

G I E D R I U S S U B A Č I U S

The Author of *A System of Plants*: Jurgis Ambraziejus Pabrėža (1771–1849)

At the beginning of the 19th century, Jurgis Ambraziejus Pabrėža (1771–1849) was one of the most prolific Lithuanian authors from the Lithuanian Lowland region (*Samogitia*, *Žemaitija*, it is the Western and Northwestern part of today's Lithuania). For about a half of a century Pabrėža was writing religious (mostly Catholic sermons) as well as scientific (first of all botanical and medical treatises) texts.

Pabrėža graduated from Kretinga School in Lithuanian Lowlands, then in 1791–1794 he studied medicine, botany, chemistry, law, history, and theology at Vilnius University. In 1794–1796, he was a student at Varniai Catholic Seminary and became a Catholic priest in 1796. In 1816, he entered Kretinga Bernardines (Franciscan Observants) Monastery and stayed there till death. All his major works were produced while in Kretinga.

Being a Franciscan monk with no means he was not able to print any of his twenty or so voluminous manuscripts. Posthumous publications of his writings were usually prepared by others in a different orthography than his own (for instance, *This Examine of Consciousness* [*Parkratima tąn Saužines parasze Kunegas Ęmbraziejus Pabrieža, Bernadinas Kretingos klosztoriaus Metusi 1849* (Tilžė, 1869)]). So the book *A System of Plants* (*Tayslós Augimyyinis* or *Taislius augyminis* in Standard Lithuanian) in three volumes today is the very first publication of an entire original Pabrėža's manuscript.

A System of Plants is no doubt the major and the most significant work by Pabrėža. The manuscript contains 1042 pages (LXII pages of "Introduction" and 980 pages of the main text; in folio). *A System of Plants* was completed in about 8 years (1835–1843), yet it was also preceded by long years of research and transitional compilation of auxiliary manuscripts (cf. *Alphabetic List of Lowland–Latin Words* [*Sryje Balsenyyny, Biiluu Žemayt–Lotinyyniu*, 1834; manuscript kept in Nature Research Centre, Palace of Verkiai]) and *Systemic Names of Plants* [*Wardaa tayslyynee Augimiu*, 1834; manuscript kept in Martynas Mažvydas National Library of Lithuania, f. 124 – 4]). *A System of Plants* deserves fame of one of the very first significant secular scientific works written in Lithuanian in the nineteenth century. The manuscript is preserved at Martynas Mažvydas National Library of Lithuania and was included in the Lithuanian register of heritage protected by UNESCO. Due to Pabrėža's botanical treatises, he is considered "a father" of Lithuanian botany, his various Lithuanian botanical neologisms have penetrated special dictionaries and are still current.

Even though Pabrėža created the tradition of Lithuanian botany, he did not compose his texts in what we term today the Standard Lithuanian Language. Of course, it was because he was creating *before* the modern Standard Lithuanian emerged in approximately 1880s. But his texts are difficult to read for Lithuanians today because of significant dialect difference: Standard Lithuanian is based on a Western variety of the Lithuanian Highland dialects, and

Pabrėža used his own native Lithuanian Lowland dialect (*Samogitian, Žemaitian*). To argue his case, Pabrėža contemplated it was the best to write the way our “reverent parents and neighbors speak” and “to follow our speech” (Jurgis Pabrėža: Letter of 20 March 1835 to Jonas Krizostomas Gintila from Kretinga to Saint Petersburg; ed. by K. Sendzikas, *Mūsų Senovė* 2[3(8)], 1938, 493–495). Pabrėža was born in the village of Večiai in the farthest northwestern corner of the Lithuanian Lowlands, which was as distant topographically and linguistically from the Highland dialects as one can imagine for those times.

Having made his dialect choice Pabrėža also developed orthography of his own. Sometime between 1799 and 1831, he shaped and used his original orthography adjusted to his native dialect including specific idiosyncrasies that make his writing different out of all other contemporaries. For instance, Pabrėža included diacritical marks on the letters <é> and <ó> to signify sounds known only from the Lowland dialects (absent from the Highland ones): they indicated intermediate vowels between [i] and [e] ([ɛ]), and between [u] and [o] ([ɔ]) respectively. He also chose a specific marking of diphthongs that were characteristic only of the northern section of the Lowland dialect: <yi> ([ɛi]) and <ou> ([ɔu]).

