Preface

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Our volume is based on lectures of the international conference on *Verbal Charms and Narrative Genres* held in Budapest on October 12–15, 2017, whose primary goal has been to bring close together these two distinct areas of folkloristic research – charms and belief narratives – as well as to establish fruitful links between the scholars who are working at present in each of them. It is worth pointing out that this has been the first meeting organized jointly by two committees of the International Society for Folk Narrative Research (ISFNR): the one focused on *Charms, Charmers and Charming* and the other, the *Belief Narrative Network,* both of which have organized many international events in their own right. In addition to folklorists, many other scholars representing related disciplines – anthropologists, medievalists, literary historians, historians of religion, as well as specialists in Germanic, Slavic, Baltic and Balkan studies – joined the Conference. Studies were submitted by nearly half of the more than 30 conference attendees from Eastern and Western Europe, as well as from Asia, America, and Australia. As we affirmed in the call for proposals, "Through collaboration, we would like to conduct a parallel examination of Eastern and Western European folklore from the Middle Ages to the present, and also to examine phenomena from Christian and non-Christian, elite and popular, literary and oral traditions." In this sense, our conference has boosted interdisciplinary co-operation, as it can be seen in this volume.

The book has been structured around the three major, pre-determined topics of the conference. These three groups of articles explore the possible ways in which charms (and related genres: prayer, blessing, curse, threat) as well as belief narratives and other narrative folklore genres (religious legend, fairy tale, heroic epic, etc.) are related. Each of these topics is represented by several articles from different geographic locations and disciplinary perspectives, with diverse methodological approaches, shedding light on distinctive layers of the networks of folklore genres. What *Haralampos Passalis* writes about his own research applies to the objectives and results of each study here presented: "Although belief narratives and charms are regarded as two different folklore genres with

different modes of transmission, performance and function, they are both in a constant dialectical relationship, yielding mutual feedback."

1. The articles of the group titled *Verbal Charms in the Context of Narrative Genres* show the diverse contexts of charms in terms of their various related and narrative genres. A relevant aspect of *Bernadett Smid*'s analysis is the use of a Catalan version of the so-called *St. Cyprian prayer* as a charm. This multidimensional approach also touches on other aspects of the social and narrative context of verbal charms. Based on the textual and gestural elements of the charm in the surviving records of a 16th-century Inquisition trial of a hermit, the article attempts to trace the written sources of the hermit's healing prayer, thus extending the genre connections toward elite literacy. *Laura Jiga Iliescu*'s study analyzes the different manifestations of the mythical context of St. Elijah, the "meteorologist saint", in Romanian folklore. In doing so, the author attempts to uncover the hidden and obvious (via common textual motifs) connections of charms to other narrative genres. She is right to conclude that charms and other religious/magical genres are different expressions of the same worldview, knowledge, motif stock, and therefore one cannot be understood without the other. *Ekaterina V. Gusarova*'s contribution examines the figure of another saint – a protagonist in several folklore genres in the Mediterranean and East-European regions of the Eastern Church through the Ethiopian Coptic versions of the legend of *Saint Sisynnios*. The author's meticulous philological analysis reveals a peculiar type of relationship between legend and charm – known mainly in the Christian and Muslim Middle East – where a written version of a legend is used as an amulet (i.e., a protective charm).

The most common version of the textual link between legend and charm is the incorporation of legendary healing stories into charms, as their *historiola* (a sacred example or analogy for promoting the success of the current healing charm). *Nicholas Wolf*'s article on the role of Irish saints in charms presents a less common version of these links, where it is not the motifs of common Christian legends that are found in charm types prevalent throughout Europe, but mainly this role falls on national saints (Columcille, Bridget, Patrick). *Katherine Leach*'s study also takes us to the Celtic language area, in which the author analyzes the types of Welsh medieval to early modern narrative charms. By examining the temporal changes in three international charm types *(Longinus, Three Good Brothers, Flum Jordan),* she captures the changes in their relationship to religion, magic, and healing. At the same time, she observes the increasing penetration of religious narratives into charms that have become increasingly more Welsh than Latin.

