



The Death of Tony: On Belonging in Two Worlds

Antanas Sileika

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Lithuanian-Canadian Antanas Sileika's memoir *The Death of Tony* is about moving between two worlds.

Sileika's parents fled Lithuania following the Soviet takeover in 1944. Sileika grew up outside of Toronto, where he had jaunty adventures at camps and cultural events. Although he spoke Lithuanian at home and attended Lithuanian activities, he gravitated to Western literature, earned an English degree, and taught English. He also wrote novels with Lithuanian people and places at their center.

Sileika's moves between his Canadian and Lithuanian worlds shape the narrative. After resenting the Lithuanian cultural inculcation of his youth, he reverted from wanting to be called "Tony" to using Antanas after college. Thanks to the cultural foundation laid by his parents, he was able to knowledgeably report on Lithuanian independence in 1990. In the course of this book, he also covers a prolonged trip to Lithuania during COVID-19 and the start of the war in Ukraine.

This is a memoir that straddles borders; its work is both intellectual and personal. Lithuania is addressed in dreamy, fantastical terms—a noncountry for a time, it was a place to which Sileika's parents would never return. Sileika meditates on the nation's uncomfortable existence, noting that its people are always readied for potential attacks. And Lithuania holds symbolic resonance herein, with Sileika drawing parallels between his origin story and those of other people at the margins. Indeed, the book cites other Canadian immigrant writers' work, showing how literature connects people and ruminating on topics including politics and aesthetics.

The tone, set by the question of Sileika's belonging, is solemn throughout. As much as the memoir *The Death of Tony* comments on the place of literature in shaping identities, Lithuania's dark history also looms large in its pages.

MARI CARLSON (March / April 2024)

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