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FOLKLORE IN LITHUANIAN LITERATURE

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Folklore, as an oral heritage of agrarian culture, expresses the primitive world view of man and nature. This expression, nevertheless, has multiple facets—legends, fairy and magic tales, songs and lamentations and myth. The most significant fact is that folklore itself comprises a broad gamut of emotions, feelings and the very basis of human existence. Folklore, therefore, is not primitive, just simple. The poetics of folksongs, for example, has been perfected to a point where it is hardly possible to make it simpler. Simplicity is also one of the main characteristics of classic art.

The deceptive appearance of folklore, i.e. its simplicity, and a primitive world view apparently were among the reasons why folklore was ignored for so long time by writers and scholars. Folklore came to the attention of writers only a few centuries ago. In the Romantic movement folklore became a particular subject of veneration, as the main spring of human culture and as an actual embodiment of national mind and spirit. The suggestive and evocative power of folklore had lured and still lures writers.

Many writers of the twentieth century, such as James Joyce, Thomas Mann, Herman Hesse, William Yeats, T.S. Elliot, Garcia Lorca, Garcia Marquez, Ezra Pound, turned to folklore as well as mythology for their sources of inspiration, themes and motifs. Folklore was also used as a vehicle of self-expression of feelings, ideas and as well as world vision.

The presence of folklore in literature, whether in the form of structural or semantic components, or as an ancillary means of expression, neither automatically ensures the success of the work, nor adds to its aesthetic value, nor lends itself to a greater appreciation of it. What matters is how folklore is used and how well it is integrated into the totality of the literary work.

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Lithuanian folklore is abundant in quantity, diverse in genre and archaic in nature. The earliest information about Lithuanian folklore comes from chronicles dating back to the 9th century. Folksongs are considered to be the most original and oldest in origin. To judge from the abundance of folksong material, the Lithuanians apparently had special songs for every kind of activity, occasion and happening. There are songs of work, games, dance, mythology, religion, love, death, family ritual and customs. Predominantly lyrical in nature, folksongs are rich in diminutives, terms of endearment, onomatopoeia and epithets.

A remarkable type of folk poetry is the *rauda*, or lament, characterized by a monotonous and recitative melody expressing feelings of mourning and inconsolable grief. The *rauda* had a two fold function. On the one hand, it was an integral part of the funeral ceremonies which were supposed to influence favorably the deceased person's fate in the realm of the dead as well as to assure his continuous relationship with the living members of the family. On the other hand, the *rauda* served as a means of expressing the miserable conditions of those who were left to live. The *raudas* are first mentioned in the 13th century chronicle and have survived up to the, middle of the twentieth century.

Another type of folklore which stands out among legends, ballads and folk tales in its originality and imagination is that of magic tales (*stebuklingos pasakos*). They present an enchanted world teeming with supernatural beings, magic things and miraculous happenings. Magic tales fed the imagination of writers and many elements of these tales were incorporated

into their works. The most popular of them was, and still is, a tale about a girl becoming the wife of a serpent, known in literature and musical compositions by the name of Eglė, žalčių karalienė (Eglė, Queen of the Serpents). This tale is undoubtedly based on a pantheistic world view, characteristic of the pagan Lithuanian religion.

II

The investigation of Lithuanian folklore was initiated by German ethnographers in the 17th century in Prussia. A genuine interest in folklore as art was only aroused by Philipp Ruhig, when in 1745 he published the first three Lithuanian songs in his German work on the beauty of the Lithuanian language. These songs made a great impression on Gotthold Ephraim Lessing and Johann Gottfried Herder because of their simplicity and sincerity. The first collection of Lithuanian folksongs, *Dainos oder Litauische/Volkslieder*, published in 1825 by Ludwig Rhesa, was well received by the folklorist Jacob Grimm and the poet Johann Wolfgang Goethe. The Lithuanian national renaissance in the 19th century provided an additional stimulus to the exploration and collection of all the basic genres of Lithuanian folklore. Since works in the Lithuanian language were banned in Lithuania by the Russians from 1864 to 1904, most books on Lithuanian folklore were published in Germany and the United States. The most comprehensive works were extensive collections by Jonas Basanavičius, published in Chicago in 1903-1904; *From the Life of Souls and Devils* (Iš gyvenimo vėlių bei velnių) and four volumes of Lithuanian folktales (Lietuviškos pasakos).

