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The Witch in Lithuanian Tales of Magic: Folklore and Mythological Peculiarities of the Image

Summary

The article discusses one of the most popular characters of Lithuanian tales of magic – the witch – and fire as an important attribute of her milieu. In Lithuanian folklore studies, the image of the witch as a mythical creature in belief legends has been analysed in more detail, while the picture of the witch in folktales and her connection with the element of fire has so far been poorly researched. In Lithuanian folktales, belief legends, and belief statements as well as in witch trial reports the witch is usually referred to by the same name (*ragana* in Lithuanian). What is more, the tales of magic can also comprise specific imagery which is close to mythological folklore, and this way they merge the poetic features of both the folktales and the legends. Thus, the witch in Lithuanian tales of magic is not just a folklore char-

acter but can also acquire the features of a mythical being. The article attempts to highlight the peculiarities of the tales of magic with a common focus on witches and the element of fire: the fire as a marker of the witch's environment, the concept of the witch as the mistress of fire, and the image of fire as a protection against the witch. Folklore motifs are explained in the broader framework of other folklore genres, mythology, and customs. The functions of witch and fire in tales of magic enable us to better understand not only the direct empirical but also the mythical contexts reconstructed by the researchers. At a closer look, a complex and multifaceted layer of meaning is revealed, which confirms that the witch of the magical tales is one of the most interesting and complex characters in the Lithuanian narrative folklore.

Keywords: witch, belief legend, tale of magic, Lithuanian folklore, Lithuanian mythology.