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Regional Identity and Multiculturalism: the Baltic Germans of Latgale in the Early 20th Century Latvian Literature

Alina Romanovska alina.romanovska@du.lv

*Daugavpils University, Institute of the Humanities and Social Sciences,
Lithuania*

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7048-4352>

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Abstract: In the studies of Latvian culture and history, there is a number of investigations dedicated to the influence of Baltic German culture on Latvian culture. Hence the Latgale region was not given due attention in this regard. The role of the Baltic Germans in this region is peculiar due to its specific history, and it is important to study how the Baltic German culture influences the multicultural identity of Latgale. A project of the Latvian Science Council *The Baltic Germans of Latgale in the context of socio-ethnic relations from the 17th until the beginning of the 20th century (2020–2021)* is devoted to this topic. One of the tasks of the project is the analysis of the image of the Baltic Germans in fiction. In the framework of the research, the works written in the Latvian literary language, the action of which is set in Latgale, are analysed. The focus is on fictional works about Latgale written by two authors – Antons Austrīņš (1884–1934) and Ādolfs Ers (1885–1945) – in the first and second decades of the 20th century. The said writers are the first currently distinguished authors narrating in the Latvian literary language, who describe Latgale in a number of their works. Compared to other nationalities (Poles, Russians, Jews), the Baltic Germans are mentioned minimally in their works; moreover, it is a commonplace that in some cases protagonist's belonging to German descent is not mentioned, which can only be inferred. Although the Baltic Germans belong to the Latgale past, their culture is imperceptibly and harmoniously apparent in Latgale, i.e. it is evident in the castles (castle ruins) and manors as well as in the use of Germanisms by the Baltic Germans, it has determined the location of the Latgale cities and influenced the worldview.

Keywords: regional identity, multiculturalism, Latgale, Baltic Germans, Latvian literature.

Introduction

Intercultural communication has been one of the most pressing, complex and controversial topics over the centuries. Cultural migration/mobility, as viewed from different perspectives and situations, is treated both positively (as a mutually enriching process) and negatively (as the suppression of culture). Foreign culture tends to be both intimidating (it is a commonplace that in some cases protagonist's belonging to German descent is not mentioned) and attractive (for the unknown arouses interest). In Latvia, which, as a result of various cultural and historical processes, has developed as a multicultural, though a small country, the idea of preserving national culture is especially relevant. The Minister

of Culture of the Republic of Latvia Helena Demakova pointed out that multiculturalism is in stark contrast to the idea of a national state. However, the future of Latvia is possible only when based on the uniting ideas – the Latvian language and national symbols (Demakova, 2008). There is also a positive assessment of multiculturalism, to give an example, ethnologist I. Apine (et al., 2001, pp. 100–103) claims that democratic intercultural communication is the most successful political solution. S. Greenblatt (2010, p. 5), in his work *Cultural Mobility: a Manifesto*, with reference to Michel de Montaigne, considers cultural migration as a process enriching national cultures; in turn, cultures that do not experience it are stable and develop slowly and dully.

In contemporary Latvian humanities and social sciences, much attention is paid to the interaction of cultures; attempts are being made to form an analytical and neutral view. The influence of German culture on Latvian culture was that of the earliest, starting with the invasion of the Crusaders into the territory of Latvia. There are numerous studies of the history, culture, and literature of the Baltic Germans in Latvian and foreign studies (M. Grudule, B. Kalnačs, Z. Gūtmane, J. Vērdiņa I. Daukste-Silasproģe, A. Wilhelmi, D. Lele-Rozentale, R. Cerūzis, D. Brugis, P. A. Jezjorskis, etc.)