In independent Lithuania, i.e. between 1918 and 1940, folklore exploration and collection was conducted by the University of Kaunas, by private institutions, and by leading writers, such as Vincas Krėvė and Balys Sruoga. In 1935, the Lithuanian Folklore Archive was put in charge of all matters related to the collection, research and publication of folklore. The Archives published seven volumes of Folklore Studies (Tautosakos darbai) and up to 1940 it was able to collect about 500,000 items of diverse kinds of folklore. After the war under the supervision of the Soviets a number of professional ethnologists and folklorists have been preoccupied mainly with the collection, classification and publication of folklore. The folklore archives in Vilnius are the largest in the Soviet Union and contain more than 800,000 items of folklore.

Numerous scholarly studies have been published in the course of 60 years. The most outstanding of them are works on the history of folksongs by Mykolas Biržiška (1920), on the poetics of the folksongs of Balys Sruoga (1923), on folk melodies by Teodoras Brazys (1920) and Jadvyga Čiurlionytė (1938), on choral rounds ("sutartinės" in Lithuanian) by Zenonas Slaviūnas (1958-9), on ballads and fables by Jonas Balys (1940-1956), on the value and originality of folklore by Donatas Sauka (1970), on the styles and genres of folklore by Ambraziejus Jonynas (1971). Algirdas J. Greimas published an innovative study in which mythological and magic tales are analyzed by semiotic methods (1979).

While tremendous effort and energy were devoted to the analysis of various aspects of folklore, the study of folklore in literature, except for frequent cursory remarks, was regrettably neglected.

III

It is necessary to note that there is a distinct developmental parallel between the investigation of Lithuanian folklore and the use of folklore in Lithuanian literature: with each acceleration in the pace of attention paid to folklore the folkloric materials in literature proportionately grow in number and scope. The more serious the studies of folklore, the more original and sophisticated the use of folkloric elements in literature.

At the very outset of the development several German writers showed a sincere interest in Lithuanian folksongs. Themes and imagery from Lithuanian folksongs have been identified in Goethe's lyrical poem *Willkommen und Abschied*. A Lithuanian song "Ich hab's gesagt schon seiner Mutter" was introduced by Goethe in his play *Die Fischerin*. Other lesser known poets were influenced by and used Lithuanian folksongs in their poetic works. Polish writers, such as A. Mickiewicz and J. Slowacki also drew motifs and themes from Lithuanian folklore.

However, most Lithuanian writers of the 18th century and the larger part of the 19th showed few signs of appreciation the literary significance of folklore. One such writer is Kristijonas Donelaitis, the classical Lithuanian poet of the 18th century. In the narrative poem *The Seasons* he portrays the vivid and starkly realistic everyday life of peasants. The picturesque and expressive colloquial vocabulary is devoid of folkloric elements, except for occasional proverbs and sayings. The narrative prose of Motiejus Valančius shows a similar indifference to folklore. Realistic descriptions of the customs and mores of the rural folk are presented in a style close to the colloquial language, but almost without any trace of the spirit and idiom of folksongs and folktales. However, the poems of Antanas Strazdas and Antanas Vienažindys are in diametrical opposition to the works of Donelaitis and Valančius. Both of these poets wrote original verses in the manner of folksongs and many of

them have been adopted as such by the people. They apparently did differentiate folksongs from individual creations or simply were unconcerned about the matter.

Writers who grew up during the time of the Lithuanian national renaissance at the end of the 19th century acquired their own individual styles of their expression and their own characteristic ways of using folklore. Being very self-conscious about national identity, Liudas Gira and Vincas Krėvė turned to the sources of oral tradition with the intent of grasping the spiritual traits of the Lithuanian national character. Gira tried to achieve this mainly by imitating folksongs and V. Krėvė by stylizing and recreating legends, folksongs and folktales.

Gira diligently tried to recreate the literary quality of the folksong, lamentation and ballad by copiously using epithets, diminutives, parallelistic structures and the poetic syntax of folklore. As a result, his poems more often appear as "folklorized" poems than as original creations.

