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BOOK REVIEW

THE SEASONS

Kristijonas Donelaitis, THE SEASONS. Translated by Nadas Rastenis.

In the past the English speaking world has had only glimpses of the greatest narrative poem ever to appear in Lithuanian literature. Fragments of *The Seasons (Metai)* had appeared previously in several publications, the latest being *The Green Oak, Selected Lithuanian Poetry*, 1962. Now at last the entire work is available in English.

Kristijonas Donelaitis (or Christian Donalitius, as he used to sign his name) was born in 1714. This translation of his famous work is presented in a book which is a „Commemorative publication of the two hundred fiftieth anniversary of his birth“.

Donelaitis' *The Seasons* has been translated into seven languages. There have been several translations into German, the most recent being one by Dr. Buddensieg. There also exist Latvian, Polish and Russian versions and one Czech translation. Partial translations have been made into several other languages.

This edition of *The Seasons*, however, marks the first time that the entire work appears in English. The translation is the careful and poetic work of the Lithuanian-American poet Nadas Rastenis.

Mr. Rastenis was born in Lithuania in 1891 and has lived in the United States since 1911. In 1925 he was admitted to the Maryland bar and in 1942 he was elected to the Maryland house of delegates in which he served for four years. He is the author of many poems in both English and Lithuanian and has made some outstanding English translations of the foremost Lithuanian poets, e. g. Maironis, Putinas, Kudirka, etc. He has also rendered into English verse another Lithuanian classic, *The Forest of Anykščiai* by Antanas Baranauskas.

Donelaitis wrote *The Seasons* in hexameter, which he adapted to Lithuanian. This hexameter is not exactly the same as that of classical Greek and Roman authors where it was based primarily on the occurrence of long and short syllables. For Donelaitis' hexameter the position of stress is important rather than the length of the syllable. In Lithuanian the length of the syllable is independent of its accentuation. Thus a long syllable in Lithuanian can be unstressed, and a short syllable might well be stressed. Rastenis uses stress as the criterion for the English hexameter, as well he must, since English does not have a contrast of long versus short syllables. Essentially then, the English translation using stress, corresponds well to the Lithuanian original which also uses stress for the determination of a poetic foot. Here is an example with the stressed syllables in capital letters:

JAU sauLElė VĖL atKOPdama Budino SVIEtą
IR žieMOS šaitOS triūsUS parGRIAUdama JUOkės.

The CLImbing SUN aGAIN was WAKening the WORLD
And LAUGHing AT the WRECK of FRlgid Winter's TRADE.

As one can see even from these first two lines of the original and the translation, Rastenis did not automatically render Donelaitis' hexameter. But his translation is very good and tends to preserve, one might say, the original juicy flavor of the great Donelaitis and at the same time it is a poetic re-creation in its own right. Two examples will suffice. The first one illustrates one of the most lyrical passages in *The Seasons*, the second one — one of the most realistic passages.

Krūmus ir gires visokios ošino dainos,
O laukus visur bei pievas skambino garsai.
Gegužės ir strazdai sumišai lakstydami žaidė,
Ir Sutvertoji, linksmi rykaudami, gyrė.
Kregždės su lengvais sparnais aukštai pasikėlė,
Irgi bešūtydamos nei kulkos šaudė per orus.

Bush, forest, grove and hurst resounded with sweet song;
Green fields and meadows rang with mingling melodies.
The cuckoo and the thrush sang their most joyous songs
That gave glad, grateful praise to the Eternal Lord.
Light-winged swallows rose beyond the distant clouds
And filling all the skies with melancholy song;

Dikšas, ans žioplys, mieste didei pasipūtęs
Ir su rūbais blizgančiais kasdien išsirėdęs,
Nei dievaitis koks tarp būrų skiauturę rodo;
O kad kartais mes jo glūpą girdime kalbą,
Tai būrs tur spiaudyt ir didei nusidyvyt,
Ypačiai, kad apjekėlis toks niekina Dievą,
Ir, besišypsodams kaip pons, glūpumą parodo.

Take Dikšas, that sluggard, displaying city airs;
Attired in foppish clothes, he treads the village streets,
And struts among the boors like some rare demigod.
But when at times we chance to hear him speak his mind,
Then e'en a simple boor must spit to hide a blush;
And all the more when he proceeds to scorn the Lord —
And with each utterance displays his ignorance.

This edition is provided with a thirteen page introduction by Dr. Elena Tumas, who teaches comparative literature at the California State College at Fullerton. In her introduction Dr. Tumas sums up Donelaitis' place in the tradition of the epic poems and briefly describes the character of *The Seasons*. Here and there a few stylistic improvements might be made. Thus, for example, *wretched life conditions* (p. 9) should be replaced by *wretched living conditions*; the phrase *Beside his professional and vocational operations*; should read *Beside his professional and vocational activities*; since Donelaitis was a Protestant it is probably more appropriate to call him a *pastor* or *minister*, rather than a *priest* (p. 14), etc.

We must congratulate the translator for this long-expected gift of the great Donelaitis to the English-speaking world.

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