

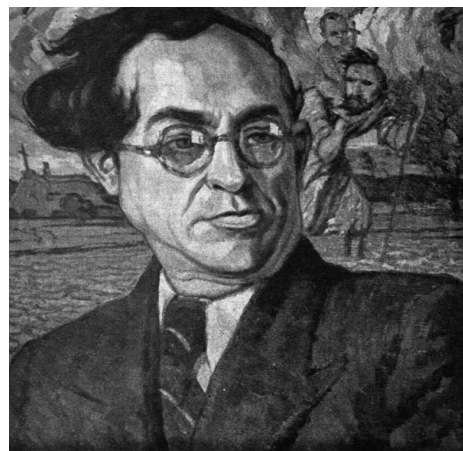
## BERNARDAS BRAZDŽIONIS

Aug. Taginis

Two generations of Lithuanian poets came to maturity between the two world wars.

The outstanding representatives of the first group are Vincas Mykolaitis — Putinas (born 1893), Balys Sruoga (1896-1947), Kazys Binkis (1893-1942) and Faustas Kirša (born 1891). These poets are in general characterized by their use of symbolism and to an extent by their modernism. They did not confine themselves to poetry but also wrote fiction (Mykolaitis — Putinas), plays (Binkis and Sruoga), literary criticism and literary history.

The second group concentrated mainly on poetry, and lyric poetry in particular. If any of them did wander into another field, it was primarily literary criticism and history. The most prominent lyricists of this generation are Jonas Aistis (born 1904), Salomėja Neris (1904-1945), Antanas Miškinis (born 1905) and Bernardas Brazdžionis (born 1907). Some of these poets are characterized by their subtlety and mastery of expression others by a classical clarity; some discovered new uses for folklore elements while others are noted for their synthesis of the traditional and the modern. In the last-mentioned tendency, Bernardas Brazdžionis especially distinguishes himself.



*Portrait by A. Varnas*

Brazdžionis is probably the most prolific member of this group; so far he has published about a dozen collections of poetry, the first of which appeared in 1926. In his second collection, **Amžinas Žydas (The Eternal Jew)**, published in 1931, the poet's new and unique tendency is already defined. His creative development continued in the collections **Krintančios žvaigždės (Falling Stars)**; **Ženkilai ir Stebuklai (Signs and Wonders)**; **Kunigaikščių Miestas (City of Princes)**, which won the state literary prize in 1940; **Viešpaties žingsniai (Footsteps of the Lord)** and **Per Pasaulį Keliauja žmogus (Man Traverses the World)**.

In these and other collections, Brazdžionis showed himself a modern poet from the standpoint of form and content. At the same time, however, he was in close contact with the national traditions; at times his poetry is almost an echo of the ancient Lithuanian hymns. This is the source of another of his traits — a religious tone that sounds with the wrath and force of the Old Testament prophets. It is not surprising then, that his poems are filled with Old Testament names and place names, which gives his verses a strange, prophetic note. His poems are also prophetic in their vision. Before the Second World War he wrote, in **Ženklių Psalmė (The Psalm of Signs)**, words that prophesy, as it were the coming reality:

Ezekiel's forgotten psalms

Turn and return like shattered quiet to my mind,  
And they shall lead the orphan soul of parents old  
Beyond the Bible, beyond Kaunas, and beyond Nairn.  
Governments will collapse, pale, shadowlike, cabinets  
Fall, and multi-million banks corrode;  
The lights will die in Boston, Liverpool, will die in Moscow, Kaunas and Nazareth  
In darkness nations will blindly grope.

Another facet of Bernardas Brazdžionis' poetry is the patriotic one; here it is as if he renews and extends the tradition of the noted poet Maironis (1862-1932). We find many patriotic poems in **Kunigaikščių Miestas**, in which the poet makes

use of images from Lithuanian history. He deals in especially intimate fashion with the sufferings of his homeland, the tragedy of his nation and the difficult exile in which many Lithuanians found themselves. Since the poet is so sensitive to the history of his times, it is hardly surprising that he does not avoid political poetry. "Ekskursija į UNO" ("Excursion to the United Nations"), in the collection **Didžioji Kryžkelė (The Great Crossroads)**, will serve as an example of this type.

"The Red Sea, I know it, Mr. Chairman, I have been rescued from its flood.  
It circles Asia, Europe, Africa, it overlays  
The sun of Finland like a lampshade made of blood,  
And in the pipelines of Iran it rears its hellish flames.

Brazdžionis is capable of striking a tone quite different from these hard and threatening ones —a sensitive, soft, harmonious tone: playful, if you wish. And when necessary he is capable of expressing himself in strict classical forms. Here is a brief excerpt that illustrates this other side of Brazdžionis:

Our life — a soft-fleeced honeybee —  
Late at night at the hive will alight;  
The song will be done, the frost will gently breathe,  
Like thoughts of God we will assemble by the gate.

But this does not exhaust Brazdžionis' work. He is possibly the favorite writer of children's literature in Lithuanian literature. His poems such as "Meškiukas Rudnosiukas" ("The Brown-Nosed Baby-Bear") have become classics of the genre. It might be noted that the poetry intended for children is signed with the pen name Vyte Nemunėlis.

It is further necessary to mention his work as a literary critic, in which field he has done considerable research. He has given us some valuable articles on Lithuanian writers. He has recently edited a two-volume anthology of Lithuanian prose; the first volume has appeared, and the second is at the printers.

Brazdžionis has also taught in a number of schools and edited several magazines. At present he is editor-in-chief of the monthly "Lietuvių Dienos" ("Lithuanian Days"), which is published in Los Angeles, California.

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#### THE PILLAR OF FIRE

One life, like a sailboat on the seas,  
Far away rides out the calms;  
Another, like a beggar on his knees,  
Never stops begging for alms.

One life like a tall pillar of fire  
For the nations and countries glows;  
Another, a hurricane into the mire  
Like a broken tulip throws.

Singing over the good earth I walk.  
I see old beggars in crowds,  
Beyond them God's harvest ripening on the stalk,  
And the seas, and the boats, and the clouds.

I see the shining pillar of fire;  
Its light floods over my face —  
Closing my eyes to the flame I aspire,  
Walking the earth, the heavenly trails I trace.

*Translated by Sofija Tomaras*

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#### PROCESSION TO CHRIST

Above dales where the camomile flowers  
And where caraway scents are abounding,  
Above towns in which ills overpower,

Above bights where the pleasure-craft founder,

Above earth and its smile's petrefaction,  
Above steel and artillery thunder,  
Trough the dance of remote constellations,  
There is thrust out a bleeding reminder.

And the rivers stream down as in labor,  
Bearing sin's heavy care in their waters.  
From the pale upward palms of the Saviour  
Mark the blood down emaciate fingers.

Listen, you in those white marble churches,  
And you inmates of underground oil-wells,  
With your strikes and hobnobbing with murder  
And all you that are dancing or hopeless—

The tall bells cry to faith and unheeding  
And hosannas help form a procession.  
Ah, how, little by little, the bleeding  
Drops are caught in the heart in recession!

Risen Christ of the flowering springtime,  
Drip eternally into the chalice!  
See, towards you we tend in our singing  
And these drum-beats and high trumpets' flourish.

*Translated by W. K. Matthews*