

LITUANUS

LITHUANIAN QUARTERLY JOURNAL OF ARTS AND SCIENCES

Volume 10, No.3-4 - Fall and Winter 1964

Editor of this issue: Thomas Remeikis

ISSN 0024-5089

Copyright © 1964 LITUANUS Foundation, Inc.



LITUANUS

www.lituanus.org

Commentary:

250th ANNIVERSARY OF DONELAITIS' BIRTH: East and West

The 250th anniversary of K. Donelaitis' birth was widely celebrated on both sides of the Iron Curtain. In exile, the Lithuanian World Congress proclaimed 1964 as the year of K. Donelaitis. Subsequently the series of essays on various facets of Donelaitis' life and works appeared in Lithuanian refugees' newspapers, and numerous lectures were delivered during the commemorative gatherings of Lithuanians in America, Europe and Australia. The most worthy tribute to Donelaitis was the entire 3rd issue of the cultural magazine *Aidai*. An issue, No. 1, of this quarterly was also devoted to Donelaitis.

The commemoration of Donelaitis' birth behind the Iron Curtain probably even surpassed in some respects the commemoration in exile. By the decree of the Lithuanian Soviet Government, the anniversary of Donelaitis, the Protestant pastor-poet, was marked by meetings of social and cultural groups and even of atheist clubs in Lithuania and of Russian writers in Moscow. Various eulogies to the poet were published in the first issues of the official writers' monthly journal *Pergalė* (Victory) and weekly literary newspaper *Literatūra ir menas* (Literature and Art). Besides articles honoring Donelaitis in other newspapers and new editions of *The Seasons* in Lithuanian and in Russian, an anniversary postage stamp with Donelaitis' picture was issued, and his name was given to a mountain peak in the Pamirs, in Central Asia. The most lasting tributes to Donelaitis can be considered L. Gineitis' book, *Kristijonas Donelaitis ir jo epocha* (K. D. and His Epoch, see review of this work in Book Review section of this issue) and J. Kabelka's philological study, *Kristijono Donelaičio raštų leksika* (The Vocabulary of K. D.' Works).

The enthusiasm of the Soviets for Donelaitis makes us wonder. While they recently have renewed their efforts to stamp out religion and inculcate atheism, at the same time they have paid such homage to Donelaitis, who urges man in his works to lead a Christian life through hard and honest work, to love God and neighbor and to resist foreign occupants. The Soviets, realizing that it would be too ridiculous to ignore or to proclaim his works as worthless, apparently decided to make the best of it. Since peasants stand in the center of *Seasons* and since Donelaitis depicts them objectively, the Soviet picked only one aspect of the *Seasons* — the social and economical conditions — and interpreted them from a current Soviet communist view. Consequently Donelaitis appears as almost a predecessor of Socialist Realism; one who opposes not only the feudal system and has sided with peasants, but a man who has "inspired working people to depend on their own strength" and has "helped Lithuanian workers to grasp clearer the social and national rights of their class". In making of Donelaitis a promoter of communism, the Soviets want to convince others and themselves that only they propagate and appreciate his works. Especially do they feel uneasy about the studies on Donelaitis completed during the period of the independent Lithuania (1918-1940). They denounce these studies as meaningless and erroneous, or they simply maintain that "the bourgeois government hated this bard of the serfs" and "hid him from the working people".

In spite of the misrepresentation of Donelaitis in the Soviet Union, the commemoration of his birth accomplished several things. First, Donelaitis was introduced to readers in various countries. Second, the harm done by tendentious interpretations, which change with every new ruler in the Kremlin, is temporary; Donelaitis' works themselves speak about his views and his epoch. Third, on hearing about the thousands of volumes of Donelaitis' works sold in the last year and about the numerous commemorative meetings which took place in Lithuania, one wonders whether or not the present collective farmers — serfs of the Soviet regime — identify themselves with the serfs of Donelaitis, and whether or not Donelaitis' urging of resistance to foreign occupants reminds the Lithuanians of their Soviet occupants. It is also a paradox that the Soviet should erect a memorial stone in Tolminkiemis (Donelaitis' parish) for the Lithuanian pastor-poet, a defender of oppressed by German colonist landowners, while Tolminkiemis now has a Russian name — *Čystyje prudy* and it is settled entirely by recent colonists from Russia.

