REVIEWS

Bronislava Kerbelyte, <u>Tipy narodnykh skazanii. Strukturno-semantycheskaia klassifikacia etiologicheskikh, mifologicheskikh i istoricheskikh skazanii i predanii</u> [Folk Legend Types. The Structural-Semantic Classification of Lithuanian Etiological, Mythological and Historical Legends]. St Petersburg: Evropeiskii dom, 2001, 606 pp. ISBN 5-8015-0114-2

A new catalogue of Lithuanian etiological, mythological and historical legends, written in Russian and English, has recently been published in St Petersburg. Compiled by Bronislava Kerbelyte of the Institute of Lithuanian Literature and Folklore in Vilnius, it is based on a card index, which systematizes more than 85,000 variants of Lithuanian folk narratives. Included in this number are approximately 3,000 etiological, 24,000 mythological and 4,000 historical legends. In the card index folk legends are classified according to the recommendations of the International Commission as published in <u>Fabula</u> [1960: 3, 299]. However, these classificatory principles cause serious problems, given that different mythical characters in mythological legends may figure in the same plot, or else in etiological legends the origin of different objects may be explained by means of what is essentially one and the same plot. In her search for more objective criteria for classification, Bronislava Kerbelyte has come to develop an innovatory structural and semantic analysis of folk texts, based on the distinctive features of their structure and the underlying semantic features of folk narratives. What she demonstrates is that complex plots are made up out of elementary plots, transformed into a hierarchical system. An elementary plot is one in which two characters or two groups of characters collide in the course of the hero's progress towards his goal. What results from this collision depends on how the hero behaves. Kerbelyte defines 152 different types of elementary plot in Lithuanian folk tales, legends and anecdotes, each of which has several versions. She has worked out a special semantic language for describing these elementary plots on three levels. The organization of folk legends in the catalogue is also based on this structural-semantic classification system, the main principles of which are thoroughly explained in the book's introduction.

Most folk legends consist of a single elementary plot. However, a proportion of legends possess a more complex structure. If we compare legends with differing levels of complexity, it is

possible to study the evolution of a given narrative. This kind of analysis also makes finding semantically similar narratives in different genres easier and more precise. On the other hand, it shows that outwardly similar elementary plots may in fact possess semantic differences. What is more, the principles of structural-semantic analysis help us to reconstruct the probable original forms of folk narratives.

Bronislava Kerbelyte's research reveals that the hero of the mythological legend is not the mythological figure itself but the human protagonist. This being so, the internationally accepted classification of legends according to the mythological characters that feature in them is inadequate. Consequent upon her discovery, she has grouped texts of this genre in the catalogue according to the hero's behavior, which can be of three kinds: correct, incorrect, and neutral. This method of grouping mythological narratives, irrespective of which mythological characters they depict, helps reveal the general rules of conduct for dealing with the mythological world. It could be said that avoiding various mythological beings would normally be considered the correct course of action. However, maintaining good relations with the mythological world may also be considered the right way to behave. When neutral conduct is depicted, the hero by chance observes strange happenings and draws conclusions about their origin. It is evident that it is those elementary plots that present examples of neutral behavior, which preserve and furnish the most stable and reliable information about the world of mythological beings.

Time and place in mythological legends are concrete. Time refers either to specific moments within a twenty four-hour period, or to the life cycle of an individual or to calendar festivities. Space is associated with the specific places where important rites are performed or terrifying locations where various mythological beings may appear. This permits comparisons between legends and folk customs or beliefs. Some legends aim to encourage the preservation of a given tradition, while others cast doubt upon antiquated beliefs. Elucidating a protagonist's behavior and the consequences of that behavior brings out the distinctive features of the popular worldview and its evolution, as well as of the legends themselves. These propositions lead to the conclusion that the main function of mythological legends is pragmatic; they not only regulate relationships with the mythological in the surrounding environment, but also promote traditionally accepted interpersonal relationships among members of the community.

It is to be hoped that the innovatory principles underlying the structural-semantic classification of folk narratives in the catalogue will attract the attention of scholars more widely, and that <u>Folk Legend Types</u> will, in its turn, both provide valuable information about the

Lithuanian world outlook and contribute to the comparative study of the folklore of different nations.

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