

A Fervent Plea for a Lithuanian-English Proverb Collection

WOLFGANG MIEDER

University of Vermont (USA)

It is truly amazing to see the incredible accomplishments of proverb scholars in small countries with languages that are not known to many people throughout the world. A good example is without doubt the paremiological work that has gone on in the Baltic states of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania together with the cooperation of Finnish scholars. An unsurpassed proverb collection that resulted from these comparative efforts is *Proverbia septentrionalia: 900 Balto-Finnic Proverb Types with Russian, Baltic, German and Scandinavian Parallels* (1985) that was edited by the distinguished scholar Matti Kuusi with the help of Marje Joalaid, Elza Kokare, Arvo Krikmann, Kari Laukkanen, Pentti Leino, Vaina Mälk, and Ingrid Sarv. While the texts of the six Balto-Finnic languages Finnish, Karelian, Estonian, Votic, Vepsian, and Livonian are listed in their original without English translations, equivalents from Russian, the two Baltic languages Latvian and Lithuanian, German, and Scandinavian languages are merely listed by bibliographical references to national proverb collections. The magisterial collection is thus of limited use to scholars who do not know these languages. Of course, had English translations been provided, this collection of 451 pages would have become at least threefold the size and impossible to publish.

To a certain degree this is also true for the comparative proverb collection *Patarlių paralelės: Lietuvių patarlės su latvių, baltarusių, rusų, lenkų, vokiečių, anglų, lotynų, prancūzų, ispanų atitikmenimis* (1987) that my dear Lithuanian friend Kazys Grigas (1924–2002) put together. It includes 2276 Lithuanian proverbs for which he was able to list 908 Latvian, 679 Belorussian, 684 Russian, 1029 Polish, 729 German, 366 English, 336 Latin, 293 French, and 155 Spanish equivalents in their original languages with references to proverb collections. Many of the 611 proverb types belong to common European proverbs and are thus not particularly

Lithuanian by origin. This is also true for Dobrosława Świerczyńska and Andrzej Świerczyński's newer polyglot collection *Patarlių žodynas 9 kalbom* (2000) with its 632 commonly known proverb types of Europe. It includes equivalents for Lithuanian, Polish, English, French, Spanish, German, Russian, Italian, and Latin, with Rasa Kašėtienė having provided the Lithuanian texts. Nevertheless, international proverb scholarship would have an impressive collection of 2276 proverbs known in Lithuania, if K. Grigas had the opportunity to include literal English translations of them. True, the keyword index at the end of the book enables scholars to find the 366 English equivalents as well as those of the other languages, and that adds considerably to the special value of this collection that is obviously primarily directed to Lithuanian readers. It should also be noticed that K. Grigas included a trilingual introduction in Lithuanian, Russian, and German on "The International Proverb" (pp. 6–108) that remains to this day a valuable statement on the origin, history, and dissemination of proverbs throughout Europe (see Mieder 1988). Of course, as is well known, many of these inter-European proverbs date back to classical antiquity, the Bible, and medieval Latin (see Mieder 2000, 2004: 9–13). It is a shame that K. Grigas was not able to include an English version of this insightful discussion, and perhaps this could still be done and be published in an issue of *Tautasakos darbai* or *Proverbium*. Be that as it may, this international proverb collection belongs to the treasure of my International Proverb Archives at the University of Vermont, and I still remember when the package arrived with the book as a special present with the inscription:

Geehrtem Prof. Dr. Wolfgang Mieder / mit den Grüßen aus Litauen / Kazys Grigas / Vilnius / 1989. 3. 15.

