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Interdictions in Lithuanian Paremias: Links with Mythological Beliefs

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ABSTRACT. The article focuses on two types of conversational genre: proverbs and beliefs. The study aims to highlight three aspects of Lithuanian paremias: the establishment of certain social norms through interdiction, the expression of a mythological mindset through imagery, and interaction with another genre of short folklore, namely, belief. The article analyses proverbs related to the mythological mindset, grouping them into eight different themes. The study also discusses aspects of the expression of interdictive proverbs. Reviewing the entire collection of Lithuanian mythological paremias with interdictions shows that some belief and proverb texts are identical or very similar in form. In such cases, attribution to the particular genre of folklore depends on the context in which these texts are used.

KEYWORDS: conversational folklore, beliefs, mythological mindset, paremiology, social norms, interaction of genres.

Draudimai lietuvių paremijose: sąsajos su mitologiniais tikėjimais

SANTRAUKA. Straipsnyje dėmesys telkiamas į du šnekos žanrus: patarles ir tikėjimus. Tyrimu siekiama išryškinti tris lietuvių paremių aspektus: tam tikrų socialinių normų steigimą per draudimus, mitologinės mąstysenos raišką per vaizdinius ir sąveiką su kitu trumpuoju folkloro žanru – tikėjimais. Straipsnyje patarlės, susijusios su mitologine mąstysena, nagrinėjamos sugrupuotos į aštuonias skirtingas temas. Tyrime taip pat aptariami draudimų patarlėse raiškos aspektai. Peržvelgus lietuvių mitologinių paremių su draudimais visumą galima teigti, kad kai kurie tikėjimų ir patarlių tekstai savo forma yra identiški arba labai panašūs. Tokiais atvejais priskyrimas konkrečiam folkloro žanrui priklauso nuo konteksto, kuriame šie tekstai yra vartojami.

RAKTAŽODŽIAI: šnekos folkloras, tikėjimai, mitologinė mąstysena, paremiologija, socialinės normos, žanrų sąveika.

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INTRODUCTION

For a long time, short forms of folklore received far less attention from folklorists than narratives or songs. Nevertheless, they have always played an important role in people's lives. While telling a story or singing a song takes more time and requires certain circumstances, short forms of expression have always been part of everyday conversation. It is not surprising that researchers have identified a distinct category of folklore encompassing many short genres, known as *conversational folklore* or *conversational genres* (Abrahams 1968, 1976; Yerkovich 1982; Brunvand 1998: 92–93). This article focuses on two types of conversational genre: proverbs and beliefs. The aim of the study is to highlight three aspects of Lithuanian paremias: the establishment of certain social norms through interdiction, the expression of a mythological mindset through imagery, and interaction with another form of short folklore, namely, belief.

The study of the interplay of genres in folklore is not a new one (Röhrich 1991; Dégh 1995; etc.). The interaction of paremias with other genres of folklore has also been touched upon in the work of other scholars, but the focus is usually on how short folklore genres interact with larger texts that usually have a developed narrative, such as fables (Doyle 1984; Priest 1985; Carnes 1988, 1991; Grzybek 1989; etc.), folk/fairy tales (Mieder 1986; Knappert 1998; Kaplanoglou 2013; Hrisztova-Gotthardt 2014; etc.) or belief legends (Būgienė 2004).

Although brief references to the interaction between short genres can be found in various academic works (Brunvand 1998: 100; Kudirkienė 2016: 18, 21), the subject has not yet been extensively studied in the fields of folklore or belief, which are sometimes also referred to as superstitions or as marginal folklore genres and so are rarely included in the researcher's field of vision. We can say that, in paremiology, the interaction between beliefs and proverbs can be observed in studies of the so-called weather or meteorological proverbs (Taylor 1931: 109–121; Grigas 1964; Arora 1991; Klodnicki 1993; Mieder 1997) because they are closely related to the weather predictions attributed to beliefs. Other types of belief are sometimes mentioned in paremiological studies (Taylor 1931: 67–82; Dundes 1994). Nevertheless, such research is not abundant. In this article, belief is considered not only as a means of communication that expresses a particular mythological worldview (folk legends can also be such a means), but also as a separate genre of folklore with its own specific form.

This study adheres to the classification and terminology established in Lithuanian paremiological studies of folklore, in which all phrases akin to proverbs are divided into three categories: proverbs, proverbial phrases and situational sayings (further information can be found in the first article in this volume, Zaikauskienė 2026: 24–36). This article collectively refers to all of these expressions as paremia,

although more precise terms are sometimes used. Furthermore, the terms *paremia* and *proverb* are used interchangeably as synonyms in some cases.

THEORETICAL APPROACH: GENRE INTERACTION AND CONTEXT

Most of the folklore examples discussed in this article are written down without the context of their use. However, some context is still important when exploring cross-genre interaction between proverbs and beliefs. The present study employs Richard Bauman's concept of folklore in context, a notion that was applied during field study but which is also relevant to folklore studies as a whole. According to Bauman, the production of high-quality research is inseparable from an understanding of the interrelationship between folklore and its context:

If we are to understand what folklore is, we must go beyond a conception of it as disembodied superorganic stuff and view it contextually, in terms of the individual, social and cultural factors that give it shape, meaning, existence. This reorientation in turn requires us to broaden the scope of our fieldwork; a contextual perspective on folklore makes the enterprise of folklore fieldwork much more remified and complex [...] (1982: 362).

