a third stratum to his intellectual makeup, the Romance tradition, which would become his dominant frame of reference going forward. With Duraffour, he defined a doctoral dissertation topic in historical linguistics. The thesis would study place names in the Graisivaudan Valley near Grenoble, identifying creations and alterations effected by its successive inhabitants, from pre-Celtic tribes through the Celts, Germanic tribes, and Romans. The Graisivaudan may still await its study, however, for international political events again altered the course of Greimas's career.

In September 1939, Germany invaded Lithuania's southern neighbor Poland. Moving to establish a line of defense along the border of its zone of influence as defined in the final Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, the USSR issued ultimatums to the three Baltic States and Finland and exerted its control over the countries. As Greimas recalls, "the Russians arrived, but left the country so-called 'independent.'"<sup>32</sup> He was mobilized in the Lithuanian army, called back home before classes started in the fall of 1939 in Grenoble, and enrolled in Officer's Training at the Pirmojo Lietuvos Prezidento Antanas Smetona Military Academy in Kaunas. A fellow member of his platoon remem-

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<sup>30</sup> Greimas, "La France est gagnée," 44.

<sup>31</sup> Greimas, "Intelektualinės autobiografijos bandymas" I, 15.

<sup>32</sup> Greimas, "La France est gagnée," 44.

bered him afterwards as “a true apologist for peace, but also a good soldier.”<sup>33</sup> In 1940, after a little over a year’s training, Greimas completed the curriculum, but did not receive an officer’s commission, allegedly for political reasons, and was instead assigned to the reserves.<sup>34</sup>

After a year of the velvet glove, the Soviets dropped pretenses, issued new demands, and engineered the takeover of the Baltic nations. Greimas remembers, “then the Red Army arrived: ultimatum, occupation. They incorporated us into the Red Army; I didn’t know a word of Russian. I was given a piece of paper: I was a reserve officer in the glorious Red Army of workers and peasants. We were Bolsheviks.”<sup>35</sup> The USSR began a systematic process of Sovietizing every aspect of the Baltic countries, from politics and finance to business and education. Its political police also began secretly identifying military, political, civic, economic, and moral leaders, whose removal would enhance the stability and security of the new Soviet Republics and foster their development toward Bolshevik socialism.

In October 1940, Greimas began teaching French and Lithuanian Language and Literature and other humanities subjects at schools located in Šiauliai. Although he had lived there a dozen years earlier, he no longer had family or friends in town. He taught at the Trade Institute and got hired to give additional classes at the adult high school (*gymnasium*) and the girls high school, which the Soviets made coeducational at the start of classes in the fall of 1940.<sup>36</sup> He met and became friends with one of his students in the evening adult classes, Julius Juzeliūnas, later a well-known composer and organist. The thirteen-year-olds in the former girls school recall their first impression of Greimas: “young, very young and blond, hair evenly combed back, blue eyes, lips compressed, head tilted

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<sup>33</sup> Nainys, “A. A. Algirdas Julius Greimas.”

<sup>34</sup> Kašponis, *Algirdas Julius Greimas*, 7.

<sup>35</sup> Greimas, “La France est gagnée,” 44.

<sup>36</sup> This and most of the information about Greimas in Šiauliai come from two sources: Greimas, “Tada, kai bauriškas kraujas virto mėlynu” and Peleckis-Kaktavičius, “Prasmių paieškos.”

somewhat to one side, agreeable. He entered in full stride."<sup>37</sup> In the course of the year, the students developed a nurturing "special psychological connection" with their instructor such that they still remembered him in great detail six decades later. Greimas emphasized literature, of which he evinced a deep knowledge, and delivered interesting lessons. He "spoke very beautiful Lithuanian, with a light Suvalkian accent." He stressed that, as Lithuanians, their national identity and their roots in the country were important and that the Lithuanian language possessed a poetic quality. He also underlined the worth and richness of French literature and encouraged everyone to see Paris at some point in their lives in order to experience an international intellectual center. In his second year at the school, Greimas struck up a friendship with his late-life correspondent Aleksandra Fledžinskaitė, then a student completing her last year, later an environmental artist in the United States and the wife of Greimas's friend Vytautas Kašuba.<sup>38</sup> He also became close friends with a Lithuanian language teacher at the school, Tomas Stonis, who remembered that "there wasn't a better conversationalist than A. J. Greimas... he never lied, never minced his words."<sup>39</sup>

Contemporaries in town recall the twenty-three year old Algirdas: "In Šiauliai, A. J. Greimas was a free spirit, a willing show-off, and a frequent guest at the homes of the most prominent Šiauliai citizens."<sup>40</sup> Thanks to his knowledge of French and German, he got involved with the theater in town: he translated a play, recited a poem by Baudelaire during the performance, and provided actors with background information.<sup>41</sup> He also had his first serious romantic relationship, with Šiauliai native

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<sup>37</sup> This quotation and the following sentences are from Greimas's former student Julija Bartašiūtė-Adamkevičienė as recorded in Peleckis-Kaktavičius, "Prasmių paieškos," 12-13 and 15-16.

<sup>38</sup> Aleksandra Kašuba, "Pažintis," in Greimas and Kašuba, *Algirdo Juliaus Greimo*, 5.

<sup>39</sup> Quoted in Peleckis-Kaktavičius, "Prasmių paieškos," 17.

<sup>40</sup> Peleckis-Kaktavičius, "Prasmių paieškos," 18.

<sup>41</sup> Greimas, "Tada, kai bauriškas kraujas virto mėlynu," 5-6.



