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Book Review

A COLLECTION OF LITHUANIAN FOLKSONGS

Algirdas Landsbergis and Clark Mills, eds., THE GREEN LINDEN, Selected Lithuanian Folksongs. Foreword by Robert Payne with an Introduction by Marija Gimbutas and illustrations by Viktoras Petravičius (New York: Voyages Press, 1964).

The publication of the Lithuanian folksong collection, together with the previous appearance of selected Lithuanian poems under the title *The Green Oak* (Voyages Press, 1962) creates a noteworthy literary sequence which suggests a refreshing renaissance of Lithuanian cultural achievement in the United States, extending to the other English-speaking countries as well.

The Foreword by Robert Payne provides a poetic commentary leading to the analytical and historical Introduction by Marija Gimbutas. One is pleasantly surprised to note that the interest and penetrating understanding of the spirit of Lithuanian culture is so clearly in evidence among English-speaking writers, a fact to which one must react with gratitude. The Introduction itself is also a very admirable addition to the publication. A reader not too familiar with the Lithuanian nation and its considerable cultural treasures will discover not only sufficient information regarding the "dainos," but also will be stimulated to seek a closer acquaintance with a nation having so much to contribute toward the disclosure of the roots of our civilization. Following these two introductory preparations, the main body of the translated Lithuanian folksongs mirrors thematic and chronological stages. Thus the first segment of these songs reaches into a mythological sphere, the mystic beginning of the singer's world of which he never lost sight. The element of pure poetic "time" passes through the time and change of mother nature. In these "dainos" nature appears as a colorful mosaic reflecting man's temporal existence in its entirety. Here the singer experiences harmony with all that the benevolent nature has to offer him. These Lithuanian songs accompany the steps of a man's existence as their melodious shadows. The gay, melancholy and elegiac tones form a strange symphony pursuing man's life, a symphony which comes, like the wind from the Baltic sea, among the pale dunes of life and departs with a last abrupt and grating sound. Thus, cries of lamentation in the final moments of human life.

The verse translations of the Lithuanian folksongs by such an elite of well-qualified writers project excellence in reproducing a variety of moods and the fine contours of the singers' lyrical soul. For this no doubt arduous task, the translators should be highly commended. One thought, however, remains in the reviewer's mind — granting the fact that this publication of Lithuanian folksongs in English is of monumental significance, one still wonders if in the future such collections or anthologies should not include similar contributions from other Baltic peoples sharing common ethnic or historical origin. This might bring diversity and greatly supplement the magnificent picture of the deep antiquity, where the Lithuanian culture in particular and the Baltic tradition in general found their beginning.

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