Krėvė was more successful in his creative endeavors than Gira. Using various stylistic devices from magic tales, songs and legends in his poetic narrative *Legends of the Old People of Dainava* (1912) Krėvė succeeded in creating a unique new form akin to an ancient heroic epic genre that no longer survived in Lithuanian folklore. Folkloric person-ages and legendary heroes in the dramatic epic *Šarūnas* (1912) acquire mythological dimensions. Portraying rural village life against a very realistic background in the collection of stories *Under a Thatched Roof* (1922) Krėvė introduces sages holding animistic, pantheistic belief who appear as peculiar relics and transmitters of vanished and forgotten folk traditions. Overall, even the most folkloristic works of Krėvė are richer in detail and more elaborate in dramatic design than any folktale or legend. His tales and short stories, possessing distinct individualistic characteristics, have a logic and vitality of their own. In addition to this, Krėvė created three new literary figures: in his tales "bernelis", "mergelė" (a lad, a lass), a folkloric character, in the play *Šarūnas* a mythological hero and in the short story the "Herdsman" Lapinas and in the story "Atheist" Vainoras, an ethnographic man.

In the twenties a new generation of writers began to search relentlessly for new values, new means of expression, and new ways of using folklore in their works. Among them the most innovative and vocal were the futurists and other avant-garde writers who flocked around the literary magazine *The Four Winds* (Keturi vėjai). They rejected outright the old and widely used ways of imitating and poeticizing folklore and they urged searching for crude, paradoxical and even vulgar content in folklore and peasant culture.

It is not clear whether *The Four Winds* or some other factors have influenced the treatment of folklore in Lithuanian literature, but in any case we saw the birth of an entirely new phase. By a creative process of integration, folkloric elements were merged with others to function as an organic unit. Imagery, symbols, phrases, even simple details of two different modes of artistic expression became integral parts of the whole work. Due to this process of creative integration the literary output of Lithuanian writers became more original and more national as well.

The initiators of this trend were none other than Balys Sruoga (1896) and Vincas Mykolaitis-Putinas (1893). Sruoga in his poetry was able to merge influences from symbolism and impressionism with folkloric elements and the musical lyricism of folksongs. The most typical poem of this kind is *The Mower* (Pjovėjas). Imagery, metaphors and symbols, drawn from love and harvesting songs, magic and fairy tales, are harmoniously blended into a single organic form. In the lyrical context of the poem, elements of folklore have acquired playful gaiety, spontaneous expression of love and joy.

Putinas' outstanding achievement in fusing folkloric material with his dramatic and contemplative poetry is his poem *Rūpintojėlis*. a word that could be rendered into English as pensive Christ. Rūpintojėlis is a wooden sculpture of a seated peasant in a sorrowful, pensive pose. This kind of statue was carved by village artisans, called "godmakers" and usually placed at roadsides. Putinas poem *Rūpintojėlis* depicts a youth standing at night in front of such a statue and contemplating the fate of both man and rūpintojėlis. According to Putinas, this poem was inspired by a folksong telling about a starry night as the best time for a lad (bernelis) to ride to his beloved lass (mergelė). By the process of merging ingredients from three sources—folksong, folk sculpture and the poet's own lyrical meditation, Putinas has created a masterpiece.

The thirties experienced a reinvigorated attention to folklore and folk art which was partly stimulated by governmental and academic activities and partly by the initiative of certain groups. One such group was Ars, which comprised so-called modernist artists who sought to combine modern Western European art trends with the folk art of Lithuania. The same tendency was also occurring in the poetry of Antanas Miškinis, Jonas Aistis, Salomėja Nėris and the prose of Petras Cvirka. The poets distinguished themselves by finding innovative ways of infusing folklore into their work. Nevertheless, they essentially continued the trend started by Sruoga and Putinas. Cvirka's novel, *The Craftsman and his Sons* (Meisteris ir jo sūnūs, 1936), however, was an entirely new type of narrative in Lithuanian literature. To distinguish this work from other prose writings it could appropriately be called a folkloristic novel.