Hania Lukauskaitė.<sup>42</sup> The daughter of a well-known lawyer, ten years older than Algirdas, Hania had studied in Vienna and Kaunas, married, borne two children, divorced, taught school, and published two collections of poetry.<sup>43</sup> She had recently returned to Šiauliai to direct its public library. An activist in leftist politics, Hania temporarily drew Greimas close to the ideology of the Socialist Revolutionary Party, the Lithuanian offshoot of Alexander Kerensky's unsuccessful rival to Lenin's Bolshevik Party.<sup>44</sup> Later during the war years, Algirdas and Hania would go their separate ways, but Greimas always harbored enormous respect for Lukauskaitė. She worked tirelessly to give Šiauliai a dynamic cultural life, became active in the anti-Nazi resistance, survived nearly a decade in the dreaded Vorkuta Gulag during the Soviet era, and afterwards became one of five founding members of the Lithuanian Human Rights Committee of Helsinki. Greimas's obituary of her paints her as a principled woman "leading by peace and dignity," bearing the "glow of human nobility," and showing unflinching courage: "She did not know what fear is."<sup>45</sup>

Writing about Šiauliai some forty years later, Greimas describes the metropolis as unique within Lithuania. He argues that "the epic that was the city of Šiauliai" must be preserved "for the memory of the nation" because, alone among urban areas of the country in the 1940s, it successfully embodied "the revival of the independence idea."<sup>46</sup> Šiauliai managed to knit together into a positive dynamic three constituencies that defined separate, often antagonistic agendas elsewhere: workers who had arrived to man the recently established manufacturing sites, reformist-minded city dwellers, and the traditional landed gentry in the surrounding countryside. "Šiauliai was a distinctive Lithuanian symbiosis of the Twentieth Century, constructed by

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<sup>42</sup> Ona Lukauskaitė-Poškienė (1906-83); Greimas letter to Kašuba 4 January 1990 in Greimas and Kašuba, *Algirdo Juliaus Greimo*, 102.

<sup>43</sup> Dikšaitis, "Ona Lukauskaitė-Poškienė."

<sup>44</sup> Greimas, "Intelektualinės autobiografijos bandymas" I, 15.

<sup>45</sup> Greimas, "...Apklojo ūkanos, apgaubė voratinkliai."

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

new labor in the factories, with progressive townspeople and 'Lithuanian-style' district landowners."<sup>47</sup>

In March 1941, Greimas was recruited by an acquaintance and former scout leader into a nationalist movement, the Lithuanian Activist Front (LAF).<sup>48</sup> He recalls being told, "We have a secret activist organization here. You're a member," to which he replied, "OK, let's do it."<sup>49</sup> But lacking local contacts, he initially had only infrequent interactions, when he would visit Churginas in Kaunas.

Algirdas's parents had moved to Prienai in Suvalkija, astride the Neman River about twenty-five miles from both Kaunas and Marijampolė. Education inspector Julius was elected mayor in 1934, a position he held until the Soviets took over in 1940. On 14 June 1941, Soviet authorities detained Julius and Konstancija in Prienai by force, separated them, locked them in cattle cars on trains, and shipped them out to different camps in Siberia.<sup>50</sup> They were two out of 18,500 Lithuanians<sup>51</sup> and 45,000 Balts deported during the week of 14-18 June. In Šiauliai, the Soviets mobilized reserve lieutenant Algirdas Greimas and ordered him to inventory the possessions of individuals who had been deported during the night, even as his parents waited in their freight cars in Prienai.<sup>52</sup> The deportations represented the first major wave in the Soviet plan to relocate or eliminate notables throughout the region.

Julius Greimas was sent with the other Baltic men to prison camps and then transferred with the majority of the Lithuanian men to *Kraslag*, the complex of Gulag "Corrective Labor Camps" clustered around the town of Reshoty, a stop on the Transsiberian railway in Krasnoyarsk.<sup>53</sup> He died in Reshoty

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Greimas, "Apie 1941 metus," 6.

<sup>49</sup> Greimas, "Iš Algirdo J. Greimo atsiminimų apie rezistenciją," 45.

<sup>50</sup> Burauskaitė, *Lietuvos gyventojų genocidas*, 306.

<sup>51</sup> Anušauskas, "Deportations."

<sup>52</sup> Greimas, "Tada, kai bauriškas kraujas virto mėlynu," 4.

<sup>53</sup> Burauskaitė, *Lietuvos gyventojų genocidas*, 306. On Kraslag, see the Krasnoyarsk "Memorial" Society website.

on 23 January 1942.<sup>54</sup> When the NKVD special tribunal examined his case later in absentia, it dropped the charges brought against him. Algirdas recounts:

it's the image of his death that haunts me continuously... he only stayed alive three months in the minus forty degrees Celsius cold. What my sister told me afterwards from those who survived is that his friends removed his last pair of pants in order to bury him in the absolutely frozen ground. And that's the last image of my father.<sup>55</sup>

Like the other Baltic women and children detainees, Konstancija was sent to an exile settlement in a remote area of the Soviet Union. She was ordered to work on a stud farm in the village of Yabogan in rural Altai territory,<sup>56</sup> about fifty miles from the border with Kazakhstan. She returned semilegally to Lithuania in 1948, but was arrested in 1949. After five months in the Kaunas prison, she was brought back to Yabogan, where she remained another five years. In 1954, after Stalin's death, she was allowed to go home, along with most of the other deportees in Soviet territories. She rejoined her daughter Gražina and family in Kaunas and lived the last two years of her life with them.

Algirdas would maintain leftist political views and intellectually consider himself a Marxist throughout his life, but the experience with Soviet rule turned him into an emphatic anti-Communist.

