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Rolfs Ekmanis, **Latvian Literature Under the Soviets: 1940-1975** (Belmont, Mass.: Nordland Publishing Co., 1978, 533 pp. incl. index). \$37.50

The author was born in Riga, earned his Ph.D. in Slavic Languages and Literatures at Indiana University, and is Professor of Slavic Languages at Arizona State University in Tempe. He has written extensively in areas of Latvian and Soviet literature, as well as on matters of general intellectual interest. This book is a pioneer work on the Sovietization of Latvian literature.

Dr. Ekmanis deals in turn with the first year of Soviet rule (1940-1941), Latvian Communist writers in the Soviet Union, 1941-1945, Literary Decline During the Period of Zhdanovism, Latvian Literature During the First Thaw, 1953-1957, the Aftermath of the Thaw, 1957-1960, and, finally, the Battle for Cultural Autonomy. There are eighty-six pages of notes, and a massive "selected bibliography" of seventy-five pages.

The transformation of the Latvian artistic and intellectual environment into one in harmony with Soviet policy proved to be a difficult process, with only Communist lackeys collaborating. Operation Barbarossa temporarily ended Soviet control, but during the period 1941-1945 Latvian Communist writers and their mentors were busy in Moscow. When they returned in 1945, reimposition of orthodoxy to Marxism-Leninism was swift. Under the leadership of Andrei Zhdanov, the Soviets moved in the direction of total domination of cultural affairs. This was highlighted by a campaign to destroy non-Russian nationalism throughout the USSR, and particularly in Ukraine and the Baltic States. In order to compel the Baltic intellectuals to conform to the rigid and stereotyped Soviet norm, its members were muzzled, cajoled and threatened at the same time. It was not until Stalin's death that this rigidity came to an end (albeit only temporarily).

The 20th Party Congress and Khrushchev's new line suggested the possibilities of a thaw. But these hints of liberalization were snuffed out by the Soviet response to events in Hungary and Poland towards the end of 1956. In 1958 the Communist parties of the non-Russian republics held their congresses. Nationalism was again attacked, and particular attention was paid to "unhealthy moods" among intellectuals. Writers such as Visvaldis Lams (Eglons) were castigated for their failure to conform.

Thus the story of Communist-controlled literature in Latvia is inseparable from the twists and turns of the Soviet Communist Party in Moscow. The reimposition of rigid controls in the later Khrushchev years and, since 1964 under Brezhnev, were reflected in all the non-Russian republics, including Latvia. Latvian Communist leader Augusts Voss demonstrated great skill in keeping in tune with the Moscow line. He expressed special dismay not only concerning the reluctance of writers, poets, critics, and literary scholars to participate in the "unmasking process of bourgeois ideology, anticommunism and antisovietism," but also about writings which "play on the national sentiments of the people and their respect for the past, thus impregnating the consciousness of Soviet people with alien views and moods."

In spite of de-Stalinization, then, "the literary machinery has remained practically the same," and the official language, in the midseventies, "darkly threatening the disobedient authors resembled the language of Andrei Zhdanov in 1946 and of the Latvian Party secretary Arvids Pelše in the early 1950's." (p. 352). The author concludes that "although a person living in Riga now has somewhat easier access to Western literature (often through Russian translations), and hence to Western ideas, Latvian literature is still not ventilated by sufficient contact with the highly literate societies beyond the Soviet borders, societies that might give the local product perspective and a place in world literature." (p. 353).

We are indebted to Dr. Ekmanis for this comprehensive and judicious work. Not only the text itself, but the notes are full of insights. I hope this book will have a wide readership.

Anthony T. Bouscaren  
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