Bauman distinguishes two broader types of contextual interaction in folklore: cultural context and social context. He further divides them into six smaller categories: 1) context of meaning; 2) institutional context; 3) context of communicative system; 4) social base; 5) individual context; 6) situational context (*ibid.*). However, as Annikki Kaivola-Bregenhøj notes when distinguishing between different categories of context in her narrative research, it is important to bear in mind that in reality, different categories of context overlap to some extent and the actualisation of one context or another is only a theoretical tool used by researchers (1992: 154). This article is concerned with the third type of context identified by Bauman, namely context of communicative system, and it employs *paremias* and beliefs as a means of analysis. It is in this specific context that the interaction between diverse genres of folklore is revealed. According to Bauman, it can be argued that studies of genre interaction actualise one of several approaches to the study of folklore in context. As he states, “[t]he question is how particular forms of folklore relate to other folklore forms within the culture” (Bauman 1982: 364).

Consequently, this study distinguishes several levels of folkloric context. Firstly, the interaction between beliefs and *paremias* is examined within the communicative system identified by Bauman. Secondly, as both of the small genres under scrutiny in this article are presented in the form of interdictions and reveal a mythological

way of thinking, it can be posited that these texts also reveal the general context of traditional Lithuanian culture, as far as can be ascertained in this particular instance. Furthermore, as the meaning and use of small genres of folklore depend largely on the situation, the study also highlights certain aspects of the situational context.

THE SIMILARITIES BETWEEN INTERDICTIVE PAREMIAS AND BELIEFS

Many folklorists have emphasised that proverbs are a short form of folklore which often offer conservative advice and warnings, and contain imperative references (Grigas 1968: 9; Brunvand 1998: 92–93, 101; etc.). One of the strictest forms of such references are interdictions. For example: “*In svetimus barščius nagų nekišk*” (Don’t put your fingers into other people’s borscht, LTR 1071/101⁸¹/), “*Neimk, kas tau nepriguli, nekalbėk, kas tau neprideri*” (Don’t take what is not for you, don’t say what you are not supposed to, LTR 6352/64/). According to William R. Bascom, one of the four functions of folklore is to maintain conformity to the accepted patterns of behaviour (1954: 346). Interdictions are a particularly appropriate means of performing this folklore function. Another form of folklore text, distinguished as a separate small genre in Lithuanian folkloristics and also characterised by various interdictions, is the belief text, short sayings that express mythological thinking. Usually, texts of a mythological or magical character that fail to meet the classification criteria of other folklore genres are attributed here. Lithuanian folklorist Daiva Vaitkevičienė distinguishes two types of belief, textual and action (1998: 90). The first type conveys mythological information in the form of a simple statement. The second type is more complex. Some of these texts have a typical syntactic and semantic structure, pointing out to certain causality, for example “*Jeigu arklys iš stonios vedamas baidos, atsispiria – bus pavogtas*” (If a horse boggles and kicks when being led out of the stable, it’s going to be stolen, JK: 14), “*Jeigu atkalbi nuo gyvatės, neužmušk gyvatės – kalbėjimas bus nepamačlyvas*” (If you are practicing charming snakes, you must not kill one otherwise the charm will not work, JK: 363). Quite often these texts contain taboos, warnings, and guesses. Such regulations might be defined as certain rules of interpretation or behaviour. Prohibitions that are based on the logical relationship between an action and a result are characteristic of action beliefs, for example: “*Nebučiuot su kąsniu burnoje: vaikai bus belekiai (mikčios)*” (Don’t kiss with a bite of something in your mouth: your children will stutter, JK: 377).

Emphasising the practical purpose and function of proverbs, folklorist Brunvand states:

Proverbs are perhaps the most common and familiar form of *conversational folklore* (oral traditions that occur frequently in everyday situations of communication); but proverbs are much more than mere quotable quotes, wise sayings, or memorable phrases. People employ proverbial expressions to pass judgment on events, to give advice, to rationalize their own actions, or to criticize and praise others (1998: 92–93).

In the context of this study, it is worth noting two aspects of Brunvand's statement. Firstly, beliefs are also a form of conversational folklore, in the same way as paremias. Secondly, both paremias with interdictions and action beliefs establish norms of appropriate and inappropriate behaviour.

Syntactic similarities are visible in both paremias and mythological beliefs. Both of these small-genre folklore texts can be formulated as follows:

Do not do something.

Do not do something because it will be this or that.

If you do this or that, something will be or happen.

These interdictions undoubtedly target actions that are socially undesirable or destructive to the mythological order.

Similarities between paremias and beliefs have also been noted by other researchers. In the analysis of beliefs, Leonardas Sauka claims that the form of their texts – their syntax – is precisely what resembles proverbs and proverbial phrases, and is determined by the purpose of these texts (Sauka L. 2004: 16). As Brunvand notes, some proverbs are based on beliefs (1998: 100).

He is echoed by Lithuanian paremiologist Lilija Kudirkienė, according to whom some situational sayings that are similar to proverbial phrases are based on beliefs. Sometimes, it is only possible to determine which genre a text belongs to by considering the context in which it is used (2016: 18, 21). Consequently, it can be assumed that the mythological thinking revealed in paremias that include interdictions often originates from beliefs. The similarities in the syntax of these two short forms of folklore facilitate interaction and fluctuation between them.

