

PILLĒ VELJATAGA

Notions of the National Art Development in Lithuania and Estonia at the End of the 19th and the Beginning of the 20th Centuries

Summary

Comparing the National Revival processes of Estonia and Lithuania reveals differences that emerged from the ethnic language as an important component of the German (Romantic) concept of the nation as well as the state of the education. Estonia had a greater number of literate residents and an earlier formed literary Estonian language. Following uprisings of 1830–1831 and 1863, Lithuania experienced tsarist repressions, persecution of the Catholic church, and ban of publications using the Latin alphabet. Estonian russification took place in the last decade of the 19th century when the strengthening of the national consciousness was well-advanced. The major purpose of the Estonian National Movement was the resistance to the impact of the Baltic Germans; meanwhile, the formation of modern Lithuanian nation faced the complicated dilemma of Lithuanianness/Polishness in all areas, from the lingual to the political. The ethnic identity-based notion of Lithuanianness rejected the cultural tradition of noblemen to speak Polish, focusing on the tradition of folk culture alone. This explains the Romantic pathos of ethnicity that predominated in the Lithuanian national discourse and the importance

of expressing the neo-romantic “national spirit” in art.

Sociocultural circumstances in Estonia – industrial development, the increase in the numbers of Estonian urban residents and bourgeoisie, peasantry with experiences of social life, establishment of farmer and industrialist associations, and support to cultural activities, Protestant mentality and more secularised atmosphere of the cultural life, formation of the outlook at an artwork as an object of the market – created conditions to disassociate from the paradigm of the “national Romanticism” and strive for the autonomization and professionalization of the art process. The slogan “Let us remain Estonians, but let us become Europeans too” used by the literary group Young Estonia and the collaborating new generation of artists followed the European trends of the art of the time. The Young Estonia theoreticians perceived the national distinctiveness of the future Estonian art as a self-contained quality that demands no creation with the help of the “national spirit” or “ethnic character” constructs. This kind, namely, a more modern notion of national art that “serves not a nation but culture” as well as principles of aesthetic perception disinterest and art autonomy

that lay theoretical foundations of the early modernism established in Lithuania in the third decade. At the beginning of the century, the Lithuanian national culture development focused on professional art inspiration from folk sources and neo-romantically interpreted public mission of art. The less radical articulation of the

modernism, compared to that of the Young Estonia, was determined by the situation where Lithuanian art innovators had to withstand the accusations of promoting Decadentism. In the name of the Catholic aesthetic doctrinal truths, the accusations were brought by the authoritative confessional wing of the national movement.

Keywords: Lithuanian aesthetic thought at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries; Estonian aesthetic thought at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries; national culture; the national distinctiveness of art and literature, neo-romanticism, modernism.

Gauta 2016.12.10