

Anna Engelking

The Curse  
On Folk Magic  
of the Word



MONOGRAPHS



Institute of Slavic Studies,  
Polish Academy of Sciences



The Curse  
On Folk Magic  
of the Word



Anna Engelking

---

The Curse  
On Folk Magic  
of the Word

Translated by  
Anna Gutowska



MONOGRAPHS



WARSAW 2017



Institute of Slavic Studies,  
Polish Academy of Sciences

First published in 2000 as *Kłątwa. Rzecz o ludowej magii słowa*, Wrocław: Fundacja na Rzecz Nauki Polskiej, Wydawnictwo Funna. The significantly altered and expanded second edition was published in 2010 in Warsaw by Oficyna Naukowa.

This translation is based on the second Polish edition.

Praca naukowa finansowana w ramach programu Ministra Nauki i Szkolnictwa Wyższego pod nazwą „Narodowy Program Rozwoju Humanistyki” w latach 2014–2017.

This academic publication was financed within the “National Programme for the Development of Humanities” of the Minister of Science and Higher Education in 2014–2017.



## NATIONAL PROGRAMME FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF HUMANITIES

ISS PAS MONOGRAPHS SERIES

Editorial supervision

*Jakub Ozimek*

Cover and title page design

*Barbara Grunwald-Hajdasz*

Editing

*Jakub Ozimek*

Typesetting and page makeup

*Beata Jankowska*

This is an Open Access book distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 3.0 PL License ([creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/pl/](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/pl/)), which permits redistribution, commercial and non commercial, provided that the book is properly cited.

© Copyright by Anna Engelking

© Copyright for the English translation by Anna Gutowska, 2017

**ISBN: 978-83-64031-63-2**

Instytut Sławistyki Polskiej Akademii Nauk

ul. Bartoszewicza 1b/17

00-337 Warszawa

tel./fax 22/ 826 76 88

sow@ispan.waw.pl, [www.ispan.waw.pl](http://www.ispan.waw.pl)

*A word is always a charm.*

Gerardus van der Leeuw [1938: 404]

*There are wonders in the world...*

Jadwiga of Papiernia (interlocutor)



# CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION. TOPIC, SOURCES, METHOD .....	9
PART ONE. MAGIC .....	15
1. MAGIC: IN SEARCH OF THE MEANING OF THE WORD AND THE CONCEPT .....	17
1. Magic. A Linguistic Approach .....	18
1.1. The Observers' Perspective .....	18
1.1.1. The History of the Concept. From the Magi to Magic .....	18
1.1.2. The Word Magic in Contemporary Polish .....	20
1.2. The Perspective of Magic Subjects. An Outline of the Concept in Slavic Folk Culture .....	25
2. Magic. The Anthropological Approach .....	28
2.1. Difficulties in Defining <i>Magic</i> .....	28
2.2. Attempts at Definition. Between <i>Action</i> and <i>Worldview</i> .....	29
2. MAGIC OF FOLK VERBAL RITUALS .....	35
1. The Magic of the Word. The Theory .....	35
1.1. The Linguistic Approach. The Magical Function of Language ....	35
1.2. The Anthropological Approach: Magical Language .....	40
1.3. A Particularization: the Folk Verbal Ritual .....	55
2. The Magic of the Word in Practice. An Introduction to Word Magic in Folk Culture .....	57
PART TWO. THE CURSE .....	79
3. THE CONCEPTUAL <i>FIELD</i> OF "CURSING" .....	81
1. Casting a Curse. CURSING <sub>1</sub> ( <i>Przekląć (to Curse); Przeklęcie (a Curse)</i> ) .....	83
2. Cursing to Exclude from a Community. CURSING <sub>2</sub> ( <i>Wykląć (to Excommunicate); Wyklęcie (Excommunication)</i> ) .....	89
3. Cursing to Enchant. CURSING <sub>3</sub> ( <i>Zakląć (to Enchant, to Cast a Spell); Zakłęcie (an Enchantment, a Spell)</i> ) .....	92
4. Cursing to Abuse. CURSING <sub>4</sub> ( <i>Przeklinać (to Swear); Przeklinanie (Swearing)</i> ) .....	95
5. Cursing to Hold Someone Obligated. CURSING <sub>5</sub> ( <i>Zaklinać (to Conjure), Zaklinanie (a Conjuraton)</i> ) .....	105
6. Cursing to Assure. CURSING <sub>6</sub> ( <i>Zaklinać się (to Swear a Vow); Zaklinanie się (Swearing a Vow)</i> ) .....	106
7. Conclusion .....	111

4. THE FOLK RITUAL OF THE CURSE .....	115
1. Parental Curse .....	115
1.1. In Search for the Structure of the Ritual .....	115
1.1.1. The Object of the Ritual .....	121
1.1.2. Performer of the Ritual .....	124
1.1.3. The Agent of the Ritual .....	139
1.1.4. Conclusion .....	143
1.2. A True Story of a Daughter Cursed by Her Mother. A Case Study .....	144
2. The Reverse of Parental Curse. A Child's Curse .....	163
3. Curses Cast by Other Speakers .....	179
5. SEMANTICS OF THE CURSE .....	211
1. Linguistic Structure of Magical Directives .....	211
1.1. Imperative-Optative Utterances .....	212
1.2. Enchanting-Optative Utterances .....	214
1.2.1. Type One of Curse Formulas: <i>May God Punish You!</i> .....	214
1.2.2. Type Two of Curse Formulas: <i>May You Perish!</i> .....	219
1.2.3. Other Formulas in the Function of a Curse .....	221
1.3. The Semantic Structure Curse .....	221
2. The Contents of Curse Formulas .....	225
2.1. God's Punishment. The Curse Agent as Curse Executor .....	226
2.1.1. A Special Case: Virgin Mary as Curse Executor .....	233
2.2. The Devil in His Many Guises as Curse Executor .....	234
2.3. The Fate of the Cursed .....	239
2.3.1. Disease .....	239
2.3.2. Death .....	246
2.3.3. Misfortune .....	252
6. FROM CURSING TO LIFTING THE CURSE .....	255
1. The Fate of the Cursed One. The State of Being Cursed .....	255
2. Possibilities of Lifting the Curse .....	262
CONCLUSION .....	275
1. Final Remarks .....	275
2. Further Research Questions .....	278
APPENDIX: THE BLESSING RITUAL IN FOLK CULTURE, OR ON THE ALLO- CATION OF FORTUNE'S GIFTS BY EMPLOYING WORDS .....	281
ENDNOTES .....	307
THE INTERLOCUTORS .....	361
REFERENCES .....	367
List of Abbreviations .....	367
Other Works Cited .....	370

# INTRODUCTION. TOPIC, SOURCES, METHOD

Let us attempt to understand that other.

Aron Gurevich [1988: 216]

What is the essence of the folk ritual of a curse?

This book in its present shape, scope and structure is an attempt to answer this question. In the first part of the book, I analyse the term *magic*, scrutinise selected linguistic and anthropological approaches to verbal magic, and treat them as inspirations for an overview of magical utterances in folk culture. The second part of *The Curse* is devoted to an analysis of the curse proper (in isolation from ancillary and related terms) from the point of view of pragmatics and semantics. The curse ritual is analysed both in its situational contexts, and as a part of the broader cultural context of folk mythology, folk religiosity, and social values and norms.

The curse, understood as a verbal ritual, is a phenomenon that exists in the majority of human cultures and is in all probability universal. It became the focus of interest for Biblical scholars, Orientalists and classical scholars, historians and anthropologists.<sup>1</sup> But so far, researchers specializing in European folk culture and the lives of peasant communities did not devote much attention to the curse. I have only been able to find two studies analysing the curse in Ireland and Macedonia (and it should be noted that both publications are collections of source materials, and not critical studies).<sup>2</sup> Also, linguists (in so far as I was able to discover) did not pay any special attention to the curse ritual. In linguistic studies, curses are routinely mentioned as examples of the performative function of language (as a type of verbal magic that endeavours to change reality by means of words). An alternative linguistic perspective on the curses

highlights their emotive aspect – they are viewed as utterances that help the speakers express their negative emotions. Among the scholars who were drawn to the phenomenon of the curse, a special mention is due to the Orientalist James A. Matisoff [1979],<sup>3</sup> who analysed curses as a type of psycho-ostensive expression (and actually coined the latter term). Another interesting perspective on the curse can be found in Mariia Koniushkevich's article that dissects Belarusian linguistic behaviours [Koniushkevich 2001]. In her article, Koniushkevich analyses the diversity of Belarusian curses in terms of their linguistic content, structure and function. She treats Belarusian curses as instances of verbal behaviour that function in a linguistic situation of "Cursing," which is sacred in origin. Until very recently, there was a dearth of comprehensive studies of the curse by Polish scholars. Polish ethnographers, cultural anthropologists, folklorists and linguists only referred to the curse in passing in broader studies of folk culture and folk speech. In 2000 (concurrently with the first Polish edition of this book) there appeared a monograph by Magdalena Zowczak entitled *Biblia ludowa* (*The Folk Bible* [Zowczak 2000, 2nd edition: Zowczak 2013]), where a whole chapter was devoted to the phenomenon of the curse, understood as a punishment coming from God.<sup>4</sup> Zowczak asserts that "the curse is among the favourite motifs of the folk bible" ("temat kłątwy [jest] ulubiony przez biblię ludową") [Zowczak 2013: 176]. My own research also proves the validity of this claim.

The source material for *The Curse*, which constitutes the first Polish monographic treatment of the phenomenon of the folk ritual of the curse in its cultural context, comes from two types of sources.

Firstly, I used primary sources,<sup>5</sup> and especially transcripts of conversations I had conducted in the field. My field research was conducted in the years 1980–1989. I made numerous trips (with varying frequency), mostly to the Podlasie region (then Biała Podlaska voivodship, today, after the local government reforms of 1999 that changed the administrative boundaries, part of Lublin voivodship). I also visited Siedlce, Białystok, Suwałki and Przemyśl voivodships (today within the Mazovia, Podlasie and Subcarpathia voivodships). In 1993, I continued my research in Grodno, Brest and Gomel provinces in Belarus, where I talked in Polish and Belarusian to the inhabitants of Catholic and Orthodox villages. Generally, my research covered the borderlands of Poland, Belarus and Ukraine, including the Grodno region, Podlasie, Polesie and Subcarpathia. Some of my interlocutors represented the Catholic and some the Orthodox variety of the culture of this borderland; they spoke Polish, but also Belarusian and Ukrainian dialects. But while the phenomenon of the curse in the folk culture of the Polish-Belarusian-Ukrainian borderlands must be anal-

used in all its cultural complexity, I would like to argue that underneath the cultural differences, the different cultural takes on the curse there is indeed an underlying unity as they can all be traced back to a common pre-Christian source. For this reason, in my analysis of the curse, I am going to focus on its universal aspects.

The bulk of my sources is provided by transcripts of 86 conversations.<sup>6</sup> I conducted most of the them personally, while a dozen or so were conducted by the students participating in field research under my supervision. A vast majority of the interviews were recorded on cassettes, and in a small number of cases the answers were noted down by the interviewer. I also sporadically made use of field materials gathered by other researchers, held in the archives of the Institute of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology at the University of Warsaw.

Secondly, I used secondary (printed) sources. Absolutely indispensable to my research was Oskar Kolberg's seminal multi-volume work entitled *Lud (The Folk)*.<sup>7</sup> I used Kolberg's collection for comparative purposes, using his records from different regions of ethnographic Poland as well as – for comparative purposes – from Belarusian and Ukrainian lands. Another crucial source was Michał Federowski's *Lud białoruski (The Belarusian Folk)*.<sup>8</sup> I also used dialect dictionaries, general dictionaries, and collections of proverbs. A relatively small portion of the material comes from nineteenth century ethnographic journals and other archive sources.<sup>9</sup> It should be stressed, however, that the use of printed materials for the study of the curse is fraught with problems. Printed records typically do not yield exhaustive and complete data on curse and other types of conjuration. The printed materials are mostly concerned with just one aspect of verbal rituals which is quite outside the scope of my research, and to which I only refer in passing – cure spells. Cure spells are a very distinct category of verbal rituals, they could even be seen as a separate literary genre. The highly specialized practices from the borderland of folk medicine and magic that are meant to cure illnesses have been the focus of academic interest since the nineteenth century, and are thus by far the best researched and most exhaustively described area of verbal magic. The rare and brief references to conjuration (including curses) have to be sifted from accounts that describe a wide variety of topics: from the descriptions of life cycle and family cycle rituals, to descriptions of folk beliefs and customs and summaries of folk literature texts.

For this reason, it seemed to me that if I wanted to analyse the curse in all its complexity, open-ended conversations with villagers, inspired by qualitative methodology, should constitute the core of my research. The description of the phenomenon will involve both the structure and

function of the rituals in question, and their status in the consciousness of the research subjects.<sup>10</sup> Since I conducted the research personally, I was able to make necessary *ad hoc* adjustments, asking additional questions or requesting clarification. Naturally, this was not possible with respect to my analyses of nineteenth century texts. The information contained therein is very often random, fragmentary or inconclusive, and it gives rise to unanswerable questions. For this reason, I treat data obtained from nineteenth century sources as only supplementary.

The materials gathered during the research process are not analysed with respect to geographical or chronological distinctions. I refrained from using a ethnogeographical or diachronic approach, and instead applied a synchronic approach that would allow me to best understand the structure, semantics, mechanisms and cultural functions of the curse, in other words – its general model.

Any researcher who attempts to analyse folk verbal rituals endeavours to uncover their “internal system,”<sup>11</sup> shaped within the confines of a given culture in which these rituals are rooted in manifold ways. In these attempts, one should follow Claude Lévi-Strauss’s advice and do what

every anthropologist tries to do in the case of different cultures: to put himself in the place of the men living there, to understand the principle and pattern of their intentions, and to perceive a period or a culture as a significant set [Lévi-Strauss 1966: 250].

Such an attempt requires the researcher to take pains not to impose his/her own cognitive categories or judgements on the material. In this matter, I agree with Gurevich, who postulates perceiving the researched culture as “other” and

admitting that it is not our culture and that the criteria for evaluating it must be sought within itself. Only with such an approach can one count on entering a dialogue with it. A dialogue assumes not a view from the top to the bottom, and not a condemnation, but amazement and interest in understanding the interlocutor and deciphering his language [Gurevich 1988: 216].

This way of thinking is the rationale behind incorporating extensive quotes from the interlocutors in the following chapters. There is no doubt that they are the experts on their own culture. By letting them speak on the pages of my book, I also give myself – and the reader – a chance to slowly “decipher their language” by listening/reading attentively, and carefully analysing and interpreting their utterances.

I acknowledge a considerable debt of gratitude towards the interlocutors, inhabitants of Polish and Belarusian villages, who answered my questions graciously and patiently. They generously shared their

knowledge about folk verbal rituals and in truth, and in fact all of them should be recognized as co-authors of this book. I am absolutely certain that without their generous cooperation, my attempts to understand the phenomenon of the curse in folk culture could only end in failure. For this reason, I did not want my commentary to overshadow their original voices, and I made no attempt to hide or code their names (a full list of interlocutors can be found in the book). In the course of my research, I grew close to some of my interlocutors and visited them over and over again. Many of them were quite elderly, belonging to a generation that is quickly passing away. Some of them already have: and with them, their culture, tradition and wisdom.



PART ONE.  
MAGIC



# 1

## MAGIC: IN SEARCH OF THE MEANING OF THE WORD AND THE CONCEPT

Magic happens in a world of its own,  
but this world is real to the natives.

It therefore exerts a deep influence on their behaviour  
and consequently is also real to the anthropologist.

Bronisław Malinowski [1935: 215]

Scholars differentiate between many types of magic. Some of the categories include the magic of pre-industrial cultures (primary magic), professional (dualist) magic, elite (learned) and folk magic, forbidden (degraded) magic, white and black magic, ancient, classical, Jewish, Christian, medieval, Renaissance and modern magic, etc.<sup>1</sup> It is also possible to differentiate between diverse magical sub-disciplines, such as alchemy, astrology, necromancy, sorcery, medicine, divination, rituals, etc. Magic is a universal phenomenon that occurs in all human cultures, and for this reason, scholarly literature on the subject is very rich and varied.

In my monograph, I am going to focus solely on non-professional folk magic, whose practice has been recorded by researchers in the Polish-East Slavic borderlands ever since the nineteenth century. I am interested not in its specific manifestations (and so I will not describe individual practices classified by researchers under the category of magic), but in the internal mechanism of its operation. In unravelling their “internal system,” I will endeavour to answer the question whether and in what sense the practices mentioned above can be described as “magical.”

My inquiry into the nature of the curse and its place in folk culture must necessarily start with clarifying the meaning of the word “magic” itself. What is the word’s etymology in Slavic languages? What is its colloquial usage? Its connotations? What is its usage in terminology? Is it used (and if so, when in what contexts) by magic practitioners themselves?

## 1. Magic. A Linguistic Approach

Magicians and scientists [...] are using different conceptual systems. They speak different languages

John Middleton [1987: 83]

### 1.1. The Observers’ Perspective

#### 1.1.1. The History of the Concept. From the Magi to Magic

The world *magic* (*magia* in Polish) derives from Old Persian, where there existed the word *magu* (“magician”), whose etymological meaning “one who has power” can be traced back to the Proto-Indo European root *\*māgh-*,<sup>2</sup> meaning “power, might, wealth” [Pokorny: *Magh-: Māgh-*].<sup>3</sup> The Persian word was then taken over by the Greeks, and the Greek word *mageiā* was in turn borrowed into Latin and subsequently, through Latin, to many European languages.<sup>4</sup> It entered Slavic languages indirectly, as a borrowing from German, probably “through books and reading” [Vasmer: *Mag*].

Magic was a domain of the magi, members of a hereditary priestly caste of Median origin in Western Persia, whose existence dates back to the eighth to sixth century BCE and continued well into the Hellenistic period.

No priesthood of antiquity was more famous than that of the Magi. They were renowned as followers of Zarathushtra (Zoroaster); are the teachers of some of the greatest Greek thinkers (Pythagoras, Democritus, Plato); are the wise men who arrived, guided by a star, at the manger of the new-born savior in Bethlehem, and as the propagators of a cult of the sun in India. But they were also known as the Chaldeans, the priesthood of Babylon [Gnoli 1987: 80].

These “priests and philosophers of ancient Persia, who apart from religious rituals also pursued star gazing” (“kapłani i filozofowie dawnej Persyi, którzy oprócz obrządków religii gwiazdorstwem się bawili”) [Linde: *Magia*], for whom “the creation held no secrets” (“przyrodzenie nie miało tajemnic”) [SWil: *Mag*], had a powerful position in the state, influencing the course of public and private affairs and acting as tutors

of princes. Their position was so exalted that ancient Greeks claimed that magi possessed secret knowledge and were skilled in the occult.

It is worth noting that in the Christian tradition the Magi (or, as they are also called, the Wise Men) are also identified as kings: “The Three Magi who visited Christ in Bethlehem are commonly called the Three Kings” (“Trzej magowie, którzy nawiedzili Chrystusa w Betleem, zowią się pospolicie Trzej Królowie”) [SWil: *Mag*]. Their double status of rulers and magi (those who have power, those who can) makes them something more than ordinary kings. Their tribute to the newly born King of Heaven imparts to their figures a sacred dimension with manifold symbolic aspects. These resplendent figures seem very far removed from the modern usage of such terms as “magic” or “magician.”<sup>5</sup>

It was to the Greeks that we owe the negative connotations of the word *magic*. While Plato employs the word in a positive way, referring it to “Zarathustra’s magical knowledge” [Betz 1987: 93], Aristotle uses it in a derogatory fashion, to describe practices of the Persians (representatives of a culture perceived by the Greeks as alien, inimical and inferior). Thus, usage of the word *mageia* moved from purely descriptive to pejorative.

Subsequently both the Greeks and the Romans used the word to refer to anything alien, subversive or reprehensible that used hidden or supernatural forces and thus fell beyond the understanding or comprehension of ordinary people. By a very slight shift in meaning it could also be used to refer to any false or evil religious or parareligious practices [Mathiesen 1993: 157].

Meyer and Smith in their study of ancient Christian magic concur with Mathiesen’s views: “the words *mageia* and *magos*, ‘magic’ and ‘magician,’ were used to categorize the exotic and the dangerous. They were foreign words to a Greek speaker, used to describe foreign practices semiotically joined to the word barbarian” [Meyer, Smith 1994: 2].

The gradual growth and spread of Christianity was concomitant with further strengthening the negative associations that surrounded the word *magic*. One of the factors that contributed to this were the writings of St. Augustine. Because *magic* denoted practices and worldviews that clashed with the official teaching of the Church, *magic* became practically synonymous with paganism. The pagan gods (who aided the magi) were deemed demons by Christianity, and magic was considered a demonic art. Its practice was banned by both the Church and the state. The collocation *black magic* was coined.<sup>6</sup> Magic was now debased and, as some scholars put it, it was transferred to the sphere of the *anti-sacrum* [Buchowski 1993: 68].

### 1.1.2. The Word *Magic* in Contemporary Polish

What are the connotations of the word *magic* (*magia*) in the contemporary Polish language? While endeavouring to answer this question, I will not attempt a full semantic analysis or try to define the lexeme MAGIC.<sup>7</sup> Instead, I am going to focus exclusively on Polish-language dictionaries, reflecting on the relationship between the dictionary definitions of magic and common intuitions.

Witold Doroszewski's seminal *Polish Language Dictionary* [SJPDor] accompanies the definition of *magia* by two telling quotations: "Magic is closely associated with divination with which it shares common intellectual principles" ("W bliskim związku z magią pozostaje wróżbiarstwo, opierające się na tych samych podstawach myślowych") (Jan Stanisław Bystrzeński) and "Spells belong to the very broad realm of magic – the oldest form of religious ritual" ("Zaklęcia należą do rozległej dziedziny magii – najdawniejszej formy obrzędu religijnego") (Tadeusz Zieliński). One would expect that the lexicographer would draw inspiration from these quotations from two outstanding experts in this field and consider in his definition the connection between magic and religion or the intellectual principles of magic. However, Doroszewski's definition is rather disappointing in that degree, as it reads: "*Magic*: 'a supposed ability to use ritualistic practices in order to cause phenomena that are at variance with the laws of nature; sorcery, jugglery'" ("*Magia*: 'rzekoma umiejętność wywoływania za pomocą rytualnych praktyk zjawisk sprzecznych z prawami natury; czarnoksiężstwo, kuglarstwo'").

This standard definition gives rise to a range of negative connotations. The standard Christian attitude to magic as a "an impious, evil and blasphemous perversion of religiosity" [Wax, Wax 1963: 497] seems to be perpetuated in Doroszewski's definition. Granted, following changes in the language of scientific description, Doroszewski changes the categories of his evaluation. But the expressions used in the definition (*supposed, at variance with the laws of nature, jugglery*<sup>8</sup>) suggest that he views magic as "an evil and blasphemous perversion of rationality." The striking contrast between the tenor of the definition and the objective, matter-of-fact attitude evidenced by the accompanying quotations can perhaps be explained by the influence of the prevailing attitude to magic in nineteenth century anthropology, which was heavily evolutionist and Eurocentric, and thus viewed magic as a "pseudo-science" or "the bastard sister of science." It should also be remembered that Doroszewski published his dictionary at a time when the Marxist paradigm was preponderant in the Polish Academia.<sup>9</sup>

The definition in Auderska and Skorupka's *Concise Dictionary of the Polish Language* [MSJP] reads:

Magia – ogół wierzeń i praktyk dających rzekomo władzę nad ludźmi i rzeczami, nie opartą na prawach przyrody.

(*Magic*: a body of beliefs and practices that supposedly give the practitioner power over people and objects, which is not based on the laws of nature.)

and Szymczak [SJPSz] defines it thus:

ogół wierzeń i praktyk opartych na przekonaniu o istnieniu sił nadprzyrodzonych, których opanowanie jest rzekomo osiągalne dzięki stosowaniu odpowiednich zaklęć i czynności wykonywanych w określony sposób i przez określone osoby.

(the body of beliefs and practices that are rooted in the conviction that there exist supernatural powers that can supposedly be controlled thanks to spell-casting and performing specific activities in a prescribed manner and by specific persons.)

I will disregard the question whether *magic* can indeed be reduced to a body of beliefs, practices and skills that are used to cause specific phenomena, seize power or control certain forces, I will also refrain from reflecting on the near synonyms of *magic* as provided by Doroszewski, namely, *sorcery* and *jugglerying* (though one does wonder whether this choice of synonyms is particularly apt). Instead, I am going to focus on the telling usage of the word *supposed* (or, in its adverbial form, *supposedly*) that appears in all three definitions quoted above: Doroszewski mentions “a supposed ability,” whereas Skorupka talks about magic supposedly giving its practitioner power over people and objects, and finally, Szymczak talks about “supernatural powers that supposedly can be controlled.” In each definition the word *supposed/supposedly* appears in a slightly different context, but one thing remains constant: the word *supposed* introduces the element of a very specific evaluation. What sort of evaluation is it?

Doroszewski, Szymczak and Skorupka define *supposed* (*rzekomy*) as

‘nie istniejący w rzeczywistości, [wbrew stworzonym przez kogoś pozorom,]<sup>10</sup> nie będący tym (takim), za kogo (za jakiego) go niektórzy uważają; pozorny, [zmyślony,]<sup>11</sup> fałszywy.’

(‘non-existing in reality [despite appearances created by someone], not being what one believes it (him, her) to be; illusory, [imagined,] false.’)

Similarly, the adverb *supposedly* (*rzekomo*, defined by Szymczak and Doroszewski, but absent altogether from Skorupka's dictionary) is defined as

‘zgodnie z tym, co ktoś mówi, ale nie z rzeczywistością; jakoby, niby.’

(‘in agreement with what someone says but not with reality; purportedly, allegedly.’)

This review of dictionary definitions of *supposed* shows that the inclusion of this word into the definitions of magic suggests that, according to the definition author, magical abilities and powers and control over supernatural powers do not exist in reality, and are only imagined – and that the author knows for a fact that they are not real.

It seems that lexicographers of the past were better at defining magic without depreciating it. Samuel Bogumił Linde writes “*Magic* – ‘the sorcerer’s craft, that makes it possible to achieve things outside the bounds of human possibility and natural capability’” (“*Magia* – ‘kunszt czarodziejski, czyniący rzeczy nad siły ludzkie i możność przyrodzoną’”) and Karłowicz’s dictionary contains the following entry: “*Magic* – the study of supernatural and secret arts; sorcery, jugglery” (“*Magia* – ‘nauka sztuk nadprzyrodzonych, tajemnych; czarodziejstwo; kuglarstwo’”).

And what figurative meanings of *magic* and *magical* can be found in the dictionaries? The following definitions are provided: “*magic*, (*figurative*): ‘extraordinary power or influence; magic of words’” (“*magia*, *przen.*: ‘niezwykła siła oddziaływania, wywierania wpływu’”) [SJP Dor: *Magia*, SJP Sz: *Magia*]. Szymczak’s dictionary also contains the following examples of such usage: “*magic of words, magic of numbers, magic of sound, magic of Słowacki’s poetry, theatre magic*” (“*magia słów, cyfr, liczb, magia dźwięku, ducha i stylu Słowackiego, magia teatralna*”) [SJP Sz: *Magia*]; “*black magic (colloquial)*: ‘something inexplicable, difficult to comprehend, completely unknown to somebody’” (“*czarna magia*, *pot.*: ‘rzecz niezrozumiała, trudna do pojęcia, zupełnie dla kogoś nieznaną’”) [SJP Dor: *Magia*, SJP Sz: *Magia*]. Further related definitions include “*magical*: ‘astonishing, incomprehensible, strange but effective (*magical influence*)’” (“*magiczny*: ‘zdumiewający, niepojęty, dziwny a skuteczny, stanowczy (*wpływ magiczny*)’”) [SW: *Magia*]; “*magical (figurative)*: ‘enchanted, wonderful, mysterious (*magical power of words, magical influence*)’” (“*magiczny*, *przen.*: ‘czarodziejski, cudowny, tajemniczy (*magiczna siła słowa, magiczny wpływ*)’”) [SJP Dor: *Magia*, SJP Sz: *Magia*].

It seems that common linguistic intuition is close to these figurative meanings. Most of them seem to be rooted in the basic perception that magic is something incomprehensible, unlikely or mysterious. When we talk about *magical influence*, we do not deny the existence of the influence

itself, we only concede that we do not know its principle of operation. But it does not mean that the influence is only “supposed” (which in other words means “fictitious” or “unreal”).

When do we say that something is *magic* or *magical*? It seems that it is often the case when we do not, or cannot, understand and/or explain the causal relationship between somebody’s actions and their effect on the grounds of our own value and belief system. The words *magic* and *magical* will be used if the speaker believes that the effect of the action in question is **different** than it should normally be, that it goes against the sensory and/or psychological experience of the speaker, breaks the rules of probability and transcends the worldview and expectations that are based on these rules.

For example, when we see somebody suffering from a headache who takes a painkiller, and whose headache subsequently abates, we will not call it *magic* but simply *taking medicine* or *curing/healing*. We have no doubts that there is a causal relationship between taking the painkiller and the subsequent reduction of pain. Such a relationship is fully compatible with our worldview. In this situation, the worldviews of the observer and the doer are the same. There is no context for *magic*.

But let us assume that the person suffering from a headache did not take a painkiller but instead was cured by hypnosis, healing touch, prayer, a cure spell, or distant healing with the use of a photograph, that they took medicines prepared by a priest, a wise woman-whisperer, or a practitioner of Chinese, Tibetan, African or Native American medicine. Will we call some or all of these practices *magic*? If so, which ones? And why?

Probably all of us find ourselves from time to time in such a situation, and different people would answer the questions above in different ways. It is so because, as it seems, the notion of *magic* is **relative**. Each observer uses it according to her knowledge, beliefs or religious persuasion. When a given sequence of events is in accordance with our worldview, we perceive it as “normal,” natural, and expectable, and when it is not, we perceive it conversely as mysterious, improbable or miraculous. But the three latter adjectives apply only when the given sequence of events is not caused by human action. When we use the adjective *magical*, we refer to events caused by men and dependent on someone’s will, skills and power. What is more, we assume that the given sequence of events has its own internal logic within the worldview of the doer. The person who acts in a way that the observer describes as “magical” **acts in order to cause some desired effect and is confident that the effect will take place. And conversely, the observer is confident**

**that the action in question should not (or normally does not) bring about that effect.**

Thus, *magic* can be seen as a descriptive, reporting category. It belongs to the vocabulary of the observers and not the actors. The word *magic* will be used by those looking from the outside in, observing, and naming.

A definition of *magic* should also use the category of “different” (or of “unknown and incomprehensible”), which is a very (perhaps most) significant component of the process which the observer names *magic*, since “the effect (either intended or both intended and actual) of X’s actions is **different** than expected by the observer on the basis of their knowledge about the results of such actions.” The definition of magic must therefore account for both these perspectives as well as their mutual distance and juxtaposition. The semantic structure of the word *magic* is indeed complex: any person who uses the word juxtaposes what they witness and relate with their knowledge of the world, while at the same time communicating their own point of view.

Is the juxtaposition synonymous with the observer’s negative evaluation of the doer’s actions? Does the word *magic* contain a component of judgment? In my view, the observer’s distance towards the observed phenomena and events is in this case only a cognitive distance. The observer **knows something different** from the doer, and references a different worldview. If the distance was accompanied by a negative opinion (‘the observer believes that what X is doing is bad’), then the observer’s commentary would be probably something along the lines of *it’s a dirty trick, it’s a lie, it’s cheating*.

It seems that any negative opinion of magic has to be additionally highlighted by the speaker, if she needs to clarify her opinion of the event that she calls *magical*. For example, utterances such as: *You can still find traces of magic in the country; I’ll bet she used a love spell; You have a magical sway over me; He did it as if by magic* are neutral. It is only the speaker’s (or listener’s) decision whether to imbue them with positive, negative or neutral value.

The most important insight in all the above reflections on the word *magic* is the fact that it belongs to “the language of the observers.” In other words, it testifies to the observer’s experience of otherness. This aspect of the word *magic* was important from the very beginning: the Old Persian magi were of Median origin, and thus were perceived as strangers by the Persians. It is the outside observer, coming from the Western civilization, who would refer to some events, actions or phenomena in traditional society as *magical*. *Magic* is not a cognitive category that would be used by the actors themselves, in other words, by subjects of magical thinking.

The term *magic* is just as enigmatic as magic itself. In fact, the word *magical* is much overused in all situations when some event goes beyond the commentator's rationality, whereas in some other cultural context it could be fully explained [Rypson 1989: 116].

After these preliminary remarks, it is time to analyse the place of magic in the context of Slavic folk culture.

## 1.2. The Perspective of Magic Subjects. An Outline of the Concept in Slavic Folk Culture

Magic, understood as a system of actions, is inseparable from the vision of the world of people who practice it.

Ryszard Tomicki [1983: 23]

Let us try to look at magic in a different way than that of observers looking from the outside in (or like ancient Greeks looking at Persian magi). Let us try to embrace the perspective of the magic subjects themselves – of people who currently practice magic or used to practice it in the past.

The Polish word *czar* is impossible to accurately translate into English. Its meaning covers the semantic fields of *enchantment*, *spell* and *charm*. It has equivalents in all other Slavic languages (the Proto-Slavic version is *čarь*). It is also related to the modern Lithuanian *kēras* (pl. *kerai*).<sup>12</sup> All these lexemes are derived from the Proto-Indo-European root *kr-*, meaning 'make, do, act, create' [cf. Pokorny: *K̑er-*; Buck: *Magic, Witchcraft, Sorcery*].

Kazimierz Moszyński [KLS: 343] lists the most common words used to denote doing sorcery (*czarowanie*) among Slavic people: **čarovati** (Old Bulgarian *čarodějb*; Serbo-Croatian *čárati*, *čaróvnik*; Slovenian *čárati*, *čaroděj*, *čarovnik*; Czech *čarovati*, *čaroděj*, *čarovník*; Kashubian *čařéc*, *čarovnik*; Polish *czarować*, *czarodziej*, *czarownik*<sup>13</sup>; Belarusian *čaravać*, *čaraŭnik*; Great Russian *čarovat'*, *čarod'ej*, *čarovnik*; Ukrainian *čaruvaty*, *čarodij*, *čarivnyk*); **činiti** and **učiniti** (Serbo-Croatian *činiti* (*čini* – 'czary', 'sorcery'), *učiniti*; Slovenian *učniti*; Lusatian *načinić*, Polish *uczynić* (*uczynek* – 'czary'); Ukrainian *včynyty*, *pryčynyty* (*učynok* – 'czary')) and **robiti** (among some Western and Eastern Slavs). Moszyński goes on to note:

Originally, all these terms were synonymous, as *čarovati* derives from the Indo-European root *k̑er-* 'to make, to do' (cf. the Old Great Russian *tvorit'*, meaning 'czarować [to do sorcery]' (literally: 'to create, to do'); Old Russian *potvory* – 'czary [sorcery]'; Czech *uděláti* – 'czarować [to do sorcery]' (literally: 'to perform'), *udělek* – 'czary [sorcery]' (literally 'work') etc.) [KLS: 343].

Thus, according to Moszyński, the Slavic word *czary* denotes “magical practices performed in order to harm others” (“praktyki magiczne wykonywane na szkodę bliźnich”) [KLS: 341]. This meaning is quite general, and for this reason, there exist multiple hyponyms that refer to the specific (and sometimes very complex) practices and techniques of doing *czary*: “Due to the profusion of practices of doing sorcery (*czarowanie*), there exists a vast array of specific terms” (“W związku z nader wielką obfitością sposobów czarowania pozostaje niezwykła liczebność odnośnych terminów”) [KLS: 341]. The following list, while far from being comprehensive, contains some examples of such verbs: sorcery/spells (*czary*) was/were associated with such actions as: *to give* (*zadać, zadawać*),<sup>14</sup> *put on* (*zakładać, założyć*), *to place underneath/to lay* (*podłożyć*), *to pour* (*podlać, oblać*),<sup>15</sup> *to throw/to cast* (*rzucić, zarzucać*), *to throw in* (*wrzucić*), *to throw down* (*ćpić, ciepnąć*), *to sprinkle* (*obsuć, obsypać*),<sup>16</sup> *to let go/to release* (*puszczać*), *to plant* (*zasadzić*), or *shot* (*postrzelić*), *to spoil* (*popsuć*), *to befoul* (*opaskudzić*); or even *to aunt* (*ociotować* – a derivative of *ciota* (*aunt*), meaning “a witch”). Moszyński adds that “apart from the above, some Slavic people also use terms that relate to the act of talking or whispering” [KLS: 343]<sup>17</sup>.

Other examples include verbs denoting spell casting with one’s eyes: *to bewitch/to charm* (*urzec, uroczyć, przyroczyć*), *to glimpse* (*obziarać, zazorzać*), *to glance* (*zażrzec*), *to give* (*zadać, dać*), *to cast a spell* (*rzucić urok*) or *to release a spell at someone* (*puścić na kogoś uroki*) [Barthel de Weydenthal 1922: 3]. “A similar action is called *to breath on* (*ozionąć*), when the practitioner opens his or her mouth and breathes on somebody in order to enchant them” [DWOK 40, *MazPr*: 81].

As the above brief review demonstrates, there exists a very rich and varied set of actions whose common hypernym is *czarowanie* (doing sorcery). But the specialization does not end there, *czarowanie* also has its antonym. The vocabulary describing protection against magic and spells is also very rich and varied. Thus, in Polish and Ruthenian *czarowanie* (doing sorcery) also has its opposite: *odczarowywanie* (undoing sorcery). Other pairs of oppositions include: *doing / making* – *undoing / unmaking* ((*u*)*czynienie*<sup>18</sup> – *odczynienie* and *robienie* – *odrabianie*<sup>19</sup>), *giving* – *taking back* (*dawanie* – *odbieranie*), *casting* – *removing* (*rzucanie* – *zdejmowanie*), *sending* – *recalling* (*nasyłanie* – *odsyłanie*), *doing harm*, *spoiling* – *repairing* (*psucie* – *naprawianie*) [KLS: 343–344].

There also exist separate names for practitioners of these techniques.<sup>20</sup> These include *czarownik* (*sorcerer, male witch*) and *czarownica* (*female witch*), *czarnoksiężnik*<sup>21</sup> and *czarnokniźnik* (*wizard, sorcerer*) as well as *czarnokniźnica* (*wizardess, sorceress*),<sup>22</sup> *ciota* (*aunt*),<sup>23</sup> and the Kashubian term *kutin*.<sup>24</sup>

Terms for practitioners who undo sorcery include:<sup>25</sup> *znachor* – ‘one who knows’ (Belarusian *znachar*<sup>26</sup>); *mądry, mądra* (Lusatian *mudry muž, mudry człowiek*) [KLS: 344] ‘the wise one’; *wiedzący, wiedząca* ‘the one who knows’; *zamówca, zamowca, zamawiacz* ‘the speaker, the spell-caster’; *szeptun* (Belarusian *šaptun*) ‘the whisperer’; *doktor, dochtor, dochtór, lekarz* ‘the doctor.’

The above presentation of pertinent vocabulary in Polish is by no means exhaustive – it is meant only as an illustration.<sup>27</sup> But an overview of the vocabulary listed above also leads to the following conclusions: all the terms coming from the categories of both *nomina actionis* and *nomina agentis* are connected to the semantic field of “making/doing” and also of “speaking” (which can also be understood as a particular kind of “doing”) and of “knowledge” (wisdom).<sup>28</sup> Some of the examples also refer to the semantic fields of “looking” and “breathing.” In situations where this semantic kinship proves obliterated and therefore tenuous, it can still be reached by studying the word’s etymological provenance. Such is the case e.g., with *czary* (sorcery) and also with *urok* (charm, spell), *urzekanie, zarzekanie* (enchancing, bewitching) that are all derived from Proto-Slavic *rek-ti* ‘to speak.’

It would seem that the examples presented above justify the assertion that Slavic folk culture developed no superordinate, general category of “magic,” that it knows not the word “magic.”<sup>29</sup> If we decided that *czarowanie* (doing sorcery), or – following Moszyński’s insights – either *czynienie* or *robienie* (doing, making) is the most suitable equivalent of this category, then the full scope of this category would only be reflected by *czarowanie* (doing sorcery), or *czynienie* (doing, making) as well as *odczarowywanie* (undoing sorcery), or *odczynianie* (undoing, unmaking).

Thus, we can conclude that from the point of view of folk culture insiders, the phenomenon referred to generally as *magic* simply does not exist. What does exist for them is *making/doing, speaking* and *knowledge* that are expressed in diverse, and often highly specialized, practices. There is no “magus” here. “Those who have power” in the world of Slavic folk culture are *czarodziej* (sorcerer), *szeptun* (whisperer) and their “colleagues” listed above. Their power stems from knowledge and allows them to act effectively. In short, there is no need in this context for a general term like *magic*, because every action has its proper name. Thus speaks *znachor* (literally, “the one who knows”), the one who whispers when he whispers and undoes when he undoes.

As I have stipulated before, the concept *magic* comes from outside the folk culture. It belongs to **the language of the observers**,<sup>30</sup> that is used “to describe **other** cultures and subcultures” [Meyer, Smith 1994: 3].

The history of the concept shows how inexorably observation is intertwined with judgments and evaluation.

## 2. Magic. The Anthropological Approach

### 2.1. Difficulties in Defining *Magic*

It seems paradoxical that, while the term *magic* is routinely used by anthropologists, and the phenomena it describes have been the object of their scrutiny since the dawn of the discipline, there is no widely accepted academic consensus with regard to the term's definition or its field of application. The issue is still under debate: "Magic is a word with as many definitions as there have been studies of it" [Middleton 1987: 82].

This problem was also noticed by Clyde Kluckhohn: "Anyone can make a definition that will separate magic from religion; but no one has yet found a definition that all other students accept: the phenomenal contents of the concepts [...] simply intergrade too much" [in: Wax, Wax 1963: 499]. As late as in 1982, Åke Hultkranz called for a debate that would decide whether the phenomenon of magic can be defined at all [Winkelman 1982: 47].

In fact, no meaningful progress has been made on that front until the present day. It is not only that the answer to the question "what do we mean when we use the word *magic*?" remains elusive, it is also that it is difficult to say whether the phenomenon that could be called *magic* really exists.<sup>31</sup>

The old Eurocentric, evaluatory perspective that used to be predominant in anthropological study of magic is not yet completely abandoned and even today scholars occasionally have to refute it:

Throughout the history of contemporary study of religion and culture, as we have noted, the definition of "magic" in relation to science and religion has been a major problem. At the root of the problem is the loaded, evaluative connotation of "magic" as false, deceptive, discredited or morally tainted, contrasted with both science (a correct, enlightened understanding of natural law and causation) and religion (a correct, enlightened understanding of the divine and spirituality). Thus, "magic" is relegated to the "they" side of the "we/they" dichotomy. This is simultaneously unfair to the materials and practices studied under the heading of "magic" and self-serving for the materials (mainly those we identify as "our own") that are exempted from the label [...] The word "magic" is often used simply to label actions, sayings and ideas that do not seem reasonable from a Western-positivist or Christian point of view [Meyer, Smith 1994: 13].

Therefore, despite the fact that there is now a more widespread consciousness that “magicians and scientists [...] are using different conceptual systems: they speak different ‘languages’: the one symbolic and the other concrete, and translation or interpretation between them is meaningless until this fact is taken into account” [Middleton 1987: 83], one could say that “even in the scholarly literature the term ‘magic’ is used with the same rhetorical force as it was in antiquity, a term of contrast to reinforce a cultural self-image of purity and rationality” [Meyer, Smith 1994: 3]. Such usages of the term do not shed light on the *definiendum*, but on the values and worldviews of the definitions’ authors.

There are however many scholars of magic who endeavour to understand it and define it in a constructive and comprehensive way. One of the most recent attempts can be attributed to John Middleton, the author of the definition in the seminal *The Encyclopedia of Religion* edited by Mircea Eliade:

Magic is usually defined subjectively rather than by any agreed-upon content. But there is a wide consensus as to what this content is. Most peoples in the world perform acts by which they intend to bring about certain events or conditions, whether in nature or among people, that they hold to be the consequences of these acts. If we use Western terms and assumptions, the cause and effect relationship between the act and the consequence is mystical, not scientifically validated. The acts typically comprise behavior such as manipulation of objects and recitation of verbal formulas or spells. In a given society magic may be performed by a specialist [Middleton 1987: 82].

Within the twentieth century anthropology there exist two basic approaches to the term *magic*. One views *magic* as a specific type of social practice – and thus a type of **action** (just as in Middleton’s definition quoted above) and the other sees it as a type of social consciousness and thus – as a **worldview**. However, we do not always deal with such a stark division: magic, understood as a practice, can also be seen as implementation of a specific belief system, a “magical worldview.” Let us therefore briefly review these two approaches.

## 2.2. Attempts at Definition. Between *Action* and *Worldview*

Marcel Mauss, the author of the classic study entitled *A General Theory of Magic* referenced the well-known fact that etymology of *magic* in many languages can be derived from the root meaning ‘to make, to do, to act’ and opined that magic is “essentially the art of doing things [...] is the domain of pure production, *ex nihilo*” [Mauss 2001: 175].

According to Mauss, the essence of a magic ritual and the factor that determines its effectiveness is therefore power (*mana*).<sup>32</sup> The term *mana* (meaning literally power, strength or magical effectiveness) is the core of his theory of magic. In Mauss's view, all characteristic features of magic stem from *mana* or are connected to it. He elaborates:

*Mana* is first of all an action of a certain kind, that is, a spiritual action that works at a distance [...] It is also a kind of ether, imponderable, communicable, which spreads of its own accord. *Mana* is also a milieu, or more exactly functions as a milieu, which in itself is *mana*. It is a kind of internal, special world where everything happens as if *mana* alone were involved [...]

In order to explain more clearly how the world of magic is superimposed on the other world without detaching itself from it, we might go further and add that everything happens as if it were part of a fourth spatial dimension. An idea like *mana* expresses, in a way, this occult existence. [...] All this provides us with an idea of what goes on in magic. It provides us with a necessary concept of a field where ritual occurs, where the magician is active, a place where spirits come alive and where magical effluvia are wafted. It also legitimises the magician's powers and justifies the need for formal actions, the creative virtue of words, sympathetic connexions and the transfer of properties and influences [Mauss 2001: 138, 145].

Many scholars further developed Mauss's theories, emphasizing the connection between the effectiveness of magical practices and various forces or powers (secret, mystical, mysterious/miraculous) on which the practitioner can draw. Below I provide three examples of such definitions:

We shall bring under the head of magic all those actions by which man seeks to wield at will the course of nature and to influence all beings, ranging from the lowliest animals up to gods, and including – though this might sound queer on first hearing – even himself. These actions constitute magical rite in the broadest sense, and for their efficacy they depend largely on miraculous powers believed to be inherent in certain articles, words, or gestures [Izutsu 1956: 16].

In the most literal sense [...] [the word *magic*] refers to any 'ritual performance or activity believed to influence human or natural events through access to an external mystical force beyond the ordinary human sphere' [McIntosh 1994: 2343, quoting: Middleton 1989: 671].

In its purest sense magic is a power that is activated and controlled by human beings themselves. The power is very much the magicians' power, which they use to produce readily observable empirical results in the world. They almost always use the power in critical situations and they usually act secretly and individually. The assumption of magicians is that if they practice their art correctly, it will automatically bring about the desired result [Levack 2006: 4].

Bronisław Malinowski, who – like Mauss – understood magic as a peculiar type of action, at the same time criticized the latter’s attempts to define *magic* through the concept of *mana*. Distancing himself from any notion of “mystical powers” (or other connected terms), he focused on the notion of practicality and usefulness of magic, which he called “the specific art for specific ends” [Malinowski 1948: 68]. Malinowski’s own view on magic is expounded in the following quotation:

we have defined, within the domain of the sacred, magic as a practical art consisting of acts which are only means to a definite end expected to follow later on [...]. The practical art of magic has its limited, circumscribed technique: spell, rite, and the condition of the performer form always its trite trinity. Religion, with its complex aspects and purposes, has no such simple technique, and its unity can be seen neither in the form of its acts nor even in the uniformity of its subject-matter, but rather in the function which it fulfils and in the value of its belief and ritual [Malinowski 1948: 68].

However, neither Mauss nor Malinowski understand magic solely as a set of techniques for operation. They agree it is something more: a specific belief system which is connected to magical acts. Mauss defined *mana* as “unconscious category of understanding” [Mauss 2001: 146], whereas Malinowski opted for a holistic understanding of magic as a phenomenon that encompasses many areas of culture:

magic and religion are not merely a doctrine or a philosophy, not merely an intellectual body of opinion, but a special mode of behavior, a pragmatic attitude built up of reason, feeling, and will alike. It is a mode of action as well as a system of belief, and a sociological phenomenon as well as a personal experience [Malinowski 1948: 8].

The perception of magic both as an act and a worldview is present in the majority of recent definitions. It is also shared by Polish scholars working in the field, Andrzej Wierciński<sup>33</sup> and Jerzy Sławomir Wasilewski.<sup>34</sup> A similar vision is present in the works of Michał Buchowski, the author of *Magia (Magic)* [Buchowski 1986]), *Magia i rytuał (Magic and Ritual)* [Buchowski 1993]) and an essay entitled *Kultura typu magicznego (The Magical Type of Culture)*, co-authored with Wojciech Burszta [Buchowski, Burszta 1992: 15–31]. It should be noted, however, that the latter work puts much more emphasis on the worldview aspect of magic. According to Buchowski: “The magical worldview, though latent, influences the sphere of practice, with which it is wholly merged, creating at the same time an explanatory system for the homogeneous natural and social order” [Buchowski 1993: 54].

According to Buchowski, one could even posit the existence of magical culture. He explains that

Magic is a syncretic type of culture. The magic subjects do not differentiate between different kinds of actions [i.e., practical, communication-related and worldview-related – A.E.] [...] A symbolic action carries basically the same status as a practical/utilitarian action [...] In a magical society, the peculiarity of particular spheres of practice lies in a sui generis fusion of their functions. In modern European culture, we assume that different functions are performed by their respective spheres of practice. Not so in the magical culture, where the homogeneous practice has a wide range of functions [Buchowski 1993: 30–32]

A study of the structure of magical worldview and attempts to define rules that govern magical thinking<sup>35</sup> are focal subjects of interest for the phenomenological and structuralist schools within anthropology.

The magical worldview is firmly rooted in an assumption of unity between man and nature (the notion of “universal sympathy”<sup>36</sup>), and thus of integration of the actor and the external world, and in lack of a firm juxtaposition between subject and object.

for primitive man the modern concept of “world” does not really exist, and that far from regarding his environment as an object, he immediately constitutes it his own “conjoint world”; and in this principle the essential feature of the religious *Weltanschauung* has already been expressed. I may now repeat this, however, in the sense that a “religious *Weltanschauung*” is never merely a “point of view,” but is always a participation, a sharing. For out of his own particular environment everyone constructs a world for himself which he believes himself able to dominate [van der Leeuw 1938: 543].

Modern scholars call the attitude described by van der Leeuw mystical (or magical) solidarity. The term draws attention to the principle of reciprocity (*do ut des*) as the basis for the relationship between people and other components of their world. An alternative term which is also used is universal participation (the principle of participation).<sup>37</sup>

The principle of participation, or of spiritual oneness with the world replaces the reflection about the world, which in the non-mythical paradigm is possible thanks to such thought patterns as the juxtaposition of subject and object and the distance between “I” and “not-I.” As Eliade puts it, it is

a style of thinking totally different from our modern style, with its roots in the speculation of the Greeks. [...] That collection of truths does not simply constitute a *Weltanschauung*, but a pragmatic ontology (I would even say soteriology) in the sense that with the help of these “truths” man is trying to gain salvation by uniting himself with reality [Eliade 1958: 33].

Modern analyses of mythical thinking focus on its propensity to make sense of the surrounding events and phenomena and to create a harmonious and comprehensive vision of the world. It is characterized as “an attempt to negate the randomness of the world by incorporating it in an atemporal structure” [Tomicki 1987: 247]. It is stressed that “a myth does not seek reconciliation with the sensory reality, but a reconciliation with deep meaning, it is a perpetual demonstration of the nature of reality – the order of the world” [Stomma 1986: 131].

Another important feature of the magical and mythical thinking is its internal order and logic. A mythical worldview is not a random collection of superstitions and “nonsense” (as nineteenth century scholars and some of their followers would have us believe.) On the contrary, internal order and systemic nature of a belief system and imagery are a hallmark of a “primitive” society’s worldview [Lévy-Bruhl 1910]. Claude Lévi-Strauss’s research drew attention to the internal structural logic of such systems and to the “unconscious cultural grammar” [Lévi-Strauss 1963, 1969]. He writes thus:

The savage mind is logical in the same sense and the same fashion as ours, though as our own is only when it is applied to knowledge of a universe in which it recognizes physical and semantic properties simultaneously. [...] Its thought proceeds through understanding, not affectivity, with the aid of distinctions and oppositions [Lévi-Strauss 1966: 268].

The exceptional features of this mind [...] relate principally to the extensive nature of the ends it assigns itself. It claims at once to analyze and to synthesize, to go to its furthest limits in both directions, while at the same time remaining capable of mediating between the two poles [Lévi-Strauss 1966: 219].

And, in an oft-quoted passage he states: “The savage mind totalizes” [Lévi-Strauss 1966: 245]. Magical thinking and doing is based on continual metaphorical and metonymic transformations (analyzed by Lévi-Strauss and his successors in myths, sets of beliefs, witchcraft practices etc.<sup>38</sup>), whereby signs (symbols) are treated as signals – and thus a metaphor becomes a metonymy.<sup>39</sup> The magical worldview can be characterized by constant transitions to and from the relation of similarity (metaphor) and the relation of proximity (metonymy), the transition from causal connection to symbolic connection and back again. According to Buchowski,

one should not even call it a transformation, it is in fact co-existence, simultaneous appearance of these two types of relationships (the idea of palimpsest). Scientific thinking cannot be both metaphorical and metonymic. For this reason, a modern European can only understand and relate to thought processes of a magic subject by referring the category

of transformation, i.e., of some “objective,” non-intentional transition from the metonymic thinking to metaphorical thinking and back again. [Buchowski 1993: 59].

As Lévi-Strauss’s demonstrated,

the mythological logic is metaphorical in nature and as such it is capable of generalizations, classifications and analysis. It is no less effective than scientific logic, even though it operates on a different level (that of direct sensory data) and employs different tools in order to solve problems (binarism, the mechanism of continual mediation). According to Lévi-Strauss, in the final analysis, a myth becomes a field of logical operation, whose purpose it is to supply a logical model for resolving contradictions. A myth reflects the most universal, subconscious structures of the human mind [Tomicki 1987: 246].

Thus, such phenomena as magic and religion are empirically connected to the traditional society in an irrevocable and seamless way. They can only be isolated or extracted by means of analysis. But one needs to be aware that the very idea of this distinction is in fact a manifestation of the highly rationalized Western perspective of the external observer. The failure to provide a satisfactory explanation of so-called magic phenomena, which has plagued research projects using diverse approaches and methodologies suggests to modern-day scholars that magic can be more effectively studied as a social fact that imbues the traditional way of life with a supernatural sanction, as a *sui generis* worldview that puts particular stress on ritual. The worldview in question should be studied as a rational and coherent system of thought and action, applied by rational and intelligent people.

Such an approach is employed for example by Ryszard Tomicki, a Polish scholar researching magic in folk culture [cf. Tomicki 1983]. He draws attention to the fact that magic is an immanent feature of the world, as it is an inherent feature of a mythologised worldview, that plays a part in the dualistic vision of the cosmic order characteristic of the folk *Weltanschauung*. The folk magic stems from a religious system of beliefs and ideas – it is highly Christianized, but is far removed from canonical Christianity.<sup>40</sup> It is shaped by what Ryszard Tomicki described as *folk mythology*.<sup>41</sup> Tomicki concludes his remarks with a warning to other researchers:

In conducting research on magic, one should not extract it from its natural environment that is the model of the universe that is current in the given culture [...]. One should not measure [magic] by one’s own yard-stick. [Tomicki 1983: 23].

## 2

# MAGIC OF FOLK VERBAL RITUALS

### 1. The Magic of the Word. The Theory

No theoretician of language, who would grasp the mental processes which underlie the mechanism of speech, can afford to ignore the uniqueness of the magical function of words, the effects of whose working become more and more conspicuous as we penetrate deeper into the mystery of human language.

Toshihiko Izutsu [1956: 10]

#### 1.1. The Linguistic Approach. The Magical Function of Language

*Verbal magic, magic of words, word magic, magical language, magical power of words, magical function of language/text* – all these expressions (and many similar ones) are used in scholarly literature on the subject. The phenomena which these terms describe can be divided into at least four groups. The first consists of linguistic facts that are characteristic of traditional communities, e.g., linguistic taboos, spells, incantions, and other verbal rituals. The second group involves traces of these linguistic facts that are present in general language, including conscious and unconscious superstitions connected to speaking (e.g., knocking on wood with apotropaic intent, or not saying “thank you” after someone wishes you success in order to ward off bad luck<sup>1</sup>). The third group involves modern (and increasingly popular) instances of “new linguistic magic,”

such as techniques of verbal persuasion, used in political propaganda, marketing, advertising, etc. Finally, the fourth group includes instances of the “magic” of literature and of poetic language. The label “magic” is often used metaphorically in relation to literary texts, and especially poetry.

Already since the ancient *phýsei – thései* debate, famously evidenced in Plato’s *Cratylus*, which juxtaposed two different approaches to language: either that the relationship between the word and the object is assigned by nature (*phýsei*) or that it is assigned by social convention (*thései*), in many ancient reflections on the subject of language, one can trace “anxiety about the word and its agential character” [Tokarski 1971: 8].

These traces manifest themselves, for instance, constataions of “the characteristic psychological tendency of human beings to equate words and objects” [Rozwadowski 1921: 100], in arguing that “all attempts to equate names and the designated objects can in fact be classed as magical thinking” [Doroszewski 1974: 295] or in citing what was considered to be manifestations of magical thinking, e.g., linguistic taboos, euphemisms and spell formulas.<sup>2</sup> They were also authors who offered a more in-depth, psychological interpretation of these phenomena; the first Polish scholar to do so was probably the linguist Jan Baudouin de Courtenay, who remarked:

viewed from the linguistic perspective, the whole world is a projection of one’s self outside. It is created in the image and likeness of oneself, of one’s thinking, feelings, and psychological states. The man unconsciously moulds the diversity of the universe to fit his own image [...] The baptism of language imbues these phenomena with a “soul.” [...] This is the foundation of the belief in the power of words, in the power of magic spells and in efficacy of benedictions and maledictions. This is the inspiration behind the Polish saying “don’t call the wolf out of the forest,”<sup>3</sup> and behind the superstition that forbids one to use the word “plague” during a plague epidemic. Hence the superstitious fear of blasphemy. Hence the naïve belief that “words can freeze over” (e.g., during Napoleon’s invasion of Russia in 1812) and that “words can become flesh”... [Baudouin de Courtenay 1984 (1915): 158–159].<sup>4</sup>

The renowned linguist Roman Jakobson<sup>5</sup> saw the magical function of language in the context of the Organon model of language, originated by Karl Bühler:

The traditional model of language [...] was confined to these three functions – emotive, conative and referential – and the three apexes of this model – the first person of the addresser, the second person of the addressee, “the third person” properly – someone or something spoken of. Certain additional verbal functions can be easily inferred from this triadic model. **Thus the magic, incantatory function is chiefly some kind of conversion of**

**an absent or inanimate “third person” into an addressee of a conative message** [Jakobson 1985: 115; emphasis A.E.].

Jakobson does not elaborate on views on magical language in the essay. He only follows the formulation quoted above with three examples one of spells and incantations.<sup>6</sup> Because of this scarcity of material, his ideas might seem somewhat hermetic. But when one carefully examines Jakobson's theory, his intuition that the third element of Bühler's triad can somehow be “converted” into the second one seems to illuminate one crucial aspect of the magic of the word. Thanks to this transformation, “what is spoken of” (i.e., the world referenced in the utterance) by being the recipient of a conative message (which uses the vocative case and the imperative or optative mood) the addressee of the text. As a consequence, because the message is conative (or, to use more widespread terminology, impressive),<sup>7</sup> the speaker of the utterance expects the addressee (the absent or non-existent “third person”) to react to the message received according to the speaker's intent: by obeying an order or fulfilling a request or a wish. In other words, by bring about a state of affairs desired by the speaker. In the case of one of the magical utterances quoted by Jakobson, *May his arm wither!*, the speaker expects that some force (the addressee of the optative utterance) capable of causing cause the arm of the named person to wither, will do so.

More recent approaches to the magical function of language or magic of the word usually take into account J. L. Austin and John R. Searle's theories of performative utterances and speech acts.

The first Polish attempt to apply the theory of performatives to issues of “the magical” in language is Małgorzata Marcjanik's article *Magiczne funkcje słów w kulturach pierwotnych i w działaniu językowym współczesnego człowieka* (*The Magical Functions of Words in Primeval Cultures and in Language Behaviour of Modern Man* [Marcjanik 1981]). However, despite having used the expression in the article's title, the author failed to define the term *magical function* (*funkcja magiczna*) and only named examples of “so called language magic” (“*tw. magii językowej*”) based on anthropological studies of the subject matter, and compared them with performative utterances, deciding in conclusion that the latter are *quasi-magical* words.

In her classification of language functions, the Polish scholar Renata Grzegorzczkowska has devoted some space to a description of the agential function.

The agential utterances occupy the opposite end of the spectrum from purely informative utterances. The goal of the agential utterances is not informing the addressee, but creating reality. We can differentiate between two types of such utterances: belief-based utterances such as e.g., folk magic (incan-

tations, curses, etc.) and sacramental utterances (sacraments, absolution of sins, consecration, etc.) and utterances linked to social conventions that can shape or create social reality. Performative utterances, described by Austin and Searle, belong to this category (promises, apologies, legal acts, etc.). [...] [The common feature of both categories is] their agency. The utterance *I promise* is not only informative, it also creates an obligation. The difference between the two categories is that [...] in religious utterances the addressee is not necessary (unless one treats the supernatural force as an addressee) [Grzegorzczkova 1991: 24].

We cannot analyze the magic of the word without understanding the words' agential function and without realizing that magical speaking is also at the same time creation of states of affairs. The question of how to adequately describe this function remains open, and the more specific issues, like the problem of classifying agential utterances discussed above, are debatable. A more detailed classification of "belief-based" agential speech acts was attempted by Jadwiga Sambor in her study entitled *Magiczne i religijne (chrześcijańskie) akty mowy (Magical and Religious (Christian) Speech Acts* [Sambor 1998]). According to Sambor, their common features are the creation of a new reality in the sphere of belief of the ritual's participants and the assumption that the ritual's agential power is beyond the human world. The features that distinguish different types of such speech acts fall into two categories: those determining performativity and non-performative ones. In the former category she enumerates differences in the aim of magical and religious acts the character of their agential power, the conditions that need to be fulfilled by the actor, his beliefs, attitudes and intentions, the effect of the act and its time and place. The non-performative differences pertain to the sphere of behavioural norms (taboo vs. ethic) and the oppositions individual vs. social and official vs. unofficial. Sambor herself stated that her theory is "a preliminary draft in need of numerous corrections," but in my opinion it is a valuable contribution to the field, even though personally I would prefer to see the categories proposed by Sambor as a spectrum and not as an opposition.

Austin's theory of performatives and his approach to speech acts also provided inspiration for Krystyna Pisarkowa [1994, 1998, 2000], who, however, also posited that any attempt to analyze magical speech should use a wider anthropological perspective. Pisarkowa is a keen student of Bronisław Malinowski's ethnographic theory of language, which inspired her to argue that there is

a need to re-examine and re-evaluate the much and variously described concept of magic as language. Scholars of magic notice that magic has – just

like art or fairy tales – the capacity to create a reality of a different order. [...] This reality requires a new, different research approach [Pisarkowa 1998: 161–162].