Yet Pabrėža was not satisfied with his achievements. He would consider getting involved in botanical research even more during his decision making years (about 1827–1831). And then he needed precise tools for his work. He was not happy with the orthography he had created so far, so he decided to modify it, to develop into a more precise tool to express his phonetical particularities. Thus, along with the maturing of his scholarly botanical ideas, he was growing as a linguistic thinker.

Pabrėža set out to express long vowels and the vowels under the particular Lowland accents in double letters: <aa>, <ee>, <ii>, <yy>, <oo>, <óó>, <uu>. For example: *skob-taa-iilinkmióóuts* ‘bent at an angle’, *pyrsztneerwee* ‘finger nerves’, *pyylkjooris* ‘light green’, *sódrুক্তints* ‘thickened’ (*Sryje Balsenyyny, Biiluu Žemayt–Lotinyyniu*, 1834: 360, 326, 324, 360). None of these double characters were present in Pabrėža’s texts before 1831. Another new idiosyncrasy after 1831 was his digraphs <ćz> and <śz> to denote the palatalized affricate [ch’] and the consonant [sh’]. For instance: *ózwercćzio* ‘in closing (one)’ (title p.), *sóplieeśzítasis* ‘(the one that is) torn down’ (*Waardaa tayslyynee Augimiu*, 1834: 20). Such features are obvious throughout the entire text of *A System of Plants*, published in this edition, like in this sentence: “**Łaapaa**: žemesnyijy tryka**ątee**, sodoy **śzyr**diety **yysz**pliesty kóp-turóuty: wyr**śz**esnyijy byszki **maa**žesny, smaylinty: wysóauksztiausyijy dzydóuty yr **liig**maly: **wyysy** dažkart birólingelóuty, óudygótiety” (p. 260_{10–13}). So, after 1831, especially in his numerous botanical treatises, Pabrėža adhered to his “double vowel” and “double palatal consonant” way of spelling. One can immediately identify Pabrėža’s standard orthography by these two unique types of double letters.

It was more than just two different orthographies that he invented (one for his religious texts, another for scholarly writings, textbooks, and alike). Pabrėža would also create his own standard language. He termed his model of standard spelling “the Coastal Lowland Orthography,” and his standard language “the Coastal Lowland Language” (A Little Beam Announcing the Chart of Diseases [*Promyzyek Zwiastujqcy Tablicę Chorób*, 1827; manuscript kept in Martynas Mažvydas National Library of Lithuania, f. 124–2], 4v). Once on his way of the auxiliary preparation work needed for his *System of Plants*, Pabrėža set his proposed standard (Lowland) language. He claimed he wrote “for the real Lowlanders, who do not intermix any language of the Highlanders,” he penned “in the genuine language of the Lowlanders,” and he created his *System of Plants* for the Lowlanders and not for the Highlanders, since the Highlanders could have found much better writers than him (*Tayslós Augimyynis*, 1843: V).

Pabrėža preferred linguistic separation from the Highlanders: “Let Lithuania be Lithuania, let the mixed [people] be mixed, and let the Lowlanders be the Lowlanders” (Jurgis Pabrėža: Letter of 9 October 1838 to Jonas Krizostomas Gintila from Kretinga to Saint Petersburg, 9 Oct. 1838; ed. by K. Sendzikas, *Mūsų Senovė* 2[4(9)], 1939, 663). He meant that the Lowlanders could have a separate standard of their own.

Pabrėža was not the only one who worked on his Coastal Lowland Language; he had attracted some helpers/followers into his project as well. For instance, Simon Gross composed a manuscript grammar with a vocabulary corresponding to Pabrėža’s ideas of orthography and dialect use (1835), and Juozapas Butavičius rewrote the manuscript of Lithuanian Lowland History by Simonas Daukantas of over 1100 pages (1835) to comply to Pabrėža’s orthography. Thus, Pabrėža’s model for a standard language held strong premises for influencing the Lithuanian Lowlands’ cultural milieu at the time: his own *System of Plants*, Grammar and Vocabulary by Gross, and Lithuanian Lowland History rewritten by Butavičius: no comparable endeavors were known on such a scale in the Lithuanian Lowlands. Yet nonetheless the model of Pabrėža’s standard language achieved no significant impact: all these volumes composed for that purpose never saw a printer’s press. Next generations of Lowlanders forgot the attempts of Pabrėža and his followers, and some decades later, from 1880s on, they began accepting the new more prestigious modern Standard Lithuanian that was based on a Highland dialect and not on any dialect of their own.

All in all, Pabrėža was not only a founding figure in Lithuanian botany; he was also an intensive (even if unsuccessful) planner of his Coastal Lowland (Standard) Language and orthography.