In *The Craftsman and his Sons* Cvirka portrays rural life during the first years of this century. The most conspicuous characteristic of the novel is its wealth of folkloric material and ethnographic information as well. Furthermore, folk art and folksongs are mainly introduced by folkloristic protagonists, namely Deveika, a carpenter and a "godmaker", and his friend Krizas, a tailor and poet. The main traits of both of these characters are derived from folktales and folksongs. In short, Cvirka presents a vivid picture of rural society, a portrait which captured the color and rhythm of life by skillful adaptation of

the folk speech of peasants and artisans. A shortcoming of the novel, it seems, is that Cvirka is less successful in transforming this rich oral heritage into a new idiom of artistic expression. In regard to the method of using folkloric elements in the narrative, Cvirka did not advance beyond a process of stylization and poetization. Kazys Boruta, in this respect, went much further in his mythological tale-novel *The Windmill of Baltaragis* (Baltaragio malūnas, 1945).

Boruta wrote this novel after having grappled with the forces of oppressors during the Soviet and German occupations. At the moment of the holocaust of Lithuania he turned to the very sources of Lithuanian culture—oral tradition. The universe of the novel is that of dramatic actions, hostile forces and conflicting powers. It is a place where the world of magic and the supernatural collides with the world of the matter-of-fact. As a result, it takes a form of mythical reality which defies laws of logic, time and space.

The novel is basically developed on two leitmotifs: love and revenge. Love generates all the actions of Baltaragis, the miller, such as his pact with the devil, Pinčukas and his deceit in later dealings with Pinčukas. Revenge unleashes the dormant demonic power of the vengeful Pinčukas.

Folkloric and mythological materials are evidently derived from various legends, fairy and magic tales of Lithuania and other nations. The main characters appear to be composites of heroes found most frequently in the oral narratives. The devil is one of the oldest mythological creatures of Lithuanian fairy tales. In some tales he is tricked by the peasant.

The disguise of Pinčukas in the form of a lazy, somewhat naive man and later as a merciless supernatural figure is also used by the evil forces in folktales. Baltaragis is a type frequently found in stories, legends and ballads throughout most of Europe. The most significant thing here is that in pursuit of love, happiness and freedom Baltaragis struggles heroically against supernatural forces—against the hopeless odds of human destiny. His undiminishing intrepidity up to the bitter end springs directly from an awareness of his duty as a human being—never to surrender.

Boruta succeeded brilliantly in transforming his folkloric and literary materials into a realistic psychological novel. He also created a naive narrative style, an original idiom which preserves the intonation, rhythm and flavor of the speech of folktales. Furthermore, *The Windmill of Baltaragis* displays all the ingredients of a mythological novel and at the same time reflects the spirit and predicament of man living in the age of totalitarian regimes.

IV

The flourishing trend of folklore in literature was abruptly discontinued for the rest of the decade, when the Soviet regime imposed restrictions on literature in 1945. With the first signs of the so-called thaw in the Soviet Union, writers, especially poets, again turned to Lithuanian folklore and mythology. At first the traditional methods of adaptation, such as imitation, poeticization and stylization of folklore were dominant. By the end of the 1960s Janina Degutytė and Marcelijus Martinaitis acquired imaginative and authentic means of integrating folklore into their compositions of poetry. By the eighties, the adaptation of Lithuanian oral tradition is clearly defined and, no doubt, is one of the most striking characteristics of Lithuanian literature, distinguishing it from other national literatures in the Soviet Union.

It is characteristic that the earliest works, dealing with folklore depicted a fairyland similar to that of Krėvė's created world of legend. Boruta, for example, recreated a collection of tales and fables, *The Sky is Falling* (Dangus griūva, 1955). It deals mainly with the world of domestic and wild animals and birds, but its allegorical implications are clear, for each creature signifies a certain aspect of human conduct and character. His second work, the tale *The Wanderings of Jurgis Paketuris* (Jurgio Paketurio klajonės) was based entirely on materials taken from various legends and tales, especially those involving lies and fools, where everything occurs in a grotesque and absurd way. The tale takes place in a medieval feudal society, which in many aspects resembles some totalitarian regimes. In the guise of a fable, Boruta was able to voice his protest against the injustice, exploitation, and ignorance of the human race.

This trend was continued for a while by Aldona Liobytė. She wrote several fables and plays in the manner of Lithuanian fables. Folkloric and literary materials were generously used in Kazys Saja's folk-play *The Village of Nine Woes*. (Devynbėdžiai). None of these writers mentioned progress measurably in style beyond the stylization and recreation of the oral tradition.