Pisarkowa believes – and I wholeheartedly concur – that the study of magic texts is possible only in their cultural context, as a part of a framework that Pisarkowa calls “the magic game.” She defines the magical texts thus:

In order for it to function as an executive act (*akt wykonawczy*) – and there is little doubt that it is one – the social contract describing the position of a magical practitioner in the community cannot treat it as a spell “in a bottle in the sea”! The text’s interpretation as an executive act and its corresponding contexts must be determined above all by its univocally performative purpose. We are talking here about a “determination” that results from the definition of the object. The object in question is a formula. Its function is its *raison d’être*. Without somebody’s knowledge of the formula’s function, the spell will not be efficacious. The act will not be successful. [...] The knowledge of the sound of the formula and of its purpose are conditions of the magical game/magical contract [Pisarkowa 1998: 157].

Yet another perspective that inspired my own work on the magic of the word can be found in Maciej Kamiński’s study of the seventeenth century *Libri maleficorum* [Kamiński 1988]. In his article, Kamiński utilizes the anthropological perspective [cf. Buchowski 1986]. His work is rooted in the assumption that there exists a disparity between the status of language in the modern symbolic culture and in the syncretic traditional cultures. For this reason, he eschews the term *magical function* (which refers to the modern culture) and instead uses the term *magical speech* (*mówienie magiczne*) [cf. Kmita 1984]. He argues that “in the magical culture, speech played an utilitarian and technical function alongside its symbolic (communicative) function” [Kamiński 1988: 279].

The dual, symbolic and pragmatic character of the magical speech means that

within the paradigm of magical thinking, the *verbum* equals the operation. In other words, it is an action, not less so than the utilitarian act. The assumption that the word and the action are functionally equivalent parts of a ritual means that from the perspective of the magic subject, speech and action are both equally tangible [Kamiński 1988: 279–280].

According to Kamiński, magical speech causes a particular state of affairs in the world – and also causes knowledge about that state. “To speak magically is to cause a given state P (pragmatic sense) and at the same time to cause Y’s knowledge of the state P (symbolic sense)” [Kamiński 1987].

Kamiński elucidates the essence of magic speech (“by saying ‘P,’ I cause P”) in the following formula: “when X uses the expression ‘P,’ he causes the state P’, whereas the relationship between ‘P’ and P’ is objective-metonymical in character” [Kamiński 1988: 280].

Kamiński’s symbolic and pragmatic approach to magical speech has its follow-up in Anna Chudzik’s analysis of “magical speech behaviours” monograph entitled *Mowne zachowania magiczne w ujęciu pragmatyczno-kognitywnym (Magical Speech Behaviours: A Pragmatic-Cognitivist Approach* [Chudzik 2002]). Chudzik endeavours to define various kinds of magical speech acts, and discusses the structure and lexical and syntactic features of magical utterances. She also proposes a typology of magical speech acts which draws on propositions from existing literature. Her comprehensive analysis of the diverse materials that includes both folk magic formulas and instances of magical use of words in contemporary colloquial Polish takes inspiration from modern cognitivist and pragmatic theories of language and leads Chudzik to propose her own theory. She posits that “‘magical’ speech acts are in essence **hidden directives**,” and further explains that

the feature that sets them apart among other obligative speech acts is their addressee, “the obligated being,” who is not a human. As the speaker assumes the felicity of these acts, there is also an underlying certainty that the “obligated party” is willing to grant a wish or a request of the speaker or follow their command, and that it will do so. This certainty is produced by the illocutionary force of the words uttered. [...] On the intentional plane, the “magical speech acts” constitute a complex **directional and agential** structure. [She also proposes the following explication for the magical speech acts:] WHEN SAYING X, I WANT SOMETHING SPECIFIC TO HAPPEN AND I AM CONFIDENT THAT IT WILL HAPPEN [Chudzik 2002: 56–59].

Chudzik’s monograph is the first attempt in Polish literature on the subject to propose a monographic overview of magical speech acts in all their typological diversity. As such it testifies to the fact that academic inquiry into the field of linguistic magic is quite well-grounded in Polish linguistics.

## 1.2. The Anthropological Approach: Magical Language

All anthropologists who study language magic agree that in societies who possess mythic consciousness, language “is to be regarded as a mode of action rather than a countersign of thought” [Malinowski 1923: 477]. The logical continuation of Malinowski’s observation inspires continuing

attempts to study and understand the language magic (or even the magical language) from three distinct perspectives: within the broader cultural context, with reference to the pragmatic character and functions of language and within semiotic analyses of the linguistic signs. At the same time, many scholars treat the study of “magical” aspects of language in oral cultures as a starting point and contrast for their study of more complex, literate cultures.

Just like linguists, anthropologists have been involved in the study of the magic of the word practically for a long time. In the Polish context, the first anthropological discussion of the subject are probably two lectures by Jan Karłowicz, published in 1903 in a volume entitled *O człowieku pierwotnym* (*On Primitive Man* [Karłowicz 1903]). Karłowicz writes:

In certain times, the word has an indomitable power. I say “in certain time,” as this restriction has survived in the beliefs of our folk: that the word has magic power only when it is spoken in compliance with certain conditions, when it comes from the mouths of certain individuals (parents, healers [*znachorów*]) and in certain moments, which are referred to as “the wrong hour,” if a curse is involved. [...] In the life of the primeval people, the faith in the enchanted power of the word had most diverse applications. It was used either for good or for evil. In the former case, we had blessings, good wishes, curing incantations and other formulas aimed at expressing and ensuring the best possible outcomes; in the latter case, we encountered curses, spells, swearing, leading to somebody’s harm and peril; finally, there were intermediate formulas: neutral, commanding, protective formulas and so on [Karłowicz 1903: 104–105].

Karłowicz’s work – concluded with the following remarks: “Many years shall pass before we cease to greet and congratulate one another, wish one another prosperity or good health, or curse one another and wish others ill. It will be a long time before we break free of the enchantment of such beliefs, that we inherit along with the blood and bones of our ancestors” [Karłowicz 1903: 118] – is more than a mere presentation of material. It also features an outline theory of the “miraculous power of the word”: it points to the particular conditions, persons and time required by magical speaking and provides a classification of verbal rituals (differentiating between positive, negative and neutral ones).

Karłowicz’s writings might have been an inspiration for Jan Stanisław Bystron’s essay *Przeżytki wiary w magiczną moc słowa* (*Remnants of the Belief in the Magic Power of the Word*, first published in 1927, new edition: Bystron 1980). In his essay, Bystron juxtaposes conventional approach to language which is a characteristic feature of logical thinking with “treating language as an absolute value that has the closest possible connection with its object”

which he sees as characteristic of “people with the primeval mindset” [Bystroń 1980: 204]. Inspired by Lucien Lévy-Bruhl’s theory of pre-logical thinking, Bystroń describes multiple verbal rituals present in Polish and Ruthenian folklore that are rooted in treating the word as being “in an actual connection with the object, not denoting it but as if being a part of it” [Bystroń 1980: 205]. Bystroń differentiates between positive rituals (“pronouncing certain words in order to [...] bring about certain events or cause certain phenomena”) and negative rituals (“avoiding certain words in order to prevent the occurrence of certain undesirable phenomena”) [Bystroń 1980: 205–208]. He discusses various examples of positive rituals that include supplications, commands and curses and highlights their formal and pragmatic determinants: “a formula of this kind has strictly prescribed wording and is efficacious only when certain conditions in terms of wording, place, time and person are met, in accordance with the principles of magic” [Bystroń 1980: 207].

Bystroń’s student, the Romanian ethnographer and folklorist Piotr Caraman, further developed his theory in a monograph entitled *Obrzęd kołędowania u Słowian i Rumunów* (*The Practice of Wassailing among Slavs and Romanians* [Caraman 1933]). Caraman adopts Bystroń’s theory that the word is identified with the thing signified, and that this leads to “limitless faith in the power of the word, which by its very utterance can lead to the manifestation of the object or the fact that it denotes” [Caraman 1933: 350]. He also accepts Bystroń’s division of verbal rituals into those consisting in avoiding specific words and those consisting in pronouncing certain phrases. He calls the latter practice spell-casting and divides spells into two categories: negative (exorcization) and positive (wish formulas). Caraman differentiates between several kinds of wish formulas, and it is here that he includes blessings, curses, incantations and “carols of good wishes.” The latter kind becomes the focus of Caraman’s study of wassailing wherein he analyzes the carols as elements of magical practice.

The interpretation and classification of magical verbal rituals, initiated by Karłowicz and Bystroń, was subsequently continued by Kazimierz Moszyński in his monograph of Slavic spiritual culture (first published 1934, new edition 1967 [KLS] and 2010). Moszyński presented the rituals as elements of the mindset of “unenlightened peasants” [KLS: 266] and analyzed them in the context of his own complex classification of sub-magical and magical practices (which he divides into translational, transmissional, sympathetic, creational and inceptional) [cf. KLS: 266–347]. According to Moszyński, spells and incantations

are set apart from other kinds of magic, and cover partly the same ground as prayers and direct imperatives [...]. All of them are rooted in the belief

that “word can be made flesh,” or that whatever is uttered, can come true. [...] The underlying belief in the power of words is also the foundation of the deep-rooted faith in the efficacy of curses and blessings that can be observed in Slavic villages. Especially parental curses and blessings are said to have enormous power. [...] The power with which the primitive mind imbues words is [...] simply limitless [...]. For this reason, I think it is only a matter of chance that I have not managed to find in my sources any direct references to killing someone with magical words [KLS: 301, 347].

Yet another valuable contribution to the study of magical speech comes from Florian Znaniecki. In the seminal *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America* [1927 (first published 1918–1920)] Znaniecki and William I. Thomas analyzed peasants’ “magical attitudes” and demonstrated that it is inescapably connected with their attitude towards words [Thomas, Znaniecki 1927: 230]. Znaniecki wrote about the peasants’ respect for words, which he explained by “a magical connection between the word and the thing symbolized” [Thomas, Znaniecki 1927: 212] and posited that metaphor and metonymy are the key mechanisms employed in the process of symbolization.

This character of the magical relation explains the fact that most of those relations are, or rather appear to us to be, symbolical. [...] Sometimes it is analogy between the supposed cause and the desired effect [...]. Sometimes again, it is a part representing the whole [...]. Or an action performed upon some object is presumed to exert an influence upon another object which is or was in spatial proximity with the first [...]. Succession in time, particularly if repeated, becomes often a basis of a magical connection [...]. The connection between the word and the thing symbolized by it is...particularly often exploited for magical purposes. The words exert an immediate influence upon reality [Thomas, Znaniecki 1927: 255].

A classic anthropological approach to the magic of the word is Bronisław Malinowski’s ethnographic theory of language.<sup>8</sup> Malinowski based his theory on a pragmatic and semantic analysis of language in a tribal community. He focused primarily on the language of magic, but was also interested in such problems as language acquisition in children and pragmatic functions of language in the European society of his day. It would be difficult to find a later scholar who would not reference Malinowski’s approach: his theory has been an enduring inspiration for linguists, especially for pragmatists and cognitivists.

Malinowski was first and foremost a field anthropologist, and not an “armchair anthropologist.” He perceived culture as a comprehensive system, whose elements were functionally and conceptually connected. For him, the mission of the anthropologist was to observe and subse-

quently describe the language as a primarily pragmatic phenomenon, “the speech in action.” For this reason, Malinowski’s fundamental tenet is that language cannot be studied in isolation, without its broad context, which he understood both as the situational context of a given utterance (claiming that the ideal way to reconstruct such context would be with the use of sound film) and as the cultural context (encompassing norms, values, and worldviews of a given culture).

The pragmatic relevance of words is greatest when these words are uttered actually within the situation to which they belong and uttered so that they achieve an immediate, practical effect. For it is in such situations that words acquire their meaning [Malinowski 1935: 52].

Analysing magical formulas, Malinowski stressed the fact that putting them “within their appropriate context of native belief” [Malinowski 1935: 215] was the condition of fully understanding their significance. He also applied the same approach to pragmatic uses of language: “One of the contextual conditions for the sacred or legal power of words is the existence, within a certain culture, of beliefs, of moral attitudes and of legal sanctions” [Malinowski 1935: 53].

Analyzing the use of language in the broad range of social interactions which he observed and in which he participated during his research among the Trobriand Islanders, including work, everyday conversations, magical rituals, and ceremonies, Malinowski formulated the fundamental tenets of his theory: he argued that language “in its primitive uses [...] is a mode of action and not an instrument of reflection” [Malinowski 1923: 312]. What is more, speech is subjugated to action.

language in its primitive function and original form has an essentially pragmatic character [...] it is a mode of behaviour, an indispensable element of concerted human action. [...] to regard it as a means for the embodiment or expression of thought is to take a one-sided view of one of its most derivative and specialized functions [Malinowski 1923: 316].

And elsewhere he notes:

the fact is that the main function of language is not to express thought, not to duplicate mental processes, but rather to play an active pragmatic part in human behaviour. Thus in its primary function it is one of the chief cultural forces and an adjunct to bodily activities [Malinowski 1935: 7].

In volume two of *Coral Gardens and Their Magic*, entitled *The Language of Magic and Gardening*, Malinowski describes how (to use Austin’s phrase)

the Trobriand Islanders “do things with words.” Malinowski devotes a lot of space to analyzing the pragmatic function of language: “Words are part of action and they are equivalents to actions” [Malinowski 1935: 9], “words in their primary and essential sense **do, act, produce and achieve**” [Malinowski 1935: 52; original emphasis]. Uttering particular verbal formulas is an action that brings about immediate practical results. The expected outcome of speaking is a particular effect. For this reason, anthropologists should study the dynamics of words, and not their purely intellectual function – the true meaning of words can only be gleaned by studying their “pragmatism,” that is their “effective force” [Malinowski 1935: 49].

Malinowski differentiates between two “peaks” of the pragmatic power of words:

one of them is to be found in certain sacred uses, that is in magical formulae, sacramental utterances, exorcisms, curses and blessings and most prayers. All sacred words have a creative effect, usually indirect, by setting in motion some supernatural power, or, when the sacramental formula becomes quasi-legal, in summoning social sanctions. The second climax of speech dynamism is to be found obviously in the direct pragmatic effect of words. An order given in battle, an instruction issued by the master of a sailing ship, a cry for help, are as powerful in modifying the course of events as any other bodily act [Malinowski 1935: 52–53].

The power of both pragmatic peaks lies in their agential function: “here words produce an actual change in a universe which, though mystical and imaginary to us agnostics, is none the less real to the believer” [Malinowski 1935: 55]. The level of pragmatic efficacy of words can vary. On the left-hand side of the scale (the two peaks are not perceived by Malinowski as an opposition, but as a spectrum) lies “the language of magic.” “As to its intrinsic nature, the language of magic is sacred, set and used for an entirely different purpose to that of ordinary life” [Malinowski 1935: 213]. Its function is “to induce certain phenomena by mystical means” [Malinowski 1935: 228–229]. The right-hand peak consists of “words of direct individual efficacy,” such as orders and requests. It is also here that Malinowski includes legal formulas. Both peaks of the “dynamism of speech,” the magical (sacred) and the secular (everyday speech) coexist in every culture and in the development of every individual. They are universal. “Between the savage use of words and the most abstract and theoretical one there is only a difference of degree. Ultimately all the meaning of all words is derived from bodily experience” [Malinowski 1935: 58].

Reflecting on the mechanisms of magical fulfilment of what is uttered, Malinowski pointed out to the so-called “creative metaphor of magic” [Malinowski 1935: 70], which he defined as the belief that multiple repetition of specified words will bring about the reality which they evoke. “It is the essence of magic that, by the affirmation of a condition which is desired but not yet fulfilled, this condition is brought about” [Malinowski 1935: 70]. As far as the efficacy of magic is concerned, he explained the its principle thus: “each rite is the ‘production’ or ‘generation’ of a force and the conveyance of it, directly or indirectly, to a certain given object” [Malinowski 1935: 215]. The results which (according to the native’s worldview) are brought about by the utterance of magic formulas in a specific situational context at the same time constitute the formulas’ meaning. Malinowski concludes:

The word is used always in direct active conjunction with the reality it means. The word acts on the thing and the thing releases the word in the human mind. This indeed nothing more or less than the essence of the theory which underlies the use of verbal magic. And this theory we find based on real psychological experiences in primitive forms of speech [Malinowski 1923: 323].

Malinowski posits that the essence the theory underlying the use of verbal magic is contained in the mechanism described above (“The word acts on the thing and the thing releases the word in the human mind”), thus reducing verbal magic to a problem of semiotics. This approach has inspired researchers who look for features of the linguistic sign characteristic of “the magical language.”

An interesting attempt to describe the aforementioned mechanism can be found in a volume entitled *Language and Magic: Studies in the Magical Function of Speech*, authored by the Japanese philosopher, linguist and scholar of religion Toshihiko Izutsu [1956]. He argues that the magical use of language is the most fundamental function of speech, from which all others derive. He criticises modern scholars who, in his view, treat the magical function of language as only marginal and do not devote sufficient attention to its study.

We shall note that such an approach, though perhaps legitimate and justifiable so long as the purely **logical** analysis of language is concerned, may nevertheless lead to very superficial, and, in many cases, erroneous views on the nature of our own linguistic habits. [...] [N]o theoretician of language who would grasp the mental processes which underlie the mechanism of speech can afford to ignore the uniqueness of the magical function of words, the effects of whose working become more and more conspicuous as we penetrate deeper and deeper into the mystery of human language [Izutsu 1956: 15; original emphasis].

Izutsu explains how the language in primitive societies was imbued with magico-religious connotations to the point where it essentially became merged with ritual. Then, commensurately with the development of human civilization, it became more and more autonomous and secular, detached from its ritualistic roots and contexts. The profane world of the practical pushed the ritualistic aspect of life to the margins of human experience (or perhaps banished it to the collective unconscious). It is with this margin that we today associate so-called superstitions and linguists – the so-called magical function of language.

We may rightly look down upon various linguistic habits of openly magical import which we still observe around us as “primitive absurdities,” but it would be a grave mistake if we forget the while that the language in our possession is an instrument originally designed to serve “absurd” purposes, that it is “a medium developed to meet the needs of arboreal man” (Ogden and Richards) [Izutsu 1956: 16].

Izutsu’s linguistic theory rests on the opposition between magic and logic, where the two are understood as two opposite poles of all linguistic behaviour. The language fluctuates between the two extremes, ritual and pure logic, between using words to create states of affairs and the academic discourse. He states:

as there can be no magical use of language without at least a minimum of logicity, so in the ordinary descriptive use of language [...] the actual words employed cannot [...] be entirely free of illogicality. [...] the words and the ways (in which) we combine them are largely remnants from primitive ages [Izutsu 1956: 19].

Izutsu quotes multiple examples of magical language use from diverse cultures, and all of them illustrate the universal tendency of the human mind to closely connect (or indeed identify) the signifier and the signified, which leads to establishing a causal relationship between language and reality. Speaking becomes causing: evoking, creating fulfilling or however else we choose to call it. “To state or declare something to be so and so means at once to make the object actually so and so” [Izutsu 1956: 37].

Izutsu argues that the magical dimension is constantly visible in all human linguistic behaviours.

We may, I think, roughly compare the abovementioned magical dimension of speech to the Freudian realm of the “unconscious” [...] into which all kinds of irrational beliefs, unconscious desires, and frustrated wishes are “repressed” and out of which they can emerge [Izutsu 1956: 70].

Introducing the category of the unconscious, Izutsu suggests that not only language usage but also the sheer structure of language is magical. His search for proof of “magicality” in the semantic structure of language leads him to proposing a connotative theory of linguistic magic.

While describing “the fundamental magic of meaning,” Izutsu refers to the Ogden/Richards triangle. Just like earlier followers of Ogden and Richards, Izutsu links the magic use of language to the treatment of the relation between the symbol and the referent as direct and natural (*phýsei*), as opposed to an arbitrary relationship (*thései*) [cf. Heinz 1978: 249–250]. In Izutsu’s view, the semantic triangle is only used in order to refer to the denotative aspect of language magic. In reality, however, it is the connotative sphere that plays the more important (albeit less tangible) role in the creation of verbal magic. Izutsu associates psychologically (and not logically) understood connotation with mental imagery: vague and shapeless images that are first called up to mind by using name-words. After all, words are not symbols of the things themselves, but of the images of things. And it is here – in the sphere of “images of things” – that Izutsu places connotation. He concludes that magical linguistic behaviours consist namely in evoking the connoted objects (concepts).

All words through their very nature as symbols are capable of conjuring up something in our minds. [...] This process of verbal evocation, then, we can safely take as the most fundamental act of verbal magic, though from the ordinary man’s point of view it may perhaps be too fundamental or commonplace to be called “magic” at all [Izutsu 1956: 60].

The human mind has a tendency to confuse connotation and denotation, or, as Izutsu puts it, “to project mental contents on to the external world” [Izutsu 1956: 66] and thus to make independent beings out of concepts (to hypostatize connotations). This tendency seems universal, and is evidenced by countless beliefs and superstitions, from animism to popular stereotypes and scientific fallacies. It is also the underlying cause of the mental attitude known as verbalism or nominalism.

[W]henver a name-word is uttered in the absence of the object, it tends to make the hearer *think* or *feel* as if he were in the presence of the object, in other words, by making the object mentally present, it tends to cause the hallucination that the thing-meant, whatever that may be, really existed [Izutsu 1956: 66].

The world of connotation is a world where such inexistent things as “dragons,” “unicorns” or “phlogiston” can very well parade in exactly the same capacity as “dogs” and “tables”; but if this is possible it is simply because, in this world, even dogs and tables are after all mere conjured-up phantoms [Izutsu 1956: 75].

The scholar understands verbal magic as a kind of evocation, even going as far as identifying it with evocation, conjuring. And because the power to “create reality” is the most apparent in the poetic use of language, he calls poetry the magical language *par excellence*. The metaphor plays the crucial role here, because “it belongs properly to the order of action” [Izutsu 1956: 82]. Its uses are not limited to the poetic language: most of our speech and thought is based on metaphors.

Metaphor, as a peculiar kind of transference of meaning from one sphere to another, is at the root of natural speech construction; it is as it were the very tissue of linguistic meaning, it is language. [...] [L]anguage is through and through evocation [Izutsu 1956: 82; original emphasis].

Izutsu sees the signs of the overwhelming magical quality of language also in other spheres. One of them is the emotive sphere, the other – grammatical and semantic structure of language that serves to categorise (build, create, evoke) the surrounding reality. This attitude stems from naïve realism that views semantic categories as reflections of previously existing categories of reality. Izutsu muses: “what we usually call the ‘real world’ is, partly at least, a very complex and complicated product of our language patterns” [Izutsu 1956: 90]. Later, he stresses the claim that “the semantic resources of our language may and must be viewed as essentially based on mental evocation” [Izutsu 1956: 101]. Izutsu’s “mental evocation” is another name for the magicality of language. For this reason “magic is [...] an essential, vital component of meaning that, in short, lies at the very root of language behaviour” [Izutsu 1956: 101].

The problems raised by Malinowski and Izutsu, i.e., pragmatic and semantic mechanisms of the “magical quality” of language were further developed and clarified by the influential contemporary British anthropologist, student of rituals and their language, Stanley Jeyaraja Tambiah. He is the author of a thought-provoking critique of the two classical descriptions of spell-casting magic (in the works of Malinowski and Evans-Pritchard) and of deployment of J. L. Austin’s theory of speech acts for the analysis of ethnographical materials.<sup>9</sup>

Tambiah understands the magical language as a complex of specific mechanisms within the sacred language. He does not differentiate magic from religion and does not juxtapose the two. In his reinterpretation of selected spells used by the Trobrianders and the Azande, he offers a theory of the language of ritual which is an alternative to the views of Malinowski and Evans-Pritchard. Based on his definition of the ritual as a complex of words and actions, in which “the uttering of words itself is a ritual” [Leach 1966: 407, quoted in: Tambiah 1968: 175], he analyzes

the mutual relationship between the two. The proportion between words and actions is different in different rituals and different cultures. Tambiah places the particular proportions on a continuum, where one pole is constituted of purely linguistic rituals, and the other – of rituals whose dominant component is action.

He looks for the connection between word and action in rituals on two planes. The first is the external structure, i.e., the pragmatics of ritual (where he in essence concurs with Malinowski who, according to Tambiah, has perfectly captured “the functional relation of the rites to their extra-ritual context” [Tambiah 1968: 199]). The second plane is the internal structure, i.e., the semantics of the ritual. The basic mechanisms of the internal structure of the ritual are metaphor, metonymy and analogy. Tambiah discusses many examples of their functioning and finds manifold confirmations and clarifications of Lévi-Strauss’s understanding of the magical thought-action as continuous metaphorical and metonymic transformations.

Tambiah defines the metaphor as “a figure of speech in which a name or descriptive term is transferred to some object to which it is not properly applicable” [Tambiah 1968: 189]. Thus, a metaphor has a dual reference: it refers both to its primary and secondary object. He argues:

Every metaphor [...] contains both truth and fiction: if it is taken literally it misrepresents, but it is more than a conventional sign because it highlights a resemblance. The metaphor is a mode of reflection and enables abstract thought on the basis of analogical predication [...] The metaphoric use of language exploits the procedures of selection and substitution by which words or ideas replace one another in terms of semantic similarity [Tambiah 1968: 189].

Rituals – whose goal is to transfer some attribute to the recipient – are based precisely on thus understood metaphorical use of language. Tambiah concludes: “There is not trick here; it is a normal use of language” [Tambiah 1968: 189].

If metaphor is a substitute, then metonymy – or the mechanism of replacing the proper name of an object with the name of its part or attribute – is a supplement. Both use the mechanism of verbal transfer. Analyzing spells, Tambiah shows that both metaphor and metonymy refer to the verbal component of the ritual and to the objects used by the practitioner. The features of ritual objects are treated as abstract terms that are be given metaphorical value within the system of symbolic classification.

The rite of transfer portrays a metaphorical use of language (verbal substitution) whereby an attribute is transferred to the recipient via a material

symbol which is used metonymically as a transformer. [...] The technique gains its realism by clothing a metaphorical procedure in the operational or manipulative mode of practical action; it unites both concept and action, word and deed [Tambiah 1968: 194].

In contrast, verbal rites that are not accompanied by substitution or action “depend entirely on suggestive metaphors and similes” [Tambiah 1968: 195].

In a later article, Tambiah offers a succinct summary of his theory:

Most “magical rites” (as indeed most rituals) combine word and deed [...] the rite is devoted to an “imperative transfer” of effects, which some might phrase as the “telic” and others as the “illocutionary” or “performative” nature of the rite [...]. The semantics of the transfer itself, the logic of the construction of the transfer [...] depend (1) on metaphorical and analogical transfers by word mediated by realistic contact transfer through objects used as “transformers,” and (2) on imperative verbal transfer of energy to a “whole” through the metonymical naming of the parts [Tambiah 1973: 219].

Tambiah analyzes the mechanism of analogy, which is crucial for rituals. He defines the analogy as identifying similarities between instances compared and predicating that “a certain proposition is true of the one; therefore it is true of the other” [Tambiah 1973: 209, quoting J. S. Mills]. Further, he differentiates between two basic types of analogy: the scientific predictive type and the conventional persuasive type [Tambiah 1973: 212]. He contrasts the scientific analogy, understood as a relationship between the *explicans* and the *explicandum*, with the persuasive analogy, characteristic of magical acts, which is based on transfer and evocation rather than on prediction.

In his analysis of rituals, Tambiah demonstrates how the magical action is based on similarities (positive analogy) and differences (negative analogy) in the attributes of the magically juxtaposed objects or processes. This mechanism is much more complex than Frazer’s simplistic formula of sympathetic magic (“like attracts like”). The ritual is based on “persuasive transfer” (also called “‘persuasion’ through contact”) [Tambiah 1973: 212-213] of the desired attributes of one object to another. It is not a causal action, but a symbolic one. The analogical relationship and the desired effect are confirmed verbally, simultaneously with performing the action.

Just like performative utterances, magical acts that are based on analogy in thinking and action cannot be verified in terms of the criteria of truth of Western logic. Tambiah counts among Western scholars’ typical mistakes their attempts to interpret magical analogical acts in terms of causal relationships that lead them only to disparage the erroneousness of “savage mind.” In his opinion, magical acts are better described in

terms of “validity,” “accuracy” or “felicity” of the performed ceremony. Such approach seems only one step away from the application of the performative theory in the analysis of magical acts, and Tambiah actually makes this step in his writings. He concludes thus:

Ritual acts and magical rites are of the “illocutionary” or “performative” sort, which simply by virtue of being enacted (under the appropriate conditions) achieve a change of state, or do something effective [...] On the one hand, the magical act bears predicative and referential *langue*-type meanings and on the other it is a performative act. Both frames are co-existent, and it is as a *performative* or “illocutionary” act directed by analogical reasoning that magic gets its distinctiveness [Tambiah 1973: 221, 223].

In *A Performative Approach to Ritual* Tambiah further develops his analysis of semantic and pragmatic dimension of rituals. He refers to Peirce’s classic typology of signs (symbols, icons and indices) and links the semantic dimension of a ritual symbolically with its content, and, by the same token, with its whole cultural context. He also links (indexically) its pragmatic aspect with the ritual’s participants, i.e., with the interpersonal and social contexts of ritual action. Thus, Tambiah sees the ritual as a unit of dual nature: symbolically and/or iconically, it represents the contents of a given culture, and at the same time it refers indexically to the social context, outlining and sanctioning social hierarchies. Tambiah describes thus interpreted ritual as an “indexical symbol” (or, using a Jakobsonian term, as a “shifter” [cf. Jakobson 1984] and/or “an indexical icon” [Tambiah 1979: 154]). The indexical symbols (icons) combine two roles: they are symbols (icons) associated with the object they represent by conventional semantic rules (they represent the object iconically based on the conventional semantic rule of similarity), and at the same time they also exist as indices, that have a pragmatic existential relationship to the objects they represent.<sup>10</sup>

Anthropologists who study cultures other than the modern European culture point out to the fact that cultural otherness goes together with a different status of language in culture.<sup>11</sup> This realization is shared by field and armchair anthropologists alike, and has recently been expounded by some prominent Polish scholars.

Mariusz Kairski and Marek Wołodźko, while doing research among indigenous people of the Amazon region, endeavoured to understand a culture very diverse from their own. Their research required gaining perfect command of the native language and as a consequence the researchers devote much space to analysing the pragmatic and semantic aspects of language in indigenous cultures [Kairski 1996]. Their point of departure is that languages of such cultures

are not “pure” symbolic-communicative practices, but rather methods of doing things (a classic example is the belief in ‘physico-technical’ efficacy of magical formulas). For this reason, language serves as a tool of physically changing the reality and not as a tool for mental operations and communication [Kairski, Wołodźko 1995: 74].

One should also mention the contribution of Michał Buchowski, a scholar of magic and ritual, who co-authored, together with Wojciech Burszta, a study of language in magico-syncretic cultures [Buchowski, Burszta 1986; 1992: 32–46]. The two scholars point to the peculiarity of these cultures which finds its manifestation in the unity (syncretism) of their various spheres: the technical and utilitarian sphere, and the spheres of communication, and worldview. According to Buchowski and Burszta, these spheres can only be differentiated analytically, from the perspective of an outside observer. This syncretism is also visible in language: speech as a separate, autonomous part of culture does not exist here.

As Burszta writes

In such circumstances, it is difficult to talk about language as a separate linguistic practice, whose primary goal would be symbolic communication. Such state of affairs is difficult to imagine, especially from our modern analytical perspective, in which we find it easy to differentiate linguistic phenomena. It is customary to treat language as an element of the communicative sphere of culture, alongside art and custom. But within “magical culture,” in which “everything is everything,” such division and analytical differentiation between areas of culture is utterly misleading [Burszta 1986: 72–73].

He adds:

Both thinking of the magical type and magical speech share one general feature: they are not intellectual or reflective in character. To the contrary, they evoke phenomena and at the same time constitute a participation in these phenomena. Values embodied in magical speech and action belong primarily to the metonymical and artefactual order, and, as such, they can become objects of human action [Burszta 1986: 75].

In syncretic magical communities, it is possible to extract speech as a separate sphere of culture only from a theoretical perspective. In its original context, it is inextricably “bound” to other spheres, in a way that cannot be compared to the relation of language with other cultural spheres in modern culture [Buchowski, Burszta 1986: 39].

The recognition of this “inextricable bind” between speech and other spheres of culture leads Burszta and Buchowski to further explore

the phenomenon which they call “magical speech-action” (or even “simultaneous speech-thinking-action-influence”) [Burszta 1991: 101]), whose “referential connections consist of simultaneous symbolic-semantic and artefactual-metonymic components” [Burszta 1986: 72].

Burszta and Buchowski’s views were inspired by the theories of their mentor Jerzy Kmita, a noted philosopher of science, who described the unique syncretic mechanism of magical speech in the following way:

A speech act symbolizes what refers to semantically, and at the same time also remains in a metonymic relationship with it, that is, influences it causally or is its physical part. To say a word or a phrase is not only to call to the mind the corresponding object or phenomenon, but also to influence this object or phenomenon and often – to conjure it literally. [...] Magical speech always refers to reality, belongs to it, is a method of existing within it and influencing it [Kmita 1984: 32, 35].

A more recent attempt to elucidate “the existential dimension of language and the profound connection between the word and being in cultures of the folk type” [Tokarska-Bakir 2000: 219] comes from Joanna Tokarska-Bakir. The scholar used Gadamer’s concept of **non-differentiation**, understood as “an onto-epistemological [...] tendency to merge not only the *signans* and the *signatum* of the traditional semiotic differentiation, but also the very being of that which is represented and that which represents” [Tokarska-Bakir 2000: 48]. Tokarska-Bakir points to the crucial role played by the “existential trope” or “the merging of thought and being, and further – image and being and word and being” [Tokarska-Bakir 2000: 367] in the folk and religious worldviews. Her approach, owing to its perspective which combines philosophy and religious studies, offers a possibility of a broader perspective on the cultural contexts of the folk speech-action, and seeing how, just like the sacred, it is a phenomenon that can be curbed down but not rooted out completely. Tokarska-Bakir posits that

between the “existential” and “communicative” concept of language there is a chasm filled with the work of consciousness that differentiates between the thing and its name. The magico-religious merging of the object and its name is the “natural state” of language, that is reaffirmed whenever the conscious efforts of differentiation cease. The religious, existential concept of language does not require effort, and for this reason, it often wins in confrontation with linguistic conventionalism. In this sense, the “old,” magical attitude to language and image, grounded in non-differentiation, has the edge over all “new,” critical attitudes. The existential aspect of language and image will never evaporate completely [Tokarska-Bakir 2000: 49].

### 1.3. A Particularization: the Folk Verbal Ritual

Magic and myth, and also myths in action (or rituals) can be treated as techniques of actualizing the sacred.

Ryszard Tomicki [1983: 12]

One of the ways in which the magical speech-action manifests itself in folk culture are verbal rituals.<sup>12</sup> Their characteristic cultural context is the mythical worldview (folk mythology): the dualistic image of the cosmic order, which is influenced by Christianity but distinct from the canonical Christian beliefs.

Mircea Eliade defines rituals as all activities of the archaic man that constitute a repetition of the primordial, archetypal gesture, originally made *in illo tempore* by the mythical ancestors or gods [Eliade 1958: 32–34]. Within this paradigm, even the most immaterial or trivial activities can be imbued with meaning and metaphysical value. The performance of a ritual does away with the secular time, and the ritual becomes one with its archetype. Its participants stand beyond time, unified with the original act of creation, they exist in perpetuity, in the “eternal now.” The ritual allows for “actualization of the sacred” [cf. Tomicki 1983: 12].

Vladimir Toporov offers an interpretation of the ritual that is similar to Eliade’s. He highlights that the ritual’s crucial function is the cyclical restoration of the sacral dimension of human experience that, due to the activity of various factors unrelated to the realm of the sacred often grow weak or even disappear altogether. Because only the sacral is real (the profane is not associated with any values), we can even talk about the pan-sacrality of archaic cultures. Thanks to their cyclical nature and to the fact that they symbolically repeat the original act of creation, rituals merge “here and now” with “then and there,” providing a feeling of security and comfort and satisfying the human thirst for meaning and direction in life. Thus, Toporov sees rituals as the core of communal life. They constitute an archaic mechanism of experiencing the world, whose goal is “taming the chaos” – putting order into and integrating the experience of the world. Viewed in this light, the ritual becomes a mechanism of the mediation between nature and culture that is essential for mankind [Toporov 1988].

This interpretation of ritual finds its confirmation in the etymology of the words used to denote it. Toporov identifies as the semantic motivation of names of ritual activities in Indo-European languages in the concepts of ‘sacrality’ (e.g., the Latin *sacrum*: ‘that which is holy/sacred,’ Greek *mustērion*, *-ia*: ‘that which is secret’), ‘doing’ (word derived from the PIE root *\*k<sub>u</sub>er-* ‘do, make,’ including the Proto-Slavic *\*čaro-dějъ*)

and 'law, order' (e.g., the Latin *ritus*: 'religious rite,' derived from the PIE root *rtá-*, which in the Vedas denotes 'universal cosmic law'). The Slavic words for ritual are derived from the Proto-Slavic *\*obręd* (with the same root as the Polish *rząd*, meaning 'order, range, sequence'). "The word *obriad* [ritual] [...] should therefore be understood as the instituting of the natural sequence of conduct [...], [of] order, which is the necessary condition of recreating the beginning" [Toporov 1988: 27].

Modern scholars concur that ritual and myth are closely connected. The myth (mythical worldview) is an indispensable foundation for the ritual, and conversely, the ritual is "myth in action" [Tomicki 1983: 12]. It is through rituals that we learn about the contents of myths: "all ritual is a kind of language; it therefore translates ideas" [Mauss 2001: 75, cited in: Tomicki 1983: 12].

The perception of ritual as a language which contains symbolic content of a culture is naturally shared by proponents of semiotics. Nikita Tolstoj thus summarizes the semiotic approach to ritual:

the term *text* denotes [...] a sequence of actions and interactions with objects that has a symbolic meaning and verbal results. If we treat ritual as a kind of text, expressed in the semiotic language of culture, we can differentiate three [...] of its components: the verbal (words), the physical (objects, artefacts), and the actional (action, activity). In rites, rituals and some cultural activities [...] elements of these three codes, which – to put it in a general way – constitute "words" of one semiotic language, can often be used as synonyms and treated interchangeably, and some of them can be eliminated or reduced [Tołstoj 1992: 21–22].

The structure of ritual is therefore a *sui generis* triad of word, object and action, but in some cases it can be reduced to a verbal-actional diad.<sup>13</sup> Folk verbal rituals, such as the curse, can be called speech-action which sometimes involves the use of paraphernalia. Stanley Jeyaraja Tambiah (inspired by Austin's theory of performativity) defines it in the following way:

Ritual is a culturally constructed system of symbolic communication. It is constituted of patterned and ordered sequences of words and acts, often expressed in multiple media, whose content and arrangement are characterized in varying degree by formality (conventionality), stereotype (rigidity), condensation (fusion), and redundancy (repetition). Ritual action in its constitutive features is performative [...] wherein saying something is also doing something [Tambiah 1979: 119].

To particularize, and in summary, a folk verbal ritual is characterized by the following three features:

1. It is a verbal-behavioural phenomenon that takes place in a specific pragmatic (situational, cultural) context, and which may require the use of paraphernalia.
2. It has specific linguistic form (generic, syntactic and lexical) as well as definite conditions of use.
3. It is connected to the sacred and is symbolic in character (it remains closely connected with the semantic fields of “sacrality,” “action,” and “order”).

Any description of verbal rituals, such as the curse, should take into account that:

thought and action, myth and ritual, symbol and referent create [in this case] a homogeneous whole, which is difficult to imagine, or present discursively. It is the job of the anthropologist to break down this whole into “elemental parts,” into categories that would be comprehensive for his/her own culture, and then reconnect them, creating a coherent whole [Buchowski, 1993: 111].

## 2. The Magic of the Word in Practice. An Introduction to Word Magic in Folk Culture

Whoever utters words, sets power in motion.

Gerardus van der Leeuw [1938: 405]

The world of the primitive and of antiquity, and above all the religious world, knows nothing whatever of ‘empty words,’ of ‘words, words’; it never says: ‘more than enough words have been exchanged, now at last let me see deeds’; and the yearning no longer to have to ‘rummage among words’ is wholly foreign to it. But this is not at all because the primitive world has a blunter sense of reality than ours; rather the contrary: it is we who have artificially emptied the word, and degraded it to a thing. But as soon as we actually live, and do not simply make scientific abstractions, we know once more that a word has life and power, and indeed highly characteristic power [van der Leeuw 1938: 403].

This thought-provoking passage from *Religion in Essence and Manifestation* finds its full confirmation in the workings of folk culture. Within the mythical worldview, the expression “empty words” is a contradiction in terms. Within this paradigm, words cannot be empty. They are *sui generis* physical beings, that have specific properties and capabilities.

An anecdote reported by Kolberg can serve as an illustration:

Słyszałem, jak jednego parobczaka proszono, aby co opowiedział, a on się drożył w ten sposób (by się od tego wywinąć): „Kiedy dziś w lesie, jak ciąłem drzewo, torebkę z bajkami powiesiłem na sęku i zapomniałem!” To znaczyło, że on niby miał bajki swe złożone w woreczku, który zapomniał w lesie, i teraz nie może nic powiedzieć. Jednakże, gdy go nie przestawano prosić, przyłożył mały palec do ucha i zdawał się bacznie przysłuchiwać, co ten palec mu szepcze, po czym rzekł: „At, mój mały palec jesse pamięta jedno bajkie, to i powiem” [DWOK 42, *Maz* 7: 413–414].

(I have heard a field hand being asked to tell a tale, and he was stalling (so as to extricate himself) saying: “When I was in the forest earlier today, and I was cutting wood, I hung my story bag on a tree and I forgot it!” It supposedly meant that he had all the folk tales he knows stored in a special bag, and without the bag he could not remember them. But when his interviewer persevered, he finally relented and put his little finger<sup>14</sup> to his ear. He seemed to listen to what the finger was whispering and finally said: “All right then, my little finger remembers this one story, so I can tell it to you.”)

Studying folk verbal magic, we are in a world where folk tales can be stored in a bag, forgotten in a forest, and then found in a little finger, whose miraculous ability and willingness to talk seems to be taken completely for granted. Thus, the words of a folk tale seem to take on a character of physical objects that can be stored in a bag. They can be heard, but also experienced through other senses: especially sight and touch. “When the hearing and touch merge, aural sensations gain physical properties, they can, for example, be perceived as heavy...Haptic precession of auditory stimuli can mean that a word belonging to the order of sacral acoustics can become perceived in spatial terms: it can be lifted and laid down, summoned and banished” [Tokarska-Bakir 2000: 224, more broadly Tokarska-Bakir 2000: 244–246]. Such words, anchored in the matter are not inanimate: to the contrary, they appear to live with a life of their own, which is not wholly dependent on humans.

The motif of the physicality or corporeality of words and utterances can of course be found in many time periods and cultures. Aron Gurevich quotes several pertinent medieval anecdotes:

Caesarius of Heisterbach tells without marvelling what took place in a church in which priests sang loudly and without piety, “in a secular manner”: one cleric noticed a demon standing on high and gathering the voices of the singers into a large sack. And they thus “sang” a “sack full.” Around a monk who habitually dozed off in the monastery choir demons scurried in the form of pigs. With grunts they picked up the words of the psalms, devoid of grace,

that fell from the mouth of the sleepyhead [...]. Jacques de Vitry mentions a stupid peasant who thus imagined hymns. He went to a neighbouring town intending to buy some cantilenas, for the feast-day of his village's patron saint was approaching. A trickster sold him a sack full of choice canticles, but in fact he had filled it with wasps, which in the end repeatedly stung everybody gathered in front of the church [Gurevich 1988: 194–195, 254].

Another similar trope is that of frozen words, which crops up in folklore and literature of many nations and regions. Julian Krzyżanowski gives an example of this recurring motif:

A pilgrim lost his way in winter, amidst in the wilderness, amidst a rocky maze. Suddenly he saw a sable, scampering between the rocks. The pilgrim cried out: "That must be the way!" and he immediately froze solid because of the cold. When he melted in the spring, he noticed with astonishment that the shape of the words he uttered could be seen on the ground, each letter made of growing grass. He followed the trail of the words and found a way out of the maze [Krzyżanowski 1977: 646].

Incidentally, it is worth remembering that some of the semantic fields of 'speech' and 'thing' are etymologically connected. We know that the Polish word *rzecz* (a thing) originally meant 'speech, word' [SEBr: *Rzec, Rzecz*]. This meaning is still preserved in some Slavic languages (cf. Russian *reč'*, Slovak *reč*, Czech *řeč* – 'speech, language' [Vasmer: *Reč'*]). This linguistic evidence is a telling proof that in Slavic culture, there existed a strong connection between speech and objects. Their concept of magical speech-action left traces that are visible to this day, permeated in the languages' semantic structure.<sup>15</sup>

Songs and fairy-tales packed into sacks,<sup>16</sup> words that appear on the ground, written in grass [...]. Words truly have a life of their own, which is "identical with the existence of the thing they denote" [Tokarska-Bakir 2000: 150]. As I said before, the life of words can be independent of the humans who utter them, and can even at times surprise the speakers. Words can also be dangerous:

The death would be announced in such a way that the inhabitants of the neighbouring houses on the left and on the right would notify those who lived in the next house. The news would thus travel clockwise and anticlockwise at the same time, and it had to make its way to every house in the village before sunset, because keeping such news to oneself overnight and not passing it on would bring misfortune [Biegeleisen 1930: 199].

The above custom shows that news of death can be "contagious," and that it is the most threatening at night – a time, when the demonic powers

of the other world are at their full potential. It can happen therefore that words that were supposed to communicate news of somebody's death can exhibit metonymical relationship to death itself. Informing about death, the words also bring death, they can besmirch the recipients of the news and bring misfortune to the their families. After all, "magic is a system in which cause-effect relationships and symbolic relationships overlap" [Buchowski 1993: 65]. The belief recorded by Biegeleisen is an apt illustration of the mechanism of magic speech-action, which is based on metaphorical and metonymical transformations, and on treating symbols as signals (and the other way round).

The possibility that words which are uttered can materialize lies at the foundation of many proverbs: *Speak of the wolf and the wolf is in the net* (*Wilka mienią, wilk w sieci*) [NKP, Wilk, Gadać, Słowo]; *What people say will come about* (*Co ludzie gadają, to i wygadają*) and optatives, such as *May your words turn into shit* (*Żeby się twoje słowo w gównno obróciło*) [NKP: Wilk, Gadać, Słowo] or *May your words turn into naught* (*Żeby się twoje słowo w co nie obróciło*; common saying). It is also the foundation of another belief, that "we should not speak to much of the dead, even if what we say is complimentary, because 'we do not want to summon them from their graves or to trouble them'" [LB 4: 377]. Words that are connected with evil spirits and curses – can – just as news of somebody's death, infect the world around with evil. Tarnished by contact with them, life itself weakens and dies, and is replaced with death. *He curses so bad that the grass withers* (*Klnie, aż trawa schnie*),<sup>17</sup> *Trees wither when he starts to curse* (*Drzewo by uschło, gdy pocznie przeklinać*) [NKP: Kląć] – these two sayings perfectly encapsulate this relationship. In order to protect oneself from the evil power of words one can try to send them outside the human world, "to the forest" (incidentally, similar thinking is employed in banishing disease). Again, proverbs and sayings provide clues to the underlying belief: *Chaj klony twaje na les iduć* (*May your curses go to the forest*) [SBH 2, 476]. The forest is also the place where *wieźmar's* [sorcerer's] words would go:

on puszcza swoje słowo z wiatrem, i ono idzie drogą i jak nikogo nie spotka, to wchodzi w drzewo, i ono uschnie. Jak w lesie drzewo suche, to w nim lichy [LB 1: 90].

(he casts his word on the winds, and the word wanders, and if it doesn't meet anyone, it will climb a tree, and the tree will wither. If you see a dry tree in the forest, it's because evil is lodged there.)

On a similar note, there is a belief recorded by Kolberg in Mazowsze region: "If somebody bites their tongue while eating, this means that

the next word that he was going to utter would have been a lie" ("Jeśli ktoś jedząc, w język się ugryzie, to znaczy, że pierwsze słowo, które miał powiedzieć, byłoby kłamstwem") [DWOK 42, *Maz* 7: 410]. Should we infer that even a word that is not yet uttered, that is unrealized also has some measure of material existence? It seems so. The word is there physically on the speaker's tongue, waiting to be said, but is prevented from being spoken by a higher power that guards the truthfulness of words and is responsible for their proper relation to physical reality. The power intervenes and the mendacious speaker bites his tongue (or even perhaps, he bites on the false word). It seems therefore that speaking (or refraining from speaking) is not always only an act of will of the speaker: words have a life of their own, and superhuman powers can intervene in speech.

Not only words (uttered or unuttered) can have physical presence. The same characteristic also seems to apply to thoughts: "If someone wants to say something, and they forget what they wanted to say, they need to come to the same place where the thought first crossed their mind, sit there, and it will jog their memory" ("Jak chce kto coś powiedzieć, a w tej chwili zapomni, powinien wrócić w owo miejsce, gdzie mu ta myśl przysłała do głowy, i usiąść na nim, to mu się zaraz przypomni") [DWOK 42, *Maz* 7: 409] (this belief is still popular today). So it seems that a thought that has "slipped your mind" can simply be found in the same place where it was "dropped." The image projected here is that of a thought that is left or misplaced, exactly like the stories, left in a sack hanging on a tree by one of Kolberg's interlocutors. The division between the verbal and the physical is also blurred in the case of enchantments, cast by an "evil eye," evil thought or insincere praise – such an enchantments can be physically cleansed off a person who is subjected to it: "In order to undo an evil enchantments, a mother should lick the baby's forehead three times, spitting out after each lick" ("Aby dziecku odczynić urok, matka zliznać mu go trzy razy powinna z czoła, i splunąć za każdym razem") [DWOK 26, *Maz* 3: 93].

Enchantments can therefore be licked off and spat out. Incidentally, this practice brings into focus the special properties of saliva in folklore, which is treated as an intermediary between the human body and the outside world. Similarly, words themselves can be rendered invalid by spitting them out:

There are ways in which one can protect oneself against the onerous consequences of oath-breaking. If during taking a false oath you have a small pebble in your mouth, and then you spit out the pebble, the oath will not bind you.

Likewise, if you have a coin secreted under your tongue, the false oath will stick to the coin, and the oath-breaker will not come to any harm [Koranyi 1927: 4].

The abovementioned protective measures against consequences of oath-breaking demonstrate that a word can indeed be treated as a physical object. Kolberg's collection contains one more interesting illustration of this worldview:

Kto przysięgał krzywo, ten nie przeżyje tego występku ani pół roku. Jest jednak sposób ująć śmierci po fałszywej przysiędze, a mianowicie potrzeba wsadzić sobie za pazuchę wróbla żywego i trzymać go tam, przystępując do wymawiania słów przysięgi; wyszedłszy zaś po odbytej przysiędze na dwór, wróbla wypuścić; ten wkrótce zdechnie, a człowiek ujdzie cało. Niektórzy zamiast wróbla kładą za pazuchę kawałek żelaza, bo i ono ma własność wciągania w siebie słów wymawianej fałszywie przysięgi [DWOK 34, *Chetm* 2: 160].

(If someone breaks a solemn oath, this person will die within six months. But there is one way in which an oath-breaker can protect himself. Namely, one should put a live sparrow on one's bosom under the shirt [*za pazuchę*] and hold it there when one takes the oath. Then, after taking the oath, one should go outside and set the sparrow free. The sparrow will soon die, but the man will live. Some people put an iron nugget under the shirt instead of a sparrow, because iron also has the power to absorb the words of a false oath.)<sup>18</sup>

As Thomas and Znaniecki put it:

"the animated and conscious thing" seems to be a category of the peasant's thinking in the same sense that the mere "thing" or "substance" is a category of scientific reasoning [...]. For the peasant, the word is not only a symbol, it is a self-existent being [...]. The attitude towards the word as an independent being exists. This fact we must fully recognize [Thomas, Znaniecki 1927: 209, 212].

The peasant's thinking sees words (spoken, intended or only thought) are substantive. If words have physical presence, then their utterance can lead to physical consequences. Van der Leeuw muses on this characteristic of words in the following passage:

The word determines possibilities. The word is an act, an attitude, a summons, an enactment of power. In every word there is something creative [...]. Every word is a spell: it awakens beneficial or threatening powers. Whoever utters a word, influences the word, but also puts himself in the harm's way. For this reason, names are both essential and dangerous [...]. The word has decisive power. Whoever utters words, puts powers in motion [van der Leeuw 1978: 448–449].

In a village called Huszcza, off Biała Podlaska, I have heard the following story:

Tu przed wojną do Częstochowy pielgrzymka jeździła, i moja mama pojechała z jedną kobietą. I była w ciąży ta kobieta, nie było jeszcze widać. I kaleki siedzieli przed kościołem, i na takiego garbusa ta mówi kobieta: "Ale to, Matko Boska, coż to za potwór!" I takie same dziecko urodziła! Takie samiuśkie! Miało garb wyżej głowy. "Co to za potwór, co to za potwór!" – to, niby, po prostu nazwała nie po ludzku, bo człowiek to nie potwór żaden. Pan Bóg tak [sprawił], żeby upamiętać, że nie można z kogoś zaszydzić, zaszyderować [18].

(Before the war, people from here would go on pilgrimages to Częstochowa. So one year my mother decided to go with one other woman. That woman was pregnant, but it didn't show yet. There were cripples sitting outside the church. So this woman saw a hunchback, and she says: "Sweet Mary, what a monster!" And when her time came, she gave birth to a baby that looked exactly like that hunchback! He was exactly the same! His hunch was so high, it stuck above his head. "What a monster, what a monster!" – that's what she said about the cripple, and it was inhumane, because he was no monster, but a man like everyone else. God willed it so to show that you shouldn't mock or jeer at people.)

This story is yet another proof of the maxim: "Whoever utters words, puts powers in motion." Words have the power to become embodied, to summon the objects they denote or to make them flesh – just as if the connection between the signified and the signifier was a physical bond. We are dealing with what Tambiah would term a "metaphorical transfer." The phenomenon was also described by Jakobson and Waugh:

Sound and meaning prove to be not *thései*, but *phýsei* – inalienably interconnected for the naïve members of any extant speech community. In defiance of the scholastic slogan claiming the arbitrariness of verbal signs, a native German is prone to believe at heart that the Frenchmen are silly when they name "ein Pferd *cheval*" [Jakobson, Waugh 2002: 182].

But the special relationship between the signifier and the signified is not a full explanation. In the cases that I am most interested in, the agential power of words is only revealed in specific conditions and circumstances.

This is the essence of the story I quoted above. Its heroine, the pregnant woman, is on a pilgrimage (a form of sacred time-space) and her unwitting remark is a form of blasphemy (a pilgrim should be pure of heart). She offends the cripple sitting by the church wall (therefore, a person singled out by God, marked by his suffering, who is furthermore sitting

in a sacred place). The situation related by my interlocutor is therefore specially imbued with the sacred on multiple levels.

There is one more significant factor in this story, to which the interlocutor alluded in her own comments on the situation. “what she said about the cripple [...] was inhumane, because he was no monster, but a man like everyone else.” The folk philosophy of speech implies that every object has its own proper name, and therefore ethics demands that these proper names should be used. **You should call every person and thing by their proper names.** A man is *a man*. If you call a man something else, you shouldn’t be surprised that there will be consequences. ‘God will remind you that you shouldn’t mock others or jeer at them.’<sup>19</sup> The pregnant woman used the word *monster* to refer to somebody who was not a monster – and therefore this name was a misnomer, it could not harmoniously merge with the person it was purported to describe and thus hung in the void. But because empty words cannot exist in the folk worldview, and every uttered word creates its signified, the word *monster* somehow created a real monster which it could denote. The birth of a hunchbacked baby becomes a lesson to the mother, and a punishment for her sin. We may infer that she sinned not only against the hunchback in question, but also against God, and perhaps against the very language itself. You should not break the rules concerning the relationship between words and objects. The principles of folk ethic of speech are rooted in the structure of language. One could almost say, in the magical structure of language.

Bystroń recorded:

It is common to avoid using the word *frog* [*żaba*] for two separate reasons: one is fear that children will stop growing and will forever stay small like little frogs. And the second reason is fear of an illness called *the frog*. Peasants in Kujawy think that if you address a child by an endearment *little frog* [*żabuchna*] or if you simply use the word *frog* or *froggy* [*żabka*] around a child, the child will cease to grow. It is generally inadvisable to utter this word in front of small children [Bystroń 1980: 210].<sup>20</sup>

The reasons behind this taboo seem straightforward enough: if you call a child *frog*, the child will take on some of the properties of the frog: it will start to look like it.<sup>21</sup> Tambiah calls this process “persuasive transferring” [Tambiah, 1973: 212]. Incidentally, the prohibition against using the word *frog* is curiously widespread and pervasive, as during my research in Białystok region I heard the following admonition:

Nie można mówić *żaba* na dzieci, mądry człowiek tego nie powie. Nie wolno tak mówić, bo to dzieciak; jaka on tam *żaba*! *Żaba to żaba, a dzieciak to dzieciak* [21].

(You should not call children *frogs*, a wise person would never do this. You shouldn't do it, because a child is a child, and not a frog. **A frog is a frog, and a child's a child.**)

The above remark is an apt illustration of the direct relationship between words and objects. Roman Jakobson commented on it in the following words:

only for a detached, alien onlooker is the bond between the *signans* and the *signatum* a mere contingency, whereas for the native user of the same language this relation is a necessity...The Swiss-German peasant woman who allegedly asked why cheese is called *fromage* by her French countrymen – “Käse is doch viel natürlicher!” – displayed a much more Saussurian attitude than those who assert that every word is an arbitrary sign instead of which any other could be used for the same purpose [Jakobson 1965: 25].

Let us emphasize here, that the aforementioned prohibition concerns not only the act of naming (“don't call children *frogs*”). In the passage quoted above, Bystroń shows that its application is broader: “It is generally inadvisable to utter this word **in front of** small children”. The same prohibition is recorded by Karłowicz: “The word *frog* must not be used if there is a small child in the house” [SGPKarł: *Kicka, Kiczka*].<sup>22</sup> Karłowicz follows this admonition with examples of euphemisms that can be used instead: *kicka* and its variant form *kiczka* (meaning literally ‘the one that jumps’ [SGPKarł: *Kicka, Kiczka*]).<sup>23</sup> It seems therefore that the agential power, the power to summon lies primarily in the true name, **the proper name** denoting the person or object.<sup>24</sup> It seems that this is how words function within the folk speech-action: as if they were actual proper names for objects they denote. It is connected to the non-transparency of the linguistic sign and is rooted in treating the signifier as a physical entity with a life of its own, and not only as a signpost, directing one's attention towards the signified. Such non-transparent signs – *indexical symbols* – are precisely proper names: objects they denote are merged with words themselves. The words and objects have a metonymic connection. As Leszek Kołakowski argues: “in some circumstances [...] signs cease to fulfil their representational function and instead they **become what they denote**” [Kołakowski, 1991: 54; emphasis AE]. The same characteristic of names is described by Martin Buber:

for a man given to magical thinking, the “true” name of a person or object is not only just a word, it is the essence of the said person or object, a distillate of their being, which, when uttered, as if re-creates them **once more** [cited in: Tokarska-Bakir 2000: 370–371; original emphasis].

So, the word *frog* in the sources that I have quoted above serves referential and evocative functions. It both denotes an object and summons it. But the euphemisms do not have this quality: they are not true (proper) names. Being circumlocutory and indirect (e.g., *kicka* – ‘the one that jumps’) they are merely descriptive and do not have the power to evoke. This is after all their function: they are created not to evoke the object in question, but to identify it in a safe way. Describing is not creating. A paraphrase is devoid of the power of the original, the power of the proper name. Izutsu thus summarizes the ramifications of this phenomenon:

Whenever and wherever man is moved by the desire to get possession of a specified piece of reality he gives it a name; the name once fixed, he can at will conjure up the thing designated and exercise over it whatever control he pleases by simply uttering the name [...] to primitive type of consciousness [...] to name, or to know the name of, a thing is [...] to grasp the very living soul of that object. He who hold sway over words [...] exercises thereby over the beings something of the creative sovereignty of God [Izutsu 1956: 50–51].

The power of naming, linked to the palpable connection between the name and the object (a relation of contiguity between the signifier and the signified) can lead to such consequences as these we have seen in the story about the pregnant woman who uttered the word *monster*. The woman uttered the word unwittingly, oblivious to the principles described above. The literature on the subject and the materials I have collected abound with similar examples, of which I am going to present just a handful.

Kiedyś, jak jechali na chrzest, po drodze do karczmy wstępowali, a potem w kościele mówili *chcę mary* – zamiast *wiary*. No i byli mary, upiory, chodzili nocną porą, po koniach jeździli. Ludzie pijani podawali dzieci do chrztu. Teraz akuratny człowiek musi zajechać, żeby wymawiał za księdzem jak trzeba, nie *zmoraś*, tylko *zdrowaś Mario* [8].

(People were going to church to baptize a baby, and they stopped in a roadside inn. So then in church they were a bit soused, and they said *This is our wraith [chcę mary]* instead of saying *This is our faith [chcę wiary]*. And thus a child would become a wraith, a ghoul, hurting horses at night. Or people would give a child to be baptized when they were tipsy. A godparent must be careful and must recite after the priest exactly what the priest says: *Hail Mary (zdrowaś Mario)* and not *Ghost Mary (zmoraś Mario)*.<sup>25</sup>

A slip of the tongue, an unconscious omission – minor mistakes made unintentionally by the speaker can lead to grave consequences.

This widespread trope<sup>26</sup> demonstrates that, within the folk philosophy of speech, the evocative power of a non-transparent sign (as if an sign-index or indexical symbol) is independent of the speaker and belongs to the very fabric of language.

Some illustrations of the belief in the power of language border on the extreme: in some regions there are, for example, prohibitions against planting and sowing on any weekday in whose name there is the sound *r*<sup>27</sup> – because *r* is the first sound of the word *robak* (*worm*) [DWOK 3, *Kuj*: 94].<sup>28</sup> The right time for beginning, for setting in motion the mysterious process of the natural growth, is a special sacred moment. By the same token, it is a time which is especially threatened by evil powers who want to thwart it. One needs to be careful and guard against evil. Worms are probably biding their time waiting to devour the saplings and seedlings, so one needs to avoid any word that could be connected with them, in order not to summon them (metaphor=metonymy). As the proverb says, *When evil is silent, do not stir it* (*Złe, kiedy się uciszy, nie poruszaj*) [NKP: *Złe*].

And now let us come back to the belief that mistakes made by the godparents in their responses during christening can cause a child to become a wraith. It is important to note that this slip of the tongue does not happen in an everyday situation: it occurs during a religious rite, which becomes befouled, or even turns into a sacrilege, because the godparents are intoxicated. And being drunk, they are in the power of the devil. So who says *This is our wraith* and *Ghost Mary*? The slip of the tongue may be unintentional, but at the same time it is a serious trespass against the principles of language, against the equation of names with the objects they denote. Whoever changes the signifier, destroys the natural order of things.<sup>29</sup> So who can it be, if not the implacable enemy of God, one who endeavors to thwart God at every step? It seems that the real speaker of those words is therefore the devil, whom the incautious godparents let into their company when they decided to stop in an inn. Who else would have a stake in increasing the number of wraiths and ghosts?

Gurevich concurs:

In these stories the demons “take” a man at his word: he swears and mentions the devil, and immediately the latter appears. Is this the magic of the word so characteristic of archaic cultures? Perhaps. In any case, the devil only waits until he is summoned or his name is uttered by chance [Gurevich 1988: 189].<sup>30</sup>

This is the reasoning behind the folk proverbs: *Don't mention the devil at midnight* (*Nie wspominaj diabła o północy*) or *Don't call the wolf out of the woods* (*Nie wywołuj wilka z lasu*) or *Let's be quiet and let the devil sleep* (*Cicho, niech śpi lichy*) [NKP: *Diabeł, Licho*].

Jan Stanisław Bystroń also recorded a similar anecdote:

I remember that back at University, me and Tadeusz Lehr-Spławiński invented an interesting pastime. Namely, we would use all ways and means we could think of in order to force his servant, Wiktoria, to utter the word *devil*. Wiktoria was very devout and always referred to the devil as *he*. She thought it was sinful to use the word *devil* itself. So once, when I called on Tadeusz and found him not at home, I left a message for him, charging Wiktoria to repeat it to her master word for word. The message was *Mr Bystroń was here and went to the devil*. Wiktoria repeated it to Tadeusz with perfect accuracy, and thus she sinned for the first time in her life, to our great amusement [Bystroń 1980: 212].

