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THE CONDITION OF A FREE PRISONER

Poetry and Prose

of Vincas Mykolaitis - Putinas

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ANDRIUS SIETYNAS is a pseudonym of an outstanding Lithuanian poet and literary critic.

From a certain standpoint, Vincas Mykolaitis-Putinas is one of the most tragic personalities in Lithuanian literature. Fated from his very adolescence to be an "eternal spiritual emigrant," he constantly had to struggle with the discipline imposed on him by someone else, to obey someone, not being in a position nor having the necessary willpower to rebel openly. The first and perhaps the main cause of this inner "emigration" was his entrance into the theological seminary (a step typical of his times) without feeling a real vocation, simply in obedience to the will of his parents, who were persuaded that he "would get used to it." And indeed, Putinas did "get used to it," as we can see from certain biographical data, and above all from the analysis of his literary work. It is in this fact of "getting used to it," in our opinion, that the roots of his personal tragedy are embedded. At the seminary, besides his studies of theology, Putinas acquired also the art of dual existence; he not only learned to dissimulate, but also grew accustomed to concealing his true thoughts and feelings. It is not by chance that the main character of his clearly autobiographical novel *Altorių Šešėly* (In the Shadow of Altars), the seminarian Liudas Vasaris, who is in many ways the author's *alter ego*, chooses as his motto and as his guide of behavior a verse from the poem "Silentium" of the Russian poet Tiuchev: "Be silent, disguise yourself, and hide your dreams and feelings." It is partly because of this that his silent conflict with his parents did not come to the surface. In order to suppress this conflict, it was necessary to withdraw very early into a shell of indifference and to restrain the craving for freedom, so as to prevent any possibility of a real revolt. Henceforth, resignation and avoidance of self-commitment became the norms of his existence, and the field of conflict was limited to his inner self. This spiritual state, called by the early critics of his poetry "the condition of a free prisoner," has been accurately and vividly described by Putinas himself in his symbolic poem "Vergas" (The Slave)¹:

In the palace of my Lord I dwell
A traveler, a stranger brought by chance.
Gates are open wide — where'er I turn,
Yet the freedom that's beyond I cannot reach.

Later, after the completion of his theological studies a new conflict arose within him — that between the priest and the poet — which, as time passed, turned into an open revolt and ended by eventual emancipation from priesthood. Psychologically, however, leaving the priesthood was a mere outward act: the constant inner revolt had already become his way of life, and eternal bonds had been the usual state of existence. To express it by a paradox, Putinas had already become a Prometheus in reverse, depending for his own existence on the existence of the eagle devouring his entrails.

The entire creative work of Putinas is essentially autobiographic. In it are vividly reflected the various periods of the poet's inner development, as will be seen from the following summary analysis of his work. Before considering the creative work itself, however, we would like to present the most important facts from the poet's life.²

academy of theology in St. Petersburg for further theological study. During the period of 1918-1922 he studied philosophy, history of art, and literature at the University of Fribourg in Switzerland, wrote a dissertation (in French) — *L'Esthétique de Vladimir Soloviev* — and was granted the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. At this university he was impressed especially by the professor of psychology and aesthetics, a Dominican, M. de Munnynck. Then, for one year, he continued his studies at the University of Munich under Prof. Fritz Strich and others. In the fall of 1923 he began to teach literature at the University of Kaunas; in 1939 he transferred to the University of Vilnius, where he remained until his retirement.