On 22 June 1941, a week into the mass deportations in the Baltic States, Hitler launched the largest military operation in the history of the world, the invasion of the Soviet Union, in-

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<sup>54</sup> Out of 2,500 Lithuanian prisoners taken to Kraslag, only 400 survived the winter of 1941-42, a time when the USSR was at peace with its neighbors. Throughout Russia, the majority of the Baltic summer deportees died that winter from hunger, exhaustion, and exposure (Eidintas, "Aleksandras Stulginskis" and Anušauskas, "Deportations").

<sup>55</sup> Greimas, interview with Piolot, 14 February 1989.

<sup>56</sup> Burauskaitė, *Lietuvos gyventojų genocidas*, 306. I thank Giedrius Subačius for the transliteration and translation from the Russian, kindly obtained and sent by Vytas Virkau.

cluding the Lithuanian SSR. Over four and a half million Axis personnel participated in the attack. On the very first day of Operation Barbarossa, the Luftwaffe bombed military targets in strategic Lithuanian cities, including Šiauliai, and the Wehrmacht flung over 900,000 troops against some 600,000 Soviet defenders in the country. Aleksandra Fledžinskaitė recalls hiding all night in the cellar with the family where she rented a room while the artillery shells exploded, then being rousted out at gunpoint by German soldiers in the morning. She recounts that “Later that morning, Greimas came over and together we went to town to see what was going on. On the main street, joining the people standing on the sidewalk, we watched the German tanks roll in, cannons pointed, the steady rattle of their treads shaking the ground. In silence we stood there witnessing yet another invasion.”<sup>57</sup>

Whereas in the capital city, Kaunas, the LAF took advantage of the invasion to commandeer public buildings and communication centers and declare independence before the Germans arrived, hoping that the invader would recognize the new government, Greimas saw no such uprising in Šiauliai.<sup>58</sup> Just as the Soviets had told Lithuanians that they were “liberating” them from blood-sucking capitalists, so too the Germans now assured them that they were “liberating” them from the Bolshevik menace.

Greimas recalls that the following morning, he heard that LAF partisans were gathering in the former Girls Teachers College, and ran over.<sup>59</sup> As a former reserve officer, he was appointed to lead the company comprising some two hundred unarmed men. He began signing orders to get the city running again and gave permission to open a bakery so that the inhabitants could buy bread. The German command sent over the order to round up and deliver at least one hundred Jews to sweep the streets. Greimas was surprised and remembers feeling “that something was not right. I conveyed the order,

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<sup>57</sup> Aleksandra [Fledžinskaitė]-Kašuba e-mails to the author 23 and 24 December 2010.

<sup>58</sup> Greimas, “Apie 1941 metus,” 6.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

but the next morning, I didn't return to further 'liberate' the homeland."<sup>60</sup> "It smelled bad," he recalled afterwards.<sup>61</sup> He became the editor of the Šiauliai weekly *Tėviškė* for a time. In cities and small rural settlements, Lithuanians themselves carried out pogroms that burned synagogues and killed almost 4,000 Jews in Kaunas alone in June 1941<sup>62</sup> and eight to ten thousand total throughout the country between 23 June and 3 July.<sup>63</sup> Although Greimas says that he himself witnessed no such Lithuanian violence against Jews in June in Šiauliai, history records that Lithuanians murdered about a thousand Jews in the city on 30 June and 1 July.<sup>64</sup>

Whereas the *Wehrmacht* mainly advanced through Lithuania with little resistance, a fierce battle took place near Raseiniai, forty miles from Šiauliai, halfway along the road to Kaunas. For four days, 23-27 June, German Panzers fought the Soviet armor, including new KV heavy tanks, in a conflict involving over one thousand tanks. Greimas recalls a vivid scene he witnessed at the time in Gubernija, a suburb of Šiauliai: "I'm lying in a ditch next to a Gubernija highway, and in the middle of the road a Russian tank is burning. On both sides of the highway, young German soldiers wearing glasses hurriedly lay telephone lines. The hatch of the tank flies open and a Red Army soldier jumps out of it, on fire. A German stops, approaches him, and we surround the two heroes. Excited, the German starts cursing the Russian. 'See where it got you, wanting war and revolution!' And the Russian, as if he had understood, answers in his own language: 'Stupid! He thinks we wanted war,' and dies."<sup>65</sup>

During the first months after the invasion, many Balts, ecstatic to be rid of the Soviets and hopeful for independence, welcomed the new invaders. Greimas recalls that "in the beginning,

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Paul Perron, conversation with the author 12 July 2011.

<sup>62</sup> Gaidis, *A History*, 74 and Ona Šimaitė letters to Ichokas Meras 17 May 1961 and 31 January 1964, quoted in Šukys, "Ona Šimaitė."

<sup>63</sup> Arad, "The 'Final Solution'," 742-743.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 743.

