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SIMILES IN LITHUANIAN FOLK PROVERBS

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Each nation has conserved in its language an indefinite number of proverbs in which two things of some similarity, but of different categories, are compared in order to get a vivid phrase. Such proverbs in the theory of literature are known as similes. They reveal a creative spirit of the people and belong to verbal wealth of folklore.

Lithuanians use a lot of similes too. Once in a while they resort to them for the purpose of emphasizing, or-nating or giving variety to their conversation. For example: *Sėdi kaip šuo ant akėčių*. Literally: He sits like a dog on a harrow. Or: *Aš myliu tave kaip krislą akyje*. Literally: I love you as much as a chip in my eye. Or: *Meili kaip gulbė*. Literally: She is as lovely as a swan. As it can be seen from these three examples, a simile consists of two components, or parts, connected with a conjunction "*kaip*", meaning "as" or "like". Only a limited number of Lithuanian similes are composed of four components. For example: *Mylėk žmoną kaip dūšią, kratyk kaip grūšią*. Literally: Love your wife as your own soul, shake her as a pear-tree.

The form or structure of a simile is very simple. Its style is strict, concise and clear. Much attention is paid to the sonority of a phrase. Both components of a simile are frequently rhymed. Sometimes even alliterations are used. For example: *Paikas kaip avies vaikas*. 'He is as silly as a child of a sheep'. Or: *Apsirėdė kaip pelėda povo plunksnomis*. 'She dressed herself like an owl with the feathers of a peacock'.

The people who ornate their conversation with similes do not strive for intentional emphasis: they only aspire to describe something in a picturesque way. It is appropriate here to quote a few words from Ch. Sally's "Traité de stylistique française" (1951): La langue parlée est très peu abstraite pour rendre les idées, elle cherche constamment des points de contact avec le monde sensible; elle recourt à des comparaisons et à des images (§273).

The bulk of Lithuanian similes were created by the peasantry — from the people's own experience. Only a small amount of similes came into every day usage from written literature. Besides, some others were brought in from the neighboring nations and spread all over the country without any notice of their foreign origin. However, I shall confine myself here to quote only authentic similes, produced by the Lithuanian folk.

Many Lithuanian similes are pretty ancient. They throw light on the mentality, convictions, national customs, superstitions of the people and, in general, on their mode of life throughout the long ages of their existence. One can trace in similes the most ancient aspects of Lithuanian culture, pertaining to various spheres of life.

Because of their antiquity, not all Lithuanian similes are conceivable to the common people today. Sometimes they need interpretation in order to be understood correctly. For example: *Šnypščia kaip žaltys be ožkos pieno*. 'He hisses like a serpent without goat-milk'. To comprehend this simile, one must recollect the ancient Lithuanian esteem for serpents which were kept at home and fed on milk. Also not everyone can today understand the meaning of the following simile: *Apsikaišiojusi kaip Sekminių karvė*. 'She has adorned her head like a Whitsuntide cow'. The simile is aimed at a maiden which puts into her hair ostensive embellishments. It has originated from the custom to adorn the heads of cows with flower wreaths on Whitsuntide. The custom is still practiced in Lithuania up to this day.

The simile *Gajus kaip ragana skandinama* — 'He is as tenacious as a witch being drown' — is connected with a custom to drown witches. And what is the meaning of the following simile: *Gražus kaip laumės vaikas*? Literally: 'He is as handsome as a fairy's own child'. As one knows there are two kinds of fairies in Lithuanian mythology: the good ones and the bad ones. They are present to take over a new-born child. Its handsomeness or ugliness will depend upon the fate predetermined by the fairies. Here I would like to quote two similes pertaining to doves or pigeons. For example: *Liūdnas*

kaip *karvelj pašovęs*. 'He is as sad as the one whose shot wounded a dove.' For ancient Lithuanians the doves were sacred birds bringing good fortune to people. Even the accidental wounding of a dove was considered bad luck. Another simile with a dove is as follows: *Linksmas lyg jam karvelis būtų kelią perskridęs*. Literally: 'He is as joyful as one whose path has been crossed by a flying dove'. The meaning of the simile is clear from the above given explanation.