The role of the Baltic Germans in Latgale is different from the rest of Latvia because Polish, Jewish and Russian cultures were also significant here. These and other ethnic cultures still form the multicultural space of Latgale. Studies of the “German factor” on the territory of Latgale are fragmentary. In order to understand the place of German culture in the formation of Latgale identity from the 17th century to the present day, a project *The Baltic Germans of Latgale in the context of socio-ethnic relations from the 17th till the beginning of the 20th century* (2020–2021) of the Latvian Science Council is launched, in the framework of which research is carried out with the aim to determine the place of the German community in the multicultural environment of Latgale in a diachronic and synchronic perspective based on certain methodological principles, analysis of various sources (acts, collection of law, ego documents, folklore, fiction texts etc.) and introducing new diverse sources into the scientific circulation. One of the tasks of the project is the analysis of the image of the Baltic German in fiction. In the framework of the present research, the works written in the Latvian literary language wherein the action is set in Latgale will be analysed. These works present a peculiar view on Latgale – it is a view from the outwards, created by authors who were not born in the Latgale region, hence get acquainted with it in their adolescence, and are affectionate by and eager to learn its peculiarities. The focus is on fictional works about Latgale written in the first and second decades of the 20th century by two authors, Austriņš (1884–1934) and Erss (1885–1945). The said writers are the first currently known authors narrating in the Latvian literary language describing Latgale in a number of their works.

The idea of an American literary theorist Walter Benn Michaels who stated that literature is a part of culture is a great contribution to the

present research (Michaels, 1987, pp. 23–24). The literary text was considered the evidence of the century, which reflects significant ideas of its time (Korolova et al., 2016, p. 194) writes, “fiction is an indicator and creator of spiritual search. Depicting their characters’ life process in a particular historical period, writers reproduce their own subjective and a nation’s collective understanding of time portrayed from a contemporary perspective, subordinating narrative to certain artistic conceptions. In this respect, fiction becomes an extremely important research object”. The findings of imagology, which is getting especially relevant nowadays when national and ethnic identity issues are getting escalated (Leerssen, 2018, p. 9), were used in the study to analyze the mutual perception of the Baltic Germans and other nationalities as well as to analyze the image of the Baltic Germans inhabiting Latgale as created in Latvian literature and to analyse preconditions for its formation. Researchers point out that stereotypes and ethnotypes are part of a usually dormant, even latent repertoire of possible mental attitudes (Leerssen, 2018, p. 11). A fictional text provides a subjective worldview and is subject to a certain artistic task; however, the images and events reflect the author’s perception of the world and the collective perception and the ideas formed in it. This, in turn, is also influenced by cultural memory mechanisms. In a fiction text, any reference to a character’s belonging to a particular nationality is semantically valuable; moreover, it is a common thing that ethnicity is the key to the protagonist’s behaviour and personal traits (Leerssen, 2000, p. 269).

Critics have pointed out that Austriņš and Erss looked at Latgalians from the outwards, from a perspective of a non-Latgalian. However, it is possible that the peculiarities of the life of Latgale inhabitants (including the Baltic Germans) are more visible from the outside (Salceviča, 1995, p. 12). Taking into account that a nation is most characteristically manifested itself in precisely those aspects in which it is most different from others (Leerssen, 2018, pp. 22–23), the depiction of the Baltic German of Latgale provided by Latvian authors can reveal important details in the collective image of the Latgalian Baltic Germans and can be successfully analyzed as a hetero-image through the application of the methodology proposed by imagology.

1. Historical, cultural and literary preconditions for the Baltic German image formation

In order to understand the specifics of the Latgalian Baltic German image in the analyzed texts, it is necessary to look at the peculiarities of Latgalian culture and history, to define the peculiarities of the time whereby the analyzed texts were created as well as to define the authors’ personality traits. Researchers believe that Latgalian regionalism is distinguished from the local peculiarities of some places in Courland and Vidzeme, as Latgale has a distinct historical, religious and ethnic composition specificity alongside its language (Apine, Volkovs, 1998, p. 25). Latgale is a cultural and historical region in the eastern part of Latvia. The territorial

