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## Word and Life: Marija Pečkauskaitė as a Writer, Translator and Educator

### Summary

The present article aims to discuss the impact a word can have on a person's life choices and aspirations. The life of Marija Pečkauskaitė, Lithuanian writer, translator and educator, can be an example. Coming from a family of impoverished Lithuanian nobility, Marija Pečkauskaitė (1877–1930), the pen name Šatrijos Ragana ('The Witch of Mount Šatrija') was brought up in the spirit of Polish culture at her parents' home in Labūnava (later Užventis), where she was taught music and foreign languages. Influenced by Povilas Višinskis (1875–1906), a Lithuanian cultural and political activist during the Lithuanian National Revival who tutored her brother, she became involved in the Lithuanian National Revival movement, learned the Lithuanian language and started writing fiction in Polish and later in Lithuanian. Her patriotism was permeated with deep religious feelings, humanism and the aim to serve society; this became the basis of her life and work. Marija Pečkauskaitė was one of the most educated women of her time: in 1896, she graduated from beekeeping courses in Warsaw, and from 1905 to 1906, she studied in Switzerland and listened to lectures on pedagogy, ethics, philosophy, etc. Meeting the German educator, philosopher and sociologist Friedrich Wilhelm Foerster (1869–1966) and attending his lectures at the University of Zurich was a turning point in Pečkauskaitė's life. After returning to Lithuania, she became an educator and translated Foerster's most prominent works into Lithuanian. In 1909–1915, she worked as a teacher at the Marijampolė Grammar School for girls. In 1915, Pečkauskaitė settled in a small town, Židikiai and became involved in the community's social life and Christian charity, caring for the underprivileged children, the sick and the poor until her death.

**Keywords:** Lithuanian National Revival, Lithuanian romantic writing, Friedrich Wilhelm Foerster, translation, pedagogy.

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**VĀRDS UN DŽĪVE: MARIJA PEČKAUSKAITE KĀ RAKSTNIECE,  
TULKOTĀJA UN PEDAGOĢE**

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AS A WRITER,  
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**Kopsavilkums**

Raksta mērķis ir aplūkot, kā vārds var ietekmēt cilvēka dzīves izvēli un centienus. Par piemēru var kalpot lietuviešu rakstnieces, tulkotājas un pedagoģes Marijas Pečkauskaites (*Marija Pečkauskaitė*, 1877–1930) dzīve. No trūcīgas lietuviešu muižnieku ģimenes nākusī Pečkauskaite, kuras pseidonīms bija *Šatrijos Ragana* 'Šatrijas kalna ragana', tika audzināta poļu kultūras garā vecāku mājās Labūnavā (vēlāk Užvente), kur viņai mācīja mūziku un svešvalodas. Lietuviešu kultūras un politiskais darbinieks Lietuvas nacionālās atmodas laikā Povils Višinskis (*Paweł Wyszyński*, 1875–1906) mācīja viņas brāli, un Višinska ietekmē viņa iesaistījās Lietuvas nacionālās atmodas kustībā, apguva lietuviešu valodu un sāka rakstīt daiļliteratūru poļu valodā un vēlāk – lietuviešu valodā. Viņas patriotismu caurstrāvoja dziļa reliģiska jūtība, humānisms un mērķis kalpot sabiedrībai; tas kļuva par viņas dzīves un darba pamatu. Pečkauskaite bija viena no izglītotākajām sava laika sievietēm: 1896. gadā viņa Varšavā pabeidza biškopības kursus, 1905.–1906. gadā studēja Šveicē, klausījās lekcijas pedagoģijā, ētikā, filozofijā u. c. Iepazīšanās ar vācu pedagogu, filozofu un sociologu Frīdrihu Vilhelmu Foersteru (*Friedrich Wilhelm Foerster*, 1869–1966) un viņa lekciju apmeklēšana Cīrihes universitātē bija pagrieziena punkts Pečkauskaites dzīvē. Pēc atgriešanās Lietuvā viņa pati kļuva par pedagoģi un tulkoja Foerstera ievērojamākos darbus lietuviešu valodā. No 1909. līdz 1915. gadam viņa strādāja par skolotāju Marijampoles meiteņu ģimnāzijā. 1915. gadā Pečkauskaite apmetās uz dzīvi mazpilsētā Židikos un līdz pat savai nāvei iesaistījās kopienas sabiedriskajā dzīvē un kristīgajā labdarībā, rūpējoties par maznodrošinātajiem bērniem, slimajiem un nabadzīgajiem.