In addition to their immediate relatives of the "religious/magical" genre, some textual motifs – or even types – of verbal charms appear throughout Europe in more distantly related narrative genres, such as fairy tales and epic songs. In this case, the "original", "real" magical situation is only present indirectly, on a different semantic level. In her multifaceted analysis, *María Palleiro* examines the use of charms as magic formulas in the Argentinian tale of 'John the Lazy', collected in fieldwork. She analyzes as well the motif of the divine origin of a charm received in a dream known from several narrative genres. In this context, she suggests interpreting this charm embedded in a tale as a speech act, that is to say, using Urban's terms, as a "speech about speech in speech about action" (Urban 1984). *Kinga Markus Takeshita* gives firstly a brief preliminary overview of Iranian folklore research, secondly presenting some examples, especially from the Shahname national epic poems. In this way, she lays the foundation for a study

which extrapolates the texts of charms and invocations or prayers used as charms, as well references to their use from linguistic data,

In European folklore, there is a separate genre category of origin legends, about the origins of charms, which represents itself the relationship between these two interdependent genres. In this sense, *Haralampos Passalis'* article deals with the Greek variants of a charm against abdominal diseases *(The Good Master and the Evil Housewife),* known primarily in the Eastern Mediterranean. Its *historiola* about Christ the Healer includes the origin legend of the charm embedded in a story of a successful healing, according to which Christ taught the healing charm to the protagonist of the story who had an abdominal ailment. This, as a speech act embedded in a speech act – quoting Urban's above mentioned words cited by Palleiro: "speech about speech in speech about action" – increases the effectiveness of the current healing act.

2. This volume represents some of the many options available on the theme of *Verbal charms and belief narratives: comparative aspect.*

Aigars Lielbārdis explores the ways and instances the devil appears in charms and in some other genres of Lithuanian folklore, focusing on the motif of "the devil struck by lightning". Like other authors of this volume, he notes that "texts from different genres complement each other by providing missing narrative fragments and aspects of meaning." This study confirms that a joint examination of a belief legend and a charm type that share a mythical background can be the key to fully exploring/understanding their mythic deep structure. As the previous author, also *Edina Dallos* centers her analysis on the various shapes a mythical entity can take, emphasizing the geographical/regional aspects of the comparison. In this way, she examines the representations of *Albasty* – a demon of the Turkic peoples that menaces childbearing women and newborns – in various genres, and analyzes the regional differences in a belief legend and a charm that share a mythical background on the Eurasian steppe and in the Volga region.

Vita Džekčioriūtė-Medeišienė's approach to Lithuanian child-threatening mythical creatures known from traditional culture moves slightly away from the genre of "real" (magical) charms towards child-frightening threats, focusing her analysis in threatening expressions that contain both real and fictitious creatures. Examining these mythical creatures is also useful for the study of characters that are often identical in charms, even though child-threatening expressions cannot be considered verbal magic *par excellence*. When comparing belief narratives and incantations, *Danijela Popović Nikolić* focuses her attention on genre-specific forms of textual representations of human contact with the supernatural. Her main question is how similarly or differently the common mythical background – the dangerous nature of traversing between the human and the demonic world – is expressed in these two genres, and what kind of correlation can be found between charms and belief narratives in this regard (e.g., which various transformed versions of verbal charms – swearing, cursing, command, reproach – appear in belief narratives dealing with encounters with demons as a "genre within a genre").

3. *Belief narratives about charmers and charming* are rarely the subject of scientific analysis. In this sense *Smiljana Đorđević Belić*'s article, based on Serbian data collected in fieldwork, captures this topic – also important in terms of genre relations. Like Popović Nikolić, she also focuses the attention on supernatural communication. Her analysis also addresses how motifs of the supernatural, the afterlife, and eschatology survive in the texts while such narratives change and get secularized, and what their role is in terms

of the community role and identity of the healers. Finally, *Emese Ilyefalvi* examines the threats found in the records of 17th–18th-century Hungarian witch trials, primarily from the perspective of the place of these texts in the forthcoming Digital Database of Hungarian Verbal Charms. Using the results of historical speech act research, she comes to the conclusion that these threats can in some sense be perceived as charms, and their context – stories of bewitching and healing heard as part of court discourses – is a special type of belief narrative. The author thereby contributes to the clarification of the relationship between belief narrative and verbal magic.

We deem that the conference on which this volume is based has indeed helped to bring close together folklorists and specialists in other disciplines, belonging as well to different geographic and cultural locations. In this sense, the volume is a testimony to the fruitfulness of sharing ideas and research on common issues. As several authors of this volume concluded: it is impossible to penetrate the deep structures of belief narratives without understanding the textually related genres such as charms; and that is certainly true vice versa. We recommend our book to all folklorists and scholars of related disciplines, as a proposal of encouraging further collaboration.

Budapest – Buenos Aires, January 2020

REFERENCES CITED

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