MATERIAL SELECTION CRITERIA

The idea for this study arose during the preparation of the third volume of *Lithuanian Proverbs and Proverbial Phrases* (LPP 3), a volume that tries to present as many links as possible between paremias and other genres of folklore. While preparing the publication the editors noticed that some Lithuanian paremias are related to mythological thinking and beliefs. The first attempt at a similar study was

an earlier article on the links between Lithuanian beliefs and proverbs and proverbial phrases (Džekčioriūtė 2021). The paremiological material for that study included the Volume III, which published Lithuanian paremias with keywords beginning with the letter K (for example *katė* (cat), *karvė* (cow), *kėlias* (road), *kiaušinis* (egg), *kvailys* (fool), etc. (LPP 3)). The present study is more comprehensive, as its material covers the whole range of Lithuanian proverbs and proverbial phrases. On the other hand, it is more focused, since it does not include all Lithuanian proverbs manifesting mythological thinking, but only those related to bans and interdictions that function as a social imperative. The material for this study was selected from the Lithuanian Proverbs and Proverbial Phrases database,¹ which was searched for paraphrases based on specific linguistic formulations. For example, different verbs in the negative form were searched for, such as ‘don’t do’, ‘don’t go’, ‘don’t look’, ‘don’t eat’, etc. Certain syntactic structures that express interdiction have also been entered into the base, such as “if... so...”. For the analysis, the most representative examples of proverbs containing prohibitions that reveal a mythical way of thinking were selected. In order to convey the ancient Lithuanian way of thinking more accurately, the proverbs presented in this article have been translated directly into English rather than using English equivalents.

The selected data reflect the traditional Lithuanian worldview, which was widely held until the middle of the 20th century.

The objective of this article is to show how the principles of the mythological way of thinking, which in many cases reveals itself through interdictions, are reflected in paremias. Such texts can be called mythological paremias with interdictions. Therefore, the article focuses on mythological paremias grouped thematically into eight different themes. Some of these themes are mentioned in various works that tend to classify both proverbs and beliefs. Nevertheless, they have been independently identified based on the Lithuanian material under investigation, with no reference to classifications presented by other scholars. The article also discusses some aspects of the expression of paremias with an interdictive function, revealing more about the interaction between proverbs and beliefs.

A VARIETY OF THEMES IN PAREMIAS WITH INTERDICTIONS

Upon reviewing the research material, a number of prominent themes emerged around which paremias expressing mythological thinking tend to cluster.

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1 Online access to the database is available at <https://elpp.archyvas.ilti.lt/en>. The database is based on the Card Index of Lithuanian Proverbs and Proverbial Phrases, which comprises over 200,000 texts.

The notion of happiness, luck und misfortune. The first theme is concerned with expressions related to the notion of happiness and luck in traditional Lithuanian culture. It was widely believed that happiness is predetermined for every person:² “*Neieškok laimės – pati ateis*” (Don’t look for happiness – it will come itself, LTR 75/4787/), “*Kam laimė žadėta, ateis neieškoma*” (To whom happiness is promised, it will come when it is not looked for, LTR 64/799/). Nevertheless, strong emotions may reduce the luck: “*Nesidžiauk laime, prisišauksi nelaimę*” (Don’t rejoice in happiness, or you will be heard by misfortune, LTR 5889/14/), “*Nesigirk, kad klojasi, nes nelaimė gali už durų stovėti*” (Don’t boast that things are going well since misfortune might be standing behind the door, LTR 75/5076/), “*Neverk nelaimėje, nedžiaukis laimėje*” (Don’t cry when you are unhappy, don’t cheer when you are happy, LTR 407/455/). Thinking and talking about bad things may attract them: “*Bloga kalba veikia įvyksta*” (Bad talk happens quickly, LMD I 240/88/), “*Skelbiamos nelaimės veikia įvyksta*” (Declared misfortunes happen quickly, LKŽ 19: 354).

Socially unacceptable actions. The second group of expressions relates to certain socially unacceptable actions, such as certain behaviour towards another person, sleeping too much and stealing. Various prohibitions in different cultures have long regulated inappropriate behaviour towards others, and such regulations frequently appear in proverbs. In traditional Lithuanian culture, it was believed that misbehaving towards someone or wishing them misfortune could result in one’s own misfortune: “*Nesijuok iš nebylių – bitės išskris iš avilių*” (Don’t laugh at the dumb – bees will fly out of bee hives, LTR 5397/672/),³ “*Nesijuok iš invalido: gali ir pats tokiu palikti*” (Don’t laugh at a cripple: you can become like him, LTR 40021/32/), “*Nesijuok iš seno – senatvės nesulauksi*” (Don’t laugh at the old – you won’t get old, LMD I 683/83/), “*Nesijuok iš kito nelaimės, pačiam prilips*” (Don’t laugh at others’ misfortunes, they [misfortunes] may stick to you, MST: 101), “*Nekišk kojos kitam, nes pats pargriūsi*” (Don’t make others trip over your feet, or you will fall yourself, LTR 864/191/), “*Nebugink kito, nes pats išsigąsi*” (Don’t scare others, because you will get scared yourself, LTR 465/36²¹⁹⁹/), “*Nespešk kitam kilpų, pats įkliūsi*” (Don’t trap others, or you’ll be trapped yourself, MST: 101), “*Nekask duobės kitam – pats įkrisi*” (Don’t dig a hole for others, or you will fall there, LMD I 232/168/), “*Nespjauk kitam, nes teks pačiam*” (Don’t spit on others, because you will have to spit on yourself, LTR 465/36²⁴⁶⁷/).