Putinas began to write during his very first years at the seminary, his first poem was published in 1911.³ In 1916 appeared the ballad *Kunigaikštis Žvainys* (The Duke Žvainys) and the first collection of poetry under the title of *Raudoni Žiedai* (The Red Blossoms). Two volumes of his works were published in 1921. These included all of the poetry that Putinas had written up to that point; the drama entitled *Valdovo Sūnus* (The Ruler's Son) (in 1930 its second version was called simply *Valdovas* — The Ruler); and three short stories: "Medusa" (The Medusa), "Vienu Pabučiavimu" (With a Single Kiss), and "Šviesūs šešėliai" (Bright Shadows). In 1926, *Židinys* (a magazine edited by Putinas himself) published the drama *Žiedas ir Moteris* (The Ring and the Woman). In 1927, the mystery play *Nuvainikuota Vaidilutė* (The Deflowered Vestal) appeared in the same magazine. In this same year Putinas published a collection of poetry entitled *Tarp Dviejų Aušrų* (Between Two Dawns), a collection which is of greatest historical importance in Putinas' artistic evolution, comprising the poems of his symbolist period, written between 1921 and 1926. Henceforth poetry no longer played the main role in Putinas' artistic production: he began to concentrate mainly on drama, and somewhat later on prose fiction, a shift which resulted in the two aforementioned dramas and in two novels — *Altorių Šešėly* (In the Shadow of Altars), published in 1933, and *Krizė* (The Crisis), published in 1937. In 1936 Putinas reedited his entire poetical work, selected certain poems for reprinting, and published them together with his latest poems under the title *Keliai ir Kryškeliai* (Roads and Crossroads). During the years of the German occupation, in 1944, the magazine *Kūryba* began to serialize his play *Operacija* (Operation); in 1943 the press of the underground published another collection of poems, *Rūsčios Dienos* (Grim Days). While teaching at the university, Putinas wrote extensively on the question of literary criticism, theory, history, and aesthetics. The most significant of these studies are: a study of the Lithuanian dramatist and philosopher Vydūnas (1863-1953), *Vydūno Dramaturgija* (The Dramaturgy of Vydūnas) (1935); *Naujoji Lietuvių Literatūra* (The New Lithuanian Literature), part I published in 1936; and a collection of articles entitled *Literatūros Etiudai* (Essays on Literature), published in 1937.

II

As can be seen from the above biobibliographic sketch, the creative work of Putinas comprises all three of the main literary genres, expressing the different stages in the author's inner evolution. Of these foremost is his poetical work, which even now remains the basic and most important part of Putinas' literary contribution.

Up to the year 1933, i.e. until the appearance of the novel *In the Shadow of Altars*, Putinas was best known as a poet. His poetry had penetrated wide masses of readers. He was read and recognized, to a degree, even by those who read and appreciated but one poet, Maironis. (Maironis, 1862-1932, was the greatest Lithuanian poet at the turn of the century. His poetry played an important part in the movement of national rebirth). Thus, upon the death of Maironis, despite the fact that Putinas had at the time turned away from poetry, wide masses of readers considered him as the only poet worthy of inheriting the crown of the late bard and prophet of national rebirth. Indeed, many were the ties between Putinas and Maironis. The very first seeds of his poetic talent had germinated under the influence of Maironis poetry. Maironis was his inspiration, his teacher, and his ideal. While the other most significant poets of his generation (i.e. Faustas Kirša, Balys Sruoga) entered the poetical arena under the banner of anti-*maironic* reaction, disagreeing with this poet both aesthetically and ideologically, the poetry of Putinas retains to the last certain notes of Maironis, especially in the constant dwelling on the years of captivity. In a certain sense Putinas, like Maironis, is a poet of a still unliberated nation. Maironis, to his very death, remained faithful to his ideology of national struggle, and pursued this struggle even after liberty had long been won. Putinas, too, as if remembering the grandeur as well as the sorrow of that national struggle for freedom, constantly returns to those same moods that made up the dominant note of his pre-independence poetry. Due to his bond with the *maironic* poetry and ideology, Putinas appeared in the eyes of his public as the only heir of the lineage of pre-liberation poets, destined by fate itself to take over the honor and the burden of that inheritance.

Putinas' poetical development was very slow. Having begun his creative activity under the influence of Maironis, Tiuchev, Lermontov, and Fet, he became interested in symbolism only at a time when that movement had already become history and had been replaced by newer movements both abroad and at home. His symbolist period coincided with the futurist movement born from *Keturi Vėjai* (The Four Winds), 1924-1927, the literary review of Lithuanian futurists. Putinas' strange inability to keep pace with his times eventually put on him the stamp of a conservative. Thus, among the poets of his generation he was always to fulfill the obligations of the dutiful son who had remained at home, while the others were taking advantage of the freedom and privileges of prodigal sons.

