# *Dainius Razauskas-Daukintas*
# Maironis – the Bard of the Perennial Tradition

The subject of this work is the lyrics of Maironis (1862–1932), the Lithuanian romantic poet and the patriarch of contemporary Lithuanian poetry. As never before, here it is looked at from the point of view of tradition, particularly of the Lithuanian one reflected in folklore, old literature, historical sources etc. Not only Lithuanian, though: the other two branches of the Baltic tradition, Latvian and Prussian, are also taken into consideration when it is relevant, as are also Slavic, Germanic, Classical (Greek and Latin), Old Iranian, Old Indian (Vedic) and other traditions. That is, the lyrics of Maironis is looked at as if through the prism of traditional poetics, folklore, and mythology seeking to distinguish in it the motives which would resonate with the traditional, ancient, widely prevalent, archetypal ideas thus constituting the 'perennial tradition' of humanity.

The poetry of Maironis appeared to be very appropriate for such an approach. In this way, the forty-seven main motives were distinguished and arranged as separate chapters in the following way.

1. The Witches of Šatrija. Mount Šatrija is one of the most famous hills in Lithuania particularly known in Lithuanian folklore for the assemblies of witches on the Feast of St John. There are some hints that in ancient times Šatrija could be a sanctuary with the future witches, – similar to the Vestals cultivating the sacred fire on it.

2. Medvėgalis. That is another distinguished hill in Lithuania whose name in folklore (folk etymology) is derived from the compound *mudvi galim* ('the two of us are able'). Maironis obviously uses corresponding folklore legends in his verse on Medvėgalis.

3. Dyvitis or Dievytis. Yet another sacred hill and a nearby lake in Žemaitija (Samogitia), which in one sixteenth-century source is presented even as a divinity.

4. The Legendary Bells. In Lithuanian folklore, there are well-known legends of the drowned bells. Maironis was especially attracted to these and other folklore legends in his poetry of the late period.

5. The Lithuanians of Perkūnas. Maironis wrote of ancient Lithuanian warriors as fighting like Perkūnas, the thunder god himself. This comparison is already present in some other writings of the nineteenth century where it arrived from the ancient tradition of relating our own defenders with

the protagonist thunder god, while linking the enemies to his demonic antagonist. This tradition has been known all over the world since the most ancient times, beginning with the Vedic myth of Indra persecuting his enemy Vritra, or Vala. From the Teutonic Crusade into Baltic lands from the thirteenth to the fifteenth centuries, in the Lithuanian tradition the usual nickname of Velnias, the mythological antagonist of Perkūnas, is *vokietukas* 'the little German', which is also reflected in Maironis' poetry.

6. The Tombs of Giants. In Lithuania, a barrow, or tumulus, is often called *milžinkapis*, 'a tomb of the giant'. In folklore, these barrows and the numerous burials that have survived since prehistoric times are attributed to the 'ancient race of giants' and related to the traditional legends about giants. Maironis uses them to emphasize the 'greatness' of the ancient Lithuanian warriors.

7. Heroes in Our Hearts. The giant then is interpreted metaphorically as an ancient hero, in Lithuanian *didvyris*, 'the great man', and even psychologically: the true 'greatness' is attributed not to the body, but to the soul of the hero. The metaphor is traditional and quite ancient, cf. Old Indian *mahavīra*, namely 'the great man', *mahātmā* 'he of great soul, or great self', Greek μεγάθυμος, μεγαλόθυμος, μεγαλόψυχος 'he of great soul, or great spirit' etc. That way, 'the ancient heroes' may justly be interpreted in terms of spiritual powers slumbering in the heart of a contemporary commoner.

8. The Resurrection of the Giants. Maironis then predicts the resurrection of the giants sleeping in the barrows and mounds. This is a traditional folklore motive occurring in respective legends where a passerby incidentally meets an ancient warrior who asks him: "Has the time come yet?" It turns out that the ancient soldiery is sleeping in the mound waiting for the time to come to resurrect and fight for our homeland. Given the previously mentioned metaphor, this amounts to spiritual resurrection of the nation from its slumber under the tomb of ignorance. Actually, the inner, psychological, interpretation of such folklore legends in the beginning of the twentieth century, the time of Lithuanian liberation from the Polish and Russian oppression, was quite common.