<sup>65</sup> Greimas, "Tada, kai bauriškas kraujas virto mėlynu," 4.

when the Germans would pass by, villagers would tie a cow to their cannon and give them the cow. Take it, thank you for having liberated us."<sup>66</sup> Soon, however, the Gestapo and the SS showed up and set up camp. "When the Gestapo arrived, we learned what a real occupation was like."<sup>67</sup> Greimas was aware of few atrocities committed by the initial *Wehrmacht* units, "but the *Sicherheitsdienst* ('Security Service') and the *Einsatztruppen* under its control started actively liquidating the Jews."<sup>68</sup> Some 250,000 Lithuanian Jews were executed or deported under the Nazis, most of the latter never to be seen again.<sup>69</sup>

In addition, rather than undoing the Soviets' radical economic revolution or compensating the dispossessed as the Baltic States had hoped, the new occupiers maintained and even extended the Soviet nationalizations and collectivizations.<sup>70</sup> Institutions of higher learning and many schools were closed. Germans arrived to run the farms, factories, businesses, and financial institutions, like modern Baltic Barons, while the locals were hired at low wages paid in a paper currency possessing little market value.<sup>71</sup> As under the Soviets, locals saw massive quotas of domestic output get shipped away to the center of the empire with little compensation, while virtually nothing useful came back in return.<sup>72</sup> Legal food and fuel were rationed and access to public transportation curtailed. Hitler, Himmler, and the SS officials who drafted the Master Plan for the eastern territories annexed by Germany (the *Generalplan Ost*) decided that 85 percent of Lithuanians would be deported or eliminated in order to create the desired "elbow room" to be enjoyed by the German *Übermensch* colonizers.

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<sup>66</sup> Greimas, "Iš Algirdo J. Greimo atsiminimų," 45.

<sup>67</sup> Greimas conversation with the author 20 January 1982.

<sup>68</sup> Greimas, "Apie 1941 metus," 7.

<sup>69</sup> Porat, "The Holocaust in Lithuania," 160, and Gaidis, *A History*, 80–81.

<sup>70</sup> Foreign Delegation of the Lithuanian Social Democratic Party, Memorandum, 220–222; cf. Oras, *Baltic Eclipse*, 227, 249.

<sup>71</sup> Foreign Delegation of the Lithuanian Social Democratic Party, Memorandum, 220.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 220–221; cf. Oras, *Baltic Eclipse*, 228–229.

The teaching positions in Šiauliai represented dependable income, but the provincial industrial center did not offer the most stimulating environment for a young man under the age of 25.<sup>73</sup> In the fall of 1942, Greimas moved back to the lively capital, Kaunas. He landed a job as a library expert in the Department of Cultural Affairs within the Internal Affairs Office. Once in Kaunas, Greimas became active in the Union of Lithuanian Freedom Fighters (*Lietuvos laisvės kovotojų sąjuga*, LLKS), an independent underground group that had previously had intermittent association with the LAF and with the Lithuanian Nationalist Union.<sup>74</sup> Attracting activists from different political orientations, the LLKS counted among its leaders chemist Jurgis Valiulis (later Karolis Drunga), engineer Klemensas Brunius, chemist Jonas Deksnys, and Stasys Žakevičius (later Žymantas), who was a Vilnius University professor and mayor of Vilnius during the German period. From 1941 to 1944, about three thousand individuals joined the LLKS and took the vow:

I swear by all that is holy and honorable that, with all my efforts and my life, I shall fight for the restoration of Lithuania's Independence, without any hesitation whatsoever shall execute all directives of my intermediaries and all commands received through them, shall never reveal anything that could betray the LLKS, and shall not abandon the LLKS until Lithuania's independence has been restored. This oath I guarantee with my life.<sup>75</sup>

The organization's bylaws further specified that "LLKS members breaking the oath will be punished by death."

Greimas helped produce the group's major publication, its four-page bimonthly newspaper *Freedom Fighter* (*Laisvės kovotojas*), one of the three principal underground periodicals edited in Lithuania during the war.<sup>76</sup> Through radio contact with its

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<sup>73</sup> Žibuntas Mikšys telephone conversation with the author 10 December 2010.

<sup>74</sup> Greimas, "Iš Algirdo J. Greimo atsiminimų," 45. On the LLKS, see Bubnys, *Nazi Resistance*, 60-80.

<sup>75</sup> *Lietuvos laisvės kovotojų sąjungos įstatai*.

<sup>76</sup> For information on *Laisvės kovotojas* see Bubnys, *Nazi Resistance*, 65-67, 74-80, and Kaszeta, "Lithuanian Resistance."

representative Algirdas Vokietaitis stationed in Stockholm, the LLKS enjoyed regular communication with the British Intelligence Service. Through its own domestic sources and through the conduit to Britain, the *Freedom Fighter* disseminated uncensored information, as well as perspectives aligned with Lithuanian rather than Nazi interests, to the populace. The paper also demonstrated to the outside world that Lithuanians as a whole did not support the Third Reich's program of a "New Europe" as did the puppets installed by the occupiers in nominal positions of authority. It is difficult to overestimate the significance of such publications in times of war and relentless propaganda. Around the time that Greimas joined it, the paper was producing 3,500 copies of each issue, and soon increased its circulation to 5,000. Greimas got to know one of the directors of the newspaper, Jurgis Valiulis, who became one of his closest friends for life.<sup>77</sup> On 4 August 1943, the Gestapo discovered the main printing offices in Kaunas, confiscated all of the equipment and papers, and arrested and jailed eleven LLKS members, some of whom were sent to Dachau.<sup>78</sup>

In the course of 1943, the fortunes of the armies at war shifted significantly: after halting Axis forces at Leningrad, Moscow, and Stalingrad, Soviet forces went on the offensive and began to advance along much of the Eastern Front. The Germans beat a continuous westward retreat toward their homeland, hoping only for eventual stalemate and a negotiated settlement.<sup>79</sup> The picture was similar in the West, where the Allies advanced steadily, clearing the *Wehrmacht* from North Africa in May 1943, from Sicily in July 1943, and from the southern part of mainland Italy by October 1943. The enormous buildup of Allied troops, aircraft, ships, and materiel on the English Channel in 1943 pointed to a massive invasion of France.

Part of the Third Reich's response was to ratchet up its efforts to impress civilian workers and recruit military units throughout its occupied territories. It set quotas for Lithuania

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<sup>77</sup> Greimas, "Kad Jurgis nemirtų."

