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Jonas Lankutis, A. Dmietrieva, editors, *Istorija litovskoj literatury* (History of Lithuanian Literature). The Lithuanian SSR Academy of Sciences, Institute of Lithuanian Language and Literature. (Vilnius: Vaga, 1977). 957 pages.

This large volume encompasses the entire history of Lithuanian literature, from its beginnings to the present day. A systematic historical treatise on such a wide scale brings with it the responsibility for objectivity and accuracy of scholarly perspective — a responsibility which, unfortunately, is not always properly met. One of the most glaring instances of political bias is the total omission of any discussion, indeed, any mention, of Lithuanian literature written in the West, particularly after the Second World War. The attitude seems to be that any creative writing done independently of ideological control by the Communist Party is simply not literature and has no place in history. Of course, since this volume is written in Russian and addressed to the entire multinational Soviet reading public, one can understand how it may be "inconvenient" to let everyone know that this particular "Soviet nationality" has a viable and vigorous cultural life outside the long reach of the empire. To understand, however, is not to excuse.

Another fundamental distortion of scholarly perspective is rooted in a central belief of Soviet-style literary Marxism, namely, that the value of art is to be determined first of all by the degree to which it serves social and political causes and only then by the intrinsic quality of art as such. The result is that second-string writers with "correct" political attitudes are given a large amount of space in this volume, while truly outstanding artists committed only to their own creative voice are disposed of with a few superficial remarks. Thus, for instance, Teofilus Tilvytis (1904-1969), for whom "pure literature is a useless occupation," and Julius Janonis (1896-1917), an intensely idealistic revolutionary rhymester, rate extensive and detailed discussion, but the extraordinary talent of the poet Henrikas Radauskas (1910-1970) gets a response of only eleven lines, referring only to his first book, published in Lithuania in 1935, without a single word about his other works and without any reference to the fact that Radauskas achieved the summit of his creative powers during the time he lived in the United States.

A curious case is that of Liudas Gira (1884-1946), a rhetorical poet of middling talent who found it congenial to himself to expound ideological messages of opposite content as the political climate of Lithuania moved from official patriotism of the independence period to Communist propaganda after 1940. Gira's nationalistic poetry is not much better or worse than his Soviet verse, but the book speaks of the former as being "cold and bombastic," and of the latter as "filled with passionate pathos."

The older literary classics, whose place in the history of Lithuanian literature is now established beyond the point of controversy, are treated with all the respect and attention which many of them truly deserve. In this sense, the present volume faithfully continues the traditional hierarchy of values prevalent in diachronic literary criticism. On the other hand, the specific contributions of these figures are reassessed in the same manner in which the Soviet Russian critics have dismembered and reassembled their own literary classics to make them seem like the forerunners of the "highest stage" of Russian literary achievement — Socialist Realism. Just as there is now a Soviet Tolstoy, Gogol and even Dostoevsky, we have here a Soviet Lithuanian Maironis, Žemaitė, Valančius, Mykolaitis-Putinas, and others. The effect is created by giving strong emphasis to such aspects of the classics' achievement as can possibly be interpreted in the light of desirable social and political "messages" to be found in their works.

The periodization of Lithuanian literature is also standardized according to the overall Soviet model of literary history where historical and political events representing the functions of the Marxist dialectical "laws of history" are given primacy over inherent literary developments. Thus Lithuanian literature is divided into three main periods: prerevolutionary (up to 1917), independence or "bourgeois" period, 1917 to 1940 (of course, Russian literature has no equivalent here), and Soviet literature proper, since 1940. In the case of Lithuania, 1940 did indeed bring radical changes in literature, but these were artificially imposed by the Soviet occupation. The year 1917, however, is of no particular significance in Lithuanian letters and cannot be objectively used as a marker for periodization. Yet, this subordination of literature to history along the general ideological lines of the Soviet state gives this book a certain official "textbook" aspect which will set all subsequent historical studies of Lithuanian literature in the same distorting mold.

The best feature of the book is the rather high level of sophistication, insight and precision which becomes manifest in the discussions of individual authors once the critics have discharged their political obligations to the regime and can turn to the "specifics of art". The prevalent methodology seems to be interpretative and analytical, with some tendency toward the structuralist approach, although not identified as such by the critics. The earlier classics, such as Donelaitis or Baranauskas, are particularly well described with a judicious mixture of original insight and traditional judgment. In all cases, the documentation of critical opinion, the scholarly apparatus, represents a considerable advance over previous methods and knowledge, irrespective of political considerations. Such critics as L. Gineitis, A. Zalatorius, K. Nastopka, and V. Kubilius show themselves to be truly talented, careful and perceptive readers in their lucid and articulate presentations of the esthetic values inherent in art.

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