**Raksturvārds:** Lietuvas nacionālā atmoda, lietuviešu romantiskā literatūra, Frīdrihs Vilhelms Foersters, tulkojums, pedagoģija.

**Introduction**

Marija Pečkauskaitė (pen name *Šatrijos Ragana*, March 8, 1877 – July 24, 1930), a Lithuanian humanist, translator, educator and romantic writer, was born in 1877 into a family of Samogitian nobility, in Medingėnai Manor (now Plungė district), which belonged to her mother's family, the Šiukštys, a prominent though impoverished family of Samogitian country nobility. She spent her childhood in the picturesque settlement of Labūnava, and her youth – in her parents' rented manor of Užventis. She was brought up in the spirit of Polish culture, was taught music and foreign languages, and spoke Polish as her first language in her early years. In the family of four children, Marija was the eldest; she had three younger siblings: sister Sofija and brothers Steponas and Vincentas. The future writer completed her grammar school education at home with hired home tutors

Juzefa Sumorok and Cecilija Sondecka (Striogaitė 2013: 52; Žėkaitė 1984: 11). Marija's life might have taken a different turn had not she met three completely different people – Lithuanian cultural and political activist Povilas Višinskis (1875–1906), Catholic priest Kazimieras Bukontas (1872–1961) and German educator and philosopher Friedrich Wilhelm Foerster (1869–1966) – whose ideas and take on the world influenced the formation of her character, life choices and aspirations.

### **Marija Pečkauskaitė as Learner and Writer**

A significant turning point in the life of the future writer, translator and educator was her acquaintance and friendship with Povilas Višinskis, the son of a peasant who lived in the neighbourhood. In 1891, Višinskis, a Gymnasium student in Šiauliai town, later a student of Natural Sciences at St. Petersburg University and a figure of the Lithuanian National Revival, was invited by the Pečkauskas family to help their son Steponas enter a Gymnasium, a type of school providing secondary education and preparing students to enter university. Višinskis introduced Marija to the ideas of Lithuanian National Revival and aspirations to serve the nation.

As Speičytė notes, “Višinskis turned Marija's noble patriotism, her love for her native land, her belief in Catholic tradition and reverence for Polish culture towards the ideas of the National Revival of Lithuania, encouraged her to learn Lithuanian and stimulated the girl's creative ambitions” (Speičytė 2013) [here and below translation from Lithuanian mine – A. R.]. With the help of a governess from Warsaw, Sofija Sventožečka, in 1892, Marija entered the third grade of St. Catherine's Gymnasium in St. Petersburg. However, the humid weather took its toll on her health, and after six months, Marija returned home to continue her studies with a home tutor. The friendship with Višinskis continued; urged and influenced by him, Maria leans Lithuanian and starts writing fiction. In 1896, Višinskis translated her first work, “Motley Pictures” (Margi paveikslėliai; initially written in Polish), into Lithuanian and published it in liberal Lithuanian periodicals *Varpas* and *Ūkininkas* (Dambrauskaitė 2020). However, Pečkauskaitė disagreed with their secular agenda and turned to a pro-Catholic periodical *Tėvynės sargas* (*Guardian of the Fatherland*) and similar newspapers (Kapočius 1970–1978: 216–217).

The future writer and educator learned Lithuanian consistently, so she could not only converse in Lithuanian in her everyday life but

also use it fully and, most importantly, write fiction in Lithuanian. When, in the autumn of 1894, Višinskis left for St. Petersburg to study, she wrote letters to him already in Lithuanian. In two years, she wrote 34 letters addressed to Višinskis (Balvočiūtė-Knyzeliene 2021). In her letters, she reveals her emotions, ideals, and aspirations to work for the good of Lithuania and its people. For example, on November 4, 1896, *she writes*: “Sometimes I don't know what to do, it's all so sad and dark! [...] the reasons for this are the same: it seems to me that no one in this whole world needs me, that I am of no use to anyone – at all. So if someone showed me the way to take, even if I were to be tormented day and night for the good of the people, even if I had to die, to suffer – I would go, and then I would be happier than ever...” (Šatrijos Ragana 1986: 92). Marija's letters to Višinskis are, to use Speičytė's words, “one of the most interesting phenomena of Lithuanian epistolary literature, revealing the youthful communication, creative collaboration, and the drama of feelings of the two future prominent figures of Lithuanian culture, as well as the way the Lithuanian language became established in her private writing” (Speičytė 2013).