To be sure, K. Grigas had included an enlightening English summary on "Lithuanian Proverbs. Comparative Study" (pp. 294–303) in his paremiological study on Lithuanian proverbs entitled *Lietuvių patarlės: Lyginamasis tyrinėjimas* (1976) that appeared in Russian translation eleven years later as *Литовские пословицы: Сравнительное исследование* (1987). The renowned Estonian paremiologist A. Krikmann reminded the international paremiologists assembled at the Institute of Lithuanian Literature and Folklore on March 5, 2004, in Vilnius in memory of K. Grigas (see Kudirkienė, Zaikauskienė 2005) that this is an extremely important publication on the theoretical basis of comparative paremiography. All of us at that meeting agreed with his statement that "The contribution of Kazys Grigas to Lithuanian folkloristics cannot be overstated; his theoretical works and publications of source materials made K. Grigas one of the most famous and prolific paremiologists of the 20th century. His lifework is worth a whole monograph and I

sincerely hope that someone from the younger generation of Lithuanian folklorists would eventually write it” (Krikmann 2005: 23). We do have Lilija Kudirkienė’s “Kieno dalia – ir jaujos gale (Kaziui Grigui – 75)”, Rūta Pleskačiauskienė’s “Kazio Grigo darbų bibliografija” (1999), and my short necrology „Kazys Grigas (1924–2002)“ (2003), but a monograph on the life and work of this important folklorist and paremiologist is a definite desideratum. The same is true for such celebrated paremiologists as Archer Taylor, Matti Kuusi (someone is working on a biography now), Grigorii Permiakov, Démétrios Loukatos, Lutz Röhrich, and others. It behooves us to remember these giants of paremiology and to hand their wisdom on to the younger generations by remembering their superb work and their life dedicated to scholarship.

Regarding my friend K. Grigas, I wrote his fellow proverb scholars in Vilnius the following letter (cited here in part) on December 3, 2002, after having heard about the untimely death of their team leader:

There is no doubt that Kazys Grigas will be remembered in Lithuania by students, colleagues, friends and family members. But he was also known far beyond Lithuania to folklorists and paremiologists throughout the world. His work has influenced scholars in Northern Europe, in the United States, and elsewhere. <...> Kazys Grigas was one of the true giants in the field of proverbs, and I am thankful that I have been able to stand on his shoulders to do my own work for international paremiology.

What will we do without Kazys Grigas? I am certain that he would want us to carry on his work in his memory and in recognition of his invaluable labors. I want to encourage the Lithuanian team of paremiologists to continue with their work on the large Lithuanian proverb collection. I believe the plan is to have five volumes altogether. Finish this *magnum opus*, and do it for Kazys Grigas! This will keep his memory alive, and as you labor on this voluminous project, be aware of how much Kazys Grigas appreciates the fact that you are finishing his life’s work. Working on a project is one thing, but doing it for a dear and beloved friend is very special indeed. Thinking of Kazys Grigas while you work will give you the strength and joy of carrying on with the legacy of this great colleague and friend.

The Lithuanian people have every reason to be proud of their folklorist and paremiologist Kazys Grigas. He has brought recognition for the folk wisdom of your small country throughout the world. His work is a model for us all, and we must try to live up to the standards of his scholarly work. We have lost a very special person, but his accomplishments will live on forever (Mieder 2002: 15–16, 2003: 440).

The fact is, of course, that K. Grigas’ “busy bees”, as he loved to call his co-workers, have carried on his work with diligence and dedication. He himself was

still able to send me the massive first volume of *Lietuvių patarlės ir priežodžiai* (2000), and I was honored to write a detailed review of this magnificent publication of the national treasure of Lithuanian proverbs (Mieder 2001; see also Voigt 2001) that resulted in the following letter dated September 24, 2001, from Vilnius:

Dear Professor Mieder,

We – authors, compilers, editors as well as colleagues of folklore research and administration of the Institute – are deeply impressed by your exhaustive and most favourable review of the first volume of our publication.

We are delighted to have our work presented to the world community of paremiologists by your review. You have endorsed our efforts to seek ways of introducing the spiritual culture of small nations into the world context. We believe that namely that intention prevented you from the criticism, which this first major work of ours has doubtless deserved.

