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## LITHUANIAN LITERATURE UNDER THE SOVIETS

JONAS VELAIKIS

National non-Russian literatures, including Lithuanian, have to adhere to one literary theory, namely socialist realism, and are controlled from Moscow.<sup>1</sup> In this respect the atmosphere in which writers must work in Lithuania does not differ from that in other "socialist republics" of the USSR. Nevertheless, Lithuanian fiction has developed in its own way through the postwar years and has acquired distinct indigenous characteristics.

During the Soviet rule of Lithuania in 1940-41 no significant literary contributions were made. After the period of German domination, from 1941 to 1944, the Soviets once again occupied the country, at which time the majority of Lithuanian writers left for the West. Those that remained submitted to the demands of the Party. Nevertheless, soon some of them were silenced, others imprisoned or deported to Siberia. Although the number of works was large, they were, except for a few poems and short stories, devastatingly barren from the literary standpoint.

Among the works written during this period, K. Bo-ruta's novelette, "Baltaragio malūnas" (The Windmill of Baltaragis, 1945) is worthy of mention. Apparently he began it during the German occupation and finished before the infamous attack by A. A. Zhdanov on writers and artists in 1946. His novelette, based on elements in Lithuanian folklore, has nothing in common with socialist realism. It is a poetic story of fantasy, love, reveries, nostalgia, woe of people, especially of Baltaragis, a dynamic, powerful and tragic individual.

After Stalin's death, Soviet writers acquired greater freedom of expression, but in Lithuania, the "freeze" continued until 1956 - 57, at which time a few works, especially in poetry, demonstrated new spirit and ideas. It is significant that these works were written primarily by young writers who gained most of their prominence in the sixties. The end of the fifties, therefore, was period of experimentation where budding writers searched for themes and means of expression. Since the literature of the sixties is more complex and diverse with respect to literary genres, it is necessary to examine each one separately: poetry, novel, short story and drama.

### I

Poetry written prior to Stalin's death hardly exhibits any aspects of poets' individuality; in most cases thematic and compositional clichés and political slogans of Soviet Russian poetry were rearranged and rhymed in Lithuanian. After Stalin, poetry was the first genre to show change in theme and subject matter. Already in 1956, poems on nature and personal feelings appeared in periodicals for the first time in more than a decade. This change was more conspicuously demonstrated by the works of young poets. They shunned rhyming Soviet banalities and gradually learned how to express private feelings and more profound thoughts.

The first notable poetic work, "Dvidešimtas pavasaris" (The Twentieth Spring) by J. Marcinkevičius, was published in 1956. Despite the occasional clichés, prosaic descriptions and other deficiencies, this narrative poem is noted for its subtle lyricism and lively, easy flowing prosody. In 1957 another young poet, Alg. Baltakis, published a collection of poetry "Velnio tiltas" (Devil's Bridge). These poems primarily reflect Baltakis' experiences during the post-war years of violence. Although Baltakis is not free from a descriptive and declamatory style, akin to Soviet Russian poetry, his youthful flair and melodious lyricism make this collection one of his most outstanding works.

Gradually a number of poets began to master artistic expression. Around 1960 there was already a diversity in poetic types and disparity in poets' styles. The most versatile and probably the most talented poet appears to be J. Marcinkevičius. In addition to his prose works, he also wrote epic, declamatory-journalistic and lyric poetry. His epic narrative poem "Kraujas

ir pelenai" (Blood and Ashes, 1960) is based on a tragedy of a village and its people burned by the Germans during the Second World War. Leaving aside his futile efforts to adjust the tragedy to the theory of Soviet Marxism, Marcinkevičius succeeded in creating a picturesque lyrical landscape and a tragic atmosphere, fused with realistic, romantic and pantheistic elements of the village. The prosody is traditional, but the language itself is rich in imagery.

Marcinkevičius' declamatory - journalistic poetry — "Publicistinė poema" (Journalistic Poem, 1961), "Donelaitis" (Donelaitis, 1965) and "Siena" (The Wall, 1965) — display original characteristics, though it is not of great artistic value. Its greatest defect is lack of cohesion; declamatory and descriptive fragments which are basically prosaic do not blend with lyrical parts of the poems. Contrary to his other poems, "Siena", an allegorical poem, written already in a more evocative language, suffers from its obvious, shallow subject matter. Marcinkevičius' lyric poems, small in number, are probably his best works. Some of his lyrics appear in periodicals and in the collection of poetry "Rankos, raikančios duoną" (Hands which Slice Bread, 1964).