<sup>78</sup> Bubnys, *Nazi Resistance*, 75.

<sup>79</sup> Müller and Ueberschär, *Hitler's War*, 127.



to provide tens of thousands of additional laborers for German factories. In February 1943, it launched an initiative to create a Lithuanian SS Legion.<sup>80</sup> *Freedom Fighter* led the struggle against the endeavor, which proved to be the principal focus of Greimas's anti-Nazi underground activities.<sup>81</sup> As he remembered the paper's message:

The Germans are asking you to participate in the Work Brigade?  
The answer is: don't go, don't join! The Germans are talking up  
the SS Legion? Answer: Don't go, don't join.<sup>82</sup>

The protests bore positive results: Lithuania fell far short of its workforce target and managed to emerge from the war as one of only two countries (with Poland) occupied by Germany that never formed a native SS Legion.

Publishing and printing were among the many sectors that were highly controlled during the occupation. Greimas believed strongly that there should be a forum in which the writers of the day could express themselves and be read by a broad public. He conceived the idea of a cultural journal. The occupiers would never issue a permit for such a work in the capital, but he was able to obtain approval to produce it in Šiauliai.<sup>83</sup> Having no experience in the publishing world, he recruited partners and went through Hania Lukauskaitė's brother-in-law, a prominent doctor, to get a recognized writer to serve as editor-in-chief. Kazys Jankauskas, Šiauliai native and author of well-received novels and short stories, recalls that Greimas somewhat bluntly explained to him:

In peace time you could not be an editor, you're not a fighter, you could not struggle against other editors, but during the war, when there are so few periodicals, you are the perfect fit to represent not just one literary opinion, but the whole.<sup>84</sup>

In spite of wartime logistical hurdles, thirty nationally or internationally known Lithuanian authors contributed original

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<sup>80</sup> Bubnys, *Nazi Resistance*, 162-170.

<sup>81</sup> Greimas, "Intelektualinės autobiografijos bandymas" II, 28.

<sup>82</sup> Greimas, "Iš Algirdo J. Greimo atsiminimų," 45.

<sup>83</sup> Greimas, "Tada, kai bauriškas kraujas virto mėlynu," 6.

<sup>84</sup> Peleckis-Kaktavičius, "Prasmių paieškos," 18.

articles to the 1943 and 1944 book-length installments of *Varpai: literaturinis visuomeninis almanachas* (*The Bells: A Public Literary Almanac*), printed in ten thousand copies. The title recalls that of the celebrated nineteenth-century nationalist cultural magazine *Varpas* 'The Bell.' The almanac established the reputation for putting out a quality product, and also for never printing pro-Nazi or anti-Semitic pieces, in spite of watchful censors.<sup>85</sup> Bringing together talented contributors of all generations from youthful to established authors, offering perspectives on every aspect of art and culture, and containing samples of almost all of the writers from the time who enjoy recognition today, *Varpai* represents the most important record of Lithuanian letters of the period.

More than half of the first issue of 328 pages was devoted to literature, including a complete five-act play, a contribution by Vincas Krėvė-Mickevičius, and poems by Henrikas Radauskas, Jonas Aistis, Bernardas Brazdžionis, Kazys Bradūnas, Antanas Miškinis, and Jankauskas himself. Churginas, Radauskas, and others also provided translations of classic world authors such as Shakespeare, Goethe, and Dante. The texts were interspersed with full-page reproductions of artwork by M. K. Čiurlionis, Adomas Galdikas, and other contemporary artists. The 1943 issue also offered essays on music, painting, science, theater, and society by director Juozas Miltinis, Vincas Mykolaitis-Putinas, Greimas, and others. It concluded with obituaries, reviews, and a calendar of events.

The 400-page 1944 issue adopted a different structure and format, but provided a similar comprehensive sampling of literature, ideas, and the arts, and included many of the same contributors. It also incorporated work by senior figures in their field, including poems by Jurgis Baltrušaitis senior and essays by Jonas Grinius and Vaclovas Biržiška. Art again held a place of choice, notably works by Vytautas Jonynas, Juozas Kėdainis, and Aleksandras Marčiulionis.

The literary criticisms Greimas contributed to *Varpai*, were among his first publications. The 1943 volume included

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<sup>85</sup> Tomas Venclova letter to the author 24 August 2010.

his obituary of the poet Kazys Binkis,<sup>86</sup> futurist and leader of the literary movement The Four Winds (*Keturi vėjai*) and someone who, with his wife, had hidden Jews in their home from the Nazis. Greimas's longest article, the 1944 "Verlaine, the Man and the Poet,"<sup>87</sup> presents the nineteenth-century French Symbolist Paul Verlaine. At the time, Lithuania's intelligentsia was largely unfamiliar with French literature, and Greimas was keen to introduce the modernist lyric poets Baudelaire, Verlaine, and Rimbaud. Immediately following the article are four Verlaine poems selected by Greimas and translated by Radauskas. The same issue also includes a largely unfavorable review of Gražina Tulauskaitė's second collection of poetry, a piece that foreshadows Greimas's considerable polemical production.<sup>88</sup>

The *Varpai* article by Greimas that has since attracted the most attention is his 1943 essay "Cervantes and his Don Quixote" ("*Servantesas ir jo Don Kichotas*"). The piece was occasioned by the publication of the first complete Lithuanian translation of Cervantes' masterpiece, on which Aleksys Churginas collaborated. In what would prove to be Greimas's typical fashion, the article engages the specifics of the work then uses that discussion as a springboard for a broader, deeper reflection. Articulating the goals of his Rygiškių Jonas reading group, Greimas writes:

We must truly recognize with some shame that we don't know the classics, that we don't even intuit the possibilities enclosed in the works of the great masters which are offered to travelers of this earth as a common treasure of humanity.