With sincere thanks,

Kazys Grigas

Lilija Kudirkienė

Rasa Kašėtienė

Dalia Zaikauskienė

But I had meant every word of my praise, and there was no need for the humility expressed in the letter that was accompanied by a still treasured photo of the four smiling paremiographers. In fact, the only criticism, actually more a positive suggestion, was that I wished that the trilingual Lithuanian, German, and Russian introduction (Grigas [et al.] 2000: 7–24) as well as the excellent trilingual survey of Lithuanian paremiography (ibid: 25–88) had been augmented by a fourth language, i.e., the international *lingua franca* of English. In fact, I suggested that this might be achieved in the second volume that in the meantime has appeared in 2008 (Mieder 2001: 411). Unfortunately it was not done, but I assume that the publisher was unwilling to do so with this volume having reached 830 pages without these additional English pages. However, and this is truly incredible and invaluable, this volume includes a giant index of the 3272 Lithuanian proverbs of the first volume in English translation (ibid: 537–604) and the 3222 Lithuanian proverbs of the second volume in English translation (ibid: 605–673). This means that the world now knows about 6494 Lithuanian proverbs in English translation for proverbs whose keywords begin with the letters A–J. The two volumes include similar translations for German and Russian! Congratulations and thanks from the international community of proverb scholars to Giedrė Bufienė, Rasa Kašėtienė, Lilija Kudirkienė, and Dalia Zaikauskienė who have accomplished this feat in

admirable team work. All of this means that we now know about two-fifth of the national stock of Lithuanian proverbs, even though the two extant volumes make it quite difficult for those not knowing Lithuanian to locate a particular proverb. There is no doubt that we still need a one volume collection of Lithuanian-English proverbs to start with, and it is to be hoped that other bilingual collections will follow to make the most common Lithuanian proverbs available to scholars and laypersons alike.

It must be remembered that before this second volume of *Lietuvių patarlės ir priežodžiai* (2008) was published very little could be ascertained about Lithuanian proverbs by scholars, students, and general readers needing these materials in English. Of course, in addition to Kazys Grigas, other Lithuanian scholars (usually his colleagues and friends) like Giedrė Buftenė, Gražina Kadžytė, Lilija Kudirkienė, Gediminas Radvilas, Leonardas Sauka, Dalia Zaikauskienė, and others have published on Lithuanian proverbs in Lithuanian, and there is also some scholarship in German and Russian on Lithuanian materials (see Mieder 2009). But there is quite little paremiological scholarship on Lithuanian proverbs in English. K. Grigas himself published the exquisite articles “The Motif of the Mote in Someone’s Eye and the Comparative Study of a Proverb” (1995), “Problems of the Type in the Comparative Study of Proverbs” (1996), and “Some Semantic Enigmas of Proverbs” (2002). There are also the following isolated English studies that shed some light on Lithuanian proverbs: Juozas Tininis. “Similes in Lithuanian Folk Proverbs” (1971); Gediminas Radvilas. “A Lithuanian Proverb ‘Geriau po seno barzda, nagu po jauno botagu’ / ‘It’s Better to Be Under an Old Man’s Beard than Under the Whip of a Young Man’ and Its International Equivalents” (1996); Rainer Eckert. “Phrase and Idiom in Bretke’s Old Lithuanian Bible” (2004); and Dalia Zaikauskienė. *The Lithuanian Paremiology at the Turn of the 20th-21st Centuries: Tradition and Innovation* (2012). This last reference is an English and Lithuanian summary of D. Zaikauskienė’s doctoral dissertation that brings the impressive Lithuanian paremiology and paremiography into the modern age. It deals on the one hand with the impressive tradition of this folk wisdom, but it also looks at new proverbs and anti-proverbs as they appear in oral communication and above all in the mass media, including the internet (see Baran 2012). Obviously this impressive study includes numerous examples, alas once again, and understandably and justifiably so, in the native Lithuanian language.

