

THE FABLES BY
KRISTIJonAS DONELAITIS

Dalia Dilytė

SUMMARY

The focus of the present monograph is on those aspects of the fables by Kristijonas Donelaitis that have not received sufficient research attention. The book comprises four chapters.

In the first chapter, “Plots”, the author briefly introduces those phenomena and authors of European fables that are in some way related with Donelaitis’s works. Then the analysis of the links between the plots of Donelaitis’s fables and those of the works by his predecessors and contemporaries follow. It is stated that plots similar to those of the Lithuanian poet’s fables “Rudikis jomarkininks” (Rj; “The Dog at the Fair”) and “Pasaka apie šūdvalių” (Pš; “Fable of the Dung Beetle”) have not been found. Until it has been proven otherwise, we should assume that Donelaitis invented these plots himself. The other four fables – “Lapės ir gandro česnis” (Lgč; “The Fox’s and the Stork’s Feast”), “Šuo Didgalvis” (Šd; “The Clever Dog”), “Vilks provininks” (Vp; “The Wolf-Judge”), and “Aužuols gyropelnys” (Ag; “The Braggart Oak”) – and the works by earlier writers display some common features: the same characters, a similar narration of action, and, sometimes, a similar vocabulary and statement of the moral. However, it should be emphasised that these fables are by no means mere copies of the earlier works – they are all marked with originality. Donelaitis invents new characters (for example, the Stork’s hired hand in “Lapės ir gandro česnis”), and adapts the situation to the environment that

is familiar to his readers and the understanding of the common people of Lithuania Minor. He is not afraid to give a peculiar twist to the customary plot line (for example, the Stork refuses to invite the Fox to the feast in “Lapės ir gandro česnis”, and the Oak ridicules and mocks smaller plants in “Aužuols gyropelnys”), and presents a wide and extensive description of the situation or characters (the Clever Dog, the Wolf, and the Oak). It can be concluded that Donelaitis employs the same principles as other fable writers of the 18th century, who sometimes chose well-known plots and sometimes created their own, but always tried to be original and give a new interpretation or an unexpected turn to the old, so-called Aesopian plots, or endow their characters with different features. Although the fables by the Lithuanian writer may sometimes seem long and drawn out, when reading the books by 18th century fable writers, we can see that the authors of those times treated the plots as they pleased. Some works are very short, but some are even much longer than those by Donelaitis. Therefore, Donelaitis was a typical fable writer of the 18th century in all respects. Among the writers of earlier times, the author of *The Romulus of Nilant* written in hexameter in the 12th century would be stylistically closest to him. In Donelaitis’s fables the old elements are nicely intertwined with modern ones.

The second chapter, “Verses”, is dedicated to research on the versification of the fables. The analysis is focused on the accentual (also called tonic) versification, as the principles of this versification are more distinct in Donelaitis’s hexameter. Attention is drawn to those geminates of Martynas Liudvikas Rėza’s edition, which constructively supplement or emphasise the elements of quantitative versification, as well as to the system of diacritical signs of Georg Heinrich Ferdinand Nesselmann’s edition. The properties of the feet and caesurae of each line have been analysed. Referring to Aleksas Girdenis’s method developed in the process of analysing the versification of the poem *Metai*, it has been found that, in addition to the layer of accentual versification, the hexameters of both the fables and *Metai* contain some features of quantitative (or metric) versification, but the elements of accentual versification have more weight and stability. The research material shows that spondees and penthemimeres caesurae are predominant in the fables. It was the most frequent choice of the poets of classical antiquity, which most appealed to the readers of

their poetry. Certainly, each poet would insert caesurae of other types in their works. Donelaitis did exactly the same. In his fables we also find other types of caesurae. Sometimes the same hexametric line in a fable can be read in two versions, with a different caesura, or using the principle of *syllaba anceps* and changing the position of ictus. Various possibilities in placing caesurae or ictus do not indicate the imperfection of the text or the poet. These things are neither an innovation discovered by Donelaitis, nor a flaw. They are typical of all hexametrical poetry. Therefore, the research results allow us to assert with all confidence that from the viewpoint of accentual versification, the versification of Donelaitis's fables is regular and mature, while the distinct layer of quantitative versification nicely supplements and enriches it.

In the third chapter, "Words", the lexis of the fables is analysed. The aim of the analysis is to define the nature and features of the vocabulary of the fables, and to explore its relation with that of *Metai*, as short hints by various scholars, not grounded by any research, usually give precedence to the vocabulary of *Metai*. In addition to establishing the relation between the fables and *Metai*, the author was curious to trace the relation of words found in the fables with the lexis of other early Lithuanian writings. The research revealed that the fables do not have their own distinct vocabulary. A detailed analysis and description of each word revealed that out of 782 words of different meanings used in the fables, only 21 words are missing in *Metai*. The research material allowed us to draw the conclusion that the lexis of the fables is closely related with that of *Metai*: the words that are found in the poem are also used in the fables. Additionally, the nature and principles of their use are identical: both in the fables and *Metai* the same dialecticisms, the same cases of irregular usage, and the same word meanings and word combinations are found. Since the lexis of *Metai* and the fables is basically the same, the language of the fables cannot be either better or worse than that of the poem. Another aspect of the analysis of the lexis showed that the absolute majority of words found in Donelaitis's fables were already present in the first writings of Lithuanian literature, and the vocabulary of Donelaitis's fables is not different in quality from that of the poet's predecessors, who most often produced writings of religious content. Certainly, although the translators and authors of the Bible, catechisms,

sermons and hymns had already used in their books the majority of the words found in the fables, Donelaitis constructed totally different, new and unseen images from the same words.