In the late autumn of 1894, a young priest, Kazimieras Bukantas, arrived in Užventis, where Marija's family lived at the time. The Pečkauskas and Bukantas families had known each other for a long time, and the old friendship was renewed when Bukantas' son Kazimieras arrived in Užventis (Žėkaitė 1984: 19). The encounter with the young priest happened to be another life-changing experience for Marija: having fallen in love with him, she chose never to get married, and till the end of her life kept and cherished this friendship which, in its turn, strengthened her faith and Christian values even more. As Aldona Ruseckaitė notes, “her heart leaned to then young priest Kazimieras Bukontas, with whom she had been friends throughout her life. Both loved books, poetry, and music, and both were deep believers [...] While not becoming an actual nun, Marija Pečkauskaitė-Šatrijos Ragana chose a path of spirituality.” (Ruseckaitė 2022)

In 1896, Marija went to Warsaw for a beekeeping course and wrote *Lietuvos bitininkas*, a guidebook for beekeepers (published in 1926). This knowledge was useful later in life, especially when living in Židikiiai. When her father, Anupras Pečkauskas, died in 1898, the family was left with no means of living. The Labūnava manor was in debt and mortgaged to the bank. On February 8, 1926, Marija wrote about that painful period in a letter to Juozas Tumas-Vaižgantas,

a famous public figure, educator, writer and priest: “Generally speaking, our whole family was not suited for the practicalities of everyday life. [...] We were so distant from all material matters that were so disgusting for all of us.” (Šatrijos Ragana 1986: 410) To make ends meet, Pečkauskaitė started working as a tutor teaching children on the estates in Samogitia; her siblings also took up work. At that time, she became involved in the distribution of banned Lithuanian press and was detained and searched by the Tzarist police (Speičytė 2013).



Picture 1. **Front row (left to right): Marija Pečkauskaitė, Stanislava Pečkauskienė (mother), Sofija Pečkauskaitė (sister); second row (left to right): Rev. Kazimieras Bukantas, Steponas and Vincentas Pečkauskas (brothers).** Courtesy of Mažeikiai Museum

Working as a tutor, studying in Switzerland (1905–1907), teaching at Marijampolė “Žiburys” school for girls (1909–1915) and after moving to Židikiai in 1915, Marija continued writing fiction in Lithuanian. Since the first publication in 1896, Pečkauskaitė perceived her literary work as her duty to the country and its people and worked consistently in this field (Tijūnėlienė 1998: 7). Her literary oeuvre includes more than fifty short stories and eight short plays; novellas “*Viktutė*” (1903), “*Vincas Stonis*” (1906), and “*Sename dvare*” (1922); autobiographical sketches “*Atsiminimai apie broliuką Steponą*” (1904), “*Ant Uetlibergo*” (1914), and “*Lietuvos senovės septyni paveikslai*” (1905); short stories for children “*Nepasisėkė Marytei*” and “*Bičių knygelė*” (both 1906); educational books “*Motina – auklėtoja*” (1923) and “*Rimties valandėlė: Jaunoms mergelėms*” (1928) reprinted as “*Mergaitės kelias*” in 1948. She also wrote numerous articles for such magazines as *Naujoji vaidilutė*, *Moteris*, *Lietuvos mokykla*, and *Skaitymai*.

Pečkauskaitė's literary works reflect the social changes of her time and address the existing problems by describing the challenges her characters face and how they overcome them. All her main characters are strong romantic individuals living according to Christian ideals. They usually altruistically sacrifice themselves for the benefit of society. For example, in the short story “*Viktutė*” (published under the pen name of Šatrijos Ragana suggested by Povilas Višinskis and written in the form of a diary), Pečkauskaitė describes a budding love affair between the diary author Viktorija, a young lady of the manor and Polish culture, and a young doctor Antanas, a conscious Lithuanian patriot. Viktorija sacrifices her career in arts to work as a teacher in a small town and chooses a Lithuanian identity by reading Lithuanian literature and learning the Lithuanian language. The hero of “*Vincas Stonis*” not only successfully takes over his father's farm but also persuades him to return from emigration to America. Her most critically acclaimed novella, “*Sename dvare*”, is somewhat autobiographical and depicts a family of a Samogitian landlord. The estate and manor owners, unlike in writings of contemporary writers Žemaitė or Lazdynų Pelėda, are not the sources of social injustice but the last remaining outposts of the culture, ideas, and values of country nobility. Through the depiction of Mamatė (the diminutive form of “mother”), the author expresses the idea that physical life is temporary and reveals the longing for metaphysical existence through death. As with her other works, some episodes of “*Sename dvare*” are