The Humanism articulated in the article is one in which each nation is called to participate actively. As Spain has done through the "genius" Cervantes, "each nation must bring its seed to the granary of humanity." The article explicitly ties the importance of the translation to historical circumstances:

It comes at the moment when we are in the greatest need of help. In this terrible encounter between the powerful of the world,

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<sup>86</sup> Greimas, "Binkis—vėliauninkas."

<sup>87</sup> Greimas, "Verlaine'as—žmogus ir poetas."

<sup>88</sup> Greimas, "Gražina Tulauskaitė."

this beloved country is so lacking that naive faith in its own human mission.

Neither the style nor the structure of the work engages Greimas in the article, but rather its emblematic hero, “the great optimist.” Don Quixote “will teach us how to battle windmills without fearing ridicule.” The man from La Mancha also demonstrates that hedonism is not the answer: “Happiness is not important to him: he seeks the complete realization of his life, its meaning.” Wartime Lithuanian readers recognized obvious antitotalitarian and anti-Nazi overtones,<sup>89</sup> and Greimas himself later declared the piece a political allegory:

In this absurd situation, we had to organize the resistance against the Germans, right? But to what end? So that the Russians could move in? The resistance was an absurd resistance. That’s when I wrote my first article in Lithuanian, on Don Quixote.<sup>90</sup>

The essay on Cervantes’ work sketches a transcendentalism that draws from both Romanticism and Platonism to formulate a stirring call to heroism for a higher purpose, one which readers tacitly grasped:

Understand that above and beyond this world of distorted and paltry images, there is another fairer, truer reality: the world of ideas and forms created by man himself in accord with his divine image. And Don Quixote tells you: think great things, for thought is the only reality in the world. Raise nature to your level, and may the entire world be a reflection of your heroic soul. Struggle for honor; this alone is truly worthy of man. And if they wound you, let your blood flow like healing dew, and smile.

In later years, Jonas Mackus used the code name Don Quixote for his anti-Soviet resistance work.<sup>91</sup>

In January-February 1944, Lieutenant General Markian Popov finally relieved the siege of Leningrad and began driving the German forces back toward the Baltic States. In early February, Soviet troops crossed the border into Estonia

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<sup>89</sup> Tomas Venclova letter to the author 24 August 2010.

<sup>90</sup> Greimas, “La France est gagnée,” 44.

<sup>91</sup> Caro, “Don Quijote.”

and fought multiple engagements. Straight to the east, in Belarus, Red Army Marshals Zhukov and Vassilevskiy controlled the skies, massed a force four times larger than the enemy's, and prepared for a decisive assault.<sup>92</sup> In February 1944, General Commissar von Renteln announced a new initiative to recruit military units in Lithuania. After intense negotiations, General Povilas Plechavičius, hero of the wars of Independence, agreed to form and lead the Lithuanian Local Special Units, provided that they operate solely under Lithuanian command and be deployed only to defend the homeland.<sup>93</sup>

The nationalist call for volunteers brought in twice as many men as the Germans could or would arm. Lacking commanders, however, the units ordered officers of the Lithuanian army to register, including Greimas. As he recalls,

When I registered, the Germans took the list with the names and addresses where people lived along with other documents. They started looking through them and were thinking of sending some of the men on the list as officers to serve in active reserve units. So I moved, I changed apartments. I started living with a friend. I changed my job, too.<sup>94</sup>

Aleksys Churginas suggested that he join him as a translator in the National Publishing House in Kaunas. They went to see the editor-in-chief, Henrikas Radauskas, who hired Greimas. It turned out that he was not actually competent to do the work, but the situation did not prove to be insurmountable:

I corrected translations of Hauff's tales. The translation was very bad and I was a poor editor, I didn't know how to correct it. So Churginas taught me, gave me private lessons in how to translate. In a word, the work was a pretext. Nobody there worked seriously.<sup>95</sup>

Greimas's friend the artist Adolfas Vaičaitis held a position as a book designer at the same publishing house, and remembered Greimas as a brilliant conversationalist.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> Mitcham, *Crumbling Empire*, 16.

<sup>93</sup> Bubnys, *Nazi Resistance*, 184-203.

<sup>94</sup> Greimas, "Iš Algirdo J. Greimo atsiminimų," 46.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

<sup>96</sup> Peleckis-Kaktavičius, "Prasmių paieškos," 11.

As of fall 1943, resistance efforts in Lithuania were coordinated by an umbrella organization VLIK (*Vyriausiasis Lietuvos išlaisvinimo komitetas*, Supreme Committee for the Liberation of Lithuania). On 30 April-1 May 1944, the Nazis captured a VLIK agent, Colonel Kazimieras Ambraziejus, with compromising documents on him.<sup>97</sup> Using the information obtained, the Germans arrested fifty-seven members of the LLKS in the following days, along with many other resisters. Half of the LLKS taken were leaders, including Jurgis Valiulis and the other principals of the *Freedom Fighters*; nine of them died during their incarceration in prisons or concentration camps, or shortly thereafter. The Germans confiscated the publishing offices of the paper as well. Greimas endeavored to take Valiulis's place as best he could by directing the publishing operations and the propaganda section of the paper.<sup>98</sup> He contacted the editor of the Šiauliai weekly *Tėviškė*, who arranged for his workers to produce *Freedom Fighter*. Greimas made Šiauliai resident and LLKS member Bronys Raila the editor. Two more issues of the paper came out in this fashion, ten thousand copies each, which had to be shipped in suitcases from Šiauliai on trains surveilled by the Nazis.

