

## Book Review

### A SOVIET STUDY OF LITHUANIAN FOLKLORE

K. Korsakas, ed.-in-chief. Lietuvos TSR Mokslų Akademija, Lietuvių Kalbos ir Literatūros Institutas, Lietuvių tautosakos apybraža (Institute of Lithuanian Language and Literature, Lithuanian SSR Academy of Sciences, Outline of Lithuanian Folklore), Vilnius, 1963; pp. 474.

\*

After twenty years folkslorists in occupied Lithuania finally managed to prepare a comprehensive outline of Lithuanian folklore. The just published book is a collective effort by a couple of well-established Lithuanian folkslorists and several newcomers, under the guidance of the Marxist academician K. Korsakas, who "essentially contributed to some parts of the text." The work is intended to be a textbook for university students and secondary school teachers.

The introduction of the book is devoted to a discussion of the fundamental theoretical questions regarding the study of folklore. The first part (pp. 21-116) is a historical review of the Lithuanian folklore activity; the second part (pp. 119-433) is a discussion of the various categories of the pre-Soviet folklore, i. e. songs, tales, and miscellaneous folklore (proverbs, riddles, etc.). The last chapter (pp. 437-462) is called "Soviet Folklore". As already suggested, all categories of folklore are classified as falling into pre-Soviet or Soviet periods. A bibliography and an index of names are attached at the end of the book.

It is, of course, to be expected that in present-day Lithuania a study of folklore can be written only in accordance with the Marxist principles. This fact is in no way negated, as the following excerpts indicate:

"During the pre-Soviet period, the bourgeois folkslorists evaluated Lithuanian folklore primarily on the basis of idealistic concepts. A completely new phase in the development of Lithuanian folklore began during the years of Soviet order when, in the evaluation of folklore, application of Marxist methodology was begun" (p. 21); or "The tendencies of bourgeois folklore appear most sharply in folklore research, in which foreign bourgeois folkslorists were usually followed without regard to the national uniqueness of the poetic creativity of the Lithuanian people. In essence, idealistic positions were obstacles to the bourgeois folkslorists to solve correctly the many questions analyzed" (p. 99). Application of Marxist methodology to the study of folklore does not as yet constitute the approved view; the sanction of the Communist Party is also needed. "The concern of the Communist Party and the Soviet Government for the propagation of art, science, literature and national culture in general helps a lot the Soviet Lithuanian folklore to develop successfully. The Party helps to determine the correct direction of scientific work for the Soviet Lithuanian folkslorists, just as it does for other workers of the ideological front" (p. 100). One of these "correct directions" is expressed in the following contention: "The development of Soviet Lithuanian folklore is related to the development and achievements of folklore of the Russian nation and of the other nations of the Soviet Union" (p. 100).

The so-called "bourgeois folkslorists" can accept the cited charge of following "foreign bourgeois folkslorists" as a compliment. If the folkslorists of independent Lithuania were doing this, then they were not lagging behind the accomplishments in this field of endeavor. It would have been highly unlikely for free scientists to follow Soviet folkslorists who at that time had not accomplished anything better than to produce a mass of "revolutionary folklore" and the so-called "folk songs" glorifying Lenin and Stalin.

The authors of the study fail to define clearly the "Marxist method" in folklore. A sense of it may be deduced from statements which demand the establishment of the class nature of folklore, which emphasize the manifestations of antagonistic social relations and of class struggle in folklore, which demand that "revolutionary folklore" be sought out, while evading the so-called superficial "factualism" and esthetic orientation of the poetic art of the masses (see pp. 86 and 115). It is obvious that the Marxist method, as defined by the authors of the study, requires the Soviet folkslorist to disregard facts which are inconsistent with the Marxist theory ("factualism" is a disregard of this tenet), to ignore the esthetic or

artistic values of ancient poetry ("estheti-cism" is a deviation in this area), and to emphasize class struggle (otherwise one would be guilty of idealizing the past).

It may be contended that the so-called bourgeois folklorists were more objective by considering all available facts of folk art and lore, more scientific by not disregarding the esthetic aspects of folklore, and more truthful by not ignoring the romantic nature of much of the folk creativity. They were correct in portraying folklore as the product of the entire and unified nation and in showing that revolution is foreign to the Lithuanian national character and has been brought in from outside. The "bourgeois estheti-cists" correctly understood that political slogans, even though they were rhymed, did not constitute art and creativity; that the rudiments of symbolism and expressionism which we find in folklore correspond to the Lithuanian national character; that recognition of the beauty of poetic folk art is not a condemnable "estheti-cism", but a great value inherent in Lithuanian folklore.

The attempt to answer theoretical questions of folklore shows numerous inconsistencies and lack of comprehension. It is emphasized that "folklore is a poetic creation not of separate individuals but of a collective" (p. 5). A few pages later a perfectly correct statement can be found that "even though folklore is a collective creation, separate individuals play a large role in its creation and existence" (p. 8, emphasis in the original text).

The historical part of the study, dealing with the history of folklore from the earliest ages up to the beginning of Lithuania's independence, is written quite factually. It gives a fair credit to the principal contributors in the study and collection of folklore. However, the last two sections of the historical part, entitled "Folklore During the Years of Bourgeois Rule (1918 - 1940)" and "Soviet Lithuanian Folklore", although not quite out of bounds, show definitely slanted preferences. Evaluation and praise are given only to those folklorists of independent Lithuania who accepted or acquiesced to the demands of Marxism and paid recognition to the Russian folklorists, as did B. Sruoga and J. Baldžius, for example.

A description of the different categories of folklore constitutes a major portion of the book (pp. 119-433). It is an average discussion and is quite weak in some parts. A full account of the discrepancies contained in this section would be too lengthy to include in this review. Nevertheless, for the lack of a better work, this part can be considered useful for general orientation. Of course, the folklorists of present-day Lithuania are unaware of accomplishments being made in this field in the Western world. They are also unaware, or at least pretend to be, of the achievements made in this field by Lithuanian emigre folklorists presently working in the West. There can be no doubt that isolation within the Soviet bounds and lack of contact with the Western world is producing great harm — in fact, a regression — in the study of Lithuanian folklore.

An obviously overemphasized boastfulness is evident in the statement that "About 100,000 various pieces of folklore were collected during the post-war years (until 1960)" (p. 102). It has been determined from other Soviet sources that during 20 years of Soviet rule only 10 per cent of the folklore was collected in comparison to that which was collected during the 20 years of independence.

Among the few accomplishments of Soviet folklorists is the republishing of valuable old folklore collections, such as those of Stanevicius, Juska, and Reza. Also a worthwhile effort is in process to publish a five-volume work of selected folklore, entitled **Lithuanian Folklore**. The first volume, containing folk songs, has already been published. It is likely that less interference from the Party and greater freedom would result in more good work.

Dr. Jonas BALYS