9. The Lithuanian as an Oak. Meditating on the bravery of the ancient Lithuanian warrior, Maironis compares him to a falling oak struck by an enemy. The comparison was already known in the nineteenth-century romantic literature and is usual in folk songs about a young man recruited to fight in the war and struck down like an oak by the enemy. The comparison, therefore, is traditional. Moreover, Maironis compares the arms of the warrior to the branches of the oak, and his legs to its roots. This comparison is also quite traditional, found in many folk songs, being expressed in some of them in almost the same words as Maironis uses. The comparison of the warrior

to a tree, particularly of a noble species, is also characteristic to the Homeric epic and to the Vedic hymns, thus it reaches back to the Indo-European antiquity. It is eloquent that 'Elegy on the Indo-European Hero' which was composed by Martin Litchfield West in English using traditional tropes, and which concludes his brilliant book *Indo-European Poetry and Myth* (Oxford University Press, 2007, 504), contains the lines *He stood firm amid the missiles / like the oak of Perkunos under hail*, which look like a quotation from Maironis.

10. Forests Slashed Down. In several verses, Maironis compares Lithuanian troops and Lithuania itself with the sacred woods and forests felled with axe. The comparison is traditional. Sometimes a tree used to be planted to mark the birth of a child and it was believed that if the tree were slashed down the human would die. Besides, the whole Lithuania in one instant in the nineteenth century was, in the words of the goddess of woods and forests Medeina, related with forests, so that if the forests were felled down the Lithuania would perish.

11. The Wood of God. In one of his verses, Maironis says that forests in Lithuania previously belonged to God. On the one hand, this can indicate the times when forests still were nobody's property. On the other hand, the wood belonging to God is a sacred wood. Actually, there is information in the historical sources of the ancient Lithuanians worshipping God in their sacred woods and naming such woods 'the God's home', or *domus Dei* in Latin.

12. The Eternal God. We may ask, which God it is – the Christian or the pagan one? How can we divide and own God if we really speak of God, the creator of the universe? Isn't He truly universal? A similar attitude can be detected in Maironis. He translated into Lithuanian some hymns of *Rigveda* (perhaps not from the original) and chose primarily those in which the one God, *deva eka*, is praised (for example, X.121, 129). It is worth mentioning that the Vedic *devas* and Lith. *dievas* are still almost the same word (I-E **deiwos*) reaching us from antiquity of no less than five thousand years.

13. God's Trial. The posthumous trial of the human soul is also a very ancient idea, by no means an invention of Christianity. It is also known in the Lithuanian tradition where it was performed by God on the top of the mythical mountain. God's trial mentioned by Maironis in mythological contexts, then, also must not be attributed exclusively to Christianity.

14. The Warrior of God. In many ancient traditions, two kinds of death were distinguished, i.e. the 'good' and the 'bad' one, and the surest way to die the 'good' death was a battle. It could almost be looked at as a way to influence God's trial. In the Baltic tradition, too, the warriors fallen in battle were supposed to go directly to God, and in this sense Maironis is just one of its successors.

15. The Heavenly Homeland. The ancient Lithuanian name for 'heaven'

is *dausos*, of the same root as *dvasia* 'spirit'. Thus, *dausos* is the 'place of the spirits' or the 'spirit land'. The folklore assures us that the Milky Way is the path to *dausos* and this way the birds in autumn go there too. Moreover, the heaven, or *dausos*, is often looked at as the final and the real homeland of the human soul. All these notions are not exclusively Baltic but known in many ancient traditions, including Vedic, Roman and others. They emerge several times in Maironis' verses, too.

16. The Burning Heart. Another perennial archetypal notion is the presentation of all kinds of passion and fervor by images of heat and fire. Maironis in this respect is, of course, by no means peculiar but thoroughly traditional. Furthermore, in his poetry the burning heart is a kind of engine by which one can reach *dausos* while still alive.

17. The Wings of Spirit. A spiritual engine and a universal perennial metaphor of ascent consist of wings. Again, Maironis is not peculiar in this respect but altogether traditional and is strongly inclined to use on the occasion his spiritual wings that make a pride of every poet.