The world of feelings and emotions is primarily represented by the lyric poetry of two women poets: J. Vaičiūnaitė and J. Degutytė. Vaičiūnaitė's poetry — "Kaip žalios vynos" (As Green Wine, 1963), "Per saulėtą gaublį" (Through the Sunny Globe, 1964) and "Vėtrungės" (Weather Vanes, 1966) — displays a true poetic instinct. She looks at the world with the eyes of one who sees it for the first time and, therefore, her poetry of ever-changing moods and impressions has a fresh, childlike outlook toward life. However, in her latest poetry there are some signs of anxiety about the frailty of life, and she turns more often to the realm of memories, reveries and vision. Though some of her lyrics are set against a motley landscape, Vaičiūnaitė prefers an urban scenery, full of noises, motion and diversity. Her lightly woven poetry contains a rich, metaphorical language and many associations of disparate elements. Nevertheless, the majority of her lyrics suffer considerably from her verbosity.

J. Degutytė's poetry — "Dienos — dovanos" (Days are Presents, 1960), "Ant žemės delno" (On the Palm of the Earth, 1963) and "Šiaurės vasaros" (Northern Summers, 1966) — reveals her intimate feelings and variable moods, closely related to nature and landscape of Lithuania. Romantic in temper and passionate in mood, she has a voice of her own, although she is still under the influence of Soviet stereotypes and Lithuanian poetry of 1930's. It is significant that her work tends to be more thoughtful and emotionally profound and has acquired more authentic characteristics of poetry.

We find a different trend in the poetry of Alf. Maldonis: "Vėtra veja debesis" (Tempest Chases Clouds, 1960), "Saulėti lietūs" (Sunny Rains, 1962) and "Aukšti medžiai" (Tall Trees, 1965). His poetry is of a dual nature: subtle, lyrical meditations pervaded with doleful emotions, on the one hand, and, on the other, social themes, presented with a strong dose of Soviet official optimism. Nevertheless, his best lyrics are those in which he registers the fleeting moment of feeling and an especially acute awareness of his own temporariness. In spite of allusive metaphors and associations of disparate elements, he follows primarily the standard of the traditional prosody in his poetry. Contrary to the verbose lyrics of Vaičiūnaitė, Maldonis' poetry exhibits a frugal use of words and a mature control of thoughts and imagery.

The poetry of VI. Šimkus in "Krantų kontūrai" (Outlines of the Seashore, 1963) resembles that of Maldonis. His verse, however, is devoid of intimate and lyrical emotions; it is more intellectual in content and expressed in a more somber, restrained way.

Another trend of poetry, which is declamatory-journalistic in nature (Soviet critics sometimes call it "intellectual"), enjoys prestige and is praised by the official Soviet circles. It originated undoubtedly from Soviet declamatory, rhetorical and sermonizing verses of Maya-kovsky and his Soviet Russian imitators. Mieželaitis, and to some extent Marcinkevičius, have developed it into a conglomerated style where prosaic, rhetorical and lyrical elements are fused or grouped by means of allegory, hyperbole or mere enumeration. The most conspicuous characteristic of this poetry is a glorification of Communist ideals and of Soviet life.

The prime exponent of such verse is E. Mieželaitis, a Lenin prize winner for his collection of poems "Žmogus" (Man, 1962). Mieželaitis is a prolific poet and an able manipulator. He is noted for large variety of concepts, phrases, and words taken from various literatures, science, politics, geography, etc. Through long practice he acquired skill in the realm of prosody. However, his best poetry, noted for its expressive style and improvisations, often lacks naturalness and restraint.

The above mentioned poets began to publish their works under the Soviet regime. Poets of the older generation didn't contribute anything significant in the field of poetry, with the only exception of V. Mykolaitis - Putinas.<sup>2</sup> Of his four collections of lyrics, published during the Soviet period, only two — "Būties valanda" (Hour of Being, 1963) and "Langas" (The Window, 1966) — are of high literary value. His style and themes are predominantly those of his early neoromantic poetry: man's solitude, secrets of existence and death. In "Langas", gloomy, pessimistic moods and spiritual fatigue have replaced his superficially optimistic attitude, present in some of the poems in "Būties valanda".