The poetry of Putinas readily falls into three periods: romantic (1911-1920), symbolistic (1920-1926), and classic (1926-1944). These divisions represent not only a difference in method, but also indicate quite accurately the pace of Putinas' maturation as a poet. The poetry of his romantic period, written under the influence of Maironis and of the Russian romanticists, appears today as weak, unoriginal, and unauthentic. Even such poems as "Pabudai, gamtužėle" (Reawakening of nature), "Kalnių debesėlis" (The little mountain cloud), "Bus ruduo" (Autumn is nearing), which found their way into the school readers, are but naive examples of the so-called *Heimatpoesie* found in the poetry of this type of every nation. They clearly indicate that the poet was following a wrong route. It is interesting that even such a stubborn

conservative as Jakštas-Dambrauskas (1860-1938), a poet and critic of the old school, while enthusiastically welcoming the young poet, considered his verses of this period only in their relation to Maironis, not even pretending to credit them with any degree of originality.

It was symbolism that delivered Putinas out of the above mentioned situation. During the symbolistic period, his talent blossomed forth to its full beauty. The work of this period was influenced, to be sure, by the Russian symbolists, especially by the leading poet and essayist of the Russian symbolist movement Viacheslav Ivanov (1866-1949), and the Lithuanian and Russian poet of the symbolist school Jurgis Baltrušaitis (1873-1944); but we must observe that this influence was one of ideas rather than one of form: it revealed to him a completely new understanding of the universe. At any rate, Putinas suddenly shook off all of the romantic elements and influences and, for the first time, addressed a truly authentic message to his audience. At the center of his symbolistic poetry stand the cycles of "Pesimizmo himnai" (Hymns of Pessimism) and "Viršūnės ir gelmės" (Heights and Abysses), difficult in their theme and form, expressing the poets' aesthetic and philosophic *Weltanschauung*. The individuality of Putinas relates more closely to Ivanov than to Baltrušaitis. Both Solovyev-formulated world concepts become real to him only on the plane of individual consciousness: "all things, like pale shadows, become dual in one's vision, and one no longer knows by what name to call them." ⁴ Putinas' concept of the universe is one of a festively gloomy ceremony in the temple of the Unknown God. The most typical poems of his symbolistic period are "Pesimizmo himnai" (Hymns of Pessimism), "Tylūs ir nykūs" (Silent and Barren), "Nerandamai" (To One Who Cannot Be Found), "Juodas angelas" (The Black Angel), "Plaštakai" (To the Butterfly), "Gedulas" (Mourning). We must also mention another poem of this period, *Rūpintojėlis*, although it stands apart from the others: in writing it the poet borrowed the symbolism of the Lithuanian folksongs, and it is one of the best examples of this type of poetry in all of Lithuanian literature.

In his classical period, Putinas turned to moderate realism, exchanging the symbolistic aesthetic of *correspondence* for the classical principle of impartiality; his poetry seems to have become clearer, brighter, to have rid itself of extreme individualism, acquiring a ring of greater universality. The best poems of this period — "Nuostabios naktys" (Wondrous Nights), "Pakvipo žemė" (The Earth Becomes Fragrant), "Tavęs nebėr" (You Are No Longer Here), "Pietų šalies posmai" (Verses of the South), "Saulėleidy" (In the Sunset), "Marche funèbre", "Lėlių baladė" (The Dolls' Ballad) — present a more organically balanced form, objective suggestivity, and a greater simplicity. "Vestuvių muzikantas" (The Wedding Musician) may be considered as the poem that sums up this period: its *leitmotif* is a melancholic resignation to the concept of man's condition.

With respect to his themes, which give an indication of the poet's inner evolution, the poetry of Putinas is a kind of analysis of a monastic life, an anatomy of bondage, a search for premises of self-liberation, and an attempt at self-orientation in his human condition. As for form, Putinas has remained within the framework of traditional prosody. In comparing him in this respect with Maironis, one could say that Putinas shows somewhat more variety in the use of poetic devices, that he uses language much more correctly, etc., but also that he has not contributed anything particularly new.

The influence of Putinas' poetic work in the development of Lithuanian literature was not always proportionate to its aesthetic worth. At the time when he himself was still under the influence of maironic poetry, new schools and movements had already begun to rise. Because of his conservative attitude, Putinas was automatically thrown into the camp of the "old school." Hence, he never established any school of his own; he was imitated and openly emulated only by various amateurs. True, some influences of the poetry of Putinas can be found in the works of the younger poets Stasys Santvaras and Bernardas Brazdžionis; however, these writers soon went in completely different directions. In any case, Putinas has played a historically important role as a type of moderator and a conservator of the treasures of tradition. Kazys Binkis (1893-1942), poet, dramatist, and leader of the Lithuanian futurists, with the offensive of his review *Keturi Vėjai*, impaired not only the old poetical tradition but respect for norm and rules as well, sowing the seed of a verse of unperfected form.