2 Further information on the concept of happiness and its predetermination in Lithuanian culture can be found in the works of the mythologist Daiva Vaitkevičienė (2002a, 2002b, 2009).

3 In traditional Lithuanian culture, bees were treated with special respect and were considered sacred (LTR 1483/34/); if they left their hive, it was seen as an ominous sign. If a beekeeper died, the bees may die too (LTR 780/373/). They had to be informed of their master’s death and treated with special care. It was believed that if this was not done, the bees would die (LTR 780/375/).

In traditional society, boasting and being conceited were also considered undesirable features: “*Nebūk mandras – apšiks gandra*” (Don’t be conceited, or a stork will shit on you, LTR 5200/826/), “*Nebūk labai puikus (ar mandras), kad višta neapdrėbt*” (Don’t be conceited, so that a chicken wouldn’t shit on you, LTR 52/72/), “*Kas save giria, tą Perkūnas spiria*” (He is kicked by thunder who boasts about himself, LTR 69/441⁵⁵/).⁴

Paremiās often refer to actions that are not in accordance with social norms. A person who did not look another person in the eyes was considered to be wishing them ill: “*Jeĩ į akis nežiūri, tai širdy tikrai velnią turi*” (If he doesn’t look [you] in the eye, then he really has a Devil in his heart, LTR 3837/57/). Lying and stealing were also identified as undesirable behaviours. “*Nemeluok, liežuvis plaukais apaug*” (Don’t tell lies or your tongue will get overgrown with hair, LTR 6190/943/), “*Nevok, nagai nubręš!*” (Don’t steal, your nails will fall off, LKŽ 19: 890). These two sayings could have been used either for humour or to discipline children and teach them socially acceptable behaviour. Children usually take such sayings at face value until a certain age, so they can be an effective educational tool.

In traditional peasant culture, sleeping a lot was associated with laziness. Consequently, people who slept for too long might have been mocked using the following expression: “*Nemiegok taip eilgai – užpakaly dantys išdygs*” (Don’t sleep for such a long time, teeth will grow in your bum, LTR 4883/677/). Certain actions that disturbed other people, such as shouting, were also undesirable: “*Nešauk – rūra sprogs*” (Don’t shout, or your bum will burst, LTR 4240/359/), “*Nerėk taip, ba šikžarnė išlīs*” (Don’t shout so much, because your arse gut will fall out, LTR 307/162/), “*Nerėk – ir plaučius pamesi*” (Don’t shout, you’ll lose your lungs, LTR 4055/82/), “*Nerėk, nes snukis apžels*” (Don’t shout, because your gob will get overgrown with hair, LTR 6246/51/). Such phrases reveal the mythologisation of bodily functions that is characteristic of traditional pedagogy (see more: Džekčioriūtė 2016: 186).

It is worth noting that some of these sayings rhyme (“*Nebūk mandras – apšiks gandra*”, “*Kas save giria, tą Perkūnas spiria*”, etc.). They are used because their alliteration makes them more playful and easier to remember. Therefore, it could be argued that some of the interdictions in these paremiās exist precisely because of the use of rhyme as a stylistic device.

Death and relations with the dead. Another important topic which reveals mythological thinking in Lithuanian paremiās is death and relationships between the living and the dead. Many interdictions are implied by this relationship, since it establishes a connection between the living and the afterlife, which has frightened

4 *Perkūnas* is the Lithuanian name for the pre-Christian god of thunder.

people since ancient times. Some proverbs are used to discuss actions related to shrouds and coffins: “*Įkapių nedalyk, ka tavęs neapvilktų*” (Don’t give out a shroud, or you will be dressed in it, LKŽ 19: 409; meaning do not offer death to others so that you will not die first), “*Nedaryk grabą, kol ligonis gyvas*” (Don’t make a coffin while the sick man is alive, LTR 1547/205/). Many proverbs are intended to instruct the living on how to treat the dead. They define specific behavioural norms and establish certain taboos. For example: “*Kol nabašninkas guli ant lentos, verk kiek nori, o kai pakavotas, tai duok jam ramybę*” (While the dead is lying on the board, cry as much as you want, but when he/she is buried, give him/her peace, LTR 4413/41/). This expression is related to the belief that the soul of the dead suffers greatly when someone mourns the dead person very deeply. Throughout Lithuania, it was widely believed that one should not speak ill of the dead. This belief is reflected in the following proverbs: “*Nešnekėk apie mirusį blogai – nekilnok iš kapų*” (Don’t talk ill of the dead – don’t get them out of the grave, LTR 4629/81⁹⁷/), “*Apie numirusius niekados kalbėti neturiam, tik tai arba gerai, arba nieka*” (We should never talk about the dead, or talk only well, or nothing, LPm: 302), “*Apie numirusius arba gerai kalbėk, arba nieko nekalbėk*” (About the dead, talk either well or nothing, LMD I 881/287/). According to ancient beliefs, you can’t talk about the dead badly because then they appear to the living and suffer severely (BIR: 185, No. 955–957). These beliefs are confirmed by another saying: “*Vaidilus žinok, bet apie juos nekalbėk*” (Know the ghosts but don’t talk about to them, ST), i.e. if you talk about ghosts, they will come to you.