New members had to be recruited in order to rebuild the underground network. Greimas brought in teacher and poet Antanas Miškinis and novelist Liudas Dovydėnas. He recalls having them take the LLKS oath on the tomb of Kazys Binkis in the Kaunas cemetery, just for added effect.<sup>99</sup>

The Lithuanian Local Special Units headed by General Plechavičius dissolved in late spring 1944, when the Nazis attempted to exert their control over the troops. Plechavičius and other leaders were arrested in May and shipped to concentration camps. Other regular Lithuanian army battalions remained active, units which the Germans had formed initially for Lithuanian self-defense and internal security, but which they had progressively co-opted for duties on the Eastern Front. In the

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<sup>97</sup> See Bubnys, *Nazi Resistance*, 77-79 and 136-141.

<sup>98</sup> Greimas, "Iš Algirdo J. Greimo atsiminimų," 45.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*

spring and summer of 1944, these battalions began coming back from Minsk, and their commanders looked to the Resistance movement for instructions. Greimas recalls, “the battalion chiefs came to me and asked what they should do. And I was only a newspaperman. I’m sitting there by myself and I’m discussing with these officers. It was a bit scary for me. And they say, ‘Give us orders.’”<sup>100</sup>

Around the same time, Greimas was approached by a German officer who commanded an *Abwehr* military intelligence unit that was withdrawing from Lithuania. The men wanted to leave their weapons and ammunition with the Lithuanian Resistance: they could arm an entire regiment.<sup>101</sup> Greimas arranged for the officer to meet with a colonel in the active Lithuanian army who commanded a military sector, and the massive munitions transfer did indeed occur. His friend Bronys Raila always enjoyed telling the story of how the transaction earned Greimas, the “impractical philologist, connoisseur of French literature and poetry,” a record in the NKVD files in Vilnius as an arms merchant.<sup>102</sup>

In early March 1944, Soviet air raids severely damaged the historic Estonian town of Narva and heavily bombed the capital Tallinn. Ground battles in northern Estonia intensified throughout the spring. The Allies finally invaded France in early June 1944. Greimas became aware that informed Lithuanian military personnel such as General Raštikis and other commanders were only willing to direct anti-Soviet operations from outside the country, from Germany.<sup>103</sup> In June, VLIK decided to transfer its operations to Germany.<sup>104</sup> The LLKS demanded that a national manifesto be drawn up and proclaimed, but VLIK officials could not convene a meeting since its leaders had dispersed.<sup>105</sup> Greimas later recalled,

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<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 46.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> Raila, *Versmės ir verpetai*, 119-120.

<sup>103</sup> Greimas, “Iš Algirdo J. Greimo atsiminimų,” 45-46.

<sup>104</sup> Bubnys, *Nazi Resistance*, 142.

<sup>105</sup> Greimas, “Apie 1941 metus,” 7.

I had no doubt how the war was going to end. The Russians were going all the way to Berlin. What kind of an underground are you going to organize?... When there was nothing else that could be done, I left the country.<sup>106</sup>

With the Soviet reoccupation of Lithuania fast approaching, surely he also realized that his profile and resistance activities would put his name on the NKVD lists and earn him the same fate as befell his parents. Perhaps he also wondered whether it might just be possible to return to a free France at some point in the not too distant future.

Greimas recounts that he left Lithuania, travelled to Mülheim in the Ruhr Valley, then in July 1944 settled in Mulhouse in southern Alsace, annexed to Germany during the war.<sup>107</sup> There he met with Raila and other resistance members at various times. In February 1945, Alsace was liberated by the Allies, and in April Greimas made his way to Paris.

Greimas was among the fortunate individuals who survived the war unscathed, but the years were intense, turbulent, and determining for him. The twenty-two year old who had planned to write a dissertation in a tranquil French Alpine town instead trained in Lithuania to be an army officer, officially served under three different flags in succession, suffered the separation and deportation of his parents and the death of his father, and participated in the resistance and the underground press. Greimas says that his wartime experiences spawned two notions that proved to be important to him throughout his life. First, his *Candide*-like successive integration into warring German and Russian forces inspired in him a transnational European identity: "I had the feeling of being a European. Two armies were struggling against each other, and I was right for both of them."<sup>108</sup> Secondly, the conflict inspired him to devote his career to the search for the fundamental conditions of signification and values:

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<sup>106</sup> Greimas, "Iš Algirdo J. Greimo atsiminimų," 47.

<sup>107</sup> Greimas conversation with the author 20 January 1982 and Raila, "Atsisveikinant su Greimu," 272.

<sup>108</sup> Greimas, "La France est gagnée," 44.



I looked at everything that was happening with consternation... I felt very intensely the feeling of the absurd, of non-sense, which impelled me toward a quest for meaning.<sup>109</sup>

Greimas's friend and Lacanian psychoanalyst Mustapha Safouan once described Greimas as sincere, single-minded, engaging, generous, and also as "a very combative man, all the more so that he had to deal with dark forces of death, perhaps connected to Lithuania."<sup>110</sup> Knowing nothing about Greimas's father, when Safouan heard the story of his death, he felt strongly that it supplied the impetus in question. On the other hand, a good friend emphasized the importance that the occupations and the deportation of his parents had on Greimas, but judged that on balance, "the entire experience of the war years was a character builder for Greimas."<sup>111</sup> The long-time reader of Nietzsche could apply the notion of *amor fati* to his own circumstances and embrace what chance and destiny thrust his way. Another close collaborator noted that Greimas always consented to "the accidents of History that he had lived through"<sup>112</sup> and indeed told him and another member of the Paris research group, only partly tongue in cheek, "What you and Françoise Bastide need is a good little war."<sup>113</sup> Greimas either already possessed or quickly acquired humor as well as a certain fatalism to negotiate cataclysms.