The spectrum of poetry in contemporary Lithuania combines its main components: contemplative (Putinas), emotional, lyrical (Vaičiūnaitė, Degutytė), personal fused with social aspects (Baltakis, Maldonis, Marcinkevičius, Šimkus), epic (Marcinkevičius), and declamatory-journalistic with a strong dose of generalities and ideological abstractions (Mieželaitis, Marcinkevičius). Although this poetry has on the whole reached a certain level of aesthetic significance, it is superficial in many respects; it still lacks strong feelings, imaginative and intense perception of life and world. V. Kubilius, a leading critic

of poetry in Lithuania, gave a precise diagnosis when he said: "The (Lithuanian) poet considers common and too general those problems or postulations which are too far removed from worries and tribulations of contemporary man. The poet 'philosophizes' using his reason but not his heart or all the faculties of his soul, as it should be in lyrical verse."<sup>3</sup> What Kubilius did not dare to mention is that this Lithuanian poet must adhere to a rigid set of political and social values and is not allowed to judge his own life and that of others independently.

## II

During the first decade of the Soviet regime the novel had completely disappeared from the literary field, except for numerous worthless books written on history and life of the Soviets. Even talented writers failed to write a decent novel. For instance, A. Vienuolis, a writer of the older generation, in his highly touted but mediocre novel "Puodžiūnkiemis" (Puodžiūnas' Farmstead, 1952), tried in vain to squeeze the panoramic life of a provincial district into narrow precepts of socialist realism, i. e. in depicting the life of peasants in free Lithuania, he had to place everything in the light of class struggle and to rely entirely on a descriptive and journalistic style. The novel "Pikčiurnienė" (Mrs. Pikčiurna, 1953) by E. Simonaitytė, written in a similar manner, is even less successful. Here everything is devoted to the description of social conflicts and landowners' greed, leaving no time for artistic considerations.

After the denunciation of the so-called personality cult, according to Soviet critics, time came for radical change: "Our prose began to shake off the combined weight of oppressive greyness and dogmatic thinking."<sup>4</sup> Writers began to place greater emphasis on human beings than on events or social phenomena. However, themes of the more significant novels were drawn from the past, because novelists had already learned from the Soviet Russian writers how to interpret and to present the past in the light of Soviet Marxist theory.

The most noteworthy novel of the "thaw" is J. Baltušis' "Parduotos vasaros" (Sold Summers, 1957). Despite the depiction of the contradictory forces of hired laborers and landowners, and of the merciless exploitation of working man, Baltušis vividly portrays village life of the former Lithuania. He is especially successful in delineating colorful and distinctive characters, in vivid descriptions of nature and in the mastery of rich language. V. Mykolaitis - Putinas' historical novel "Sukilėliai" (Rebels, 1957), though artistically less significant, is also written according to the same formula. He tried to adjust events and participants of the 1863 uprising in Lithuania to a contemporary Soviet theory on history and literature, i. e. the focus is placed on social and moral problems, on the discovery of class contradictions and on the exaltation of revolutionary spirit among the peasants, interpreted from the Marxist point of view.

These or other less significant novels, written in the period between 1953 and 1960, show no radical changes in themes, problems and their treatment. Those writers who tried to portray salient traits of the contemporary life were yet unable to avoid Soviet clichés and generalities.

New trends in Lithuanian fiction became apparent in the beginning of the sixties, at first in the short story and later in the novel. There was growing interest in fresh ideas, new themes, a more critical attitude toward contemporary life, and a greater emphasis on human experiences. Moreover, writers dared to experiment in form and style.

This new upsurge was due to several circumstances. Authors were newcomers, young people who began their literary activities during the thaw period. They were more aware of the yearnings and problems of their own generation. At that time Soviet Russian literary "frosts" and "thaws", i. e. a period of uncertain and fluctuating policies of the Party, had settled down, and at last it was possible to know, more or less, which new themes and problems are acceptable to the Party and to what extent one is allowed to pursue them.

Young Lithuanian prose writers, however, dealt in most cases with safer themes instead of trying out new ones. For that reason, probably there were no Lithuanian Ehrenburgs, Dudintsevs or Solzhenitsyns.