While these references might perhaps not include all paremiological studies on Lithuanian proverbs in English, they do illustrate that it is still not easy for non-Lithuanian speakers and readers to inform themselves about the rich treasure trove of Lithuanian folk wisdom. The picture is no better on the paremiographical side of the proverbial coin. As far as I know, there is no English language collection of

Lithuanian proverbs. Neither Wilfrid Bonser's *Proverb Literature: A Bibliography of Works Relating to Proverbs* (1930) nor Otto Moll's *Sprichwörter-Bibliographie* (1958) include a reference to a collection of Lithuanian proverbs in English or as a bilingual Lithuanian-English compilation. The same is true for my *International Bibliography of Paremiography* (2011) that list the 3615 proverb collections from around the world that I have been able to assemble during the past forty-five years in my International Proverb Archive.

The picture does not improve when turning to international proverb collections that list all texts from numerous languages in English translation only. The following large collections include a few Lithuanian proverbs in English translation, but since these compilations are arranged by subject matter or keywords, one would literally have to read the entire books to locate the Lithuanian texts that are represented in very small numbers in any case: Wolfgang Mieder. *The Prentice-Hall Encyclopedia of World Proverbs* (1986); Harold V. Cordry. *The Multicultural Dictionary of Proverbs: Over 20,000 Adages from More Than 120 Languages, Nationalities and Ethnic Groups* (1997); and Jon R. Stone. *The Routledge Book of World Proverbs* (2006). The impressive multilingual three-volume *Dictionary of European Proverbs* (1994) by Emanuel Strauss with its 1804 proverb types does include Lithuanian equivalents in their original language, but one would have to read through the first two volumes of the collection to find them. While the third volume includes several hundred pages of a multi-lingual keyword index, a reader would have to know Lithuanian to find the keywords that would lead to the proverbs themselves. And things are really not much different with Gyula Paczolay's superb *European Proverbs in 55 Languages with Equivalents in Arabic, Persian, Sanskrit, Chinese and Japanese* (1997). It contains but 106 European proverb types, for which Paczolay can cite Lithuanian equivalents in one hundred cases. All of them, however, are internationally disseminated proverbs from classical antiquity, the Bible, and medieval Latin, and they are not home-grown Lithuanian proverbs! These texts simply show that these old proverbs also reached Lithuania in the North as loan translations, indicating that Lithuania is well integrated into the common European proverbial base.

But how about those international proverb collections in English that group their texts according to languages? As with other small countries, Lithuania is often not even included, to wit the two volumes of Selwyn Gurney Champion and Ethel Mavrogordato *Wayside Sayings [of the World]* (1922–1924); Henry Davidoff *A World Treasury of Proverbs from Twenty-Five Languages* (1946); and John Newbern and P. M. Rodebaugh *Prixilated Proverbs of the World: Shafts that Drive Deep. You Can Laugh and Weep! Pointed Petards of 61 Countries* (1971). Which leaves two international proverb collections that do include a special section on Lithuanian proverbs in English translation, a meager and deplorable

paremiographical state of affairs. There is first of all the still valuable collection by S. G. Champion with its somewhat unfortunate title *Racial Proverbs: A Selection of the World's Proverbs Arranged Linguistically with Authoritative Introductions to the Proverbs of 27 Countries and Races* (1938, rpt. 1963). Even though the section on Lithuanian proverbs does not have its own introduction, S. G. Champion lists the following 48 proverbs. Some of them might have benefited from a short explanation and a better translation, and it would be interesting to hear what my Lithuanian paremiographical friends think of the representative nature of this selection. The texts are numbered and the keywords set in boldface in the original:

LITHUANIAN

1. An **age** to an age is not a brother.
2. One does not live two **ages**.
3. They live like an **axe** with a stone.
[i.e. cat and dog life.]
4. Upon all flowers the **bee** alights, but not from all of them it gathers the nectar.
5. Give **beer** to a feared man and to a beloved one.
6. To a starving man **bread** is sweeter than honey.
7. There are many crosses upon a **cemetery**, but no cares.
8. It is good to **complain** when there is one who consoles.
9. I shall hold the horns and you will milk the **cow**.
10. The **dawn** grants a day.
11. One **day** teaches the other.
12. **Death** will come uninvited.
13. To a **drunkard** even a drop is dear.
14. Everything has its **end**.
15. Ask the **eyes** and you will find.
16. **Fear** and love do not walk together.
17. Rely upon **God**, but have bread in a bag.
18. He thinks he has grasped **God** by the beard.
19. **God** has given teeth, God will give bread.
20. You have not measured your fingers with **God's**, therefore you cannot know what is in store.
21. **Gold** shines even in the mire.
22. Without **gold** even the light fades.
23. Come expected, leave loved, so you will be a true **guest**.
24. A small **home**, but his own.
25. A common **horse** is always lean.
26. A **house** is blind without a dog, dumb without a cock.