Several poets achieved more significant results by recreating the style of the traditional lament—the *raudos*. They copiously used the rhythm, intonation, vocabulary and imagery of the *raudos*. The most characteristic in this respect are the poetic lamentations of Martinaitis and Degutytė.

In Martinaitis' collection of poetry, *The Cycle of the Sun* (Saulės graža, 1969) there are six poems, entitled simply *raudos*, lamenting various people and birds as well. These poems are curious evocations of sorrowful moods, and of the air of naivete and primitivism of the traditional lamentations. In some poems the symbol of fire reminds us of the time that Lithuanians worshipped fire. In "The Lament of Justinas at his Mother's Grave", a son bewailing his dead mother cries out

that "no one will tend the fire at home" and that the "fire will be cold without her." He wished "to be dead and to stay with her in the green mound and to be silent for ages."

A common Lithuanian folk belief is that a cuckoo can foretell the future. A similar belief is conveyed in the poem, "Lament of the Cuckoos", where an individual laments that from the calling of the cuckoos he has comprehended his hard and sad future. In "The Lament of Severiutė", an orphan laments bitterly how she was mistreated, exploited and finally thrown out "on the road." Adapting the style of folk lamentations in the manner of an ancient wailer, Martinaitis developed a very original and sophisticated idiom of expression.

Degutytė's mode of poetic expression of laments is more direct and less sophisticated than that of Martinaitis. Without stylistic disguises or pretenses she fulfills both roles, namely that of the wailer who is invited to perform the ritual and that of the person who experiences the grief and misfortune. The poem "Lamentations" sounds very much like a genuine folk funeral lamentation.

Another innovative and imaginative use of folklore is the creation of mythological characters. In poems great Lithuanian historical individuals appeared as epic heroes with mythological powers rather than as mere mortals. Among them are the priest and poet Antanas Strazdas who lived in the 19th century and is the main character of Sigitas Geda's poem, entitled *Strazdas* (1963). In Lithuanian "strazdas" means thrush. In Geda's poetic vision the poet-priest Strazdas is transformed into a mythological man-bird figure. The poem is constructed on the principle of alternating models: Strazdas—bird, Strazdas—poet, Strazdas—man and Strazdas—centaur. This multifid and multinominous figure with universal dimensions extends over the entire panorama of Lithuanian serfdom.

In a cycle of poems, entitled *Ballads of Kukutis* (1977) Martinaitis presents Kukutis, an entirely new mythological character in Lithuanian literature. In previous poems Martinaitis already created a private and intimate universe, domestic and rustic, where the boundaries between Lithuania past and present are effaced and where those between life and death disappear. Everything from the past takes place simultaneously with the present. There is no death, but rather a continuous, transforming process of becoming, of growth, of deterioration and rebirth. This is the universe in which Kukutis lives.

The name of Kukutis existed in folklore, but it has never been used in literature. In folk speech the name Kukutis was sometimes used to denote a kind of bird, thunder or an unbaptized child. Kukutis is a composite of the fools, liars, and the naive and lazy characters found in fairy ballads, fairy and magic tales. Kukutis undoubtedly exhibits some of the characteristics of the third brother known in folklore: a paradoxical combination of wisdom and stupidity. Likewise, in *Ballads of Kukutis* as in magic tales, there are no boundaries between human existence and nonexistence:

Kukutis jumps from life to death and back again. He has been hanged and buried; he saw his own death and again walks the earth. From the windows of his house he is able to see Lithuania, America and Asia. Possessing a primordial mythological world outlook, Kukutis looks at nature and life with a naive, serene tranquility.

In conclusion, I would like to note that I did not even briefly comment on many deserving works of such outstanding authors as Miškinis, Aistis, Nėris, Radauskas, Škėma, Bradūnas, Mackus, Marcinkevičius and Bložė. They all belong to the third category, i.e. the creative integration of folklore into literature. They did not treat larger folklore themes, genres or created folkloric characters, as, for example, did Krėvė, Boruta and Martinaitis, but, nevertheless, they were able to fuse many folkloric motifs, metaphors, imagery, phrases with other elements of their works so that organic and authentic works of art resulted. In some instances, elements of folkloric origin function as kinds of messages, signs, allusions or semantic references to specific situations, events or characters in folklore. To analyze them thoroughly and in depth as they deserve would necessitate undertaking separate studies of each author.