We have demonstrated that calling an object or a person by its proper name causes them to appear, to materialise. It follows therefore that the power of a name can be consciously evoked by a person who knows how to do it. Descriptions of magical practices give numerous examples of such actions.

In Ukraine, people would strike their own heads with a stone three times, in some regions saying *kamen holova* [*stone head*] at each stroke, which seems to suggest a willingness to give to the head one of the characteristics of the stone, namely, its durability [KLS: 489].<sup>31</sup>

The name necessarily implies the thing signified. The person engaged in this practice can be sure that his/her head will now take on the durability of a stone and that it will be impervious to hurt, thanks to the twofold contact with the stone (the tactile contact: the stone touches the head, and the verbal contact: the word *stone* evokes the characteristics of the stone).

Conversely, evoking a proper name can also be a very effective method of removing unwanted spells:

Jeden włościanin z głębi Litwy objeżdżał wózkami po kraju, opowiadając, że dzieci jego i cała rodzina przemienieni zostali w wilkołaków na weselu, gdy zapomniawszy się, w dniu piątkowym tańczyli. Kto by więc ujrzał w polu wilka – prosił stroskany ojciec – niech wymieni imiona nieszczęśliwych, przeżegna go i zmówi pacierz, a wilkołak przemieni się w człowieka [ES: *Wilkołak*].

(A peasant from the depths of Lithuania was traveling around the country in a wagon, telling all and sundry that his children and family were all transformed into werewolves at a wedding, because they forgot that it was a Friday and indulged in dancing. So, the disconsolate father implored, whoever would see a wolf should call the names of his family members, cross oneself and say a prayer, and (if the wolf should prove to be the werewolf in question), the beast will transform back into a man.)

This special property of names can also be used if one needs to guess some information. Gleaning the right name will solve the mystery:

Komu zrobi się chrosta na języku i piecze go przez chwilę, tego ktoś obgaduje; należy sobie wspomnieć taką osobę, a jeżeli się ją rzeczywiście odgadnie, chrosta znika i ból ustaje [Gonet 1896: 332].

(Whoever has a pimple on the tongue, it is because people are gossiping about him. He should utter the names of the people he suspects, and, once he guesses right, the pimple will vanish and the pain will subside.)<sup>32</sup>

And similarly:

Jak co zginie, by zgubę znaleźć i złodzieja, jedna osoba utkwii nożyczki z góry w sito, a drugie dwie osoby podpierają uszka nożyczek drugimi palcami prawej ręki. Jedna z nich mówi: “Święty Pawle i Piotrze, wyjaw tę zgubę!” – i wymienia imiona osób podejrzanych. Więc jeśli trafi na imię złodzieja, wówczas sito odwraca się lub też odpada [DWOK 42, *Maz* 7: 412].

(Should something get stolen, you can learn the name of the thief in the following way: one person should thrust shears into a sieve. Two people should prop the shears handles with the index fingers of their right hands. One of them should say “Saint Peter and Saint Paul, reveal to us who stole it!” (“*Święty Pawle i Piotrze, wyjaw tę zgubę!*”) and the other person should recite the names of the suspects. Once the name of the thief is uttered, the sieve will overturn or fall to the ground.)

There is yet another widespread custom which is predicated upon naming, that of baptizing “little souls.” Such “baptism” is a creational act, and as such can change the existential status of the souls of unbaptized children (called “little souls” (*duszyczki*)). The souls of babies who died without baptism wander aimlessly in the intermediary zone between the earth and heaven, but after being baptized, they become fully fledged individuals, and can enter heaven:

Gwiazdy spadające to duszyczki dzieci “nieokrzconych.” Dobry uczynek zrobi ten, kto ujrzawszy taką gwiazdę, zawoła: “Adamie albo Ewo, ja ciebie krzczę” [Pleszczyński 1892: 101].

(Falling stars are the little souls of unbaptized children. It is a good deed if, upon seeing a falling star, one should say “Adam or Eve, I baptise thee.)

Chłop słyszy ptaszki wołające “chrztu, chrztu,” chrzci je słowami: “Jeśliś pan, niech ci będzie Jan, a jeśliś panna – niech ci będzie Hanna,” ptaszki, tj. wybawione dusze niechrzczonych dzieci, odlatują z podziękowaniem [PBL 2: 205].<sup>33</sup>

(A peasant hears little birds crying “baptise us, baptise us,” and he baptises them saying: “If you’re a man (*pan*), I name you Jan, and if you are a maiden

(*panna*), I name you Hanna.” Upon hearing this, the birds – i.e., the souls of previously unbaptized children fly away feeling thankful.)

To nas i ksiądz uczył [...]: Idziesz, mówi, drogą czasami, czy gdzieś przechodzisz, i tam płacze, mówi, dusza płacze, dziecko płacze. Ona nieochrzczona. Wtenczas stań i powiedz: “Duszo, czego potrzebujesz, może chrztu? Jeżeli jesteś chłopiec, niech ci będzie imię Krystopiec, jeżeli dziewczyna, niech ci będzie imię Krystyna. W imię Ojca i Syna i Ducha Świętego, amen, a ja ciebie chrzczę.” I, mówi, przestanie płakać. Bo to ktoś zamordował dziecko nieochrzczone, i to dziecko prosi chrztu. Ot, tak [50].

(So the priest taught us [...]. He told us that sometimes when you are walking on the road, there might be a soul crying, a child crying. This would be an unbaptized soul. So then you should stop and say: “O soul, what do you need? Do you wish to be baptized? If you are a boy (*chłopiec*), I name you Christopher (*Krystopiec*), and if you’re a girl (*dziewczyna*), I name you Christine (*Krystyna*). In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, Amen, I baptise you.” And then the soul will stop crying. Likely, somebody has murdered a baby, and this baby craves baptism.)

Above, we have discussed the properties of proper names or “true names” of people and objects. Within the mythical worldview, which is characterized by “blurred distinctions between subject and object, word (name) and object (physical entity), the *signans* and the *signatum*, the whole and the part, the one and the many, the temporal and spatial relationships” [Tomicki 1987: 246]. It is a world in which “one is all and all is one.” Thus perceived, the proper names seem to join the symbolic and indexical aspects of a sign and its denotative and nominative functions. According to Peirce, “The indexical relation between *signans* and *signatum* consists in their factual, existential contiguity” [quoted in: Jakobson 1971: 700]. **A child called a frog is one.** It happens here and now, in the moment when the word is spoken, because “an index has the being of PRESENT experience [...]. The value of an index is that it assures us of positive fact” [Peirce 1933: 448, quoted in: Jakobson 1977: 1032, original emphasis]. Jakobson continues his analysis of Peirce’s theory in *Quest for the Essence of Language*:

Peirce’s concern with the different ranks of co-assistance of the three functions in all three types of signs, and in particular his scrupulous attention to the indexical and iconic components of verbal symbols, is intimately linked with his thesis that “the most perfect of signs” are those in which the iconic, indexical and symbolic characters “are blended as equally as possible” [Jakobson 1965: 26].

The “magical” sign should therefore be perceived as tripolar: the symbolic, the iconic, and the indexical. Such a sign would therefore refer to

the signified in accordance with the usual semantic rules, would represent it in accordance with the principle of similarity, and would also be connected to it by a relationship of existential proximity. Therefore, if we wanted to show “the most perfect of signs” using Ogden and Richards’ triangle of reference, we would have to reimagine this triangle as a sphere in which all the three elements: the subject, the referent and the designation are merged into one.

Here, classification (categorizing an object into a class) can be equaled with nomination: naming specific objects, calling the objects by their true names. By calling a child *frog*, or even uttering the word *frog* in the child’s hearing, we are using the true name of the object, therefore pointing to a particular, specific entity. *Żaba* (*frog*) as opposed to *kiczka* (*jumper*, the one that jumps) is not a predicate but an index, and also a vocative. The true name indicates and evokes. The folk culture is aware of these properties of names, and for this reason uttering the word *frog* becomes a taboo. It also contains a contingency measure if the word should be used inadvertently:

This word should not be uttered in the presence of a small child. If however someone says it, the mother or other carer can immediately undo the spell by saying *garlic under the tongue* [*czosnek pod językiem*]. If the counter-measure is not taken, the child will have ulcers inside the mouth, or the tongue will be tethered to the floor of the mouth, in the shape of the frog, and the child will lisp [Bystroń 1980: 210].

Every utterance of a word causes the evocation of the object. Saying “P” evokes P’. The magical sign summons the object by the power of the semiotic convention. Its reference – the *signatum* – becomes also its effect. The magical language is after all “indexical” – it not so much signifies as refers. Speaking is not used to describe the world or reflect upon it, but repeatedly recreates it anew, and establishes order. Incidentally, the goal of “describing the world” is by definition redundant, as the relationships between words and objects are already obvious, well-known and well-defined, and for this reason they do not need to be further explored or questioned. The magical language directly influences and changes the world. After all, the language “is a mode of action, and not an instrument of reflection” [Malinowski 1923: 312]. Where there is no juxtaposition between subject and object, there is also no room for description or reflection. Let us remember that “‘religious Weltanschauung’ is never merely a ‘point of view,’ but is always a **participation**” [van der Leeuw 1978: 577, original emphasis].

The imperative function is crucial for magical speech – I would even venture to say that it is perhaps its basic principle. The evocative

function of naming, discussed above, can also be seen as an imperative function – every name used in magic is also a vocative. And a vocative implies an imperative. Magical speech (that is speech-action) is always tantamount to saying *be so and so* (whether I say *stone head*, and when people say *O oak tree, my oak tree, make what I eat good for me* (*Dębie, dębie, daj, żeby było zdrowe, co jest w gębie*) [Kotula 1974: 71] or when I swear: *Go to hell!*). In truth, the magical speech has a vocative-imperative structure.<sup>34</sup> What is more, the magical speech-action does not involve only summoning objects: it seems to be the very condition of the objects' existence. If something is not named, it does not exist. There is no object without a name. A folk riddle asks: "What is the one thing that God, water, man and everything else cannot do without?" ("Bez czego się Pan Bóg, woda, człowiek, w ogóle wszystko nie obejdzie?") And the answer to the riddle is "Without a name" ("Bez imienia") [the riddle recorded by Gonet 1896: 230; quoted in: Tomicki 1981: 31].

So far, we have looked for the traces of the vocative-imperative linguistic structures in names, and therefore – in words where that feature of magis speech action is present in a condensed form. But how does it look in longer utterances? The perusal of sources and my own interviews have yielded the following examples:

Zaraza w postaci niewiasty w białe szaty przybranej na wysokim wozie o dwóch kołach objeżdża wiejskie osady i ulice miasta. Gdy przed dom który przybyła, pukając zapytywała: "Co robicie?" Kiedy odpowiedziano: "Nic nie robimy, tylko Boga chwalimy" – ponurym dodawała głosem: "Chwalcież go na wieki" – i w tym domu zaraza nie panowała. Gdy zaś wieczorem gdzie przybyła, a na zapytanie: "Czy śpicie?" odpowiedziano: "Śpimy," wtedy rzekła: "Śpijcież na wieki!" I całe wymarło domostwo [DWOK 42, *Maz* 7: 342].

(Pestilence takes the shape of a woman, dressed in a white gown. She drives through towns and villages in a high wagon. When she passes a house, she stops the wagon, gets up, knocks at the door and asks "What are you doing?" If people inside answer "Praising God" then she would reply in a glum tone "And so you shall," and people inside would not succumb to the plague. But sometimes she was traveling in the evening, and she would ask people: "Are you asleep?" and when people replied "Yes, we are," she would say "So now you will sleep for all eternity" and all people inside that house would die.)

In the example above, the imperative comes from a demonic presence, a personification of pestilence. Words spoken by a supernatural being (both negative and positive) become a reality every time, with no exceptions. In fact, all utterances of such a powerful figure become reality: it does

not involve only indicatives but also simple statements. Below we will discover further proof that the special status of the speaker can imbue utterances with power:

Święty Wojciech to był ksiądz. On miał wielki przywilej od Boga. On mówił, i potrafiło się tego dnia tak stać [1].

(Saint Adalbert was a priest, and thus he received a great gift from God. Whatever he said, would happen on that day without fail.)

Koń chodził po trawie, jak Matka Boska z Panem Jezusem uciekała. Pan Jezus chciał, żeby koń podwiózł ich; koń odmówił, że się jeszcze nie najadł. I powiedział Pan Jezus mu: "Żebyś się nigdy nie najadł!" I faktycznie koń się nigdy nie naje, dzień i noc żre. Potem spotkali osiołka i osiołek im nie odmówił [8].

(When Virgin Mary and Jesus were on the run, they saw a horse in a pasture. Jesus wanted the horse to give them a ride, but the horse refused, telling them that he is hungry and needs to eat some more. So Jesus told him: "May you never be full!" And so it is: a horse has to eat and eat all day and all night. And later Virgin Mary and Jesus met a donkey, and the donkey helped them.)<sup>35</sup>

Kiedys jak Matka Boska uciekała z Panem Jezusem, schowała się pod osinę, a ona zaczęła się trząść. Matka Boska mówi jej: "Będziesz się całe życie trzęsła, czy będzie wiatr, czy nie." I dlatego osina się całe życie trzęsie. I schowali się pod leszczynę, ona gałązki opuściła do dołu i ich okryła. Dlatego leszczyna jest taka niska jak parasole [9].

(When Virgin Mary and Jesus were on the run, they hid under an aspen tree and the aspen started trembling. And so Virgin Mary told the aspen: "And now you'll be trembling all your life, whether there's wind or not." And that's why we now have trembling aspen. So later they hid under a hazel tree, and it hid them willingly, lowering its branches. And this is why now hazel trees are short and look like umbrellas.)<sup>36</sup>

As the stories above testify, the words of Virgin Mary and Jesus, who are divine beings, are so potent that their effects are permanent. They can shape the reality and put order into the world. Spoken in the mythical time of beginnings by the mythical creators, these words have the power to create. Folk imagination includes countless saints in the ranks of creators and it contains a belief that "the curse of a saint is more influential than that of an ordinary person. Thus, nobody in or from the town Gniezno can ever make a fortune since St Adalbert cursed the town more than nine centuries ago" [Thomas, Znaniecki 1927: 262].<sup>37</sup>

But words of ordinary people can be powerful too:

Na Zwiastowanie przeważnie bociany przylatują, to już dzieci krzyczą: "Bocian, kiszka, przynieś mi braciszka!" Matka ile się nakłęła! [2].

(Around the feast of Annunciation the storks usually come, and children shout to them “O stork-bowel, bring me a brother” [“Bocian, kiszka, przynieś mi braciszka!”] My mother was so furious at this that she cursed and cursed!”)

The children’s custom of ‘asking’ a stork is much more widespread than the Podlasie region from which the above testimony comes.<sup>38</sup> The most perplexing element of the reported utterance is the compound *stork-bowel* (*bocian-kiszka*).<sup>39</sup> It would be tempting to assume that the word *bowel* here is used just as verbal padding (and in order to provide a rhyme for the word ‘brother’ (*kiszka/braciszka*)), but such an explanation undoubtedly robs the quoted utterance of much of its interest. Let us therefore try and explain the significance of the term *kiszka* (*bowel*).

I believe that the word can be interpreted in two ways. One interpretation is very straightforward, it implies that the word *kiszka*, recorded in Podlasie, is a corruption of *kliczka* (‘a clacker, one that clacks’). After all, records from Kielce region give us a similar utterance with the word *kliczka*: ‘Storky, you clacker, bring me a brother!’ (*Bocuś, kliczka, przynieś mi braciszka!*). *Kliczka* is clearly defined as ‘one who clacks, who makes a clacking noise’. Karłowicz [SGPKarł: *Klek*] even lists the word *klek* (clack) as a synonym for stork, and Brückner’s dictionary [SEBr: *Klicz*] contains the entry *klik* (click) which is defined as ‘a cry’ (cf. Belarusian *klikać* – ‘to call’).

Whether the word *kiszka* (*bowel*) found its way into the children’s rhyme as a corruption of the original form *kliczka* (clacker), or whether we are dealing with an independent incantation that originally used the word *kiszka*, it is important to stress that the word itself has obvious phallic connotations: in European folklore, a stork is a bird bringing babies, and thus a symbol of fertility<sup>40</sup> (and incidentally, according to some folk tales, a stork is really a magically transformed human).<sup>41</sup> This association is confirmed by some meanings of the lexeme *kiszka* (*bowel*), which can be stretched to denote all long objects; there are also some suggestions that the word *kiszka* can be an euphemism for *phallus*.<sup>42</sup>

Thus, the power invoked in the incantation is a stork, a giver (or bringer) of life, a stork who clacks. This attribute of storks seems closely related to their role as a symbol of life and fertility because clacking (just as any noise or sound) in the folk system of binary oppositions is situated on the side of life and is the opposite of death and silence.

Thus, the double vocative *Bocian-kiszka!* (*O stork-bowel!*) can be seen as a magical invocation. If we call the stork both by the bird’s proper name and by the term *bowel*, we are invoking it twice, but every vocative has its own separate function. The word *bocian* is a proper name, which serves as an evocation (the history of magic consistently predicates that the knowl-

edge of a proper name gives the speaker power over the object or person in question). But the second name, *kiszka*, is not a proper name, but rather a paraphrase, a description. Thus the double vocative consists of an index (the proper name) and its description (a grammar structure that describes the object's attributes: *you who clack*). Thus the invocation serves to call on the stork and fully describe its power, and the stork is summoned and needs to obey. The speaker proves that she knows the name of the object and its attributes, that she knows the secret principles of its operation.<sup>43</sup> Magic speech is only possible when the speaker knows the proper names of things and is always, at its core, a spell. Whoever invokes objects or beings by their proper names forces them to come to him, or to take shape.

And whoever conjured a power (and thus subjected it to their will), can command it. For this reason, in the abovementioned formula of stork invocation, the next word after the apostrophe is an imperative: *bring me!* (*a brother*). Thus, one can say that semantically, such vocative-imperative structure of conjurations is tantamount to pronouncing "o power, make it so and so." The speaker of such a spell must every time specify the power that is invoked (identified and characterized, or magically named, that is conjured) and to give it a specific task. The basic formula (*O power, make it...!*) must be filled with specifics. In the example above, the specific command that the stork should obey is "so that I have a brother."

After this in-depth analysis of the stork conjuration it is easier to understand the mother's reaction ("My mother was so furious at this that she cursed and cursed!" [2]). Perhaps the mother is afraid or unwilling to get pregnant again, and now her children have invoked a magical power,<sup>44</sup> they have bound it to their wills. The new baby brother will come. So the unhappy mother "curses and curses" in desperation, wishing to avoid the inevitable.

But taking back one's words (and especially undoing a spell) is an impossible task. Our study of folk speech magic demonstrates that the word and the object it denotes are bound in an absolute and irreversible way, which is independent of human volition:

Opowiadali ludzie, że jeden trzy razy sąsiada spalił i potem pokutował [po śmierci]. Przyszedł do tego, co go spalił, i mówi, żeby mu tamten wybaczył, to przestanie pokutować. Ale tamten odpowiada: "Jakbyś mnie raz spalił, to bym ci wybaczył, jakbyś mnie dwa razy spalił, to też bym ci wybaczył, ale żeś mnie trzy razy spalił, to ty idź do diabła i mi głowy nie zawracaj!" On tego nie chciał, ale jak to powiedział, to jak się wiatr nie zerwie, diabeł przyleciał i tego pokutującego zabrał [8].

(People said that there was a man who burned down his neighbour's house three times and then had to atone until he died. He came to the neighbour

whose house he burned and asked for forgiveness. But the neighbour told him: "If you only burned me once, I would forgive you. Even if you burned me twice, I would still forgive you. But you burned my house three times! So now don't beg me for forgiveness, go to hell and stop pestering me!" He didn't mean for this to happen, but once he said it, wind rose, and the devil came on its wings, and took the arsonist with him to hell.)

We know how that in magic repeating a gesture or a formula three times has a special significance. Similarly, committing the same sin three times carries an especially heavy punishment – eternal damnation with no possibility of appeal. The wronged farmer cannot offer forgiveness, even if he wanted to. It is a significant moment: it appears that the words uttered by the wronged neighbour (perhaps even unwittingly) serve as instruments of God's justice. The highest power, guarding the order of the word, uses the words said by the man in order to bring a sinner to justice.

Words can become reality, and thus serve the cause of justice:

Pewien gospodarz był przez siedem lat wilkołakiem, zamieniony w taką postać przez czarownicę. Wrócony do ludzkiego kształtu, gdy skończył mu się czas przemiany, wraca nocą do domu i woła żonę. Siedem lat zmieniło wiele. Z chałupy wybiegł z widłami jego dawny parobek, obecnie mąż gospodyni. Uderzony tym nieszczęściem, zawołał wniebogłosy: "O, czemuż nie jestem dalej wilkołakiem!" I w tej chwili przemienił się znowu i w wilczym kształcie pożarł dziecko gospodyni z drugiego małżeństwa, ją samą kąsając śmiertelnie [Ślupecki 1987: 89].

(There was a farmer who was turned into a werewolf by a witch for seven years. When he became human again, he came back home, he stood in front of his own house and called his wife. But seven years is a long time. So the door opened and his former field hand emerged, with a pitchfork in his hand. It turned out that now he was married to the man's wife. Struck by his misfortune, the man cried out: "I wish I were a werewolf still!" And in a blink of an eye, he was changed again. As a werewolf, he ate his wife's baby by her second husband and bit his wife to death.)

Earlier we talked about the substantiality of the word that is spoken, intended, or even thought. Now, talking about the agential power of words, we should also address the issue of words that are merely thought:

Diabłów może czarownica zadać np. w wódce. Toteż, kto się od tego chce uchronić, winien przed wypiciem wódki przeżegnać się lub pomyśleć o krzyżu świętym, a natychmiast dno szklanki wyleci i wódka razem z diabłami rozleje się [DWOK 3, *Kuj* 1: 100].

(A witch can make you swallow a devil, serving them for example in a glass of vodka. In order to safeguard oneself, one should cross oneself before

drinking, or at least think about the holy cross: then the bottom of the glass will fall off, and the vodka with devils will spill.)

Kobieta brzemienna jeśli o co prosi, nie można jej odmówić, bo odmawiającemu wszystko szczury i myszy zjadłyby. Jest jednak na to sposób, gdy taka kobieta o co prosi, a nie chce jej ktoś tego uczynić; jeśli nie wypada głośno powiedzieć, to przynajmniej myśleć te słowa: "Moje chusty (bielizna) w twojej skrzyni" – to wtenczas nie temu, kto odmówił, lecz proszącej myszy szkody narobią [DWOK 42, *Maz* 7: 392].

(If a pregnant woman asks for something, one should not refuse her. If one refuses a pregnant woman, mice and rats will eat all possessions of such a man. But there is one way by which one can refuse with impunity: one can say (or at least think) a phrase "My sheets are in your chest." Then mice will eat things belonging to the pregnant woman and not to the person whom she asked for a favour.)<sup>45</sup>

All the above-mentioned examples of agential power of words were connected with the *sacrum*: a stork as a bringer of fertility, a soul atoning for sins, a devil, a werewolf, and a witch: all these addressees are not ordinary mortals. However, words can have agential power also in everyday situations. An elderly woman in Podlasie told me the following story:

Była tu jedna panna, taka piękna! Tak mi się podobała, że ja zażyczyła: "Żeb ona była dla naszego Andrzejka! Jaki nasz Andrzejko dobry!" – chociaż ona miała narzeczonego. I jak tylko się zobaczyli, to się pożenili. Żeb moje słowa byli błogosławione! [19].

(A beautiful girl came here. I liked everything about her, so I made a wish: "Let her marry Andrew, my grandson. Our Andrew is such a great boy that he deserves her!" She was engaged to somebody else then, but once she met Andrew, that was it. They got married. It's as if my words were blessed!)

This situation is however only superficially mundane. Perhaps my interlocutor voiced her wish at a particularly auspicious time? Or perhaps her words truly had supernatural power? After all, they brought about an event that seemed impossible (as the girl was engaged to somebody else).

Using a language is a mystery, it is a magical activity. Men and women struggle to master it, and sometimes their mastery of language is not complete. The principles of language operation may seem obscure to the language users themselves. Sometimes a speaker's words can be blessed, sometimes – the opposite. As Gerardus van der Leeuw puts it: "a word is always a charm: it awakens power, either dangerous or beneficent" [van der Leeuw 1938: 404].



PART TWO.  
THE CURSE



### 3

## THE CONCEPTUAL *FIELD* OF “CURSING”<sup>1</sup>

Tatuś mój, mój tatuś mówił, i ksiądz na amboni, czy do spowiedzi pójdą, to krzyczał bardzo: “*przeklenstwo* nie błogosławienstwo! Weź różga i utnij go. Różga to się zagoi, a *przeklenstwo* nie błogosławienstwo.” I przeklinać nie można było [53].

(My daddy told me that the priest often hollered from the pulpit or in the confessional “*Cursing* is not blessing! Take a rod and strike him that offends you! The rod will heal, but *cursing* is not blessing.” And you could not curse.)

Tamta sąsiadka, która była zabrała ten plac, to chodziła do cerkwi i świece stawiała. U nich tak jest przyjęte, że każdy jeden, kto przychodzi i prosi tam, błaga kogoś czy *przeklina*, czy coś, to kupuje świece w cerkwi i stawia tam przed ikoną. [...] *Przeklinała* różnemi sposobami, o [44].

(There was this woman, our neighbour, who wanted to lay her hands on that plot of land. She went to the Orthodox church and lighted candles. For they have this tradition that whoever comes into the church and lights candles in front of an icon, can ask God for help in good or ill, can beg for help or curse. [...] And so she *curse*d in many different ways...)

– Bo to jak już dziewczyna idzie za mąż za tego, za ruska, to ksiądz przeciw, a jak ruska idzie dziewczyna za polaka, to też w cerkwi dzwonią dzwony. Dlaczego?

– A, bo już im się nie podoba, jakby *klęstwo*. Batuszce płacą i sługi dzwonią [51].

(– So when a Polish girl marries a Russian (Orthodox) guy, the priest might not like it. But when a Russian girl marries a Pole, they ring the bells in the Orthodox church.)

Why is that?

– They don’t like it, that’s why. They want to curse the girl. They pay the Orthodox priest and he orders the bells to be rung.)

Ale ot Sybylia – ona już wiedziała. Nawet tam drzewo było, które na krzyż... było podobrano gdzie to w budowie, ono nigdzie nie szło. Mówili, że to przekłete drzewo. Rzucili na rzekę Cyndron i przechodzili po kładce z tego krzyża. A już Sybylia przechodziła – całowała tą kładkę i przechodziła przez rzekę. Wiedziała, że to krzyż dla Pana Jezusa [54].

(Sybil the prophetess, she knew about it. There was a tree that was only fit to be made into a cross, it wasn't fit to be anything else. They said the tree was *cursed*. But they cut the tree and used it to make a bridge across the brook Kidron. Many people crossed the bridge made from the cross-tree. But prophetess Sybil, when she was crossing, she would always kiss the wood. She knew this would be used to make a cross for Lord Jesus.)<sup>2</sup>

– Ale zrazu, oj wiedziałem, w jakim to roku, zrazu zebrali się kardynały. [...] Zebrali się i oni *klatwa* taka dali, znaczy, że nie żenić się. No i od tego tak i poszło.

To tylko na księży taka *klatwa* była?

– Tylko na księży, na batiuszków nie [66]

(– And so all cardinals gathered and they put a curse on all priests so that they would not marry. That's how it started.)

So the curse was only put on priests?

– Yes, only on Catholic priests, not Orthodox.)

It is clear from the quotations above that the word “curse” can be used to describe a range of different activities and phenomena. In Polish, the semantic field of curse contains such activities as wishing somebody ill (by thinking ill, or by voicing one's wishes, as well as by performing some magical activities or rites), somebody, holding somebody obliged or swearing an oath. The concentration of polysemy and synonymy is so intense that it can almost seem impenetrable. Most lexemes in the semantic field of *curse* are in fact ambiguous: *kląć* (to curse) means ‘to put a curse on somebody/something’, but also ‘to imprecate? berate, to swear’ (*złorzeczyć, wymyślać*). The reflexive verb *kląć się* means ‘to swear an oath’ (*przysięgać*). Another related collocation is: *kląć kogo* – ‘to beseech/implore somebody’. The noun *przekleństwo* (a curse) means also ‘anathema’ and ‘a slur, a term of abuse’, and the noun *zaklęcie* (a spell) can also mean ‘a magic formula’, ‘an entreaty’ or ‘an oath’ (in the reflexive form *zaklęcie się*). The relations of synonymy exist not only between the derivatives of *to curse* (*kląć*) such as *kląć, zakląć, skląć, przeklinać* (‘to imprecate? berate, to swear’) or the nominal forms: *klątwa, przekleństwo* and *wyklęcie* (an anathema), and also between non-related words such as *przeklinać, złorzeczyć* (to inveigh), *wymyślać* (to accuse), *pomstować* (to rail against something), *tajać* and *rugać* (both meaning to scold), *bluzgać*

(*to holler*). Another strand of synonymous verbs includes *zaklinać się* (*to pledge oneself*) – *przysięgać* (*to swear*) – *zarzekać się* (*to promise*) – *zaręczać* (*to vow*) – *bożyć się* – *zadusiować się*. The same relation of synonymy can also be noticed among non-related nouns: *klątwa* (*a curse*) – *anatema* (*an anathema*) – *ekskomunika*; *przekleństwo* (*a curse, swearing*) – *obelga*, *wyzwisko* (both meaning *abuse*) – *inwektywa* (*an insult*).

An attempt to impose order upon this broad and chaotic field would require a systematic and in-depth synchronic and diachronic analysis. Such an analysis lies regrettably beyond the scope of my monograph.<sup>3</sup> Below I will offer some remarks about the semantic field of *curse* in Polish. My analysis is in no way comprehensive: its goals are purely practical. In the maze of many related words that form the semantic field of *curse* in Polish, I would like to indicate which ones are the most pertinent for my research because they are connected to the folk ritual which is the subject of my research. With this objective in mind, I will now endeavor to present the polysemic and synonymic relationships within the semantic field in question. I hope that this chapter will lead us closer to the understanding what “the curse” means within the context of the folk culture.

In my discussion, I am going to use Polish language dictionaries na których podstawie będą przytaczane przykłady użycia, jak również eksplikacje omawianych leksemów. Jako dodatkowy materiał posłużą przykłady z rozmów, przeprowadzonych w czasie badań terenowych. As I have stated before, I am interested primarily in the synchronic image of the semantic field of *curse*. I am mostly going to rely on modern dictionaries, but occasionally I may resort to older dictionaries in order to provide historical context. The reliance on such limited material (dictionaries and interviews) must necessarily lead to simplifying the image of the field, but I believe that it will be fully sufficient dla założonego celu – próby zrozumienia, czym jest ludowy rytuał klątwy.

## 1. Casting a Curse. CURSING<sub>1</sub> (*Przekląć* (*to Curse*); *Przeklącie* (*a Curse*))

The folk ritual of the curse is intimately connected with the first sphere of the conceptual field of ‘cursing,’ which I denote CURSING<sub>1</sub> and define ‘by uttering specific words, cause something bad to happen to somebody (something) because they (it) did something bad.’<sup>4</sup>

“CURSING<sub>1</sub>” is represented in dictionaries by verbs *kląć*, *przekląć* and *wykląć*, and by *zakląć* (which is archaic in this usage). The dictionary definitions are as follows:

**kląć:** ‘to speak ill, to bring about a calamity or misfortune by *mocą słowa* (‘złorzeczyć, sprowadzać na kogoś nieszczęście lub niepowodzenie mocą słowa’) [SXVI]; ‘to cast a curse’ (‘kłątwę rzucać, wyklinać’) [SW, SJPDor]. Interestingly, Doroszewski’s entry contains a note ‘archaic’ and Szymczak’s dictionary omits the entry altogether;

**przekląć:** ‘to cast a curse on somebody/something, to repudiate somebody’ (‘rzucić na kogo, na co kłątwę, wykląć kogo, co’) [SW, SJPDor, SJPSz]; e.g: *He cursed his wicked children (Przeklął wyrodne dzieci); God cursed the entire generation (Bóg przeklął całe to pokolenie);*

**wykląć:** ‘to repudiate/renounce somebody, to condemn somebody by cursing them’ (‘wyrzec się kogoś, potępić go przeklinając’) [SJPDor, SJPSz]; *He repudiated his own child (‘Wykląć własne dziecko’);*

**zakląć:** (only Linde) ‘to curse somebody, to hurl abuse at somebody, to alienate somebody by cursing, to cast somebody off’ (‘zaklinać kogo, wyklinać, kłątwą wyobcować, od społeczeństwa odcinać’).

In modern Polish only two verbs from this group are in popular use. They are *wykląć* and *przekląć*. The other verbs are archaic, as appropriate notes in the dictionaries testify. It should also be stressed that both verbs are in the perfective aspect and imply that the activity was only performed once (they are non-continuous).

The linguistic material gathered in the field supports the dictionary explanations of CURSING<sub>1</sub>. Interestingly, when one analyzes lexical units that my interlocutors used to talk about CURSING<sub>1</sub>, the one verb that was preponderantly used was *przekląć* (to curse). “When a mother curses her child, this curse will surely be fulfilled...” (“Jak matka *przeklnie* dziecko, to się spełnia...”) [15], “Parents are most likely to curse” (“Rodzice najprędzej mogą *przekląć*”) [42] are just two examples. But this one broad similarity (the preponderance of *przekląć*) should not lead our attention away from the differences between dictionary definitions and folk usage.

The material collected during the interviews differs from the tenor of dictionary definitions. The differences mainly involve the syntax, which also influences the aspect of verbs in Polish. Many interlocutors used the phrase *ktoś przeklina komu/na kogoś* (somebody is cursing at somebody/something), where the verb *przeklinać* is in the imperfective aspect, highlighting the fact that the activity is repetitive and performed many times. Some examples include:

W kościele [...] świecy postawiła. Już ta się modli, a ta poniosła koło niej, żeby ona wiedziała, że to ona *jej przeklina* [53].

(She put some candles in the church. A woman was praying, and she took the candles and put them right in front of the woman, so that the woman would know that she *has been cursing* her.)

*Przeklinała* różnemi sposobami, o. No, to kto wie, czy to przekleństwo spadło, czy nie spadło... [44].

(She *was cursing* in different ways, so she was. Who knows whether her curses fell down?)

Rodzicom nie wolno *przeklinać*, broń Boże, to jest najgorsze [40].

(Parents should never *curse*, God forbid. That’s the worst thing you can do!)

Matka na swoje dziecko bardzo *przeklinać* nie może. [...] Dawniej to mówili tak, że jak cudza kobieta, czy tam ktoś *przeklina*, to nie szkodzi, a jak matka, to szkodzi [33].

(A mother should not *curse* too much at her own child [...]. People used to say that when a strange woman, or just somebody strange *curses* the child, it doesn’t matter. But when a mother *curses*, real harm will be done.)

The second significant difference between dictionary definitions and folk usage is the fact that the verb *wykląć* is altogether absent from folk usage. And thirdly, *kląć*, considered by Doroszewski as archaic, seemed to be quite widespread in my interlocutors’ usage, apart from the preponderant *przekląć* (and the imperfect form *przeklinać*). *Kląć* is used quite often to express the meaning CURSING<sub>1</sub>. Występuje on w schematach składniowych *ktoś klnie kogo/na kogo/komu*, jak w przykładach:

*Nikogo* nie powinno się *kląć* [6].

(You shouldn’t *curse anybody*.)

Ja czasem *na kogoś klnę*. U mnie taka sąsiadka, szo wszystko krade, a najwięcej drowa. To ja *jej klnu*. Taka wredna [25].

(Sometimes I *curse* someone. I have a neighbour who steal everything, firewood most of all. So I *curse* her. She’s so mean.)

And finally, not only *kląć* is common but also *zakląć* (only noted in Linde’s early nineteenth century dictionary and long considered archaic) is quite popular. It often appears in such expressions as *ktoś zaklął kogo/na kogo* (*somebody curses somebody/at somebody*):

Jak zrobi jakiś krzywde i ten skrzywdzony bardzo zaklina, to później się odziedzicza [27].

(When someone wrongs somebody, and the injured party *curses* (*zaklina*) the wrongdoer, the effects of the curse can be inherited by next generations of the wrongdoer's family.)

Mówią, że jak ojciec czy matka zaklnie na dzieci, to bardzo szkodliwe jest [40].  
(They say that when a mother or a father *curses* (*zaklnie*) their children, it is very grave indeed.)

The nominal sphere of 'cursing<sup>1</sup>' is CURSE<sub>1</sub> (PRZEKLEŃSTWO, CURSE proper). In the dictionaries it is represented by two lexemes, *klątwa* and *przekleństwo* (English equivalents for both nouns are 'a curse, a malediction'). *Kłęcie* and *przekłęcie* are defined in dictionaries [SW, SJPDoR] as: 'the noun form of the verb *kląć* (*przekląć*)' ('forma rzeczownikowa czasownika *kląć* (*przekląć*)'), with no usage examples given, I will therefore not dwell on these two words.

In the older dictionaries *klątwa* (**a curse**) is defined as 'words that can cause misfortune (through magical means) to someone, *maledictio*' ('słowa ściągające (w magiczny sposób) na kogoś zło; złorzeczenie, *maledictio*') [SSStp]; 'malediction and its results, such as untoward and unfortunate events and happenings, etc.' ('złorzeczenie i jego skutki w postaci niepowodzenia, nieszczęścia itp.') [SXVI]; examples include: *a curse of God* (*klątwa boża*), *to be the object of a curse* (*być w klątwie*).

Modern dictionaries only give examples of metaphorical usage of the term: *They have fallen under the curse of time* (*Kłątwa czasu już na nich padła*) [SW, a quotation from Wincenty Pol]; *Zbiorek ballad, uważanych za gatunek poezji romantycznej, zostającej pod klątwą, rzuconą przez wielu poezji arbitrów* (*A collection of ballads, considered a genre of Romantic poetry, which is under an anathema from the arbiters*) [SW, a quotation from Adam Mickiewicz]; *In schools, dip pens are under a curse* (*an anathema*), *students are still expected to write with quill pens* (*W szkole stalówki znajdują się pod klątwą – uczniowie są obowiązani pisać wyłącznie piórami gęsimi*) [SJPDor, a quotation from Wiktor Gomułicki].

In turn, **przekleństwo** (**a curse**) is explicated as 'a curse, malediction' ('klątwa, złorzeczenie'), e.g., *A curse on his head* (*Przekleństwo spadło na jego głowę*); *He came home, with a curse of his countrymen upon him, and was struck by thunder on his doorstep* (*Gdy wracał okryty przekleństwem ziomków, na samym progu zginął od pioruna*) [SW]; 'literary: a wish of misfortune, bad luck and failure directed at somebody, a malediction' ('książk. wyrażone przez kogoś życzenie komuś złego losu, nieszczęścia, klęski itp.; klątwa'), e.g., *to cast a curse* (*rzucić na kogoś przekleństwo*), *to lift a curse* (*zdyć z kogoś przekleństwo*) [SJPDor, SJPSz]. A dictionary of collocations [SFraz] also notes metaphorical usage, e.g., *love is a curse*

(*Miłość jest przekleństwem człowieka*). The dictionaries also quote two archaic forms: *przeklęctwo* and *przeklęstwo* [SW, SJPDor].

The material related to the nouns *klątwa* and *przekleństwo* collected in my research is in line with the dictionary usage. Most common examples include:

Matki *klątwa* najgorsza [17].

(A mother's *curse* is the most potent.)

*Klątwa* zostaje w rodzinie [43].

(A *curse* will run in a family.)

*Przekleństwo* matki spada na dzieci [44].

(A mother's *curse* befalls her children. Do as you would be done by.)

To jakieś *przekleństwo*, niedobre życzenie, nieszczerze... [44].

(It was like a *curse*, an ill-wish, a wish which was full of meanness.)

*Przekleństwo* może ci się stać. Nie życzy nikomu, co tobie niemiłe [38].

(The *curse* can happen to you. Do as you would be done by.)

Less common noun forms include *przeklon* [SW] (in two dictionaries: [SW and SGPKarł], both noun forms *przeklon* and *przekłęcie* refer directly to *przekleństwo*)<sup>5</sup> and *klon* which is listed as a variant of *praklon* [SBH2: 476 and LB4:146]<sup>6</sup> and *klęstwo* (absent from dictionaries altogether).

The examples show that CURSE<sub>1</sub> (KLĄTWA<sub>1</sub>) is an ambiguous term. It denotes primarily the verbal formula that can cause ill to befall to somebody. But its meaning is expanded to contain also the speech act itself: the act of speaking the magic formula. The range of metaphorical usages also suggests that the term has also a third meaning which refers to the results of a curse, czyli o „przeklęciu spełnionym”. It denotes *the state of being cursed*. We can therefore assume that we are dealing with a classic instance of regular polysemy: CURSE<sub>f</sub> is “a verbal formula that contains an ill wish”, CURSE<sub>a</sub> is “the act of uttering CURSE<sub>f</sub>” and CURSE<sub>s</sub> is the state of being cursed as result of CURSE<sub>a</sub>, or the result of uttering the curse formula (CURSE<sub>f</sub>), misfortune, bad luck.”<sup>7</sup>

Our modern European worldview forces us to treat the CURSE in such an analytical way, splitting the meaning of the word into three components: the formula, the act of uttering it, and its result. Within the syncretic mythical worldview, all the three components are united, forming a homogenous speech-act. For this reason, within the folk

worldview, words simply *must* have effect on reality. Words do not exist as abstracts disconnected from the act of speech, and there is no action without a result. Within the folk worldview, CURSE<sub>f</sub>, CURSE<sub>a</sub> and CURSE<sub>s</sub> are the same.<sup>8</sup>

But if we pursue the analytical train of reasoning, we can come to the conclusion that within the field of CURSE<sub>f</sub> one can detect a kind of evolution, or two subtly different but disparate meanings. It seems that dictionaries contain two different definitions of CURSE<sub>f</sub> (PRZEKLEŃCIE<sub>f</sub>): it denotes either an agential verbal formula, which by the mere fact of uttering it will bring the expected or desired result, or an ill-wish, an utterance in which the speaker wishes somebody bad luck, but which does not necessarily have an agential function (or in other words, agentiality is not a necessary condition for a thus-defined curse). The second, non-magical meaning of *curse* is more common today. As dictionary evidence shows, this meaning is frequently carried by the lexeme *przekleństwo*. In the following part of the chapter we will see that this word serves as a link to CURSING<sub>4</sub> (cursing to abuse, swearing at someone.)

This meaning of CURSE<sub>f</sub>, understood as a wish of bad luck or misfortune finds confirmation in the explication of the English verb *to curse* provided by Anna Wierzbicka in *English Speech Act Verbs. A Semantic Dictionary* (1987).

The real purpose of *curses* is speaker-oriented. The speaker doesn't really want to cause any harm for the person or thing cursed, although he momentarily thinks that he does. What he really wants to do is to give an expression to his feelings [Wierzbicka 1987: 163].

Wierzbicka's entry also contains an explication of CURSE<sub>f</sub> in its meaning of a magical formula.

It should be added that the verb *curse* can also be used in another (historically no doubt earlier) meaning, where the causation of harm is thought of as not imaginary but real, as in the following example: *Perhaps he was also afraid that his father might curse him, and there is nothing an Italian fears more than a parental curse* [Goudge 1961: 40]. In both cases the speaker feels "something bad" towards someone or something and says (implies): "I want something bad to happen to X." However, in one case he says so in order to express his feeling ("I say this because I want to show how I feel thinking of X"), in the other, in order to actually cause some harm ("I say: I want something bad to happen to X, I assume I could cause it by saying this, I say this because I want to cause it to happen") [Wierzbicka 1987: 164].<sup>9</sup>

## 2. Cursing to Exclude from a Community.

### CURSING<sub>2</sub> (*Wykląć (to Excommunicate)*);

### *Wyklęcie (Excommunication)*)

CURSING<sub>2</sub> (KLAĆ<sub>2</sub>: *wykląć, wyklęcie*) should be considered as a narrowing of the meaning of CURSING<sub>1</sub>. The meaning of CURSING<sub>2</sub> is limited to one very particular type of cursing that follows a strictly prescribed scenario: that of religious excommunication. Such a meaning is exemplified by the following definitions:

**Kłać:** ‘to exclude somebody from the religious community, to excommunicate, to cast a curse, to cast an anathema’ (‘wyłączać ze społeczności kościelnej, ekskomunikować, rzucać klątwę, obejmować klątwą’) [SStp]; ‘to cast an ecclesiastical curse’ (‘nakładać klątwę kościelną’) [SXVI];

**wykląć/wyklinać kogo/co:** ‘to cast a curse, an anathema on somebody, to exclude somebody from the church community by means of a curse, to cast somebody out, to denounce somebody by means of a curse, to condemn a document, a book or a belief on the grounds of its blasphemous or heretical nature, etc.’ (‘rzucić nań klątwę, ekskomunikę; klątwą wyłączyć ze społeczności wiernych, wyobcować; przez klątwę potępić, nacechować nieprawowierność pisma, książki, mniemania itd.’) [SW]; ‘religious: to exclude somebody from a Christian church, to cast an anathema, to excommunicate’ (‘rel.: wyłączyć kogoś z kościoła chrześcijańskiego, rzucić klątwę, ekskomunikować’) [SJPDor, SJPSz];

**zakląć:** ‘to dispel with a curse, to exorcise, to evict with a curse, to excommunicate’ (‘klątwą wypędzić, wydalić; klątwą wyłączyć, egzorcyzmować; wykląć klątwą, ekskomunikować’) [SW].

Some dictionaries also contain the antonym of CURSING<sub>2</sub>, the verb *odkląć (to lift a curse)*, which means “to lift or break a curse, to rid somebody of an ecclesiastical curse” (‘znieść, zdjąć klątwę, uwolnić od klątwy kościelnej’), e.g., *On one synod they curse, on the next they lift the curse (Synod na synod; jeden wyklina, drugi odklina)* [SW, quotation from Piotr Skarga]. The verb *odkląć* also has a secondary meaning, ‘to counter a curse with another curse, to send a curse back’ (‘klątwą odpowiadać na klątwę, odbijać echem klątwę’) [SW, SJPDor].

In modern Polish, only the lexeme *wykląć* still exist. The other two lexemes within the field of CURSING<sub>2</sub>, *kląć* and *zakląć*, are now definitely archaic. The material I collected only occasionally referred to *cursing* in its meaning of *excommunicating*, even though folk culture undoubtedly

came much contact with this church ritual through the ages. The lexeme used by my interlocutors is *przekląć/przeklinać*. An interlocutor opined:

Przekląć nie może zwykły człowiek, bo nie ma łaski bożej. Natomiast księża mają dużą moc i przeklinają po łacinie.<sup>10</sup>

(An ordinary person cannot *curse* like this, because they don't have God's grace. But priests have a lot of power, they can *curse* in Latin.)

There is only one noun referring to CURSE<sub>2</sub>, it is simply *klątwa* (*curse*).

**Kłątwa:** 'a punishment that consists of excluding someone from the church community' ('kara polegająca na wyłączeniu ze społeczności kościelnej, od uczestnictwa w obrzędach; ekskomunika') [SStp]; 'an anathema' ('klątwa kościelna, wyklinanie') [Linde]. Similar definitions can also be found in SW, SJPdor and SJPSz.

Just as in the case of CURSE<sub>1</sub>, it seems that CURSE<sub>2</sub> (EXCOMMUNICATION) is polysemous and can be subdivided into three subtly different meanings. możemy mówić o jej trzech podznaczeniach, reprezentujących analogiczne do KLĄTWY<sub>1</sub> relacje regularnej polisemii. They can be called EXCOMMUNICATION<sub>f</sub> 'the verbal formula which excludes its object from the church community'; EXCOMMUNICATION<sub>a</sub> 'the act of uttering the verbal formula (EXCOMMUNICATION<sub>f</sub>)'; and EXCOMMUNICATION<sub>s</sub> 'the state resulting of EXCOMMUNICATION<sub>f</sub>, i.e., the exclusion of the object of the curse from religious community, the state of being excluded from religious community.'

The ecclesiastical curse – excommunication (Latin *excommunicatio* 'excluding from community'), anathema (Greek *anathema* – 'something dedicated'),<sup>11</sup> interdict (Latin *interdictum* 'a censure') belong to high culture. Within the framework of Judaeo-Christian culture (but also in other religions), excommunication is an institutionalized religious ritual that has specific legal consequences. Its roots can be traced back to legal traditions of Eastern antiquity, codified in the Old Testament. From the point of view of my own research interests, it is important that both the Catholic and Orthodox Church use excommunication as a type of ecclesiastical punishment, which excludes the wrongdoer from the religious community.<sup>12</sup>

A visible trace of the fact that the folk culture retains awareness of ecclesiastical curse are the references to the practice of *bell ringing* (*wydzwanianie*)<sup>13</sup> in the interviews. One of the quotations I included in the opening section of this chapter contains a reference to this practice (which persisted to 1939) in the Catholics–Orthodox borderland in Belarus. Bell ringing was practiced when people from two different religions

were married. The first fragment of conversation about bell ringing can be found above, below I include the follow-up:

– [Wydzwanianio] patamu, szto ana była wrogom swajej wiery i ana uże swaju wieru astawiała, katolicku, a szła na prawosławnu. Uże paslednije zwany w kaściele zwani, że ona nie dołżna bolsze w kaściele pajawitsia. Ana uże dałżna chylitsia da cerkwy. Ot – zwani zwonami. [...]

A kto dzwonił w kościele?

– Kościelnik. On uże iz złości zwanił. Znaczyt, ana kidaje swaju wieru i idzie da prawosławnych. Czy to może od księdza tak? Ana idzie na prawosławnu, tak treba jejo wyzwanit' iz kaścioła [64].

(– [They would ring the bells] because the girl was the enemy of the faith, she was rejecting the Catholic faith and entering the Orthodox church. So they would ring the bells to show that she had no right to set her foot in the church ever again. She should go to the Orthodox church. So they rang. [...]

But who would ring the bells?

– The sexton. He would get angry and would ring the bell, because the girl turned her back on her faith. Or maybe the priest would tell him to do it? Because the girl wanted to become an Orthodox, so you would have to ring her out.)<sup>14</sup>

Yet another trace of excommunication in folk culture is the use of candles<sup>15</sup> in folk curse rituals, referencing the one of the three components of church excommunication rite.<sup>16</sup> Dashing burning candles to the ground (and in some instances stomping on them) is an element of the church ritual. In the folk ritual, a candle is placed in the church, and the person performing the ritual endeavours to break it in two or to twist it, so that (according to magical logic) the object of the curse would also be broken or twisted. Thomas and Znaniecki in their monumental study of Polish peasant culture argue:

The use of objects consecrated by the church could be made in the favor of the devilish as well as of the divine community, according to the intention of the person who used them. Sometimes it was necessary, indeed, to use them in a perverse way in order to attain results favorable to the devilish community, especially in cases where the long use for divine ends had evidently imparted to these objects a certain incompatibility with the world of the devil [Thomas, Znaniecki 1927: 267].

The fullest description of the folk ritual of curse (CURSE<sub>1</sub>, which uses the props connected to CURSE<sub>2</sub> or the church ritual of excommunication) that I have been able to find does not come from ethnographic records at all but from fiction: it features in a novel written by Florian Czarnyszewicz, entitled *Chłopcy z Nowoszyszek* (*The Boys from Nowoszyszki*):

przesunęła się podle ściany ku prezbiterium, zmówiła Ojcie nasz, zapaliła gromnicę i zaczęła zaklinać: "Jezu Nazareński! Królu Żydowski! Ja służebnica Twoja przysięgam, że na kobiercu teraz żulik stoi! Skrzywdził zdrajca niewinna dziewczyna. Siedem lat sukinsyn musztrował biedna dziecka, a teraz rzucił ją na hańba. Na świadectwa prawdy tego co mówia, łamię przed Twym ołtarzem ta gromnica, a Ty Boża złam jemu życia cała!..." [Czarnyszewicz 1963: 294]. (she tiptoed along the wall towards the altar, said a Pater noster, lighted a blessed candle and started cursing: "Jesus of Nazareth, king of the Jews! I am thy faithful servant and I swear to thee that that unworthy rascal is getting married now! He, the betrayer/traitor? hurt a poor innocent girl. He was pursuing her for seven years and now he left her, and she is ruined. And in confirmation that what I say is true, I am now breaking this blessed candle in front of thine altar, and I beseech you, O Lord, to break this liar's life.")

My interlocutors were also familiar with this ritual:

Czy stawiają w kościele świece, żeby komuś podrobić?

– A stawiają, stawiają u nas. U nas skidaje batuszka, kak wiedaje, szto kto ta takuju paszkudnu świeczku stawić w cerkwi.

Jaką świeczkę?

Obyknawiennuju kuplajut w cerkwi świeczku i stawiać jeju tam. Tam gawariat, szto wykruczywajuć jeju i łamajuć i wsielakije figury, kab etamu czeławieku, katoraha praklinajuć, kab jeho tak łamało. Ale batuszka kak uwidzić, to haworyć, sztoby bystra snimać [64].

(Do people place candles in the church in order to do for somebody?)

– Oh yes, they do. But our priest will tell them to remove them, if he knows that these are ugly candles.

So what candles are they?

– They look like normal candles you buy at church. They buy them and put them in front of the altar, but they twist them and break them beforehand, so that the man whom they curse would also be twisted and broken. So when the priest sees this, he tells people to remove such candles right away.)

### 3. Cursing to Enchant. CURSING<sub>3</sub>

(*Zakląć (to Enchant, to Cast a Spell)*;

*Zaklęcie (an Enchantment, a Spell)*)

The third meaning of *curse* is best rendered by the English verb *to enchant*. It features in the following dictionary definitions:

**kląć**: 'to enchant, to cast a spell' ('zaklinać, zaklęcie rzucić') e.g., *They enchanted a spirit and it had to obey (Klęto ducha – klątwy słucha)* [SW, quotation from Adam Mickiewicz];

**zakląć:** ‘to cast a spell in order to enthrall, captivate, render unconscious, render harmless or enchant, to transform somebody by means of a spell’ (‘klnąc obezwładnić, zmóc, znieruchomić, zdrętwić, unieszkodliwić, zaczarować; klęciem zamienić w kogo, w co’) e.g., *to put a charm on fire* (*zaklinać ogień*), *he was silent as if somebody charmed him* (*milczy jak zaklęty*), *a princess charmed (transformed) into a frog* (*królewna zaklęta w żabę*) [SW];

**zakląć/zaklinać (perfective/imperfective):** ‘in fairy-tales: to cast a spell, a glamour on somebody or something, to transform somebody by magic, to enchant, to avert’ (‘w bajkach: rzucić czar, urok na kogo, na co; przemienić w co za pomocą czarów, magii; zaczarować, zażegnać’) [SJPDor].

The study of the material I collected leads to the conclusion that the list should also include the verb **przekląć**: “I’ve heard once a mother cursed (*przeklęła*) her children so that they turned into rooks, because they were naughty” (“Słyszałam, że raz matka przeklęła dzieci w gawrony, jak były nieposłuszne”) [8]. This remark is an echo of a popular folk tale trope *Siedem kruków* (*Seven ravens* (T 451) [PBL 1: 141–142]). Folk tales containing this trope teach that an enchantment (ENCHANTMENT<sub>s</sub>) can sometimes be lifted (if certain conditions are fulfilled). The verb *zakląć* (‘to curse, to enchant’) has a handy antonym *odkląć* (‘to lift a curse/an enchantment’). This usage is confirmed by dictionary definitions: *odkląć*: ‘to lift a spell, an enchantment, to ward off a spell’ (‘odczyścić zaklęcie, zdjąć urok, odczarować, odżegnać’) [SW]; *odkląć/odkлинаć*: ‘arch. to lift an enchantment, to ward off a spell’ (‘odczarowywać z zaklęcia; odżegnawać urok’) [SJPDor].

CURSING<sub>3</sub> is mostly used in the syntactic structure *ktoś zaklina kogoś/coś w kogoś/coś innego* (*somebody transforms somebody/something into somebody/something else*). This meaning of the verb *zakląć* (to enchant) can best be summarized as “obliging a power, by use of specific words to change somebody(something) in a way desired by the speaker.”

### ZAKLĘCIE (CURSING<sub>3</sub>, ENCHANTMENT)

**Klątwa:** ‘an enchantment’ (‘zaklęcie’) [SW]; ‘arch. an enchantment’ (‘daw. ‘zaklęcie’), e.g., *They intoned the first curse, by the distaff and the garland* (*Już się tam ludzie zebrali. Pierwszą klątwę już zaklęli, klątwę wianka i kądzieli*) [SJPDor, quotation from Adam Mickiewicz];

**Zaklęcie:** ‘words spoken by a magic practitioner, magic’ [SW]; ‘a magic formula that allegedly<sup>17</sup> causes supernatural effects (an element of primitive religious rituals)’ (‘magiczna formułka wywołująca

rzekomo nadprzyrodzone skutki (element pierwotnych obrzędów religijnych)’) [SJPDor, SJPSz].

This usage of *enchantment* (both *klątwa* and *zaklęcie*) is also confirmed in my own material:

Cyganki to też mają jakieś *klątwy* [4].

(Gypsy women have their own *enchantments*.)

Za Bugiem, na Polesiu, tam są czarnoksiężniki. Zaklęcia były. To byli ludzie, tylko wszystko wiedzieli. Zaklęcia robili, że całe wesele w wilki puścili.<sup>18</sup>

(Beyond Bug River, in Polesie, there are sorcerers there. They have *enchantments* there. They are ordinary people, but they see more. They cast spells and *enchantments*, for example there was this one time when they turned all wedding guests into wolves.)

*Zaklęcie* (*enchantment*) is undoubtedly closely connected with CURSE<sub>1</sub> (a narrowing of CURSE<sub>1</sub> which only refers to the religious ritual of curse). In fact, CURSING<sub>3</sub> (ENCHANTMENT) seems to be the broadest of all the three notions, as it means ‘obliging a power, by use of specific words to change somebody (something) in a way desired by the speaker.’ Summoning a power, and then binding it to do the speaker’s bidding seems to be the key component in the semantic field of CURSING.<sup>19</sup> For this reason, I believe that CURSING<sub>3</sub> (ENCHANTING) can be considered to be the very core of the whole semantic field of CURSING. The other variants can be seen as its narrowings or more specialized usages. In the case of CURSING<sub>1</sub> (*to curse*), the power is summoned by the speaker, who binds it to their will in order to cause some misfortune to the intended object (in revenge for some evil act previously perpetrated by the object of the curse). In the case of CURSING<sub>2</sub> (*to excommunicate*), intended by the speaker is quite simply the exclusion of the object of the curse from the church. But in contrast, the meaning of CURSING<sub>3</sub> (*to enchant*) is much broader: the person casting the spell can wish for different outcomes, good and ill. But always, whether we are dealing with turning a princess into a frog, turning a miller into a bear, asking a stork for a baby brother, or wishing the perfect girl to marry the speaker’s grandson – ENCHANTING “actions and motivations of individuals through formulaic appeals to deities, spirits and *daimones*” [Gager 1990: 216]. This particular aspect of enchantments, the speaker’s power over the object of the enchantment, is very visible in the name by which such enchantments are commonly referred to in English-language literature on the subject, which is *binding spells* [Gager 1990: 216].

In the case of the nominal usage CURSE<sub>3</sub> (ENCHANTMENT) we can also perceive the polysemy, familiar from our study of CURSE<sub>1</sub> and CURSE<sub>2</sub> (excommunication). Again, we can perceive three subtly different meanings of ENCHANTMENT: ENCHANTMENT<sub>f</sub> 'a verbal formula which binds the power to perform what the speaker wishes'; ENCHANTMENT<sub>a</sub> 'the act of uttering ENCHANTMENT<sub>f</sub>' and ENCHANTMENT<sub>s</sub> 'the state resulting from ENCHANTMENT<sub>a</sub>, the result, the state of being enchanted, or, the state in which the wishes of the person performing the enchantment are fulfilled.'

It is also worth pointing out that the three verbs we have discussed so far (*przekląć* – to curse, *wykląć* – to excommunicate, *zakląć* – to enchant) also possess their past participles: *przeklęty* (cursed), *wyklęty* (excommunicated) and *zaklęty* (enchanted): a cursed daughter, a cursed tree, excommunicated children, an excommunicated person cannot enter a church, enchanted knights, an enchanted kingdom. The existence of these collocations is a proof that, from the folk perspective, the three actions analyzed below (cursing, excommunicating, enchanting or 'binding') are seen as effective. The cursed daughters and excommunicated children and knights are people who were the object of CURSE1, CURSE2 and CURSE3. As we will see, it will be different for the remaining three spheres of CURSING which shall be discussed below.

#### 4. Cursing to Abuse. CURSING<sub>4</sub>

##### (*Przeklinać* (to Swear); *Przeklinanie* (Swearing))

The fourth sphere within the semantic field of CURSING consists of verbs whose meaning is *to swear*. A full list of these verbs includes: *kląć*, *skląć*, *zakląć*, *nakląć* (*przekląć*), *przeklinać*, *wyklinać*.<sup>20</sup>

**Kląć:** 'to utter curses or swear words, *maledicere*' ('złorzeczyć, przeklinać, źle życzyć, *maledicere*') [SStp]; 'to utter swear words, to curse, to utter expletives' ('mówić przekleństwa, przeklinać, złorzeczyć, wymyślać') [SW]; 'to utter expletives, usually in anger, to swear at somebody or something' ('używać wyrazów obelżywych, zwykle w zdenerwowaniu, w złości na kogoś lub coś; złorzeczyć, wymyślać') [SJPDor, SJPSz].

My interlocutors often used the verb *to curse* in the same meaning:

Teraz to stary *klnie* i młody *klnie* – dawniej to trudno było to posłyszeć. Jak wolność weszła w dziewięćset piątym, to dawniej żeby kłócić się, czy przezywał, to nie było [17].

(Now the old ones *curse* and the young ones *curse*. Earlier, not so much. It only started when we got our freedom in nineteen-oh five.<sup>21</sup> In the old days, people would never quarrel or call one another names – they just didn't.)

**Skłqć:** 1. 'to level verbal abuse by someone by cursing them, to inveigh against somebody' ('klnqć zwymyślqć kogo, nazłorzeczyć komu'). 2. 'to utter a curse, to swear' ('wymówić przekleństwo, zakłqć') [SJPDor]. My material contains only one usage of *skłqć*: "His mother swore at him" ("Matka go za to *skleła*") [13].

**Nakłqć / (imperf.) naklinać:** 'to curse repeatedly, to hurl verbal abuse' ('wiele przekleństw nagadać, nawymyślqć') [SW], 'to hurl curses, to insult, to berate' ('obrzucić przekleństwami; nawymyślqć, zwymyślqć') [SJPDor, rare]. Both dictionaries also note reflexive form *nakłqć się*: 'to curse somebody repeatedly, to swear continually; to become tired due to swearing, to have enough of it' ('wiele razy kogo skłqć, wypowiedzieć wiele przekleństw; zmęczyć się wymyślaniem komu, przeklinaniem, mieć tego dość') [SJPDor]. This verb was also used by my interlocutors:

Inny raz to tam i nawymysla, i *naklnie* – i nic. A to jest taka chwila, że tak się wypowie i tak się stanie [34]

(Sometimes you can curse and curse (*naklnie*) and nothing happens, and then a time comes when you curse and lo! it happens.)

**Przekłqć/przeklinać** (more often used in the latter imperfective form): 'to be unable to let go, to be unable to stop regretting something, to condemn by cursing' ('nie móc sobie czegoś darować, nie móc odżalować czegoś; potępić coś złorzeczqć'), e.g., *to curse one's fate* (*przeklinać swój los*), [SJPDor, SJPsz]. The usage of this form points to the ongoing process of semantic specialization with regard to aspect: the modern meaning of *przekłqć* is to curse<sub>1</sub>.

**Przeklinać** (only imperfective): 'to utter swear words, fabrications, obscenities, to swear, to curse' ('używać przekleństw, wymysłów, wyrazów nieprzyzwoitych, ordynarnych; kłqć') [SJPDor, SJPsz]; the definition in SW is closer to the meaning of CURSING<sub>1</sub>, which is further reinforced by an old quotation: "to curse, to inveigh" ("złorzeczyć, pomstować, kłqć (bodajkać)") e.g., *She was cursing him so that he would break his leg: may you break a leg!* (*Przeklinała go złamaniem nóg: bodaj nogi złamał*) [SW, quotation from Grzegorz Knapski – Knapiesz].