27. **Hunger** increases the understanding.
28. There is **justice** in the world, but it is blind.
29. Without **learning**, without eyes.
30. **Listen** much and speak little.
31. With eyes you will not win **love**.
32. The **needle's** age is a short age.
33. **Ploughing**, we learn to plough; mowing, we learn to mow.
34. From a large cloud comes little **rain**.
35. A man without **shame** is always filled.
36. He who wears the **shirt** himself, mostly calls the naked.
37. From expecting I have lost my **sight**.
38. In **sight** one is like silk; out of sight one is like a wolf.
39. A cut **slice** will not stick on.
40. Good eyes are not afraid of **smoke**.
41. Even the severest winter is afraid of the **spring**.
42. A stationary **stone** grows round with moss, but when thrown is bare.
43. The **stone** that remains in one spot becomes covered with moss.
44. The end of the way is upon the **tongue**.
45. Other **trees**, other woodcutters.
46. There is in the world one **truth**, but it seems as if there were a hundred.
47. The hungry **wolf** goes for food even into the village.
48. She wept, as if she had lost the **wreath**.

[To lose a wreath means in Lithuanian folk-songs to lose virginity.]

(Champion 1938:227–228)

The other international proverb collection in my possession that includes a special section on Lithuania is Gerd de Ley's *International Dictionary of Proverbs* (1998). It lists the following 36 proverbs in English translation without numbers and no particular order. Again, just as in the case with Champion's collection, no source is given for the proverbs. It will be seen that a number of the following proverbs also appear in Champion's collection, even though they might differ slightly in translation. Surprisingly, Champion's standard collection is not listed in Ley's bibliography:

LITHUANIA

The breath of others always stinks.

If it weren't for sorrow and bad times, every day would be Christmas.

Fear and love do not go together.

Who gives, has.

God gave teeth, He will give bread.
 To be without learning, is to be without eyes.
 Offer the lazy man an egg, and he'll want you to peel it for him.
 To a starving man bread is sweeter than honey.
 It is easier to give orders than to work.
 The older the goat the tighter the rope.
 Don't laugh when your neighbors oven is on fire.
 There is an herb for every kind of sickness but not for death.
 Even the smallest drop is appreciated by the drunkard.
 There is no worse devil than a farmer who wants to be a gentleman.
 As one devil goes out, another one comes in.
 Without gold even the daylight is dark.
 Not all that glitters is gold; not all that is sticky is tar.
 Gold glitters even in the mud.
 Dogs cannot make dreams come true – people must do that.
 Good eyes don't fear smoke.
 For every head a hat.
 The calf isn't even born yet and there he is sharpening his carving knife.
 The church is nearby, God is far away.
 It is difficult to teach a cow to climb a tree.
 You are learning all your life and you die stupid.
 There is no need to whip docile horses.
 If you go to bed hungry, you'll wake up without having slept.
 Smoke in your own country is purer than fire in a foreign land.
 With the intellect of another you won't get very far.
 The beauty of a housewife will not put more fat into the soup.
 Even the hardest of winters fears the spring.
 From a big cloud comes little rain.
 Words do not fill your purse.
 Smoke spreads further than the fire.
 Sleep on a bed of silver and dream of gold.
 A man without a beard is like bread without a crust.

(Ley 1998: 229–230)

This is indeed a disappointing result! And how about the internet? When I typed in “Lithuanian Proverbs” I found a list of 21 proverbs cited in Lithuanian with English translations and English equivalents. Not surprisingly, they were taken from the collections by E. Strauss and G. Paczolay mentioned above. Here they are in English translation:

LITHUANIAN PROVERBS

God gave teeth, God will provide the bread.