After the war, Greimas continued his activities in the underground, now targeting the Soviets. He also published articles that reflect on what such struggles entail, especially the 1953 "The Concept of Resistance" ("*Rezistencijos sąvoka*"). A first irony: they necessitate new political leaders. The existing legitimate principals selected by the traditional legal procedures cease to be effective or valid, ceding the stage to "unprepared and unqualified volunteers... who will dare to make

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<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

<sup>110</sup> Mustapha Safouan telephone conversation with the author 9 June 2010.

<sup>111</sup> Paul Perron conversation with the author 12 July 2011.

<sup>112</sup> Landowski, "Honoris causa."

<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

themselves a laughingstock of 'serious' people and renounce their quiet work and life."<sup>114</sup> Far from underlining the ambient moral and material degradation or the toll exacted by the conflict, the essay emphasizes that underground struggles force the collective body to think, to confront the changed context, and to renew its purpose:

Resistance... is the original, tense moral climate in which, shaken by history, a nation finds its new opportunities, the consciousness of its new destiny.<sup>115</sup>

Similarly, at the level of the individual, rather than foreground such emotions as fear or despair, uncertainty or regret, the article argues that the elaboration of a novel axiology engenders in participants a vivid aesthetic experience and unique awareness, "a specific sensuous atmosphere, in which new human values are created, in which one's world view is experienced and comes into being."<sup>116</sup> In an existentialist mode, the underground activities oblige each subject to reflect, make choices and declare their positions in the face of limit situations:

Resistance is primarily the act of self-determination of a free individual, an authentic commitment of the individual, speaking against outdated or imposed values and in favor of a certain system of values implicated in the act of self-determination itself. Before it becomes an action, Resistance is a choice and a pronouncement.<sup>117</sup>



Vytautas Kavolis once asked Greimas, "What did you bring with you from Lithuania that later proved particularly important to the development of your academic thinking? Did Lithuania prepare you well for your destiny?" Greimas responded, in part:

Probably I brought nearly everything from Lithuania: the country smell of my childhood in the region of Aukštaitija, my ambition and obstinacy grounded in the region of Suvalkija, elements of German culture in philosophy and history; an under-

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<sup>114</sup> Greimas, "Rezistencijos sąvoka," 1.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

standing of the Scandinavians' and Slavs' 'spirit'; all of these things remained incomprehensible to the nations of the former Roman Empire.<sup>118</sup>

Arrived at the end of our narrative, one may extend Kavolis's query to probe the relation between Greimas's formative years and his subsequent life and career. Three points suggest themselves. Growing up in the new Lithuanian Republic and being raised by a civic-minded parent seems to have inculcated in Algirdas an unusually strong commitment to his native land and a singular interest in using and nurturing the Lithuanian language. Many are the exile scholars who publish only in their adopted international idiom. Secondly, in contrast to newer Western trends, Greimas retained the Old World tradition of long-term close friendships: throughout his life, he maintained an active exchange with a number of family members and friends from youth, and after leaving Lithuania, established a number of new bonds and close collaborations that lasted three decades or more. Lastly, Greimas was steeped in the historical perspectives of the nineteenth century, which informed not only his academic thinking, but also his political beliefs and outlook on life. In order to become a major figure in continental structuralism and semiotics, he had to break with what he knew best and held most dear and strike out in new directions—in his late 30s!

Beyond sure conclusions such as these, one can entertain two further reflections. First, Greimas's semantics and semiotics appear unusual in that their wide purview embraces language, discourse, and society, spheres typically segregated into distinct disciplines in the postwar era. In today's highly specialized research cartography, linguistics concentrates on constituent sounds and language structures up to the sentence, literary criticism explores works beyond the sentence, while sociology and anthropology study societies. Greimas's "revolutionary" extensive, multidisciplinary project in fact continues the venerable comprehensive perspective of the philology that he learned from Duraffour, which comprises an inseparable triad of language, culture, and texts. More broadly, his wide scope is in

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<sup>118</sup> Greimas, "Intelektualinės autobiografijos bandymas" I, 3.

harmony with traditional East European inquiry that resisted hyper-specialization and retained a more holistic approach.

Second, it is hard not to be struck by parallels between Greimas's participation in resistance movements and his later work with semiotics. As he constructed the latter project, it too required a deep commitment to a collective effort focused on daunting long-range objectives pursued in the face of tenacious, entrenched adversaries. The semiotic enterprise entailed an almost impossible goal: to develop a new scientific project and to get it established alongside such disciplines as linguistics, psychology, anthropology, and philosophy. And whereas most productive intellectuals focus their energies on their individual research, particularly in the humanities, right from the start, Greimas actively sought to build a group in Paris and devoted great time and energy throughout the rest of his career to recruiting promising students and colleagues, mentoring them, collaborating with them, and brainstorming ideas for projects and responses to attacks. The underground struggle proved to be excellent training for the academic battles of the Latin Quarter, France, and the globe.



*Lithuanian students celebrating February 16 in Grenoble, France, in 1938 or 1939. Algirdas Julius Greimas is the second to last seated on the right side of the table and Professor Antonin Duraffour is directly across from him. Photograph courtesy of Ramutė Iešmantaitė Ramunienė.*

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