Pursuing their safe theme, the depiction of the past, novelists began to write on subjects concerning the Second World War and post-war events. There was already a diversity in approach and in the treatment of subject matter. This is especially apparent in the development of original styles and outlook of the writers. For instance, previously war themes and people were viewed from the position of an observer and portrayed in a stereotyped way. Now as we may see in novels, for instance, of I. Meras' "Lygiosios trunka akimirka" (A Tie Lasts a Wink, 1963), R. Lankauskas' "Vidury didelio lauko" (In the Middle of a Wide Field, 1963), Alf. Bieliauskas' "Mes dar susitiksim, Vilma" (Vilma, We Shall Meet Again, 1962), the portrayal is focused on individuals and their conflicts.

In "Lygiosios trunka akimirka" Meras pursues a popular and already worn-out theme: life in a Jewish ghetto of Nazi Germany. However, he gives a new twist: episodes of absurdity and inhuman cruelty are sketched through the medium of thoughts and memories of a Jewish prisoner. While he plays a fatal<sup>5</sup> chess game with a German guard, he goes back in his thoughts to the life and death of the members of his own family. Despite the lyrical, longwinded and sometimes sentimental meditations, the novel is a fresh attempt to fathom human tragedy. It also should be noted for its original short-story-like construction, well suited to the flashback technique.

The most original novel on war, "Vidury didelio lauko", was written by R. Lankauskas. Contrary to the Party line which requires to show the heroism of Soviet soldiers and to degrade the enemies to mere animals, Lankauskas depicts the horror of a senseless war with objectivity; Germans as well as Soviets die without knowing why. The focus of the novel is Gediminas, a Lithuanian in the Red Army, who is destined to fight alone for his life and later, as a war invalid, to continue a tragic and lonely life in the indifferent world. In addition to this, in portraying the past of the hero, the flashback technique was skillfully applied for the first time in Lithuanian literature. However, Lankauskas was criticized not for abandoning the photographic and sequential depiction of life, but for neglecting the "characteristic traits of a Soviet soldier" and especially for "not solving problems in the right (sic!) way"<sup>6</sup> and for "belittling the image of a Soviet soldier."<sup>7</sup>

Alf. Bieliauskas' novel "Mes dar susitiksim, Vilma" is less artistically significant and more conventional. Nevertheless, it shows an attempt to break away from the stereotyped portrayal of Soviet teenagers during the war. Basically dealing with social problems and psychological development of young Lithuanian refugees far from the front in Russia, Bieliauskas tries to view life from the teenager's point of view.

Other novels, based on post-war conditions, indicate a greater variety in choice of themes and in their treatment. Since the writers are young, they are, as one may expect, preoccupied mainly with the lives of young people. M. Sluckis, in the novel "Laiptai į dangų" (Stairway to Heaven, 1963), treats in a somewhat less conventional way the dilemma confronting every Soviet citizen: to choose one out of two possibilities — with the Soviets or against them. Limiting himself mainly to the description of the fate of a family, Sluckis concentrates on the situation of two young individuals in love in the midst of post-war turmoil, i. e. of vigorous Lithuanian partisan resistance against the Soviet regime. What deserves mention is Sluckis' attempt to apply psychological analysis to the conflicts of vacillating heroes. Soviet critics tend to praise the novel for its innovations in the realm of lyricism and inner monologue. These terms, however, are hardly appropriate to long-winded descriptions of scenery and to the sometimes sentimental deliberations by the characters as well as by the author. Nevertheless, this presentation of a naive and, at least in the beginning, an erratic youth with strong romantic inclinations might be considered a novelty.

Another significant step forward was made by J. Marcinkevičius. Staugaitis, the hero of the novelette "Pušis, kuri juokėsi" (The Pinetree that Laughed, 1961), is allowed to question the principles of Soviet Marxism and furthermore, to be captivated at least for the time being by individualistic Western ideas, namely existentialism. Readers were apparently fascinated with the hero who dares to argue about meaning of life so radically for the first time in the fiction of contemporary Lithuania; in fact, only an average novelette, it was suddenly one of the most discussed, admired and quickly sold out. Nevertheless, Staugaitis, "this little Hamlet of our time,"<sup>8</sup> suddenly and unconvincingly becomes an ideal Soviet man — he falls in love with his work — his painting, and with factory workers.