identity of present-day Latgale can be traced back to the principality of Jersika at the turn of the 12th and 13th centuries, which in the Latin texts is called Lethia, but in the old Russian records, Lotigol. The territory inhabited by Latgalians, Letija, gave its name to the whole of Latvia. As a result of the invasion of German crusaders, Latgalian lands in the 13th–14th centuries were divided between the Livonian Order and the Archdiocese of Riga. After the Livonian War (1558–1583), the Latgalian lands became part of the Polish-Lithuanian commonwealth. In 1629 after the Polish-Swedish War (1600–1629), the Truce of Altmark was signed. According to the treaty, Latgale (the Inflanty Voivodeship) was separated from Vidzeme, which remained under Swedish rule. In 1772 after the first partition of Poland, Latgale became part of the Russian Empire. Initially, it was added to the principality of Pleskava, then to the principality of Vitebsk, that is, “Latgale was part of other provinces than Vidzeme and Courland, and until 1905–1906 it was not perceived as truly Latvian land by the inhabitants of Vidzeme and Courland” (Kursīte, 2005, p. 17). When the state of Latvia was formed in 1918, Latgale was recognized as a part of a new state. This promoted the strengthening of Latvian interest and became a focus in the regionalization of Latgale, as the difference between Latgale and the rest of the territory of Latvia was spotted in fiction, science fiction and official narrative. The deep regionalization of Latgale, marked in the first decades of the 20th century, is still relevant today.

Under the influence of historical processes, the Baltic German culture in Latgale also developed peculiarly, distinguished from the rest of Latvia. When Latgale belonged to the Polish-Lithuanian commonwealth, this state stood out with a distinctly multicultural character. In addition to the ethnic indigenous peoples of Latgale (Latgalians), Germans, Poles, Lithuanians and immigrant Russian Old Believers, and Ruthenians, who had arrived at the area mainly from Belarusian lands, also lived in the Inflanty Voivodeship (Jezjorskis, 2019, p. 180). Ethnic diversity also influenced the local nobility, most of whom were noble kins of German origin who had settled here at the end of the Middle Ages or later moved to Latgale from neighbouring Courland (Dybaś et al., 2018, p. 9).

When Latgale was part of the Polish-Lithuanian commonwealth, the local nobility was dominated by representatives of the old Livonian noble families of German origin (Dybaś, 2003, p. 245). At the turn of the 19th century, most of them were determined to convert to Catholicism (except for the von Korffs, who remained faithful to Lutheranism and German cultural traditions). In this way, they got closer to the royal court – acquired patrons from among the wealthiest and most influential kins of the Polish-Lithuanian commonwealth and obtained impressive landholdings, getting closer to the Polish-Lithuanian commonwealth elite (Jezjorskis, 2019, pp. 180–184.) It was clear to the landowners of Latgale in the 19th century that “the Orthodox and Old Believers are Russians, while the Catholic Church is the Polish church” (Stafecka, 2004, pp. 224–225). The oldest monument of Latgalian writings is the

Gospel translation *Evangelia toto anno 1753* .*Gospels for the whole year 1753*) dated 1753. The book of songs, prayers, catechism and gospel *Naboženstvo ku czci chvale boga w troycy s.jedynego (Worship in Honor of the Holy Trinity)* (1771), compiled by the Catholic clergyman and missionary Michael Roth, the founder of Latgalian secular literature, is also believed to have been translated from Polish. In the first collection of Latgalian spiritual poetry, which has survived from 1801 under the influence of the Polish tradition, all texts are written in the syllabic verse system, similarly to the later works. The conversion to Catholicism implied that the Baltic Germans were often perceived as Poles from the point of view of the locals. F. Kemps (1910, p. 38) writes: “Faith, not language, according to Latgalians, determines a person’s belonging to one or another nationality.” However, the social situation still determined the differences between the Baltic Germans of Latgale, who were primarily noble, and the local Latgalians, mainly peasants. During the Russian Empire, the Baltic Germans were also strongly influenced by Russian culture. Thus, due to cultural migration and the political and economic condition, the situation of the Baltic Germans and the peculiarities of German culture in Latgale changed many times.