It is good fishing in streamy water.

Well begun, is half done.

Just as one calls into the forest, so it echoes back.

What kind of parents, such children.

To whom it itches, scratches it.

He who does not want to work, that cannot eat either.

Cat patting leads to hump raising.

Such father, such son.

Constant dropping wears the stone.

Misfortune comes on horseback and goes way on foot.

Don't sell the skin till you have caught the bear.

Measure thrice, cut once.

All that glitters is not gold.

The apple does not fall far from the tree.

An old love does not rust.

The shoemaker is always barefooted.

Dry bread at home is better than roast meat abroad.

Those who do not reply to a request or accusation, or who raise no objection to something said or done, are assumed to have acquiesced.

Crows do not pick out crows' eyes.

Men are like fish; the great ones devour the small.

(http://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Lithuania_proverbs)

As can be seen, these proverbs are for the most part common European proverbs and really do not say much of anything about Lithuanian proverbs that originated over time in Lithuania itself! All of this should be taken as a clear indication that the internet has by no means replaced printed proverb collections! But not to be too negative about electronic research possibilities – they definitely are of great value for paremiographical work – let me mention what I did find by chance:

Gudauskas, Giedra. *Impressions on 3 Lithuanian Proverbs for Piano*. Norwalk, California: Highland Music Company, 1980 [first composed 1969]. 8 pp.

The composer Giedra Gudauskas (1923–2006) was born in Lithuania and came to the United States in 1946, first to Chicago and later to Santa Monica, California. She began playing the piano at the young age of seven and studied

at the State Conservatory of Music in Lithuania, at the Akademie für Musik in Dresden, Germany, and after arriving in North America at Roosevelt University in Chicago and the University of California at Los Angeles. She earned considerable recognition as a composer and her works were performed in various cities in the United States. The *Impressions on 3 Lithuanian Proverbs* was originally composed for piano and percussion instruments in 1969 with the piano version of this composition having been performed at Los Angeles and elsewhere. In any case, the three short pieces have the proverbial titles “Strike While The Iron Is Hot”, “The Fruit Does Not Fall Far From The Tree”, and “Even Among The Ashes Gold Glistens”. As can be seen, at least the first two proverbs belong to common European proverbs, with the third most likely being a proverb of Lithuanian origin. Hoping that my Lithuanian friends might not know these musical compositions, I mention them here as a small present and since I have been able to obtain the musical score, I would gladly send it to them in Vilnius.

It is my hope that I have been able to show that we need a collection of Lithuanian proverbs in English translation, preferably a bilingual Lithuanian-English collection. It will still take many years to complete the remaining three volumes of *Lietuvių patarlės ir priežodžiai*, and besides, this voluminous collection of the national treasure of Lithuanian proverbs is intended primarily for Lithuanian scholars and international proverb scholars. What we need is a one-volume Lithuanian-English proverb collection that is based on the serious paremiological and paremiographical work going on at Vilnius. I am certain that K. Grigas would agree that his “busy bees” should edit such a very much needed collection. I am sure that a publisher could be found in Lithuania or abroad to make such a collection available that would, of course, also include an introduction written by Lithuanian experts. Publishing this collection of Lithuanian proverbs with a commercial press would be best, but if that were to fail, it could appear in the *Supplement Series of Proverbium* that appears at the University of Vermont. The series includes 36 volumes by now, and individual volumes may include up to 320 pages. Usually 800 copies are printed of which about 225 are mailed free of charge to international subscribers of *Proverbium* and another 225 copies are sent to North American university libraries, all of them at no cost! The remaining copies could go to Lithuania to be distributed there, once again without any cost to recipients. All expenses would be covered here at the *Proverbium* headquarters in recognition and appreciation of the exquisite paremiological and paremiographical work by K. Grigas and his incredible team of “busy bees” carrying on the valuable publication of the national treasure of *Lietuvių patarlės ir priežodžiai*.

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