III

Putinas' dramatic work represents a bridge between his lyrical poetry and his fictional prose. In its essence it is still closely related to the poetry and is, from many a standpoint, its extension. The thematic moments analyzed in his lyric poetry are joined in his dramatic compositions into logical constructions of greater dimensions, intended to present the illusion of the essence of life. Whereas his poetry is an analysis of man's loneliness and moral ensalvement, his drama is a theoretical experimentation with the possibilities of self-liberation, presented in the form of dramatic conflicts drawn from life situations. Here, too, we constantly encounter the same themes: duality of existence, revolt, really or supposedly (most likely the latter) unconquerable obstacles, and dreams of liberation; there is the ever-present question of keeping or of breaking some commitment. Thus, every situation is more or less directly related to the personal situation of the author. In *Žiedas ir Moteris* (The Ring and the Woman), a nun breaks her vows; *Nuvainikuota Vaidilutė* (The Deflowered Vestal) treats basically the same theme but on a different level — the national one. In all of his dramas, Putinas allows his heroes to revolt and to try to find an escape at any price, as if in an effort to discover a route for his own liberation.

From the dramatic standpoint, the plays of Putinas are not of any great value. Their dramatism is too casuistic, without a basis in reality, and difficult to express through theatrical devices. The intrigue, weak to begin with, is fatally impaired by long monologues, through which the author himself attempts to explain the motives of various acts, instead of allowing them to be brought out in the course of action of his characters.

IV

In 1921 Putinas made his debut as a writer of prose fiction. However, his first attempts did not draw much attention from either the readers or the critics, and rightly so. Only the appearance in 1933 of the voluminous novel *In the Shadow of Altars* placed the author in the very first ranks of the Lithuanian prose writers. The publication of this novel must be considered as one of the most important events in the Lithuanian literature of the period of independence. For the first time, a book overshadowed daily events and became a universal object of discussions. To be sure, it was not merely the artistic qualities of the novel that prompted these discussions; but this fact even adds to the novel's importance, for up to that date Lithuanian prose had been sadly lacking in current interest, never concerning itself with anything but patriarchal rustic life. Even to this day, thirty years later, the historical importance of the date of appearance of this novel has not decreased, although the book itself no longer inspires the same enthusiasm. Through this novel Putinas has played a very important role of precursor, not only by firing the ambitions of other writers, but also by inspiring them with greater self-confidence. *Altorių šešėly* (henceforth *In the Shadow of Altars*) was, in fact, the very first example of a truly modern novel in Lithuanian literature.

In his introduction to *In the Shadow of Altars*, Putinas pointed out that in the novel he would analyze the relationship of the qualities of priest and poet, and the reasons for a man's turning away from the priesthood. The novel is, without any doubt, an autobiographical work, based on the personal experience of the author. Its action takes place during the period of 1905-1926. The protagonist, Liudas Vasaris, is the absolute center and axis of the novel: the author's complete attention is concentrated on him. In order to make his hero stand out all the more, Putinas creates a rather detailed historical background. For this reason, *In the Shadow of Altars* is also a cultural history of the epoch depicted. In the course of the novel the author touches on all of the cultural problems typical of that period: the emancipation of the worldly intelligentsia, the struggle for language and for the freedom of national self-determination, the struggle with the remains of the dying aristocracy, the struggle against parents for freedom in choosing one's vocation, etc.