Relations with sacred natural phenomena. Since ancient times, people have had a special relationship with their surroundings. Certain natural phenomena, for example, fire, water and the sky were given sacred significance. They were treated as living beings and with caution. This led to the development of certain forms of behaviour associated with specific taboos manifested in Lithuanian proverbs through expressions with interdictions relating to certain natural phenomena. Man’s relationship with fire is described in proverbs as though with a sacred being: “*Ugnis ne su rietais kūrenama, ne su kojom spardoma*” (Fire is lit not with the thighs, and it is not kicked with legs, LKŽ 17: 384), “*Nemušk ugnelės – šventa*” (Don’t beat the fire, it is sacred, LTR 778/970/). It was also believed that fire should be shared with others: “*Ugnies ir vandens kaimynui negailėk*” (Don’t begrudge your neighbour fire and water, LKŽ 17: 384). Expressions about water also reveal that it was earlier perceived as a sacred phenomenon. A well-known saying throughout Lithuania is: “*Nespjauk į vandenį, nes reikės atsigerti*” (Don’t spit in the water, because you will need to drink it, LTR 5337/199/). This expression has a figurative meaning: this is what is said about someone who despises and slanders other people, and

then needs their support. In other words, you don't have to decide anything in advance. However, there are quite a few other variations of this saying that are not used figuratively and which fully express the mythological taboos related to death. For example: "*Nespjauk į vandenį, nes po mirties reikės sugerti*" (Don't spit into the water, as you will have to drink it after your death, LTR 618/19⁹/), "*Nespjauk į vandenį, nes mirdamas lovą prišlapinsi*" (Don't spit into the water, because you will pee in the bed when you die, LTR 874/419¹⁷/), "*Nespjauk vandenin – liežuvi pritrauks*" (Don't spit into the water, or your tongue will be cramped, LKŽ 16: 700), "*Nemyžk į vandenį, ba po smerties turėsi jį išgerti*" (Don't pee into the water, as you will have to drink it after your death, LTR 1001/372⁴⁸/). The following two examples express water-related taboos much more strongly and are personalised: "*Nespjauk į vandenį, užspjausi savo motinai akis*" (Don't spit into the water, or you will spit over your mother's eyes, LMD III 225/223/), "*Nemyžk į vandenį, nes užmyši savo motinai akis*" (Don't pee into the water, or you will pee over your mother's eyes, LMD III 225/224/). These interdictions are related to ancient beliefs that the souls of the dead stay in the water. This belief is probably the origin of all the expressions about water that have been cited. Upon reviewing all the variations of this saying, it becomes clear how paremias can evolve from a personal relationship with a deceased mother, to a more abstract relationship with one's own mortality, and ultimately into a metaphorical expression of social norms that are no longer related to death.

Paremias also mention certain taboos that define specific behaviour towards the sky, as in mythological thinking it can be perceived as the residence of deities: "*Nerodyk pirštu į dangų, Dievui akis išdursi*" (Don't point your finger at the sky, you'll poke God's eyes out, LTR 960/354¹⁴/). In this saying, we see that the sky is associated with God. Even in pre-Christian times it was believed that one of the main gods of the ancient Lithuanian pantheon lived in the sky. Therefore, the sky must be treated with special respect.⁵

Relations with mythical beings. Two mythical beings are most often mentioned in Lithuanian paremias with interdictions: God and the Devil. Most phrases that mention God are straightforward. They refer directly to God, rather than to social situations: "*Nelįsk Dievui į akis*" (Don't hang around God's eyes, LTR 4665/628/), "*Nešok Dievui į akis, kad nereiktų gailėtis*" (Don't jump into God's face, so that you don't have to regret it, LTR 3549/64/), "*Su Dievu baikų nedaryk*" (Don't joke with God, LTR 436/156¹³⁵/), "*To nedaryk, kas Dievo užginta*" (Don't do what is forbidden by God, LTR 465/36³³⁶⁴/). However, some phrases that mention

5 There is also a belief that if you point your finger at the moon, it will attract you (LMD I 1060/892/), since the moon is also perceived as a celestial deity in ancient beliefs.

God and express interdictions have a figurative meaning. One of these sayings states: “*Neturėk kitų dievų, tik mane vieną*” (Have no other Gods but me alone, LTR 5852/188/). This expression may look like an imperative from the Decalogue, but it is used in situation when somebody wants to persuade another person to act according to his or her will. Another widely known saying in Lithuania, which has almost 250 variants and belongs to one of the larger types of Lithuanian paremia (LPP 1: 555–559, No. 2561), proposes: “*Nevyk Dievo į medį*” (Don’t drive God into the woods, LTR 4017/208/). It applies to someone who lives well and still complains about something.