inspired by Marija's early childhood loving memories, dreams and aspirations, and lean towards impressionism (Daujotytė 2008: 15). It must be noted that Marija was the first writer in Lithuanian literature to raise the issue of the impact of parental divorce on the child. The short story "Irkos tragedija" (1924) depicts a painful crash of a young girl's innocent world when she faces the harsh reality of parents' divorce. Pečkauskaitė is one of the first Lithuanian writers to create complex characters, analyzing not only their psychology but also spirituality, and her fiction reflects the three main aspects of her worldview: Christian faith, altruism and aestheticism (Vaidila 2005).

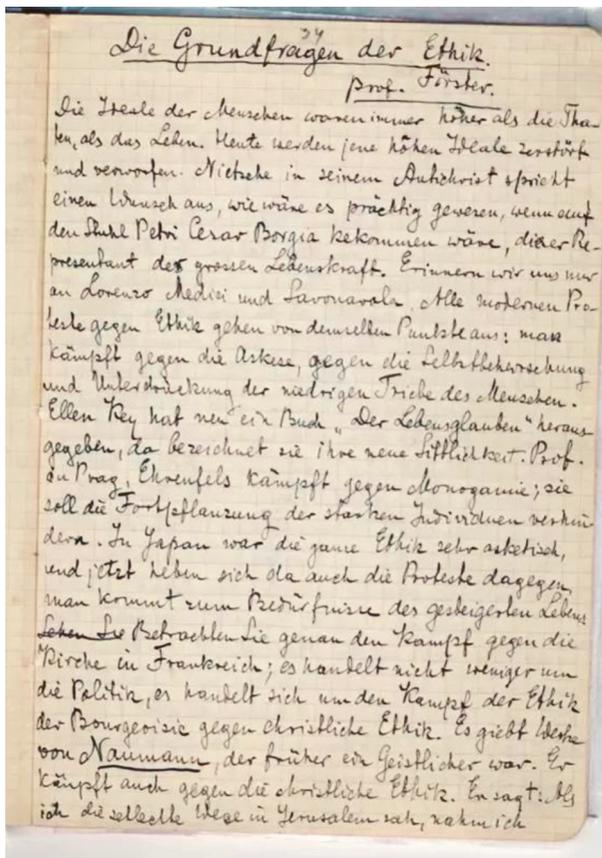


Picture 2.  
**Marija  
Pečkauskaitė  
(Šatrijos Ragana).**  
Courtesy  
of Mažeikiai  
Museum

### **Marija Pečkauskaitė as Translator and Educator**

In 1905, with the help of Povilas Višinskis, Pečkauskaitė received a scholarship to study in Switzerland. The scholarship was awarded by the Lithuanian American Catholic Educational Society "Motinėle",

founded in 1900 in Pittston, Pennsylvania, the United States, by a group of Catholic priests (Katilius 2012: 92). The aim of the Society was “to help Lithuania and Lithuanians win the freedom of speech, freedom of religion and independence, to revive the nation through education, [...] and to financially help the young people of Lithuania who will later work for the good of the nation” (Končius 1943: 110, 112). In 1905–1907, Marija spent three semesters at the University of Zurich and one semester at the University of Freiburg studying sociology, philosophy, aesthetics, theology, pedagogy, German and French literature and took part in the activities of Lithuanian student societies (Brazauskas 2020).