Both verbs, *przeklinać* and *przekłqć* were commonly used by my interlocutors, e.g.,

Kląć to niedobrze. Dobry człowiek, porządny, nie będzie kogo *przeklinał*, tylko subrawiec [13].

(A good person, an honest person will not curse (*przeklina*) anybody, only a rascal.)

**Wyklinać:** 'to hurl abuse, to inveigh, to execrate, to call somebody names' ('wymyślać, złorzeczyć, pomstować, wyzywać kogo') [SW]; 'to use verbal abuse against somebody, to curse somebody/something, to inveigh, to rebuke' ('używać wyrazów obelżywych w stosunku do kogo; przeklinać, kląć kogo, co; złorzeczyć, wymyślać komu'), [SJPDor].

My interlocutors confirm such usage: for example, in reply to my question "Why is cursing bad", one of my interlocutors said:

A po co ja mam panią kląć na przykład? Tak się zagniewać, tak *wyklinać* bez potrzeby? [38].

(Why should I curse you for example? Why should I be angry at you and curse (*wyklinać*) you for no reason?)

**Zakląć:** 'to utter a curse, to curse, to inveigh' ('wymówić przekleństwo, odezwać się z nim, złorzeczyć') [SW]; 'to utter a curse, to curse' ('wypowiedzieć przekleństwo, przekląć') [SJPDor, SJPSz].

As I said before, my interlocutors used *zakląć* in its meaning of CURSING<sub>1</sub>.

#### CURSE<sub>4</sub>: PRZEKLEŃSTWO (ABUSE)

The only nominal form of *przeklinać* which is used today is *przekleństwo* ((*verbal*)*abuse*, a *swearword*). With the exception of *przekleństwo* (abuse), all nominal variants of PRZEKLINAC found in the dictionaries are archaic or dated. Perhaps it is yet another proof of the process of semantic specialization: today, the primary meaning of *klątwa* is A CURSE and EXCOMMUNICATION, whereas the primary meaning of *zaklęcie* is ENCHANTMENT or BESEECHMENT. The dictionary definitions are as follows:

**klątwa:** 'a curse, a swearword' ('przekleństwo, plugawy wyraz') [SXVI]; 'swearing, a curse, cursing' ('przeklinanie, przekleństwo, przeklęcie') [SW]; 'dated cursing, swearing' ('*przestarz.* przeklinanie, złorzeczenie') [SJPDor];

**wyklinanie:** '*rarely, usually plural* disparaging words, inveighing somebody/something; insults, curses' ('*rzad., zwykle w l.mn.* słowa uwłaczające, złorzeczące komu, czemu; obelgi, przekleństwa') [SJPDor];

**zaklęcie:** 'a curse, a malediction' ('przekleństwo, złorzeczenie') [SW]; 'dated a curse' ('*daw.* przekleństwo') [SJPDor].

The dictionary definitions of *przekleństwo* are quite self-explanatory and define the word in the following way: ‘cursing, swearing’ (‘klątwa, złorzeczenie’) [SW]; ‘often plural, derogatory, rude words expressing the speaker’s anger or irritation with somebody or something’ (‘częściej w l.mn. obelżywe, wulgarne wyrazy używane w stosunku do kogoś lub dla wyrażenia gniewu, złości’), e.g., *a volley of abuse (wybuchnąć gradem przekleństw)* [SJPDor, SJPSz].

Apart from the ubiquitous noun *przekleństwo*, my interlocutors also used *klęcie* as *nomen actionis*:

Diabeł się nieraz przyśnił za *klęcie* [12].

(The devil can come to you in your dreams for cursing [*klęcie*].)

The boundary between them seems somewhat vague, and I would like to explore the similarities and differences between these terms a little further.

“Cursing (*przekleństwo*) is an ambiguous notion,” Maciej Grochowski aptly opines [Grochowski 1995: 12], and moves on to differentiate

three meanings of the notion: **evaluative, instrumental and expressive**. The **instrumental** meaning, “rooted in the belief in the magical function of words, which permeates folk culture and religion” is visible in such phrases as *somebody casts a curse on somebody else, somebody curses somebody else* [Grochowski 1995: 12].

Grochowski’s “instrumental meaning” is thus identical with my own CURSING1 (*przekląć*) ‘to cause with certain words for something bad to happen to someone (something) because they did something bad’ (‘spowodować za pomocą określonych słów, że komuś (czemuś) staje się coś złego, ponieważ zrobił coś złego’). In contrast, *przeklinanie* (*cursing, swearing*, CURSING4) is only an expression of the speaker’s emotions. This verbal behaviour does not affect any change in the outside world. The results it causes can only be interpersonal and subjective (e.g., the addressee can experience discomfort, anger or other emotions – provided, that is, that the curses have their designated addressee, which is not always the case.) Thus defined, CURSING<sub>4</sub> matches Grochowski’s “expressive meaning,” exemplified by the phrase *somebody’s swearing*. It is

spontaneous verbal behaviour, uttering a string of derogatory expressions and swear words such as *hell, bloody hell, damn, darn*, which reveal the speaker’s emotional state...It is also important to remember, that such sequences of derogatory expressions or expletives do not necessarily be uttered only when the speaker experiences extreme emotions. For some speaker’s, their use may also be conditioned by habit [Grochowski 1995: 12–13].

So far, the situation seems clear, bipolar: CURSING<sub>1</sub> (*przeklećie*) is an agential act (containing a CURSE<sub>f</sub> as a lexical unit which has “instrumental meaning”) and CURSING<sub>4</sub> (*przekleństwo*) is a non-agential act, a lexical unit that has “expressive meaning.” It seems however that between these two poles there exists a spectrum of transitional forms.

Dwubiegunową opozycję zaciemnia już trzeci wyróżniony przez Grochowskiego „sens przekleństwa” – wartościujący. The third identified by Grochowski is called **evaluative**. It is exemplified by such phrases as *somebody curses somebody else for doing something* (e.g., *a mother curses her daughter for squandering the family money*) and *somebody curses something* (*Eva curses the long queues in which she has to wait every day*). This usage of the verb *to curse* conveys “the speaker’s negative opinion of somebody else’s action (or potential action)” [Grochowski 1995: 12].<sup>22</sup> At first glance, the first example quoted seems close to the usage of the CURSING<sub>1</sub> (*przekląć*), whereas the second example is closer to CURSING<sub>4</sub> (*przeklinać*). Grochowski’s definition of a curse states “a curse is a lexical unit which allows the speaker to spontaneously reveal their emotions towards somebody or something, without passing on any information” [Grochowski 1995: 13].<sup>23</sup> To my mind, it refers to the expressive pole, but excludes the instrumental (and also, partially, the evaluative pole.)

Anna Wierzbicka’s *English Speech Act Verbs* also contains a relevant entry:

*Swearing2* involves giving vent to one’s negative feelings (anger, frustration, irritation) by saying something that is felt to be ‘bad’...it is not necessary, however, for the swearer to express a judgement: one can also *swear* in the imperative or exclamatory form, without either saying or implying anything bad about a particular person or object, but simply expressing one’s feelings (*shit! bloody hell!*). What is necessary for *swearing2* is the use of taboo words, that is to say words which are widely regarded as words which should not be used, at least not for the purpose of expressing one’s emotions [...]. Breaking a taboo belongs to the very essence of *swearing2*. The swearing person feels ‘bad feelings’ and wants to express them. But this is not the only purpose. *Swearing* has also a semi-magical purpose (as a substitute for action) and therapeutic one [Wierzbicka 1987: 252–253].<sup>24</sup>

Grochowski would probably not be willing to accept the second part of Wierzbicka’s argument, because he draws clear distinctions between *przekleństwo* (*swear words*), *wulgaryzm* (*an expletive*) and *wyzwisko* (*a slur*). “An expletive is a lexical unit which allows the speaker to express their emotions towards somebody or something, in a way that breaks a linguistic taboo” [Grochowski 1995:15]. A swear words does not need to

be an expletive (and conversely, not every expletive is a curse). Similarly with slurs, which are: “spontaneously uttered expressions that reveal the speaker’s emotions towards the addressee: they can be used so that the addressee would know that the speaker feels negative emotions towards them, and to make the addressee feel bad about it” [Grochowski 1995: 18]. Curses and expletives can be used as terms of abuse, but this function can also be fulfilled by other types of expressions.<sup>25</sup>

And now let us leave the academic perspective and study the point of view of the folk speakers of curses.

Many interlocutors talked about *przeklinanie* (CURSING<sub>4</sub>, swearing), for the simple (if paradoxical) reason: the folk culture contains interdictions against swearing.

– Sowieść i cześć, mówi sie, człowieka. Jak to można [przeklinać]? Jeden “maty, pierematy,” a drugi – ot, pakryczał i paszoł.

A co to znaczy?

– Jak tam powiedzieć... to te taki niecenzurnyje słowy, o ni, tego już nie. [...] Jak człowiek normalny, to on tego wymawiać nie będzie, a jak język rozpuści... [77].

(– There are such things as conscience and honour. How can you curse? Some people holler *maty*,<sup>26</sup> and some just yell and go away.

What does it mean, *maty*?

– How best to explain this... they are swear words. [...] A normal person would avoid using them, but some people can’t resist...)

– Ja nie przeklinam się, ja nie lubię przeklinać.

No, ale jak się pani zdenerwuje?

– No, taki mat.

Mat? A co to takiego?

– A nu, to brzydko tak. Ksiądz krzyczy [na tego, kto przeklina] [75].

(– Me, I don’t swear. I hate swearing.

So what happens when you get angry?

– Well, then I say *mat*.

What is *mat*?

– It’s an ugly word. The priest hollers [at people who use it].)

“The priest forbids us to swear, but all the same some people swear their neighbors, which you shouldn’t do. It’s a sin, and a grave sin at that” (“I ksiądz nie dozwala, żeby przeklinać, tak jak niektóre przeklinają sąsiada swojego, to tak nie można. To grzech wielki, to grzech”) [56].<sup>27</sup> Why is swearing a sin?

I asked this question to my interlocutors and have received a range of diverse explanations: “Because it’s bad, people say it’s bad to swear” (“Bo to tak źle. Mówią, że to niedobrze, że to źle”) [39], “Because one to another does harm” (“Źle robi jeden drugiemu”) [36], “Because it can

happen” (“Bo może tak się stać”) [37]. This question will become clear if we analyze the folk names for people who swear a lot. Such a person would be called *niedobry człowiek* (a bad man) [36], *wyklętny* (cursed), *bezbożny* (godless), *świntuch* (a swine) [38] and finally *przeklętnik*. *Przeklętnik* is somebody ‘who swears a lot’ and also (to use the SW definition) ‘a cursed man, somebody damned, a human fiend (*piekielnik*),’ and ‘a devil’ (‘człowiek przeklęty, potępieniec, piekielnik,’ ‘diabeł’).

My interlocutors were quick to describe the direct link between swearing and the devil: “It’s a sin to swear. In the old days, it wasn’t like today. People were really afraid of sinning. Sometimes, if you swore during the day, at night the devil visited you in your dreams” (“To grzech kląć. Dawniej tego nie było co teraz, strasznie się bali tych grzechów. Diabeł się nieraz przyśnił za klęcie”) [12]. “It can sometimes happen, the devil will possess you in life” (“Bywa tak. Diabeł za życia opęta”) [38]. Thus a sequence of implications is uncovered: if somebody swears a lot, he is sinning, and as a result this person is cursed, or damned – in short, the swearer is put under the power of the devil. The swearer (sinner) “will need to do penance” (“mówili, że będzie pokutował”) [36]. “He swore so much, there will be no rest for him after he dies, if he said all those things” (“Taki przeklętnik, cholera, po śmierci nie miał miejsca, jak on takie rzeczy mówił”) [24]. Even more interestingly, it seems that the devil is really invested in increasing the number of sinners, and actively tempts people to swear, because then he can possess their souls.<sup>28</sup> A logical (and ethical) consequence is therefore one exception from the general ban on cursing:

Czy na diabła można nakląć?

– Na diabła można [78].

(So, can you curse the devil himself?

– Yes, you can.)

This exception proves the rule that those who swear (CURSE<sub>4</sub>) are beyond the pale, excluded from contact with God.

Można żyć nie wierujuczy?

– Nie można, nada wierować Bohu, bo Boh je. [...]

Jak heta można pznać, szto czeławiek nie pryznaje Boha?

– Raz ruhajecca u Boha, to toj i nie pryznaje Boha.

Szto heta znaczyć, szto ruhajecca u Boha?

– Matami [84].

(Can you live without faith?

– No, you can’t. You have to believe in God, because he exists. [...]

How can you tell that someone doesn’t believe in God?

- If somebody swears, that means they don't believe.  
Swear, how?
- If they holler *maty*.<sup>29)</sup>

The folk worldview is essentially dualistic, stating that the world was created jointly by God and the devil. As a result, God is the lord and the source of all that is good in the world, and the devil – of all that is evil and sinful. God is the fount of blessings, and the devil – of swear words/curses. According to “the dualist structures of folk cosmogony, the Devil is the originator of all that is opposed to God and his creation” [Tomicki 1980: 62]. The connection between the devil and cursing (swearing) seems self-explanatory, and also, as the word *przekłętnik* demonstrates, inscribed in the very fabric of the language.<sup>30</sup>

As we have established in the preceding chapter, the folk ethic of speech<sup>31</sup> demands that people and objects should be called by their proper names. It also demands that words should be uttered in the right circumstances or situational contexts, they should not be misused. As we have seen in the prohibition against referring to children as frogs and in the story of a pregnant woman who was punished for unwittingly offending a beggar, misused words can attach themselves to their object or to the unfortunate speaker. There is also another eventuality: misused words (or other verbal offences, such as swear words or gossip) can also accumulate in the underworld, waiting for the speaker to join them:

Kto na tym świecie ludzi obgaduje, oczernia, to sam jest na tamtym świecie uwalany w brudzie, piasku i sadzach, **bo nikt nie rzuca słowa na nikogo innego, jak tylko na siebie samego na tamtym świecie** [LB 1: 223, emphasis A.E.].

(Whoever gossips about people behind their backs and speaks ill of them, will be covered in filth, dirt and soot in the afterlife, **because whenever you speak ill of someone, these same words will come back to you in the afterlife.**)

People who understand that words have a real power to evoke, will not badmouth others (because the filth will stick to the speaker in the afterlife), and will refrain from swearing (specifically, from using such expletives as *bloody hell!* or *what the devil!*), because such curses can actually summon the powers to which they refer – and then the speaker himself will be in grave danger. This paradigm explains the existence of folk proverbs such as *Don't stir up evil when it's silent* (*Złe, kiedy się uciszy, nie poruszaj*) [NKP, *Złe*]. The folk culture puts great emphasis on this interdiction, it is a taboo that should not be broken. And thus – breaking

it is a highly transgressive, dangerous act. As Anna Wierzbicka argued in the passage quoted above “Breaking a taboo belongs to the very essence of *swearing*” [Wierzbicka 1987: 253]. For this reason, one of my interlocutors, in answering the question which curse is the most potent replied: “It’s *May the devil take you*” (“*Żeby diabli cię wzięli*”) [37].

The situation is different of course when cursing is justified: this is precisely the difference between CURSING<sub>4</sub> and CURSING<sub>1</sub>.

CURSING<sub>4</sub> (*swearing*) breaks the most important rule of the folk speech ethic, that of calling things by their proper names (as we remember from the previous chapter, *a man is a man* and not *a monster*). But, more importantly, it is also an act of evocation or summoning, which can result in bringing the powers on which the speaker calls into the world. The evil powers, enchanted by the swearer, are obliged to react. They come at the speaker’s behest and act according to their nature: in situations where swearing is justified on the grounds of folk ethic (the speaker swears a sinner or a wrongdoer), the evil powers do the speaker’s bidding. But if swearing is unjustified (for example, somebody swears at an innocent person, at somebody who does not deserve it), the evil power will take care of the swearer instead. In the first case, we are close to the field of CURSING<sub>1</sub> (cursing) and in the second: CURSING<sub>4</sub> (swearing.)

We can say therefore that the folk worldview knows two versions of cursing: one is CURSING<sub>1</sub>, which we have discussed in the first section of this chapter. This type of cursing is connected to preserving the natural order of the world, and consists of evoking the power of God and imploring God for just punishment for those who break it. CURSING<sub>1</sub> is a ritual that puts order into the world. The second type of cursing, described in this section, is CURSING<sub>4</sub> (swearing), connected to God’s adversary and with the opposite with all that is holy and good in the world. Swearing is on the side of chaos. Whoever swears, summons the evil forces in the world, and puts themselves at their disposal. For this reason, swearing is taboo.<sup>32</sup> One of my interlocutors summed up the folk view on swearing in the following way: “If you swear, you are going to end up badly” (“*kto klnie, temu w życiu źle się powodzi*”) [37]. A person who swears rejects the world of God and enters the world of evil. The same themes are also visible in the following interview transcript (in which I have inserted my comments):

– Jak klnie ktoś bardzo [czyli KLNIE<sub>4</sub>], to mówio, toż on może przekląć [czyli PRZEKLAĆ] – czy dziecko, czy co. Po co takie klencie [czyli PRZEKLINANIE]. To i teraz tak gadajo. Ot, mówio, jaki to przeklęty [czyli *przeklętnik*<sub>1</sub> – ‘ten, kto (dużo) przeklina’, ale zapewne też jednocześnie *przeklętnik*<sub>2</sub> – ‘człowiek przeklęty, potępieniec, piekielnik’]. On klnie, ale on nie wie, czy to on na siebie klnie, czy on na kogo klnie [czyli PRZEKLINA]. To nie wiadomo, czy

ono przystanie na tego, co on klnie, czy na niego upadnie [w momencie przystania czy upadnięcia na kogoś PRZEKLEŃSTWO – KŁĄTWA<sub>4</sub> staje się PRZEKŁĘCIEM – KŁATWA<sub>1</sub>].

Od czego to zależy?

– Od durnego człowieka. Jak on nie rozumie nic takiego, a chłapie czort wi co. Bo mądry człowiek to musi się zastanowić, czy to można powiedzieć, czy nie można to powiedzieć [24].

(– Is somebody swears [CURSE<sub>4</sub>] a lot, they can curse [CURSE<sub>1</sub>] a child. Why should you swear [CURSE<sub>4</sub>]? If somebody curses too much, he becomes cursed (*przeklętnik*: a noun meaning both “a person who swears too much” and “a cursed one”). So such a man curses [CURSE<sub>4</sub>], but he doesn’t know if he curses [CURSE<sub>4</sub>] himself or somebody else. He doesn’t know if bad things will happen to himself, or to the person whom he curses, if the curses will fall on him or on somebody else it seems that in the moment of uttering the words, CURSE<sub>4</sub> becomes CURSE<sub>1</sub>).

So what does it depend on?

– It depends on the person. If somebody is dumb and wag their tongue, they have it coming. A clever man will think about what they want to say, and will know whether this thing should be said aloud or not.)

The same belief is also visible in another, older interview:

Tak jest, bo anioł i diabeł krążą wokół człowieka i noszą przekleństwa. Jak przeklina człowiek nawet szatana, to nie jego, ale własną duszę przeklina, bo Pan Jezus powiedział: “zemstę zostawcie mnie”.

(Angels and devils fly around people, carrying curses [i.e.: swear words]. Even when somebody swears Satan, in reality he is cursing his own soul. After all, Jesus said: “Vengeance is mine.”)<sup>33</sup>

This is precisely the point: men should not meddle in God’s justice. Those who would like to take justice in their own hands, are in fact playing into Satan’s hands. The mills of God grind slowly, but they grind fine. A person who swears in fact “curses their own soul.” Who is not with God, is with the devil – there is no other option.<sup>34</sup> *Who renounces God, has Satan for a companion (Kto wyrzeka się Boga, temu czort radzi)* [LB 4: 35].<sup>35</sup>

As the proverb goes, *what people say is bound to happen (co ludzie gadają, to i wygadają)* [NKP: *Gadać*]. It could also be paraphrased as *he swore and swore until the curse was fulfilled (kłął, kłął, aż przekłął)*. The very principle of folk speech-action describes the process in which *przekleństwo* (CURSE<sub>4</sub>, swearing) becomes a curse (CURSE<sub>1</sub>). It cannot happen any other way: verbal abuse must turn into a curse. It is precisely this process of transition from SWEARING “giving vent to one’s negative feelings [...] by saying something that is felt to be ‘bad’” [Wierz-

bicka 1987: 252] or else “breaking a language taboo to express a strongly negative emotional state” to CURSING<sub>1</sub>: “the state where, as a result of uttered words, someone has done something bad happens,” which we can observe on the linguistic plane between the poles of “CURSING<sub>1</sub>” and “CURSING<sub>4</sub>”, which in all probability takes place in the grey area between the two meanings.

It is not surprising. When we are studying this problem synchronically, we can assume that “cursing<sub>3</sub>” (and in my terminology, “cursing<sub>4</sub>”) “(in the synchronic sense,) is a semantically independent predicate of cursing<sub>2</sub>” (in my terminology, cursing<sub>1</sub>) [Grochowski 1990: 91]. However, this does not change the fact that the semantic relations between the two units point to their close connection in the past.

Swearing was genetically connected with the magical function of language. Swear words belonged to the category of ill wishes: they sent the addressee or some other object to the sphere of evil. Today, they are heavily conventionalized signals of negative emotions, and their etymological meaning has long since waned [Przybylska 1986: 348].<sup>36</sup>

The original curse/swearing, before it became conventionalized, could express no emotions at all, but it had to send its designated object “into the sphere of evil”, the domain of the negative sacred.

The exact verbal formulas of CURSE<sub>1</sub> and CURSE<sub>4</sub> may be completely different (e.g., CURSE<sub>1</sub>: *May you turn into stone!* and CURSE<sub>4</sub>: *Damn!*) or they may be identical: *May the devil take you!* or *Go to hell!*<sup>37</sup> (here, CURSING<sub>4</sub> is not limited to evocation, it also becomes an optative).

Today however, outside the folk culture, swearing has completely shed its dangerous magical function of summoning the evil powers. Now its tole is purely expressive. According to van der Leeuw, it has become “an empty shell” [van der Leeuw 1938: 454]. The swear words have completely lost their magical power and agential function.

## 5. Cursing to Hold Someone Obligated. CURSING<sub>5</sub> (*Zaklinać (to Conjure), Zaklinanie (a Conjuration)*)

The fifth usage of the verb *to curse* is relatively straightforward. Its English equivalent is the verb *to conjure*.

**kląć: kląć kogo na co;** ‘to beg persistently, to implore, to conjure’ (‘zaklinać, prosić usilnie’), e.g., *I beseech you in the name of all that is holy – speak the truth!* (*Klnę cię na wszystkie świętości – powiedz prawdę!*) [Sfraz].

***zakląć/zaklinać (perfective/imperfective aspect)***; ‘to bind somebody with a curse, to oblige somebody with a curse, to implore, to coerce’ (zaklinać kogo złorzeczeństwem, pod przekleństwem obowiązywać, zaprzysięgać, prosić, przymuszać’) [Linde]; ‘to oblige somebody under a curse, to beseech’ (‘zobowiązać pod przekleństwem, zaprzysięgać’) [SW]; ‘to implore, to beg’ (‘prosić, błagać o co’) [SJPDor, SJPSz].<sup>38</sup>

The nominal form of CURSING<sub>5</sub> is *zaklęcie* (*conjunction*): ‘the words used for beseeching’ (‘słowa błagalne’) [SW]; ‘an earnest entreaty’ (‘gorąca prośba, błaganie’) [SJPDor, SJPSz].

What is the connection between CURSING<sub>5</sub> and the previous types of cursing? It seems that traces of the connection are visible in the classic dictionary definitions of Linde and Karłowicz (‘to bind somebody with a curse,’ ‘to oblige somebody under a curse’) and secondly, in the now obsolete construction *zaklinać na coś*. The speaker may implore *in the name of God* or *in the name of all that is holy*, and this makes conjunction different from other, more ordinary “earnest entreaties.” CURSING<sub>5</sub> (CONJURATION) is an act of binding the addressee, holding them obliged by magical means, forcing them to do the speaker’s bidding. Whoever beseeches somebody in the name of God or in the name of heaven, calls on the highest possible authority to hold the addressee obliged, to make it impossible for the addressee to refuse. In this way, we are entering the realm of CURSING<sub>3</sub> (ENCHANTMENT) – the addressee of a conjunction is as if under a spell, deprived of freedom to exert their own will.

## 6. Cursing to Assure. CURSING<sub>6</sub> (*Zaklinać się (to Swear a Vow); Zaklinanie się (Swearing a Vow)*)<sup>39</sup>

In contrast with the others, CURSING<sub>6</sub> describes a conditional CURSE directed against the speaker him- or herself, lest the speaker keep his or her word; thus, it differs formally from all other spheres of cursing. This meaning in modern Polish is carried by lexemes *kląć się, zakląć się* (perfective) and *zaklinać się* (imperfective). The dictionary definitions are as follows:

***kląć się***: ‘to swear an oath, to make a vow, *anathemizare*’ (‘przysięgać, zaklinać się, *anathemizare*’) [SXVI]; ‘to swear an oath’ (‘klnąć, przysięgać się’) [Linde]; ‘to pledge (oneself), to make a vow’ (‘zaklinać się, przysięgać się’) [SW]; ‘to make a vow, to pledge oneself’ (‘przysięgać, zaklinać się’) [SJPDor, SJPSz];

***zakląć się/zaklinać się (perfective/imperfective aspect)***: ‘to assure under a curse, to assure under oath, to pledge oneself’ (‘zapewniać pod

klątwa, pod przysięgą, zaprzysięgać się’) [Linde]; ‘to make a promise under a curse, to pledge oneself’ (‘zapewnić pod klątwa, przysiąc się’) [SW]; ‘to aver or assure under oath, to swear’ (‘zapewniać o czymś, zaręczać pod przysięgą, przysięgać’) [SJPDor, SJPSz].

The nominal of CURSING<sub>6</sub> is today completely archaic: the old lexemes **zakłęcie** and **klątwa** were ambiguous, and alongside the meanings which we have discussed above (*zakłęcie* – *enchantment*, *klątwa* – *curse*), they used to convey the meaning of CURSE<sub>6</sub>, but in modern Polish they were completely supplanted by the unequivocal noun *przysięga* (*an oath, a vow, a pledge*).

The act of *pledging oneself* or of *swearing an oath* contains a conditional curse directed at the swearer himself/herself.<sup>40</sup> This voluntary curse (CURSE<sub>1</sub>) should take effect if the speaker’s words prove to be untrue or if the speaker breaks his promise or vow. In the act of swearing an oath (CURSING<sub>6</sub>), the speaker calls on a supernatural power (*God, heaven, hell, all saints, etc.*) to witness their oath. The swearer is fully aware of the consequences of oath breaking, which will take the form of punishment, meted out by the power that witnessed the oath.<sup>41</sup>

Making a pledge or a vow is undoubtedly very close to taking an oath (*przysięganie*). According to SPsł, “the meaning of ‘taking an oath’ developed from the original ‘to curse oneself, to cast a curse on oneself in the eventuality if one lies’” (“znaczenie ‘przysięgać’ rozwinęło się z pierwotnego ‘przeklinać samego siebie, złorzeczyć sobie na wypadek mówienia nieprawdy’”) [SPsł: *Kłęti*].<sup>42</sup> For my interlocutors, the two lexical units are so closely bound together that it is difficult to distinguish them. They used *kląć się* (*pledge oneself, curse oneself*) and *przysięgać* (*swear, take an oath*) interchangeably, as perfect synonyms. Asked about *zaklinanie się* (*cursing oneself*) they described the ritual for taking an oath.

My interlocutors see *pledging oneself* (*zaklinanie się*) and *swearing an oath* (*przysięganie*) as synonymous. It is easy to understand, as in the folk culture an oath retains its original sacred character, it is still seen as *assuring under a curse*. The interlocutors, however, differentiate the curse from such speech acts as *promise* (*obietnica, przyrzeczenie*) or *obligation* (*zobowiązanie*). These acts may also require drawing on a supernatural power as a witness, but it is not obligatory: “A promise, giving your word of honour – then you are bound in your honour to do it. But if you swear an oath, the thing rests with God” (“Obietnica, słowo honoru – to człowiek honorowy. Trzeba dotrzymać. A przysięga – to już Pan Bóg”) [12]. Thus, an oath is closely connected with God: “We on earth do not decide this. It is the power above that decides” (“O tym my na ziemi nie decydujem. To już chyba góra decyduje, czy jak”) [16].

Swearing an oath is a complex verbal ritual that needs to fulfil a range of special requirements. To use the words of Tolstoy, it needs to fulfil “prop-related and action-related requirements” [Tolstoy 1992: 21–22]: the presence of certain people, objects and gestures. My materials contain descriptions of the ritual:

Przysięga prawdziwa była, ten krzyż dawali. Dwa palce podnieść trzeba było i krzyż dawali całować. I przysięgało się, że się będzie mówiło prawdę. Jak sprawa jakaś była w rodzinie, to w domu przysięgali, krzyż się stawiało, świadkowie byli. Do kościoła chodzili na przysięgę, przysięgali przed księdzem, przed ołtarzem. Bez krzyża przysięga nieważna [20].

(In order for an oath to be valid, there needs to be a cross. You raise two fingers and kiss the cross, and you swear that you will tell the truth. If it was a family matter, then it would take place at home. There would be a cross and witnesses. Or people could go to the church, to swear in front of the priest, at the altar. Without a cross an oath is not valid.)

Podnosił dwa palce do góry: “Wzywam Boga na świadka, że będę mówił prawdę.” Ksiądz wydaje przysięgę, jest przy tym. Później ksiądz daje krzyż całować [13].

(You would raise two fingers and say: “As God is my witness, I will tell the truth.” A priest needs to be there, to oversee an oath being given. And then the priest gives you the cross to kiss.)

My interlocutors seem very aware of the oaths’ power: “Once you swear an oath, you must keep it until death. You can’t go back on your word” (“Jak już przysięgał, to musiał dotrzymać do śmierci. Słowo się rzekło, kobyłka u płotu”) [21] and of the consequences of oath breaking. The punishment for oath breaking or perjury could be termed CURSE<sub>s</sub>, “the state of being cursed by CURSE<sub>a</sub>.” “They say that if you swear an oath on the cross and break it, the family will be cursed unto the third generation: they will be born blind or stupid or some such” (“Mówią, że jak ktoś fałszywie na krzyż przysięgał, to do trzeciego pokolenia ta rodzina jest przeklęta i rodzą się jacyś głupi albo ślepi czy coś takiego”) [3].

In essence, an oath is a conditional CURSE<sub>a</sub>, an act of cursing **oneself** conditionally. The results of the curse only come into effect if the condition of the curse (the speaker’s truthfulness, or his promise to keep his word) is unfulfilled. The person who swears an oath puts himself/herself voluntarily in the hands of divine justice, which were called upon by the act of swearing the oath: thus, if an oath is not taken in good will, the speaker is justly punished. Those who swear an oath untruthfully,

in effect curse themselves. They experience the same consequences as people who were cursed by others (CURSING<sub>1</sub>).

Tu jeden taki był, co przysięgał w kościele. To on miał z panną dziecko i się nie przyznał, to mu mordę wykręciło. Każdy gadał, że go Pan Bóg skarał, bo w kościele przysięgał [4].

(There was a man here, he swore an oath in church. He had a child out of wedlock, but he kept it a secret, and he was punished, his face got permanently twisted. Everybody was saying that he was punished for swearing falsely at church.)

Jak ktoś fałszywie w sądzie zeznawał, za pieniądze, za wódkę, i później, kiedy mu się coś stało, to mówili: “Pan Bóg cię dotknął za krzywoprzysięstwo.” Za moich czasów w Krypach umierał człowiek, bogaty rolnik, [który] strasznie się procesował, brał świadków fałszywych. Jak umarł, to strasznie było patrzeć na niego, oczy miał otwarte i język wywalony. Każdy uciekał. Mówiło się, że Pan Bóg go skarał [7].

(If somebody went to court and perjured himself for money or for vodka, and then something bad happened to him, people would say that it was because of the perjury. In my lifetime, there was this old farmer in Krypy, who was very rich. He always took people to court and bought witnesses. When he died, he looked a sorry sight: his eyes were open and his tongue was sticking out. People would be rushing out of the room, so horrible he looked. People said that God punished him.)

Oj, mówio, że może stać sie coś. Jak przysienga, to mówi, że grzech wielki może spaść na dzieci czy na wnuki. Nic nie wolno, mileńka, złęgo. Nic złęgo nie wolno. Mówi sie “nie czyn drugiemu, co tobie niemiłe.” To już takie przysłowie i tak mówi sie. I ot, coż tut robić? [50].

(Sure, bad things can happen. When you swear an oath falsely, this is a grave sin. Sins of the fathers can be visited on the children or grandchildren. For this reason, my darling, one should do no ill. It is said “Don’t do unto others and you wouldn’t want others to do unto you.”)

The fear of grave consequences of a false oath led to an interdiction against swearing oaths (similar to the interdiction on swearing (cursing, using swear words) which we discussed above.) An early reference to the towards oaths can be found in a twelfth century chronicle by Hel mold of Bosau “Slavs take oaths very reluctantly, for they live in fear of oath-breaking, and of resulting anger and punishment of God” [in: Brückner 1980: 145–146].

An oath-breaker risked not only temporal, but also budzące grozę supernatural punishment... Gods, invoked as guarantors of the oath, would punish

the oath-breaker. The situation of the oath-breaker reversed the normal human condition: instead of being under the benevolent protection of the gods, the oath-breaker was now cursed by them, and those objects and people that were nearest and dearest to him (his own sword, his own kinsman) could turn against him [Modzelewski 2004: 156].

As we can see, the reluctance against oath-taking is very long-lived:

We know with what trepidation peasants swear an oath at court: they are afraid that, through a momentary defect of memory or mistake, they can bring on their heads God's punishment for perjury. The act of oath-taking fills them with holy awe: it sometimes happens that a litigant chooses to lose the case if the a chance of winning would bring the necessity of swearing an oath [Koranyi 1927: 3].<sup>43</sup>

He who speaks sets powers into motion...He who swears "calls on powers." *Świtezianka* (*A Nymph from Lake Świtez*), one of the best-known ballads of the Polish Romantic bard Adam Mickiewicz contains an accurate presentation of an act of pledging oneself (making a sacred oath):

Chłopiec przyklęknał, chwycił w dłoń piasku, / Piekielne wzywał potęgi, /  
Klął się przy świętym księżycu blasku...

(A boy knelt and took a handful of dust/ He called on the powers of hell/  
Cursing under the holy light of the moon.)

It is worth stressing that this short passage contains all the constitutive elements of taking a holy oath: the ritual takes place in a special time (the night; the moonlight can even be interpreted as the supernatural power that will be the guarantor of the oath). The speaker performs ritual gestures (kneeling, taking a handful of dust) that refer to the ancient form of swearing "on the earth."

An analysis of this passage can illuminate the essence of swearing a holy oath (and in fact, all the six spheres of CURSING which we have discussed in this chapter). Swearing and cursing are predicated upon "calling upon powers" This fact finds confirmation in the etymology of both *kłątwa* and *przysięga*. *Kląć* ((Proto-Slavic *klęti*, *klъnъ* (*sę*) [SPsł: *Klęti*]) in all probability shares its root with *kłonić* (*to bow*, Proto-Slavic. *\*kloniti*, *\*klon-* [SESł: *Kląć*]) and with *kłęczeć* (*to kneel*). Its broadest meaning is 'to bend, to squeeze.' Brückner notes: "Making a vow, a Slav would *bow* (*kłonić się*) to the ground, and touch it with his hand" [SEBr: *Kląć*]. In turn, *przysięga* (an oath, a vow) is derived from *sięgać* (*to reach*, Old Church Slavonic *sękti*, *sęga* 'to reach, to touch, to seize' [SPsł: *Prisękti*]); and Brückner again provides an explanation: "Making a vow, a Slav would

touch the ground with his hand, would reach for the ground” [SEBr: *Przysięga, Sięgać*].<sup>44</sup> Similarly, SPSł notes:

The completely lexicalized meaning ‘to swear, to make a vow’ [‘ślubować, składać przysięgę’] is strictly connected with the Slavic ritual of making a vow, that required consuming a small quantity of earth, kissing the earth or laying one’s hand on it... By reaching to the earth, or bowing to it, the speaker calls upon its power as a witness of the oath, or a guarantor of the obligation [SPSł: *Prisękti*].

By reaching towards the ground or bowing to it, the speaker invokes its great power and asks the earth to witness the vow and become its guarantor.<sup>45</sup>

## 7. Conclusion

As shown by the above discussion of the semantic field of CURSE in Polish, *calling upon a power*. What are the reasons for calling?

PRZEKŁĄĆ (TO CURSE) – ‘by uttering specific words, to call upon a power, to oblige the power to do something bad to somebody (something)’;

WYKŁĄĆ (TO EXCOMMUNICATE) – ‘by uttering specific words, to call upon a power, and to oblige the power to exclude somebody from the community’;

ZAKŁĄĆ (TO ENCHANT, TO CAST A SPELL) – ‘by uttering specific words, to call upon a power, obliging it to do something, wished by the speaker, to somebody (something)’;

PRZEKLINAĆ (TO SWEAR) – ‘by uttering specific words, to call upon a power,<sup>46</sup> breaking a verbal taboo, in order to express a negative emotional state of the speaker’;

ZAKLINAC (TO CONJURE) – ‘by uttering specific words, to call upon a power, to oblige the power to force somebody to do what the speaker wants’;

ZAKLINAC SIĘ (TO SWEAR AN VOW) – ‘by uttering specific words, to call upon a power, obliging it to do something bad if the speaker word.’

The semantic field of CURSING can also be illustrated graphically.

The table below shows the different meanings of the verb *kląć* and the noun *klątwa*, based on the material which I had collected. It presents the six distinct of CURSING, differentiated on the basis of semiotic differences between them.

**Table 1.** The semantic field of CURSING in Polish. The differentiation of meanings of the verb *kląć* and the noun *klątwa*, on the basis of the collected material

		'by uttering specific words, invoking a power'				
		'to oblige the power to do something so that'				
		'something bad happens to somebody'		'somebody performs an action desired by the speaker'		'something desired by the speaker happens to somebody'
		'because they did something bad'				
		'exclusion from the community'				
'if they break their word'						
'cursing <sub>6</sub> '		'cursing <sub>2</sub> '	'cursing <sub>1</sub> '	'cursing <sub>5</sub> '	'cursing <sub>3</sub> '	'cursing <sub>4</sub> '
ZAKLINAC SIĘ to swear a vow		WYKLAĆ to excommunicate, to cast off	PRZEKLAĆ to curse	ZAKLINAC to conjure	ZAKLAĆ to enchant, to cast a spell	PRZEKLINAC to swear
<i>zaklinać się na coś, że coś</i> to swear a vow by something that something is true		<i>wykłąć kogo skąd</i> to curse somebody so that they stay away from a given community	<i>przekląć kogo</i> to curse somebody	<i>zaklinać kogo, żeby co</i> to conjure somebody to do something	<i>zakląć kogo w coś</i> to transform somebody into something by the use of an enchantment, a spell	<i>przeklinać kogo</i> to swear at somebody
ZAKLINANIE SIĘ swearing an vow, a VOW		WYKŁĘCIE excommunication	PRZEKŁĘCIE a curse	ZAKLINANIE a conjuration	ZAKLĘCIE an enchantment, a spell	PRZEKLEŃSTWO swearing, a swearword

The materials analyzed in this chapter come mostly from standard Polish language dictionaries and from my interviews with representatives (or, in most cases, successors) of folk culture. The idiolect of most of the interlocutors was half way between regional dialects and standard Polish. I feel that perhaps I should justify my decision of using dictionaries of standard Polish and not dialect dictionaries. There is a practical reason for this decision: the only dialect dictionary which might be relevant for my research, is Karłowicz's *Słownik gwar polskich* (*A Dictionary of Polish Dialects*). I used Karłowicz's dictionary as much as I could, but it does not contain entries for many lexemes that were the focus of my argument. Moreover, Karłowicz's examples of usage are so short and devoid of context as to make them ambiguous or vague. Generally it seems that SGPKarł confirms the meanings of CURSE<sub>1</sub> and CURSE<sub>4</sub> for the lexeme *kląć*, CURSE<sub>4</sub> and CURSE<sub>6</sub> for *przekląć*, and CURSE<sub>3</sub> and CURSE<sub>4</sub> for *zakląć*. Thus, there are no discrepancies between SGPKarł and non-specialist dictionaries.

The folk ritual of the curse is connected with the first sphere of the semantic field described above, Rytuał klątwy wiąże się z pierwszą sferą pola pojęciowego 'klęcia' CURSING<sub>1</sub>. A study of dictionary definitions leads to a conclusion that the meaning CURSE<sub>f</sub> (PRZEKLEĆCIE<sub>f</sub>), 'the magic verbal formula' is confirmed only for historical usages. Contemporary dictionaries often preface the definitions of *klątwa* and *przekleństwo* with notes that these word's meanings are metaphorical or literary. Is it possible that for a contemporary speaker of Polish the meaning of curse (*klątwa* or *przekleństwo*) as “words that bring harm to someone” became dated? This is what dictionary definitions seem to suggest. Such a constatation however would be a mistake: it seems more likely that the definitions in the newest dictionaries are not exhaustive or comprehensive. The understanding of the curse as an agential magic formula seems far from forgotten. During my many conversations I have noted many contemporary examples of curses that were fulfilled.



## 4

# THE FOLK RITUAL OF THE CURSE

Kiedyś to wierzyli bardzo w klątwy i byli posłuszne rodzicom, bo mówili, że to przekleństwo bardzo na człowieka potem upadało.

(People used to really believe in curses and obeyed their parents, as they said that a curse would have terrible consequences.)

Luba from Zabłocie

## 1. Parental Curse

### 1.1. In Search for the Structure of the Ritual

Parental curse (most frequently encountered in the form of a mother's curse) is the most common type of a curse ritual in folk culture. The majority of the accounts collected during my research concern curses of this type. Below are some of the accounts of my interlocutors:

W mojej wsi przed wojną córka [katoliczka] wychodziła na prawosławne wiare. A matka miała jedne jedyne córke. No, jedzie do ślubu, do cerkwi. Matka bardzo płakała. No, już jak to do ukłonu, jak to przed ślubem – błogosławi ojciec, matka. I matka powiedziała: «Żeby ty, dziecko, nie dojechała!» Tak, tak jo już pożegnała przed tym ślubem. Jechali do ślubu furami; konie skręcili gdzieś na ruski cmentarz; wypadła w rów, złamała rękę od razu. Pojechali do szluby; no, jak ksiądz? Ksiądz, taki był staruszek – ja pamię-

tam – wyszedł, no, prawa ręka złamana. Ale dał, nałożył te obrączkę i dał ślub. No i ona tam już była u jego rodziców, tam już ją pilnowali z tą ręką, składali, wozili do Bokinki do tego Romanowicza, on te ręce złożył. No i urodziła dzieci bliźniaczki, dwa syny, oboje nierozwinięte. [...] Oni oboje byli takie. Oni niezdatne ni do roboty, ni do mowy, ni do niczego. Więcej nie miała już dzieci, tylko te dwa nieakuratne chłopczyki [41].

(It happened in my village before the war. One daughter, (a Catholic) was getting married to an Orthodox. Her mother had only one daughter. So, she was going to the Orthodox church to get married. The mother cried a lot. And, as always before the wedding, the father and the mother were to give their blessings. And that mother said: ‘may you never get there, my kid!’ This is how she parted withblessed her before the wedding. They were going to the church in wagons when suddenly the horses turned into a Russian (i.e. Orthodox) cemetery; the wagon fell into a ditch and the daughter broke her arm at once. They arrived at the church; and what did the priest do? The priest, he was such an old man; I remember, he came out and saw the bride with the right arm broken. Never mind, he put a wedding ring on her finger and married them. And so the daughter stayed at her husband’s parents, they took care of that injured arm, they took her to Bokinka, to that man, Romanowicz, and he fixed her arm. Later she had twins, two boys, both retarded. ... They were both like that. They were unable to work, speak or do any other things. She didn’t have more children except for those two unfortunate lads.)

W Piszczacu matka nie kazała się synowi żenić tam, gdzie chciał: “Wolałabym cię w trumnie widzieć niż z nią przy ołtarzu!” Chłopakowi, jak deski na stoły robił, piła się wyrwała i przerżnęło go na pół. Przyjeżdża orkiestra, a on w trumnie. Mówili matce: “I teraz zadowolona jesteś? Nie powinnaś płakać!” [18].

(One mother in Piszczac forbade her son to marry the girl. “I would rather see you in a casket than at the altar with her!” she said. And so, while he was cutting planks for tables, the saw slipped from his hands and he got cut in a half. The wedding orchestra came only to see him in the casket. People kept saying to the mother: “Are you happy now? You shouldn’t be crying!”)

Tutaj po sąsiedzku on sie podzielił sam majątkiem i jesce przeklinał. Matka mówi tak: “To przeklinaj na swoim!” I uderzył matke, az krew posła. Matka go za to skleła. A jesce przy mnie nieraz, ja tam do nich zajde, mówiła: “Ja mu nie daruje, niech mu Pan Bóg nie daruje!” Juze drugi rok, jak umarł, z głowy. Widzi pani, matke w głowe uderzył, to i matka powiedziała: “Ja mu nie daruje, niech mu Pan Bóg nie daruje!” Ja wiele gdzie był, przeżył 80 lat: matcyne przeklony skodzące! I kto jaką miarką mierzy, taką jemu później odmierzają. Wszystkim [13].

(Here, in the neighbourhood, one man divided the property himself and yet he kept cursing. His mother told him: "If you want to curse, do it in your place". He hit her so hard that she bled. The mother cursed him. And oftentimes, when I came over, she would tell me: "I will not forgive him, and may God never forgive him, either". And now it's been two years since he died umarł, z głowy > umarł, bo zachorował na głowę, taki sens. You see, he hit his mother on the head, so the mother said: "I will not forgive him and may God never forgive him". I am eighty, I have seen a lot, when your mother curses you, you are done! And with the measure you use it will be measured to you, it's the same for everybody.)

Tu jeden pobił matkę. I rzucił ją na ziemię. A ona mówi: "Żeby cię Pan Bóg tak rzucił!" Wie pani – i spełniło się! Jego przypadzisko [tj. padaczka] chwyciło. I dziś jeszcze żyje ten człowiek, niedaleko. I dziś ma taki lęk do ludzi. Widzi pani – matka przeklnie! [38].

(One man here beat his mother up and threw her to the ground. The mother said: "may God throw you to the ground like this!" And you know what? It came true! He got the accident [*przypadzisko*, i.e., epilepsy]. He is still alive, he lives here, nearby. And he is still scare of people. You see, that's what a mother's curse is!)

W jednym miejscu była wydana córka za męża, były dzieci, a te stare za ten majątek to by jak najdłużej chciały ciągnąć te zyski. Tamta już się chciała usamodzielnąć, zaczęła się kłócić: "Oddajcie majątek!" A ta stara mówi: "Bodajś się zatrzęśła ze swojemi dziećmi!" Potem się te dzieci trzęsły tak, aż było strach patrzeć. To była faktycznie prawda, moi rodzice o tym mówili [24].

(There was a woman here, she got married, she had children, but her parents still wanted to profit from the property. The daughter wanted to become independent and she started to make demands: "Give me my property back!" Her mother said to that: "may you get the shakes, together with your kids." And after that these children started to shake so terribly that it was hard to watch them. It is a true story, my parents told it to me.)

Mówili kiedyś, że matka z córką coś nie tego, sprzeczką była, córka uparła się, wyszła za męża. "Żeby ciebie to i tamto!" – matka zaczęła przeklinać. I dziecka żadnego nie urodziła jak należy, umarła bez dzieci. Jedno dziecko urodziło się z dziurą w podniebieniu (wilczą paszczę miało), drugie ryjek miało [18].

(People talked once about a daughter and her mother, they didn't get on, they quarrelled, the daughter got her way and got married. "May this or that happen to you!" the mother cursed her. And the daughter never gave birth properly, she died childless. One kid was born with a cleft, with a mouth like a wolf, another had a muzzle.)

Rodzice prawowali się z synem o ziemię i odebrali tą ziemię. On – dawaj żenić się, a ten majątek ojciec zabrał. No i pożenili się, a tu nie ma i nie ma dzieci. Coś tu poszkodziło – matka tego młodego to bardzo klęła, bo ten nieprawnie chciał wziąć ten majątek [28].

(The parents took their son to court over land and took this land away from him. He was about to get married, but there was no land, the father took it away. So they got married, and there are no kids at all. Something must have gotten in the way: that man's mother cursed him really hard, because he had no right to that land.)

Tu był jeden, kawaler taki. “Żeb ty zdrów nie przyjechał!” – ojciec go zaklął, jak konie wziął bez pozwolenia na kulig z panną. I w drodze koń mu oko wybił – kopnął go, jak sprawdzał, czy się nie zagrzał [13].

(There was one bachelor here. One day he wanted to take a girl for a sleigh ride and he took the horses without his father's permission. The father cursed him: “may you not come back in good health.” During the ride he got his eye kicked out – the horse kicked him while he was checking if it wasn't too sweaty.)

Ona się uczepliła do jednego i chciała za niego wyjść. Ojciec przeciwko był. Pożenili się, wieczorem ślub w kościele wzięli. Ojciec ją potem z widłami przeganiał. Ona umarła i dziewczynę zostawiła chorą. Ojciec okropnie przeklinał [11].

(One girl insisted on marrying a man against her father's will. She got married, in church, after dark. After that the father would chase her with a hayfork. Later, the daughter died and left a sick daughter behind. The father cursed terribly.)

W Piaskach więcej było prawosławnych, a polaków mało. [...] Były siostry [prawosławne] i jedna wyszła za katolika. Jak ona przyszła z kościoła od spowiedzi i ojciec już wiedział, że ona wychodzi za polaka, to mówi: “Lepiej, daczuszka, ja ciabie widziałby na katafale czym na kabiercy». I do roku czasu ta córka zmarła – przy porodzie; dzieciaczek ten też. I on potem mówił: «Wychodźcie za koho choczenie, choć za żyda, ja nie będę bronil” [44].

(In Piaski there were more Orthodox people than Catholics [...]. There were two (Orthodox) sisters and one of them married a Catholic. When she came back from the confession, her father, who had learnt of the marriage, said to her: “I would sooner see you on the deathbed than at the wedding altar.”<sup>1</sup> The daughter was dead within a year. She died at childbirth, her child died, too. Afterwards the father kept saying (to his other children): ‘marry whoever you want, even a Jew, I won't speak a word against it.’)

“True stories” told by my interlocutors smoothly turn into mythical tales and tropes. Real life events blend with folklore in such a way that we can no longer be sure whether the story we are listening to is a “true story” which took place “here”, or the one that happened “once upon

a time”, “in the past”, “somewhere”; whether the narrator witnessed it or knows it from ‘someone who saw it’ or, simply, from “people,” which may indicate that the narrator retells various folklore tropes presenting them as “true events”. The credibility of people who are the source of the information serves as the only criterion of its veracity (“It is true, my parents told me this story”<sup>2</sup>). We are dealing here with the culture in which tradition is transmitted orally (“the oral culture”, ‘the folklore culture’ – to bring up just two of various terms which are used to describe it); the transmission of “the truth” and “tale” is governed by the same narrative rules, as if both “the truth” and “the tale” were instances of reported speech, preceded by a “someone once told me...”.

May we therefore conclude that the difference between the truth and the myth is not so important?<sup>3</sup> We must remember that there is a kernel of truth in every tale. The structure of “tales” about casting the curse is the same as the structure of ‘true stories’. As a matter of fact, in the case of both “the true stories” and “the tales,” we are dealing with a myth. Let us listen to what it has to say:

Moja teściowa opowiadała: Na Wólce był leśniczy. Miał takie pare koni i dubeltówkie. A matka była bardzo religijna. I matka do kościoła, a on na polowanie. Brał te psy i te dubeltówkie i już jechał na te polowanie. A matka prosiła, żeb on szedł do kościoła. A ten syn nie posłuchał. Usiadł w tą bryczkie, i te pare koni założył, i tych dwa psy, i pojechał. Wyjeżdża, a matka mówi: “Żebyś ty sie obrócił w kamień!” I jest ten kamień! Para koni, bryczka, dwa psy i człowiek. A jak zaczęli rwać tego kamienia (już długo po tym, jak się to stało), bo chcieli rozbić, to krew wytrysnęła [34].

(My mother in law told one story: there was a forester in Wólka. He had a pair of horses and a double-barrelled gun. His mother was very religious. She would go to church while he would go hunting. He would take the dogs and that gun and off he was to the forest. The mother begged him to attend the mass but he didn’t obey her. He got into the chaise, harnessed the horses, took two dogs and set off for the hunt. He was leaving when the mother said: “May you turn into a stone!” And lo and behold, there it was! Two horses, the chaise, two dogs and the man turned into stone. And while they were trying to uproot this stone (long after it happened) they wanted to crush it, and blood gushed from it.)

Mówią, że jedna matka... tak, o, dziewczynka pod oknem stała, i tam coś ona... a ona wszystko krzyczała na jej, ta matka, a ona, nie wiem co, nie posłuchała... I ona mówi: “Kab ty kamieniem stała!” I kamień stanął [50].

(People say that there was this mother... a girl was standing by the window, and something was wrong, that mother yelled at her, but the girl didn’t obey her, and the mother said ‘May you turn into a stone!’. And the stone appeared.)

Matka nie pozwalała córce wyjść za mąż za ukochanego, więc córka uciekła z nim z domu. Matka powiedziała: "A żeb ci się nie szykowało, żeb ty zginęła!" I jak jechali do ślubu, córce upadła chusteczka i, schylając się po nią, zamieniła się w kamień. Kamień ten teraz znaleziono; to było w Neplach [32].

(Once a mother didn't let her daughter to marry her sweetheart, so the daughter eloped with him. The mother said: "may life be hard on you, may you perish!" While they were on their way to the wedding, the daughter dropped her handkerchief, and, as she bent to pick it up, she turned into a stone. This stone has been found just now, it all happened in Neple.)

Słyszałam, że raz matka przeklęła dzieci w gawrony, jak były nieposłuszne [8]. (I've heard once of a mother who cursed her children into rooks, when they were disobedient.)

Opowiadają w Lubelskiem o złej i leniwej dziewczynie, która na wołanie matki chowając się, odpowiadała kukaniem. Pewnego razu matka zniecierpliwiona przeklęła ją słowami: "Żebyś tak kukała i w świat poleciała!" I zła córka przemieniona została w kukułkę, która odtąd nie ma gniazda, lata i kuka [Biegeleisen 1930: 41].

(In Lubelskie people talk about one bad and lazy girl. When her mother called her she hid and cuckooed like a bird. Once the mother lost her patience and cursed the girl: "May you cuckoo and fly away!". And the wicked daughter turned into a cuckoo who, since then has no nest, just flies and cuckoos.)

The stories about someone being turned into a stone or a bird are akin to myths and magical folk tales, they speak of the punishment "that seems to be incommensurate with guilt. The punishment is symbolic" [Tokarska-Bakir 2000: 116]. The story of the girl turned into a cuckoo corresponds to the folk tale trope T 2522 [PBL 2: 182–183],<sup>4</sup> while the motif of turning children into rooks is an echo of the trope of The Seven Ravens (T 451). This magical folk tale is known throughout Europe (Krzyżanowski tracked 21 versions of it in Poland alone), which tells a story about a sister freeing the brothers who had been cursed by their mother (alternatively by the step-mother or the father) into ravens (alternatively into eagles or storks) [PBL 1: 141–42]. In the version recorded by Kolberg, the situation in which the curse was cast is described in the following way:

Miała matka trzech synów i jedne córeczkę. Poszła z córeczką do wody prać i zabaczyła wziąć jedny koszuli z domu. I tyj córeczce kazała bieżyć po tę koszulę. Córka poszła po onę koszulę, a oni bracia ij się psocą przed sienią. Tak matka, która to widziała, zaklęła ich, żeby tak polecili, jak to ptactwo leci, żeby oni razem z nim polecili. Tak też Pan Jezus dał, że oni polecili z nimi (ptakami) i nie widzieli ich już bez sidem lat ani ojciec, ani

matka, ani siostra (*O trzech braciach-ptakach i siostrze – The Story of Three Brothers and Their Sister* [DWOK 18, *Kuj* 1: 123]).

(A mother had three sons and one daughter. Once she took the daughter with her to do some laundry, but she forgot to take with her one of the shirts. She sent the daughter to bring it. When she came home to pick up the shirt, she saw that the brothers who were left at home were naughty. When the mother saw it, she cursed the sons telling them to fly away with the birds. And so Jesus made them fly with the birds and neither their mother, their father, nor their sister saw them for seven years.)

Let us take a closer look at the participants of the curse ritual.

### 1.1.1. The Object of the Ritual

Jeżeli dziecko niedobre, to matka przeklnie  
(If the child isn't good, the mother will curse them.)

Stanisława from Krasnybór

The curse ritual focuses on the cursed person. The object of the curse is the very reason why the curse comes into existence. In all of the situations described above, the object of the curse was a child (or children). What kind of a child becomes the object of the curse? What leads to such a curse?

As it follows from the accounts of the interlocutors, the children who are cursed are naughty (they play pranks, cry, yell), disobedient (and their disobedience can manifest in various ways, from seemingly trivial situations to very serious ones, such as getting married against the parents' consent, or even without their knowledge)<sup>5</sup> arguing with their parents (wishing to get married against the parents' will, litigating over property), raising their hand against the parents, or rejecting commonly accepted religious values (by ignoring holy days or changing their faith).<sup>6</sup>

Let us listen to what my interlocutors had to say about it:

Jeżeli dziecko niedobre, to matka przeklnie [37].

(If the child isn't good, the mother will curse them.)

Tutaj jeden, on takim był bandziorem, on ludzi mordował, jego matka jego zakleła: "Zeby ty sie nicego nie dorobił!" I nic sie nie dorobił [13].

(There was one man here, he was a bandit, he murdered people, and his mother cursed him: "may fortune never come your way!" And he never prospered.)

Zocha Kisielowej miała tego Heńka. Był kawalerem i tak pił. Ona była po prostu wykończona; widocznie przekleła, bo zachorował i umarł szybko, w ciągu paru tygodni [12].

(Zocha, Kisiel's daughter, had that son, Heniek. He was a bachelor and a drunkard. She's had enough; she must have cursed him, because he fell ill and soon died, within a few weeks.)

Powtarzają na przykład, że matka na syna powiedziała, czy na córkę, bo była nieposłuszna; że i przekleła, i ziemi nie dali, dlatego, że nie byli pokorni dla swoich rodziców – o, takie o [23].

(People talk about a mother who said something against her son (or maybe it was a daughter), who was disobedient; and that mother cursed that son (or daughter), and didn't give them land, because they weren't respectful to their parents. Well, at least that's what they say.)

Każdyja baćki swajmu dziciaci dabra choczuc. Praklinajuc tolka taho, katory nie pa sahtasiju baćkoꝯ idzie zamuż. I jakojeb jano nie było dzicia, ci jano dobraje, ci niadobraje, jeśli jano paszło zamuż prociꝯ baćkoꝯ woli. Abyczna każuc: "Jak jana chocz. Ci tam syn. Ażaniꝯsia, nu i niachaj. Nie nravicca mnie niawiestka. Ja, każa, da ciabie wiek u chatu nie zajdu" [52].

(All parents wish their children well. They curse only when a child marries without their permission. It doesn't matter whether the child is good or bad, if they married against their parents' will, the parents usually say: "It is her (or his) choice. He got married, so be it. But I don't like my daughter in law. I shall never set my foot in their house.")

A jedna to tak przeklinała swoją córkę, bo nie chciała, żeby za rozwodczika szła: "Będę przeklinać ciabie uże aż do śmierci, skolki ja żyć budu" [65].

(One woman cursed her daughter terribly because she didn't want her to marry a divorced man: "I will keep cursing you as long as I am alive, till I die!")

Przed wojną, nie daj Boże, była wtedy w wiosce dziewczyna, co się w jednym ruskim zakochała, potem w drugim, ale matka nie puszczała i ksiądz zakazywał. A ona i tak poszła, i ożeniła się w cerkwi, i wtedy dzwony dzwoniły na przekleństwo, że od swojej wiary odeszła, katoliczka się z prawosławnym ożeniła [50].

(Before the war, God have mercy, there was a girl in our village, she fell in love with one man of Orthodox faith, then she fell for another, but both her mother and the priest were against such a marriage. She did it anyway, got married in the Orthodox church, and the bells rang to curse her for betraying her faith, a Catholic who married an Orthodox.)

As we can see, the cursed child is naughty, disobedient, and disrespectful; commits a grave sin by drinking or committing a murder; breaks the community rules governing marriage by maintaining a relationship with somebody divorced or a heretic. Can we find a common

denominator for all the transgressions that result in a parental curse? The answer seems to be positive. The child who is cursed is the one who opposes their parents (“isn’t respectful to the parents” as one of my interlocutors puts it). They may rebel against their parents in two ways: either directly, by disobeying them (i.e., opposing their will) or by showing lack of respect (the extreme example of which is beating a parent), or indirectly – by rejecting traditional values upheld by the parents. We must keep in mind that the parents are the ones who introduce children into the community, teaching them that drinking, murder, godlessness, or converting to a different faith are sins. A sinful child is, in fact, a **disobedient child**.

One of the typical ways in which such disobedience can be manifested is the loss of virginity (for girls) (in Polish folk culture the loss of virginity by a girl is called *strata wianka* – “loss of the garland”) or loss of innocence (boys). The consequence of breach of the norm of prenuptial chastity is parental refusal to bless the newlyweds. This trope has a separate place in folk songs.

Songs about “the loss of the garland”<sup>7</sup> often contain the motif of the curse: they feature either a mother cursing her daughter who committed a transgression<sup>8</sup> or a girl cursing a boy who had abandoned her.<sup>9</sup>

The loss of innocence in the circumstances other than permitted (i.e., in a ritual wedding scenario) prevents the parents from passing their blessing to the newlyweds. By committing a sin, the newlyweds lose the possibility to inherit good fortune from their family in a ritual way. “Parental blessing, mainly a father’s blessing, is a wedding ritual through which the progeny or descendants are allowed to benefit from ‘familial good fortune’ represented by the father and bestowed by him” – as Józef Obrębski commented, referring to the traditional culture of Polesie. “Continuous litanies of parental blessings accompanying specific stages of the wedding ceremony reach their culmination in ‘the sitting ceremony’ (*posad*) which, in the old times, was related to checking the innocence of both the bride and the groom. The newlyweds who had disregarded stringent patriarchal interdictions and engaged in premarital sexual intercourse were deprived of the right to the above ceremony and its blessings, including the paternal blessing, or else they would be deemed sacrilegious” [Obrębski 2007: 152]. As a consequence, such newlyweds remained in a non-blessed state, which may easily be called the state of the curse (CURSE<sub>s</sub>).

As it is difficult to analyze the situation of a disobedient child in isolation from the parents, let us take a closer look at the person who performs the curse ritual.

## 1.1.2. Performer of the Ritual

Matki przekleństwo to mury cementowe wraca...  
(A mother's curse tears down even cement walls...)<sup>10</sup>

Maryja from Krasnowce

Since we are analyzing the parental curse, the performers of the curse are parents; and in the material I have collected, they are in fact mainly mothers. Although it is difficult to present an exhausting characteristic of cursing parents on the basis of the accounts quoted above, they still provide us with lot of useful information.

What we learn from them are the causes of the curse: a mother argues with her daughter, a mother punishes her son for beating her, parents sue their son over land, parents are against marital plans of their children. We also learn about two other possible situations: a mother “cried terribly” and “a mother pleaded him to go to the church”. There is also a story about a mother who *bezmyślnie* uttered the dangerous words *May the devil take you*. We can delineate three situations in which a parental curse is uttered. In the first situation, the parents sternly enforce their will and punish disobedience: the child must obey the parents unconditionally. An apt label for this role of the performer of the ritual would be **the punishing mother** (punishing parent/parents). In the second situation, parents suffer because of the child's maltreatment and disobedience (**the wronged mother**); in the third situation a mother loses control over her tongue, the curse ‘slips’ out of her mouth (**the careless mother**). Let us listen to what my interlocutors had to say about it.

