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# Knygų recenzijos

**The Storytelling Human: Lithuanian Folk Tradition Today.** Lithuanian Studies without Borders. Lina Būgienė (ed.). Boston: Academic Studies, 2020. 270 p.: illustr.

In an academic world exceedingly dominated by *anglophonie*, work published in languages other than the ubiquitous English tends to be dismissed by a primarily monoglot anglophone readership as parochial almost by definition. As an early career researcher, this reviewer was once informed by a well-meaning colleague: 'If it is important, it is published in English.' By that token, any research, for its value to be recognised, has to be translated into English. With that in view, Indiana University Press in the 1980s and 1990s produced the series 'Folklore Studies in Translation', which featured *Of Gods and Men: Studies in Lithuanian Mythology* (1992) by Algirdas Greimas. 'Lithuanian Studies without Borders' continues that laudable endeavour with a broader disciplinary remit, and it is good to see folklore studies featuring in that portfolio.

With *The Storytelling Human: Lithuanian Folk Tradition Today*, Lina Būgienė presents a topical collection of contemporary Lithuanian folklore scholarship. Storytelling has become a big theme, attracting significant research funding in many countries, in parallel with the rise of 'indigenous methodologies' that emphasise relationality and ceremony. In Būgienė's book, storytelling is both performance praxis observed (or 'audied', as one might

say, in the spirit of Aelita Kensminienė's insightful contribution 'Predominant Modes of Perception and Folk Narrative'), and research praxis performed. This reflects the multifarious innovations that the discipline has undergone over the past generation or so, not just in Lithuania. The Foreword, presumably written by the editor, offers a useful introduction to the volume, contextualising the eight diverse contributions with regard to political and social changes affecting Lithuania, along with its neighbours in Central-Eastern Europe, as they emerged from the debris of the Soviet Union into a wider world where many things, including folklore research, were done differently. In Western Europe, folklore-related disciplines had already undergone more or less dramatic reorientations for some time: emerging as university subjects in Scotland and Ireland in the 1950s, transforming German *Volkskunde* since the late 1960s into a subject of many names that were only recently, and not without controversy, distilled into 'Empirical Cultural Studies'. While the closeness of dialogue between Lithuanian folklore studies and international scholarship is evident in the individual contributions, this reviewer would have liked to see in the introductory Foreword a critical engagement, however brief, with these developments, and how they related with the evolution of folklore in Lithuania.

The broad range of topics, from the repatriation of remains of Stalin-era deportees and the rituals linked with this, to contemporary basketball fan culture, provides a rich and colourful tapestry of

Lithuanian folk traditions today. The body of the book is divided into two parts, each containing four essays. In Part One, 'History and Tradition in a Changing World', Aelita Kensminienė looks at 'Predominant Modes of Perception and Folk Narrative', offering an interesting conceptual distinction between different types of interlocutors: a semi-literate *Homo audiens*, representing the aural orientation of traditional folklore informants, versus the literate *Homo videns* whose narrative is more visually rooted. Radvilė Racėnaitė, in her essay 'Taking Shelter in Memoir Amid the Turmoil of History: Reconstructing Mental Landscapes in Autobiographical Narratives', investigates how transformations in the physical landscape have affected people's connection with the land, showing how the emotional distancing this has brought about has led to a shift in creative responses from the collective (folklore) to the individual (various formats of 'egodocumentary'). In what is in many ways the most moving contribution to the volume, 'The Dead Want to Come Home: Stories about the Repatriation of Siberian Deportee Remains to Lithuania', Daiva Vaitkevičienė looks at both memories of the deportations (1941–1953), and more recent endeavours by relatives to repatriate the remains of their deported family members. The first part concludes with Lina Būgienė's examination of 'Borderland Lives: Historical Reflections in Eastern Lithuanian Life Stories', which deals with memories of conflict situations in the ethnic frontier region of Valkininkai, highlighting the ethnological insight that 'truth' can often be relative, and the tension between these varied truths irreconcilable; in such situations, storytelling can support accommodation, as projects like 'Healing through Remembering' in Northern Ireland have shown.

Whereas the essays in the first part concentrate on the narratological approach of the new folklore studies, with its emphasis on memory and related constructivist themes of cultural studies, in Part Two, 'Traditional Folklore and Modernity', the focus shifts towards classic typological genres of folklore studies, and how these have been affected by cultural change in recent decades. Jūratė Šlekonytė, in 'Life in Folktales or Folktales in Life? How Storytellers Influence Folk Traditions', shifts the focus of investigation from the tale to the teller, and on how s/he shapes the narrative. Dalia Zaikauskienė, looking at 'The Contemporary Consumer and Creator of Proverbs, or Why Do We Need Proverbs Today?', compares traditional and contemporary uses of proverbs, and shows how the genre has evolved and adapted to changing circumstances, to the point where using such a traditional cultural expression of community may even signal individuality. In '*Homo ridens*: The Joking Human in Lithuania from the Late Nineteenth to the Early Twenty-First Centuries', Salomėja Bandoriūtė charts the use of humour in different historical periods as a way of delineating 'community' through targeted mockery. Povilas Krikščūnas concludes the second part with his examination of Lithuania's most popular sport. In 'Between Culture and Subculture: The Case of Lithuania's Basketball Fans', he examines the use of texts, images and memes within the fan community.

Obviously, it is impossible to present a comprehensive picture of a country in a single and relatively short book. However, the authors and editor have gone a long way. The selection of themes, together with copious notes, ensures broad as well as in-depth coverage that gives the reader a wealth of insights into both Lithuania today, and the multiple pasts it has come

from. An extensive bibliography of work in Lithuanian, linked through the notes with the main text, is set up to help guide the reader deeper into the topics covered and the wider debates. It may not inspire

many to learn enough of the language to read these texts in Lithuanian, but at least encourage them to look up work the same author(s) may have published in other languages.

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