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Book Review

A SOVIET STUDY OF KRISTIJonAS DONELAITIS

L. Gineitis. KRISTIJonAS DONELAITIS IT JO EPOCHA (K. D. and his Epoch). Vilnius, 1964. 383 pp. Includes a 7 page resume in Russian, bibliography, and name index.

The 250th anniversary of the birth of Kristijonas Donelaitis has received unusually great attention from the soviet regime in Lithuania. Several years in advance, preparations were made to properly commemorate the poet's birth. Besides numerous articles in the soviet periodical press, several works of greater scope have also reached the bookstores. Gineitis' work reviewed here is probably the most outstanding soviet contribution on Donelaitis and his age.

The name of Gineitis is familiar to those interested in Donelaitis or in the general literary and cultural life of the eighteenth century. In 1954 he published quite an extensive study of Donelaitis' poetry: *Kristijono Donelaicio "Metai"* ("The Seasons" by K. D., Vilnius, 1954). In this work, however, Gineitis relied heavily on the opinions of such "literary critics" as Marx, Engels, Lenin, Stalin, Malenkov, etc. The author's knowledge of Donelaitis' work was evident, but an insincere quest for "authorities," "evaluation," and "overvaluation" of certain manifestations, forced upon the author mainly by the political regime, left an impression of insincerity on the reader.

After ten years, L. Gineitis came out with an even more extensive study of Donelaitis and his epoch. Of course many things changed in the ten years since 1954; even the opinion of some of the "authorities," such as Stalin and Malenkov turned out to be erroneous and unacceptable. Finally, perhaps the author himself made tremendous strides in the direction of scientific maturity and objectivity. With the latest work, we can admit, Gineitis has built a lasting monument to Donelaitis and his age.

In the introduction Gineitis describes the literary state in Lithuania Proper and the intensification of literary activity in Lithuania Minor. In the first part the author considers the literary environment of Donelaitis, touching as much as possible on all features of literary activity that had undeniable significance in the development of eighteenth century literature. Having a talent for choosing characteristic illustrations and for using them effectively, Gineitis made this somewhat boring period interesting and intriguing, and this part of the book easily readable. Especially, Gineitis does use marginal material masterfully, coloring the age and its people in vivid hues.

Admittedly, Gineitis is not quite successful in maintaining a chronological consistency. The author admits in the foreword that in using the "parallel or cross - section" method he introduced certain anachronisms. This happened in his analysis of the literary activity of Milkus (Mielke) and Kreutzfeldt — collector of Lithuanian Folk Songs before that of Donelaitis, although, as the author admits, Milkus wrote after Donelaitis. This, of course, is justifiable when eighteenth - century literature is first analyzed in general and when Donelaitis' contribution is considered in a separate chapter. But it is hardly justifiable in the second part (p. 232), when Gineitis speaks of Donelaitis' predecessors, and lists K. Milkus along with Schultz and Schimmelpfenning. This is an outright disregard of chronology. In the history of Lithuanian literature, the work of K. Milkus appeared 10 - 20 years after Donelaitis' death. In such a case, the chronology suggests that the direction of influence is quite opposite to that postulated by Gineitis.

The author also failed to evade certain contradictions. For example, he states: "Pietism affected negatively all literary manifestations of East Prussia of that time" (p. 56). In the same section, however, he reaches the opposite conclusion: In certain measure, "Pietism also directly vitalized Lithuanian literature" (p. 56); "In this way, through religious writings (Hymnals), in a certain measure pietism encouraged the development of the literary Lithuanian language" (p. 57). Perhaps such contradictions appeared because of the author's overly strenuous attempt to evaluate all aspects of life and creativity from a certain a priori position, sometimes even before a thorough analysis of a situation.

There is very little direct information about Donelaitis' years of study. Here Gineitis attempted to fill in the gap. Very systematically he has collected facts about the environment in which Donelaitis lived and studied and reached quite convincing conclusions. The author writes extensively about the life in Koenigsberg of that time, about Koenigsberg University, library, student life, separately introduces the more noted professors that lectured in the University at the time that Donelaitis studied. The author also reviews the periodical press of the eighteenth - century Prussia, regretting that a number of publications were not available. All this factual information about the student years of Donelaitis, defining his formative influences, is the most significant contribution that Gineitis makes. Only with this background information can we perceive the development of Donelaitis' talents and the direction of his creative activity.

The author cites examples of old writings in the original language, with the aim of maintaining the essential features of writing in that period. He cites Donelaitis' manuscripts. In this way the author not only presents the genuine writing of Donelaitis, but at the same time evades transgression against Donelaitis himself, by writing "God" in the lower case.

In analyzing the social position of Donelaitis' poem *The Seasons*, Gineitis, of course, calls on the authorities of Marxist ideology — Marx, Engels, and Lenin. These authorities are especially indispensable to Gineitis in analyzing "the ideological narrowness" of Donelaitis' poetry. Gineitis has to make long excursions into the Marxist theory in order to substantiate his claims that "religious ideology limited his (Donelaitis') activities, also leaving a mark on his creative work" (p. 258). It is the author's privilege to expound his personal philosophy. However, when Donelaitis, a sympathetic pastor who never wavers in his ideological commitment and seriousness, is presented as beset by ideological contradictions, we can rightfully charge Gineitis himself with intentional ideological bias.

Fortunately, these ideological and sociological interpretations of Donelaitis' work are not the essential part of the contents. The study, as the author states, is intended for "teachers of Lithuanian literature and for those interested in the history of Lithuanian culture and literature. In it (study) they will find compiled a certain number of facts, a broader view of the manifestations of Lithuanian literature of the Donelaitis epoch, certain problematic questions raised about the creative work of Donelaitis himself, and the attempted solutions to these questions", (p. 8). Neither ideological excursions, nor the non-essential conclusions of the author in "evaluating" and "overevaluating" facts of literary and cultural life, but the extensive compilation of factual material and its proper and systematic classification make this study by Gineitis one of the most significant contributions not only to "Donelaitiana" but also to the history of Lithuanian literature.

In the second part of the book Gineitis writes about Donelaitis as a classic of Lithuanian literature. In describing Donelaitis' personality he merely repeats the data already published in his earlier work. In the second chapter the author describes the ideological aspects of Donelaitis' work. Since the ideological discussions are notably colored with Marxist theoreticians (Marx, Engels, Lenin), this section must be considered as the author's contribution to the soviet regime.

Gineitis disputes the previous view that Donelaitis' *The Seasons* consists of four idylls. The author rather defines the work as a poem. Gineitis also discusses extensively the literary influences upon Donelaitis. He maintains that although Donelaitis was acquainted with classical literature and with the 18th century descriptive poetry of nature, nevertheless Donelaitis followed directly neither the one or the other. In his talented expression of reality Donelaitis even surpassed notably the descriptive — natural poetry of his age (J. Thompson, E. Kleist, Saint-Lambert, E. Druzback). In the last chapter Gineitis attempts to show that Donelaitis is the fore-runner of the realistic method, but not of the realistic movement, in Lithuanian literature. The creative method of Donelaitis is described by Gineitis as "enlightening realism".