The first decades of the 20th century is a very important time in forming Latvia’s national and regional identity. This is the period when, in the context of Latvian culture, for the first time in history, the Latgale region begins to be actualized with its specific cultural and historical peculiarities, which are not typical for other inhabited territories of Latvians. The first publicist articles and fiction works created during this time provide a basis for subsequent attitude towards the Latgale region, determine the perception of Latgalian regional identity and shape both the hetero-image and the auto-image of Latgalian residents. Foreign, incomprehensible and untouched by historical changes, the Latgale region appears as a symbol of mystery in the official cultural discourse. In fiction, the interest in Latvia is already emerging in the first decade of the 20th century; thus, the region becomes the object of increased attention of the intelligentsia. The works of individual authors about Latgale mostly get a rather critical evaluation, as, according to Latvian critics, this region is undeservedly idealized (Sudrabkalns, 1919, p. 22; Virza, 1930, p. 121; Paegle, 1920, p. 59).

One of the first writers who offered the Latvians an image of Latgale was Austriņš, who in 1909 wrote the first stories about Latgale proclaiming this region space for the revival of the Latvian spirit. Romanovska (2019, p. 52) points out that Austriņš associated this region with the possibility of reviving the national idea. It preserved the untouched past; people here lived in harmony with nature and cyclical run of time. A little later, Erss addresses the descriptions of Latgale. Both writers have similar fates. After the revolution of 1905, they, fearing repression, as both participated in the revolution, went on the run, which brought them to Latgale. Austriņš first comes to Latgale in 1909 and Erss in 1911. The specificity of the image of Latgale is primarily determined by both writers’ first positive experience in Latgale – fleeing persecution,

they were forced to live on someone else's passports and constantly feel fear. They find the place of peaceful asylum in Latgale, being welcomed, allowed to travel freely throughout the land of Mara, thus gaining inner harmony and peace. It should be noted that both authors studied both the history and culture of Latgale in depth. They collected language data (place names, personal names, set expressions), travelled and got acquainted with people, and delved into the Latgalian culture formation processes. Researchers note that their works provide rich ethnographic material on Latgale (Salceviča, 1995, pp. 9–13).

2. Antons Austrīņš's and Ādolfs Erss' Baltic Germans of Latgale

Austrīņš created many stories about Latgale, which comprise a collection of sketches *Māras zemē (In the Land of Mara)* (1919) and *Neievērotie (Neglected)* (1931) as well as portrayed Latgale in verse. The peculiarities of the artistic concept determine the fact that the Baltic Germans / Germans are hardly ever mentioned in Austrīņš's works. This is related to the time of action in his stories, which most commonly coincides with Austrīņš's visit to Latgale – he creates his stories mainly as travelogues from an autobiographical perspective. The fact that Austrīņš mentions German culture minimally when depicting Latgale at the beginning of the 20th century suggests that Germans were not significant to the image of Latgale at that time. Germans and their culture appear fragmentary, mentioning historical contexts or cultural heritage sites. In the portrayal of Latgale by Austrīņš, two temporal dimensions are foregrounded: the beginning of the 20th century Latgale and old mythological Latgale. These two-time dimensions form a unified image of Latgale, whereby Catholicism harmoniously fits in. Latgale is characterized by mythological rather than historical time. However, one can observe some historical imprints, where the image of the Baltic German culture also appears.

Noteworthy, Germans are perceived as invaders against other nations (Poles, Russians), while Latgale is treated as a land that has suffered a lot from invaders. This peculiarity shapes the contemplative and pity image of Latgale at the beginning of the 20th century: Latgalians are a nation that has suffered a lot over the centuries and is relatively poor and oppressed. The second peculiarity in the image of Latgale, once determined by the Germans, is observed in the landscape of Latgale, namely, castles (or castle ruins) and manors. Volkenberg Castle stands out among them because it is located next to the largest lake in Latgale, rising high in the clouds and seen from a long distance. Volkenberg castle ruins keep many secrets. It also lies in the mythological past: locals know different legends about it, but nothing concrete to be said about its history or former inhabitants. However, it is remarkable that the name of the castle is mentioned following the German (Volkenberg), not Latvian (Mākonkalns) tradition. Thus, Austrīņš shows that the