18. The Waves of the Sea of Heart. Yet another perennial metaphor of emotional life recurring in Maironis' lyrics is wavy waters. The metaphor is abundantly used in different oriental spiritual teachings, and the image of the ocean of heart is mentioned several times in *Rigveda*. Again, the etymology of English *soul* relates it with the notion of 'lake', and the regular Russian word for excitement or thrill is *volnenie* (*волнение*), 'waving'. The metaphor is quite usual in Lithuanian tradition, too.

19. The Sleep of Death, the Bed of Grave. Death is equated to sleep all over the world from times immemorial. Lithuania and Maironis are not exceptions. Of special interest is the expression *kapų patalas* 'the bed of grave' because in Old Prussian the word *patalas* 'bed' is directly related with the name of the god of death, *Patolas*, and probably with the Sanskrit name of the underworld, *pātāla*.

20. The Deceased and Those Who Remember. The common feature of both death and sleep is oblivion. This presents an opportunity to relate Lithuanian verbs *mirti* 'to die' (*miršu* 'I am dying') and *miršti* 'to forget' (*miršu* 'I am forgetting'). Compare also Russian word for oblivion *zabytie* (*забытие*), 'out of being'. On the other hand, reminding, recollection, remembrance means resurrection, both metaphorically speaking of an individual and literally – of a nation.

21. The Years of Cuckoo. In folk beliefs, a cuckoo predicts the number of years left to live for the human being who hears it for the first time in spring. The same holds true in Maironis' poetry.

22. The Sun's Sap. In some of Maironis' verses, the sun in the evening is flowing, *plūsta*. Again, it is a thoroughly traditional notion, to begin with

the regular Lithuanian verb for the sunrise in the morning and the sun's way across the sky, *tekėti,* which also means 'to flow, stream, leak, seep'. The notion of the 'flowing sun' is also confirmed in folklore and in such hydronyms as *Saulotekis*, Old Prussian *Sultingen* and the like, which present a juxtaposition and even an amalgamation of the nouns *saulė* 'sun' and *sula* 'sap'.

23. The Sunrise and the Sunset. The sunrise, particularly the sunrise in spring, is connected with joy, happiness, and life. The personified rising sun smiles and laughs both in the tradition and in Maironis' poetry. Conversely, the sunset is connected with sadness: the personified setting sun grieves and weeps.

24. The Bath of Sun the Queen. Maironis mentions the bath of the personified sun in the evening as it sets into the sea and gives it a title of a queen. Well, the bath of the sun, both in the sea and in a bathhouse, is a known motive of Baltic mythology recorded in Lithuania since the sixteenth century. On other occasions, the sun is also a heavenly queen.

25. Stars the Heavenly Eyes. The stars in folklore are conceived as the eyes of heaven, of souls, of angels, of God and the like. In Maironis' lyrics, this traditional notion is also present.

26. The Diamond. On the other hand, both in folklore and in Maironis' poetry the stars are sometimes imagined as diamonds. Moreover, the poet once used the collocation *siela deimantinė*, 'the diamond soul'. The concept of the diamond mind will not be so unconceivable if we recall the concept of Buddhist *vajra*. The diamond, quite strangely, has similar connotations in Lithuania. The point is that while the appellative *deimantas*, 'diamond', is granted the same European origin as English *diamond* etc., that is not in the case of the hydronym *Deimantas* (related to *Deimė* etc.) and probably the compound personal name *Dei-mantas*, the first part of which can be related to *Dievas*, arch. *Deivas* 'God', and the second one with *manta*, *menta*, *mintis* 'mind, thought'.

27. The Gaze of Lightning. The gaze of human eyes may be compared to lightning and, vice versa, the lightning in mythology is sometimes conceived as a gaze of the thunder god.

28. The Lightning Giants. In one of his verses, Maironis calls the personified lightnings to be giants. This notion can also be found in the Baltic mythology and, for instance, in *Rigveda* (V.52.6, 13).

29. Swayed by Dreams. Maironis juxtaposes the Lithuanian. *sapnas* 'dream' and *supti* 'to sway', and he is not alone among poets in this respect. As it were, these words can be related even etymologically, on the Indo-European level (as also the Lithuanian *svajoti* 'to dream, daydream' is related to the English word *sway*).