Picture 3.  
**Marija Pečkauskaitė's  
lecture notes  
at the University  
of Zurich.**  
Courtesy  
of Maironis Museum  
of Lithuanian Literature

While studying in Zurich, Pečkauskaitė met Friedrich Wilhelm Foerster (1869–1966), a professor at the University of Zurich and a prominent German educator, philosopher and sociologist, and was so affected by his views on Christian pedagogy that later she became

the principal translator of his most important works. Foerster discusses moral, cultural, social and sexual education and political ethics from a Christian point of view. He argues that the best method of teaching is for the educator to reveal the ideals of education by example and names the main traits of an ideal educator's character: principled, clear-headed, able to resist self-centeredness, having a sense of responsibility for the life of others, etc. (MELC 2004: 164).

According to Vanda Aramavičiūtė, Foerster was actively involved in educating a strong and virtuous person. His pedagogy, based on consistent humanism, Christian ethics and psychology, is commonly referred to as moral pedagogy, aiming at character development. In his writings, he not only reveals the essence of political, social, psychological or theological problems but also seeks to show their consequences for human behaviour and relationships and discusses how they can be solved (Aramavičiūtė 2003). The author of the article points out that Foerster's pedagogy can be called "the pedagogics of assistance or practical moral pedagogics, arising from the individual life experience, the wisdom of nurturing and knowledge of people" (Aramavičiūtė 2003: 42). For example, in his *Jugendlehre* (1904) translated into English by Ethel Peck as "The Art of Living: Sources and Illustrations for Moral Lessons" (1910), Foerster writes:

*Self-control seems a very dry word when we are young and are hindered from doing what we wish. We feel like fiery horses held back by a bridle, or like a thirsty person beside a sparkling stream and not allowed to drink. It suggests some nasty medicine prescribed by grown-up people. However, I want to show you that this is not really so. Even if there were no grown-up people, and all you children lived alone upon a big island where no teachers and no guardians were to be found at all, you would realise, after some little time, that self-control is one of the most precious of human possessions. [...] For example, people could live quite well without railways, the telephone, electric light, and similar things; but not so easily without self-control. (Foerster 1910: 13)*

In general, when discussing education and upbringing, Foerster emphasises the fundamental principles of moral values. He considers moral education to be a religious, social and psychological phenomenon. For this reason, when describing the learning environment at school and in the family, he emphasises the importance of the individualised approach to the child, relying on the child's positive qualities and the educator's faith in the child.

In Aramavičiūtė's opinion, "the unity of these principles is particularly relevant nowadays as it constitutes the essential conditions for successful upbringing" (Aramavičiūtė 1993: 120).

Pečkauskaitė considered Foerster an intermediary between Christian, traditional and modern pedagogy, which greatly appealed to her. Thus, affected by Foerster's views on education, having returned to Lithuania and working as a teacher herself, she translated the most important of his works into Lithuanian:

*Jaunuomenės auklėjimas*, 1912, 1922 (2nd edition), 1926 (3rd edition) (*Jugendlehre*, 1904);

*Seksualė etika ir seksualė pedagogija*, 1923 (*Sexualethik und Sexualpädagogik*, 1907);

*Auklėjimas ir auklėjimasis*, 1928 (*Erziehung und Selbsterziehung*, 1917);

*Kristus ir žmogaus gyvenimas*, 1931 (*Christus und das menschliche Leben*, 1920);

*Mokėkgyventi*, 1934 (*Lebenskunde*, 1904).

In the Preface to her translation of *Jugendlehre* (*Jaunuomenės auklėjimas*, 1922), Pečkauskaitė writes:

*How he [Foerster] knows how to enter into the soul of a child, to awaken his attention and to stir all the strings of the child's soul! [...] Ferster says that the most difficult task for a teacher is to choose the material accordingly and to select it properly according to the age of the child. [...] Equally difficult is finding proper motivation. It is necessary to choose the motives to which the child's soul responds. If the motives we have chosen do not stir a single string of the child's soul, the science of morality is useless. Not all children respond to the same motives. That is why Ferster tries to give the most varied ones in his talks. The teacher has to feel which motive is the most appealing [to the child].* (Pečkauskaitė 1922: 6–7)

Throughout her life, Marija maintained correspondence with Foerster and even received Foerster's photograph as a token of his appreciation for her translations of his works and dissemination of his ideas in Lithuania (Čibiras 1937: 93). She considered Foerster as her teacher and mentor, relied on his ideas in her speeches, writings, and her work as an educator.