influence of German culture on the identity of the Latgale region at the beginning of the 20th century has been preserved. This is also justified by some germanisms expressed in the language of the local population. However, it should be noted that compared to Polonisms and Ruscisms, their number is much less. It is significant that when travelling around Latgale, Austrinš's autobiographical hero pays great attention to its ethnic composition, giving special attention to the local Latgalians, Jews and Russian Old Believers, but meets no Germans. Thus, it can be concluded that in Austrinš's works about Latgale, the image of a German is formed only through the prism of the Baltic Germans cultural heritage. Moreover, this cultural heritage is not defined as belonging to German culture; it has become an integral part of Latgalian culture and landscape and is perceived as one's own rather than belonging to other foreign cultures.

Latgale occupies an important place in Erss' literary euvre – both poetry and prose works are dedicated to it (quantitatively, it accounts for a third of all his works). These are the collections of stories *Latgales stāsti* (*Latgale Stories*) (1926) and *Vecā Latgale*, (*Old Latgale*) (1931), novels *Muižnieki* (*Manors*) (1931), *Krusts ceļmalā* (*Cross on the Roadside*) (1938), *Zemes balsis* (*Earth Voices*) (1939), as well as some other stories and poems included in the collections. Latgale attracts Erss by signs of antiquity preserved here. While Austrinš depicts Latgale during his travel, emphasizing specific features characteristic of this region, Erss is interested in the course of historical events; therefore, he depicts Latgalian antiquity – the life of knights and monks fates, love affairs. Erss draws attention to extraordinary, unique phenomena; therefore, he is attracted by Latgalian castles and estates in the depiction of which characteristic features of Edgar Poe's prose appear – mysticism and mystery. Erss' remarks (Erss, n.d., 118617) show that at the beginning of the 20th century, he sees signs of a spiritual crisis in Europe, while he perceives Latgale as a place where spirituality has been preserved, as not being affected by historical development. Although Erss has depicted Latgale since the invasion of the Crusaders, the Baltic Germans are hardly ever mentioned in his works. Sometimes it is possible to conclude that the character has Baltic German roots; hence, their nationality is neither mentioned nor emphasized. It should be noted that, unlike the Germans, Erss highlights the nationalities of other Latgale residents (mainly Latgalians, Poles, Russians, Jews), describing in detail their way of life, thus creating ethnographic diversity in Latgale. This feature justifies that the Baltics Germans / Germans in the world model created by Erss are not a nationality that forms the ethnographic peculiarity of Latgale.

In Erss' artistic conception, only certain influential personalities are emphasized amongst the Baltic Germans of Latgale, and mainly these are actual historical figures such as von Borch, von Hylzen/Eckeln, Plater, von Zyberk/Syberg, representatives of the von Manteuffel family. In the publicist articles, Erss emphasizes that nobility (which was formed by Poles of German origin) did not benefit the development of Latgale, except for certain personalities. He highlights Gustav Manteifel, whose

works, particularly *Inflantu zemes laika grāmota aba kalenders* (1862–1871), are the only monument to the Latgalian nobility (Erss, 1934). Such Erss' position in relation to all nobles (including the Baltic Germans) is also expressed in his stories and a novel about Latgale, in which the noblemen (both Polish and German) are not attested to any special place.

While Austrīņš sees the spirituality preserved in Latgale, which can become the basis for the spiritual renewal of Latvian and European society, Erss, depicting Latgale over several centuries, still observes changes in the image of Latgale. The idyllic past of Latgale is depicted in Erss' works until roughly the end of the 16th century, when the Polish influence became stronger. The story *Bruņinieka stāsts Latgales senlaikos* (*The Knight's Story in the Ancient Times of Latgale*) depicts the life of knights in Latgale. The exact time of the action cannot be identified; hence it could be the 13th–14th century. It is evident that we are talking about crusader knights of German descent; however, German nationality is not mentioned in this story. The story is narrated from the knight's point of view, and it adds to the story some mystery and fabulousness. Given that the story was written at the beginning of the 20th century, it sounds like a parody of a knight's novel, or at least an irony about the subject of knights.