A contrast to this stereotyped happy ending of "Pušis, kuri juokėsi", is R. Lankauskas' unorthodox novel "Tiltas į jūrą" (A Bridge into the Sea, 1963). The hero, physician Kęstutis, disillusioned with people and life in city, visits places of his childhood in the province. Most of the time he is engrossed in his reminiscences. Warm memories of the former days, however, are shattered one by one in the confrontation with reality. He finds that he is a complete stranger in the places familiar and dear to him, now inhabited by alien and indifferent people. Finally he realizes that there is nothing left for him in this world, except his childhood reminiscences: "Every-ting could be taken from man, except his reminiscences. They are our only inviolable possession."<sup>9</sup> Contrary to happy endings, demanded by socialist realism, Kęstutis runs away from the Soviet environment; he joins a crew going for a long sea voyage.

The novel was severely criticized: "It reeks of spiritual apathy, unscrupulousness and ideological marasmus"; "It is unhealthy and unacceptable to us (Soviet people) in its tendencies."<sup>10</sup> There is no need to explain why this novel didn't appear in a book form.

Since Lankauskas was not reproached for his allusive and ambiguous imagery and unorthodox technique of portrayal, one may draw a conclusion that stylistic innovations could be pursued as long as writers' insights and perceptions fit into the prescribed cult of optimism. There is an even more obvious proof of this in the case of Alf. Bieliauskas' novel "Kauno romanas" (A Romance in Kaunas, 1966). In this novel Bieliauskas depicts the life of the protagonist, Sėlis, using a technique which somewhat resembles the "stream of consciousness." Sėlis returns to Kaunas, his native town, after more than ten years of absence to erase an incident which is a threat to the good name of his superior. For the first time in his life Sėlis acts against his superior's orders. As a consequence of his decision, Sėlis replaces that superior, after the latter is dismissed for his stubborn adherence to the principles of the "cult of personality." The simple plot becomes blurry and entangled because of the shifting back and forth of Sėlis' reminiscences of events which have transpired in the period of ten to twelve years. In spite of the not very successful attempts to use the device of remembrance, and of other obvious deficiencies, the novel was greeted as a "new form of current Soviet prose," a "realistic, sober approach" to the "bugbear of personality cult" and, of course, for its optimistic and "right" conclusion of the story.<sup>11</sup>

More direct criticism of the Soviet system is voiced in J. Avyžius' novel "Kaimas kryžkelėje" (The Village at the Crossroads, 1964). Upon its publication it was unanimously greeted as a new achievement in the realm of art. Actually it was the first serious attempt to portray the ills and shortcomings of the collective farm, namely the futile efforts of the farm administration to carry out the absurd directives of the Party. The real merit was that "Avyžius was courageous enough to deal with the most important and pressing problems of the collective farm and did so according to the principles (of the



Party).<sup>12</sup> It is necessary to note that this novel, during the fifteen years it took to write it, had to go through several drafts until it was approved. From a literary standpoint, "Kaimas kryžkelėje" hardly reaches the level of an average novel. Since the emphasis was placed on social-economic problems, characters lack depth and vigor in spite of their animated dialogue. Vivid descriptions of scenes are often marred by the usage of a journalistic rather than literary style. The structure of the novel is conventional and devoid of inventiveness.

As a whole, the novel has changed a great deal in the course of six or seven years. However, there are only a few works of literary significance. It is interesting that some Soviet critics, while unceasingly talking about great literary achievement, sometimes frankly admit that "We do not yet have works which could be called a landmark and which would startle us by their novelty and truth of art"<sup>13</sup>.

### III

The short story was, and still is, the most favorable prose medium.<sup>14</sup> In the post-war decade few short stories of literary merit were written, although all kinds of mediocre stories, sketches and semi-literary reports flooded the press. Around the beginning of 1960's young short story writers, such as R. Lankauskas, M. Sluckis, J. Mikelinskas, V. Dautaratas, Alg. Pocius, appeared on the scene with their more mature works. It was a distinct shift from primitive, stereotyped description of social and political scenes and incidents toward analysis of human beings. As E. Mieželaitis put it, it was a stunning discovery for the writer: "When we returned again to the common human being and scrutinized him with our open eyes, the first impression was as if we would have novelty and truth of art."<sup>15</sup>

Writers were not only confronted with this "discovered anew" world of feelings and thoughts, but also were challenged to render it in a new literary form. The writers accepted the challenge; all major thematic and stylistic innovations, some of which were already mentioned with regard to the novel, were introduced and tried out in one fashion or another in the short stories.

