

# Summary

This book is an anthology of critical reception of the works of one of the most famous Lithuanian writers Jonas Mačiulis-Maironis (1862-1932). The texts, originally published from 1891 to 2008, explore how the interpretation of Maironis and his works changed during the Tsarist Russian occupation of Lithuania, the interwar period, the Nazi occupation and the Soviet occupation, as well as in independent Lithuania and in Lithuanian émigré communities.

Even though this book includes most of the classic texts that analyse and interpret Maironis' body of work, it is not an anthology of the best and most important critiques of the writer. The articles included in this tome were selected to portray the *history* and *evolution* of his critical reception.

The vast number and variety of texts that examine Maironis and his works means that every attempt to systemise the history of the relevant critical reception creates a version or studies an aspect of said history. Therefore, this book is also but a version of the critical reception of Maironis.

This anthology includes fifty texts which are chronologically grouped into four chapters, although the development of the critical reception to Maironis can be split into five stages:

The shaping of the image and the role of the classic writer. This is a period from 1891, when Maironis' first book was published, to 1913, the 25th anniversary of the creative work of Maironis.

Critics received the writer's first book, *Apsakymai apie Lietuvos praeiga* (Short Stories about the Past of Lithuania), with enthusiasm. On the other hand, his poetry, especially the longer, more ideologically charged poetic works, earned him some negative criticism from the members of the left-leaning intelligentsia like Jurgis Matulaitis. Regardless, during this period Maironis established himself as one of the most popular and talented Lithuanian writers. His exceptional status was cemented in 1913, when the 25th anniversary of his creative activity was commemorated.

The commemoration was followed by articles (most notably by Juozas Tumas-Vaižgantas and Vincas Mykolaitis-Putinas) and publications that finally formed Maironis' image as that of a living classic.

The revolt of the so-called post-Maironis generation, made up of young modernists as well as other modernists and the avant-garde against the authority of Maironis and poetry inspired by Maironis. The publication of a review of Maironis' *Lietuvos istorija* (The History of Lithuania) by Augustinas Voldemaras and the article "Vienužis – Maironis – Vaičaitis" by Sofija Kymantaitė, both published in 1906, can be considered the start of this period. Probably the best phrase to describe this period was coined in a review by Antanas Šmulkašys-Paparonis: 'Goodnight, Maironis!'

The third period began on 28 June 1932, the day of Maironis' death. Critical reception to Maironis' works split into two unequal parts: his works were re-examined and re-evaluated (notably by Julijonas Lindė-Dobilas, Kostas Korsakas and especially by Putinas), and Maironis was re-established as a classic of Lithuanian literature and as the most important Lithuanian writer of the late-nineteenth and the twentieth century. This period lasted up until the second Soviet occupation.

During the Second World War and directly after it, two opposing trends of interpreting Maironis emerged. The first, supported by the émigré community, attempted to continue the interwar tradition, especially the more conservative side of said tradition (for example, the works of Juozas Brazaitis-Ambrazevičius). The second trend was formed by the Soviet ideology and was permissive only of strict, ideologically pre-determined template reading of Maironis (for example, articles by Korsakas and Antanas Venclova). Both of these trends were not new, as they were born in the interwar period.

After the war, critical reception of Maironis was more intensive in émigré communities. It culminated in 1962, when an anthology of articles examining the works of Maironis was published. However, as the creative power of the émigrés dwindled, so did critical reception of Maironis. In Soviet Lithuania, an opposite process was taking place: the ideological pressure was slowly diminished and Stalinist texts were replaced by less controlled studies (this change is obvious when one compares articles by Putinas written for Maironis' anniversaries in 1947 and 1962).

The fifth and final period began at the end of the 1980s, at the same time as *Atgimimas* (the Rebirth). In independent Lithuania, traditional interpretations of Maironis were recreated and new approaches to Maironis came to light (as seen in the studies of Marijus Šidlauskas or Brigita Speičytė). In the meantime, the émigré community was already challenging the contemporary, semi-established interpretations of Maironis (articles by Vytautas Kavolis or Andrius Tereškinas).