However, next to the adventurous unclear plotline and lyrical flashbacks, depictions of the Latgale landscape appear in many scenes. One of the brightest features of the Latgalian landscape is Volkenberg Castle, which is gloomy and mysterious and resembles a sunken castle of fables. The main character is an example of the ideal image of a knight; he is generous and brave, finds a lady of his heart who dies prematurely, and the knight goes on his way again. The story creates a positive image of a knight and an idyllic narration about the times when the Brothers of the Order ruled the territory of Latgale. Although some small battles are mentioned, they fit harmoniously into the overall idyllic plot. The life of the knights of the Livonian Order and their noble relations are also unequivocally positive. The overall idyllic atmosphere is enhanced by the image of Rozalija, a daughter of a commander from Germany who is remarkably beautiful and noble. The folk loved her for kind-heartedness.

An idealized depiction of Latgalian old times also appears in some other Erss' works. In the novel *Muižnieki*, the old Polish pan Skuļteckis idyllically recalls the old times when a count ruled the manor: "Should only you know what life it was! Old Grand Duke – it was such a man! He himself was a Protestant and loved the folk. He was a count, but forbade himself to be called a count..." (Erss, 1990, p. 50). This happy life lasted until "the young lord married a Catholic and converted himself to Catholicism" (Erss, 1990, p. 51). The narrator says that refined manners were introduced at this time; hence, spirituality disappeared. Although the novel does not explicitly mention the old count's German origin, one can infer it was aware of the key events in the history of Latgale. Erss idyllically depicts the old count, hence does not mention the influence of German culture on the cultural environment of Latgale. In turn,

the fact that the Count respected the local people and even spoke the language of the folk is considered very favourable. Thus, the mutual enrichment of communication between German and Latgalian cultures is acknowledged, whereby neither of the cultures is inferior.

The Baltic Germans and their culture in Latgale, although little known, are respected by both the locals and the Polish nobles. The main character of the novel *Muižnieki* Stefans Skulteckis, searching for a wife, is determined that she should be both beautiful and highborn – at least a baroness, but there are none in Latgale. The encirclement of German wives in the 19th century implied a sharper social ascendance for Latvians and the stabilisation of their status (Zelča, 2002, p. 25). A similar conclusion can also be drawn by analyzing the image of the Baltic Germans in Erss' works where Poles or poleonized Lithuanians or Latvians are eager to marry German women. An important indication is that such German/ Baltic German women are not found in Latgale.

The image of a local polonized Baltic German women is depicted as somewhat controversial. The story *Račinska mīlestības noslēpums* (*The Secret of Racinsky's Love*) describes Count Plater's daughters. The main character should marry one of them. Examining these young girls, the potential groom compares them to horses. They look healthy, are also educated but are neither feminine nor beautiful.

On the contrary, they are masculine and robust and resemble their father, Count Plater, who "ate three servings of meat, drank alcohol, and ... was able to dance the mazurka for half an hour" (Erss, 1995, p. 78). The descendants of Latgalian Germans have been affected by unpleasant changes. In turn, the image of Vidzeme Baltic Germans, although not described in detail, is contrasted with the Latgalian Baltic Germans as much finer.

In general, Erss' works draw a positive attitude towards German culture, and it is associated with intelligence and good education. The home teachers of the children of the Polish counts are French and German, but when they grow up, it is prestigious to get an education in the "German land". However, this nuanced and subtle part of German culture is not found in Latgale, and regretfully, it can only be exported from other regions.

In the worldview created by Erss' works, Latgaian Baltic Germans are a past phenomenon. They are not present in 20th century Latgale. Once positive, the image of a German has changed, as has the whole world, which is increasingly losing spirituality. The quantitative decline of the German Baltics in Latgale and the change in their overall image were facilitated by Polonization and acceptance of Catholicism, when many false nobles appeared, which led to the total decline of the nobility. The presence of German culture in Latgale is justified by the castles (castle ruins) and manors, which are observed in the landscape of Latgale. Erss mentions and chooses many well-known Latgalian castles and manors as settings for his stories and novels, including Volkenberg, Rozitene, Ludza, Dinaburg Castle, Ridega, Beļava, Balvi Manor, etc. However, it is never mentioned that the original owners and builders of these places were