Sometimes a simile includes even a name of a person. Apparently someone in a village or locality distinguished himself by some odd trait and this touched off the imagination of the folk, causing the creation of a simile. For example: *Stovi kaip Pilypas kanapėse*. 'He is standing like Philip in a field of hemp.' Now and then the names of inhabitants of foreign countries are mentioned in similes. For example: *Gyvena kaip švedas ant marių*. 'He lives like a Swede on his seas.' Or: *Mandras kaip prancūzų šuo*. 'He is proud like a French dog.' Also mythological and religious motifs may be found in Lithuanian similes. For example: *Blaškoski kaip laumė jaujoje*. Literally: 'He (or she) flings about like a fairy in a corn-kiln.' Or: *Valgo kaip gyvulus, net snukio neperžegnojės*. 'He eats like a beast — without having made the sign of the cross on his muzzle.'

Many Lithuanian similes fascinate us by their humor and irony, as it has been seen from above quoted examples. Here are two more examples of this kind: *Mokytas kaip aptiekoriaus šuo*. 'He is as educated as a dog of a druggist.' Or: *Tiesus kaip alkūnė*. 'It is as straight as an elbow.'

The ancient Lithuanian people would themselves adopt some particular qualities or characteristics of real or imaginative beings of their surroundings, or even of the spiritual world. They expressed this in picturesque similes, where a cowardly person is being compared with a hare, a clever man with a fox, a silly one with a sheep, a slow one with a turtle, a fast one with a wind, a good one with an angel, a bad one with a devil, etc.

In order to demonstrate the immense diversity of Lithuanian similes, one may attempt to classify them. Obviously, the establishing of an accurate scheme of simile classification is a highly complicated matter. Specialists in this field try to find some general points in similes upon which they outline their schemes. As a basing of their classification they start with the first component of the simile. My own scheme roughly looks like this: A. Man in similes. B. Abstract things in similes. C. Concrete things in similes. D. Animal world in similes. Here are some examples according to this classification: A. *Alkanas visuomet, kaip gegužiukas svetimame lizde*. He is always hungry like a child of a cuckoo in another bird's nest. *Džiaugias kaip karvelis vanago naguose*: He is as happy as a dove in the claws of a hawk. *Guli našlė prie šalėlės, kaip ledo lytelė*: A widow is lying at my side like a block of ice. B. *Meilė be pavydo, kaip valgis be druskos*: Love without envy is like a meal without salt. C. *Dantys kaip karveliai*: Teeth are like doves. D. *Gegutėlė liūdnei kukuoja, kaip mergelė dejuoja*: A cuckoo as sorrowfully calls as a maiden laments.

Some similes are common to many European nations. They can be translated into other languages literally. For example in Lithuanian: *Baltas kaip sniegas*. Ger.: Weiss wie Schnee. Fr.: Blanc comme neige. However, the bulk of Lithuanian similes differ considerably from those of other nations. In order to point out this difference, - one needs but to compare a certain amount of Lithuanian and foreign similes. I will restrict myself here only to limited examples of such comparison, selected according to the first component of a simile.

1. Lith.: *Apgaulingas kaip balandžio rytas*: As deceptive as an April morning.

Fr.: *Faux comme Judas*: As deceitful as Jude.

It.: *False come un diavolo*: As deceitful as a devil.

2. Lith.: *Greitas kaip devyni vėjai*: As fast as nine winds.

It.: *Veloce come la rondine*: As fast as a swallow.

Fr.: *Rapide comme un flèche*: As fast as an arrow.

3. Lith.: *Girtas kaip kiaulė*: As drunk as a pig. *Girtas kaip šiaučius*: As drunk as a shoemaker.

Fr.: *Ivre comme une soup*: As drunk as a soup. *Ivre comme une grive*: As drunk as a thrush.

It.: *Ubbriaco come un marinaio inglese*: As drunk as an English sailor. *Cotto come un tegolo*: As drunk as a tile.