In the Shadow of Altars is essentially a thesis novel. Everything in it serves to illumine the thesis. Putinas proves himself a true master of this type of novel. To prove his thesis — that of the incompatibility of the vocations of priest and poet — Putinas starts from strictly real-life premises, taking into account every possible historical and psychological argument. The first part of the novel, "The Days of Trial", is dedicated to bringing to a head the conflict which, however, does not yet become very prominent, appearing only occasionally among many other naturally arising problems. In this part the author depicts the school years spent by Liudas Vasaris at the theological seminary. It is a kind of symphony of seminary life, written with great love and warmth. The seminary is represented here as if it were itself a dramatic character, and is shown with all of its romance, discipline, ceremonies, spiritual fathers, teachers, bells announcing the rising time, and mystically exalting melodies of the vespers. In the next two parts the thesis progressively takes on more and more importance. In the second part, "Life Goes On," Liudas Vasaris is already an ordained priest and a true poet. The conflict becomes sharper, for the conflicting ideals have now acquired a stronger grip on the protagonist. What was formerly but an adolescent rebellion has now become a reality. At the same time, the feeling of duty has grown deep roots. In the last two parts Putinas is no longer an objective narrator: in the conflict of the priest and the poet, he very clearly sides with the poet. In the third part, "Emancipation," the author again draws more extensively from his own experiences; this part is dedicated to the abdication of the priesthood and to the presentation and defense of arguments supporting this decision. For this reason, it is the most dry and the most schematic part.

In the process of the psychological evolution of the author himself, the novel represents an attempt to apply to a real life situation the dialectic of emancipation which he had formulated and analyzed in his lyric poetry and in his dramatic works. This attempt, however, ends in a fiasco, for the actual emancipation seems plausible neither to the reader, nor, most probably, to the author himself. One can see that clearly even from a summary analysis of the character of Liudas Vasaris.

Liudas Vasaris, in whom is concentrated the novel's entire complex of actions and ideas, is without a doubt the author's *alter ego*, although not in a strictly biographical sense. In every case he is the author's mouthpiece, and acts as the author himself would have or at least might have acted under the same circumstances. He represents the *I* encountered in Putinas' lyrical poetry in various images: the slave, the swimmer in a vortex, the bearer of the torch, the wedding musician. Here this *I* is transferred from the world of symbolism into reality, and is supported by historical, cultural, and psychological conditions. Actually, one can distinguish two versions of the character of Vasaris: one which the author is trying to impress on the reader, and another which can be derived from the various objective circumstances in the novel. The author would like to persuade the reader that Liudas Vasaris is the victim of outward circumstances; in reality, however, the actual cause of his tribulations is a weak will and indecisiveness. He is continuously rebelling, but his rebellion remains ever unrealized. The reason he cannot liberate himself from the priesthood is that bondage and rebellion have become the inherent and necessary conditions of his existence. Subconsciously he is afraid that he will not be capable of living as a free man. The "prison" of priesthood is unreal also for another reason: he never became a priest *de facto* but merely *de jure*. An authentic poet would easily win over an unauthentic priest, and *vice versa*. Always casuistic and scrupulous, he sins against the regulations not so much because of bad will, but rather because of weak will at times he even seems to be looking for situations in which he could live according to the above-mentioned motto taken from Tiuchev's "Silentium." As the novel progresses, the desire for liberation changes into an understandable procrastination of liberation; the thesis arguments become gradually weaker. Hence, the actual emancipation of the denouement does not sound convincing: Liudas Vasaris of the novel, like the author himself in real life, abandons the priesthood for a woman, who in this case is Aukse, an

altogether shallow and uninteresting personality. Thus, the problem of the relation of priest and poet remains essentially unresolved.

From the standpoint of style, *In the Shadow of Altars* represents a reaction of anti-ornamentation in Lithuanian literature. From its very birth Lithuanian prose had shown a tendency toward ornamentation. Valančius, Žemaitė, Vaižgantas, Krėvė, Vienuolis, Šeinius, Savickis, Tarulis, Vaičiulaitis, Cvirka, etc., all had kept, more or less, the baroque tradition of verbal ornamentation, seeking to raise the style to a rank of independent aesthetic value. The novel of Putinas was the first rather extensive work in Lithuanian prose, written in the naked style of Stendhal's tradition, in which a word is nothing but a tool for precise self-expression. Putinas does not imbue his word with either suggestive or magic significance. He uses strictly high Lithuanian, avoiding the color-fulness of dialect and the words of rare usage. In this respect he could be compared to the representatives of the French psychological novel of the end of the 19th century, such as Paul Bourget.

V.