Germans. They have become an integral part of the Latgalian landscape, the origin of which is not particularly important. Although the Baltic Germans are present minimally in the 20th century Latgalian landscape created by Erss, Germanisms can also be observed in his characters' speech, such as Fest, Gatter, Gevel, Winkel, Kaplog (Kappfenster) and others, which are much less common than Russianism and Polishism. Thus, although the traces of German culture are not emphasized, they are invisibly present and shape the image of Latgale and the identity of Latgale.

Conclusion

The research on the image of Baltic Germans of Latgale is part of the Latgale identity studies. It reflects the overall trend to pay more attention to local and regional identity when there is an eagerness at the group and individual level to preserve a sense of belonging and social integration due to a lack of stability (Eriksen, 2010, pp. 307–326). The identity studies of Latgale as a distinctly multicultural region, which culture has been formed over several centuries by representatives of different nationalities, are particularly topical nowadays as they demonstrate how different cultures, dominating in Latgale at the time, have interacted over the centuries and nowadays shape the regional identity of Latgale, whereby representatives of different nationalities coexist harmoniously.

Applying the findings of the imagology and regional studies, as well as investigations on the history of the Baltic Germans in Latgale, and analyzing the poetry and prose works of Latgale by two Latvian authors – Erss and Austriņš – the features of the Baltic German image were identified, which provides for better understanding of Latgalian identity, i.e. analyzing others provides for understanding oneself. The view provided by both authors on the Baltic Germans in Latgale and the role of their culture in Latgale is, to a known extent, similar. It is justified by the similar life experience of both writers when discovering Latgale, by the time of writing, and by the narrative perspective, namely, an outside perspective an attempt to conceptualize the identity of Latgale from the point of view of the inhabitants of another Latvian region. Austriņš's depictions of Latgale are dominated by mythological time. In his understanding, Latgale can turn a place of the rebirth of Latvian spirituality. Erss creates a two-part time structure in depicting Latgale – the old, idealized past and the present, subject to change. Remarkably, the boundary between these two-time dimensions is directly related to the loss of the dominant position of German culture, i.e. the harmonious old times end when local German nobles move into Catholicism and succumb to Polonisation.

Both Austriņš and Erss portray the Baltic Germans very rarely. Sometimes it is possible to conclude that a given character has Baltic German roots; however, their nationality is not stated. In contrast to Germans, the nationalities of other inhabitants of Latgale (mainly Latgalians, Poles, Russians and Jews) are favourably depicted by both

writers, describing in detail the peculiarities of their lifestyle. The Germans of Latgale in the texts of Austriņš and Erss are essentially a phenomenon of the past. In the 20th century Latgale they are not present.

G. F. Stender (1789, p. 40) points out in 1789 that the word “German” not merely stands for belonging to a certain nationality but is also associated with the precious and valuable. This attitude is also implicitly read in Erss’ works when it comes to the pre-polonisation period or to Germans who do not reside in Latgale. The German, in this case, is associated with education and belonging to a higher social class and beauty and subtlety when it comes to women. Under the influence of Polonisation, the once positive image of the Baltic Germans of Latgale has changed, just as the whole world has changed, increasingly losing spirituality. In the works of Austriņš, Germans are perceived as invaders against other nations (Poles, Russians), while Latgale is treated as a land that has suffered a lot from invaders. This peculiarity creates the contemplative and pity sad image of Latgale at the beginning of the 20th century: Latgalians are a nation that has suffered much over the centuries, relatively poor and oppressed.

Austriņš and Erss show that Baltic German culture is blatantly present in Latgale at the beginning of the 20th century. It shapes the image of Latgale and the identity of Latgale, and it has become a harmonious component of Latgalian identity, which is not emphasized, hence still existent. The evidence of this is both the castles (or castle ruins) and manors preserved in the landscape of Latgale, the creators and original owners of which were Germans, and these are relatively few Germanisms found in people’s language.

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