Both parents can curse their children but all the interlocutors agree that “a mother's curse is stronger” (“matki klątwa silniejsza”) [35, 40, 42], “a mother's curse is the worst” (“matki klątwa najgorsza”) [17], “a father's curse cannot have the same power as the mother's curse” (38), or even: “only a mother can curse, a father lacks such power” (“tylko matka może przekląć, ojciec nie ma takiej władzy”) [8], or: “And a mother, she can do real harm! A mother's curse, God forbid! She can really curse her child! There are such mothers. It can happen” (“A matka, to już szkodzi! Matka, to nie daj Boże! Matka na dziecko jak zaklina...! Są takie matki, są. Tak się zdarza”) [41].

It can happen...The words of the curse uttered by the mother must fulfil. *A mother never curses in vain*<sup>11</sup> (*Macierzyńskie przekleństwo na suchy las nie idzie*) [LB 4: 243].

Raz matka swojemu synowi powiedziała: “żeby ciebie pioruny biły, jak będziesz się żenił z nią.” I piorun zabił jego, i płakała, że to ona go zabiła, bo

go przeklęła. I matka tak powiedziała, a matki przekleństwo to mury cementowe wraca. To nie można, bo to tak się stanie, jest taka przedmowa na matki przekleństwo, że jak mury cementowe wraca, takie mocne, najmocniejsze Raz matka swojemu synowi powiedziała: “żeby ciebie pioruny biły, jak będziesz się żenić z nią.” I piorun zabił jego, i płakała, że to ona go zabiła, bo go przeklęła. I matka tak powiedziała, a matki przekleństwo to mury cementowe wraca. To nie można, bo to tak się stanie, jest taka przedmowa na matki przekleństwo, że jak mury cementowe wraca, takie mocne, najmocniejsze [65].

(Once a mother told her son: ‘may the lightning strike you if you marry this girl!’ [...] And lightning killed him, the mother despaired that it was her who killed him, because she cast the curse. It was a mother’s curse and a mother’s curse tears down even cement walls, strong walls, the strongest ones.)

Why is a mother’s curse so powerful?

Dlaczego? Bo matka. To dziecko nosi w sobie i rodzi [12].

(Why? Because she’s the mother. She bears this child. She gives birth.)

Kłątwa najgorsza matki. Matka to może przekląć. Bo matka jest najwłaśniejsza. Wykarmiła, wynosiła, wiele wycierpiała. No to potem dziecko musi słuchać [11].

(A mother’s curse is the worst. A mother, she can curse! Because the mother is the most important. She was the one who fed the child, who carried it, she had to suffer a lot. So the child must listen to her afterwards.)

Matki dlatego, że matka porodziła i pokarmiła [37].

(Because a mother gave birth and fed the child.)

Kłątwa matki silniejsza, bo matka na sercu nosiła w sobie. A ojciec to jak ojciec... [35].

(A mother’s curse is stronger because a mother kept the baby under her heart. A father is just a father...)

Bo matka urodziła, wynosiła pod sercem, i ten swój charakter, te nerwy włożyła [18].

(Because the mother gave birth, kept the child under her heart, and she gave a lot of herself, put a lot of nerves into it.)

Ojca klon nie taki mocny. Jak by nie było, matki, bo matka rodziła, i matki to serce lepiej boli. A ojciec powie: “niech sobie co chce robi.” Ojciec machnie ręką, i już. A matka nie tak... [30].

(A father’s curse is not so strong. In any case, the mother’s curse is stronger, because the mother gave birth, and the mother’s heart hurts more. A father will say “let him do as he wishes.” He will not care. A mother is different...)

Najgorsze przekleństwo jest matki. Bo to serce matki to wszystko wyczuje, nawet się wyśni. To jest ten instynkt matki. To dlatego matki szkodzące te życzenia [18].

(The worst curse is a mother's curse. Because the mother will know everything with her heart, she may even see it in her dreams. This is her instinct. This is why mother's curses are so harmful.)

Dziecko wychodzi z łony matki, to więcej szkodzi klątwa matki. I ojca szkodliwa, ale nie tyle, co matki [34].

(The child comes out of the mother's womb, so the mother's curse is more harmful. A father's curse is harmful too, but not as much as the mother's curse.)

Matka rodna może praklaści. Jak jana jeść matka, to może pawlijać na zdarouje dziciaci swajmu. [...] Można, jak rodna matka, i syn jaki szto utworyć, może Boh i prymie heta klenstwa [64].

(A blood [*rodzona*] mother may curse her child. Because she is the mother, she can harm her child's health [...]. She can, because she is the *rodzona* mother, and if her son does something wrong, God may listen to such a curse.)

– Przeklenstwo matki oczeń, oczeń, oczeń niedobrze. Bardzo niedobrze. Dlaczego?

– No, to, że jest matka, ona i rodziła jej, hadawała, pielengnowała, a teraz sama swoja krew przeklina. To jest niedobrze.

Swoją krew?

– No pewno, to jedna krew, ci matka, ci córka [65].

(– A mother's curse is really, really, bad. Very bad, indeed.

Why?

– She's the mother, and she gave birth, brought the daughter up, took care of her, and now she is cursing her own blood. It isn't good.

Her own blood?

– Yes, sure, it's one blood, the mother and the daughter.)

The power of a mother's curse comes from the special relationship she has with her child, as she gives life to the child. However, this relationship is not only biological, but also involves social and spiritual ties;<sup>12</sup> a mother takes care of her child, brings it up, and introduces it to the world:

Toż ona nosi jego tyle miesięcy, potem wychowuje swoim pokarmem, ile ona ma pracy! Czy ojciec tyle ma starania, co matka? Toż ona musi dziewięć miesięcy wychodzić, toż to ciężar, ja sama wiem, ja miałam pięcioro. Tyle pracy, tyle męki z porodem i wychowaniem, tyle prania i tego pielęgnowania! I dziś człowiek jeszcze dla nich miłość trzyma, czym są starsze [38].

(She carries that child for so many months, then she feeds him with her own milk, she has so much work! Does a father have as much to work as a mother?

She has to bear the child for nine months, it is a burden, I know, I had five children myself. So much work, so much suffering during the birth, so much hassle bringing them up, so much laundry to do and so much tending to them! Even now I still love them as they grow older.)

The child is seen as a part, an extension of the mother. The thread of life that binds them is never cut (it naturally snaps at the moment of the mother's death, more precisely, during the ritual of the deathbed blessing<sup>13</sup>) and it continues to impose obligations on each of them: the child "has to listen," the mother "has to love." My interlocutors explicitly refer to this obligation:

Jak można! [kląć na dzieci] Niech ono będzie i najgorsze, ale nie można kiepsko zrobić i myśleć jemu. Insza matka – to jakaś taka je złość, że naklinaje na dzieci. Ale ja nie wiem, jakie to sumienie, że można na dzieci coś myśleć... Mnie zdaje się, że koby nie [wiem] co zrobiło moje dziecko, to ja nie mogę coś na niego myśleć [25].

(How can one do it! [i.e., curse children]. Even if the child was the worst, one cannot harm him or have ill thoughts. A mother who isn't like that, who curses her children, maybe because of anger. What kind of conscience... to wish children ill... I think that whatever my kid might do, I couldn't wish him ill.)

Tu była matka taka, Przybylska nieboszka. Ona przeklinała, to raz; a po drugie oddała swoje dzieci, pod milicję oddała za Niemców, i zabrali dwóch chłopaków, zabili. Oni tam źle żyli, oni nie słuchali sie ji, a ona, po drugie, to nie była matka, tylko – bo ja wiem? [27].

(There was such a mother here, her name was Przybylska, she is dead now. First, she cursed her children, second, she turned in two sons during the war, and she gave them to the German police and they took the two boys and killed them. They got on badly in that family, they didn't listen to her, and she, she wasn't like a mother.)

It has finally been said: a bad mother is not a mother. A mother must be good to her children, accept them, wish them well – these are the conditions that the folk culture deems to be the defining qualities of a mother.<sup>14</sup>

So, is it possible that "a good mother" can curse her children? Interestingly, sometimes this is exactly the case. She can cause real harm to her children by cursing them.

Najgorsze skodzące matcyne przeklony. Bo matka wyhodowała, wychowała, to bardzo skodzące. Jezeli dzieci jest złe. Matka tak sobie nie zaklnie, tylko ze złości [13].

(A mother's curses are the most harmful. Because the mother raised the child, she can do harm. But only if the children are bad. A mother will not curse without any reason, only because she is angry.)

This is a model situation in which the curse ritual takes place: if children are "bad" the mother not only has the right to curse them, **she is obliged to do it** (a good mother will not curse without any reason). Such curses are 'the most harmful.' "If someone has a reason to curse, the curse will be harmful" ("Kto słusnie zaklnie na dzieci, to szkodzące, to niedobre") [13], my interlocutors opine. Furthermore: "they say that when the father or the mother curse the child, it is very harmful. Parents mustn't curse, God forbid, it is the worst" ("Mówią, że jak ojciec czy matka zaklnie na dzieci, to bardzo szkodliwe jest. Rodzicom nie wolno przeklinać, broń Boże, to jest najgorsze") [40].

Are we not facing a contradiction here? On the one hand, parents have the right, even the obligation to curse a disobedient child ("Parents are most likely to curse" – "Rodzice najprędzej mogą przekląć" [42]), based on a strong belief that 'the curse of a father or a mother is the worst, because they are the source of everything' ("ojca i matki klątwa najgorsza, bo wszystko zaczyna się w imię ojca i matki") [21], and on the exceptional significance of the fourth commandment in the folk moral code. On the other hand, there is a strong prohibition against cursing. What lies behind this prohibition? How is it justified? My interlocutors must have been asking themselves similar questions since they frequently mention that one should not and must not curse:

Matka nigdy nie powinna powiedzieć na dziecko, to jest bardzo źle. Zostaje nawet na całe życie [18].

(A mother should never speak against her child, it is very wrong. Such a curse may stay with the child even for their whole life.)

Jak matka przeklnie dziecko, to się spełnia, to jest bardzo groźne. Nie powinna matka tego robić [15].

(When a mother curses her child, the curse comes true, it is very dangerous. A mother shouldn't do that.)

Nie można przeklinać tak użo, kab matka praklinała. Toż matka jest rodna matka. Może Boh przyjmie takoje przekleństwo [64].

(You shouldn't curse, a mother shouldn't curse. Being a mother, this is your own blood. Maybe God will accept such a curse.)

Matka żeby się najbardziej wystrzeżała. Nawet niechcący przekleństwo wypowiedziane na dziecko będzie ciążyło na dziecku [18].

(A mother should be the most careful. Even if she did not want to curse, the curse will hang over the child.)

Nikogo nie powinno się kląć. Rzucić łatwo. Mądra matka tego nie zrobi, tylko głupia [6].

(Nobody should be cursed. It is easy to cast a curse. A wise mother would never do such a thing, only a stupid one.)

Matka nie powinna. Ona urodziła, to jak teraz przeklinać? [18].

(A mother shouldn't do it. She gave birth to the child so how can she curse him now?)

Matka na swoje dziecko bardzo przeklinać nie może. Czy jakieś niepowodzenie może być, czy coś takiego. Może coś się stać. To tego wystrzegali się. Jakie by ono tam nie było, ale trzeba już cierpieć. Dawniej to mówili tak, że jak cudza kobieta, czy tam ktoś przeklina, to nie szkodzi, a jak matka, to szkodzi [33].

(A mother mustn't curse her own child too much. Something bad may happen. So the mothers were careful not to. Doesn't matter what the child is like, you have to put up with it. People used to say that if a strange woman or someone else curses you it causes no harm, but if a mother does it, it is harmful.)

Choćby i najgorsze dziecko, to matka, choć i myśli co złego, ale boi się przekląć [38].

(Even when the child is the worst, the mother may think something ill, but she is still afraid to curse.)

Matka powie, ale też boi się, bo to dziecko. Nie posłuchało, to nie posłuchało, i już, przepadło. Boi się, żeb co nie stało się [28].

(A mother can say something, but she is also afraid to, because it is her own child. If the child didn't obey her, that's a shame, but what can you do? She would be afraid that something bad would happen.)

Matce nie można dzieci przeklinać, bo wszystko się stać może wtedy. Jak jeszcze mała byłam, to moja mamusia opowiadała, że u nas była jedna, co dziecka swego przeklęła, to piorun jego pobił. Nie można swego dziecka przeklinać [56].

(A mother mustn't curse, anything may happen if she does it. When I was little, my mum said that there used to be one mother in our village, who cursed her child and the child was struck by lightning. You mustn't curse your own kid.)

The above accounts concerning the fear of uttering the fateful words point to the heart of the matter: a curse is an agential speech act, in which

“by saying ‘P, I cause P.’” Once the words of the curse are uttered, they start to fulfil. The words of the curse fulfil independently of the intentions of the speaker. No wonder therefore that mothers are afraid to cast curses; they are aware that the words of their curse will harm the child. Since it is clear why they are afraid of cursing, maybe they should not do it at all, maybe they simply are not allowed to curse, because casting a curse, analogically to CURSING<sub>4</sub> (SWEARING) is a sin, an abuse of parental authority? My interlocutors clearly stated that mothers should not curse. How can we resolve the contradiction between the prohibition and the right (or even – in certain circumstances – an obligation) to curse?

I believe that in fact this is only an apparent contradiction. It seems that we are dealing here with casting a curse in different situations. Being aware of the irreversible effect of the curse, the mother should be careful not to cast the curse in trivial situations, against the child whose transgressions are not very serious. To put it simply, the mother must not overuse a curse. I think that this is what my interlocutors meant when they said that a mother should not or must not cast a curse. She must not do that in a situation where the child does not deserve to be cursed. “A mother should never ever, even at times of the worst anger allow herself to wish her child ill in her thoughts or to say it” (“Matka nie powinna nigdy, nigdy, nawet w największej złości dopuścić do tego, żeby dziecku jakąś krzywdę życzyć czy powiedzieć”) [18]. Here, a female interlocutor speaks clearly of a child being wronged; we may presume that she thinks of the circumstances where a curse would not be a fair punishment for a transgression.

A justified parental curse is an instrument of justice in, so to speak, extreme situations, where less severe punishments proved ineffective, when the child’s conduct is so bad that one may not forgive him/her any more:

Nieraz, jak już dobrze to dziecko da się we znaki, to może i matka powie jakie słowo... [23].

(Sometimes, when the child really got on her nerves, a mother will say something...)

Mnie zdajecca, jak matka wieryć Bohu, to nadta treba leżć za szкуру, sztoswajmu dziciaci szto zrabiła. Dziaćia jeść dzicia, baćki jeść baćki. Moża i my nie ւսio dobra robim. I nam mohuć nie ւսio dobra zrobić, to trebaż i praszczuć! [64].

(I think that if a mother believes in God, she will not do anything to the child unless it really gets under her skin. A child is just a child, parents are parents. Maybe we don’t always do everything right, so when they don’t do something right, we must forgive them!”)

Jeżeli dziecko robi coś takie, że ta matka płacze, i chodzi, i sama nie wie, co ma robić, to jednak przeklina to dziecko. Jeżeli się nie słuca dziecko i idzie tako drogo już po swojemu, to jednak matka płacze i prosi, ale ono nie słuca wcale – to jednak niedobrze. I przeklnie. I pójdzie ono niedobrze. “Żeb ty nic nie miała, żeb ty tak poszła tą drogą swojo i żeb nic dobrego ty już nie miała, dziecko. Jeżeli ty mnie nie słuchasz i moje łzy tylko lejo sie, to jednak ja cie przeklnę.” I niedobrze się dzieje [30].

(If a child brings the mother to tears, and she walks around not knowing what to do, she curses that child. If the child does not obey the mother and sticks to his ways and even though his mother cries and pleads, doesn't listen to her at all – well, that's wrong. And such a mother will curse (the child). And it won't be good for the child. “May you have nothing, may you keep to your own ways and may no good come out of it. If you don't listen to me and I spill my tears in vain, I shall curse you.” And bad things happen.)

We are dealing here with the situation where a child betrays the parents who represent moral norms of the community, and this betrayal in particular concerns the mother, who gives life to the child and brings him/her up.

As Malinowski put it, such a situation constitutes a necessary “context of cultural reality” of the curse ritual; and according to Austin, the condition of its felicity. A disobedient child occupies a position that is hostile to social norms of morality, and by doing so, he/she turns against the life itself. An act of casting a curse, understood as a deliberately used educational sanction, reveals the opposition between obedience (life) and disobedience (a state of being cursed= non-life):

Jeszcze babcia moja, że nieraz żeśmy byli niegrzeczne, to mówili: “Cie Bozia skarże i w kamień sie ubrócisz», a my sie bali. “A jak to sie stanie? A co to będzie?” – “A no skaminiejesz i już ni będziesz chodził po ziemi.” No takie były, takie kiedyś, no na małych dzieci przypowiednie takie byli, że... że nie rób tego, bo tam jak nigrzeczny był, to, bo skaminiejesz.

(We were often naughty and my grandma would say: “God will punish you and you will turn into stone” and we got scared. “How will it happen?” – “Well, you will turn into stone and you will never walk freely on earth like you do now.” People said that to small children, when the child was naughty, they would say, don't do that, or else you will turn into stone.)<sup>15</sup>

By consistent disobedience (i.e., by insisting on remaining in the state of sin) the children place themselves outside of the community, beyond the limits of the human world. Such a child provokes the curse.

We must keep in mind that the circumstances of a parental curse that are described here represent a model. However, such a model must be reconstructed, so that it can later serve as a reference for the cases

that are less typical or “pure.” We may, therefore, call the circumstances of a parental curse, **an impasse**. In such a situation, the curse ritual is performed by a mother who was originally a wronged mother but had to become a punishing mother.

And what are the circumstances in which a careless mother acts? It may seem that (as opposed to the situation of a wronged mother or a punishing mother) the circumstances are not extreme, they are not marked by lack of choice, but they are special in a different way: they are the circumstances in which “even the curse spoken unintentionally will loom over the child” (“nawet niechcący przekleństwo wypowiedziane na dziecko będzie ciążyło na dziecku”) [18]. Maybe the simple reason why such a curse “looms over” the child is that the words generally fulfil? We must remember that this is the world where speaking is acting. However, the reason may be different; maybe only the words uttered by the parents fulfil, or maybe it is the case with the words of the curse? Maybe some other factors come into play?

Może to taka godzina jest zła? Moja mama wysłała mnie do Owsiana po coś tam przynieść – miałam wtedy trzynaście czy piętnaście lat – i ja się zapomniałam. Poszłam, coś jedno przyniosłam, drugie nie przyniosłam. Ale pamiętam dobrze i do śmierci będę pamiętała. To był mojego męża ojciec – to był bardzo podły człowiek, trudny do życia, żony swojej nie szanował ni dzieci. On dyscyplinę miał, jak co powiedział, to dziecko pamiętało. I mama moja powiedziała: “Żeby ty była u Owsiana, to ty byś się nie zapomniała!” I ja potem przyszedłam do Owsiana! Czy to nie wyrzeknięte słowo? [18].

(Maybe there is an evil hour? My mother sent me for something to Owsian, I was thirteen or fifteen at that time, and I forgot to bring it. I went there and I brought one thing, but not the other. There is something I still remember very well and will remember till the end of my life. Owsian was my husband’s father, a very bad man, hard to live with, he was good neither to his wife nor children. He kept strict discipline, when he said something, the children obeyed and if he told them to do something, they never forgot to do it. And my mum said: “If you were Owsian’s child, you wouldn’t have forgotten.” And later I married Owsian’s son! Isn’t that the power of the word?)

Nawet i ksiądz teraz mówi, że rodzice mają taką władzę, że jak źle pożyczą dziecku... i to jeszcze na godzinę taką musi paść [27].

(Even these days, the priest says that parents have such power that if they wish their child ill...but it must be said in the particular hour, too.)

Which hour do the interlocutors talk about? Of course, the so-called “evil hour,” the belief in its existence (as well as in the existence of the “good hour” which guarantees the fulfilment of good wishes that are spoken in it) is common among my interlocutors. According to Kolberg:

Do spełniania się wygłaszanych przez ludzi przekleństw służą jedynie minuty; bo gdyby trwało to dłużej, to niktby chyba żywym już na świecie nie pozostał. Rzucone na kogoś przekleństwo, gdy trafi na przeznaczoną ową minutę, niesłychane przeklinanemu sprawia męki. Najstraszniejsze bowiem przekleństwa zwykły się w owych chwilach spełniać co do słowa [DWOK 33, *Chełm* 1: 110].

(there are only minutes which carry out curses cast by people, it is a matter of minutes; if it lasted any longer, then probably nobody would stay alive in this world. If the curse is cast at someone at that special minute, it causes incredible suffering to the cursed, as every word of even the most terrible curses cast at such a minute comes true)<sup>16</sup>

And:

używania [przekleństw] nawet w największym gniewie wieśniacy się poniekąd wystrzegają, aby je w złą godzinę nie wymówić i rzeczywistych klęsk według brzmienia słów tych na cudzą głowę nie sprowadzić [DWOK 28, *Maz* 5: 31].

(villagers are wary not to use (curses) even in the biggest anger, so as not to utter them at the wrong hour and bring upon the cursed any calamity that would correspond to the words of the curse.)

The same conviction underlies the words of the mother:

Może matka powiedzieć w taki czas, że... Mówią, że są takie różne sekundy, że w taki czas się powie. Inny raz to tam i nawymyśla, i naklnie – i nic. A to jest taka chwila, że tak się wypowie i tak się stanie [34].

(A mother may say [a curse] at such time, that... They say that there are such seconds, when the curse will fulfil. At other times she may swear and curse, and nothing will happen. But there is such a moment, if one curses at that moment, it will fulfil.)

It is clear that the interlocutor refers to the situation of “the careless mother”, the mother who curses her child unintentionally and even unwittingly, only because words of her curse were uttered in the evil hour. Therefore, may the circumstances in which a careless mother acts be reduced to the evil hour?

The interlocutors asked if a mother may curse her child unintentionally gave two different answers. We already know one of them: whatever the words of a curse may be, even spoken unintentionally (“unwittingly” or at “the wrong time”), they will have consequences for the child. Let us listen further:

Matka może przekląć niechcący; tego nie można potem odwołać [39].

(A mother may cast a curse unwittingly and the curse cannot be taken back.)

Matka może przekląć niechcący. Tak – jest taka chwila, ze zdenerwowaniem. I nie można tego odwołać, to jest nieodwracalne [36].

(“A mother can curse unintentionally. Yes – there may be such a moment, when she is angry. And it cannot be taken back, it is irreversible.)

The interlocutors emphasise, that even an unintentional curse is irreversible. It acts independently of human will.

O, to przepadło już, nie da się odwołać [28].

(Once it’s done, it’s over, it cannot be withdrawn.)

Odwrócić? A skąd, nie da się. To Pan Bóg już tak pokarał [12].

(Reversing [a curse]? No, it’s impossible. God has already given the punishment.)

Gdzież ty odwrócisz. Jeżeli przed Panem Bogiem przeklinasz, to później kto jego odwróci? Pan Bóg słyszy, prawda? [55].

(How can you reverse it? If you curse before God, who can reverse it? God’s already heard it, right?)

Klątwy złagodzić się nie da. Może można i żałować, nie pomoże. Słowo wypowiedziane nigdy się nie odwróci. Wczorajszego dnia też nikt nie odwróci, tak samo i tego [18].

(The curse cannot be softened. You can regret but it won’t help. You cannot take back the word once spoken. Nobody can take back yesterday, the same here.)

A coż to, a jak kamień w głębokie wode wrzucić, czy pani go dostanie? Tu nie ma co dyskutować. Czym więcej nagrzeszemy, czy rękami, czy językiem? Najwięcej to myślą, no, ale to przepłynie jak woda. A język to najgorszy, to zmija okropna [34].

(If you throw a stone into deep water, can you retrieve it? There is nothing to discuss. With which do we sin more – with our tongue or with our hands? The most with our thoughts, but they pass, like water. The tongue is the worst, foul viper!)

To give proof of that, seemingly inexorable and exception-free principle, the interlocutors told various “true stories”<sup>17</sup>:

Mego ojca stryjnia siostra miała trzech synów. Jeden pojechał u Sarata i tam został się, tam pracował. Tu zostało dwóch. Jeden był bardzo posłuszny, bardzo ona lubiała jego i on matkę lubiał. Pojechali gdzieś na wieś – a to było ruskie święto – pojechali na motocyklu na zabawę. Uderzyli w słup, kierowcy nic nie stało się, a on przez niego przerzucił się, na bruk, i trup na miejscu. Matka płacze, i potem przychodzi do mnie

i z płaczem mówi: “Ach, lepiej kab toj, szto u Saratowie, to ja i ślazy nie uroniłaby nawet... i powiedziałyby jeszcze Bogu: dziękuję – za to, szto on mnie rzucił... A ten – taki był dobry, grzeczny, posłuszny, i – o, proszę... Na coż to tak Pan Bóg dał takie nieszczęście?” A ja jej mówię: “Nie mów tak, ciocia Zosia, pamiętaj, że przekleństwo matki spada na dzieci.” No proszę – przez jakiś czas i przychodzi telegram, i tamten zginął, też od motoru. W takim samym wypadku. Tylko on sam zdaje się jechał. I potem ja jej mówiłam: “Widzisz, jak nie można przeklinać, nie można kopać na kogo jamy!” [44].

(My father’s cousin had three sons. One of them moved to Saratov, two stayed here. One was a very good boy, he got on very well with his mother. One day – it was a holy day in Orthodox church – he went with his friend to the village, to the dances, by motorbike. They crushed into the pole, the driver was all right, but the son was ejected forward, went over the driver to the sidewalk and was dead on the spot. The mother, crying, came round and said to me: “I wish it’d been the one in Saratov, I would not spare even one tear for him...I would say thanks to God that he was gone... But this one – such a good, obedient boy and look what happened. Why has God done this?’ I told her: “Don’t say that, auntie Zosia, remember that a mother’s curse comes true’. After some time the wire came; the son from Saratov is dead too, also in a motorcycle accident. The only difference is that he, I think, was going alone. I later said to her: “You see, one shouldn’t curse, one shouldn’t dig a grave for anybody.”)

Wojną panował tyfus. U jednej matki było trzy córki i trzech synów. I jedna była taka nieposłuszna, taka hulająca. Zachorowała najmłodsza i zmarła. Matka mówi: “Boże mój, Boże, chajże lepiej heta pomarła, szto tak nadojeła.” I to dziecko też umarło [44].

(There was the typhoid during the war. A mother had three daughters and three sons. One of the daughters didn’t listen to her, she was wild. When the youngest daughter got ill and died, the mother said: “Dear God, why hadn’t the other one die, the one who has gotten under our skin so much?” And it wasn’t long before that daughter was dead, too.)

Should we therefore conclude that a curse is a blind force? That its power to fulfil is not limited to the situations of impasse, but it can be fulfilled in any circumstances? It would be an extreme solution that would call into question the very sense of the existence of the curse ritual. If the words of the curse were always fulfilled, if the curse was just an instrument of blind forces acting without any purpose, what would justify the existence of such a ritual as a special way of punishing disobedient children?

Let us move to the second set of circumstances in which the careless mother acts.

One of the female interlocutors stated: “A mother cannot withdraw a curse I think. However, the words of her curse may not fulfil” (“Matka chyba nie może klątwy odwołać. Ale może się nie sprawdzi potem to, co powiedziała”) [37].

This view flies in the face of everything we have so far learnt about the irreversibility of a curse. Is it an isolated opinion? Well, let us continue our study of the material:

Matka odpowiada przed Bogiem. Klątwa ma znaczenie: nie wolno matce przeklinać dziecka [37].

(A mother answers to God Matka odpowiada przed Bogiem.. The curse means something: a mother must not curse her child.)

Klątwa niesłuszna jest nieważna [36].

(An unjustified curse is invalid.)

Jak matka klnie niesłusznie, to się nic nie stanie [39].

(If a mother’s curse is unjustified, it won’t work.)

Jak matka przeklnie niesłusznie, to na matkę się wtedy obróci [35].

(If a mother curses unjustly, the curse will turn against her.)

Tak opowiadają: jak niewinnego przeklnie ktoś, to na niego to się stanie [39].

(People say: if an innocent is cursed, the curse will befall the one who cast it.)

Grzech ma. Ta matka ma śmiertelny, mówie, grzech. Jak ona niesprawiedliwie coś tam przeklina, czy coś tam gdzie miesza sie. Nie wolno nigdy [50].

(She has sinned, it’s a deadly sin. If she curses the child unjustly, or she is only partially right, then it is a sin. She must never do it.)

A jak niesprawiedliwa matka praklinaje?

– Toje stanowicca matcy toj. Swajo dzicia hadawała, raściła, a potym zdziekujecca z jaho? [64].

(And if a mother curses unfairly?

– Then the curse will befall her. She brought her kid up, fed, and then she mistreats him like that?)

Jak matka przeklnie dziecko niewinnie, co się może stać?

– No, co? Ci na zdrowiu, ci na czym, ot tak. Może Pan Bóg, może wszystko zrobić za to [65].

(What may happen if a mother curses the child who is innocent?

– What? Her health may suffer, or something else. God may do everything for something like this.)

So, we can see some order here, after all! Even the mother may not curse without being accountable for it. If she abuses the curse – it will befall her. Its power should not be toyed with.

How can we explain the phenomenon of a careless mother? Let us consider two aspects of the curse ritual, two conditions for its felicity: firstly, whether or not the curse is justified in the given circumstances and secondly, the intention of the performer of the ritual. Both conditions are separate and independent of each other.

Firstly, we must distinguish between a justified curse and an unjustified curse – the curse that the child deserves and the one which is undeserved. If the child deserved to be cursed, they will feel its consequences, otherwise, the consequences will be felt by the person who cast the curse unfairly, the one who “toyed with the forces.” This principle governing the operation of an unjustified curse was clearly explained by of my female interlocutor from Belarus:

– Matka tady praklanie córku, kali córka dla matki niesprawiedliwaja była. Niesprawiedliwaja była rzeczywiście. A kali jana czepićsa i klanie tak sobie, no, to janaż i nie może praklaści.

Jeśli niesprawiedliwie mówi?

– No, niesprawiedliwa, no, to janoż niczoha takoha nie budzie, bo janoż niesprawiedliwa. To tady joj budzie, toj mamie.

Mamie będzie?

– Będzie mamie, tylko mamie. A jana, hetaż, no jak... Jakżeż skazać mamie na swajo dzicia, nu, takoje niesprawiedliwa... To janaż sama saheszyć, bo jana jaho hodowała, patom na jaho klanie, szto ni papała... No, tak? [60].

(– A mother will curse her daughter if the daughter was unfair to her, truly unfair. If a mother just picks up on the daughter and has no reason to do so, then she cannot curse.

If the mother speaks against the daughter unfairly?

– Yes, if she speaks unfairly, then nothing will come out of it, because it wouldn't be fair. It will come to her, to the mother.

It will come to the mother?

– Yes, the mother, only she will feel the consequences. How can a mother say something so unfair against her child? She sins this way, because she brought the child up, and then she casts curses against him, just like that... Right?)

Secondly, regardless of whether or not the curse is justified, it may be uttered consciously, with the intent to curse, or it may simply “slip out” inadvertently.

Most of the inadvertent actions have a magical influence because they are actions of conscious beings that, even if they have no explicit intention at the given moment, have a latent power of will, are capable of intentional

influence. By the usual association the inadvertent action is supposed to exert the same influence as the intentional action which it resembles because the spiritual power, non-directed, takes the habitual channel [Thomas, Znaniecki 1927: 258].

This is why even an “inadvertent” curse will “loom over the child” (“ciężyła na dziecku”) [18] as long as it is justified, while an unjustified curse will befall the careless mother.

It leaves us with as many as four possible versions of a parental curse: a justified curse which can be intentional or unintentional and an unjustified curse which can also be intentional or unintentional. The distinction based on the presence or lack of justification of the curse ritual seems to be more important than the distinction based on the intention of its performer. It may seem peculiar that the intention of the person casting the curse has so little significance, but in the world in which speaking and acting are magically connected magicznego mówienia-działania, it should not be surprising.

In the world where saying is causing it does not matter whether or not the speaker intended to say what they said, or what the speaker meant. The only thing that matters is that the words have been uttered. One of the interlocutors expressed the crux of the matter in his reply to the question which curse is the worst: “any curse, as long as this curse is necessary and the person deserves to be cursed” (“byle jakie, jeżeli ono jest przekleństwo potrzebne i dana osoba zasługuje”) [36]<sup>18</sup>. What matters the most is whether the curse is justified: bad things are supposed to happen to those who have done bad things. The manner in which the curse is uttered is less significant. The very act of uttering the curse will cause it to fulfil.

However, not only a justified curse fulfils, so does the unjustified one. The magic of speech-action, automatic materialization of the object whose name has been uttered suspends the distinction between a justified and an unjustified curse. The statement that: “the word once uttered can never be taken back” (“słowo wypowiedziane nigdy się nie odwróci”) [18] applies to all four kinds of the curse. By uttering the words of the curse the mother, regardless a potential fault of the child and her own intentions, “throws a stone into deep waters and will never retrieve it” (“wrzuca kamień w głęboką wodę i już go nie dostanie”) [34].

All that has been said so far leads to the conclusion that a careless mother is the one who utters unintentional curses, both justified and unjustified. Hence, a curse of a careless mother may also be justified. How is it possible? Can one administer justice unconsciously or against one's

will? Who is the one who curses in such a case? Who is administering the punishment? Is it the mother herself or some that is more powerful than the mother?

### 1.1.3. The Agent of the Ritual

To nieprawda, że Pan Bóg na tym świecie nikogo nie karze.

(It isn't true that God does not punish anyone in this world.)

Salomea from Popielewo

“It isn't true that God does not punish anyone in this world. One will get what one deserves” (“To nieprawda, że Pan Bóg na tym świecie nikogo nie karze. Każdy jak sobie zasłuży, tak będzie miał”) [5] –told me one interlocutor from Podlasie. Her words can be applied also to the situation of a careless mother. Such a mother appears to serve as an instrument of divine justice. The power that guards order and justice in this world passes its judgments through her lips. If the child disturbs this order by committing a serious sin, the power must intervene, since “any break of solidarity is immediately punished” [Thomas, Znaniecki 1927: 222]. As we remember, the interlocutors described the situations where the mother did not want to curse the child (“she walks around not knowing what to do” – “chodzi i płacze, i sama nie wie, co ma robić” [30]) but she must do it against her own will. Such a curse is unwanted and unintentional, although it is conscious. Because it is not the mother who decides that the curse should be administered, but the force which acts through her, we may conclude that the curse is unintentional if the mother serves as an instrument of such a power – when she is either unaware of its judgment (a careless mother, a mother who curses at the evil hour) or does not identify with it (a mother cursing against her own will). The power decides that the curse must be uttered; everything that happens afterwards is a result of this verdict. The mother has no influence over it – she is only a performer: an intermediary, an instrument of the punishing power. The power that guards the order of things in this world and its justice, designates the mother of a disobedient child the role of a performer of the ritual aimed at restoring order in the world.

Who is it, then, that actually curses? Obviously, it is neither the mother nor the father, but sacrum. The impulse signalling the necessity to restore the order of the world comes from sacrum, as the interlocutors know that “there is God above us, he hears and sees everything” (“Boh nad nami, jon usio czuje i widzić”) [64]. In order for this impulse to reach its object,

sacrum must use an intermediary. The punishing parent serves as such an intermediary. The phenomenon of ‘the evil hour’<sup>19</sup> seems to confirm that a human serves only as an intermediary who utters the words of the curse. Let us come back to this problem.

[Matka syna] przeklęła w Roubiczach. Może tak to i Pan Bóg sądził. Był syn u matki, coś powiedział jej, a ona mówi: “Żeby cię piorun, jak pierw zagrzm, żeby zabił.” On siedział na kamieniu i zagrzmiało. I od razu w jego. Zabił piorun jego. [...] Taka już minuta była, jak ona przeklinała. Żeby nie usiadł na tym kamieniu, to może by i nie zabiło. Ale ona tak mówiła: “Żeby cię piorun, jak pierw zagrzm, żeby zabił” [55].

[[A mother] cursed [her son] in Rouby. Maybe it was God’s judgment. The son said something and she said: “may you be killed by lightning right after the first thunder.” He was sitting on the boulder when it thundered. And the lightning hit him straight away. And he was killed by lightning [...] Such was the minute at which she cursed him. Had he not sat at that boulder, he might not have been killed. But her words were “may you be killed by lightning right after the first thunder.”<sup>20</sup>

The mother’s curse, “such a minute” and “the judgment” of God come together and merge into one, powerful sanction against the son who had opposed his mother (“he said something to her”), the sanction in the form of fatal strike of lightning.

Maybe we may interpret the phenomenon of the evil hour and good hour, “such moment”, a special moment, as the critical moment, the turning point that is necessary for the change required in the given circumstances to take place. The words uttered at “such moment” tip the scales towards the evil or good – frequently “such moment” is identified with breaking points of a day: noon<sup>21</sup> or midnight. This correlation between the agential power of words and the moment of their utterance is governed by the two, mutually inverse rules: the words fulfil because they are uttered in significant moment (good/evil hour/minute/second), and: if the words fulfil, the moment is significant. What is more, it seems that – despite the conviction that “within the 24 hour day there is one such second, but one never knows which one...” (“w ciągu 24 godzin dnia jest jedna [taka] sekunda, ale nigdy nie wiadomo, która...”) <sup>22</sup> – a human may have certain influence over the appearance of these critical moments. A human, by acting in a certain way may provoke the appearance of such moments. If a person acts benevolently, good hours appear, for example: “When the parents give their blessing before the wedding, when the mother wishes her child the best from the bottom of her heart, then there is the best hour” (“Jak przed ślubem błogosławią rodzice,

matka z całego serca życzy dziecku jak najlepiej, to już wtenczas jest najlepsza godzina”) [18]. This, in consequence, brings good life: “Harmony is the key. If they get married and live peacefully, then they have a good life” (“Grunt zgoda. Jak tylko pożenio sie i majo zgode, to dobre życie”) [22]. And, conversely: the son from the story described earlier provoked “such a minute,” i.e., the minute of God’s judgment, by “saying something” to his mother. It seems that a human may also prevent such special moments from appearing:

– Toż na co to mówią zawsze: “oj, żeby choć w złe chwile nie powiedzieć!,” “żeby choć Złe nie słyssało!?” Ja i sama zawsze, jak co mówię, to mówię: “żeby choć w złą godzinę nie powiedzieć!” Ja zawsze mówię: “niech Złe nie słysszy!,” żeby w kiejską godzinę nie powiedzieć, żeby nie wymówić, tylko żeby powiedzieć w dobrą godzinę.

A kiedy ta dobra godzina?

– No, znaczy, kiedy mówisz, to żeby była dobra ta godzina, żeby nie była kiejaska [31].

(– There is a reason why they always say: “may it not be said at the wrong time!,” “may no Evil hear that!” When I say something, I always add: “may it not be said/ fall upon the evil hour”. I always say: “may no Evil hear that!,” so that it won’t be said in an evil hour, but in the good hour.

When is the good hour?

– The good hour is when you say that it shall be good and not the evil one.)<sup>23</sup>

Can we therefore conclude that the evil hour can be defined as the moment when “Evil” can hear us which means it is active?<sup>24</sup> Does the evil hour appear when the person CURSED<sub>a</sub> becomes CURSED<sub>s</sub>, i.e., given to the power of evil sacrum? When the righteous God administers his punishment to the cursed person?

Closing the topic of the evil/good hour we should add that this motive is characteristic of aetiological tales, as Kolberg put it:

Istnieje pomiędzy ludem wiara, że dawniej każde zaklęcie, a mianowicie wymówione w złą godzinę, natychmiast się ziszczalo. Stąd też bardzo wiele miast, wsi, zamków, kościołów, nawet królestw, także ludzi, przez zaklęcia skamieniało lub zapadło się w ziemię, a na ich miejscu często woda powstała. Pełne takich zaklęć są gminne powieści naszego ludu... [DWOK 15, *WKsPozn* 7: 50].

(There is a belief among the folk that in the past every curse, i.e., the curse uttered in evil hour, was immediately fulfilled. This is why so many towns, villages, castles, churches and even kingdoms, as well as people, were turned into stone or perished under the earth as a result of the curse, and water appeared in their place. Our folk tales are full of such curses...)

From this perspective the motive of evil/good hour can be understood as a reference to the mythical beginning (“in the days of yore, if someone said something in the evil hour, God would make it happen” – “dawniej tak Pan Bóg dawał, że gdy kto co wypowiedział w złą godzinę, to tak się i stało” [Biegeleisen 1930: 40]), and, by the same token, it can be viewed as prefiguration of any creative act: creation (good hour) and destruction (evil hour). That special time when the God was creating the world, in everyday repetitions of that primary gesture is manifested as a special hour.

In light of the above, distinguishing specific roles of the performer of the ritual such as a punishing mother, wronged mother or careless mother seems to be justified only to a degree. The only purpose of these distinctions is the description of various (purely external) circumstances in which the curse is cast. These roles may be viewed as superficial variants of something which, in a deep structure, always remains one and the same thing – the function of the **performer of the ritual**. No matter in which form the performer of the ritual appears, whether it is a punishing mother or a careless mother, always remains only as an instrument of **the real agent** of the ritual – **sacrum**.

Most frequently, *sacrum* uses a human intermediary who utters the words of the curse. In the absence of the mother or father, the God would punish the offender himself, however it would be done in a different way than words (God spoke to people only at the time of the mythical beginning). And then people do not say: ‘the mother cursed him’, but “God punished him”. The result of both acts is the same: CURSE<sub>s</sub>, i.e., the state of “being cursed.”<sup>25</sup>

It seems that while reflecting upon the agent of the ritual we are at risk of looking at the subject of research through “cultural glasses” of the observer. This is why we should devote some space here to the characteristics of folk God, as depicted by Ryszard Tomicki:

In hierarchical structure of the natural and supernatural world the highest place was occupied by God remaining in the upper sphere of heaven, inaccessible to the eyes of ordinary mortals [...]. God was the creator, law-giver and the ruler of the universe, although his power was limited to some degree by Devil. In folk beliefs God often took the form of “distant God,” who, having completed the act of creation, became passive and did not directly intervene in human fate, remaining solely the source of the magical prime moving force (no action may be performed effectively if it is not preceded by the formula “in the name of God”). [...] The functions ascribed directly to God were more the most general. They involved preservation of the order of the universe, and the only exception was the image of God hurling lightning

bolts [...] Granting the God almost exclusive power over the entire universe lead to certain fatalism, manifested by the conviction that nothing may happen without God. However, due to the dualism of the folk world-view according to which the power of God was limited by Devil, not every calamity was seen as the manifestation of 'the hand of God.' In the view regarding misfortunes and calamities as God's punishment, successfully competed another explanation, ascribing them to demonic-witch forces [...] Nevertheless, it was a rule that people sought the reasons for the punishment in the transgressions of the members of the community against its norms, the transgressions whose effects were felt by the entire community [...]. Hence, there was a tendency to interpret both positive and negative "acts of providence" as reactions to human conduct. The connection between God's will and human acts along with the belief in God's 'justice' were distinguishing features of folk religiosity [Tomicki 1981: 41-42].

#### 1.1.4. Conclusion

Let us put the specific elements of the curse ritual in order.

It takes place in special circumstances, which may be described as a *impasse* (or, in other words, a state of grave sin in which the sinner persistently remains, showing no intent to change his ways, to reconcile with the community and its socio-cultural world)<sup>26</sup>. To remedy such a situation the curse must be employed. It must be cast and it is cast, regardless of the will, intentions, or even awareness of the participants of the ritual.

The object of the curse is a disobedient child who must be punished by God *z wyroku mocy boskiej musi zostać ukarane* for allying with Devil against him.

The punishment is administered by the power which makes sure that 'the disobedient children', i.e., those who defy the established order of things, do not transform the world in an anti-world, the cosmos into chaos.

This power is the agent of the curse. It is the same power which created the agential mechanism of speech-action used by the performer of the ritual.

The performer, i.e., the one who utters the words of the curse is a parent-intermediary, an instrument used by the agent with the aim of bringing back the order. On principle this role belongs to mother as "woman who is delegated by culture to foster the order of things in the world" „kobieta, będąca głównym delegatem kultury do pielęgnowania ładu świata" (Tokarska-Bakir 2000: 107).

The ritual of an unjustified curse requires a different description. First and foremost, it is cast in different circumstances, not extreme ones; one cannot speak of an *impasse* in which the curse must be cast. On the contrary, an unjustified curse is groundless, it must not be cast.

If it is cast, it represents abuse, a violation of the main felicity condition of parental curse, i.e., its justification.

The consequences of such an abuse are immediate and automatic; the one who has committed the offense is punished. The punishment is administered by the power maintaining the proper order of things in the world. An unjustified curse has a vector directed towards the utterer; the performer of the curse becomes its object. In this respect it is akin to SWEARING A VOW, as uttering it means that the sanctions it invokes concern the one uttering the words. It is also related to CURSING<sub>4</sub>, which spurs into action the Evil forces opposed to God. Such as a perjurer and a person who swears too much, the person who curses unjustly curses themselves. All three of them meet the same result: they are CURSED<sub>s</sub>.

## 1.2. A True Story of a Daughter Cursed by Her Mother. A Case

It is the holy truth – take it to your heart...

The fullest description of a folk ritual of a mother's curse I have encountered is a beggar song, titled *True Story of a Wicked Daughter Who Beat Up Her Mother. The mother's Dreadful Rage Drew from Her Lips a Terrible Curse: "May you be struck by lightning!"* (*Opis prawdziwego zdarzenia o wyrodnej córce, która pobiła swą matkę. Okropny gniew matki wywołał z ust straszne przekleństwo: „Ażeby cię piorun zabił!”*) The text of the song can be found in the collection of beggar songs (*pieśni nowiniarskie*) titled *Karnawał Dziadowski (Beggars Carnival)* edited by Stanisław Nyrkowski [1973: 173–174]. The version published by Nyrkowski is based on a printed marketplace leaflet from the year 1939, although the text must be much older.

*True Story...*, which fell into my hands after the main body of the material collected in my field research had been analyzed and the main conclusions had been drawn, seems to confirm my findings and even expand them. I believe it may be treated as the record of the folk myth about the curse, a “true story”<sup>27</sup>, and at the same time as an educational parable, *exemplum* of a kind. Traditionally, beggar songs (*pieśni dziadowskie*) [cf. Grochowski 2010] were performed by wandering old men, beggars<sup>28</sup> who played in folk culture the role of teachers and moral authority. What is more, they were treated as intermediaries between the earth and heaven, as they were believed to have contact with souls of the dead (such people were called by van der Leeuw “power bearers”). Stefan Czarnowski wrote about them:

Polish folk hold in deep esteem those who, having devoted themselves to God, praying for others, have foregone everything. They are an ultimate

authority on any religious issue, even if everyone knows theirat lack education of any kind. A peasant will greet a priest with great respect and will approach him about a mass or a sacrament, but will truly listen to a beggar [Czarnowski 1982: 399; cf. *passim*].

In view of these words, the text transmitted by such a person may not be incidental or insignificant, it must contain some message, some truth.

We wsi Ostrówek, powiatu chełmskiego,  
Proszę posłuchać zdarzenia tego,  
Co się tam stało – rzecz niepojęta:  
Córka przez matkę została przeklęta.

Bóg srogo karze przeklęte dzieci,  
Na równej drodze także uśmierci.  
Tą karą była dotknięta Gienia,  
Która dla matki nie miała sumienia.

Gienia w niezgodzie ze swą matką żyła,  
Że matka swoją część wydzierzawiła.  
Matka nie mogła już bardzo pracować,  
Musiała ziemię w dzierzawę oddać.

A gdy zbliżały się już kopania,  
Wtenczas gniew Boży wywołała Gienia,  
Bo dopuściła się strasznego czynu...  
Spotka cię kara, niegodziwa Gieniu!

Więc matka poszła na córki pole  
Kopać kartofle tak jakby swoje.  
Natychmiast Gienia to zobaczyła,  
Czym prędzej poszła, matkę pobiła.

Ach, córko, córko, coś ty zrobiła?!  
Żeś swoją matkę okrutnie pobiła.  
Przecież cię matka wychowywała  
I nigdy w życiu nic nie żałowała.

Więc łzy matczyne to uczyniły –  
Straszne przekleństwo na córkę rzuciły:  
„Żeby cię piorun z wysokiego nieba  
Na miejscu zabił! – O to proszę Boga”.

I oto pewno w taką godzinę  
Wyrzekła matka na swoją Gienię.  
Pan Bóg wysłuchał słowa matczyne:  
Aż dwa pioruny zabiły dziewczynę.

W tym czasie misja była w Puchaczewie,  
A matka z córką były w strasznym gniewie.  
Misjonarze naukę skończyli,  
Ludzie z kościoła powychodzili.

Wtem zaczął zaraz drobny deszcz padać,  
Ludzie zaczęli także uciekać.  
Gienia przeklęta też uciekała,  
Bo ona więcej czegoś się bała...

Stanęła sobie obok cmentarza  
Pod dużym drzewem – coś ją przeraża.  
Dręczy ją pewno przekleństwo matki –  
Tu koniec życia wyrodnej córki.

Dwóch chłopców także przed deszczem się skryli  
I blisko Gieni sobie stanęli,  
Ale Bóg natchnął niewinne dzieci  
I z tego miejsca zaraz odeszli.

W tym czasie grzmoty się pojawiły –  
Aż dwa pioruny w nią uderzyły.  
Zwęglone było całe jej ciało –  
Po cóż swej matki nie szanowała?

Więc które dzieci nie szanują matki,  
Ciężki grzech biorą na swoje barki,  
Bo całe życie nic im się nie wiedzie...  
Święta to prawda – wierzcie w nią szczerze.

(Listen to what happened  
In Ostrówek in Chełm province:  
An incredible story, like no other,  
A daughter was cursed by her mother.

God sends terrible punishment on the cursed children,  
Even on even road He can kill them.  
Such punishment afflicted the daughter,  
Who caused suffering to her own mother.

Gienia always argued with her mother,  
Because the mother leased land to another.  
The mother was old and in strength she lacked,  
So she had to lease her land.

And when the harvest was about to come,  
Gienia was the cause of God's wrath,  
As she committed that terrible act:  
You will be punished you vile brat!

So went the mother to her daughter's field  
 Digging potatoes as if they were hers.  
 The daughter saw it at once,  
 She rushed and beat the mother up.

Oh, daughter, daughter, what have you done?!  
 You battered your mother,  
 Who brought you up,  
 And who always made sure  
 there was nothing you lacked.

They were mother's tears that brought,  
 A terrible curse upon the daughter:  
 "May lightning from high heavens  
 Strike and kill you on the spot  
 this is what I ask of God"

And maybe it was that hour,  
 When Gienia was cursed by her mother.  
 God heard and acted upon mother's words,  
 And she was struck not by one  
 but by two thunderbolts.

There was a mission in Puchaczewo,  
 When mother and daughter raged at each other.  
 The missionaries finished their teaching,  
 And many people were leaving the church.

Suddenly rain started to fall,  
 People run quickly to their homes,  
 But the cursed Gienia was running the fastest,  
 As she was the most afraid...

She stood near the cemetery  
 Under a big tree – she felt a pang of awful fear  
 It was the mother's curse that afflicted her --  
 Here will come the end of the wretched daughter.

Two boys found shelter from the rain  
 They stood next to Gienia,  
 But God spared the innocent children  
 And made them move away.

And then two thunders were heard  
 And two strikes of lightning hit the girl  
 Her whole body turned into char,  
 Why didn't she honour her mother like a good child?

Children who don't honour their mothers,  
 Carry a grave sin,  
 And their entire life is a vain struggle,  
 That's the holy truth, take it to your heart.)

Let us take a closer look at this peculiar record of a myth.

"In Ostrówek, in Chełm province" ("We wsi Ostrówek, powiatu chełmskiego"). The fact that the stories are depicted as 'true' and the place where they happened is indicated, reveals the nature of folk imagination; mythic mentality is specific and not abstract. By telling "true" stories and presenting them as patterns (since myth is a pattern of behaviour), the folk narrator transmits the truths that are valid at every time and place. A story of the individual remains at the same time universal, thanks to which it can fulfil its educational purpose and serve as a cautionary tale. In fact it does not matter whether or not the depicted events actually took place in Ostrówek, the story may re-occur anywhere, including here and now.

"A daughter was cursed by her own mother" ("Córka przez matkę została przeklęta"). The actors of the drama are already on the stage, the object is the disobedient child and the performer of the ritual is the wronged mother. The name of the agent of the curse is also specified, as the "true story" says: "God harshly punishes cursed children". It confirms our findings: the mother (the performer of the ritual) casts the curse; but the punishment is administered by the agent of the curse, i.e. the God. The mother's role in the curse consists in uttering the words, the formula (CURSE<sub>f</sub>), while God is an agent of the curse understood as a punishment (CURSE<sub>s</sub>), as the situation where the words uttered by a human-intermediary fulfil. These three actors: the disobedient child, the wronged mother and the righteous God take part in the drama of the curse.

Another line of the text provides further characteristics of the agent of the ritual: "on even road He can kill them". The implication of these words is quite clear: the cursed cannot escape the punishment; his fate (provoked by his own conduct) must be fulfilled. The agent of the curse does not change their decision, the actions of the power enforcing the curse are irrevocable. My interlocutors confirm this view: "Reversing [a curse]? No, it's impossible. God has already given the punishment" ("Odwrócić? A skąd, nie da się. To Pan Bóg już tak pokarał") [12] or "'Once it's done, it's over, it cannot be withdrawn" ("to przepadło już, nie da się odwołać") [28].

The further parts of the text describe the relationship between the mother and the daughter. As we know, a good relationship between parents and children plays a particularly important role in socio-ethical

order in folk culture. The continuity of transmission of tradition between generations is based on the Fourth Commandment; the command to obey parents guarantees the stability of the entire cultural system. This is the reason why there is so much emphasis put in beggars songs (of course not only here<sup>29</sup>) on reminding the listeners of the importance of the Fourth Commandment. Even the titles of printed marketplace leaflets contain moral teachings: *God's Terrible Punishment Has Befallen a Vile Son Who Wrought His Rage On His Old Father, And When He Hit His Father On The Face, Both His Hands Stiffened* (*Straszna kara Boża spadła na niegodziwego syna, który mścił się nad swoim ojcem staruszkiem, a gdy uderzył ojca staruszka w twarz, to obie ręce mu nagle skostniały*) or: *A True Story About a Wretched Son Who Killed His Own Mother With a Whipleretree in Szczecyna Village, Janów County* (*Prawdziwe zdarzenie o wyrodnym synu, który zabił swoją własną matkę orczykiem w wiosce Szczecynie, powiat janowski*) [Nyrkowski 1973: *passim*].

The third verse of the song tells us that Gienia was conflicted with her mother. The curse was not cast at some unexpected moment, out of the blue; the context of the curse indicates that it was an effect of situation that matured over a long time. Curse may not be cast without a reason, it must have real grounds. As one of my female interlocutors put it, a child must “be truly unjust to their mother” (“dla matki niesprawiedliwe być rzeczywiście”) [60].

Coming back to our song – the mother, old and weak, deprived of any help and care which should be provided by the daughter, has been suffering for a long time. The reason for this state of affairs is the daughter’s persistence in her sin, which makes evil grow worse and worse. This growing evil stemming from the sin of the disobedient child may, and, I guess should be understood as the state of curse in which the object of the pending ritual remains. Information on remaining in the state of a curse can be inferred from the words ‘this punishment afflicted the daughter’.

It seems that the punishment is nothing else but the state of being cursed, the state of sin that is self-induced by the person who acts in a manner inconsistent with the moral norms of their community. The state of remaining in sin can be called CURSE<sub>c</sub> (c stands for a condition). It is the very reason why the entire ritual of the curse takes place, its necessary condition: an impasse. In the analyzed text the curse within the meaning of CURSE<sub>f</sub> is the formula *May the lightning strike you!* (*Ażeby cię piorun zabił!*), CURSE<sub>a</sub> – the act of uttering it by Gienia’s mother, and CURSE<sub>s</sub> – the direct result of uttering the CURSE<sub>f</sub>, i.e. another consequence of the sin of the disobedient child, enforced by the real agent of the ritual – the power of sacrum, in this belief system referred to as God.

In view of the above folk phenomenon of curse may be seen as a process consisting in the following consecutive stages: sin, the consequence of sin, i.e. the words of a curse being uttered, their necessary outcome, i.e., God's punishment, the fulfilled curse. In other words, the curse (seen as a process) starts with the object who is its "primary cause" – a disobedient child, then it is continued by the performer of the CURSE<sub>a</sub> – an intermediary (a parent) and is concluded by the agent of CURSE<sub>s</sub> – punishing God. The process finds its culmination in a "tangible" moment when the curse is being cast, i.e. when a proper formula is uttered by the intermediary.

We can find this logical sequence of consecutive stages of the curse process in the fourth verse of the song depicting Gienia's "terrible act", "God's rage" spurred by this act and "the punishment" it deserved. The logic of this sequence justifies the obviousness, and even, one is tempted to say, automaticity of the actions of the punishing sacrum. The chain of sin must be broken, otherwise the world would fall into chaos. The words of the curse may not remain unspoken; the flaws of the world must be undone.<sup>30</sup>

One more thing is clearly visible here: a person who falls into the state of sin out of their own accord, brings the punishment upon themselves *sprowadza na siebie karę* (because such a person cursed themselves by sinning).

The power of sacrum is the agent of the curse, whereas the intermediary who utters the curse is its performer. A deeper analysis, however, reveals that the *raison d'être* of the ritual is its object – a disobedient child, as there would be no reason for the ritual to exist if the child had not started the entire **process of the curse**. The agent must be inspired by the object, we are dealing here with the process that includes mutual feedback; I would even risk saying that the entire process of cursing is **self-imposed** and, paradoxically, at the same time it **involves three actors** – a disobedient child is the object of a divine, parental, and ... their own curse.

The fifth verse describes the direct cause of uttering the curse, about a "straw which broke the camel's back." The amount of evil brought about by Gienia reaches the critical point. By raising her hand against her mother, the daughter commits the worst of sins; let us not forget that battery is a metonymy of homicide which, as we know, in folk moral code this sin is punished by hell.

Let us leave the text aside for a while and make a digression. It is worth noting that this moral code seems to be governed by logical and detailed prescriptions, with specific punishments reserved for specific transgressions. Before the sinner finally ends up in hell, they meet the pun-

ishment which constitutes a direct, tangible (according to the rule that “with the measure you use it will be measured to you” – “kto jaką miarką mierzy, taką jemu później odmierzą” [13]) result of the committed act – the hand raised against the mother withers. Since the withering of hand should be understood as a metonymy of death, the punishment providing that the hand raised against the parents withers, corresponds to the death sentence for homicide. There is a clear causal chain: the sin – destruction of the direct means of sin (the hand) – destruction of the agent of sin. This motif can be easily encountered in various forms in common beliefs (a common warning: *don't raise your hand against your mother, or else it will wither*) as well as in folklore texts.

In the sixth verse of the text (“The mother brought you up and / there was nothing you lacked” – “Przecież cię matka wychowywała / I nigdy w życiu nic nie żałowała”) the motif of the mother’s goodness and benevolence towards the child recurs. Folklore texts put a strong emphasis on these values; they are particularly visible in wedding songs in which the newlyweds ask for parental blessing and thank the parents for raising them, often emphasizing the importance of discipline and proper punishments.<sup>31</sup>

“They were mother’s tears that brought / a terrible curse upon the daughter” (“Więc łzy matczyne to uczyniły – / Straszne przekleństwo na córkę rzuciły”). Let us recall the words of one of the interlocutors who was quoted earlier: “If you don’t listen to me and I spill my tears in vain, I shall curse you. And bad things happen” (“Jeżeli ty mnie nie słuchasz i moje łzy tylko leją się, to jednak ja cie przeklnę. I niedobrze się dzieje”) [30]. This is confirmed by another female interlocutor: “It is so hard, one cannot [curse] like that! No, one cannot. But if you suffer terribly- you must [...] When the pain you bear becomes too heavy and you speak from the bottom of your heart, then [the curse] may be cast” (“jakżeż trudnieńko, etoż nie można hetak! No, nie można, wot. Ale jak przydziecca baluczka – musisz. [...] Kali za duszu zaskrabie mocna, i skążasz tak ad szczyraha serca, to heta moża i paść”) [60]. It is not easy to cast a curse; one does not utter its words with a light heart. What gives the mother the right or even forces her to say the ‘terrible formula’ is, firstly, her undeserved suffering inflicted by the daughter and, secondly, the social imperative to raise children in discipline enforced by proper punishments. The mother does not want to cast the curse, but she is forced to do it. The power of a curse is stronger than human’s will.

This is another proof that the agent of the curse is not a person who utters the formula, but it is the power stronger than a human – the righteous God, who always takes the side of the wronged person ; it may

also be the universal principle that every act has specific consequences, the principle which guarantees the order of the cultural universe. One of the principles underlying this order is the belief that the harm inflicted on a person must be remedied, otherwise the cosmos will fall into chaos, i.e. into the state that may be termed as “anti-culture.”

“May lightning from high heavens / Strike and kill you on the spot – this is what I ask of God” (“Żeby cię piorun z wysokiego nieba / Na miejscu zabił! – o to proszę Boga”). The moment when Gienia’s mother utters the formula of the curse indicates that we have reached the climax of the ritual. The first question we should ask is why the mother beckons the thunder and lightning. Why does she not say, instead: *May God punish you!*, *May you writhe in pain!*, *May the holy earth reject your remains!*, or, the one that seems particularly fitting in this situation, *May your hand wither!?* Who decides on the form of punishment administered to a disobedient child? Is it the mother, God, or ethical rules governing the consequences of human acts?

Let us recall several sequences of the transgressions and punishments reported by the interlocutors quoted in previous chapters. In one of the accounts, at the moment when the daughter is leaving for the church to get married, her mother says *may you never get there*; when the son forces mother to the ground she says: *may God throw you to the ground like this*; the interlocutor who tells the story of the son who hit his mother on the head and later dies “of his head.” The transgression, according to the rule providing that “one will get what one deserves” (“każden jak sobie zasłuży, tak będzie miał”) [5] (or, in other words, “*who lives by the sword May die by the sword*” [Matthew 26:52]) comes back to the sinner in the mirrored form. It may well be that we are dealing here with the rule that plays a significant role in mythical view of the world, describing the relationship between acts of a person and their fate in this world and the other world. “Folk in Belarus believe that punishments in the other world are nothing else but a reflection of the ones in this world,” Michał Federowski writes [LBS 1: 223], giving many examples of this rule:

Na złodzieja i razbojnika piekło czakaje. Co chto ukradu na tuom świecie, musić u zubach nasić, a chto ukradzie pierścionak, abo hołku, to na tuom świecie musić praz ucho hołki, abo praz pierścionak preleżć. [...] Chto na hetuom świecie praz wiedźmarstwo pje małako czužoje i masło bje, to na tuom świecie budzie dajnicaju smału pić i smału u bojcy zamiż śmietany boutać. Chto na hetuom świecie nadto zazdrony (v. zawisny), to na tuom świecie chodzić, horło raździawiwszy. Chto na hetuom świecie nadto skupy, to na tuom świecie za hołym stałom siedzić. Chto tutaka lenujeście pracawać na sibile i nimaje czym adziećsie i za szto pachawaćsie, to na tuom świecie leżyć hoły, abo im warota

padpierty. [...] Chto na hetuom świci pluje, to na tuom świci sabaczyje siki chłępcza. Pojęcia takie i tym podobne są powszechnie znane i krążą w okolicach Wołkowyska, Słonima i Lidy, z bardzo małymi zmianami [LB 1: 223–224].

(Hell awaits thieves and bandits. One who stole something will have to carry it in his mouth, a person who stole a ring or a needle, will have to go through the ring or the eye of a needle in the other world [...] A person who, in this world, using magic, steals milk from the cows which belong to someone else and churns butter that is not his, in the other world will drink tar from a pitch and churn tar instead of butter. A person who is very jealous (or envious) in this world, will walk with an gaping mouth in the other world. A person who is very mean in this world, will “feast” at the empty table. Who is too lazy to work and support himself, has no clothes and leaves no savings for a proper funeral, in the other world will lie naked, or will be used as a gate stopper [...]. Who spits in this world will drink dog’s piss in the other world. These and similar beliefs are common in Volkovysk, Slonim and Lida, with very minor variations.)<sup>32</sup>

We may still hear them, being spoken *expressis verbis* even today:<sup>33</sup>

A po co [...] obmawiać? [...] Jak można oczerniać człowieka? “Ach, on taki, on nie taki...”. Po co język strzępić? Jak ktoś wygaduje dużo takich niesprawiedliwości, to kiedy umrze, Bóg da mu karę – za języki wieszają. Jest ikona... [która to pokazuje] [63].