Literature and literary criticism began to interest Putinas rather late, and he studied these subjects somewhat systematically only during the period of his stay at Munich. He got his basic notions of aesthetics from the afore-mentioned M. de Munnynck. Putinas based his own aesthetic principles on M. de Munnynck's statement, *L'art — c'est la creation humaine*. Denying the beauty of nature and rejecting the classic principle of harmony, Putinas considered as aesthetic reality the vision of a higher reality perceived through purely human means. In his university lectures, in interpreting various literary facts, Putinas followed the theories of O. Walzel, W. Dilthey, F. Strich, and E. Ermatinger. In actual literary criticism Putinas showed himself as a sober, objective, and intelligent appraiser of literary facts, although not a very original one. His *Naujoji Lietuvių Literatūra* (New Lithuanian Literature) is not a very important work. In evaluating contemporary Lithuanian literature, Putinas shows himself incapable of freeing himself from the historically patriotic criteria of evaluation or from the long-established mold of textbook interpretation.

VI.

In the summer of 1944, as the Soviet armies were for the second time drawing close to the Lithuanian borders, Putinas decided not to leave the country, although, as he himself later admitted, to stay was to "risk his freedom, and maybe even his life".⁵ After a period of silence, to the great surprise of many of his compatriots, this idealist par excellence and practically the official poet of independent Lithuania began to appear in the press with stereotyped Soviet poems and various public statements. His road from idealistic romanticism to socialistic realism appears unbelievably short. In one of his statements made to a representative of the weekly *Literature and Art* on the occasion of a New Year, Putinas regrets having been lost for so many years in the darkness of idealism, and that now so little time remains to redeem his errors. In 1946, at the second convention of Soviet Lithuanian writers, Putinas spoke in these terms: "I am interested in our writing works which would make a deeper and greater impact on our readers, which would touch not only their minds, but also their hearts. ... Only with such works of art shall we be contributing to the education of the man who will establish the most beautiful and the most noble desire of mankind, the Communist system ... I rejoice today that the events of life have brought me onto the true and the most fruitful road of realism. I am grateful to the Party and to the Government, that they have made it possible for me, at the end of my life, to devote myself more fully to literature, and possibly, to realize my last and vastest project".⁶ Commenting on the reaction of Boris Pasternak, when the latter was granted the Nobel prize, Putinas wrote: "It is impossible to understand how a writer who has lived for forty years in a Soviet land could have reached such a shameful end ... In entering the road of Soviet writers, we entered the only right road".⁷

As we well know, Putinas had never been a fighter. He always avoided opposition, preferring to conform to the regime of the moment, even though without showing too much involvement. This time, however, it was not enough to be obedient; a positive commitment was necessary, and a complete disavowal of his past. There is only one question: how did he do it? Leaving aside all details, we shall content ourselves with simply observing that Putinas was not very courteous toward that past of his, not to mention faithfulness to his former views and ideals.

During the Soviet period Putinas developed a wide literary activity: he wrote poetry, took part in public literary gatherings, gave lectures, etc. His literary production of this period is also quite abundant: there appeared three collections of poems — *Sveikinu Žemę* (I Greet the Earth) in 1950, *Poezija*, rinkiniai eilėraščių (Poetry, selected poems) in 1956, and *Būties Valanda* (The Hour of Being) in 1963: a novel *Sukilėliai* (henceforth referred to as *The Rebels*). part I, was published in 1957; translations of *Konrad Wallenrod* and the *Sonnets of Crimea* of Adam Mickiewicz; and several fairly extensive articles on literary history and criticism. In addition he published his collected works in eight volumes.

During this last period, Putinas' poetry was at first emphatically Soviet, stereotyped, full of well known slogans, names, and other elements of this type. Such poems comprise his first collection, *Sveikinu Žemę* (I Greet the Earth). Only after the wave of de-stalinization, when the so-called personality cult and the theory of unquestioning assent were denounced, could he return to personal themes. These themes predominate in the collection *Būties Valanda* (The Hour of Being). In comparing this collection with his earlier poetry, one notices a rather marked ebb, although not yet a real decline, in talent. The dominant moods are those of fatigue, apathy, and a total resignation of a man who has seen, suffered, understood, been disappointed in, and lost many things. Most of the poems are permeated with stark pessimism, no longer consolable. In the best poems of the collection, Putinas still shows himself to be a truly authentic and great poet. "Prometheus" is one of such poems. Through a thin layer of official optimism, slightly tinted with the colors of revolutionary romanticism, one

catches a glimpse here, from time to time, of the poet, broken by the decisions and resolutions of various conventions, but still alive. In spite of the shortcoming in form, *Būties Valanda* is undoubtedly the best of all the Lithuanian collections of poetry that have appeared behind the Iron Curtain during the Soviet period.