One of the most talented representatives of short story is R. Lankauskas, who has already published four collections of stories: "Klajojantis smėlis" (Shifting Sand, 1960), "Kai nutyla trompetas" (When the Trumpet Becomes Silent, 1961), "Trečias šešėlis" (The Third Shadow, 1964) and "Nuo ryto iki vakaro" (From Morning Until Evening, 1965). His stories are distinctive in that they focus on the inner life of man. In contrast to the mass-mind and the mass-emotions of the majority of Soviet stories, Lankauskas introduced into literature melancholic, disillusioned, alienated individuals. The majority of his individuals are professional people rather than workers or peasants, longing for a true friendship, human warmth, beauty, tranquility. They live or wander in the forests, meadows, empty, huge houses, at the sea shore and rivers. The stories are drawn with sparse but vivid imagery and economy of words. Soviet critics at last have recognized his literary merits, although they advise him to be more precise concerning time and place in the stories and to furnish characters with "more distinct social background": "In some of his short stories it is difficult to understand where and when his heroes live — in our country or in another, in our days or in the nineteenth century".<sup>16</sup> Judging this statement, from a standpoint of Soviet criticism, the universal characteristics of the literary work appear to be a shortcoming.

M. Sluckis, prolific writer and an ardent supporter of the Soviet regime, has published five collections of stories, of which two are more significant: "Geriau mums nesusitikti" (Better that we do not Meet, 1961) and "Išdaigos ir likimai" (Pranks and Destinies, 1964). He tends to experiment: to work with lyrical descriptions, romantic, sometimes sentimental aspects of life. His favorite theme is to describe experiences of young men who have been trapped into the turmoil of war and of post-war partisan resistance. However, his heroes, contrary to those of Lankauskas, are often positive Soviet types. Problems and actions in which men are destined to participate are no more than sketched out. The majority of his stories, with the exception of a few, are mediocre, without insight and freshness, longwinded, often overflowing with sentimentality.

A contrast to Sluckis' lyrical digressions, sentimental stylizations, and dealing with rather conventional problems, are J. Mikelinskas' four collections of short stories: "Senis po laikrodžiu" (The Old Man Under the Clock, 1960), "Šiltos rankos" (Warm Hands, 1962), "Pažinai tu jį?" (Did You Recognize Him?, 1963) and "Žiupsnis smėlio" (A Pinch of Sand, 1965). Mikelinskas concentrates on small objects or insignificant incidents in order to discern causes for their occurrences or to probe the secrets of human life. He is attracted, therefore, to psychological crises and subtle conflicts rather than to lyrical nuances. Consequently, he seldom identifies himself with his heroes; he is primarily an observer who tries to analyse man's soul with somewhat detached curiosity. While Lankauskas, for example, tries to generalize feelings and moods of his individuals and depicts them in a few terse but vivid, suggestive phrases, Mikelinskas focuses his analysis on each reflex and each minute detail. Mikelinskas' stories, for that reason, are characteristic for their rather extensive, detailed descriptions. Since he chooses mainly everyday insignificant moments, his analysis, except for a few observant glimpses, is devoid of flair and fresh surprising discoveries or psychological depth.

Similarly Alg. Pocius' stories, of which a collection "Verpetas" (Whirlpool, 1963) deserves mention, are almost devoid of intrigue and action. Pocius works against great odds: he describes the commonplace with various superficial psychological problems. This is a characteristic phenomenon with regard to the majority of Lithuanian short story writers who for some reason or other avoid the realm of suffering, violence, and death. It is significant that Pocius, dealing more with dramatic events and tragedies of people in the post-war era, picks up rhythm and depth.