(Why [...] gossip about people [...] How can you slander a person? “It is such, or such.” Why waste your breath? When someone talks behind people’s back and says many unfair things about others, then, when he dies, God will give him a punishment – they hang [such people] by their tongues. There is an icon... [which shows it].)

“The penance which they do [the souls in the other world] has a magical character – Znaniecki noticed – it is always analogous to the sin and has thus the aim of destroying the sinfulness” [Thomas, Znaniecki 1927: 243].

The intermediary who utters the words of curse should observe the “mirror-image principle.” In fact, this is what usually happens. There are numerous examples, for instance in Kolberg’ work, which confirm the “mirror principle”<sup>34</sup>: A person who had been beaten up speaks of his tormentor: *May God beat him up! He battered me! (A bóg go pobił! jakże mnie skatował!)* [DWOK 29, Pok 1: 24];

Gdy komu zginie co do jedzenia, to przeklinając złodzieja, mówi: *bodaj go tam rozparło!* albo: *bodaj on sie najadł ostatni raz!* [...] Pijaków przeklinając, mówią: *bodaj się oni gorącej smoły ponapijali!* [DWOK 34, Chełm 2:219].<sup>35</sup>

(If someone’s food was stolen, he curses the thief, saying: *May he bloat and burst!* or *‘may that be his last meal!* [...] Cursing drunkards, they say: *May they drink hot tar!*)<sup>36</sup>

Federowski gives several dozen examples of vivid curse formulas based on the mirror principle<sup>37</sup>, among them:

Oszukałeś mnie, a żeby ciebie Bóg oszukał!; Nie pomógł on mi, a żeby jemu Bóg nie pomógł!; Pożałował mi on [czegoś] dać, a żeby jemu Bóg nie dał ani zdrowia, ani szczęścia, ani życia, ani tego, czego on od Boga oczekuje!; Oszkalował on mnie, a żeby on, daj Boże, po polu i lesie biegał i szczekał!; Nie powiedział mi prawdy, a żeby on, daj mileńki Boże, nie odezwał się już do swojej żony i do swoich dzieci!; A żeby z niego kiszki tak się ciągnęły jak postronek! [za ukradzenie postronka]; Ukradł ktoś widły, a żeby on się na nich przebił!; Ile ja łez wylałam, żeby z niego po śmierci tak wiele ropy się wylało!; Żebyś ty tak sobie ręce powykręcał, jak gałęzie powykręcałeś! [na złodzieja, kradnącego owoce z drzewa] [LB 4: 405–413].

(You deceived me, may God deceive you!; He didn't help me, may God not help him!; He begrudged me [something] may God give him no happiness, health, life, and nothing he expects from God!; He slandered me, may he run around the fields and the forest barking!; He didn't tell me the truth, may he, dear God, never speak to his wife and children again!; May his bowels be drawn out behind him like a rope! [for stealing the rope]; Someone has stolen my pitchforks, may he stab himself on them!; May as much pus spill out of his body upon his death as many tears I shed!; May you twist arms as you twisted the branches! [against the thief stealing fruit from the tree].)

The mirror principle, as the above examples show, leaves the performers of the curse a certain margin of freedom, they may employ their invention while formulating the curse. However, the curse formula chosen either from the repertoire of commonly known curses, or referring to the given circumstances must show a logical link between its reason (harm caused to the person casting the curse) and consequence (punishment based on the mirror principle).

– Te Ukrainki, to one nie mówią, jak u nas: “Przynieś mnie to i to” – “No nie ma, mama, nie ma,” ale: “Kab ty oślepła, jak ty nie widzisz.” A ta Ukrainka to mówi: “Żebyś ty chodziła po świecie, a światła nie widziała.” Nie przeklina, ale: “Żebyś ty chodziła po świecie, a światła nie widziała.” [...] I wiesz, jak u nas to przekleństwo, jak wprzód opowiadali. Jak ona wyleje tobie na ścieżkę, czy co, jak niektóre przeklinają się. [...] Na przykład, jak ona tam, wyleje tam gdzieś jakie pomyje mnie: “Ach, żeby z ciebie ropa łała się, jak ty tu wylałaś!” Wienc przeklinajon się. [...] “Żeby z ciebie ropa łała się!” Albo tam kura wejdzie do ogrodu: “A żeby tobie trumna ciasna była, jak tym twoim kurom ciasno w chacie, że je w ogród puszczasz!” I wiesz, u nas jedna zmarła i co z nią było? I ta trumna ciasna, nie dobrali tej trumny, jej położyć. I przybijali te deski, i tak ona rozdęta była [...] “A żeby tobie trumna ciasna była”...

Czyli spełniło się na niej to, co ona życzyła komuś?

– Może być, może być.

Bo to ona mówiła tak: “A żeby tobie trumna ciasna była”?

– Nie, to nie wiadomo. Ale tak mówią, że jaką garstką mierzysz, taką ci odmierzają. [...] Tatuś zawsze mówi: “Dzieci, jeżeli coś przykrego wy będziecie robić, to i dla was to będzie” [53].

(– These Ukrainian women don’t say like we do: “Fetch me this or that” – “It isn’t there mom, it isn’t”, but: “may you go blind if you can’t see it.” This Ukrainian says: “may you walk the world and not see it.” She doesn’t curse but she says: “may you walk the world and not see it” [...] When someone spills something on your path, some slop or something, some people curse: “may pus spill out of you as you spilled this!” Such are the curses [...] Or, when a chicken goes into the garden: “may your casket be too small for you if the house is too small for your chickens and you let them into the garden!” One neighbour died here and you know what happened? Her casket was too small, they didn’t choose a good casket for her. And they were nailing the planks and she was so bloated [...] “may your casket be too small for you”... So what she wished others came to her?

– That’s possible.

It was her who said “May your casket be too small for you?”

– No, nobody knows that. But people say that the handful you use to measure, with the same handful it will be measured to you [...] My dad used to say: “Kids, if you do harm, it will come back to you.”)

Analyzing the motif of withering hand, I mentioned the stages of punishment: destruction of the means with which the sin was committed, followed by the destruction of the sinner. Withering of the hand, failing to reach the church for one’s wedding, being thrown to the ground, or “beaten up by God,” having last meal – all these, as well as innumerable other “handfuls” with which the consequences of sinners’ deeds are ‘measured’ to him, represent metonyms or metaphors of death. In other words, they are specialized, hyponymic elements of the superior semantic field constituted by the notion of death (or, more precisely, “non-life”).

The question that remains to be answered is why Gienia’s mother, having failed to say: *May your hand wither!* invokes lightning instead of leaving the decision on the proper punishment of her daughter to God, by saying, for example ‘*may God punish you!*’ or *May God repay you!*?<sup>38</sup>

Searching for the answer to this question we may reach for the Slavic myth (in the literature ‘the primary myth’<sup>39</sup>) depicting the fight between the heavenly deity carrying stone lightning<sup>40</sup> with the chthonic deity blocking life-giving waters (in the form of a serpent or dragon). Perun, having opened with his stone lightning the rock in which Veles is hiding, frees waters enabling the rain necessary for vegetation (i.e. for life);

the meeting of the “heavenly stone” with the “earthly stone” restores the order of the world. Veles is imprisoned in the rock – in other words, he is cursed into stone. Lightning, an attribute of the deity of high heaven, is an instrument of administering punishment not only to Veles, but to everyone who allied with the opponent of the Lord of lightning. “Mythical battle between the Lord of lightning and the Devil/Dragon was in folk consciousness a precedent of many events, taking place every day at many levels of reality” [Tomicki 1976: 82]. In line with the structure of the primary myth, the lightning remains in folk world-view the symbol of the battle between good and evil; in the language of Christian myth – the fight between God and Devil. The traces of this myth may be found even nowadays [cf., inter alia, Bartmiński 1989]. Let us also quote a popular text closer to the times when wandering beggars sang their “true stories,” recorded by Michał Federowski in Belarus:

Jak czort skusił Adama i Ewę, to Bóg powiedział czortowi: “Nie rozkorzeni się twoje pokolenie, bo ja wybije piorunami!” A czort mówi:

– Nie wybijesz, Boże, bo my będziemy pod takie rzeczy się chować, że Tobie będzie szkoda – i dawaj wyliczać:

– Będę się chować pod zwierzęta.

– Ja – mówi Bóg – i tam będę bić!

– Będę się chować pod ptactwo.

– Będę i tam ciebie bić!

– No, to ja będę się chować w wodę.

– Będę i tam ciebie bić!

– Niech ci będzie! a ja będę się chować w drzewa.

– Będę i tam ciebie bić!

– No, to bij, a ja będę się chować pod ludzi.

– Będę i tam ciebie bić!

– No, to i dobrze! A co będzie, jak ja się schowam do kościoła albo do żydowskiej szkoły [tj. bóżnicy]?

– Już powiedziałem – ja ciebie wszędzie znajdę!

[LB 1: 152].

(When the devil was tempting Adam and Eve, God said to him: “Your descendants will not spread over the world, because I will kill them with my lightning bolts!” And the devil replied:

– You will not kill us, God, because we will hide among such things that you will feel sorry for them. – And he continued:

– I will hide among animals.

– I, – said God, – will strike you even there!

– I will hide among birds.

– I will strike you there, too!

– So, I will hide in waters.

- I will strike you there, too!
- So be it! I will hide in trees.
- I will strike you there, too!
- So do it, and I will hide among people.
- I will strike you there, too!
- So be it! And what will you do if I hide in a church or a synagogue?
- As I have told you, I will find you everywhere!)

Federowski's work contains another important piece of information that gives us insight into the relationship between the lightning bolt and the disobedience of children. "When it thunders [people] say to children "God is angry at naughty children"" (LB 4:34). In light of the above, thunders and lightning are manifestations of God's wrath against bad children and a strike of lightning is a consequence of this rage, the executed punishment.

The formula of the curse: *May thunder kill you!* is thus equivalent to formulas such as *May God punish you!* or *May God pay you back!* invoking the highest power of the sacred. When one calls on lightning and thunder, one calls on the deity. The name *Gromowładca* (*Thunderer, Lord of Lightning*) is not its proper name but an metonymic term referring to one of its attributes. The cursing mother from the song about the wicked Gienia invokes the death of her daughter, going straight to the point; Gienia's sin is so grave that she deserves the most stringent punishment, the fire from heaven. The punishing hand of God will touch her directly. The mother adds *this is what I ask of God (o to proszę Boga)*<sup>41</sup> – indicating the agent of the ritual.

And maybe it was in that hour/ When Gienia was cursed by her mother. We have already talked about good hours and evil hours; and the song clearly shows that the peculiarity of the moment in which the curse is felicitous stems from the fact that it does not originate from the secular order but from God who curses the sinner. "That hour" constitutes the moment in which all conditions for a felicitous curse are met: the proper situational context (time and place), the participants and the words. This concurrence of these conditions enables the intervention of the sacred in the human world. The secular time is suspended: "that hour" comes, a moment in time that constitutes a symbolic representation of the primordial time.

The way in which the deity intervenes in human fate may be seen as violent or revengeful. In fact, it is justified, and what is more – necessary. We are dealing here with the situation where chaos has grown so dangerous as a result of destructive workings of evil released by human sins, that the intervention of the power that guards the order of the universe proves necessary. According to the Slavic cosmogenic myth, the devil,

defeated by God and imprisoned in the midst of the underworld, chained to a pillar, spends the entire year trying to break the chain; when he finally succeeds and is on the verge of freedom – i.e. when the world is about to fall into chaos – the first spring lightning reforges the chain.<sup>42</sup> The act of the curse, similarly to the lightning forging devil's shackles, strikes the world threatened by chaos in order to save it. Gienia's mother really had no choice – she had to ask God to send the lightning, had she failed to do so, the universe would have descended into chaos.

The curse had been described earlier as a process that has three actors, it has also been concluded that each of the three participants of the curse: the object, the performer and the agent is responsible for one of its phases. The sinner is cursed by each of them separately and by all of them together. The structure of the song about Gienia seems to indicate that Gienia was actually cursed three times. The first time took place when, as we learn from the fourth stanza, she sinned against her mother and angered God, bringing the curse upon herself (self-imposing it.) This occasion alone provides sufficient grounds for her to be punished by God; however, it is insufficient for the curse ritual to take place, as first the relevant words must be uttered. This is why the seventh stanza talks about “the mother's tears,” which “have done it.” And so Gienia is cursed for the second time; or to put it in other words, the “sentence” she brought upon herself is “officially announced.” The third element, the sacred authority, is introduced in the subsequent part of the song through the information about “that hour.”

If we deemed such a triple structure to be a tautological multiplication of justifications for the thunderbolt, aimed at strengthening the grounds for the punishment and by the same token, at increasing the educational, didactic effect of the song, it would not explain much. It is rather seems that we are dealing here with a very important aspect of the structure of any ritual: the rule of triple repetition.

We can refer here, for example, to the practice of spitting three times in order to ward off a spell, intoning three times (or three times tripled by three) the formula for ‘speaking off’ (*zamawianie*) illness, pleading three times for a pre-wedding blessing, hitting the casket against the house's threshold three times when leaving the house after a wake, and to the three trials which the main character in a magical folk tale must go through, to give just a few examples. Significantly, it seems that a ritual act cannot be deemed completed until it is repeated three times. Moreover, even though the formula remains the same, every repetition seems to constitute an act with a different symbolic meaning; therefore such ritual repetitions are and at the same are not identical.<sup>43</sup>

The triple repetition of the curse against Gienia seems to be the manifestation of the triple-agent structure of the process and ritual of the curse (the sinner is cursed by themselves, by the mediator, and by God) and at the same time it points to the three levels of this structure: God curses the sinner through the chosen mediator.

The next line of the song is thus so fitting that it seems inevitable: “God listened to the mother’s words” (“Pan Bóg wysłuchał słowa matczyne”). Reflecting upon the meaning of this sentence, we may be led to the conclusion that the phrase: *God listened to the words* also has a triple structure. As it seems, it constitutes an entirety, containing the meaning of the phrases: *God judges the sinner*, *God “utters the word”* (utters the curse formula, acting through the mediator), and *God administers the punishment*. The word “listening” comprises the judgment, the word, and the act; it may be seen as a divine *amen*, *let it be*. It seems to be an obvious, or, we may be tempted to say, an automatic reply of God to a well-grounded need to punish the sinner. It is, so to speak, the final stamp on the ritual triad – the act that is an inevitable result of the agential word. The consequence of the state of being cursed takes the form of an embodied curse – the strike of lightning.

The text, however, tells us about two strikes of lightning. Why not one (or three)? The remaining stanzas shed some light on this perplexing duality. We learn of “the mission in Puchaczewo.” One may wonder whether that “mission” (which in fact means special sermons, preached by visiting priests and aimed at bringing sinners back into the fold) did not represent for Gienia the last chance to reconcile with her mother and avoid the fulfilment of the curse. Who knows what may have happened, had she apologised to her mother and asked God for forgiveness?<sup>44</sup> Gienia, however, fails to apologise. Their relationship is irrevocably broken and beyond repair. By her refusal to reconcile with mother, Gienia confirmed the validity of the sentence conferred upon her. This way the circle closes: an act of human’s will is at the beginning and at the end of the process. A human falls into the state of sin (i.e. the state of spiritual curse) and then, by refusing to confess her sins and to repent, causes the curse to come true. We may say that the process of the curse occurs simultaneously on two levels; the refusal to reconcile constitutes a human, earthy *amen* which is a reply to the *amen* spoken by God. For Gienia, this is the point of no return.

The text of the song confirms this view, as Gienia finds herself “near the cemetery,” i.e. the area that is stigmatised, that lies beyond the consecrated ground, in fact, the area where murderers and suicides are buried.<sup>45</sup> They are denied the right to a religious burial that aids the soul

in her journey to the other world. Gienia becomes one of them – one of the condemned, “the cursed, the condemned, those who go to hell” [SW, *Przekłębnik*]. The fact that she is contrasted with the innocent children (who, as we know, in folk culture are believed to enjoy a special attention of God and remain in close contact with him),<sup>46</sup> emphasises the gravity of the curse which befalls her. The fact that God inspires the innocent children to leave the scene of Gienia’s death may also be interpreted in a different way, as indicating that she is finally abandoned by her “guardian spirits,” “angels,” or other benevolent powers that accompany a human,<sup>47</sup> whatever they may be called.

It is now time to consider the presence of the two strokes of lightning.<sup>48</sup> They may be viewed as punishment corresponding to the two grave sins committed by Gienia: for “not living with her mother peacefully” (“w niezgodzie ze swą matką żyła”) and for “beating the mother up” (matkę pobiła). We might also take these two sins to be the violation of the Fourth Commandment and refusal to reform. However, this duplicity may also be interpreted in a different way: Gienia put the divine world and the human world into chaos – by sinning, she turned not only against her mother, but also against the one who established the order expressed in the commandments.<sup>49</sup>

It has already been mentioned that in the folk belief system, lightning symbolises a battle between good and evil.<sup>50</sup> The fact that Gienia was killed by lightning seems to indicate that she was entirely possessed by the devil (it is the case of devil “hiding among people.”) Having chosen to be a bad child, she had voluntarily given herself into the devil’s possession, and, by remaining persistently in this state, she fell, so to speak, deeper and deeper into the state of the curse, until the situation reached the critical point. Gienia’s death from the thunder stroke constitutes a logical conclusion of her story.

Considering Gienia’s story in analogy with the primordial myth, as a reflection of the story of the fight between the Lord of Lightning with his opponent, we may conclude that, similarly to the mother who in the ritual of parental curse cooperates with God, the Lord of Lightning (or is used by him), the disobedient child is an instrument of his opponent, the Devil. God and the Devil, good and evil, the order and the chaos remain in a constant battle, clashing against each other; they use as their “mediators” a wronged mother and her disobedient child, and, in a more general sense, all people in whose hearts and deeds good and evil fight a constant battle.

Maybe we should add one participant to the list of those who take part in the curse ritual, the one who directs Gienia’s actions? Any answer to this

and other questions that come to mind in relation to the true story told by a wandering beggar, would require a separate analysis. I will, however, consider one of those questions. The question I have in mind is whether the strike of lightning provides a definite conclusion of Gienia's story?

The line "her whole body turned into char" may suggest that the consequences of a punishing touch of fire from heaven reach beyond the act of killing the sinner. I would venture saying that the charred, blackened body of the sinner may be seen as a sign of a curse,<sup>51</sup> which lasts after their death. One type of a magical folk tale provides grounds for this hypothesis; it features an opposition of analogy: black, i.e. the curse, vs. white, i.e. the redemption. I am referring here to the folk tale trope T307 *Królewna strzyga* (*The Princess Turned Blood Sucking Deman*)<sup>52</sup> which Kolberg presents in the following way:

Jeden król [...] nie miał dzieci. Więc prosi Pana Jezusa, żeby mu dał choć jakiego diabła, żeby królestwo przecie komu ostawić. [...] I dał mu Pan Bóg po roku córkę; ta córka zaraz przy urodzeniu była z czarnymi stopami. Tak rosła okrutnie do 13 lat i ciągle czerniała, że taka cała czarna była w 14 roku, kiedy umarła [DWOK 14, *WKS*Pozn 6: 75].

(There was a king who had no children. He asked Jesus to give him a child, even some devil, so that he would have someone to leave the kingdom to... After a year, God gave him a daughter, who was born with black feet. As she grew older her body was blackening and when she turned fourteen, she was completely black and died.)

After the princess' death the guard stands at her tomb in the church. She rises every night and kills the guard. Finally, one guard follows the advice of an old wise man, takes holy water with him and sprinkles the creature with it for three consecutive nights. During the last night,

Koło północy wychodzi do niego ta córka z trómnym i widzi, że warta jest. [...] A ón kropił i kropił, a gdy mu zabrakło święcony wody, to kotłem od niej bił a walił, a to sie darło i darło do niego, a ciągiem bielało. I tak wreszcie obieleła jak papier. I wtenczas dopiero skoczyła do niego, i gdy go mocno ścisła za szyję, ożyła. Na drugi dzień wychodzą oboje zdrowi; ta córka ucieszona, bo ją wybawił żołnierz [DWOK 14, *WKS*Pozn 6: 77].

(Around midnight that daughter rose from her casket and saw the guard... He kept sprinkling and sprinkling and when he run out of holy water, he kept hitting her with the jug, she was screaming terribly and her body was turning white, as white as paper. Once she turned entirely white she jumped to the guard, and when she grasped his neck, she suddenly came back to life. The next day both, the guard and the girl left the church, both alive and well, and the daughter was full of joy because the guard had saved her.)<sup>53</sup>

We may wonder if Gienia also has the chance of “whitening” and redemption. Before we resolve this question, we must pose another one: has Gienia been sentenced to eternal damnation, or, having done penance for her sins, will she be redeemed? The text of the song cannot help us here but we can turn to other texts of folk tradition.

An analysis of myth about Perun’s fight with the underworld deity leads to a conclusion that lightning, by destroying evil, has a purifying power, making room for good.<sup>54</sup> It stops the forces that cause chaos, the world becomes a place of order and harmony once again. Maybe, therefore, also Gienia’s death should be seen as a chance for her to turn towards the good, a chance to reconcile with the cosmos? In the religious worldview, death is not a definitive end, but the beginning of the cycle: purification – regeneration – rebirth<sup>55</sup> [cf. Eliade 1958: 197–198].

If this is the case, then the curse (symbolic killing with the word, which here takes the form of fire from heaven) may be seen as an act which breaks the ever stronger chain of sin, in fact breaks the state of the curse. It is a turning point, the act which forces the sinner to repent and start their penance, it represents, we could say, CURSE<sub>3</sub> (ENCHANTMENT) which turns the sinner into a penitent. May we therefore conclude that the uttered curse – breaking of the state of the curse – is in fact, benevolent? Do the words of the curse come to its performer from an angelic inspiration (“an angel and a devil fly around a human and carry curses” – “bo anioł i diabeł krążą wokół człowieka i noszą przekleństwa”<sup>56</sup>) – in the same way as the words of an unjustified curse, a false oath and swear-words offending God and people come from the Devil/the tempter? Assuming that a just curse opens a possibility of redemption, such a conclusion is obvious.

The text of the song, however, offers a different conclusion, one that concerns a different level of reality. In the last lines of the song, we come back to earth: “So children who don’t honour their mother/ Carry a grave sin/ And their entire life is a vain struggle/ That’s the holy truth, take it to your heart” (“Więc które dzieci nie szanują matki, / Ciężki grzech biorą na swoje barki, / Bo całe życie nic im się nie wiedzie... / Święta to prawda – wiercie w nią szczerze”).

The moral of the song contains a rationalisation of the myth told as a “true story.” The sense of dread and the tension are lifted. Beating the mother is replaced with “disrespect,” and the death from lightning becomes “a vain struggle” (so, an unhappy life). This is how the truths from myths are reflected in everyday life.

Death from lightning is also for my interlocutors an exceptional occurrence, although not a completely unseen one. The consequences

of the curse that they are more likely to encounter in everyday life are: “unhappy life, misfortunes, and failures. A cursed child lives long, but does not find happiness” (“Życie nieszczęśliwe, niedostatki, upadki. Takie dziecko żyje długo, ale nie ma szczęścia”) [36]; “[The cursed child] is cursed until he dies; nothing goes as he wishes, a failure comes after a failure” (“...jest przeklęte do śmierci; nic mu się nie wiedzie, nie szykuje, tylko ma bez przerwy całe życie jakieś upadki”) [20]; “A cursed child has no luck and no health” (“Przeklęte dziecko nie ma szczęścia i nie ma zdrowia”) [22].<sup>57</sup>

However, the only difference lies in the degree. If sins of bad children become so grave that they require vengeance from heaven, the truth of the myth may materialise again. Our teacher, the wandering beggar, knows this, hence he calls it “the holy truth.”

## 2. The Reverse of Parental Curse. A Child's Curse

Dziecku nie wolno na rodziców coś mówić kiepskiego...  
(A child may not speak ill against her parents...)

Marianna from Choroszczyńska

May a child curse his or her parents?

Dzieci, to ja myślę, może i przeklno rodziców... ale co te dziecko, ono tylko grzeszy, bo czcij ojca swego i matkę swoją przecież odmawiamy w pacierz. Przykazanie jest – to co ono może zakląć?! A czy ono sie przyjmie na rodziców, jak klnie? To ja uważam, że nie [40].

(Children, I think, may curse their parents... but it is only a child, it only sins [by cursing the parents], the prayer says... honour your mother and your father. The commandment says so, so how can a child curse?! And can it really do any harm by cursing? I don't think so.)

Other interlocutors reply to this question in the following way: “For such a thing God will punish the child” (“Za to już Pan Bóg ukarze jego”) [39] or “It's no good, a grave sin, indeed” (“To niedobrze, to wielki grzech”) [37].

In light of these replies we may conclude that in folk moral code cursing the parents is a grave sin. Does it mean that folk ethics categorically prohibits children from cursing their parents, that such a curse is, so to speak, unjustified by definition? Before we attempt to answer this question, let us take a closer look at a different prohibition, akin to the one in question, the one we have already encountered in the *True story*... i.e. the prohibition from raising one's hand against the parents.

### In the words of my interlocutors the child who raised their hand against the parents

To już w ogóle bluźnierca. O, za to może być odwet na stare lata. Może jeszcze za życia coś mieć... [38].

(He is a finished blasphemer. He may repay for it in old age. He may even pay while he is alive...)

Dawniej, jak na ojca, matkę podniósł rękę, to ksiądz rozgrzeszenia nie dał. To już musiał jechać do biskupa [14].

(In the old days, when a child raised their hand against the father or the mother, a parish priest would not absolve their sin. Such a child had to go to the bishop.)

The punishment for this transgression (referred to as *blapshemy*, i.e. clearly defined as defying the sacrum) is irrevocable. The model protagonist (Gienia, the wicked daughter) is punished by fire from heaven that forces her to repent for her sins. Weaker reflexions of this mythical punishment can be found in my interlocutors' comments mentioning difficulties in obtaining absolution of sins, or being the subject of "revenge in old age" (the person who fails to honour their parents will be treated in the same by their own children; this is another example of 'the mirror principle').<sup>58</sup>.

Here is a fragment of one more beggar song:

Wyrodny syn bez litości  
Uderzył w twarz ojca swego;  
Staruszek upadł na ziemię  
Od ręki syna swojego.

Gniew Boży wkrótce nastąpił  
Na syna zwyrodniałego:  
Obie ręce mu skostniały,  
Straszny ból w kościach od tego.

Wtenczas upadł na kolana  
Syn przed staruszkim ubogim:  
"Ojcze daruj, ojciec wstaw się  
Za mną ty przed Panem Bogiem!"

A ojciec mu odpowiada:  
"Taka wola Pana Boga!  
Zawiniłeś, więc cierp teraz!  
To jest dla wszystkich przestroga."

Syn tak z boleściami walczył  
 Dwadzieścia cztery godziny,  
 Skończył życie w pierw od ojca,  
 Poszedł do ciemnej mogiły.

(A vile son with no mercy;  
 Hit his father on the face  
 The old man fell to the ground  
 Struck by his son's hand.

And terrible was God's wrath  
 Against the wicked son:  
 Both hands went stiff  
 And he cried with pain,

And he fell on his knees  
 The son before his poor old man:  
 "Forgive me father  
 Plead for me before God!"

And his father replies: "such is the will of God!  
 You are at fault so suffer now,  
 This is a warning for all of us"

And for a whole day  
 Did the son suffer  
 And his life ended  
 In a dark grave.)<sup>59</sup>

The causal sequence is clear: the son raises his hand against the father, i.e. which is the metonymy of killing – the hand stiffens, i.e. it is dead (the punishment falls to the "instrument of the crime")<sup>60</sup> – the wrongdoer dies an agonizing death. The punishment for (in this case symbolic) murder is the death of the offender; this punishment is administered by sacrum automatically ('such is the will of God!' – "taka wola Pana Boga!") because this is the order of things: breach of a specific prohibition entails specific punishment ("you are at fault, so suffer now!" – "zawiniłeś, więc cierp teraz!"). Even if the father intervened, if would not help, the verdict from heaven would not be reversed.

Below is an example of the sequence: killing of the father – withering of hands – painful death:

Za kilka miesięcy Pan Bóg karę daje:  
 Synowa choruje i więcej nie wstaje.  
 Ręce, które ojcu potrawę zrobiły,

Teraz jej się obie całkiem pokrzywiły,  
 Nawet pożywienie trudno do ust bierze –  
 O, popatrzcie dzieci, co się to z nią dzieje!  
 I w strasznych boleściach życie swe skończyła,  
 Za starego ojca, którego otruła.<sup>61</sup>

(After a few months God sends his punishment:  
 The daughter in law falls ill and never rises from bed,  
 Her hands which served her father his last meal,  
 Are both crooked and twisted, the spoon falls out her hand,  
 And she can barely put food into her mouth,  
 O, look, children, what's happening to her!  
 And so she died long and painful death  
 For her old father whom she poisoned.)

The punishment for cursing/ beating up/ killing of the mother of father does not end with “long and painful death”; the punishment, as Genia’s story has already suggested, goes beyond the grave:

O, straszny synu, Kaina plemię!  
 Syn zamordował ojca o mienie.  
 Strasznej pokuty za ojca trzeba,  
 Aby móc trafić kiedyś do nieba.

A syn niedobry na śmierć skazany.  
 O Jezu Chryste Ukrzyżowany!  
 Co ja mordował ojca swojego,  
 Oj, już nie ujdę ognia wiecznego.

A może ziemia ciała mojego  
 Za zbrodnię straszną nie przyjmie złego?  
 Żem ojca swego zgładził ze świata –  
 Na cóż mi przyszło na młode lata? <sup>62</sup>

(O, vile son, from Cain’s tribe!  
 A son murdered his father for his estate,  
 Terrible penance the son must serve,  
 Before he can enter heaven’s gate.

The vile son is sentenced to death,  
 Oh, Jesus on the Cross!  
 I murdered my own father,  
 I will never escape eternal fire.

May my evil body  
 Be spurned by the earth,

For this terrible deed?  
What will happen of me, at such a young age?)

The text is explicit about the consequences of “the terrible deed” „strasznej zbrodni”: the soul of the sinner will be condemned, his body may be rejected by the (holy) earth. This rejection of the sinner’s body is closely related to curse (which will be examined in the next chapter). Let us consider an interesting link between the earth (grave), hand, beating up and a rod-branch.

W Wielkopolsce lud opowiada o krnąbrnym dziecku, które uderzyło matkę i za to po śmierci póty wystawiało rączkę z mogiły, póki matka różgą jej nie obiała, a z tej różgi zasadzonej na grobie wyrósć miała brzoza [Fischer 1937: 63].

(In Wielkopolska they tell a story about a wicked child who hit his mother. When the child died, his hand would stick out from the grave, until the mother beat it up with a rod, and when that rod was planted on the grave, a birch grew out of it.)

One of such folk tales says that in Gryżyna, a village near Obra

...stoi w gruzach już dziś (1846) będący kościółek św. Marcina, a obok niego stara brzoza, której obwód trzy i pół łokcia wynosi, szanowana od ludu i siekierą nietknięta. Do tego drzewa przywiązana jest legenda. [...] Niegdyś wieśniaczka miała złośliwe dziecko, które się na nią targało; nigdy je za ten grzech nie biła, owszem, pieśczołami obsypywała. Gdy dziecko ukochane umarło, pochowano je pod kościołem. W kilka dni po pogrzebie ujrzano rączkę dziecięcia wystającą z grobu. Spostrzegłszy to kopacz daje znać o tym matce i księdzu, który w stule i z krzyżem udaje się na miejsce, gdzie i inni także ze wsi zebrali się ludzie, i wszyscy przy zaklęciach i modlitwach schować znów usiłowali rękę do grobu. Na próżno; ręka wciąż z grobu wystaje i nad nim świeci. Dopiero pleban, jakoby z natchnienia, poradził matce ukarać chłostą tę rękę, która się na nią za życia targnęła. Matka więc, przyniósłszy brzozową różgę, sama, acz ze łzami, obiała nią sterczącą z grobu rękę, po czym ta natychmiast do grobu się schowała, na świadectwo, że jedynie takiego domagała się zadośćuczynienia. Ku pamięci i przestrodze matka zasadziła następnie ową różgę na grobie, a z niej niniejsza wyrosła brzoza. (Brzoza ta, jak doniosły czasopisma, uschła i obaliła się w r. 1875.) [DWOK 10, WKsPozn 2: 18].

(...there is a St. Martin’s church now in ruins (1846), and next to the church an old birch grows, three and a half cubits thick, the folk hold it in high esteem and would never come near it with an axe. There is a legend attached to that birch [...]. In old times there lived a peasant woman, whose child used to beat her; she never beat him up for this sin, but remained kind to him and showered him with caresses. When her beloved child died, he was

buried next to the church. A few days after the funeral the child's hand was seen, sticking out of its grave. The digger, having noticed it, tells the child's mother and the priest about it. The priest, wearing his robes and holding the cross, goes to the tomb where other villagers had already gathered and they of them together, beseeching and praying, tried to push the hand back into the grave. All in vain; the shiny hand kept sticking out of the grave. Only the priest, as if suddenly inspired, advised the mother to punish and whip the hand that used to beat her. So the mother took a rod made from birch twigs and, crying, whipped that hand which used to cause her pain. The hand returned to the grave, as if to show that it finally received what it wanted. The mother planted the twig on the grave, as both a memorial and a warning That birch has grown from these twigs. By the way, the birch, as the newspapers said, withered and died in 1875.)<sup>63</sup>

It seems that beating children, apart from its explicit function (administering the punishment, "teaching discipline") in folk culture also has a symbolic dimension. What could be the other purpose of the ritual of beating with twigs<sup>64</sup> during annual holidays – Christmas and Easter, if not to strengthen children's vitality? This is exactly the message carried out by the formulas accompanying hitting children and youngsters with rods on Palm Sunday, to give an example: "It isn't me who beats you, it's that willow. After seven days – a great day will come, after six nights – a great night" ("Wierzba bije, nie ja biję. Za tydzień – wielki dzień, za sześć noc – wielka noc") [ES 3: 129], or "be healthy like water is, grow like a willow tree" ("budź zdarow jak wada, raści jak wierba") [Moszyński 1928: 127]. These words clearly mean: the one who is touched with a budding willow twig, will gain – thanks to the twig's power (the beater is only an intermediary: "it isn't me who beats you"<sup>65</sup>) similar properties. Here, 'the act of beating is sacralized, and is endowed with the desired power to influence the object' [Tołstaja 2001: 123]. Thanks to 'metaphorical transfers by word mediated by object' [Tambiah 1973: 219] some of the tree's vitality is transferred to the human ("grow like a willow tree").

Ritual beating sheds some light on a deeper, symbolic meaning of "everyday" beating; it also helps us understand that folk tradition requires that corporal punishment be administered in the process of raising and educating the child: *When the mother beats, she teaches a lesson (Kiedy matka bije, to uczy)* [LB 4: 180]<sup>66</sup>. What is more, folk tradition situates it among benevolent acts, in a clear opposition to a curse – let us recollect the words of one of my female interlocutors from the region of Grodno:

– Ksiądz mówił: "Matka, jak już tobie tak naprzykrzy się to dziecko, to weź różga, utnij go tak, niech mu krew pójdzie z mienkiego miejsca, to, mów,

nie okaleczysz jego. To sie zgoi. A przeklinać, mówi, nie przeklinaj. [...] Przekleństwo, mówi, nie błogosławieństwo. Jeżeli dziecko nie usłucha, to weź różga, pociągnij go – i nie ze złością.” [...]

– Nie ze złością? Nie można różgą bić ze złością?

– Nie można, nie. Tak spokojnie, o tak: “Nie rób tego. Nie rób tego.” I mówię: tam bić, gdzie Pan Bóg stworzył. O tu, kości nie ma, nie połamiesz. I tu sie zgoi [53].

(Cursing is not blessing! Take a rod and strike him that offends you! [...] the priest would say: ‘mother, if you cannot bear the child’s conduct, take a rod and hit the soft part of his body so that it bleeds, you will not harm it, it will heal. But beware of cursing, stay away from it ... A cursing is not blessing. If the child does not want to listen, take a rod and strike him, but do not do it with anger. [...]

Without anger? One cannot beat with a rod with anger?

– No, you can’t. You must stay calm, like: “Don’t do it, kid. Don’t.” And I say: beat where there is soft flesh, no bones, nothing will break. And it will heal.)

The legend about the birch in Gryżyna contains the message that raising a hand against the mother may not remain unpunished. On a deeper, symbolic level it also teaches us that one who had not received the due number of life-giving lashes, must take them back after their death<sup>67</sup>; otherwise they will not be able to pass to the other world and will remain in the state of suspension between this and the other world. The hand sticking out of the grave is a sign of such a state of “death that has not been completed”; while the tree growing out of the grave means that the souls has finally reached the other world.

It follows that parents should punish their children; many folklore texts indicate that this is even an imperative:

Byłaby jo, była,  
wsićkiej bidy usła,  
kieby mnie matusia  
gałązkom przesiwała.

Nie moja to wina,  
jeno mamulczyna,  
boć mnie nie karali,  
pókich mała była [SLSJ:187].

(I would have been spared  
All of my misfortunes  
If my dear mother  
Used a rod on me

It isn't mine,  
 But my mommy's fault,  
 That while I was a girl  
 I was spared the rod.)<sup>68</sup>

The girl complains, having lost her virginity. A wandering beggar preaches:

Za te grzeszne słowa, za obrazę nieba  
 Przede wszystkim winić rodziców potrzeba!

Z uczynkami swymi dziecko się nie liczy,  
 Bo ojciec, choć widzi, za złe nie wyćwiczy.  
 I matka nie skarże jak trzeba dzieciaka,  
 A przez to jest w świecie złego siła taka:

Jak dziecko wyrośnie, to harde bez granic,  
 Rodzonego ojca i matkę ma za nic!  
 O, matko, ty matko, żebyś ty wiedziała:  
 W piekle będzie za to twa dusza gorzała.

Oj, żebyś ty była za złe różgą siekła,  
 Może byś swą duszę wybawiła z piekła.<sup>69</sup>

(For these sinful words that offend God  
 Parents are to bear the blame!

A child does whatever he wants,  
 Because the father spares the rod, even he knows.  
 And the mother won't punish the wayward brat,  
 That's why the world is so bad:

And the child grows up snotty-nosed,  
 Dishonours and treats lightly his own parents!  
 Oh mother, this you must know:  
 Devils in hell will burn your soul.

Had you punished evil with your rod,  
 Maybe you would have saved your soul.)

There is a clear imperative to punish children; the parents who do not observe it, are threatened with the same penalty as their children: condemnation.<sup>70</sup> So, while a child “has to obey” their parents “have to punish.”<sup>71</sup> The child who hit their parent and the parent who **failed to** beat the child (when it was required) awaits the same punishment. Both of them, “a bad child” and “a bad parent” fail to guarantee the proper transmission of tradition and the imprudence of both may put human culture at risk of turning into chaos.

Although it may seem peculiar, it is just a prove of consistency. A child who is not punished (i.e. not raised in a proper manner) is a bad child – so, as we already know– a cursed child<sup>72</sup>. Such children fail to fulfil their obligations towards the parents no only while the parents are alive, but also after their death. They do not pray for the parents' souls – and without such prayer it is difficult for the soul to reach heaven. The parents must punish their children with the view of their own and their children's redemption and well-being in this and the other world. If the parents failed to do so, both – they and their children would be condemned.

Pan Bóg oddziela. [...] Trąba zagra, i z grobu powstaną umarli, i sędzić Pan Jezus będzie umarłych i żywych. I biada tej matce będzie, która dzieci nie nauczała, ona będzie odpowiadać przed Panem Bogiem. A dzieci też będą odpowiadać [53].

(God divides segregates. The trumpet will sound and the dead will rise from their graves and Jesus will judge the dead and the living. And woe betide the mother who didn't punish her children as she will answer for this before God. And the children will answer for it, too.)

The danger of condemnation as the punishment for the breach of the Fourth Commandment is particularly remembered at the same time of ritual year, at which the children are beaten with a rod?. New Year's carols containing greetings, as well as the orations of the participants of the Polish Easter ritual of *kurek (kogutek) dyngusowy* (the Easter Monday cock), talk about the fate of the souls of bad children:

Pawle, Pietrze, weź-ze klucze,  
Pójdź do piekła, wypuść duse,  
Tylko jednej nie wypuscaj,  
Co zabiła ojca, matkę;  
Choć-ze jesce nie zabiła,  
Ale sobie to pomyśliła.  
Więксе to jest pomyślenie,  
Niżli złe uderzenie.  
Bo się rana prędko zgoi,  
A złe słowo długo stoi [Pleszczyński 1892: 189].

(Paul and Peter, take the keys,  
Go to hell and free the souls,  
But of them must stay there,  
The one that killed father, mother;  
The one who thought about it,  
Evil thoughts

Are worse than hitting,  
 As the wound is quick to heal,  
 But evil words will stay for long.)

Let us look at different versions of this song:

[...] wszystkie duse rade były;  
 tylko jedna smętna była,  
 co się na matkę zamierzyła.  
 Gorse, duso, zamierzenie,  
 niżli samo uderzenie  
 [DWOK 24, *Maz* 1: 144].

([...] All the souls were full of joy,  
 Only one in gloom, and sad,  
 Against her mother she almost raised her hand,  
 O, remember the wicked soul,  
 that such intent is worse than the blow itself.)

and

[...] Ino jedny nie wypuszczajcie,  
 Co ojca biła, matkę krwawiła.  
 Oj, żeby ja teraz ojca, matkę miała,  
 Rącki, nozki to bym obmywała,  
 Swoim warkocykiem to bym wycirała,  
 A ten brudzik to bym wypijała  
 [Kotula 1970, s. 497].

([...] Keep one soul in hell, don't let it go away,  
 She beat her father and her mother bled,  
 Oh, if my mother and father I still had  
 I'd wash their feet  
 And dry them with my hair  
 And that dirty water I would drink.)

As if follows from the texts quoted above, hellfire is a punishment either for hitting the parent (or for such an intent; let us not forget that mythical worldview is characterized by the belief in the material nature of human's thoughts), as well as for arguing with the parents or rebuking them – which may be easily considered as CURSING<sub>4</sub> (SWEARING). To sum up, regardless of the manner in which the child breaches the Fourth Commandment, whether it is by deeds, words or thoughts – their punishment remains the same. The texts quoted above prove the analogy between cursing the parents and raising

one's hand against them. Both transgressions are treated in the texts as interchangeable, they are seen as equivalent. Words have the same power and gravity as actions.

We have come the full circle; it is time to answer the question we posed at the beginning: is the curse uttered by a child unjustified and unjust on principle – in the same way as raising one's hand against the parents is – as it is always punished by death, symbolized by withering of hand and hell?

In light of the material we have examined so far one may be tempted to give a positive answer to this question: the curse uttered by a child is always unjustified as opposed to a parental curse, which is usually justified.

Is it really the case that there is no possibility for the children to curse their parents in a justified way, for example in the situation when they are mistreated?

Jak dziecko mówi na rodziców, no to mówio, że źle, bo dziecku nie wolno na rodziców coś mówić kiepskiego. Rodzicom nic nie będzie, tylko jemu może najwyżej co się zrobić. Bo ono życzy rodzicom. Jak niesłusznie – jemu może się stać. Bo to czasem tak bywa: kto nad kim dołek kopie, sam wleci [33].

(When a child speaks against the parent, it is wrong, they say, because a child mustn't do that. The parents will be fine, but the child may get in trouble. Because he wishes his parents ill! If he is unfair – evil may come to him. It is like that, sometimes: who digs a pit for others, falls in himself.)

The interlocutor clearly expresses the common norm: a child cannot “speak against the parents.” It follows from her words that such a curse has bad consequences for the child because ‘she wishes ill to the parents’. In the next sentence, however, she modifies her view – restricting this “falling into the pit dug by the child herself” to the cases of an unjustified curse. May we therefore presume that a justified child's curse, in fact, does exist?

The answer seems positive. Such a curse is justified in the cases where the parents fail to fulfil the duties imposed on them by cultural norms, such as the duty to love the child and to take care of them, so when they become “non-father” and “non-mother.” This may be even reflected in rituals; Kolberg, for example, quotes an interesting fragment of a father's speech addressed to the daughter visited by the matchmakers, in which the father encourages the daughter to give her opinion on one of the candidates:

[...] moja rodzona, powiedz wyraźnie, czy ty jego lubisz; bo ty u nas nie jesteś zanadto, my ciebie z domu wypędzać nie chcemy, nie na tośmy cię

wypiełgnowali, żebyś nas potem miała przeklinać; powiedz więc, powiedz, co myślisz? [DWOK 52, *BiałPol*: 275].

(...tell me my dear kid, if you fancy him, we don't want to push you away, we raised you, took care of you, we don't want you to curse us.<sup>73</sup> So speak your mind, kid.)

The norm is clear: good parents raise their children properly – in a way that ensures good, blessed life; good children repay their parents with gratitude. The curse takes place when this norm is breached. This is when the following rule applies: “If the child is right to curse, then, there is nothing more we can say” (“Jeżeli dziecko przeklina słusznie, to sprawa rozegrana”) [36].

We have found the answer to our doubts concerning cursing parents by the child. However, there are no grounds to conclude that justified and unjustified child's curse (depending on whether or not the child had been mistreated, wronged by the parents) occupy the same space in folk culture. Material from my research confirms this – besides the opinion quoted above, I have recorded only one example of a justified curse against a parent. What is more, this curse was cast in circumstances that are rather uncommon.

Tu było tak. Ojciec dom postawić dał córce, a stodołę na tym placu nie daje. I później tak ten ogródek od drogi odgradzał drutem, a córka mówi: “Wy, tato, dotąd będziecie żyć, dokąd płot będzie stał.” Płot się wali, ojciec umiera. I córka potem mówi: “Musi ja przekłęła ojca, że ojciec dotąd żył, dokąd płotek ten stał. Płotek się zwał, ojciec umarł” [13].

(The father let his daughter build a house on his plot but not a barn. And while he was putting up the fence between the garden and the road, the daughter said: “Dad, you will be alive as long as this fence stands here.” The fence fell down, the father died. And that daughter later said: “I think I cursed the father, he lived as long as that fence was there, when the fence fell, he died.”)

We are dealing here with the case of an unintentional curse; the daughter was not even aware that by saying to her father: “Dad, you will live as long as this fence stands here” she cursed him. Furthermore, the words of the curse are not a typical CURSE<sub>f</sub>, they form neither an optative nor an imperative sentence, and neither does the curse does not contain an invocation of power. It is an example of an indicative sentence that functions as a curse in the meaning of CURSE<sub>s</sub> –the perlocutionary effect of which is cursing the addressee. We may presume that because the daughter was the one who was right, God used her words as a curse, administering the punishment to the unjust father.

The following conclusion of Svetlana Tolstaya concerning the sacred texts sakralnych tekstów in folklore may be applied to such situations – where the curse formula is not uttered, but its consequences are fulfilled:

since such texts have stronger ‘illocutionary force’ – as they are not only supposed to influence the reality but to influence it by deciding in the matters of life or death – the specific elements of these texts, usually completely neutral, devoid of any pragmatic aspects, having been placed in such a strong field of influence, gain certain ‘power’, becoming some of the instruments of influencing things [Tołstaja 2001: 117–118].

My interlocutors’ reaction to the question of whether a child may curse their parents was frequently the one of surprise or protest. I usually heard:

Nie może tak być, chyba że matka jakaś zbrodniaczka... [Przekleństwo pada z dziecka na matkę?] To nie... [65].

(This is impossible, maybe if the mother is ... I don’t know, a murderess? [A child curse befalls his mother?] No...)

or

Dziecko rodziców nie przeklnie. A rodzicy dziecko przeklinają. O, tak mówili. O, to ja słyszała dawniej. Bo rodzicom ciężko przychodzon sie ony i ony grzeszon, ot. Przed rodzicami [50].

(A child will not curse her parents. But parents curse children. I heard it in old days... Because it’s hard for parents to bring children up and the kids sin against the parents.)

and, to give one more example:

Już ja tego nie wiem... Ja żyję od małości i moi rodzice nigdy nie kłócili się, do kościoła chodzili, i ja tak kościół lubię, że kościół to dla mnie wszystko [44].

(I don’t know about that...My parents never quarrelled, they went to the church and I love the church too, church means everything to me.)

Let us sum up. In folk culture, a child’s curse against the parents belongs to the category of the most serious sins, the ones that must be punished by God. The penalty for these sins is condemnation, or eternal death, as we may say in the language of the Judeo-Christian system in which the rule “anyone who speaks against their mother or father is to be put to death” [Exodus 21:17] is expressed explicitly. In light of the mythological interpretation that reaches back to pre-Christian tropes, one may speak of the equivalence: offending the mother = offending the Mother

of God = offending the holy earth [Uspienskij 1983, *passim*] and notice that cursing the parents amounts to cursing oneself as the curse befalls the descendants. Hence, cursing the parents is a symbolic equivalent of the suicide. This is why it is the subject of such a strong prohibition.

A child's curse should be viewed as a *pendant* of the ritual of a parental curse, its reversal: a parental curse is justified by definition (which follows from the imperative of the parent's authority over children), while a child's curse is, by definition, unjustified (which follows from the imperative to obey the parents). However, there are exceptions to every rule, in our case the exceptions prove that the rule exists. The material fully confirms that – it contains far fewer cases that constitute an “exception” than “typical example.” Although such as it there may be incidents when the mother's curse is unjustified (by which she breaks the norm of exercising the authority over children in a fair manner), as a result of which it turns against her, there may also be incidents where a child's curse against the parents is justified (it happens as a consequence of the breach of the same imperative). These exceptions confirm the rule that: God is always on the side of the wronged person.

All that has been said about the imperative to be a good parent and an imperative to raise children in discipline, may shed some light on the conviction held by several of my interlocutors that a mother who curses her child – sins. Asked whether a mother's curse is a sin, they answered:

Wielki grzech to dla matki. [I co tej matce się może stać?] Matka też nie nadta błogosławienstwa bendzie mieć za to [65].

(It is a great mother's sin. [What may happen to such a mother?] It will not give the mother any blessings.)

No pewnie. Matka najwięcej może uczynić. I zła, i dobra. [Czy może spokojnie umrzeć?] Nie, na pewno nie. Jej wszystko się przed oczyma będzie działo, stawało. Ona się wypowiada może z tego [38].

(Of course. Mother can do the most. Good and bad. [May she die peacefully?] No, for sure, not. It all will pass before her eyes. Maybe she will confess it.)

Wszystko jedno ma grzech i nie może spokojnie umrzeć [36].

(She has sinned anyway, and she can't die in peace.)

Przeklinać nie można, może ciążyć na niej kara [39].

(She may not curse, as punishment may come to her.)

This conviction seems to be inconsistent with mother's role as an intermediary of divine curse, with the claim that “a mother does not

want to cast the curse, but she is forced to do it". If it is God who speaks through her, how can the same God punish her for uttering the words of the curse? Yet, we hear: "[A Mother] mustn't curse, it's a sin. She must confess and do penance, otherwise God won't forgive her"<sup>74</sup>. ("[Matce] nie wolno przeklinać, to grzech. Zależy, jak ona się spowiadała i pokutowała, bo tak Pan Bóg nie daruje") [37]. Considering the entire causal chain in the relations between children and parents, we may ask whether it is the case that the mother's sin consists in failure to fulfil her parental duties? Is it the case that "a bad child" is a child who was raised by the parents in the wrong way, that the parents failed to discipline them? Maybe it is not casting the curse that the mother must confess and do penance for but it is her failure as a parent? By cursing a bad child, the mother, in a sense, curses herself – as if to confirm the principle that "Whoever harms another – first harms himself. Whoever does good to another – does good to himself" ("Kto robi komu źle – nasamprzód sobie źle. Kto robi komu dobrze – nasamprzód sobie dobrze") [13]. Such a mother sins by being a bad mother – hence, she must do penance. God always sides with the one who is wronged, what is more – God is always just: "one will get what one deserves" ("każden jak sobie zasłuży, tak będzie miał") [5].

One of my female interlocutors from the region of Grodno, speaking of her exceptionally malevolent mother-in-law, who had attempted to poison her, sums up her account in the following way:

Jana była takaja. Chaj jaje Boh praszczaje, ja jaje praszczaju. Bolsz niczoha nie skazu pra jaje. Nie można abszuđać. Jana na tym świecie katory hod. Chaciejaż jana mianie atrawić. [...] Ale chaj Boh joj daść toje, szto jana da Boha zasłużyła. Nie można praklinać, ja nikoli nie praklinaju [64].

(She had such character. May God forgive her, I do. I won't say anything more about her. You shouldn't judge people. She has been there, on the other side for many years now. She wanted to poison me ... But may God give her what she deserves from him. One cannot curse, I never curse.)

The daughter-in-law, who in relation to her mother-in-law occupies the position of a wronged child, is reluctant to curse her, indicating that sinner always meets with God's justice (so a human's curse is unnecessary) and, by uttering the formula "may God forgive her, I do" – confirms the intermediary role of the performer of the ritual. This account also confirms that one is not supposed to curse the dead. A curse, as a symbolic killing with the word, concerns only the living; the dead get their repayment in a way that is not mediated by human words. Maybe, therefore, in folk culture there is no place at all for a justified child's curse? Maybe there is no need for it, as bad parents will get "what they deserve from

God" anyway? Let us not forget that everyone will be subjected to God's judgement.

Na tamtym świecie lepiej niż na tym?

– A tam, mileńka, jak zarobisz. Trzeba wiedzieć, że my nie raz umieramy, dwa razy umierać będziemy.

To znaczy?

– [...] Umrzem, to ciało nasze umrze. Nas pochowają, zasypio, odprawio msze... Zrobio tak, jak należy się, po katolicku. Ale tam trzeba będzie przed Bogiem na sąd stawać, dusza stanie na sąd. Jak zarobim, tak będziemy mieć. I tam jeszcze będziesz umierać. Ot, tak, moja miła...

Po tym sądzie?

– Po tym sądzie cię Pan Bóg osądzi. Trzeba w piekło, albo w niebo, albo w czyściec. Trzy wyjścia. Co zarobisz. [...] Sąd boski, moja droga, to... nikogo nie minie, nikogo sąd boski nie minie. Jak zarobił, tak mu i będzie. A czego my modlimsia? My tylko dla duszy modlimsia, a ciało... Jak zarobisz, tak będziesz miał [68].

(Is it better in the other world then here?)

– It depends, darling, how you fare. We don't die only one, we will die twice. What do you mean?

– [...] When we die, our body will die. They will bury us, cover with earth, say the mass. But in there, we will have to stand in front of God, judging us, our soul will stand for judgement. And we will get what we deserve. Well, darling, that's how it is...

And after the judgment?

– After the judgment God will give his verdict. We will have to go, to hell, heaven, or purgatory. One will get what one deserves. And why do we pray? We pray only for our soul. One will get what one deserves.)

We must not forget that in the universe of folk culture, besides God there is another, rival force – the devil. A human always has a choice, and this choice is based on a zero/one logic, one either sides with God or with the devil.

Adzin czaławiek biez kanca pryłuczajecca da Boha, da Boha jaho bolsze ciahnie, mahnaść, da Boha, da światoha, wot jak mienie. A katoryj da dżawała pryłuczajecca. I jon kradzie, jon bjecca, jon spletni jakija dziełaje, jon palić ludziej, zabiwaje ludziej. Heta užo jaho dusza pradadziena dżawału. Ot, užo jaho Haspodź nie prymie [63].

(One person will always join God, as it is God that attracts him, like a magnet. To God, to the holy one – I am like that. And another will chose devil. And he will steal, get into fights, lie, set fires, and kill people. His soul belongs to the devil, he sold it to him. God won't take him any more.)

We have already talked about the sequence: sin – devil – curse and about the fact that in folk worldview, the one who is not with God, sides with the devil.

A man who serves God is a good member of the community, trying to be in harmony with his group; a man who serves the devil is a rebel, trying to harm his fellow-citizens. Since every socially moral action is subordinated to the glorification of God, and since there is an essential opposition between God and the devil, every socially immoral action is conceived as serving the devil [Thomas, Znaniecki 1927: 251].

A mother is either good and as such, she raises her children in a godly way, which means that the children are good, or ... moves towards to opposite side. One way in which one may cross from Good to Evil, change blessed state for the state of being cursed, are SWEARWORDS (CURSES<sub>4</sub>). As we know, the line between them and CURSES<sub>1</sub> is rather fine.

Jak kobieta jest przeklętnicą, jak jest bezbożna, to swoje dziecko od maleńkości, albo jeszcze nosząc w żywocie, poleca czortu (bo ona nigdy go, kładąc ani odchodząc od niego, nie przeżegna, ale jeszcze przeklina i czartami posyła), to od takich dzieci anioł stróż na zawsze odstępkuje, a jego miejsce zajmuje czort i ciągle [takiego człowieka] kusi, żeby kradł, pił, grzeszył, wszystkim wyrządzał zło, a po śmierci zabiera jego duszę i niesie do piekła. Takiej matki tak samo już anioł stróż nie pilnuje, ale czort nią rządzi [LB 1: 101].

(If a woman swears a lot, if she is godless, she gives the little one, the one in her womb, over to devil (because she won't make the sign of cross over him when she is putting him to bed or leaving him, but instead she will curse and send him to devil), guardian angel always keeps away from these children and devil takes his place, and always tempts [such a person] to steal, drink, sin, harm everybody, and when he dies, devil takes his soul and carries it to hell. The same with the mother, guardian angel doesn't watch over her, but devil rules her instead.)

### 3. Curses Cast by Other Speakers

Kłątwa – to siła wszechmocna działa.

(A curse means it is the almighty's work.)

Józef from Huszcza

It's time to widen our horizons. Let's step aside from the parent-child relations and their mutual cursing and have a look instead at various circumstances in which a folk curse is bestowed.

Here a Catholic girl turns down an Orthodox Christian boy and refuses to marry him:

Michaś nazywałsja. Misza. Ja hawaru: “Niet, u cerkwu nie pajdu.” – “Paczamu?” – “Ja, każu, ja kaścioła nie ostału.” – “A ja ɥ kaścioł nie pajdu!” – “No to, znaczyć, nam nie para,” hawaru. I on haworyć: “No, tak ja budu jeździć wieździe, tak na mienia skażuć *piarechryst*.” – “A mienia, hawaru, pochwalić maja siemja, maje usie...” A wprzód to był wyjątek. Jeźeli pójdziesz za prawosławnego, wyjątek był. [...] I ety Miszka Czarkouski do mienie tak chodzić, taki fajny... I fajno tancewał, fajny chłopiec. Tak ja mówię: “No, to tobie daroha ɥ cerkwu, mnie ɥ kaścioł. I ja nie astału swoich chorągwi, szto jany kłaniajutsa przed wielkim ołtarzem, nie.” Tak: “Nu szkoda, Mania. No, waźmu [druhuju], budu spaminać pra ciebie, ale kab ty wiek nie wyszła zamuż!” Tak wziął ręka mnie, ścisnął, mówi: “Kab ty wiek nie wyszła zamuż!” [...] Żeby ty nigdy nie wyszła za mąż! I jednak nie poszłam. [To spełniły się słowa tego chłopca.] Spełnili się. Tak się spełniły, wiesz, kochana... [53].

(His name was Misha. I tell him: “No, I won’t go to the Orthodox church”. “Why not?” “I won’t leave the church.” “And I won’t go to the church!” “Well, it means we cannot be together”, I say to him ...At that time it was an exception. If you married an Orthodox Christian; that was an exception [...] And Misha Charkouski comes to see me; he’s a nice lad...and he danced beautifully, a fine lad. And I say: ‘so yours is the way to the Orthodox church and mine is the one to the church. I’m not abandoning my banners that bow before the great altar; no.” He: “Oh, that’s a pity, Mania. Well, I’ll marry a different girl; I’ll think about you but you are not to marry, ever!” He took my hand and pressed it tight and said: “may you never marry!” [...] May you never marry! And I didn’t.’ [So the words of that boy came true.] They did.)

A man denied having an illegitimate child:

Kłątwa – to siła wszechmocna działa. W Rososzu był Kurzeliński; zaklęła go kobieta, z którą miał dziecko. Miał młyn, milioner był, ale dzieci nie miał. (Gdyby był mądry, to by zapisał młyn na tego nieślubnego syna.) Podali go do sądu. Ona zaklęła: “Jak tyś niewinny, to dobrze, ale jak winny, to żeb cię żnęli po kawałku.” I jemu jedną nogę odcięli, potem zaraz drugą, i on od razu umarł [13].

(A curse means it is the almighty's work. There was a certain Kurzeliński in Rososz. He was cursed by a woman he had a child with. He had a mill, he was a millionaire but childless. (If he were smart he would have bequeathed the mill for this illegitimate son). They sued him. She cursed: “If you are innocent, good for you but if you are guilty, may you be disembodied.” And he had one leg cut off and right after that another; and then he died soon after.)

A mother doesn’t let her lad marry a pregnant lass:

– Jeść u nas dżierewnia, tam zabieremienieła dżiewoczka. Nu tak, a jon nie użiał jaje, matka joho nie zachacieła.

I jana zastałasja z etym dzieciatkam?

– Nu, ana zastałasja. Eta dżiciatka raśło, praŭda – i pamierła. A [jaje matka] skazała: “Nie dała brać maju Luba, wże nie budziesz baczyć i wnuczaniat swaich dżiaciej.” I syn ażaniłsia – nia ma dżiaciej, i daczka paszła za muž i nia ma dżiaciej, woś. [...] Hawarym wot, sbirajemsia baby: “Moża Pola szto to znała, bo w odnoho syna tak nia ma dżiaciej, i w druhocho syna nia ma dżiaciej, i u daczki nia ma dżiaciej, a he” [86].

(– In this village nearby a girl got pregnant. But he didn’t marry her; his mother didn’t allow it.

And she stayed with the baby?

– Yes, she did. The child was growing and then died. And the girl’s mother said: “You didn’t let him marry my Luba so you will not see grandchildren from your own children.” And her son got married and has no children; her daughter got married and has no children ...Well, we women speak among ourselves: “Maybe Pola could do something as one son has no children and the other son has no children and her daughter has no children either.)

A man accuses a woman of ploughing over his field and he becomes physical:

– Pryjechaŭ muj ziać i ziaciaŭ brat ka mnie siejać. [...] Czahoś jon pjany prybieh mianie bić, szto ja zaniała miažu. Da stajaćza staŭby, jak ja tam budu arać, jak ja tam budu siejać? [...] Jon prybieh bić, tak wo prybieh ka mnie, wo: “Ty szto?!...,” dy ŭsiakimi sławami, i razmachwaje ruku – bić mianie. A muj ziać jaho tak – chap! za łokać. [...] Aha, jon poniaŭ, i zrazu – mach! Jon machnuŭ, a ja tak ustała, da kažu: “Daj Boża miły, szto wy pastawili try pamiatniki.” I letaś uwosień pastawili.

Tak wy ich proklali, pałuczajecca?

– Da, wo tak skazała: “Sztob ty pastawiŭ try pamiatniki, jak ty pastawiŭ staŭby i pryszou mianie bić.” I za szto mianie bić? Nu, za szto? Jaż taho nie zaniała. I kaho ani pacharanili?

– Eta jaho matka pacharanila ziacia, unuczku i swata [...]. O tak mnie pryszło na bui skazanuć. Dy bahato dumala, szto tak pałuczycca. Ja ka, szto by ty pastawiŭ try pamiatnika, jak ty pryszou mianie bić... A jon nakinuŭsia, a ja silno bajuś etaha boju. A za szto mianie bić? To kab ja zaniała, Boża moj! Jany wuń stajać, try staŭby i siahonnia, i miaża, tak wo trawy narasło. Na szto jano mnie?

A za szto jaszcz moźna prakłaść czaławieka?

– Za szto choczasz. Jak ty niawinawata, a jon winawat, da pałuczycca [82].