The Devil (*Velnias* in Lithuanian) is another mythical being that features particularly prominently in Lithuanian folklore and proverbs. Unlike in the case of God, most of the paremias mentioning the Devil have a figurative meaning. The Devil is usually associated with a wicked person who should be avoided. Therefore, proverbs provide guidance on how to behave towards someone who could potentially cause harm: “*Be reikalo velnui špygos nerodyk*” (Don’t show a fig to the Devil if there is no reason, LTR 4666/30/), “*Neik su velniu obuoliauti – paliksi be uobuolių ir be terbos*” (Don’t go to pick apples with the Devil, you’ll be left without apples and without a basket, LTR 4713/477/), “*Su velniu draugavęs, dangų negausi*” (You won’t have heaven, if you are friends with Devil, LTR 66/734/), “*Nerodyk velniui kelio: ir pats atras*” (Don’t show the way to the Devil, he will find it himself, LTR 5219/260/). However, some sayings may reflect mythological thinking expressed directly: “*Nekeik velnio, jam seksis*” (Don’t swear at the Devil, he will be successful, ST: 11). Since in traditional culture various curses and all kinds of evil were associated with the Devil, cursing the Devil strengthens his power.

Uncomfortable emotions. In traditional cultures, various methods are used to regulate emotions. Folklore can be one of those means, especially for emotions that cause discomfort. For example, Lithuanian proverbs contain several sayings that prohibit the excessive expression of certain emotions. Such an undesirable emotion was considered to be sadness: “*Nebūk ilgai nuliūdęs, nes susirgsi*” (Don’t be upset for too long because you will get sick, TŽ: 625/1274/), “*Neverk, a tai tavi laumės užkuts!*” (Don’t cry, or fairies will tickle you to death! LTR 1438/32/). The latter saying could have been used to discipline crying children. In traditional Lithuanian culture, disobedient children were often frightened with *laumės*, mythical creatures resembling fairies. Another undesirable emotion is fear. In the sayings, fear is described as an emotion that can cause illness or bring about an unfortunate outcome: “*Nebijok, gal priemetis kišenėn neįsimes*” (Don’t be afraid, perhaps the convulsions won’t get into your pocket, LTR 356/125²¹/), “*Jei vilko bijosi, vilkui ir teksi*” (If you are afraid of the wolf, you will end up with the wolf, LTR 465/36¹²²³/).

Anger was another uncomfortable emotion that was kept under control by society using proverbial sayings: “*Nepyk, dar nakty lovą prišiksi*” (Don’t be angry, you will shit your bed at night, LTR 1697/66/), “*Kas supykęs nekalbės, tas mirties valandoj kalbos neturės*” (He who does not speak when angry will not speak at the hour of his death, LTR 3180/55/). The latter saying indicates that certain behaviour when a person is angry can determine the nature of a person’s death.

Special requirements for the eating process. Eating is a vital activity, and in different cultures guidance can be given in various ways through a range of practices and taboos. Therefore, in Lithuanian folklore there are a number of proverbs that refer to various restrictions related to eating. Some sayings prohibit eating while lying down: “*Gulėdamas nevalgyk – mirdamas susipersi*” (Don’t eat while you are lying down – you’ll poop when you die, LTR 2032/46⁴⁰/), “*Neėsk gulėdamas mirdamas apsišiksi*” (Don’t eat while you are lying down – you’ll shit when you die, VšnR F 1–835/2/). Reading while eating was also forbidden: “*Valgydamas neskaityk, atmintį suvalgysi*” (Don’t read while eating, you will eat the memory, LKŽ 17: 1074), “*Neskaityk valgydamas, nes protą suvalgysi*” (Don’t read while eating, you will eat your mind, LTR 5895/686/). Another saying is focused on the place of eating: “*Nevalgyk klojime, pelės javus sukapos*” (Don’t eat in the barn, mice will eat the grain, ST: 11). The examples provided demonstrate that eating requires the right position and place and that it should not be done alongside any other activity. These eating-related warnings indicate the cultural importance of eating. This importance is further highlighted in proverbs that link eating habits with future marriage and family life: “*Nevalgyk iš puodo – bobą juodą gausi*” (Don’t eat from the pot, you will get a black woman, LKŽ 17: 1060), “*Nevalgyk iš puodo, vaikai bus juodi*” (Don’t eat from the pot, your kids will be black, LTR 6216/15/), “*Negramdyk puodą, gausi vyrą ilganosį*” (Don’t scrape pots, or you will get a husband with a long nose, LTR 4754/626/), “*Negramdyk puodą, lis per vėseilę*” (Don’t scrape pots, or it will rain during your wedding, LTR 3064/202/). One more proverb relates to dances, which were important for a successful marriage in traditional farming culture: “*Paskutinio kąsnelio neimk, šokti neveda*” (Don’t take the last bite, no one will call you to dance, LTR 7790/34/). Interestingly, this belief is still very much alive. Although it is no longer associated with dancing, in Lithuanian culture today taking the last bite from someone’s plate is considered inappropriate, and even rude. The emphasis on eating and the various warnings and interdictions in Lithuanian paremias suggest that eating may have been regarded as a sacred act in ancient times.

