

## JUOZAS GRUŠAS

The first works of Juozas Grušas, who was born in 1901, appeared in 1925; they are representative of the efforts of a young generation of Lithuanian writers, of the literature of independent Lithuania. As does any new generation of writers his generation extended the work of other writers in new directions. The writers who participated in the creation of independent Lithuania revealed a new country in all its aspects; they exulted in its uniqueness and Lithuanian character, and they tended toward idealization. Grušas and his generation turned toward criticism and analysis.

After beginning his work with some brief sketches of city life, Grušas marked a distinct stage in realistic Lithuanian literature with his novel **Karjeristai (The Careerists)**, published in 1935. Here he analyzes the wounds of a newly risen middle class, its cynicism and its suffocating atmosphere. **Karjeristai** was also important to Lithuanian literature in a historical sense. It was the next important work after **Altorių šešėlyje (In the Shadow of the Altars)**, a penetrating psychological novel by Mykolaitis-Putinas, and it represented the sociological novel

In 1937, Grušas published **Sunki Ranka (The Heavy Hand)**, a collection of short stories in which he reached the pinnacle of his creative efforts. As if he felt he had exhausted sociological themes in his novel, Grušas turns in these stories to universal human problems. The story here published in translation, [Fairer Than the Sun](#), is one of the most beautiful in Grušas' work and in Lithuanian literature. Besides displaying Grušas' talent for composition, it also reveals his subtlety, his profound humanistic sympathy and his true artistic tact and restraint. In other short stories in this collection, Grušas approaches the Maupassant manner.

In the two decades that followed, Grušas has written mainly for the theatre. Under the German occupation, his play **Tėvas (The Father)** was produced — a somber drama of greed and guilt as opposed to idealism and humanism. The years of the new Soviet occupation, beginning with 1944, were marked by silence, except for some hackneyed and unsuccessful attempts at drama criticising the "bourgeois" past in a shrill manner, in accordance with the wishes of the Party overseers of literature.

In a sharp contrast to this stands Grušas' latest play, the historic tragedy **Herkus Mantas**. In spite of some of its artistic shortcomings and some mild concessions to the Marxian interpretation of history, it has a protagonist of stature, a relentless dramatic drive and a sense of immediacy which is attained when historic past is seen as a mirror of the present. The play deals with the struggle of the ancient Prussians, a nation related to Lithuanians, against the Teutonic order of the Knights of the Cross. The time is the 13th century. The aim of the Knights is colonization and genocide. They are numerous, powerful and modernly armed — the Prussians are few and their weapons old-fashioned. But the Prussians are firmly determined to defend their freedom and their homeland.

The parallel of this situation to to-day's occupation of Lithuania could have hardly escaped the Lithuanian audiences. (See excerpts below). The tragedy, sensitively staged by the young Lithuanian director Henrikas Vasevičius, was enthusiastically received and continues in the repertory.

The above description of Juozas Grušas' literary activity in Soviet-occupied Lithuania is necessarily incomplete. But behind the stark official announcements that reach us here, there lie suffering and humiliation, personal tragedy and struggle for survival. It is for a better future to tell their full story.

### HISTORIC PARALLELS

**SACHSE:** We are Germans, my dear Monte! We are militant, and dilligent, and fertile. The Germanic peoples need your lands, your forests, your homestead! The Germans are marching eastward! The Germans will stamp you out, trample you to dust, digest you! The Prussian nation is small!

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**MANTAS:** The idea of freedom never dies, oh Knight of the Cross! When the entire nation realizes that it is honorable to die for freedom and that life in slavery is but an infamy—such a nation can never be enslaved!

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**MANTAS** (On the hill, powerfully and with inspiration): Prussians! To battle! For a free Prussia! For free Prussians! For our free homeland! (Exit beyond the hill).

**VOICES** (In the distance): For a free fatherland! For a free homeland!

**NOMEDA** (When the voices subside, alone on the hill): Prussia... My Prussia...

**THE END**

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(From the tragedy "Herkus Mantas" by Juozas Grušas, published in 1957 by the State Publishing House In Vilnius, Lithuania).