(– My son-in-law and his brother came over to sow [...] A drunk neighbour came to beat me apparently because I took over the balk. But there are poles so how can I plough there? How can I sow there? [...] He came to beat

me and he shouts and [curses] with many different words and he waves his arms to beat me. And my son-in-law kind of grabbed him by the elbow ... Oh, he understood and right away he made a move towards me and I stood up and say: "Dear God, may they buy three tombstones." And they did that this autumn.

Does it mean you cursed them?

- Yes. I said: "may you buy three tombstones as you placed the poles and came here to beat me." Why would he beat me? Why? I didn't take over the balk. And who did they bury?

- His mother buried her son-in-law and his father and her granddaughter. [...] Well, I just happened to say those things. And I was thinking a lot that it would fulfil. "May you, I say, buy three tombstones when you came to beat me." He made a move and I am so scared of beating! Why would he beat me? If I had taken over this balk, my God!

What else can make a man curse another person?

- Whatever you want. If you are innocent and he is guilty then it is going to fulfil.)

#### A neighbour gives false testimony for profit:

To i kłątwa, to i przysięstwo krzywe, przysięstwo – to też, mówio, do dziewiątego pokolenia Pan Bóg karze za to. I to jest prawdziwa prawda! Tutaj jedna była rodzina taka, że ten mąż to za pięćdziesiąt złotych przed wojną to każdemu by przysięgał; on by trzy razy w sądzie na dzień siedział i pięćdziesiąt złotych dostał. I on tak przysięgał, że na przykład złodziej nie ukradł, bo on wtedy był z nim razem gdzie indziej... No i kiedyś sąsiad tu sąsiada spalił. No i ten spalony podejrzewał na niego i podał go do sądu. A on go tak zniszczył, że mu ani krowa nie wyszła z obory, ani konie. A ten, co przysięgał, przysięgał, że u niego (tego, co spalił) w karty grali w mieszkaniu cały wieczór. A ten (spalony) ukląkł i powiedział: "Żeby ty do śmierci się z dziećmi niczego nie dorobił!... Żeby ty... jak ty mnie ukrzywdził!" – tam już różnie na niego. I ukląkł. No i ani on się niczego nie dorobił, ani jego dzieci, ani jego wnuczki. Majątek wielki, a oni nic sobie nie poradzą. Siebie by nie wyżywili, a mają dwadzieścia kilka hektarów [18].

(For both the curse and false testimony God punishes you up to the ninth generation. And this is the true truth! There was a family here. Before the war the husband would testify under oath in any case for fifty zlotys. He would go to court three times per day to get his fifty zlotys. And he would testify for instance that a thief didn't steal because he was with him in some other place at that time...Once a neighbour burned another one. So the victim had his suspicions and took him to court. That neighbour destroyed him completely; neither cows nor horses were able to escape from the barn. And the one who would falsely testify, said under oath that they had spent the whole night playing cards in his, i.e. the one who set fire, house. So the one with the burnt

property knelt and said: “may you and your children not make any money until the end of your life! May you...as you hurt me...”. There were different words. And he knelt<sup>75</sup>. And neither he nor his children nor his grandchildren made any money. Despite considerable wealth they cannot cope. They couldn't provide enough food for themselves although they have twenty plus hectares.)

A neighbour cast a spell on a girl:

Ja byłam panienką, zajechaliśmy kopać kartofli, i przyszła taka sąsiadka, że miała syna, i tak do mnie: “O, jaka ty ładna, jaka ty piękna, będziesz moją synową.” To powiedziała i poszła. A mnie od razu ziewy wzięli i ziewam, zawroty, i na wymioty mnie zrywa, i mówię: “Tatu, chyba ona mnie zuroczyła.” No i poszliśmy do takiej babki, jakąś modlitwę nade mną powiedzieli, i potem mówią: “Przechył się, tak o, przez nogę.” Ja się przechyliłam [...] – i jak ze mnie zeszło! “A żeby ona –mówię – tego syna nie ożeniła, że ona przyszła i mnie zuroczyła!” [I co się stało z synem?] A bieda go wi, gdzie on poszed [23].

(I was a maiden; we came to dig out potatoes. A neighbour came and she had a son. She said to me: “Oh, you are so pretty, you are so beautiful, you shall be my daughter-in-law.” She said those words and left. And right after she left I started yawning and I was dizzy and nauseous. So I say: “Dad, I think she has put a spell on me.” And we went to see an old woman who said a prayer over me and then she says: “move to the side; just like this, through your leg.” I did as she said and [...] everything just let go! “May she not, I say, marry this son of hers because she came and cast this spell on me!” [And what happened to her son?] Who knows?)

A man who was riding his cart refused to help a woman who was going on foot:

Tu jedna kobieta szła z Piszczaca i prosiła jednego, żeby ją podwiózł. On wypił, był bardzo ryzykowny: “A co, ja dla was konia na loterii wygrał?” A ona mówi: “Bodaj ci zdechł!” Jak wrócił do domu, jak to pijany, nie wiedział, co koń zmęczony nie może się napić. I napoił go z tej energii. Koń dostał ataku jakiejś kolki i wziął zdechł. A on potem miał pretensje do niej, że to przez nią. A ona mówi: “No, trudno, może ja się w takiej godzinie wypowiedziała.” Potem ja z nim jechałem i on mi to opowiadał. I mówi: “Teraz to ja biorę wszystkich” [24].

(There was a woman here walking from Piszczac and she asked a man for a ride. He had been drinking and he was very prone to risk: “Do you think I played the lottery and won this horse just for you?” And she said: “may it die!” He returned home and, as a drunk usually does, he didn't know that a tired horse is not supposed to drink. So he let the horse drink because of his state. The horse had a fit, some kind of colic and died. And then he blamed the woman stating it was her fault. And then she says: “Well, tough

luck. Maybe I said those things in an unfortunate hour." Some time later I was having a ride with him and he told me this story. And he says: "Now I take everyone.")

All these tales can be summed up with one sentence: a curse uttered by a person unfairly hurt affects the wrongdoer. And, similarly to the case of the wronged mother, who unwittingly yet justly curses, here also the curse of the wronged person takes on a result which is independent of their will. Let's recall a story quoted above:

Opowiadali ludzie, że jeden trzy razy sąsiada spalił i potem pokutował [po śmierci]. Przyszedł do tego, co go spalił, i mówi, żeby mu tamten wybaczył, to przestanie pokutować. Ale tamten odpowiada: "Jakbyś mnie raz spalił, to bym ci wybaczył, jakbyś mnie dwa razy spalił, to też bym ci wybaczył, ale żeś mnie trzy razy spalił, to ty idź do diabła i mi głowy nie zawracaj!" On tego nie chciał, ale jak to powiedział, to jak się wiatr nie zerwie, diabeł przyleciał i tego pokutującego zabrał [8].

(People said that there was a man who burned down his neighbour's house three times and then had to atone until he died. He came to the neighbour whose house he burned and asked for forgiveness. But the neighbour told him: "If you only burned me once, I would forgive you. Even if you burned me twice, I would still forgive you. But you burned my house three times! So now don't beg me for forgiveness, go to hell and stop pestering me!" He didn't mean for this to happen, but once he said it, wind rose, and the devil came on its wings, and took the arsonist with him to hell.)

Therefore, we are dealing here with classic examples of the justified curse. My interlocutors are highly aware of this justification:

Jak się źle zrobi, to może przekląć człowieka i obca osoba [39].

(If you do someone wrong then even a stranger can curse this person.)

Czasem przeklinają cudze. I cudze przeklinają, jak coś niedobrze się im zrobi. To się sprawdza, a co myślicie [30].

(Sometimes strangers curse. And strangers curse when you do them wrong. This is working. What do you think?)

Słusne i cudze przeklony szkodzące, tylko słusne, jeżeli on słusny [13].

(Justified and other people's curses are only justified when the cause is justified.)

The power which is the actual agent of the curse is named in the following way:

Też, jeżeli słusznie klnie, to Pan Bóg też może pokarać [37].

(If the curse is justified then God can punish too.)

Ten przeklnie, kto u Boga godny. Jak krzywdę ktoś wyrządzi niewinnie... Jakby ja na przykład do pani coś tam mówiła, a pani w ogóle nie była winna, i pani by zaklęła, no to jednak Pan Bóg wysłucha. Tak, Pan Bóg wysłucha, jak jest godny, a jak nie jest godny, no to nie ma co [34].

(Only this one will curse whom God finds worthy. If someone does another, innocent person wrong [...] for example if I was saying something [wrong] to you and you would be innocent and you would curse then God would listen. Yes, God listens when the person is worthy but if they're not, there is no point.)

Therefore, the rule that God always takes the side of the wronged person is once again confirmed here. This truth is deeply written in the folk set of beliefs and it is also often expressed in relations that are more mythical than the ones quoted above, for instance:

Dawnymi czasy ludzie, zwłaszcza pobożni, cnotliwi, prześladowani niewinnie, przy pomocy bożej nad zwierzętami drapieżnymi wpływ wywierali ogromny. I tak na przykład zdarzało się, iż rabuś poczciwemu człowiekowi wydrzeć chciał mienie. Napadnięty, innej pod ręką nie mając obrony, zawołał w rozpacz: "Oby cię wilcy zjedli!" I natychmiast zjawiali się wilcy i wypełniali rozkaz jego [DWOK 48, *TarnRzesz*: 26].

(In the times long ago people, especially pious ones, virtuous, wrongly persecuted, with God's help had an enormous influence on predatory animals. For instance, there was a case that a robber wanted to take away a decent man's possessions. The victim of the attack, having no other form of defence at hand, called out in despair: "May wolves eat you!" Wolves would turn up immediately and execute his order.)

The whole nature, the whole world is ordered by God to take the side of the just man. Our current considerations make us conclude that the ethical and social system of folk culture provides for the possibility of everyone cursing everyone provided that the cursing party's cause is justified: "If you are innocent and he is guilty it will fulfil" ("jak ty niawinawata, a jon winawat, da pałuczycca") [82].<sup>76</sup>

A justified curse of the wronged person is a tool of God's punishment on the sinners; a punishment which is necessary (hence the wording of the curse must have the agential power) so that the world would not turn into chaos.

The above observations are confirmed in the only full description of the cursing ritual that I know from ethnographic literature on the Slavic

culture. It was recorded by Józef Obrębski, who back in the 1930s in Macedonian highlander communities studied the existing system of witchcraft and its social and mythological implications. He witnessed among other the ritual of cursing performed by the mother of a girl who because of love magic ran away to the boy. The curse was the punishment for the neighbour – the one behind the plot and the magic. Let's read the report from the Macedonian field:

I wówczas Dajlica wymierzyła karę Stamejcy jedyną drogą, która jej pozostała – uroczystym rzuceniem klątwy.

Było to we wtorek – w dzień, gdy równie jak w sobotę, klątwa posiada największą moc i najłatwiej się chwyta. Właśnie przechodziłem niedaleko od domu Dajlowców, gdy ujrzałem Dajlicę przekraczającą próg jej chaty. Zatrzymałem się z zaciekawiony. Wnuczęta jej kręciły się około jej kolan. Dajlica krzyknęła na synową: “Zabierz, kurwo, dzieci! Niechaj dzieci nie siedzą przy mnie: będę klęła.” Po czym ściągnęła chustkę z głowy i siadła na progu z rękami skrzyżowanymi na kolanach, w postawie przepisowej dla klnących. Po czym poczęła zawodzić przenikliwym, piskliwym głosem: “Jelenoo! Wyleź przed wrota, kurwo! Co milczysz jak piczka pod koszulą, kurwo jedna? Wyleź, kurwo, niechaj cię widzę! Eee, Pan mi ciebie nie oglądał! Słońce mi ciebie nie grzało! Pieniądze Sławkine, coś je wzięła, to ci było potomstwo twoje! Nimi bodajżeś się cieszyła, nic innego w domu nie miała! Ni naprzód, ni nazad. To ci było bogactwo twoje, to ci były dzieci twoje! To ci było zdrowie twoje! Ja rzekłam, Bóg [słyszał]. Ni jedna klątwa na sucho niechaj nie padnie! Wszystkie ciebie niechaj się chwycą, jako mleko matczyne, coś je cycała! Boże, eee! Czyś [słyszał], co rzekłam ja?” A zza uchylonych wrót domostwa Stamejcy słychać tylko było zrywający się raz po raz desperacki protest przeklinanej: “Tobie tam, tobie tam, coś rzekła! Samaś klęła, sama zbieraj! Coś się tak rozpieniła, kurwo stara? Dobrze ci było, gdy dwie do ciebie przyszły? Tak samo i ta: domężyło się jej i poszła sobie. Maciora! Kurwa!”

Cały dzień z przerwami trwała ta szermierka słowna – walka, w której Dajlica górowała nad przeciwniczką siłą wymowy, powagą swego stanowiska moralnego i mocą dysponowania sankcjami nadnaturalnymi. Gdyż przekleństwo rzucające na przypadkowego oponenta w gniewie, bez zachowania rytuału, nie posiada tej mocy, która właściwa mu jest, gdy formuły przekleństwa wypowiedziane są z zachowaniem wszelkich szczegółów ceremoniału i gdy przeklinany faktycznie zawinił. Wówczas klątwa staje się aktem religijnym, gdyż dociera do Boga i przez ten mistyczny kontakt uzyskuje aureolę świętości i mocy boskiej. Jeśli zostanie wypowiedziana w momencie, w którym klątwy posiadają szczególną łatwość “chwytania się,” a rozkaz klątwy pocznie się pełnić nad nim, losy przeklinanego będą przesądzone” [Obrębski 2005: 67–68].

(And then Daylitsa punished Stameytsa with the only method left, i.e. the ceremonial curse.

It was on a Tuesday, the day when, similarly to Saturday, the curse is the most powerful and the easiest to “catch on”. I was just passing by Dayle's family house when I saw Dajlica crossing the threshold of the house. I stopped out of curiosity. She was surrounded by her grandchildren. Daylitsa yelled at her daughter-in-law: “take the kids way, you bitch! I don't want them around me now; I'll be cursing.” Then she took the headscarf off and sat down on the threshold with her arms crossed in her lap, the model posture for the cursing party. She started wailing with a piercing, squeaky voice: “Yelena! Come outside, you bitch! Why are you so silent like a cunt under the shirt, you bitch? Come outside, you bitch, let me see you! May God never see you! May the sun never warm you! May the money taken from Slavka be your children! May you only find comfort in it not anything else, ever that you have in your house! Not in the future, not in the past. May it be your wealth; may it be your children! May it be your health! This I said and God [heard me]. May not even one curse fall unfulfilled! May all the curses catch you like your mother's milk you suckled on! God! Did you [hear] what I said?” And from the door left ajar of Stameytsa's house one could hear the cursed one protesting desperately time after time: “It's for you, it's for you what you said! You swore, you reap it now! Why did you get so agitated, you old bitch? Did you feel good when those two came over? The same with this one: she fucked around and she left. Pig! Bitch!”

This verbal struggle lasted the whole day with some breaks. In this struggle Daylitsa was prevailing over her opponent with the power of wording, the gravity of her moral position and the power of having supernatural sanctions at her disposal. It was because a curse bestowed in anger on an accidental opponent without sticking to the ritual hasn't got the power it has once the cursing formulas are uttered in the circumstances of the ceremony with all the details and in case the cursed person was in fact guilty. Then the curse becomes a religious act since it reaches God and through this mystical contact it takes on a halo of holiness and divine power. If the curse is uttered at the time when curses have a special easiness to “catch on” and the curse order is being fulfilled then the fate of the cursed party is sealed.)

In comparison with this model description the material I collected in Podlasie and Belarus confirms only bits, pieces and fractions of the old Slavic system of operating the magical speech-acting. It is, however, so extensive and coherent that in its basis the outline of this system can be reconstructed and comprehended. The possibility of gaining access to the system from the period when it was at its peak (it is granted due to Obrębski's report) is for the reconstruction I propose a kind of impairment test.

In Belarus I also managed to record a story of an eyewitness to a ritual cursing. It was a very powerful cursing since it was performed by the highest authority in the community, i.e. the priest.

– Ja sama byłam wtenczas. Jakoś było Przemienienie. Może piątek, może w sobotę, w kościele w Wawiórcu. Ksiondz i zmarły. Jeszcze była dziewczynka. Tu w tym Dylewie zaczęli bić się i zabili chłopca na zabawie. Zabili chłopca i ksiondz jak zszedł na ambonie, zszedł, tak przeklinał ksiondz tego, kto zabił. “Ot, mnie, mówi, dzisiaj przywieźli mnie po Przemienieniu [...], mnie przywieźli spowiednika pobitego.” On i umar zrazu. I mówi: “Przywieźli mnie do spowiedzi! Jak ojciec wstyd ma za synów! Ja za parafia swoja wstyd taki mam przed księżmi cudzemi. Przywieźli mnie spowiednika takiego!” I tak krzyczy: “Jamonty, Jamonty, żeby na wasze dziesiąte pokolenie spadło, co ja mówie! Wasza matka leży na bożej pościeli już który rok?! Żeby na was chmura czarna zesza!!” Ot, przeklinał. [...] I sam ksiondz! I tak o, w ambonie bił pieńściami swymi.

I co potem było z tymi Jamontami?

– W więzieniu posiedzieli. [...] Ich matka umarła. Ich sońdzili, matka zmarła i nie widzieli syny. [...] [Potem] przyszli, pożenili się. [...] Patom zmarli, pochowali, i wsio. Co zrobić?

Czyli nie wiadomo, czy coś tam było na tą rodzinę, czy nie?

– No, chorować, chorują wszystkie dzieci. Może Pan Bóg daje choroba jaka, czy co? Pan Bóg Świenty [wie] [50].

(– I was there alone at that time. It was during the Transfiguration. Maybe on a Friday, maybe on a Saturday in a church in Vavyerka. The priest and the deceased. I was a teenage girl then. Here in Dylevo there was a fight and they killed a boy during a dance night. They killed the boy and the priest standing at the wing altar would curse the killers with these words: “today they brought me a beaten up parishioner. They brought him for confession!” And he died right away. And [the] priest says: “How ashamed must the father be because of his sons! I feel ashamed before other priests because of the parish. They brought me such a person to have his sins heard!” And he yelled: “Jamonts, Jamonts, may it be visited upon you unto the tenth generation what I’m saying! Your mother has been bedridden for how many years now? May a black cloud fall on you!!!” Well, he cursed [...] And it was a priest himself! And he would hit the wing altar with his fists.

And what happened to the Jamonts?

– They did their time in prison...Their mother died. They were being prosecuted, the mother died not having seen her sons before her death...[Then] they returned, got married [...] Then they died, were buried. That’s all. What can you do?

So we don’t know if something fell on the family, do we?

– Well, they get ill, all the children get ill. Maybe God gives some kind of illness or what? Sacred God [knows].)

While carrying on listening to the interlocutors let us pose a question regarding the process of the curse if the cursing party is not a wronged person (like the Macedonian mother whose daughter was put a spell on

and kidnapped) and if their curse is not justified? In that case we are obviously dealing with an overuse of the curse and, at the same time, this curse is getting transformed into a self curse: "If the curse is unjustified it doesn't work. Who curses, gets cursed himself" ("Kto klnie, to na niego lgnie") [13].

In accordance with the rules reflected in the conversation quoted above:

– Jak klnie ktoś bardzo, [...] on nie wie, czy to on na siebie klnie, czy on na kogo klnie. To nie wiadomo, czy ono przystanie na tego, co on klnie [...].

Od czego to zależy?

– Od durnego człowieka. Jak on nie rozumie nic takiego, a chłapie czort wi co. Bo mądry człowiek to musi się zastanowić, czy to można powiedzieć, czy nie można to powiedzieć [24].

(– If someone curses a lot ... he doesn't know if he is cursing himself or someone else. One doesn't know if it falls on the person he curses. [...])

What does it depend on?

– On how stupid the man is. If he doesn't understand anything but says without thinking the hell knows what. A wise man will think if he can say such things or not.)

If the man is stupid he does not understand that he cannot overuse the curse and so he has to bear the consequences as envisioned in the rules: the curse falls on the one whose curse is unjustified. And life simply goes hand in hand with these rules.

Jak jest kłótnia, przekleństwa, to jest bardzo niedobrze. Bo co się w kłótni komu życzy, to się obróci przeciw temu, kto przekleństwami rzucał. I to bardzo szybko. Raz jedni ludzie życzyli sąsiadowi, żeby mu ręka uschła, to po trzech dniach ich własnemu synkowi sieczkarnia dłoń odcięła.<sup>77</sup>

(When there's a quarrel and cursing, it's very bad. Because what you wish the other person in an argument, will turn back to the one who cursed. Very fast. Once some folk wished the neighbour for his hand to wither and after three days their own son had his hand cut off by a chaff cutter.)

The power guarding the order of the universe gave the human the ability to operate the words of the curse, an efficient and double-edged tool. When the human refuses to cooperate with the sacrum while committing an act of sin they don't use this tool in an appropriate way, hence they get destroyed by it.

A common belief that the curse "comes true for both parties" ("spełnia się nie tylko na jedną stronę, ale również na tego, kto przeklina") [36] is a motivating force behind the existing prohibition of cursing. Because

“the curse may fall on you, be careful what you wish for” (“przekleństwo może ci się stać – więc nie życz nikomu, co tobie niemiłe”) [38]<sup>78</sup>. Functioning of this magical “boomerang law”<sup>79</sup> (“the curse might turn your way if your curse was unjustified” – “przekleństwo może obrócić się przeciw tobie, jeśli niesłusznie, fałszywie powiesz” [37]) is obvious for everyone including, as my interlocutors claim, the religious authority in the community:

A czemu to księża tak krzyczą? Bo to na mnie to przekleństwo pada, na mnie się odwraca. To mnie stanie, co ja życzę komu. Dlatego nie wolno, nie wolno przeklinać. Nie wtenczas, to za ile czasu, to wszystko jedno Pan Bóg zapamięta [65].

(Why do priests shout so much? Because it falls on me, it turns against me. It will happen to me what I wish for someone else. Therefore you can't, you can't curse. If not now then in some time; it doesn't make a difference because God will remember.)

The Bible says: *May those who curse you be cursed* [Gen. 27:29] It doesn't mean, though, that my interlocutors are not acquainted with the purely ethical interpretation of the prohibition of the curse:

Ten, kto przeklina niesłusznie, ma grzech śmiertelny. Trzeba przedtem udowodnić, czy to słuszne, czy nie. Gdyby klątwa się zawsze spełniała, to wszyscy byliby przeklęci. Pan Bóg złego nie chce wysłuchać [38].

(The one who curses unjustifiably has a mortal sin. It being either justified or not has to be proven. If the curse always came true then everyone would be cursed. God doesn't want to listen to the wrongdoer.)

Since the Bible also says: *Let them curse but You may bless, God* [Ps. 109:29].

But sometimes it happens that regardless of God's will the human wants Him to “listen to the evil.” And then it happens that the human who was wronged resorts to other methods of punishing the wrongdoer rather than only uttering the words. The ritual of the curse is further strengthened by using the props and ‘metaphorical transfer’. In the third chapter dealing with excommunication I mentioned a well-known method of bestowing the curse on others with use of breaking, putting out or at least placing (offering) candles in the church or the Orthodox church.

Jedna tu, prawosławna, w naszej wsi z Feliksowa. I ona przyszła. I ona bardzo pokochała tego polaka. On ładnie śpiewał. A ona w chórze śpiewała tam w cerkwi. I potem ta matuszka... matuszka też śpiewała razem z nią. I mówi: “No to, Kława, kak ty, pajdziosz za palaka?” – “Pajdu, matuszka,

pajdu.” – “Nu, paczemu ty swoju wieru brasajesz, a idziosz?” A ona mówi: “No tak, on ładnie śpiewa, pokochałam go. Pokochałam go.” – “Nu ładno, idzi, ale kak ty pieła z nami w chore, to my patuszym świeczki, i budziem pieć pa ciomnamu, puść twaja żyźnia tak ciomna prachodzić, kak nam ciomna bez ciebia.” I ona to opowiadała. I mówi: “I, Mania, rzeczywiście, szto majo życie ciomnaja było.” [...] I ona wyszła. I prawda, ona bogobojna, taka ładna, ta kobieta. I dzieci wychowywała. Ale szczęścia nie miała. Pił bardzo. [...] Ona nie widziała słońca nigdy, ciemnym wiekiem przeżyła. On pokosi jej, ale wszyscy ubiorą już ten sianokos, a on jeszcze idzie kosić... Napije się, leży... Ale taka bogobojna. [...] I żeby ona komuś tam przeklinała, że napoił jego... Mówi: “Nikt nie napoi, jeżeli sam nie beńdzie pić. [...] I ja jeho szkaduju, jak druha.” O, to mondra kobieta, mondra. Tak o, przykład popatrzeć na nion [53].

(There is one Orthodox woman in our village; she's from Feliksovo. She fell in love with one Catholic man. He was a great singer. And she was singing in the choir in the Orthodox church. And the matushka, the wife of the Orthodox priest who was also singing in the choir says: 'Well, Klava, will you marry the Catholic?'. "I will, matushka, I will." "Well, why are you going to abandon your faith and leave?" And she says: "Well, yes, he is a great singer, I've fallen in love with him. I love him." "All right, go but because you have been singing with us in the choir we will put out the candles and sing in darkness. May your life be so dark as we are dark without you." She told me this story. And she says: "And, Mania, my life truly has been dark." ... It is true she was godly, so pretty, this woman. And she raised her children. But she wasn't happy. He drank a lot... She saw no sun, never, she lived in dark times. And she says: "He would hay but everyone is done with hay cutting and he is still haying... He will have a drink, lie down...But she was so godly ...And she never made a fuss about him getting drinks from others...She says: "No one will give him drinks if he doesn't drink himself [...] I'm sorry for him as my friend." Oh, she was a wise, wise woman. I looked up to her.)

The same interlocutor observed a woman in a church who was placing candles “the evil’:

– Ja uklenkłam, ja modle sie przed wielkim ołtarzem, a ona idzie obok przed wielkim ołtarzem, koło Matki Boskiej. [...] Idzie i szepcze: “Postawie świece, żeby tobie coś stało sie. Niech Matka Boska rozbiera się.” I postawiła świece. [...]

A jak się taką świecę stawia? [...]

– Nu, czy ona tam sie modli? Do kościoła zaniesie, nie pali już, ale tak postawi do Matki Boskiej. Postawi tam gdzieś przy boku, czy gdzie. Już ona zaklina może te świece, czy ona myśli, żeby jej sie tam co złego stało... [53].

(– I knelt down and was praying before the great altar and saw her walking past me, past the God's Mother [...] She was walking and whispering: "I'll

place the candles so that something wrong might happen to you. May God's Mother decide.' And she placed the candles. [...]

How do you place such a candle? [...]

– Well, is she praying there? She will take it to the church, will not light it but place it for God's Mother. She will place it on the side or somewhere else. She might put a spell on the candles or might be thinking about something evil happening to somebody...)

You might also make offerings. You might even buy a holy mass, the so-called black mass. You might say special prayers "for the curse" or order them from people of another confession, e.g., the Jews.

Jak chcąc źle, to mnie jeszcze niedawno kobieta opowiadała, że w żarnach pieniądze mieli! Mielą w żarnach pieniądze, i żeby to stało się człowieku. I zaklęte te pieniądze już wtedy na takuju i takuju rzucasz w kościele, na tacę [65].

(A woman told me recently that if they want to do wrong they grind money on the millstones! They grind money on the millstones if they want something to happen to a man. And this money which is already enchanted they donate in church in this intention.)

Jak chce klnąć [cudzy człowiek], to też klnie, zaklina tam rozmaicie. A jak już nie, to idzie do kościoła i świece postawi. I czasem da na mszę, żeby odprawił, że jemu tak a tak się stało. To czasem tak sprawdzi się od razu. Ksiądz odprawi, a jakże – jeżeli ktoś kiepskiego coś zrobił dla niego [30].

(When [a stranger] wants to curse, he curses too, he curses in a number of ways. And if not, he goes to the church to place the candles. Sometimes he buys a mass so that something might happen to another person. Sometimes it is fulfilled at once. The priest will celebrate the mass, of course he will if someone did him wrong.)

Kahda batiuszka jechał hołdański iz Lidy u Hołdawa, wot taki małady sabrałsia i z jaho dawaj naśmieszki stroić, ciałhał jaho za baradu, naśmieszki stroił ź jaho. [...] I wot batiuszka pasmatreł na jaho, i na lico krasiwij, charoszyj, usio... ja znaju chto, no nie skažu, ot. No i heta, kaža: "Bolsz ty nie pażywiosz jak try hoda." Ot, batiuszka użiał takuju malitwu, na praklatije katoraja, maliłsia u cerkwi za prystołam, katoryja jeść takije malitwy, szto możesz pamalicca i czelawiek zdarowy adrazu umre. Jeśli czelawieku wred taki zrobisz, to czelawiek nie może jemu prastit'. I try hoda jon pażył i sam umier. Wot Haspod' jaho pasłał tak, szto jon umier. Užo bolsze jon naśmieszkoju ni z koho nie stroił. Ot, wsio heta jest [63].

(One day a batiushka [an Orthodox priest] was on the way from Lida to Holdovo and a youngster started bothering him; he pulled his beard and made fun of him ...And the batiushka just looked at him and says: "You will

live no longer than three years.” Well, the batiushka found a special prayer for the cursing and prayed in the Orthodox church behind the altar. There are prayers like this; you pray and a healthy man will die at once. Because if you do someone this kind of harm he cannot forgive you. So he lived three years and died. Well, God made him die. He never bothered anyone after that. Well, that’s all it is’)

Ja pamiętam, jak dawali na żydowskie szkoły. To to już było przekleństwo bardzo, bardzo, bardzo wielkie. To tak mówili: “dali tobie na żydowskie szkoły.” Oni tam w kupie modlą się, w takich szkołach. I tam dają, a oni już przeklinają. Widzieć, ja sama nie widziała, ale tak starsze kobiety opowiadają [65].

(I remember that they would give offerings for Jewish schools [synagogues]. It was a very very serious curse. They would say: “they gave you for Jewish schools” There they pray in groups in those synagogues. And they give and they curse at once. I never saw it myself but older women say so.)<sup>80</sup>

What are the consequences of the magical ritual of the curse undertaken in order to “do someone wrong”?

– Czasam wsio ta każuć: “pojdu w cerkoł, świeczku postaļu na eta..., pierałamaju świeczku...” Eta toj samyj ured. [...] A jak jon, czoż, nie winawat, to jamu ũsio raŕnoż niszto nie zrobicca.

A jak winawaty, to zrobicca?

– Nu, a jak winawat, to mo i robicca. [...]

Staļlali pierad ikonaju?

– Pierad ikonoju staļlajuć. Pierad ikonoj postawiać i ũże łamnuć. Dy ũsiodnoż od razuż u tu minutu wono nie zrobicca tomu czołowiek. Ci żoncy, ci czołowiek. Da ũże potom.

A to można odwrócić?

– Raz ũżo onoż pierałamnie, to kudyż ũże nazad odwierniesz? ũże nazad nie wierniesz. ũże raz wylecieli tyje słowa, to ũżeż propało.

Jak kamień w wodę?

– Da [69].

(– Sometimes they say: “I’ll go to the Orthodox church, I’ll place a candle for him [or her]..., break the candle...” This is evil ...But if he is innocent nothing will happen to him anyway.

But if he is guilty then will something happen?

– Well, if he is guilty then something might happen. [...]

Did they place them before the icon?

– Before the icon. They place them before the icon and break them immediately. But nonetheless, nothing is going to happen to this man at that moment. A man or a woman. Only later.

Can you take it back?

– If you break a candle once you can't unbreak it, can you? You won't have one candle again. If the words left their mouth once there's no escape.

It disappeared into thin air?

Yes.)

– [Sąsiadki] wszystko własność była ta ziemia, o tu, gdzie ten domek postawiony. I ona tam, dali jednemu takie... postawić domy na jej polu. Ona przysłała – mówi: “nie stawić.” On mówi: “mnie przecież to, ja mam od rządu, od kołchozu naznaczone te miejsce, gdzie ja mam domek postawić.” I pewnego razu ja idę i widzę: dwie świecy palą się na tym miejscu, gdzie ten miał dom. W czasie... tak dwunasta, pół do dwunastej, to już po kościołach nabożeństwo odprawia się... Suma. I o ile się nie mylę, czarne wstążki związane na tych świecach. A ja gęsi zabierałam i natknęłam się na to, patrzę: palą się, dwie. Ja od razu zrozumiała, że to ona. Przychodzę i mówię: “Kto tam świeczki zapalił, na tamtym placu, co to dane temu? Tam ponoć wy z kumą odpowiedzialne.” Ona mówi: “Ja!” To ja mówię: “Powiedz ty mnie, na co?” – “Żeby oni tu nie rozżyli się.”

Żeby oni się nie rozżyli...

– Tak, żeby oni nigdy dobra nie mieli. No i wszystko... Prawda, ja to wszystkim, wszystkim opowiadała, wszystkim, kogo nie spotkała [...]. I temu gospodarzowi powiedziałam: “Na twoim placu zapalono dwie świeczki.” On poszedł do председателя kołchozu i mówi jemu, że ona... – “Ty jesteś mężczyzna przecież, trzeba płuć na takie rzeczy.” No, i wszystko. Pobudował się i dziękować Bogu zdrowi i dwie córki ma, ładne dziewczuchy, do kościoła chodzą [...]. I żyją, i wszystko mają, i maszynę kupili, i bogato żyją. To przekleństwo nic nie pomogło.

Nie spełniło się...

– Nie spełniło się, nic. Bo to jest, to niesprawiedliwe. [...]

A tej kobiecie, która paliła te świeczki, nie stało się coś?

– Ja myślę, że stało się, ja tak zrozumiała – że córki syn starszy wzrostu nie ma i [...] on coś takiego jak... w szkole uczy się dobrze. A jeśli w domu, to więcej na głupiego wygląda, że jakieś takie, że coś robi takie coś... Jemu matusia kostiumek wyprasuje, [...] jeśli on dowie się, że ona wyprasowała i wymyła, on zdepcze nogami to. I teraz... [...] wziął młotek i te światło – fary takie nazywają się, takie światło w maszynie, młotek, pobił... [...] Wziął młotek i pobił... “A któż to gwoździe napędził, żeby ja przebił te koła w maszynie?” – “To on zrobił – mówi – zrobił takie coś.” Proszę bardzo...

Robi szkody własnym rodzicom?

– Własnym rodzicom. Nawet na daczy, żeby ojciec nie nadbiegł, to podpaliłby daczę... [...] To tego, to on takie wredy robi. To ja tak często [...] mówię: “no chyba za to, że ona robiła takie rzeczy, myślała, że komuś to będzie źle, to ona w swojej rodzinie otrzymała...” [57].

(– Here, where this house is, there used to be [a neighbour's] property. And a man was permitted to build a house in her field. She came over and

says: "Don't do it." He says: "It's for me; I got it from the government, from the kolkhoz. They selected this place for my house." And one day I am passing by and I see: two candles are lit in the exact spot where the house was supposed to be built. During...at twelve, half past twelve, there were already masses being celebrated at that time. The high Mass. If I am not mistaken there were black ribbons tied around the candles. I was picking up my geese and came across this; I have a look and here they are: two candles, both lit. I understood straight away that it was her. I come over and say: "Who lit the candles at the square that had been given to that man? You and your relative are supposedly responsible for this." She says: "Me!" And I say: "Tell me, what for?" – "So that they won't have a prosperous life".

A prosperous life...

– Yes, so that they might not have anything good, ever. That's all... It's true, I told it everyone, everyone I met on the way [...] And I said to that man: "Two candles have been placed in your field." He went to see the leader of the kolkhoz and tells him that she...: "You are a man; you must spit on such matters." That's all. He built the house and, thanks God, everyone is in good health; he has two daughters, pretty lasses; they go to church [...] And they live and have everything, they've bought a car and live comfortably well. The curse didn't work at all

It didn't fulfil

– It didn't fulfil at all. Because it was unjustified. [...]

What about the woman who lit the candles; did anything happen to her?

– I think so. Her older son is short and he something like [...] he looks kind of stupid; he does things like that... He does harm to his parents. Even the dacha. If his father hadn't arrived in time he would have set fire to the dacha...he does things like that. I often say: "It might be for doing those things; she thought somebody else would get hurt but it was her in her family.")

Similarly to the one who utters the words of a curse or an oath and must be careful not to say those words unjustifiably, the one who performs a magical ritual must know that this is a type of God's judgment ("I'll place the candles so that something wrong might happen to you. May God's Mother decide" – "Postawie świece, żeby tobie coś stało się. Niech Matka Boska rozbiera się" [53]). The powers have been summoned and the consequences of their activity are upon us: the punishment will definitely fall on either the one who sinned when hurting the other person or the one who sinned when demanding that the sacrum order unjustified punishment on the neighbour<sup>81</sup>.

[Czarna msza to] normalna taka msza, tylko w niej byli modlitwy przekleństwa do Boga. Ji to się zawsze sprawdzało. Ale ze nase księży, żaden tego odprawić nie chciał. Tylko pop. [...] Otylki ojcu zgineli też pieniądze ji uoni tak to na tygo, to na tygo. A to jech wziół ojcu syn te pieniądze. Ji ten

ojciec sie raz... tego i dał na te carne mse. [...] To później ten ojciec nie mógł tego przeżyć. A uon, jak uodprowił pop te mse, to jego nic nie bolało, tylko piekło. Dotąd piekło az go dopiekło. Ji później ten uojciec mówi: Cemuś mie nie powiedział, żeś to ty wzioł te pieniądze. [...] Przepadło juz. Jak sie na te mse daje, to juz nie ma odwrotu [Niebrzegowska, Panasiuk 1991: 91].

([Black mass] is a regular mass. The only difference is that it includes cursing prayers. And it always came true. But no priest wanted to celebrate this mass. Only the Orthodox priest. [...] Otylka's father couldn't find his money and they kept accusing one after another. But it was his son who had taken the father's money. And the father bought a black mass once [...] Later this father couldn't bear it. Once the Orthodox priest celebrated the mass the fson was not in pain but he had a stinging sensation. It was getting worse and worse. And later this father said: "Why didn't you tell me it was you who took the money? [...] It's all lost now. If you buy a black mass there's no way back.)

Therefore, similarly to staying away from cursing and swearing an oath, magical treatment "for the curse" is also commonly condemned.

Kiedys opowiadali, że zakupywali mszy na taką klątwę jedni drugich, ale czy to było prawdziwe, dobre coś? [38].

(People used to say that the folks bought such masses for cursing each other but was it real, was it good?)

Kiedys do kościoła jakaś kobieta przyniosła świecę, czekała dopóki ta świeca się spali i mówiła: "A żebyś ty skapał tak jak ta świeca." Ofiary składali na kogoś, żeby na niego klęska jakaś była. Ale Pan Bóg nie przyjmie takiej ofiary. Ludzkich przemówień Pan Bóg nie będzie słuchał [20].

(Once a woman brought a candle to the church; she waited for the candle to stop burning and said: "may you drip like this candle." They would bring offerings for someone's disaster or misfortune. But God doesn't accept offerings like this. God will not listen to human arguments.)

Czy stawiano świece na przekleństwo?

– A jakże, ale ksiądz to nie przyjmaby ich, powyrzucał [65].

(Did they place candles for the curse?)

– Of course, but the priest wouldn't have them, he would have them thrown away.)

– Na przykład ktoś komu krzywdę zrobił, to mówi: ja dałem na dzwony. Co to znaczy?

– No, żeby dzwony dzwonili. Oto mnie na przykład pani krzywdę jakąś zrobiła, taką ciężką, ja idę do kościoła – i ksiądz by nie przyjął. Jak to ksiądz przyjmie?! Na przekleństwo? A czy to jest prawdziwe? [57].

(– For instance when someone did harm to someone else he says: I made a donation for the bells.

What does it mean?

– Well, to have them toll. For instance, you hurt me badly. I go to see the priest and he wouldn't have it. Why would the priest accept this? For a curse? Is it real?)

– U nas do kropielnicy kopiejki rzucają... Ona chce na przykład przekląć panią czy tam mnie, jakaś głupia taka kobieta i ona przychodzi, wrzuci tam kopiejki do tego. To u nas był taki [jeden]; przybiega, wybiera te kopiejki, rzuci i mówi: "szto to jest za dzikość, żeby wrzucać do święconej wody te kopiejki?!" Potem ksiądz na kazaniu powiedział, że: "takiej rzeczy nie róbcie – do święconej wody, do kropielnicy nie wrzucajcie żadnych kopiejek." To ja widziałam sama, że do kropielnicy rzucali kopiejki. Teraz przestali. A po co się rzuca te kopiejki? Ja ofiaruję za to, żeby się komuś stało coś złego, tak?

– Tak, tak, tak. Żeby panią tam choroba jakaś, czy pani tam nogi pokręciło, czy odebrało, tam coś takie ona przemyśli i ona rzuci tam tego.

Przemyśli, i takie życzenie...

– I takie życzenie, tak. Ona już tak od duszy te życzenia ma i je rzuci do kropielnicy. Już teraz ja nie widzę, nigdy nie widzę w kropielnicy.

Coś przy tym się jeszcze modlili, czy to tylko tak, taka intencja, życzenie samo?

– Tylko same. Może ona modliła się, no mnie to nie trafiało się porozmawiać z taką kobietą, która rzuca, jak ona tam myśli i co jej przedstawi się to, te rzucanie tych kopiejek. Widzieć widziałam w wodzie, w kropielnicy, ale teraz ksiądz, to on to wszystko wytłumaczył, i... [57].

(– In our church they throw kopeks into the stoup... For example she wants to curse you or me, some really stupid woman; and she comes and throws her kopeks inside. There was a man here; he rushes in, digs in for the kopeks, throws them away and says: "What kind of savage thing is this throwing kopeks into the holy water?!" Then during the sermon the priest said: "Don't do such things with the holy water; don't throw any kopeks into the stout, into the holy water." I saw them throwing kopeks myself. Now they've stopped.

But why would you throw kopeks? Is it offering for something evil that might happen to another person?

– Yes, yes, yes. They would do it so that you would suffer from an illness or your legs would get paralyzed or cut off; she would come up with such wishes and throw them into the stoup.

So she will come up with such wishes...

– Yes, she will, yes. And this kind of wish, yes. She keeps those wishes deep in her soul and throws them into the stoup. Now I see nothing, nowhere in that stoup.

Did they pray over this or is it only perhaps an intention, a wish?

– Only a wish. Maybe she prayed. I never came across a woman and didn't manage to talk to her about the reason for throwing the kopeks...but now the priest, he explained everything...)

Czy nosili świece do cerkwi czy do kościoła na przekleństwo komuś?

– Każuć, szto rabili. Ja nie widzieła swaimi głazami, ja nikoli takoha nie rabiła. No jesli baciuszka takoje zamiecić, to jon skidaŭ. Ot, pry mierna, ja na kaho-ta złaja, jon mnie taki ŭczynak zrabiaŭ. Pojdiesz da cerkwy, kuplajesz świecekku, pastawisz świecekku na padswiecznik. I tam możasz jaje razahrawać ci ŭmiesta dwie skrucić wiarowaczkaju, ci pałamać jaje, kab użo jamu tam łamali kości ci szto. Baciuszka ŭwidzieć, srazu snimaje: “U mianie takoha nie dażno być! U nas ŭsio z Boham. A heta wy przyszli z czortam, nie z Boham, raz przyszli ŭ cerkwu wytwarać.”

Do kościoła też takie nosili?

– Każuć, szto nasili. Ależ hetaż jano nie razraszajecca [64].

(Did they take those candles to the Orthodox church or the church for cursing somebody?

– They say they did that. I never saw it with my eyes and never did anything like this. But if the batiushka notices something like this he removes it. Well, for example, I'm angry with somebody for doing things for me. You will go to the Orthodox church; you will buy a candle and put it in a holder. You can get it warm there or put two candles together and tie with some string; you can break it so that his bones can be broken too or something. But if the batiushka sees it he will remove it at once: “This is unthinkable here! Here we do everything with God! But you came with the devil instead of God to do such things in the Orthodox church.”

Did they bring such things to the church too?

– People say they did. But this is prohibited.)

Ci robiac ludzi praklaćja u cerkwach, łomiać świecek?

– Chaj na jaho padzie. Jeśli chto zarabił, niechaj... Chaj nie robić podłaha. Boh ź jim. A chto niewinna, chaj chto łomić hetyje świecek, chaj jamu, na jaho i padzie. Chaj na jaho samoha padzie, jak czeławiek dzie niewinnyj. Wot, dzietoczka. A nie można, jak nie jość, u cerkwi łamać świecek. Łamać, krucić eta nie pałożena. Nielzia robić hetaha, takoha [63].

(Do people curse in Orthodox churches, do they break the candles?

– May it fall on him. If he's earned it then may it... May he not be mean. God with him. And if unjustified then let them break the candles, may it fall on them. May it fall on him if the man is innocent. But you can't, whatever happens, break the candles in the Orthodox church. Breaking and twisting is prohibited. You can't do things like that.)

Hence, the magical cursing ritual becomes, as you might observe, the tool of God's justice towards the performer overusing it. In this way through this behaviour this person puts themselves in the possession of God's enemy.

Evil doesn't sleep. And it causes that the curse may be used as a weapon not only by the weak and not only as a tool of God's justice. It might also

be the tool of the initiated: a magical method to turning bad things onto the specific victim. "There are people like that; they curse and it comes true" ("Takie ludzie są, że jak klątwe rzuci, to jem się spełni") [12]. Who are these people? Well, these are the people who can "do" ("do against someone") and "undo":

Byli tu czarnokniźnicy?

- Byli. Może i teraz jest tych.

Nawet teraz?

- Pewnie, że jest. Te czarne. Jest jeszcze takie ludzie, że pani może zrobić, że ooo, z tego miejsca nie wstanie. [...] Jest już takie czaraŹniki. [...]

Uroki rzucają?

- O, pani, one wszystko, co pani chce. Czarnokniźniki te. [...]

A skąd oni tą swoją moc czerpią?

- Ja nie wiem.

Od Boga czy od diabła?

- Od diabła pani, od diabła. Tylko [jak] posłużysz diabłu, to on u ciebie będzie. Na takim sznurku powiesz się. [...] To oni służą diabłu te czarnokniźniki [56].

(Have sorcerers been here?

- They have. Maybe now they are here too.

Even now?

- Sure, they are. The black ones. Jest jeszcze takie ludzie, że pani może zrobić, że ooo, z tego miejsca nie wstanie [...] There are such wizards.

Do they cast spells?

- Oh my! They do everything you want. These sorcerers [...]

Where do they get this power from?

- I don't know.

From God or the devil?

- From the devil, my dear, from the devil. The only thing is that if you serve the devil then he's gonna come to you for good. That's the string for you to hang yourself ...They serve the devil, those sorcerers.)

Czarnokniźnicy tu kiedyś byli?

- Byli tacy. [...] No wot, umieli tak już szkodzić. Żeby ja tak umiała, to i jab tak robiła, ale nie umiem. To prawda. Moja kuzynka szła do Żołudka. Leci, leci, tak śpieszy, a dziad jakiś stary brodaty idzie z pałeczką. "Ot - mówi - dziewczynka, ot ty ładnie i prędko lecisz." I ona od razu już nie może. Żeby mogła, tob rękami, nogami szła, a niejaki. Jakoś do tego Żołudka doszła, a z Żołudka już przywieźli do domu. Jak zaczęła chorować, to pięć lat chorowała. A później znaleźli takiego, co mógł odrobić, gdzieś tam pod Grodnem. I w tych Tapieliszkach ten dziadźka jej zamówił, coś tam poszeptał i jej zrobiło się od razu lepiej. I ona znów stała jak kobieta. A tak dzieci byli małe u niej. Gdzie nie łazili! I wot nie mogli popaść na takiego, co by mógł wcześniej przesilić

tamtego. A ten jej człowiek powiedział, jak ona pojechała do niego: "Ja jego nie przesiłę na pewno i nie będę nic tobie robić." I ona bardzo płakała, że dzieci małe u niej, że zapłaci, ile powie. No i żona jego pożałowała jej i mówi: "Idź kobietko do domu, będzie ci on już odrabiać." I odrobił jej, i teraz żyje. I dzieci powyrastali, i za mąż już jedną córkę wydała. Moja kuzynka, nie to kto tam cudzy. I stary brodaty człowiek z pałeczką szedł. Nie mógł to na psa jakiego czy tam kogo narzucić? A narzucił na młodą dziewczynę. A skąd on miał taką moc?

– Czort jego wie. Musi diabeł z nim być. I on na człowieka narzucił. Ile ona pokutowała, ile płakała. Nic nie mogła robić, tylko płakała i płakała. Ona sama mi to opowiadała. Tylko, że przebiegła mu drogę, a on powiedział: "O, jak ładnie umiesz biegać." I tylko to powiedział, a co on tam myślał, czort jego wie. A tamten go jednak przesiłił. A co ona mu za to nie wozila, taka już była zadowolona, że zrobił z niej znów człowieka. A tak kaleką była. Chaj ich cholera weźmie! To ja mówiła, to nie modlitwa. Jakiś zły duch za nim chodzi i to robi. A toż trzeba tak robić, żeby człowiek kaleką był?! To diabeł z nim chodził i on tak robił z diabłem [55].

(Were sorcerers ever in this area?

– There were people like that. [...] Well, they knew how to do harm. If I could do such things I would do that but I can't. It's true. A cousin of mine was on the way to Zholudok. She was walking briskly, she was running and then an old bearded man with a walking stick shows up. "Well," he says, "you girl are running so beautifully and swiftly." And she immediately feels she can't. If she could she would move her arms and legs but she can't. She somehow managed to reach Zholudok but from there she was driven home. She started being poorly and it lasted five years. And then they found a man who could undo, somewhere near Grodno. He banished the disease, he whispered some words and she got better at once. And she was standing once again like a woman. She had small kids. They would search high and low and couldn't find even one that was able to prevail that man on the road. When she went to see one man he said: "I'm not going to prevail that one for sure and I'm not going to do anything to you." She started crying a lot that she had small children and was going to pay as much as he wanted. Well, the man's wife took pity on her and said: "Go home little woman; he will undo it!" And he undid it and she is alive. Her children are grown up now and she's already had one daughter married. It's my cousin, not a stranger. And it was an old man with a walking stick. Why didn't he cast a spell on a dog or someone else? He cast a spell on a young girl.

Where did he get this kind of power from?

– Who knows. The devil must have been with him there. And it was him who cast this spell on the human. And how much she suffered; how much she cried! She couldn't do anything but cry and cry. She told me that herself that she crossed his path and he said: "Well, you can run so beautifully!"

That's all he said but who knows what he was thinking. But the other man managed to prevail him anyway. She would shower him with gifts, she was so happy to be human again. And she was a cripple before. May cholera wipe them out! Some kind of evil spirit follows him and does it. Do you have to make a cripple out of a man?! It was the devil walking with him and he was doing those things with the devil.)

– Ojciec opowiadał, tak czarne książki kto czytał, to on musiał, umiał ją czytać. Ot, pan odchodził, miał czarno książkę, ot, on zaczytał, mówi na lokaja: “Tylko książki nic nie bierz!,” mówi. – “Dobrze, nie nie.” Ależ on, jemu ciekawość, szto tam w ety książce. On pojechał, lokaj odemknoł i czyta. Zara pytają sie: “Czego potrzebujesz?” A on nie wiedział, co mówić, już Lucyp..., diabli rozmowe majo. Mówi: “Cebuli!” To jak zaczęli rzucić na niego ta cebula, czuć nie zaduszyli. Dobrze że pan przyjechał, odczytał i wszystko sprzątało sie. [...]

A tutaj [...] żyli jacyś czarnoksiężnicy? [...]

– A tutaj niedaleko koło Zabłoci. Zabłoc. To, to tam jeździli, to już za moje pamięcio, jeździli, to jednemu chłopczykowi wszystko nosi cukierki, orzechy tam, a drugiemu wszystko gównem, przepraszając, oblapia i oblapia. I ksiądz przyjeżdżał, i modlili sie, i wyjeżdżali oni z domu... co oni tam nie robili! Nie wiem, jak ucichło to potem. Czarna książka, czarna książka, to nie daj Boże! Było wszystko. I diabli byli, ojciec mówił, i straszdyły byli [76].

(– My father told me that there were such people who would read black books; they must have known how to read them. Well, one lord was going on a trip and he had a black book so he says to the butler: “Don't you dare touch the book.” “Very well, I won't.” But he was curious about the content of the book. The lord left and the butler opened the book and started reading. So they ask him: “What do you need?” And he didn't know what to say, that was Lucip..., those were devils talking. He says: “onions.” And they started throwing onions at him and almost killed him. Luckily, the lord came back, he undid it and everything went quiet. ...

Have you ever had any sorcerers in this area?

– Nearby Zabolots. They would go there and one boy gets only candy, nuts and another boy only gets shit, pardon me, everything is covered in shit. The priest arrived and prayed; they left the house...and tried many different things! I don't know how it ended. This black book, this black book, may God save us from it! There was everything. My father said there were devils and bogeymen.)

The stories above demonstrate that those who can do and undo cooperate with the devil. They do, i.e. do against someone, harm people not because they were wronged by them but for totally different reasons: anger, wickedness, hatred, jealousy, envy, greed... Hence, out of evil's inspiration obviously.<sup>82</sup>

The story of a complaint of a sick woman I'm about to quote is written in the logic of the "eye for an eye" ethics as well as cursing in accordance with the mirror principle. It also clearly indicates the connection between those who "do" with the Godless sphere:

Nakinuli, czary zrabili mi. [...] A im Boha ni ma i niczoha ni ma. Ni ma. [...] Żywu [ja], baju sie Boha i wot tak i menczu sie. Treci hod. Tyje dwa hady nie znała, szto to za charoba taka [...] – a tut nie choroba, tut nakinuli na mienia. Chaj im nakinie! Nie znaju jak. I kłaści nie znaju, jak, szto skazat'. [...] Za sztoż ja tak pakutuju? [...] Ot pakuta, ot menczenie, daj Boh jemu Boh adarwał nohi, ruki. Nie mahu ja stać, tak balit naha. A zdaż ja nikomu niczoha nie zrabiła..." [74].

(They cast a spell on me; they did me [...] For them there is no God and there is nothing. There is nothing [...] I live in a godly manner and well I suffer. I've been suffering for 3 years now. 2 years I didn't know what this illness was; but it is not an illness, it's a spell. May it be cast on them! I don't know how. I can't curse; I don't know what to say [...] Why do I suffer so much? Oh, suffering, oh, torment. May God take away his arms and legs. I can't stand because my leg is so much in pain. But I did no wrong to nobody...)

Hence, we once again stumble upon the negative pole of the God-devil opposition. It seems that this time it is the CURSE<sub>3</sub> (ENCHANTMENT) sphere. I'm not going to go deep into it since it is too wide and hence would require a separate overview<sup>83</sup>. I will only touch upon several issues which are directly related to the matter of our interest, i.e. CURSE<sub>1</sub>.

It appears that the figure of a sorcerer (*wieźmar, czarnokniźnik*) is connected with the stories told by my interlocutors about an old man who would curse children making fun of him<sup>84</sup>. They are educational parables; they must have been used as with a didactic purpose in mind, to teach kids to respect the elders. The educational function of folk stories on the curse is, similarly to beggar songs and other folklore texts, clearly visible, as in this way the culture of oral transmission of the tradition safeguards its cohesion. If children do not carry on with the value system of the previous generations, if they become "rebels trying to harm their fellow-citizens" [Thomas, Znaniecki 1927: 284], this culture is about to break apart. That is why in a number of cursing tales there is an old man empowered with magic sanctions on the naughty youth.

[Taki, co umie podrobić] jechał z Wasiliszek, kto ta niedawna raskazywał, a dzieci karowu paśli. I zaśmiejałasia tam adna, może nie z jaho, a on każe: "Budziesz ty śmiejaćca ȳ mianie da śmierci." I pajechał sam. A heta dzie-wuszka i ha ha ha, i ha ha ha, i śmiejecca i śmiejecca. I ścichnuć nie smożet.

Aż wprost jana nie może. I musieli da jaho jechać, prasicca. Pakrapii i skazał tolka: "No, chwacić, uże paśmiejałasia i dobre." I prastało. Kaszpirowski – gipnoza eta" [59].

[[One man who knows how to do against someone] was on his way from Vasilishki (I've been told this story recently) while some children were minding a cow. One girl laughed; it might not have been at him and he says: "Now you will be laughing until you die." And off he went. And the lass goes haha and haha; she laughs and laughs. And she cannot stop. Well, she simply cannot. They had to go and see that man and ask him. He sprinkled her and just said: "Well, enough, you had your share of laughter. Good for you." And so she stopped.)

Jechali z Żałudka ludzi. A dziewczyna, mówi, krowy paśla już. Ładna dziewczyna, lat szesnaście miała już, tak siedemnasty rok. Mówi: "Dziadźka, adkul wy jedziecie? Z Żałudka?" Takż on mówi: "Z Żałudka." "Dziadźka, a ci prawda, szto w Żałudku grajut na dudku?" – "Budziesz ty, każe, dietki, hrać! Czekaj!" Ona, mówi, przywodziła te krowy do domu. Matka mówi: "Skocz ty, wody przynieś." Ona poszła, woda przyniesła, postawiła wiadro wody, i dawaj różne grać i śpiewać, i tralalaj, i tańczyć, różne dawaj ona, w dudka ta grać [50].

(Some folk were on their way from Zholudok. And a girl was minding her cows. A pretty girl, turned sixteen years of age, was in her seventeenth. She asks: "Where are you coming from, uncle? From Zholudok?" He says: "From Zholudok." "Is it true, uncle, that in Zholudok they play the pipe?" "You will be playing, child!", he says, "You will see!". So she brought the cows back home. Her mother says: "Go, fetch some water." So she went to the well; she fetched the water and put the bucket down and started playing and singing and dancing and other things as if she were playing the pipe.)

A spell cast by a mysterious "elder" shows in "odd" behaviour, such as inappropriate dance, singing and laughter. It is a consequence of lack of respect for the elderly which can manifest as the mirror principle, i.e. you laughed at the elderly now they will laugh at you. "The old man" is portrayed here first of all as a guardian of such values as courtesy, hospitality, helping the traveller, feeding the hungry. The spell he casts is the sanction for breaching the above.

We wsi Kamień Koszyrski zdarzył się następujący wypadek. Gospodarz zimą, nocą odmówił podróżnemu starem u dziadowi wody dla jego konia, więc podróżny zaczarował go tak, że ten po jego odjeździe wstał, ubrał się i zaczął tańczyć na dworze. Zięc jego i syn dogonili koniem podróżnego i zmusili go do cofnięcia czaru. Po ich powrocie gospodarz spał i nie zdawał sobie później sprawy z tego, co zaszło. Widział to opowiadający, jak miał 13 lat, i jego matka.<sup>85</sup>

(In a village named Kamień Koszyrski the following incident occurred. On a winter night a farmer refused to give water to a horse of an old man so the man cast a spell on him and, after the old man left, he got dressed, went outside and started dancing. His son-in-law and his son took horses and managed to catch up with the traveller and forced him to undo the spell. When they returned the farmer was asleep and later didn't realise what had happened. It was witnessed by the storyteller and his mother.)

The sanctions applied by the old man might also be more severe and undoable. Those which breach the cultural norms of the community might be punished with symbolic or literal death.

Perekazywały, szczo dzieci coś z dziadka zaśmiejalisia, coś jemu powiedzieli. A win zaklął. Jak zaklął, tak na drugi dzień tych dwoje dzieci zachorowało i bud'to poumierali. Tak ja słyszała, że to tak było, że stary może tak zakląć – nie można jego zaczepiać, nie można jemu coś takie myśleć czy mówić [25].

(They said that children were laughing at an old man and said something to him. And he cursed. When he cursed, the next day two of the kids got ill and apparently they died. I heard that it happened that an old man can curse this way; he can't be bothered; you can't think or say such [evil] things to him.)

This “old man” was also capable of turning people into stone. It would happen either to someone who turned down his request or disrespected him or to the newly married couple or even all wedding participants<sup>86</sup> as a payback for failing to invite him for the wedding or simply for not greeting him on the way.

– Darży wioska nazywajećsia [...] tam stajali kamni. [...] Takije kamni stajali: stajał czeławiek iz karowaj, i adzin czeławiek stajał. Z daŋnych hawarili, myż nie widzieli, szto, każe, wioł czeławiek karowu, i tam kala lesu... Byli daŋniejsze takije praroki, niechto tam jeho prasił, czy szto-ta, a on nie posłuchał, i on...: “Kab ty tu kamniom stał i ze swajoj karowaj!” I stał kamniom. Ktoś go prosił i on mu nie dał, tak?

– Noo... Praklał. A toj czeławiek, toj samyj, toże kazali, szto praklatyj. Mużczyna czy baba – ja uże i zabyłasia. Ale tam staić takoj kamień, nastajaszczyj czeławiek, on już tak z wiekoŋ staić [61].

(Nearby Darzhy there were stones ...The stones depicted a man and a cow. They have been telling stories about it for ages but we didn't know what and where from. They say: a man was walking with a cow and over there by the forest...there used to be prophets. One asked him for something, or something like that, but the man didn't listen so he [said]: “may you and your cow turn into stone!”. And so he did turn into stone. Someone asked him and he didn't give that, is that correct?

– Well...he cursed. And the man, the very same, they also said he was cursed. Male or female, I've already forgotten. But the stone still stands there, it's a real man; it has been standing there for ages now.)

In this story the old man changing the human into stone is associated with "old prophets". The object of his action about whom we learn that "they also said he was cursed" is therefore a sinner so he must have wronged the "prophet". Hence, this character of an "old man" is being portrayed as having an ambivalent status as once he cooperates with the devil (the interlocutors usually associate him with the *wiedźmar* (sorcerer) so someone who can "only do"), the other time with God (such a man is a healer, *znachor*, who can "do and undo")<sup>87</sup> [cf. LB 1: 101–104].

At times it is difficult to figure out if the main character of a curse story is a God's or devil's mediator. In such cases this ambiguity can be both for subjective reasons, such as for instance limitations of the teller's knowledge, and objective reasons, such as the blurred borderline between different types of cursing (CURSING – SWEARING – ENCHANTING). One of such ambiguous stories was told to me by Wanda Budziszewska whose grandmother, Amanda Bloch "was a person known for sharp speeches that came true." I cannot resolve the dilemma regarding the issue of the extent to which those "sharp speeches" were curses of a wronged person or someone who "knows how to do."

W czasie pierwszej wojny, mąż ciotki Stefanii, która była babci wychowanką, był w obozie jenieckim, a u ciotki stacjonował oficer niemiecki z ordynansem. Kiedyś ordynans gotuje rosół, i babcia dla swoich – ciotki i jej dwojga dzieci – też. Jak ordynans nie widział, to babcia zbierała oka i wlewała do swojego garnka. Raz on to jednak spostrzegł i, rzecz jasna, zrobił babci awanturę. I babcia go przeklęła: "Żebyś ty ręce i nogi połamał!" To było w Żychlinie pod Kutnem. Tego samego dnia wieczorem ordynans szedł pijany, wpadł do piwniczki i coś sobie złamał. Sprawdziło się co do dnia. *Alte Hexe* – tak ją nazywali Niemcy. I szanowali. Ciotka Stefania, którą babcia wychowywała, lubiła długo siedzieć wieczorami. I raz babcia powiedziała: "Żebyś ty kiedy oślepla." I minęło kilka lat, ciotce się zrobił wrzód na oku. Potem ona na nie widziała, ale bardzo cierpiała. To w jakiś sposób też łączono z babcią.<sup>88</sup>

(During the Great War, Aunt Stefania's husband (Aunt Stefania was raised by my grandmother) was in a prisoner-of-war camp while a German officer with his orderly were stationed at my auntie's. One day the orderly was cooking broth and grandma was doing the same for the auntie and her two children. When the orderly's back was turned my grandma would remove the fat from his pot and pour it into hers. Once he spotted her doing that and obviously had a row with her about it. And grandma cursed him: "May you break your arms and legs!". It was in Żychlin nearby Kutno. The same

night the orderly came back home drunk, he fell down into the cellar and broke some bones. It came true down to the very day. *Alte Hexe*, that's how the Germans used to call her. And they respected her. Aunt Stefania who was raised by my grandma liked to stay up late. Once grandma said: "May you go blind one day". A few years passed and the aunt got an ulcer in one eye. Later she could see with this eye but she suffered a great deal. This was also on my grandma.)