30. The World as Dream. In some of Maironis' verses, there are hints of

the conception of the world as a dream. This metaphysical notion, widely known and elaborated in many mystical teachings, is also detected in some Lithuanian creation legends.

31. The Vast Earth. The formula 'vast earth' (along with 'high heaven') stressed in some of Maironis' verses is not only overly traditional but, in its Lithuanian form, *plati žemė*, strictly coincides with the Vedic *pṛthivī kṣam*.

32. The River of Time. Of course, time flows like a river. The metaphor is usual, thus also traditional, especially when the words in poetry are precisely the same as in folk proverbs.

33. You Will not Dam up the River. One of Maironis' famous verses begins with the line *Nebeužtvenksi upės bėgimo* 'You will not dam up the flowing river' and then it flickers with the images of storm, lightning, surging dawn, a demolished obstruction, a ruined wall and the like. All these images belong to the so-called principal myth of the fight between the thunder god and his chthonic adversary. One of its most ancient examples is presented in the Vedic Indra killing his adversary Vritra, which means 'obstacle, obstruction', and thereby letting the dammed waters flow. Maironis' verse even gives the impression of a quotation from antiquity of some four or five millennia.

34. The Maids' Blossoms. In some of his verses, Maironis uses a metaphor of flowering, blossoming youth, in particular that of a maiden. The metaphor is definitely traditional. Yet Maironis perhaps would not have used it as an expression of chasteness and purity had it occurred to him that the other no less traditional sense of the image was menstruation.

35. I Will Perish like Smoke. *Išnyksiu kaip dūmas, neblaškomas vėjo* 'I will perish like smoke not dispelled by the wind', begins one of Maironis' verses. Actually, this brings to mind the ancient way of detecting the posthumous destiny of the cremated deceased in ancient traditions that practiced cremation, Lithuania among them. If the smoke from the pyre goes directly to heaven, the deceased is considered to be saved, and, vice versa, if the smoke is dispelled horizontally, the deceased is doomed to perish. This same divination has survived until recent times, except that the smoke of the pyre has been replaced by the smoke of the candle extinguished near the deceased before the burial in the graveyard.

36. The Sacrifice of the Heart. The metaphor of sacrificed heart was well known in the Lithuanian tradition since the oldest writings up to the contemporary poetry, as well as all over the world. The case of Aztecs is worth mentioning here as an instructive example of what may become of the noblest image if it is taken literally, metaphor forgotten or neglected and replaced by overly zealous religious devotion.

37. The Calf's Prayer. There is one quite strange verse in Maironis' poetry in which a calf is taken to butchery and bellows plaintively for mercy on the

way. From the last strophe, it becomes clear that the calf is considered by the author to be an image of Lithuania. The identification of the ox and the tiller in Europe can be proved beginning with Ovid; it is also confirmed by the Lithuanian data, but the most striking association evoked by the verse is the ancient Iranian, Avestan 'Supplication of the Oxen Soul' (Yasna 29). In the Indian *Rigveda*, oxen and cows can represent the sacred language and sacred hymns. Notably, Maironis in his verse used not the regular word for 'ox', *jautis*, which is a Lithuanian innovation, but the archaic *veršis*, currently 'calf', which in Latvian (*vērsis*) still means 'ox, bull' and is akin to the corresponding Indo-Iranian words.

38. The Nemunas' Talk. In Maironis poetry, the Nemunas, the biggest river of Lithuania, talks. Paradoxically, the very name of the river etymologically means 'the mute', that is, 'the silent'. Actually, the German denomination of the Nemunas, *Memel*, is related to the similar Lithuanian appellative *memelis* with the same meaning. That is because its messages are secret, as, for instance, in divinations attested by Augustinus Rotundus in the second half of the sixteenth century: he mentioned *den Orakel des Niemen Flußes* 'the oracle of the Nemunas River'.

39. The Rivers of Songs. Other rivers in Maironis' poetry also speak and sing, as is usual in folklore. In its turn, the human speech and songs generally flow like rivers in Baltic phraseology and in many ancient poetic traditions, to begin with *Rigveda*.