The fourth chapter, “Images”, is dedicated to discussing the features of the poetics of images of the fables. At the beginning, some statements of the theory of the fable genre formulated by 18th century literary theorists are briefly reviewed. An analysis of the main principle of Donelaitis’s fables, ‘epical character’, is presented. Attention is drawn to the fact that the titles of the fables, which not only introduce the characters but also describe these characters or the situation of the fable, match the texts of the fables written according to the paratactic and cumulative principles of creating images. Donelaitis aligns details one after another, like soldiers in a line, and generously heaps them up until he thinks that it is enough. He not only announces the action, but also describes how the action is performed and indicates various principal and secondary circumstances. Therefore, a narrative of this type does not jump from one subject to another, but is consistent and thorough. For example, in the first seven lines of “Rudikis jomarkininks”, the situation of the fable is defined. While further describing basically the same action repeated four times – the Dog’s attempt to snatch a bite, Donelaitis does not repeat the same details. Even a different tool for shooing the dog away is mentioned each time: a cane, a staff, a stick, and finally, an implied, though unnamed, axe. By continuously adding new elements, the poet intensifies and supplements the original image. Following the same principles of epic abundance, dialogues are created. For example, at the beginning of “Lapės ir gandro česnis”, four lines are dedicated to the Fox’s greeting and inquiring about the health of the Stork and his family. Another six lines describe an invitation for a visit, expressed in the form of a polite reproach. The Stork’s reply is half as long, but also rich in details. The functioning of the epic formulas is also subject to the paratactic and cumulative principle. The epic formulas of Donelaitis’s fables are similar to the traditional centuries-old word combinations found in epics: *Ir, kaip pratusi yr, meilingais sveikina žodžiais* (Lgč 41); *Ir šikšninį visiems, kaip pratęs, siūlijo kromą* (Rj 15); *Kas tai? Ar dar vis, kaip pratęs, smarvėje lindai* (Pš 15); *Ir po to česnies bei lapės tankiai minėjo* (Lgč 35); *Ir česnies dyvinos bei turgaus tankiai minėjo* (Rj 30); *Bet dabokit tiktai, kaip*

jam dyvinai pasidarė (Rj 8); *Bet dabokim tiktai, ar svieto būdas geresnis* (Lgč 69); *Ale žmogus smarkus, kitiems iškadą darydams* (Rj 37); *Ar nesibijotės žmonėms iškadą daryti* (Pš 27); *Kas nor iškadą daryti* (Vp 37). Consistent exposition, determined by the aims of detailing, specification, confirmation and consolidation, a thorough explanation of feelings, repetition of epic formulas, and hexametric versification constitute an exclusive unity of rich and vivid images of the narrative part of the epic fables.

While analysing the morals of Donelaitis's fables, the author shows that these morals are speeches created according to the same principle of epic abundance. The deliverer of those speeches wears the mantle of a preacher imposing strict moral requirements. In no other fable about a fox and a stork by other authors can we find a similar moral as in the one by Donelaitis. Usually the moral of the fables of this type asserts that evil is paid back with another evil. The Lithuanian poet does not state that he that mischief hatches, mischief catches; moreover, he does not hesitate to condemn any, even involuntary, wish or act of revenge, and proclaims the idea of universal love of one's neighbour. Here we probably can see an echo of the admonishments of the New Testament: "Do not repay anyone evil for evil" (*Rom* 12, 17); "Do not take revenge, dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath" (*Rom* 12, 19); "If your enemy is hungry, feed him" (*Rom* 12, 20). While drawing attention to the issue of two-faced morality in the moral of the "Pasaka apie šūdvalį", the preacher expresses a strict position: an individual must mend his ways, as bad actions are incompatible with piety, and evil people will not be saved by their prayers. Sometimes the preacher of the moral responds to the issues of the day of the 18th century. In "Rudikis jomarkininks", the expression of the ideas of Enlightenment is very distinct. Donelaitis stresses the fact that the dog acts improperly because it lacks understanding and wisdom, but an intelligent human being is not allowed to act in this way. In this fable Donelaitis expresses the Kantian idea of the supremacy of wisdom, and particularly emphasises it in the moral. The issues of equality of social classes are raised in the moral of "Aužuols gypelnys". The poet does not agree with the ideas of eliminating the social classes and making all people equal, which were gaining popularity in his times and presaged the French revolution. He follows the opinion that the respect of all classes for each other is intrinsic to society's welfare

and harmony. The higher classes must not despise the lower ones, and the lower classes should not force their way into the higher ones. Everybody must observe measure and reason, and know their place.

In generalisation of the research material, a hypothesis is advanced that the appearance of the same words and word combinations in the fables and *Metai*, and the same principles of their usage, shows that the fables are closely related with *Metai*, and Donelaitis wrote them not at the beginning of his creative career, as has been asserted until today, but approximately at the same time as he wrote *Metai*. Some fables may have been created before he began to write *Metai*, some of them simultaneously, and some of them right after the poem was finished, but, most likely, there was no large time gap between these works. In the fables “Vilks provininks” and “Šuo Didgalvis”, some references to the case of repartitioning the Tolminkiemis lands, which began in 1775 and lasted until the poet’s death, can be found.

Finally, it is emphasised that Donelaitis should be acclaimed not only as the creator of the genre of the Lithuanian literary fable. Very importantly, he can proudly be ranked among the European fable writers, both his predecessors and contemporaries, as he is an original creator rather than a talented epigone or worthless imitator.