Eng.: As drunk as a fiddler.

4. Lith.: *Gražus kaip laumės vaikas*: As beautiful as a fairy-child.

Fr.: *Beau comme un astre*: As beautiful as a star. *Belle comme une fleur*: She is as beautiful as a flower.

Lat.: *Pulcher quasi pietus*: He is as handsome as a painting.

Ger.: *Bildschon*: As beautiful as a picture.

5. Lith.: *Kvailas kaip žąsis*: As silly as a goose.

Fr.: *Bete comme une oie* (or: *comme un ane, une mule*): As silly as a goose (or: as a donkey, as a mule). The French also say: *Bete comme une cruche, comme un pot, comme un chou*: As silly as a pitcher, as a pot, as a cabbage.

It.: *Stupido come l'acqua dei maccheroni*: As stupid as macaroni water.

6. Lith.: *Liesas kaip giltinė*: As meagre as a goddess of death. Or: *Liesas kaip biasas*: As lean as a devil.

Fr.: *Maigre comme une squelette*: As meagre as a skeleton. About women French say: *Plate comme une planche*: As flat as a plank. Or: *Plate comme une punaise*: As flat as a flounder.

7. Lith.: Malonus kaip mergai busilas: As agreeable as a stork to a maiden.
Fr.: Amable comme une porte de prison: As amiable as a gate of a prison. Or: Amable comme un san-glier: As amiable as a wild boar.
Sp.: Suave como una carda: As pleasant as a card. Or: Amable como un erizo: As amiable as a hedgehog.
8. Lith.: Piktas kaip kukutis baloje: As angry as a hoopoe-bird in a swamp.
Fr.: Méchant comme un ane rouge: As angry as a red donkey. (By red donkey the cardinal Richelieu is meant here).
9. Pasigėriau kaip gaidys, o kas mane pabaidys: I got drunk as a cock: who will frighten me? Or: Pasigėriau kaip bitelė, man kojos kaip šėivos: I got drunk as a bee: my legs are like quills.
Fr.: Boire comme un templier: To drink as a templar. Boire comme une éponge: To drink like a sponge. Boire comme un Polonais: To drink like a Pole. Boire comme un sonneur: To drink like a bell-ringer.
Prt.: Beber como um animal: To drink like a beast.
Eng.: To drink like a fish.
10. Kalba kaip iš knygos: He speaks as well as from a book. Or: Kalba kaip iš medžio iškritęs: He speaks like one who fell down from a tree.
Fr.: Parler comme une perroquet: To speak like a parrot. Parler français comme une vache espagnole: To speak French as a Spanish cow.
Sp.: Hablar como una cotorra: To speak as a magpie.
11. Lith.: Miega kaip užmuštas: He sleeps as though he were killed.
Fr.: Dormir comme un sabot: To sleep like a shoe. Dormir comme un loir: To sleep like a dormouse. Dormir comme un bienheureux (or: comme un pieu, comme un juste): To sleep like a happy person (or: like a pious one, like a righteous one).
Engl.: To sleep like a log.
Sp.: Dormir como un liron: To sleep like a dormouse.
Prt.: Dorme como un porco: To sleep like a hog.
It.: Dormire come un ghire: To sleep like a seven-sleeper.
Ger.: Schlafen wie ein Murmeltier: To sleep like a marmot.
12. Lith.: Verkia kaip mažas vaikas: He weeps like a little child.
Fr.: Pleurer comme une Madeleine: To weep like Madeleine. Pleurer comme une fontaine (comme un veau, comme un enfant): To weep like a fountain (like an ox, like a baby).
Eng.: To cry like a baby.
It.: Piangere come un salice: To weep like a willow.

Although the French say *comparaison n'est pas raison*, nevertheless this very short sketch of comparison given above already shows that there is a difference of content in the Lithuanian similes and in those of the Romance languages. One can judge from this rough comparison about the individuality of imagination of a particular nation, which reveals its soul even in the form of similes.

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