40. The Divine Song. In the verse dedicated to the first song festival in Lithuania, Maironis stresses psychotherapic characteristics of folksongs and even their religious quality: they console people in their hardships and miseries, preserve Lithuanian identity through centuries, and lift human spirits. As in a proverb, *Daina dangun kopa ir žmogų su savim veda* 'The song ascends to heaven and leads the human along'. In some folktales, the singing people appear to be dear to God and get directly to heaven. Actually, this religious quality of the traditional song might serve as a semantic argument for the quite plausible etymological connection between the Lithuanian *daina* 'song' and Avestan *daēnā* 'spiritual lore, faith', as in the very denomination of the Mazdean faith, *daēnā māzdayasni*.

41. Keeping Vigil with Song. According to Maironis, the almost personified song used to keep vigil with people through history, when they were falling asleep oblivious to distress. The juxtaposition of waking and singing is indeed well known, since the traditional wake at the deceased is accompanied with singing, and this is perhaps not a coincidence, because already the Vedic rishis were used to keep wake 'with songs' (*matibhis*, *arkais* etc., see *Rigveda* II.23.6; V.44.14; VI.62.1; VII.9.6).

42. The Plaits of Songs. In Maironis' verses, as well as in the Baltic folk tradition and all over the world from times immemorial, songs, tales, and speech are described as plaited, spun, or entwined.

43. Silver and Golden Songs. Being spun, songs are characterized by Maironis as silver and golden. The characteristic is not altogether unusual: this same connection of sonorous sound and bright flickering light emerges in many Lithuanian roots as well as in Latin *argentum* 'silver' of the same root with *argūtus* 'bright', and 'sonorous, resounding', akin to the already mentioned Vedic *arka* 'flash of light, radiance' and 'song, chant, hymn of praise'. By the way, the English adjective *silver* can also describe voice.

44. The Textile of Songs. Moreover, Maironis puts his songs into a chest, and that is rather traditional: in folksongs, we find the image of a 'chest of songs' (*dainų skrynelė*). However, in domestic life a chest was a container for fabrics. That is a hint and it is not incidental: Maironis speaks of songs as being woven. Actually, the songs *are* fabrics, textile, all over the world from times immemorial (up to such a coincidence as Lithuanian *auda* 'fabric, textile' and *auda* 'song') as well as poetry, speech, and orations (cf. Latin *textus* ).

45. The Stanzas of Fancy. Maironis himself confesses that he weaves his fancies into stanzas. Moreover, the Lithuanian word for the stanza or the strophe – *posmas* – has arrived in poetics from textile technology and its original meaning was 'lock, bundle, tuft, strand (of threads, yarn)'.

46. Weaving the Gold of Dawn. Maironis not only uses the traditional metaphor of weaving poetry, but also uses it for his own poetry in a very traditional and archaic way – that is, by crossing warp of sense with the woof of sound. For instance, he writes: ***Aud****žiau nurimęs* ***auk****so svajones* / ***Aušr****os spinduliais* 'I weaved, being tranquil, my golden fancies / With the rays of dawn'. That is not only an admission of traditionally 'weaving poetry ', but also an example of classical consonance, alliteration. We have the same alliteration and in the same sequence in the folk riddle *Mėlynai* ***aus****ta, raudonai at****aus****ta,* ***auks****u išbarstyta* = ***aušr****a* 'Woven with blue, weft with red, bestrewn with gold = the dawn'.

47. The Heavenly Seer. In his verses, Maironis confesses, on a number of occasions, of the spiritual visions visiting him from above. That again can be regarded as quite a typical confession of a traditional poet. Actually, *Rigveda* is full of that kind of confessions. The traditional poet is a seer all over the world from time immemorial; with his inner sight, he *sees* the heavenly pictures and spiritual truths and then he weaves them into his verses. A considerable amount of material revealing the significance of the metaphor of the inner sight in our civilization is presented in this chapter. And finally, the attention is drawn to one very meaningful coincidence: one of the possible forms of the *nomen agentis* derived from Lithuanian verb *matyti* 'to see' would be **mačius*

(confirmed by negative *nemačius* 'unseeing, blind' and also 'fiend'), the diminutive of which, **mačiulis*, amounts to the surname of the poet famous by his pseudonym Maironis – that is, Jonas *Mačiulis*.