Unlike any other writer in contemporary Lithuania, J. Dautartas offers a world of animals, rivers, forests in the collections of stories: "Jūros spalvos" (Colors of the Sea, 1960), "Kai nurausta putinas" (When the Guelder-rose Turns Red, 1963) and "Lakštingalų naktis" (The Night of Nightingales, 1965). Dautartas' men live almost isolated from modern life in a lyrical and somewhat melancholic atmosphere. Nevertheless, some of them are burdened by memories of their dramatic and tragic past. As Sirijos Gira, a contemporary Lithuanian writer, aptly observed, almost all Dautartas' stories are tragic; life of men as well as animals is not without catastrophes or even death. It should be noted that death and other tragic aspects of life hardly ever appear in the fiction of contemporary Lithuania. Dautartas is obviously a talented narrator, for with the exception of a few allegorical stories pertaining to life in rivers and lakes, he describes what he has observed or heard during his fishing trips or wanderings along rivulets and lakes. His stories are not masterpieces, although, they are "like a promenade through a fresh forest full of ozone. After closing the book, a pleasant feeling of freshness lingers".<sup>17</sup>

In general, the short story writers, having made significant contributions in 1960 - 62, seem to have already exhausted their thematic sources to their very limits; they have begun to repeat themselves with respect to themes and styles. This can be seen in their latest rather mediocre works. V. Kubilius expressed a well-grounded fear: "It is frightful that such a standard of mediocrity would take upper hand in the realm of our short story. More and more frequently books neither surprise nor disappoint".<sup>18</sup> Of course, a remedy for this kind of impasse would be the charting of forbidden areas of suffering, despair, depravity and mystery of death. R. Lankauskas in his novels has already ventured into the realm of universal emotions, such as anguish, solitude and melancholy, although he has been reprimanded for doing so.

#### IV

In comparison with poetry and prose, the situation of dramatic literature is of even less impressive quality and quantity of plays. The post-war decade, as was the case in the other genres, is absolutely fruitless. During the thaw period several new plays were written, mainly on themes of contemporary life. However, with the exception of J. Grušas' historical drama "Herkus Mantas" (Herkus Mantas, 1957), they are either fictionalized sketches in the form of plays or mediocre melodramas with a sprinkling of psychological motivation.

"Herkus Mantas" is not only the most outstanding tragedy of that time, but undoubtedly the best play written in the Soviet period. Grušas, a representative of the older generation, managed to write it free from the stereotypes and banalities of socialist realism. Depicting the thirteenth-century Prussian uprising against the Teutonic Knights, Grušas concentrated particularly on religious and ideological conflicts of one of the Prussian leaders, Herkus Mantas. The drama, written in the tradition of romantic tragedy, has a well-knit composition. In terse and expressive language Grušas created grandeur of dramatic action, vividly delineating his characters.

The other plays by Grušas are not of particular significance, except his thesis play "Profesorius Markas Vidinas" (Professor Mark Vidin, 1963). This play deserves mention, because of its theme and well balanced, vigorous composition. The action takes place somewhere in the Western world. Vidinas who has invented a thermonuclear bomb refuses to give its formula to his employer, for fear that the bomb will be used in war. In general, the action in the play is overwhelmed by intellectual discussions which Grušas fails to bring to the psychological and dramatic level.

Young dramatists of the sixties began to shy away from primitive sociological approach and trivial dramatization of poster-like reality. The plays of such writers as K. Saja and V. Rimkevičius, were concerned with human feelings and conflicts. The number of plays in the sixties increased considerably, although only few are of significant aesthetic value.

The first more important dramatic work is "Pirmoji drama" (The First Drama, 1962), a play by K. Saja, a young writer of comedies and comical stories. He depicts the gradual downfall of an artist who is henpecked by his wife, despised by the director of the school he works in and misunderstood by provincial society. Since Soviet critics perceived unfavorable features in it, the play was changed considerably before its production on the stage.

Another variant of Saja's probings into contemporary problems is offered in the play "Nerimas" (Anxiety, 1963). The hero of the play, a highschool student named Rimas, is an idealist who becomes disgusted with his old communist father, the twist-and-vodka-loving classmates, and social hypocrisy in general. After his father has been dismissed from his post, Rimas as an ideal Soviet youth decides to become a simple honest worker. In "Nerimas" and "Pirmoji drama" Saja deals with dramatic situations, but episodes and incidents overcrowd the plot and the end result is an insipid denouement.

