

READERS' GUIDE

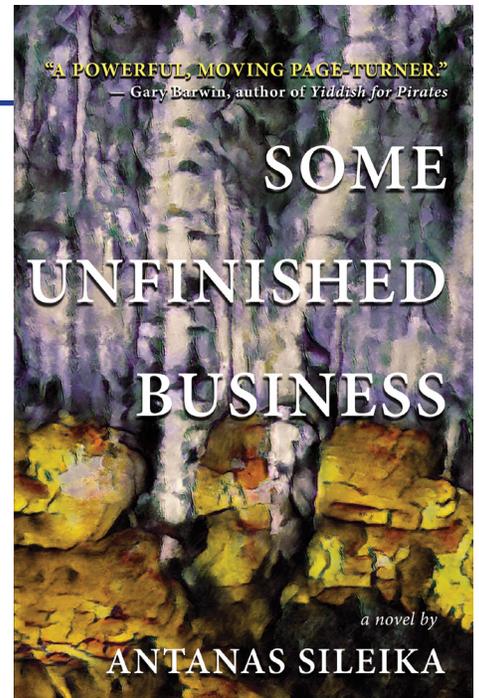
Some Unfinished Business by Antanas Sileika

INTRODUCING *Some Unfinished Business*

Is love more compelling than justice? A wife pleads for love. Her husband longs for revenge.

Gripping and evocative, *Some Unfinished Business* tells the story of a young man who is determined to prevail through anti-Soviet resistance in occupied Lithuania, imprisonment in the Gulag, and the icy hands of bureaucracy that attempt to thwart his love for a woman with a mysterious past — all while chasing the back of the man who dared him to dream in the first place.

At fourteen, Martin Averka met a teacher from the city who inspired him to seek out the wide world beyond his small village of Lyn Lake. Years later, having lived under the tyranny of an autocratic system populated by cowards and bullies and seeking revenge, he breaks into the Pažaislis Monastery Asylum to confront face-to-face the man from his youth who betrayed his friends and colleagues a decade before.



IMPORTANT THEMES

Art vs. Survival – Kostas, Martin's former school teacher and a poet, argues that art and literature are not mere frivolous hobbies, but rather necessary nourishments for the soul. As an adult, Martin works at the Book Depository, which preserves literature as a means to preserve culture. Living under the tyrannical rule of the Soviet Union, various characters struggle to reconcile their intellectual longings with their fight for survival.

Betrayal vs. Solidarity – Mistrust and misinformation run rampant in occupied Lithuania. Martin finds camaraderie with the partisans in his childhood, despite the strict protocols to keep the resistance secret and the various conflicts within the ranks. In adulthood, Martin finds new family and friends, gets reunited with old familiar faces, but is still haunted by Kostas's betrayal.

Resistance vs. Complacency – Many partisans live as fugitives in their fight for Lithuanian independence, knowing that capture will mean torture, imprisonment, and/or death. Some characters resist against Soviet rule for their ideals, for their families, or because they have no other choice. Others, such as bureaucrats or collaborators, comply to avoid trouble or weaponize bureaucratic rules to the ruination of others.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. On page 3, Martin says, “The Lithuanians even had a saying, about the virtues of silence. Tyla gera byla — silence is the best defence. Maybe the idea was never to be noticed at all, to behave like a mouse and to lose the squeak.” Does this saying ring true for the rest of the novel?
2. Kostas states, “There are values people live by and some are more important than others. For me, literature is the highest value of all” (p. 84). What values do the major characters, such as Martin, Kristina, Badger, and Raminta, hold above all else? Do these values change throughout the novel?
3. Compare Martin and Kristina’s upbringings, specifically their relationships with their primary role model (Martin’s teacher, Kostas, and Kristina’s father, Vaitkus) and their experiences with betrayal. How do Martin and Kristina’s respective history shape their outlooks on humanity and society? In what ways are they similar or different?
4. Badger. Skylark. Pike. Mole. Sparrow. What’s the significance of each partisan or partisan-helper codename?
5. Kostas argues that a poet’s desire for intellectual engagement is just as necessary as a soldier’s fight for physical survival, framing both as different paths to freedom. Badger rebuts this, stating that art can be “a consolation, but not a solution” (p. 85). What do you make of this debate about the two profession-identities? Are there characters that embody the values of both?
6. Suspicion, mistrust, and betrayal are a constant in occupied Lithuania, but despite the dangers, many characters still form bonds and show solidarity. What does it say about the characters, that they still reach for companionship despite the risks? How do they show unity with each other, in loud or quiet ways?
7. On page 249, Martin asks, “Was it better to forget the past or to remember it?” By the end of the novel, do Martin’s choices answer this question?
8. *Some Unfinished Business* paints a vivid picture of Soviet-occupied Lithuania, fighting for its independence but not receiving sufficient help from the West. How does this novel deepen your understanding of this period of post-WW2 history? How do these events impact or echo in present-day geopolitical struggles?



ABOUT ANTANAS

Antanas Sileika is a Canadian author of five previous books of fiction, as well as a memoir. Working as a Canadian journalist of Lithuanian descent, he became involved with the movement to restore Lithuania’s independence from the Soviet Union. His collection of short stories, *Buying on Time*, was shortlisted for the Stephen Leacock Award for Humour and the Toronto Book Award and long-listed for CBC’s Canada Reads in 2016. His books have repeatedly received starred reviews from *Quill & Quire* and been listed as among the one hundred best books of the year in *The Globe and Mail*. He has reviewed books for print, radio, and television and he served as the director of the Humber School for Writers until retiring in 2017. He currently lives in Toronto, Ontario.