Pečkauskaitė also translated her favourite authors, Henryk Sienkiewicz and Bolesław Prus (pen name of Aleksander Głowacki), from Polish into Lithuanian. In 1921, she translated Henryk Sienkiewicz's "Dykumose ir giriose" (*W pustyni i w puszczy*, 1911), the only novel for young adults describing the adventures of a

fourteen-year-old Polish boy, Staś, and an eight-year-old English girl, Nel, in Africa amid the Mahdist War of 1881–1899; in 1924, Pečkauskaitė translated *Bolesław Prus'* novel "Sargyboje" (*Placówka*, 1885–1886).

Influenced by Foerster's pedagogical ideas and guided by Christian ethics, Pečkauskaitė wrote her own pedagogical works, "Motina – auklėtoja" (1926) and "Rimties valandėlė: *Jaunoms mergelėms*" (1928), in 1948 reprinted as "Mergaitės kelias".

Foerster's ideas about Christian ideals and values as the foundation of human character development were especially appealing to Maria Pečkauskaitė. She claims self-control and self-discipline to be of the utmost importance and that these skills should constitute the basis of every person's character foundation. "All science, the training of the mind, in short, the whole culture stands on self-control, like a house on its foundations. Were those foundations not there, nothing will help a person to have a good heart, good desires, and good aspirations," writes Pečkauskaitė in "Mergaitės kelias" (1948: 16). She also states: "Don't forget even for a short while that our character is not made of marble, perfectly carved by a sculptor. It constantly changes and requires constant improvement" (*ibid.*, 6). Pečkauskaitė emphasises the importance of willpower in her "Motina – auklėtoja" as well:

*The will is that divine power in man by means of which he is able to resist his desires, control his strongest inclinations, force himself to do what [...] is infinitely difficult. [...] The will to the soul of man is what the bones are to the body. [...] A man without a strong will is like a seaweed.* (Pečkauskaitė 1998: 53)

To Foerster, one's relationship with people is the basis of moral education. He urged educators to teach children to respect and love people and show love and empathy to the old, the sick, and the unhappy through action. In her turn, writing about human relationships in "Mergaitės kelias", Pečkauskaitė states that "we must always remember that we do not live for ourselves alone, but first and foremost for the others" (Pečkauskaitė 1948: 75). In "Motina – auklėtoja", she addresses mothers: "Most importantly, you must respect your child. [...] Don't spare love for your child. Love is the sun of the soul. Just as the earthly flowers do not bloom without the sun, the flowers of the soul do not bloom without love. Without the mother's love, the child's soul is dark and cold." (Pečkauskaitė 1998: 143)

Discussing Pečkauskaitė's "educational *belles lettres*", Gediminas Mikėlaitis notes that "the writer's art of living is educational and

education: to cultivate will and shape the character while resorting to theological motivation” (Mikelaitis 2012: 211). These ideas were the cornerstone of Pečkauskaitė's entire life and took various forms in her writings on education and her own fiction.

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## Conclusion

Throughout her life, Pečkauskaitė remained faithful to the goals she had set in her early youth – to help the disadvantaged and the suffering. As soon as she arrived in Židikiai, she established a Lithuanian school and library for children, took care of the treatment of the sick, set up a pharmacy at her own expense and made sure that in 1920, a shelter for the elderly was established in Židikiai. In 1921 Pečkauskaitė opened an outpatient clinic where she took care of the patients free of charge once a week. Marija raised funds needed to maintain the shelter and the dispensary by organising concerts, lotteries and other events. She was actively involved in the town's cultural life, promoting teetotalism, organising the youth and adult choirs, the amateur theatre and charity work (Dambrauskaitė 2020). To use Mikelaitis' words, “the personality and work of Šatrijos Ragana is a living example of what an active Christian should be like, of how [...] to pursue [...] Christian perfection” (Mikelaitis quoted in Garškaitė 2013). In 1928, *Vytautas Magnus University* awarded Marija Pečkauskaitė an honorary degree of Doctor of Philosophy for her pedagogical work and writings; in 1929, the Lithuanian State awarded Pečkauskaitė 3rd degree Order of the Grand Duke Gediminas for her social activities. Marija Pečkauskaitė's life was cut short by illness as many as 36 years earlier than her most respected teacher and mentor, Foerster. She died in Židikiai on the 24th of July in 1930.

VĀRDS UN DŽĪVE:  
MARIJA PEČKAUSKAITE  
KĀ RAKSTNIECE,  
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