The importance of a particular time. The final theme around which paremias with interdictions expressing mythological thinking tend to cluster is

a specific time of day: morning and evening. In Lithuanian proverbs, these two periods are treated differently. Morning is described as a time when being overly emotional, cheerful, or noisy is forbidden. In most cases, disregarding the warning and rejoicing excessively in the morning will result in a disheartening evening: “*Nesijuok iš ryto, nes vakare verksi*” (Don’t laugh in the morning because you will cry in the evening, LMD I 683/81/), “*Nedžiūgauk rytą – vakare verksi*” (Don’t cheer in the morning, or you will cry in the evening, LTR 5272/50/), “*Nedainuok no pačio ryto, ba iki vakaro verksi*” (Don’t sing in the early morning, because you’ll be crying by the evening, LTR 3900/313/). Failure to comply with this interdiction may have other consequences, such as an unsuccessful marriage, or dangerous animals may appear: “*Nedainuok anksti, ba durną vyrą gausi*” (Don’t sing in the early morning, because you’ll get a stupid husband, LTR 7172/2²⁵⁸/), “*Kas rytą rygauja, tą vakare vilkas pagauna*” (He who whoops in the morning will be caught by the wolf in the evening, LKŽ 11: 594), “*Nedžiūgauk iš ryto, kad vakare vanagas nepagautų*” (Don’t cheer in the morning, so that the hawk does not catch you in the evening, LTR 5272/51/). The latter saying seems more applicable to scaring children in order to teach them to meet established cultural standards. Although not numerous, the interdictions expressed in Lithuanian sayings about the evening reflect a more mythological way of thinking. This should come as no surprise, as sunset or dusk has long been associated with the other world. The evening is also a time when certain daily tasks are forbidden: “*Vakarą nešluok gryčios, nelaimių pritirsi*” (Don’t sweep the house in the evening, or you will have bad luck, ST: 48). A mirror, especially in the evening, can serve as a gateway to another world, which is why it was said that: “*Vakare nežiūrėk į veidrodį – be laiko pasensi*” (Don’t look in the mirror in the evening, or you will get old too early, LTR 7722/2^{119a}/). Of course, there is no need to wander around certain places in the dark since mythical beings become active in the evening. Therefore, warnings like this can also be found in proverbs: “*Neik vakare į pirtį, ragių rasi*” (Don’t go to the sauna in the evening, you will meet the Devil, LKŽ 11: 35).

The eight themes revealed in Lithuanian proverbs demonstrate that the prohibitive and cautionary nature of the sayings, as well as the beliefs they convey, transmit layers of the old worldview that express mythical thinking. It is also worth noting that some of the expressions can be grouped under several themes. This is because in the mythical mindset, different areas are interconnected. For example, some inappropriate social behaviour can trigger punishment by a mythical being, and important natural phenomena are related to mythological beings or beliefs about life after death.

EXPRESSION OF MYTHOLOGICAL THINKING IN PAREMIAS WITH INTERDICTIONS

The previous section examined the themes of paremias as revealed by their content. This section discusses the formal aspects of these sayings. Mythological thinking in paremias with interdictions reveals itself in different ways of expression. It is most common for proverbs and proverbial phrases to be expressed in clearly interdictive formulations. Some of them contain direct interdictions that codify the rules and taboos of mythological lore. For example: “*Nespjauk vandenin, pa smerčiai karštų akmenį laižysi*” (Don’t spit into the water, or you will have to lick a hot stone after your death, LTR 7722/1⁹/); “*Sėdėdamas ant suolo nesupk kojų, nes velnio vaiką supi*” (Don’t swing your legs while sitting on the bench, because you swing the Devil’s kids, LTR 1305/238/), “*Nesupk kojom lopšio, nes velnio vaiką supi*” (Don’t swing the cradle with your legs, because you swing the Devil’s child, LTR 1305/237/), “*Nežiūrėk per skylę – velnią pamatysi*” (Don’t look through the hole – you will see the Devil, LMD I 701/396/). Other paremias, and they are most numerous, are used figuratively and refer to desirable or undesirable actions that are no longer linked to mythological logic and are directed towards behavioural norms. For example: “*Neik su velniu riešutauti, ba ir kelnės numaus*” (Don’t go picking nuts with the Devil, because he’ll take even your trousers off, LTR 992/502/), “*Su velniu neik į vieną lovą gulti*” (Don’t go to the same bed with the Devil, LTR 558/295/), “*Netrauk velnio už uodegos*” (Don’t pull the Devil by the tail, LTR 4178/665/). These three proverbs all compare bad people to the Devil and essentially advise against getting involved with these people. One more example represents one of the most popular proverbs in Lithuanian: “*Nevyk Dievo į medį, su pyragu neišprašysi*” (Don’t drive God into the woods or you won’t get Him back with the pie, LTR 3704/1483/). This is figuratively said of a person who lives well yet is constantly complaining about something, is always dissatisfied and overly demanding, and is critical and supercilious. It is worth noting, as regards mention of God in the saying, that this reference is an echo of the ancient Lithuanian religion. As Lithuania has been a forested country since ancient times, several deities were believed to have lived in the forest. Kazys Grigas claims that this proverbial phrase is incompatible with the Christian concept of deity, and is therefore a reflection of ancient pre-Christian beliefs (1976: 50). We can assume that proverbs and proverbial phrases expressed in clearly interdictive formulations that can be used directly or figuratively are based on beliefs that have become paremias.