Upon the publication of the first part of the novel *The Rebels*, Putinas received many compliments from both sides of the Iron Curtain. The author himself, speaking on one occasion about this work, called it the only goal and ambition of his remaining life. Our opinion on this subject is, alas, much less enthusiastic. Since it is impossible to make a final evaluation of it (since the novel is not yet completed), we shall limit ourselves to a few remarks of a general nature. In our opinion, *The Rebels* is a typically average historical novel, written with a bureaucratic application, but also with indifference, without creative fire. Afraid to depart from the Marxist interpretation of the historical events (the rebellion of 1863 in Lithuania) presented in the novel, the author limits himself to worn out banalities and to officially approved generalizations. Often when the Marxist interpretation of events does not suffice, it is necessary to "adjust" history, i.e. to falsify it, in order to make it agree with the Marxist theories. This causes various misconceptions in the novel: for example, one of the leaders of the insurrection (Rev. Mackevičius) speaks like a thoroughly indoctrinated Marxist of our day. Since the complete attention of the author is focused not on the characters but rather on the presentation and interpretation of the epoch (which can be clearly foreseen), there is hardly any reason to expect anything new from the volumes to follow. From the point of view of form, too, it is difficult to say anything approbatory: the construction of the novel is old-fashioned, boring, and lacking in rhythm; the style is heavy, indifferent, without energy.

In his literary and critical works of this period, Putinas seldom does more than echo the officially accepted views on the questions he treats. At times his efforts of conformity make him appear more Catholic than the pope. A classical example of such exaggerated efforts and of intellectual sycophancy is the essay *Tarybinė literatūra ir tautų draugystė* (Soviet literature and the Friendship of Nations) (Vilnius, 1950).

NOTES

- 1 From the collection of Putinas' poetry *Keliai ir Kryžkeliai* (Roads and Crossroads), Kaunas, 1936, p. 280.
- 2 The following essays and monographs are useful critical studies of Putinas' work: E. Radzikauskas (L. Gira), *Kritikos Raštai* (Essays of Criticism), Kaunas, 1929; J. Grinius *Putino Lyrika* (Poetry of Putinas), Kaunas, 1932; A. Ašmantas, "Kūrybinis Putino Pasaulis", *Pedagoginis Metraštis* (An essay on the creative world of Putinas in the Pedagogical Yearbook), Kaunas, 1938, vol. I, pp. 186-213; *Tarybų Lietuvos Rašytojai* (Writers of Soviet Lithuania), Vilnius, 1957; pp. 337-354; Lietuvos TSR Mokslų Akademija, Lietuvių Kalbos ir Literatūros Institutas, *Lietuvių Literatūros Istorija* (History of Lithuanian Literature, edited by the Institute of Lithuanian Language and Literature of the Academy of Sciences of Lithuanian, SSR), Vilnius, 1961, vol. III, pt. I, pp. 542-590; J. Lankutis, *V. Mykoliaičio-Putino Kūryba*, (The Work of V. M-P.), Vilnius, 1961; J. Grinius, *Vincas Mykolaitis-Putinas als Dichter. Zu seinem 70. Geburtstag*, Bonn, 1964.
- 3 Putinas' collected works have been published in two major editions: *Putino Raštai* (Works of Putinas), Kaunas, 1921, 2 vols., including works written until that date; an eight-volume edition of collected works was issued recently by the soviet regime under the title *Raštai* (Works) (Vilnius, 1959-1964). The latter edition contains all of the works referred to in this essay.
- 4 *Keliai ir Kryžkeliai*, p. 119.
- 5 See Putinas' *Raštai*, *op. cit.*, vol. VIII, p. 377.
- 6 *Ibid.*, p. 386; in the last part of the sentence he is referring to the novel *The Rebels*.
- 7 *Literaturnaia Gazeta*, Nov. 1, 1958.