In his latest play "Saulė ir stulpas" (Sun and a Post, 1965) Saja is more concerned with moral rather than psychological problems. He poses the question: Who is to blame, if an accident is caused by circumstantial coincidences? Focusing on suspense of guilt, he constructs an intricate plot. A physician Virkutis, the main character, kills a drunkard in a car accident. Because of circumstantial evidence, an innocent man was sentenced for the accident caused by Virkutis. Later, after a lengthy investigation, it became clear that Virkutis' recklessness was due to his disturbed state of mind, when he learned about his wife's love affairs with a police inspector. Later the same inspector conducted the investigation of the accident. Virkutis finally confesses, but the question of guilt, raised on a relative plane, is left unanswered. The intrigue is marred by insignificant sub-plots. Dialogue often takes the places of dramatic action. In general, Saja has a talent for dramatic writing, but his main defects in his latest works, which are essentially moral-psychological dramas, are his periodical relapses into the techniques of the pictorial and social plays.

More lively than the stereotyped products of other Lithuanian playwrights are the plays by V. Rimkevičius, especially "Ratas" (The Wheel, 1964). They are, however, less significant in regard to themes and dramatic effects than Saja's plays.

## V

Literary revival in Lithuanian fiction in the sixties is by no means a new and isolated phenomenon in the USSR. In Soviet Russian literature a similar literary movement began in 1956. Lithuanian writers essentially follow the example of their Russian colleagues, especially in the treatment of new themes and problems. For example, Lankauskas' focus on people as human beings rather than as embodiments of Party aspirations is also the prime concern of the most outstanding Russian short story writers, such as Yu. Kazakov and V. Tendryakov. Marcinkevičius' novelette "Pušis, kuri juokėsi" resembles in many ways V. Aksyonov's "Ticket to the Stars". However, Marcinkevičius' hero, Staugaitis, in search for the self is akin to Valodya, the hero in V. Razov's screen play "A, B, C, D". In respect to form, themes and spirit, other Lithuanian prose writers echo more orthodox Soviet Russian writers, such as Yu. Nagibin, Yu. Bonderov, D. Granin and others. Of course, there is no one in Lithuania to match the courage of Ye. Yevtushenko or the inventive and authentic poetry of A. Voznesensky. Nevertheless, the main trends in Lithuanian and Russian poetry are similar. Lithuanian playwrights are in perfect harmony with contemporary Russian dramatists; both are producing dull and mediocre plays. Saja's plays are written in the tradition of the Russian school of manners, represented primarily by dramatists, such as S. Alyshin, A. Arbuzov and V. Razov.

### Notes

- 1 This survey deals primarily with more prominent writers and their best works. A more detailed study of writers' freedom and creative condition by J. Girnius is included in S. V. Vardys' book *Lithuania Under the Soviets* (New York, Praeger, 1965).
- 2 See the study of the life and work of [V. Mykolaitis-Putinas](#) by [A. Sietynas](#) in *Lituanus*, Spring, 1965.
- 3 *Literatūra ir menas* (Literature and Art), No. 2, 1966.
- 4 R. Lankauskas, *Literatūra ir menas*, 1965, No. 48.
- 5 Stakes are such that if he wins, his compatriots will die, and if he loses, he will die.
- 6 J. Lankutis, *Literatūra ir humanistiniai idealai* (Literature and Humanistic Ideals) (Vilnius, 1963) p. 52.
- 7 J. Mackevičius, *Literatūra ir mevas*, June 2, 1962.
- 8 J. Lankutis, *Literatūra ir menas*, 1965, No. 45.
- 9 R. Lankauskas, "Tiltas į jūrą", *Pergalė* (Victory), 1963, No. 3, p. 22.
- 10 K. Ambrasas, *Mintys kelyje* (Thoughts on the Road) (Vilnius, 1963) p. 140.
- 11 A. Iff. Bučys, *Literatūra ir menas*, 1966, No. 29.
- 12 J. Galinis, *Literatūra, dabartis, žmogus* (Literature, the Present, Man) (Vilnius, 1966) p. 204.
- 13 J. Galinis, *Literatūra ir menas*, 1966, No. 12.
- 14 According to E. Mieželaitis' report, there were more than 40 collections of stories published in the course of seven years. *Pergalė*, 1966, No. 1.
- 15 Quoted by J. Lankutis in *Literatūra ir menas*, 1965, No. 45.
- 16 Ant. Masionis, *Literatūra ir menas*, 1966, No. 20.
- 17 G. Mareckaitė, "Žmogus ir gamta" (Man and Nature), *Pergalė*, 1966, No. 4, p. 162.
- 18 V. Kubilius, *Literatūra ir menas*, 1966, No. 13.