There may also be non-interdictive formulations of paremias that still clearly express mythological taboos and behavioural norms. Such phrases are not formulated as prohibitive commands, but as statements that provide mythological information alongside a subtle suggestion or warning about a potentially undesirable

situation: “*Po vogtu sagonu ir ugnis nedeg*” (Under a stolen pot even the fire does not burn, LTR 2102/179/). This interdiction against stealing in general takes into account the fact that fire was considered a sacred entity⁶ that would not sanction theft.

The following two examples focus on mythical beings. The phrase “*Atgaliu ranku tik ragana žegnojas*” (Only a witch crosses herself with a backward hand, LTR 1578/121/) not only describes the interdiction of improper crossing, but also provides information on how to identify a witch. Another saying forbids throwing or leaving your nails anywhere: “*Saugok kaip nagas, kad velniui nepakliūtų*” (Keep it like a fingernail so the Devil doesn’t get it, LTR 70b/2569/). It was believed that cut nails should not be thrown away because they are collected by the Devil. If the Devil collects them, the person suffers after death.⁷ Two more examples illustrate the previously discussed topic of a person’s future married life: “*Gramdo merga puodą – gaus bernelį juodą*” (The girl scrapes the pot – she will get a black boy, PP: 343); “*Jaunieji katilą grandė*” (The newlyweds were scrubbing a pot, LMD I 262/55/). This implies that the weather is bad when newlyweds are on the way to the wedding.

In such paremias, beliefs are incorporated into the text as a presentation of mythological information. Indeed, it is almost impossible to determine whether a text is a paremia or a belief statement without knowing the context in which it is used. Thus, if the circumstances of a text’s use are not explained, it may end up in the paremia, or belief corpus, depending on how the informant presents the material, how the collector records it or how the folklorist organises it.

Occasionally, paremias with non-interdictive formulations contain only hints of mythological prohibitions. Such expressions are sometimes referred to as being said as a joke: “*Neskaityk valgydams – pometę suvalgysi*” (Don’t read while eating, you will eat the memory, LTR 3786/120/). This text is accompanied by a footnote: “*Sakoma juokais, šiuo prietaru jau niekas nebetiki*” (It is said jokingly, no one believes in this superstition anymore). As Grigas notes, proverbs and proverbial phrases can acquire the function of a joke, just when the old beliefs that could logically motivate a saying are weakening. This creates the conditions for frivolous talk about

6 Until the first half of the 20th century, folklorists and ethnographers documented numerous beliefs, prayers and practices within Lithuanian rural communities that reflected a special ritualistic relationship between people and fire. Until the middle of the 20th century, fire was still called *Gabija*, a name of fire deity that originated in pre-Christian times (see further: Balys 1998: 6–22, 2000: 9–14, 2003: 203–208).

7 Many beliefs forbid throwing away cut nails. One of these beliefs states that: “*Nupjovęs rankų ar kojų pirštų nagus, sudegink, nes nesudeginus po smerčiu reiks surinkti. Ar velnias kozirką kepurei pasidirbs*” (After cutting off the nails of your fingers and toes, burn them, because if you don’t burn them, you will have to collect them after death. Or the Devil will make a hat out of them, LTR 1934/397/).

things that used to be important and decisive in the past (Grigas 1976: 63–64). Grigas' idea is elaborated by Kudirkienė:

Many traditional prohibitive expressions (used when witnessing inappropriate behaviour) are based on old beliefs. There are an increasing number of cases where these expressions no longer carry any value-based (belief, ethics, etiquette) connotations; in other words, the text has become detached from its original sphere of origin and purpose, becoming a means of everyday communication, moving into the realm of jokes and picturesque wittiness (2016: 18).

Therefore, it can be stated that such paremias express relics of mythical thinking that have transitioned from one genre of folklore (belief) to another (paremia).

CONCLUSIONS

Upon reviewing the entire collection of Lithuanian mythological paremias that have interdictions, we can observe that some of the texts of beliefs, proverbs and proverbial phrases are identical or very similar in form. In such cases particular genres of folklore depend on the context of use. However, in some cases we can assume that certain beliefs are attributed to proverbs not due to cross-genre interaction, but to the subjective reasoning of the person who is systematising folklore. Less experienced folklorists are much more likely to have confused the genres.

Although interdictions are common in Lithuanian paremias, only a small proportion of them reflect a mythical worldview, which is expressed literally or figuratively. Nevertheless, the available data show that a number of prominent themes have emerged around which paremias expressing a mythological mindset tend to cluster. These themes reflect people's relationships with their surroundings, as well as important events and areas in their lives.

Furthermore, the relationship between beliefs and paremias with interdictions expresses itself in three ways. First, some beliefs have mutated into paremias that are formulated as interdictions. Second, beliefs are included in the text of the paremias as a more subtle presentation of mythological information. Third, taboos reveal themselves as relics of a mythological worldview.

After reviewing the research material we can conclude that some interdictive proverbs sound very similar, or are identical, to beliefs due to their similarities in form and syntax. The categorisation of the text as belonging to a particular genre of folklore depends on the context in which it is used.

A mythological worldview and various interdictions are clearly expressed in beliefs. Therefore, paremias related to such beliefs also contain layers of mythological

worldview. From the perspective of Bauman's concept of folklore in context, such interaction between paremias and beliefs manifests itself as the context of the communicative system of folklore.

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