If we remain on the borderline between different types of cursing we might want to listen to a conversation from Eastern Polesie. In this talk the interlocutor, while discussing "felicity conditions' for SWEARING also accounts for the conditions for CURSING. These who are related by blood (children, mother, father) or in a wider sense by life relations (like one's community mother, i.e. one's godmother and a milk cow) mustn't be berated (CURSED<sub>4</sub>). Here we shall add that the ritual of the curse (CURSING<sub>1</sub>) is for them in justified cases. At the same time strangers (husband and wife for instance) might be sworned "from top to toe." Obviously, the which is overused (similarly to the unjustified curse) is a sin. The prohibition of cursing which equals the prohibition of killing other people is strictly in force in those places where one's culture deals with the very core of life and survival.

Ruhacca hreszno czy nie?

– Kanieszna, hreszno ruhacca! Ale wozmiesz, da ruhniejszia.

Możno żyt' biez ruhani?

– Tak nie połuczajetsia. Ruhajuś.

S kiem? S naczałstwom? Na korowu, na swiniu?

– Nu, na korowu ruhacca nielzia. A na muzyka możesz poruhacca. Jakaja radnia jon, toże na nieho można poruhacca. Jaki jon radnia? Czyży czaławiek. Jaho można ruhać i ȳdoȳż i ȳpopierak. [...]

Skażycie, czamu na korowu ruhacca nielzia?

– Janaż tabie małako daje, na szto na jaje ruhacca? Na jaje ruhacca nie nada. Karowa ciabie kormić.

A na muzyka można?

– Jakaja raznica muzyk?! Jon tabie czyży czaławiek: dobra – dobra, a nie... Jaho można ruhać tolki tak. [...]

Tamu, szto czyży? Znaczyć, na radniu ruhacca nie nada?

– Ruhacca waabszcze nie nada! Nu, muzyk – jakaja tabie radnia? Czyży czaławiek! Jaho można ruhać jak choczasz.

On otiec waszych dietiej toże.

– Nu, i szto? Dzieci – adno, ja – druchoje. Ty żanaty czy nie?

Niet. [...]

- Wot ty azeniszsia, żonka jakaja tabie radnia? Ty żonku dla taho wozmiesz, sztob jana tabie bulionu nawaryła i sztany paścirała. Jana tabie czyży czaławiek. Jaje można ruhać jak chcesz!

A ci dzieci można ruhać?

- Nikoho, ja tabie hawaru, nie można ruhać. I dzieciej nie nada ruhać!

Tolki muzyka?

- Dzieci – heta twaja krou. Ot, rodzisz dzicia, eta twaja krou. A muzyk jakaja radnia? Czyży czaławiek.

A kumu?

- Kumaż tabie dzicia dohladaje. Kumu nie nada ruhać. A muzyka! Adnahto kinu, paszo, da druhoha. Mużyk nie radnia, jakaja jon tabie radnia?

A na matku ci można ruhacca?

- Matku toże nie pałożena. Jana ciabie radziła.

A kagda uże staraja, ona tiebie nadojedajet każdyj dzień? Prosto pierestupat' czerez siebia nada?

- Nada i pieremauczac. Matka, janaż ciabie radziła. I nasiła ciabie, i hladziela ciabie, i wuczyła ciabie. Matku nada hladzieć. Eta twaja matka. Matku i baćka [83].

(Is swearing a sin or not?)

- Of course swearing is a sin! But you will go and swear...

Can one do without swearing?

- It is impossible. I swaer.

Who do you swear at? The village head? Your cow or your pig?

- No, you cannot swear at a cow. But you can at a husband. He ain't no family, you can swear at him. What kind of relative is he? A stranger. He can be sworn at

from top to toe. ...

Why can't a cow be sworn at?

- A cow gives you milk so why would you swear at her? You cannot. Your cow feeds you<sup>89</sup>.

And a husband you can swear at?

- It makes no difference that he is your husband. He is a stranger for you: if it's good then it's good but if not...you can swear at him just like that. ...

Because he is a stranger? Does it mean that your family cannot be sworn at?

- You cannot swear at all! Well, but your husband? What kind of family is he for you? He is a stranger! You can swear at him as much as you like.

But he is the father to your children.

- So what? Children are one thing and I'm the other. Are you married?

No...

- Well, once you get married, what kind of family is your wife going to be? You take a wife so that she can cook you some broth and wash your pants. She is a stranger for you. You can swear at her as much as you like!

Can I swear at children too?

- Nobody, I told you already that nobody can be sworn at. And children cannot be sworn at!
- Only the husband?
- Children are your blood. Well, you give birth to a child and it is your blood. And the husband is what family? A stranger.
- And the mother of your son-in-law?
- She looks after your child. You cannot swear at her. And the husband? You leave one, you find another. Your husband is no family; what kind of relative would he be?
- And can one's mother be sworn at?
- The mother cannot be sworn at because she gave birth to you.
- What if she is already old and is getting on your nerves every single day? You need to remain silent. It's your mother. She gave birth to you. She carried you, looked after you and taught you things. You need to take care of your mother. It's your mother. Your mother and your father.)

Let us now come full circle by returning to the positive pole of the sacrum, i.e. the justified curse in the form of God's punishment. The prefiguration of the circumstances of such a curse, the curse which is the weapon of the weak who can only be protected by God, is the mythical event from the beginning of time, when God roamed the Earth, awarding the good and cursing the evil<sup>90</sup>. Therefore, nowadays all those wronged who utter the words of the justified curse are heard:

- A ũ Wialiczkach, Wialiczki wioska była, chadził niejki czeławiek, prasił-sia na nocz, stareńki, i abaszoł... heta ludzi z wiekoŕ kazali... i on abaszoł wiosku i nikto nie puścił naczawać. A tut kala samoha kańca wioski była chateczka adna. I on pryszło u hetu chateczku, i u hetaj chataczcy puścili, pierenaczewali. I hetyj czeławiek, jak kazali, wstanuł na ranku i każe: "Stanie tu u was oziero bezdonna...". I ũsja wioska patapiłasia, tolka ta chatka astałasia. Usia wioska prawaliłasia. Heta ũże daŕno było, daŕno... No, jest jeszcze śliwniak, śliwki raśli tam... Chatki ũże nie ma, a śliwak ludzi nie ściahajuć. Chatka tolka adna astałasia, a tam gdzie była wioska - czornaja, krutaja wada. Tam nie kupajucca, nikto nie kupajecca. [...]
- [córka:] Każuć, niekali chadził Boh sam pa świeci, i wot takije rabił cudy. Pytałsia ludziej na nocz, to každy nie chacieł, bo on w takom marnym adzieni, żebrak był, to nie puskali, a ũ taj biednaj chateczkie puścili: chadzi, i my, i ty biedyje żebraki...
- Wialiczki niedaloka, o tu na bielickuju szaszu. Pry szasze heta oziero. Tam nie ma ni trawiny, ni czoha, czornaja krucicca wada [61].

(- In Vyelichki, there was once a village with that name, there was a man, very old, who asked to be put up for the night. He walked around the whole village...it's a story that has been told for ages now. So he walked from house to house and no one wanted him in for the night. At the end of the village

there was a small house. So he came to this house and they let him stay there for the night. And this man, as they said, got up in the morning and says: "A bottomless lake will be here at this spot..." And the whole village went under water except for that little house. The whole village was gone. It was a long, long time ago...Well, a plum orchard remained untouched as well. There were plums on those trees. The little house is long gone and people don't pick up the plums. Only one house was left and where the village once was now there is black water full of whirls. Folk don't go swimming there; no one goes swimming there. [...]

- [daughter:] "They say that once God himself was walking on the face of the earth and he would make such wonders. He would ask folk to be put up for the night. Not everyone would allow it since he was wearing scruffy clothes. He was a beggar so they wouldn't let him in but in this poor house they did: come inside, we are all miserable beggars..."

- Vyelichki is not far, just off the road to Byelitsa. There is a lake by the road. No grass grows there, nothing, only black water is spinning around.)



## 5

# SEMANTICS OF THE CURSE

There is not a single formula in which we do not find some important piece of ethnographic information which throws additional light on the ceremony, on its function and on its meaning to the natives.

Bronisław Malinowski [1935: 6]

### 1. Linguistic Structure of Magical Directives

In his seminal *Semantics*, John Lyons ascribes a logical structure to directives such as “*so be it, or so be it that p*” (in Lyons’ notation) [Lyons 1979: 749, 730] and stresses their instrumental function (“getting things done by imposing our will upon other agents” Lyons 1979: 752]). He also notes that “there are many cultures in which certain language-utterances (provided that they are produced by an authorized person in appropriate circumstances) are held to have a magical or sacramental effect; and such utterances may take the form of directives addressed to either animate or inanimate entities. What is especially interesting about magical or sacramental directives in the present connection is that (according to those who believe in their efficacy) their ‘so be it in  $w_i$  that  $p$  (in  $w_j$ )’ automatically guarantees the truth of ‘so be it in  $w_i$  that  $p$  (in  $w_j$ )’: their perlocutionary effect is an automatic consequence of their illocutionary force” [Lyons 1979: 827].

According to Lyons, curses should be classed as a speech genre belonging to the group of magical directives – acts that predicate upon the instrumental function of language, which he defines in the following way: “Provided that the person who says ‘so be it’ to  $p$  has the authority

to do so and the power to make this utterance efficacious, his saying of “so be it to *p* (i.e. his saying *!p*) will result, directly or indirectly, in the truth of *p* at  $t_i > t_0$ ” [Lyons 1979: 845].

Let us therefore begin our analysis of the linguistic structure of the curse, understood as a type of magical directive.

### 1.1. Imperative-Optative Utterances

“A curse begins with *may you... (a bodaj by cie)*” – thus have many of my interlocutors answered the question about the proper formula for cursing or swearing. Curses commonly begin with the optative *may* or *let (a bodaj, żeby, oby, niech)*, followed by a chosen term of abuse.

The Polish lexical units listed above (*bodaj, żeby (may), oby (may), niech (let)*) are traditionally treated as particles (function words). Maciej Grochowski includes them in his category of mood operators.

Mood operators are lexemes that cannot be inflected and cannot stand alone: [...] They do not appear in declarative sentences, and imply the use of particular verb forms. Mood operators are used in linear positions that precede the linear positions of verbs, they do not enter into syntactic relationships with nouns, adjectives or numerals [Grochowski 1986: 49].

The mood operators used in curses, listed above, are considered by linguists to be the markers of the imperative, the optative, the subjunctive and sometimes even the declarative. The mood of the verb is one of the ways of expressing modality (the relationship of the speaker to the state of affairs, wherein the property *P* belongs to the subject *S*) [Wierzbicka 1971: 179]. Thus the most fundamental question is the type of modality which they represent, their modal framework. Linguists differentiate between four varieties of modality that can be relevant for the curse: imperative (commands), expressive (expressing the speaker's will), deontic (volitative) and optative (expressing wishes).

Stanisław Jodłowski distinguishes three types of utterance with respect to “the speaker's attitude towards the state of the utterance object”: there are interrogative, imperative and declarative utterances. According to this classification, curses would belong to the second type. Jodłowski explains:

When the state of affairs is known, and is unsatisfactory, the speaker demands its change, expressing a demand. An imperative utterance can take on many shades of meaning: from a tentative request, through varying levels of encouragement, advice and urging – to a strict or imperative command. The different shades of meaning are tied to appropriate grammatical forms [Jodłowski 1976:61].

Following Jodłowski's arguments, let us take a closer look at the exhortative modality. Renata Grzegorzczkova comes to similar conclusions as Jodłowski, using the term "intentional modality [...] referring to the information about the speaker's intent in making the utterance, which of necessity is contained in every sentence uttered" [Grzegorzczkova 1990: 138]. In Grzegorzczkova's view, the intentional modality can be divided into four sub-categories. As a consequence, the type called by Jodłowski exhortative, can according to Grzegorzczkova be divided into two groups. The first one, which follows the modal framework "I want you to cause p" included all directive utterances such as commands, prohibitions, permissions, requests, advice, warnings and threats. The second one follows the modal framework "I feel that I wish": the utterances belonging to this group express the will of the speaker and are thus optatives. The modal framework 'I feel that I want' (expressing the speaker's will) serves in its turn as the basis for formulating optative utterances.

It seems that magical directives, curse formulas, can be situated on the borderlands between these two types of modality: the imperative and the optative. This intuition is confirmed by the findings of Krystyna Pisarkowa, who conducted research into Old and Middle Polish imperative and suprahortative utterances. Pisarkowa argues: "The Polish imperative mode contains an overly broad range of meanings which are expressed by homonymic syntactic forms: from expressing possibility (a request, a wish) to expressing obligation and coercion (a command, a curse, an enchantment" [Pisarkowa 1972: 35]. She also draws attention to "the semantic kinship between the imperative, the optative and the conjunctive" and to the fact that "the distinction between imperative and optative structures was never sharp enough in the Polish language." Pisarkowa concludes her remarks in the following way:

How can we differentiate between the imperative *May God give you health!* (*daj Boże zdrowie*) or *Grant that he does!* (*daj, aby zrobił*) and the optative *May he turn pale on the rope!* (*bodaj zbledział na powrozie!*)? It is impossible to precisely delineate the function of structures that used the originally negative equivalent of the verb *daj* (*to give*), the particle that takes the forms *niech*, *niechaj* and *niechać* [all three particles translate into English as *may* - A.E.]. At the bottom of all these structures there lies hidden an imperative-optative element that can be contrasted with the indicative, "the mood of the real", and it should be viewed in its entirety, while its variants cannot be precisely differentiated [Pisarkowa 1972: 35].

Pisarkowa's remarks confirm Jodłowski's theory that there exist three types of modality in Polish: the declarative, the interrogative and

the exhortative, but her description of the third type is much broader, as she understands it as an imperative-optative framework of modality.

Yet another pertinent theory pertaining to the imperative-optative modality and focused on the optative was offered by Violetta Koseska-Toszewa. According to this researcher, curses should be classified as optatives. Breaking with the established grammatical traditions which treat the optative jointly either with the conjunctive or the imperative, Koseska-Toszewa treats it as a separate mood. She writes:

All non-indicative moods, with the exception of the imperative and the optative are predicated upon the truth and introduced by the functor “it is possible that...” The imperative, as we know, is introduced by the functor “it is necessary that...” The optative, as a mood expressing a wish of the speaker, related to the fulfilment of his/her utterance, contains two functors: “it is necessary and possible that...” This property ensures the optative’s special position among the non-indicative moods [Koseska-Toszewa 1981: 130].

Koseska-Toszewa highlights that “in Polish, the signal of the optative is the information about the possible upcoming action (which can be fulfilled in the future envisaged by the speaker)” and specifies that “the burden of the optative meaning falls on the particle *oby* or *by* (may).” She differentiates five types of optative utterances in Polish: constituted (1) by the particle *oby* and a preterite verb (*Oby cię diabli wzięli! – May the devils take you!*); (2) *żeby* and a preterite verb (*Żeby ci się nic nie stało – May you not be harmed!*); (3) by the particle *oby* and an infinitive (*Oby zasnąć prędkiej! – May we fall asleep soon!*); (4) the particle *niech* (*let*) and present (or future simple) verb forms (*Niech cię diabli wezmą! – Let the devils take you!*); (5) and conditional structures (*Odwiedzilibyście nas kiedy! – If only you came to visit!*) [Koseska-Toszewa 1981: 132].

The above overview of Polish linguists’ views leads to two conclusions. Firstly, it is clear that the magical directives in which I am interested are very different from other types of directives. And secondly: their modality framework is complex, and the “burden of modality” it contains is not homogeneous, showing traces of both the imperative and the optative [Pisarkowa 1972: 35].

## 1.2. Enchanting-Optative Utterances

### 1.2.1. Type One of Curse Formulas: *May God Punish You!*

What are the characteristics of formulas constituted with the use of the mood operator *bodaj*?

Let us consider the sentence (1) **May** you be punished by Virgin Mary! (**A bodaj** cie Matka Boska skarąła!). The sentence contains the imperative-optative modal framework, introduced by the mood operator *a bodaj*. The sentence features a finite verb (*verbum finitum*) in the form of *skarąła*, and also contains the agent (*Virgin Mary*) and the object (2nd pers., sing., *you*), and thus fits the overall pattern *may somebody punish somebody else*. The sentences below conform to the same pattern.

- (2) **May** you die suddenly! (**A bodaj** cię nagłą śmierć spotkąła!)
- (3) **May** you lose your breath! (**Bodaj** z ciebie para wyskoczyła!)
- (4) **May** the sun never shine upon you! (**Bogdaj** ci jasne słońce nie świeciło!)
- (5) **May** it be struck by thunder! (**Bodaj** to piorun spalił!)
- (6) **May** the devils take him to hell! (**A bodaj** go diabli porwali do piekła!)
- (7) **May** they be struck by plague! (**A bodaj** ich cholera wyduszyła!)

The operator *may* (*bodaj*) is connected syntactically to the main verb, and their relationship “summons” the desired action or event. What is the nature of the summoning? The answer to this question lies in the etymology of *bodaj*.

Linguists agree that *bodaj* is a lexicalized form of *bog daj* (literally, *God grant* (imperative), [SEŚ, SEBr, *Bodaj*]. Krystyna Pisarkowa follows the proces of this lexicalization and names as its source the object clauses of the type: *God grant that it should happen*. She argues:

The primary function of the hortative utterance, its address to God as the addressee becomes forgotten, and the original meaning of the particle *bodaj*, which is *Bóg daj* (*God grant*) is so completely obliterated that now it is possible to use this particle in curses [Pisarkowa 1972: 36–37].

Thus the “calling upon,” the evocation of the activity to be done to a selected object begins with enchanting its agent. As we have indicated above, spells have a vocative-imperative structure (like here: *God grant!*), which involves uttering the true name of the object, and thus making the object mentally present, and automatically connoting the imperative by means of this kind of “magical vocative.” Analysing the invocation *O stork-bowel, bring me a brother* (*Bocian, kiszka, przynieś mi braciszka!*) in Chapter 2, we have established that the vocative-imperative structure of enchantments (spells) is on the semantic level equivalent to uttering “o power, make it so and so.” Whoever utters the words of the enchantment, must each time name the power and request of it the fulfillment of a specific task: fill in the pattern “o power, grant that...” with a characteristic of this task, with a specific “propositional content.”

In curse formulas, the agent of the activity is God, enchanted by the word *bodaj*, which calls Him by His name. *Bodaj* (*O power, grant that...*) becomes an operator for enchanting a power to perform a specific activity (to a specific object). *Bodaj* becomes an “enchanting framework” for a wish, and this would suggest that the structure could more aptly be termed a “enchanting-optative framework” and not an “imperative-optative framework.”

In turn, cursing someone (CURSING<sub>1</sub>) can be interpreted as enchanting a power to do something bad to the object. We have stipulated before that the agent called on in the curse ritual is God, and now we see that this finds its analogy in the structure of the word formula at the heart of the ritual.

The next stage of calling on a power is filling the pattern of “O power, grant that...” with specific “propositional content.” The power is asked to do something specific, or to “trigger” the actions of the agent of the optative activity. In the vast majority of curse formulas, the power (the agent) is explicitly mentioned (*Virgin Mary, sudden death, thunder, the devils*). But sentences such as

- (8) *May something [bad] happen to you! (Bodaj was wypotkało/spotkało/napotkało!), or*  
 (9) *May you be twisted! (Bodaj cię pokręciło!)*

should be interpreted as sentences with an empty subject that can be rendered schematically as: “may *something* happen to/twist somebody to performer of the happening and twisting, that is an unspecified “something bad” in the first case and a disease in the second, remains implicit.

Sentences (1)–(9) are examples of Type One of curse formulas which can be distinguished in the material. They follow the formula: “**O power, make Z do something [bad] to X.**” Thus, the semantic roles in the formula are: **the agent of the curse** (indicated in the “power-enchanting” operator *bodaj*, i.e., God), **the curse object** (X, named as the object in the subordinate optative clause) and **the executor of the curse**, that is the performer of the action named, or Z (the subject of the optative utterance).

Alternative curse operators include *żeby* and *oby* (also translated into English as *may*, but not carrying the oblique reference to God), and *niech* (let).

- (10) *May God never forgive you! (Żeby ci Bóg nie darował!)*  
 (11) *May you be cut into pieces! (Żeb cię znęli po kawałku!)*

- (12) *May life be hard on you!* (**A żeb** ci się nie szykowało!)  
 (13) *May you be twisted all over!* (**Żeby** cię pokręciło!)  
 (14) *May the wraiths take him!* (**Żeby** go zmory wzięły!)  
 (15) *May the holy earth refuse to receive your body!* (**Oby** cię święta ziemia nie przyjęła!)

Just as it was the case with *bodaj*, the mood operator *żeby* in the sentences above is in a syntactic relationship with the preterite form of the verb. The operator and the verb together name the action that is to be performed on the selected object: *may Z do something [bad] to X*. But there is one significant difference: the operator *żeby* is not a lexicalized construction meaning ‘o power, grant that...’ As Pisarkowa argues, *żeby* is “a mood operator whose character is imperative-conditional [rozkazujaco-warunkowy]” [Pisarkowa 1972: 38]. Utterances containing *żeby* (and also *oby*) can be interpreted as emancipated (and therefore also lexicalized) second elements of the old constructions such as *daj Boże żeby* (*God grant that*). Thus the sentence *Bog daj, aby szczeń* (*God grant, may he perish*) would on the one hand be the source of *bodaj szczeń* (*may he perish*), containing *bodaj* and thus the oblique reference to God) and on the other hand of *oby szczeń* (containing *oby*, and thus with no reference to God).

The third group consists of utterances that use the mood operator *niech* (*let*). It is by far the least popular. *Niech* is followed by a verb in the present (or future simple) tense. Formulas belonging to this group follow the pattern “let X do something [bad] to Z.”

- (16) *Let your arm wither!* (**Niech** ci ręka uschnie!)  
 (17) *Let thunder strike you!* (**Niech** cię szlag trafi!)  
 (18) *Let him not go unpunished by God!* (**Niech** mu Pan Bóg nie daruje!)

Etymologically speaking, *niech* is a contracted form of *niechaj* (an inflected form of the verb *niechać* [cf. *poniechać*, *zaniechać*, meaning ‘to forgo, to desist’]; its literal meaning is ‘leave it, do not do it, let it go’ – ‘zostaw, nie rób, nie daj’ [SEBr: *Niechać*]. SW defines *niechać* as 1. ‘to allow, give permission’ (‘dopuszczać, pozwalać’) and 2. ‘to let go, desist, forgo something, not to want something’ (‘dać czemu pokój, zaprzestać, zaniechać czego, nie chcieć czego’) [SW: *Niechać*]. I believe that it is possible to see the transition of meanings from ‘let go, desist’ – ‘dać czemu pokój, zaprzestać’ (*niechaj* (2nd pers. sing. imperative: ‘desist, let it go, let somebody else do it’ – ‘ty zostaw, nie rób tego, zrobi to ktoś inny’)) through the second meaning ‘to allow, to give permission’ (‘dopuszczać, pozwalać’) to its lexicalization as mood operator. As a mood operator,

*niech* always involves speaking to another person about a third party (*Niech on przyjdzie* – *Let him come*) or about oneself (*Niech cię nie znam* (literally: *Let me not know you*, meaning *I wish I hadn't met you*)). Just like *bodaj*, it can be interpreted as a lexicalized version of the imperative, which became (in the material I had analyzed) a “power enchanting operator.” Curse formulas (16)–(18) can therefore be interpreted as contracted forms of an utterance similar to *O God, grant that he is struck by thunder*.

It seems therefore that the three groups of the described type of magical directives might be understood as a realization of the general structure of “the wish embedded in enchantment.” which, just like the curses containing *bodaj*, can be expressed with the semantic formula: **“O power, make Z do something [bad] to X.”** The vocative (O, power) has varying degrees of explicitness in different curses (it is the most explicit in the curses that use the operator *bodaj*). But all curses share a common “vocative-imperative frame.”

The imperative mood is used for expressing commands (or requests). Its meaning can be exemplified by the phrase “I want you to...”. Thus, I would like to argue that the “O power grant that” component that initiates curse formulas can be interpreted as ‘I want the power to act and bring about the desired effect.’ In an article which studies the uses of the vocative in Polish, the linguist Andrzej Bogusławski also identifies kolejny komponent eksplikacji imperatywu that he calls “an influencer” (*autochcenie*): ‘chcę, mówiąc to, spowodować, byś działał’ [Bogusławski 1974: 193]. This component seems especially well suited to our discussion of the curse formulas: the folk curses that we have studied so far all follow the formula ‘I want my words to cause the power, so that the power causes...’ After all, our analysis of the folk worldview has so far shown us, that, in the context of magic speech, words are actions in their own right, and humans are only mediators. The belief that words, and not their speaker, are the true agents of action, is testified by such utterances of my interlocutors as “May my words be blessed” (“*żeb moje słowa byli błogosławione*”) [19] or a curse formula from the Polish-Ukrainian borderland: *May my words strike you and vanquish you!* (*bodaj moje słowo тебе pobyło, pohromyło!*) [DWOK 33, *Chełm1*: 31].

Pursuing his analysis of similarities between the curse formula and the grammatical imperative, Bogusławski argues that the imperative carries an important pragmatic function.

An imperative is a command: the addressee is supposed to obey it, and his/her refusal to do so is viewed by both sides of the act of communication as

a failure on the part of the speaker. The addressee may also be threatened by some specific consequences...Thus, we can consider that the imperative is a symbolic or even magical form of exerting pressure on the addressee... The 'game of imperatives' always implies some form of response from the addressee [Bogusławski 1974: 196].

It is different with the curse, however. Here, the "pressure on the addressee" involves exerting pressure on the *sacrum*. The speaker utters the words, binding the power to their will, coercing it to behave in a desired manner (I analysed this relationship in detail in my discussion of the semantic field of CURSING<sub>3</sub> above). The power is the true addressee of the curse. The person who becomes an object of an enchantment is bound to the will of the enchanter. An enchantment is a magical command. The person who is enchanted, becomes, by the very act of enchantment, inexorably obligated to perform the specific tasks demanded. There is no possibility of refusal (in contrast to the ordinary imperative, where, as we have seen above, a refusal would be "a failure on the part of the speaker"). The enchanted person is completely in the power of the enchanter. We should also remember, that the will of the speaker is understood here as the communicative intention of the speech act (in this case, the enchantment), and not as the psychological attitude of a particular speaker. As I have argued above, magical speech is automatically fulfilled and its felicity is independent of the speaker's intentions.

I believe however, that the situations of CURSING<sub>1</sub> (cursing proper) and CURSING<sub>3</sub> are different in this respect. Whereas casting a spell puts the object of the spell (the addressee) under pressure, a curse does not exert the same influence on the curse object (the person being cursed.) The curse could be understood as "pressure on the object" only in this sense that it generates some automatic response in the cursed person (who is a passive object in the process, and is not expected to react – in contrast with imperatives.) The object of the curse does not even need to be physically present, and does not need to hear the words – this is proved by proliferation of curse formulas that refer to the object in the third person, e.g. *May God punish him*.

### 1.2.2. Type Two of Curse Formulas: *May You Perish!*

To what extent can we talk about the automatic effect of the curse on its passive object in the case of Type Two formulas?—Let us analyse the following examples:

(19) *May you perish!* (**Bodajeś** zdecht!)

(20) *May you rot!* (**Bodajeś** zgnił!)

- (21) *May you lose your head!* (**Bodajes** głową nałożył!)
- (22) *May you never grow!* (**Bodajes** nie uros!)
- (23) *May you not die in torment!* (**Bogdajes** szczęśliwego nie doczekał skonu!)
- (24) *May you eat the devil!* (**Bodajes** diabła zjod!)
- (25) *O may the curse d vodka perish!* (O, **bodaj** przepadło przekłete gorzał-czysko!)
- (26) *May you not live and grow!* (A **żebyś** ty się nie wychował!)
- (27) *May you not come back in good health!* (**Żeb** ty zdrow nie przyjechał!)
- (28) *May you break your neck!* (A **żebyś** kark skręcił!)
- (29) *May you turn into stone!* (A **żebyś** ty się w kamień obrócił!)
- (30) *May you never know peace!* (**Żeby** on spokoju nie zaznał!)
- (31) *May you be crippled for life!* (**Obyś** został kaleką na całe życie!)
- (32) *May the earth swallow you!* (**Obyś** się zapadł sto łokci w ziemię!)

The superficial structure of examples (18)–(31) can be represented as ‘bodaj/żeby/oby/niech – ktoś (coś) – coś zrobił(o).’ In contrast with the formulas described in the previous subchapter, here the operators for “enchanting powers” introduce another type of propositional content, an activity of whose the designated object is also the agent. The activity is harmful: the object is being forced to do harm to himself/herself. the object of the curse himself/herself is supposed to be the agent of the action in question. The agency of the power is invoked obliquely: “**O power, force this person to harm himself/herself.**” The difference between Type One and Type Two formulas lies in the semantic differences between the verbs they contain.

In Type One formulas (“**O power, make Z do something [bad] to X**”) we are dealing with action verbs, whose first argument is the agent. These predicates are described as “intended mutations, directed towards an external object (causatives)” or as “operations – conscious actions directed at an object in order to cause change in it” [Grzegorzczkowska 1990: 118].

In the Type Two formulas, the predicates are non-action verbs, whose arguments are expressions that denote processes; these are “dynamic predicates expressing unconscious (unintended) change whose agent (or, to be more precise, processor) has no control over what is happening” [Grzegorzczkowska 1990: 118]. The cursed person becomes the object of the power’s action and thus perishes, rots, turns to stone or is swallowed by the earth: it seems self-explanatory that these happenings are not dependent on the curse object’s actions and are beyond his/her control: they can be more accurately called processes to which the cursed person is subjected. Type Two of curse formulas confirm my vision of the curse as a call on a power to cause something bad to somebody, of curse as an enchantment of a power to do

something bad to somebody. Regardless of the fact which operator and argument are used in a given formula (which depends on the semantic structure of the predicate specifying “the bad thing to happen”), we can always generalize it to: (“**O power, grant that something [bad] happens to X**”). This confirms the intuition expressed by my interlocutors: “a curse begins with the words *a bodaj by cie (may you be...)*,” or in other words God grant that [evil may befall you (Boże daj, żeby cię [spotkało coś złego])].

### 1.2.3. Other Formulas in the Function of a Curse

The folk repertoire of curses is not limited to the formulas discussed above. Curses can also take on other grammatical forms, and there is a large group of curses that eschew the optative *may* and instead use the imperative. Examples include:

(32) *Be a fright until Doomsday!* (**Bądź-ze** strasydłem do sądu ostatecznego!)

(33) *Go to the spirit of disease!* (**Idź** do chorobnika!)

(34) *Go to the devil and stop pestering me!* (**Idź** do diabła i mi głowy nie zawracaj!)

(35) *Sleep eternally!* (**Śpijcież** na wieki!)

Curses can also be expressed in the indicative:

(36) *You will tremble all your life, whether there's wind or not.* (**Będziesz się** całe życie **trzęsła**, czy będzie wiatr czy nie.)

(37) *You shall cuckoo for all eternity!* (Wiecznie tak **kukać** **będziecie**.)

Or in the subjunctive mood:

(38) *I'd rather see you dead than with him at the altar* (**Wolałabym** cię w trumnie widzieć niż z nią przy ołtarzu.)

These utterances can serve the function of curses because they are uttered as the verbal component of the curse ritual (so they fulfil all the prescribed conditions of efficacy) and that they are magic speech acts – and, as we have said above, a word spoken in such a context automatically becomes flesh.

## 1.3. The Semantic Structure Curse

What are the semantic features of curse as a magical directive? In one of her early works on the subject, Anna Wierzbicka proposed a semantic explication of *curse*, drawing on J. L. Austin's theory of performatives.

One of five classes in Austin's categorization of illocutionary verbs, is called *behabitives*. This class includes three verbs that are the focal points of my own research: *to bless*, *to curse* and *to wish* [...] The fundamental difference between *blessing* and *cursing* on the one hand, and *wishing* on the other consists, it would seem, of the belief in the power on the speaker's words (present in the case of blessing and swearing) and in the speaker's impotence or lack of agency (in the case of wishing) [Wierzbicka 1973: 217].

Wierzbicka provides the following explication of *curse* (*przeklinać*):

I curse you = I want to cause something bad to happen to you  
 Believing that I can cause it, saying  
 (what I say),  
 I say: I want something bad for you [ibidem].

Wierzbicka later further developed her theory (with respect to the English language). Her *English Speech Verbs* contains the following explication for *curse*:

I think something bad about X  
 I feel something bad because of that  
 I feel something bad towards X  
 I say: I want something more than bad to happen to X  
 I imagine that by saying this I could cause something bad to happen to X  
 I say this because I want to show what I feel thinking of X [Wierzbicka 1987: 163].

To my mind, Wierzbicka's discussion of the English verb *to curse* is not wholly relevant for the cursing understood as a magical speech act. The important distinction between magical and non-magical cursing is suggested already in the first sentence of Wierzbicka's commentary: "*Cursing* is a speech act which expresses emotions and which endows words with an imaginary power" [Wierzbicka 1987: 163, emphasis in Wierzbicka]. In the same commentary (from which I have quoted above in the section devoted to CURSING<sub>1</sub>), Wierzbicka argues that "the real purpose of *curses* is speaker oriented. The speaker doesn't really want to cause any harm for the person or thing cursed, although he momentarily thinks that he does. What he really wants to do is to give expression to his feelings" [Wierzbicka 1987: 164].

In contrast, in the case of the folk ritual of the curse, its real purpose is most certainly object-oriented. In a situation where all the necessary conditions for the curse's felicity are fulfilled, the formula must be uttered

by the speaker regardless of his emotions: the speaker's emotions are irrelevant for its efficacy.

Grochowski's explication also eschews the emotional component ("I feel something bad towards X"). He writes: "When somebody CASTS A CURSE ON SOMEBODY ELSE [KTOŚ RZUCA PRZEKLEŃSTWO NA KOGOŚ] (which is synonymous to the less frequent form SOMEBODY CURSES SOMEBODY [KTOŚ PRZEKLINA KOGOŚ]), the communicate that they wish for some evil to befall another person and, believing in the power of words, utters them in order for his will to be fulfilled." He provides the following explication:

X CASTS A CURSE ON Y

"Thinking about Y, X wants something bad to happen to Y;

X thinks that he/she can cause something bad to happen to Y by speaking

And so X says: let something bad to happen to Y" [Grochowski 1991: 5–6].

The study of the wording of folk curses (of which the examples quoted in this chapter provide a fair representation) leads to the conclusion that the formulas are never explicitly performative (they do not contain the phrase *I curse (you)*). We could, however, call them implicitly performative (or, to use Austin's term, *primary performatives* [Lyons 1979: 728].) **We are dealing with utterances whose semantic structure is 'power, grant that something bad happens to X' and whose illocutionary force can be called the force of the curse.**

In order to further elucidate the semantic field of the "curse proper," or, CURSING<sub>1</sub> (*przeklęcie*)), which in my materials is represented by such units as: *kląć kogo* (*to curse somebody*), *na kogo* (*at somebody*), *komu*; *przekląć kogo* (*to curse somebody, perfective aspect*); *przeklinać kogo* (*to curse somebody, imperfective aspect*), *komu, na kogo* (*to curse at somebody*); *zakląć/zaklinać kogo* (*to curse somebody, perfective and imperfective*), *na kogo* (*at somebody*) and *klątwa* (*a curse*), *klęstwo* (*a curse*), *klon* (*a curse*), *przekleństwo* (*a curse*), *przeklon* (*a curse*), I would like to offer the following semantic explication, which draws on the reduction semantics approach, and on the analysis of natural language.

Y cursed X:

(1) in a situation where X did something bad,

(2) Y who knows that such deeds cannot go unpunished,

And he/she also knows that in this situation he/she can invoke a power, fr obliging the power to cause for something bad to happen to

(3) Y said "O power, grant that something bad happens to X"

Y knows that his/her words will make it so.

The two components of the explication can be termed the preliminary conditions of the curse [Lyons 1979: 743].

The first component (1) takes into account the situational context of the curse. In the preceding chapter I argued that the natural context for a curse is an impasse, a situation with no escape.

The second component (2) characterises the speaker as an appropriate mediator, the performer of the curse ritual. My understanding of this component is at variance with earlier conceptualizations of the term. I reject the components: “Y supposes” [Wierzbicka 1973, 1987] and “Y thinks that he/she says? can cause...” [Grochowski 1991]. To my mind, these conceptualizations do not reflect the essence of the mental state of the curse speaker. In my approach this essence is knowledge. I would contend that the most cogent term to describe this state is “knowing” (and not supposing or thinking.) The semantic component of “to know” is identified as indivisible and universal by Wierzbicka [1999: 8]. Bogusławski clarifies the usage of *know* with the formula ‘somebody knows something about something’ [cf. Bogusławski 1994]. My contention that the component “Y knows” should be used in the explication of the curse is rooted in the fact that *to know* is factual: when somebody says Y knows that Z, they necessarily also say that Z is true. The phrase “Y knows that his/her words will make it so” underlines the **magical** dimension of the curse. The person performing a magical speech act automatically causes the desired results. In this situation, the speaker’s words have agential power.

By their very definition, magical speech acts (which, to quote Lyons again, follow the formula *so be it that p*, assert the occurrence of *p* “in the future state of the world” [Lyons 1979: 843]. They are not bound by the second condition of felicity of speech acts, namely by sincerity (*the speaker genuinely wants the hearer to perform the requested act*). The speaker (Y) is merely a mediator, an instrument of divine justice, and their intention does not matter. If the category of the speaker’s wanting something can be applied at all, it is on a very basic level: we can talk about the speaker wanting a just punishment for wrongdoers (but not wanting for something bad to happen to X). The wish for justice can be interpreted as a desire to safeguard and uphold the fundamental laws of the cultural universe. Because of this distinction, there exists the phenomenon of “unwanted curse” – the speaker can utter the formula inadvertently or unintentionally, but the speech act will still be felicitous. However, in the situation of an unjustified curse, the speaker (Y) becomes the curse the (X) who did something bad. The speaker becomes the wrongdoer, and his/her transgression is the uttering of an unjustified curse. Such an act cannot go unpunished.

In Wierzbicka's rationalized act of enchanting, the only component that harks back to the original magical act is the intuition of "something more than bad" that will happen to X as a result of the curse. It is time to take a more detailed look on "something more than bad" and to analyze the contents of curses, the better to understand the nature of "something more than bad."

## 2. The Contents of Curse Formulas

Bodaj moje słowo тебе pobyło, pohromyło!  
(May my words strike you and vanquish you!)

Collected by Oskar Kolberg

In answer to my question what words can be used to curse, one of my interlocutors replied: "Whatever words you want, depending of what you are thinking" [36]. The curse formula (the wish embedded in the enchantment) can be filled with diverse lexical contents. In other words the speaker can formulate diverse wishes or scenarios regarding the fate of the cursed person. But there are some restrictions to the speaker's freedom. We have seen before that the speaker (with the exception of rare situations where "untypical" utterances become felicitous (effective) curses) should construct his utterance following the above-mentioned formula: "O power, grant that (some specified) harm comes to X." Choosing the this 'something bad' the speaker should conform to the "mirror principle," which is one of the corner stones of folk ethics. The mirror principle stipulates that the punishment which is meted out to the sinner should be "a mirror reflection" of the sin they had committed. There are palpable traces of the Old Testament logic of retaliation in this approach: eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth. Thus, the punishment, 'something bad' or, as Anna Wierzbicka puts it, "something more than bad" should fit the transgression. The mirror principle implies that the harm coming to the transgressor cannot be arbitrary or random: it is an element of a well-designed system, whose first principle is justice. "You pay for death with death, for insult with insult, for harm with harm. The punishment cannot be bigger than the crime" [Obrębski 2005: 69]. The evil wished upon the transgressor is part of the grand scheme of things: it is justified and grounded in the logics of the system, which in the end it serves to uphold.

So now let us assume that the curse fulfils all the prescribed conditions for felicity and it is uttered. The words are spoken and "their perlocutionary effect is an automatic consequence of their illocutionary force" [Lyons 1979: 827], or, as Malinowski puts it: "by the affirmation of a condition which is desired but not yet fulfilled, this condition is

brought about" [Malinowski 1935: 70]. "The creative metaphor of magic" [Malinowski 1935: 70] is at work. A man who is cursed by the words *May you turn into stone!* (*Żebyś ty sie obrócił w kamień!*) [34] duly becomes a stone. The fate of the cursed person is fulfilled.

But what does this fate entail? What are the perlocutionary effects of uttering a curse formula? In the following subchapter, I am going to analyse CURSE<sub>s</sub>.

## 2.1. God's Punishment. The Curse Agent as Curse Executor

Mnie bili – ja budu bić.  
(I have been beaten, so now I will beat.)  
Stanisława of Rouby

There is a group of curse formulas where the speaker implores God to punish the transgressor (*May God punish you!*). Upon close analysis, this formula seems to be tautological as it follows the model *O power, grant that the power (God) does something wrong to X*. A tautology? Perhaps but only in a deep structure that the speaker are not consciously aware of. All the "power enchanting operators" which open curse formulas are lexicalized: whereas *May God himself punish you!* (*Bodaj cię sam Pan Bóg skara!*) [DWOK 22, *Łęcz*: 11] is correct, *\*O God, grant that God punishes you!* (*\*Daj Boże, żeby cię Pan Bóg skara!*) is blatantly incorrect.

We are thus dealing with the situation where the curse agent is also the executor of the curse. Both roles are filled by the same entity, God. It seems that this particular formula might be invoked in the case of especially grave transgressions, where the wrongdoer's punishment should be particularly severe. God punishes the transgressions that offend him, such as blasphemy, sacrilege or recanting one's faith. Many interlocutors in Belarus repeatedly related that God punishes Communists with sudden death because they *fight religion* (i.e. lock up, destroy or plunder churches).

A tut, nu, podumajcie: same polaki raźbirali [kaścioł]. Raźbirali. Jim płacił kołchoz dobra, jany partiju padniali. Paszli Ź partiju, pa praŹdzie skažu. [...] Kreszczenyj czelaŹwiek, i paszoł! I paszoł! I szto potym u hetaha czelaŹwieka? Troje dziaciej było, to adzin syn pad maszynu paszoł, zabiła, a druhi sam palez u reku, toj, i Źtapiłsia. Boh naślał. Wo, dzieťki, da czaho... Adzin pad maszynu paszoł, a druhi pad hetu... [63].

(Just think about it: the Catholics themselves dismantled the church. The kolkhoz paid them well, so they supported the party. They joined the party, that's what they did. There was a man who was baptized, and yet he joined. And what happened to him next? He had three children: one was knocked

down by a car and killed, another walked into a river and drowned. That was God's punishment. On the children, that's how it is.)

Natural disasters are also a typical God's punishment:

U nas niama dażdzu, mo jakoje zaklataje siało? [...] Boh jaho wiedaje, chto zaklaŭ, moża i sami hresznyja [85].

(There's been no rain lately [...] maybe there's a curse on the village? [...] God knows who cursed us. Maybe, sinners that we are, we cursed ourselves?)

Ci, co Boga nie przyznają, to ich Pan Bóg może pokarać, tam tak teraz w Rassieji było: i trzęsieni ziemi, i pozalewało, i pomarło tyle [56].

(Those who do not believe in God can be punished by him. That's what happened in Russia: there were earthquakes and floods, and many people were killed.)

As in the story quoted above where God, disguised as an old man and abused by people, curses them: "A bottomless lake will be here at this spot..." ("Stanie tu u was oзеро bezdonnae...") [61]. It seems that we can draw a parallel between God's punishment which takes the form of natural disasters and the motif of "wrath of the earth" wherein the earth itself is angry at human sins [cf. Uspenskiy 1983].

According to the folk worldview, the punishment of the Jews falls into the same category. The mythical worldview interprets the Holocaust as a just punishment for killing Jesus Christ. God's justice is slow but sure: the punishment is meted out after two millennia. The descendants of the killers are punished, and the punishment fulfils the spell contained in the Bible: "His blood is on us and on our children" [Matthew 27:25].

Oni Boga muczylili. Żydzi Pana Jezusa zabili. Ot, każe, kara wam przyszła. I wsio. [A sprawiedliwa ta kara?] Sprawiedliwa to koniecznie, teraz Pan Bóg wymaga! Mnie bili – ja budu bić, budu karać ludziej [47].

(They tortured God. Jews killed the Lord Jesus. So now, people said, punishment is upon you. [But was the punishment just?] O yes, it was just, it's what God demands. I have been beaten, so now I will beat, I will punish people.)

Mówili ludzie, że żydzi sami siebie przeklęli, bo gdy mordowali Pana Jezusa, to mówili "jeśli ty Bogiem jesteś, to niech krew twoja spadnie na nas i na dzieci nasze." Tak w Piśmie Świętym jest. I tak było. To nie kara, to ich los [46].

(People said that Jews really cursed themselves, for when they were murdering Jesus they said: "If you are God, then may your blood be visited on us and on our children." It says so in the Bible. That's what happened. It was not punishment, it was their fate.)

The fate of the Jews is decided and inexorable. The curse which is upon them for killing Jesus Christ cannot be wiped out. They have committed an unforgivable sin – a deed that, according to my interlocutors, is the mythical model for all murders.

Jak praklaćje źniać z żydoŭ hetych?

– Nie znaju ja hetaha. Chto ź jich znimie? No, chto ź jich moźe źniać? Isus Chrystos jim praklaćje dał...

– Jany praklalib Isusa Chrysta... jany wieczna, na wieczny wiek...

– Isus Chrystos jim za takoje pakajańje. Skolka jany jaho muczali? Jon i krest ciažoŭj nios na sabie, jaho i kroŭ iściekała, jany jaho i bili, jany jaho muczali... Kak jim Isus Chrystos moźe źniać praklaćje? Ni ŭ kakuju nie izmoźe źniać. A wy dumajecie: ispowiedź pamoźe, chto czeławieka ŭbje? Nikahda Isus Chrystos nie praścić takomu czeławieku. Wot, moźe tam za szto paruhajecca ŭ chazajstwie, ci za szto, nu, to heta ŭźe rastrojstwo czeławieka, ot, nie toje dziełaje, szto treba. Wot, na eta ispawiedź ispawieduje. No za ŭbijstwa Isus Chrystos nie praścić nikomu. Ot, tak. Raz ty ździełał heta, on nikahda nie praścić czeławieku za heta. Pa knihach pisze [59, 58].

(How can one lift the curse from the Jews?)

– I don't know. Who could lift it? They were cursed by Jesus I think...

– They cursed Jesus themselves, forever, for all time.

– Jesus Christ punished them for it. Why they tormented him so? He had to carry the heavy cross, he was beaten bloody, and they still hit him and tormented him... So how can Jesus lift this curse? He just can't! And you think: what would a confession help if someone kills a man? Jesus Christ would never forgive such a man. Well, if you quarrel with somebody, or if you are angry and do something rash, then a confession will wipe your slate clean. But Jesus would never forgive murder. That's how it is. So if you did it, you won't be forgiven. That's what is says in the books.)

What is more, my interlocutors were firmly convinced that Jews were aware of their guilt and of the justice of their punishment:

Wot kiedyś w Wasiliszkach [Niemcy] wypędzili tych żydów i ten ich kierowca, rabin [...] wystąpił i powiedział: "Moje ludzje zgrzeszyli przed Panem Bogiem i przyszedł ten czas, że my, znaczy, nie uwierzyli w Pana Boga, i my dojdziem tylko do tego, co z nami się stało. I to, mówi, tylko przez Pana Jezusa. Dlatego, że, mówi, Pan Jezus, jak do Piłata przyprowadzili, Piłat powiedział, że w tym człowieku ja nic nie mam. [...] To Piłat obmył ręce i mówi: 'niech spadnie na was i na wasze syny'" [54].

(When the Germans were taking away the Jews from Vasilishki, the rabbi stood in front of them and told them: "My people sinned against God and now the time of punishment has come. We did not recognize God when he came to us and now this is happening. This is all because of Jesus Christ.")

He said that when Jesus was brought before the Pilate, he washed his hands off it and said: 'Let it be upon you and upon your sons.'")

We are dealing here with the mythical trope of curse as God's punishment, which is well rooted in the biblical tradition. The pattern involves punishment on all those responsible for the death of Christ. By extension, all non-Christians (and in folk culture, the Jews are the standard stand-in for all non-Christians) are culpable. They are left outside the community (understood as a community of Christians.) This pattern is prefigured by Old Testament curses, notably the curse of Adam and Eve and the curse of Cain. In the apocryphal worldview of my interlocutors, the story of Christ's passion and death becomes the "mythical beginning," the foundation of all rules of behavior and principles of operation of the world. The crucifixion of Jesus not only became the fount of different faiths, but also established the precedent CURSE<sub>s</sub> – a just punishment of sinners (here exemplified by the Jews). One of my interlocutors described this aspect of the crucifixion in detail:

– Czerez try dnia kryczali ũsie: "Raspni, raspni jeho, krou jaho na nas i na dietiach naszych!" O, jak sahraszyl! Nie to, szto krou heta pała takaja – biedy takije ũsio, wo i chleba nie ma, i zasucha bywaje, i doždź zaliwaja, i izdziajut'sa [tj. szydzą, naigrawają się] czeławiek nad czeławiekam. Ot, eta ũsio ad toha wremieni pryszło, katoraja heta wremia było, szto etyje ludi sahraszyl: "Krou jeho na nas!" Krou Isusa Chrysta, jeśli razapnut', na jich padaja, eta praklatije. I z toho pakaleńnia paszoł hrech na tych ludziej, i na diatiej, i na ũnukaũ, i na praũnukaũ, i da siehodniaszniego dnia idzie eta na nas ichnaja praklatije.

A jakije byli hety ludzi?

– Jakije ludzi byli? Ludzi byli ũsie żydy.

Ci na ũsich ludziej jana pała?

– Ana, eta krou?

No, praklatije toje...

– Wychodzić, na ũsich.

Usieź praklatyja?

– Da. Wsieże. Wsieże tady byli żydy i ũsie hetyje żydy muczali. Wot. Pahladzicie wo na żydoũ. Praklatije pała. Pahladzicie, skolka Niemiec ubił jich. Jich mała, mała hdzie, hdzie nie zaniał Niemiec, tyje tolka astalisia [63].

(– For three days they all shouted: "Crucify him, crucify him, his blood upon us and our children!" Oh how they sinned! In truth his blood was visited upon them and all evils start from it: hunger and lack of bread, draught, floods and human mockery. All this stems from that time, from that hour of sin, when they shouted: "His blood on us!" The blood of Jesus Christ, whom they crucified, falls on them and they are cursed. From that generation the sin

is visited on their children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren – up to this day, they are all cursed.’

So who were they?

– They were all Jews

So this curse fell upon all those people?

– Yes, on all of them.

And they were all cursed?

– Yes. All Jews who were alive then, all of them tormented him. Just look at the Jews. They have been cursed. Look how many Germans have killed. There are hardly any Jews left now. Only in those places where the Germans didn’t get, there are some Jews left.)

Apart from interviews, beggar songs also yield interesting material for an analysis of the divine curse. A ballad which was circulated in handwritten copies in the parish of Vaverka in the neighbourhood of Lida (Belarus) contains a classical take on the subject: after the preliminary warning that a sin (murder) will be punished by God, followed by the immediate divine retaliation, which conforms to the mirror principle (death for death.)

Ojciec jej mówi: ach żona kochana,  
nie moga dzieciom być za tyrana,  
Bóg mi bym skarał tu na tym świecie,  
by zamordował swe własne dziecko.  
Żona, zrażona męża słowami,  
bierze nóż w ręce, leci schodami.  
Ja sie znów kary bożej nie boje,  
ja pozabije te dzieci twoje.  
Dzieci sie ze snu razem zerwały,  
kiedy macoche z nożem ujrzały.  
Co sama zbrodnie wykonać chciała,  
zaraz na schodach martwą sie została.  
Ludzie sie zeszli, na cud patrzali,  
zamiast kobiety kamień zobaczyli.  
Pan Bóg ją skarał za urąganie  
i za złe z dziećmi postępowanie [53].

(The father say, oh my dear wife  
I cannot be a tyrant to my own children  
God would punish me without mercy  
If I killed my own child.  
But the wife will not be moved:  
She grabs a knife and goes upstairs.  
‘I’m not afraid of God’s punishment,  
If you don’t dare to kill them, I will.”

Now the children wake up in their beds  
 And they see the stepmother with the knife.  
 She wanted to do the bloody deed,  
 But instead she fell dead on the stairs.  
 People came from far and wide  
 To see this miracle: instead of a woman  
 There was a stone statue on the stairs.  
 So God punished her for her reviling  
 And for being wicked to the children.)

The murderous wife's phrase: "I'm not afraid of God's punishment" can be treated as the cause of God's swift retribution. God expects people to lead godly lives and to live in fear of him. So if somebody declares their lack of fear, this in itself is a sin that God will punish. The punishment is death (in the ballad it takes the form of turning into stone). There is no escaping the punishment: the folk God is just, implacable, and not forgiving:

Wot, widzicie: nikoli płocha nie można dziełać, nikoli czeławieku, nikahda. A wy dumajecie, chto kaho ůbje, to heta Boh praścić? Nikahda! Jeśli maleńkij rabionak, dyk jon nie imieje uma, ździełaje szto płachoje, a czeławiek wzrosłyj, dwadcać let, wasiemnadcać let, skolka, i dziełaja podłaść – i razwie jamu Boh praścić? Nikahda! Nie pamoże ni spowiedź, nie pamoże niczoha czeławieku takomu. Ot [63].

(Look here, you should never do others harm, never. Do you think that when somebody kills someone, God will forgive them? Never! If a small kid, who does not know any better, does something wrong, that's a different matter. But when you're an adult, eighteen or twenty years old, and you do something mean – can God forgive you? Never! Even confession will not make it right. That's how it is.)

Curse formulas that implore God to punish the wrongdoer rely implicitly on the mirror principle. They ask God to mete out punishment without specifying what form that punishment should make. It is enough for the speaker to invoke the general rule: a wrong must be punished. "When they curse somebody for their wrongs, they say *May God punish you!*" ("Gdy przeklinają za swoją krzywdę, mówią: *bodaj tebe Boh tiazko skaraw!*"), Kolberg notes in his volume on Chełm region [DWOK 34, *Chełm* 2: 219].

The widespread formula *May God repay you for this!* (*Niech ci Pan Bóg odpłaci!*) reveals the underlying vision of a just God who metes out punishments proportionate to the wrongs, which has been reinforced by one of my interlocutors from Podlasie: "it is not true that God does not punish people in this world. Everyone gets what they deserve" ("Nieprawda, że

Pan Bóg na tym świecie nikogo nie karze. Każden jak sobie zasłuży, tak będzie miał”) [5]. The idea of divine punishment can be identified with God’s vengeance (*O God, avenge me for my wrongs! – Spuomśćsie, Boża, za maju kryudu!*) [LB 4: 406], or divine intervention whose goal it is to avenge grievous sins that “call upon God to avenge them.”

The wronged person says: *I will not forgive him, let God forgive him!* (*Ja mu nie daruje, niech mu Pan Bóg nie daruje!*) [13], *May God never forgive you!* (*Żeby ci Bóg nie darował!*) [38] or *Let God punish him!* (*Niech go Pan Bóg skarże!*) [DWOK 42, Maz 7: 225]. Sometimes the curse formula contains the trope of the “avenging hand of the Lord”: *May God’s hand punish you!* (*Niech cie ręka boska skara!*) [SGPKarł: Skarać], or: *May you be touched by God’s hand!* (*A bodaj cię ręka Boża dotknęła!*) [DWOK 22, Łęcz: 11]. God’s hand can hit and kill, e.g., the Ukrainian formula *May God vanquish you!* (*Bodaj te boh pobyv!*) [DWOK 29, Pok 1: 21] and the Belarusian formula *May God kill you!* (*A kab ciebie Buoh zabiŭ!*) [LB 4: 405]. It can also wield thunder, an instrument for defeating sinners who are enemies of God.

Thunder is referenced in multiple formulas, e.g.: *May you be struck by thunder!* (*Żeby cię piorun zabił!*) [37], *May you be struck and killed by the first thunder of the spring!* (*Żeby cię piorun, jak pierw zagrzm, żeby zabił!*) [55], *May you be burned by thunder!* (*Ażeby cię pioruny trzaśły!*) [SGPKarł: Bodaj], *May it please God that they should be killed by thunder!* (*Żeby ich, dał Bóg, piorun wybił!*) [Czarnyszewicz 1991: 439], *May you be struck by thunder if you marry her!* (*Kab ciabie pioruny biły, jak będziesz się żenić z joju!*) [65], *May the thunder strike you and kill you!* (*Bodaj tebe perun byv y zabyv!*) [DWOK 33, Chełm 1: 31].

The death of the curse object as a result of thunder features in the ballad about the wicked Gienia, which I analyzed in detail above, and which I consider to be the blueprint for all situations of parental curse. It should also be stressed that my interlocutors, in accordance with the mythical logic, replace the struggle between the Thunderer and his enemy with the story of the death of Christ. It turns out that striking the cursed person with thunder was prefigured in the mythical time of beginnings:

Kahda Isus Chrystos umirał na kreście, adrazu mońńja paczałaśia z toha času. Piaruny naczałi strelać wsio wremia. Woś ziemia kałychałaśia. I heta paliła ludziej, paliła wot niejaka. Ad toha wremieni tak rabiłaśia. A paka Isus Chrystos na kreście nie umirał, da toha wremieni nie było hetych, ni pierunou, ni czoha. Wot. I ad toha času aż ziemia tresiecca, jak hetyje hrymoty. A kawo ũbiwaje, eta ũžo silna hresznaja siemja ź dziadoŭ, z pradziadoŭ [...] I heta Boh nasylaŭje, o [63].

(When Jesus Christ was dying on the cross, thunder struck. Thunders were striking the ground, the earth was shaking, and people were burning. There

were fires. And that's when it all started. Before Jesus died on the cross, there were no thunders, no lightning. And since then, the earth can shake and there are thunders. If someone is killed by thunder, it means that the family must be very sinful, since their grandfathers' or great-grandfathers' generation. For God sends thunder.)

### 2.1.1. A Special Case: Virgin Mary as Curse Executor

Since the sinner can be punished in diverse ways, it is common-sensical to assume that the executors of the curse can also vary. It seems that the performance of this role by Virgin Mary (or, as she is commonly referred to in Poland, the Mother of God (*Matka Boska*) is a particularly interesting, as well as rare, case. As Florian Znaniecki puts it, the Virgin Mary “became one of Poland’s most powerful divinities through the many churches, miracles, and legends” [Thomas, Znaniecki 1927: 266].

In the folk religiosity, the primary function of Virgin Mary is that of a protectress and intercessor of sinners (she intercedes with her son, Jesus the Judge, on behalf of souls in purgatory.) She is the Mother of Mercy, who comes to the aid of sinners, “a truly effective protector and intercessor whose power operates in both words” [cf. Zowczak 2013: 394–415, 427–449]. However, an analysis of curse-related material reveals that, apart from her well-researched primary role of protector, she can also appear in a secondary role of the executor of God’s punishment. In such curse formulas as *May the Mother of God punish you! (A bodaj cię Matka Boska skarata!)* [DWOK 16, *Lub* 1: 26], *May Our Lady of Skalnik punish you! (Żeby cię Matka Boska Skalnicka pokarata!)* [Kotula 1974: 240], which reflect the basic curse formula: “O power, make Z do something [bad] to X.” The stipulated doer of “something bad” is no other than Virgin Mary. In relation to the latter formula, the folklorist Franciszek Kotula noted down the following custom:

The firm belief in great power of the picture of Our Lady of Skalnik is clearly visible in the following custom: when somebody used up all the means at his disposal to defeat an enemy, both “human” and magical, after cursing the enemy in the most elaborate sort, as a last resort they would publicly say to their adversary *May Our Lady of Skalnik punish you!* [Kotula 1974, s. 240].

Based on this account, we can surmise that the curse formulas invoking the Virgin Mary would be supposed to be specially potent. In Kotula’s account, the speakers invoke the power of a specific religious painting: the agential power of Virgin Mary herself and of the painting add up, joined in the curse formula, and make the curse stronger. Perhaps its potency derives from the reversal of Virgin Mary’s usual role: now she is

not a benevolent protectress, but an avenger. This reversal might be akin to breaking a taboo (and thus related to CURSING<sub>4</sub>.) though the scarcity of material makes this constatation only tentative. But a more in-depth analysis of the counterintuitive trope of “Mother of God as avenger” would definitely be fruitful and could shed light on a hitherto unknown aspect of folk religiosity.”

The materials I have collected indicate that, according to the folk worldview, only God and Virgin Mary can punish wrongdoers (the operative verbs in Polish are *skarać* and *pokarać*.) Perhaps counterintuitively, I have not recorded any formulas such as *\*May the devil punish you*. It seems therefore that in the context of folk curse formulas, Virgin Mary is a stand-in for God, a sort of a substitute female Judge. The role of curse executor, seperated on the semantic level, here, on the level of beliefs, is connected with the role of the agent. It is confirmed by examples from Belarus, quoted by Michał Federowski: the formula *Grant it, Holy Mother! (Mataczko Najświętsza daj!)* is added to “virtually every curse [*przekleństwo*]” [LB 4: 405]. Federowski gives two examples of such usage: *You stole my money and now, grant it, Holy Mother, may you spend it all on doctors! (Ukrał ty moje hroszy, kab ty, Matka Najświętsza daj, na znachary heto addaj)*. And *May you, so grant God and Holy Mother, be as white as this shirt! (Kab ty, Boża, Matka Najświętsza daj, tak zbiałeū, jak taja saroczka biała!)* [cursing someone who stole the speaker’s shirt; LB 4: 419]. Perhaps, just like God, Virgin Mary should also be treated as both the agent and the executor?

It is only when we analyse specific punishments meted out by God or Virgin Mary that we see that the executor of the curse who is definitely not the agent: the negative side of the sacred. Fort the devil cannot curse. He can only “fly around people carrying curses [...] After all, Jesus said ‘vengeance is mine.’” (“krążyć wokół człowieka i nosić przekleństwa. [...] bo Pan Jezus powiedział: ‘zemstę zostawcie mnie’”) The devil can only tempt people to sin, because sinners fall into his power. The devil is the executor of CURSE<sub>s</sub> – of the “state of being cursed.” He acts on the principle expressed in the proverb *When God judges you, so does the devil (Kali Buoh sudzić, to i czort)* [LB 4: 37]

## 2.2. The Devil in His Many Guises as Curse Executor

The sinner is taken over by the evil sacrum, which can be viewed as the fourth, largely latent, participant of the curse ritual, hiding ominously behind the backs of other participants. Vengeance is fulfilled through the discharge of the action specified by the curse executor. The curse

*May you go to vengeance! (Pójdź sobie do pomsty!)* testifies to a merging of the action with its doer, and serves as an illustration of the semantic formula of the curse and of the ritual which is inscribed therein. According to the *Polish Language Dictionary*, the word *pomsta* (*vengeance*) is synonymous with “devil, likho, the evil one” [SW: *Pomsta*].

What are the characteristics of the negative pole of the sacrum in its role of curse executor?

Primarily, the devil can *kidnap* the sinner (*porwać* or *wziąć*): *Let the devil take him to hell! (A bodaj go diabli porwali do piekła)* [SGP: *Bodaj*], *Let the devils take you to hell alive! (A bodaj cię diabli żywcem do piekła porwali!)* [DWOK 22, Łęcz: 11], *May all the devils take me! (Niech mnie wszyscy diabli porwą)*, *May three hundred devils take him! (Niech trzysta diabłów porwie)* [NKP: *Diabeł*]; or he can simply *have* the sinner: *You’re so stubborn that let the devil have you! (Bodaj cię diabeł miał z takim uporem!)* [SW, *Diabeł*]. The sinner can also *go* to the devil (as in the common phrase *Go to hell!*). But more interestingly, the devil can also be *drunk*: *May you drink the devil (Bogdaj wypił diabła)* [NKP: *Diabeł*]; or *eaten*: *May you eat the devil (Bogdaj diabła zjadło)* [NKP, *Diabeł*], *May you eat three hundred devils! (Bogdajeś trzysta diabłów zjadł)* [DWOK 48, TarnRzesz: 318].

The two latter kinds of formulas refer to the magical practice of “serving” the devil, magic or illness in food – mostly in vodka. This practice was very well known to my interlocutors, who referred to it frequently:

Mąż jeszcze był kawalerem, jak pojechał za Bug z weselem. To, mówi, że na weselu jedna druhá tak na niego popatrzała i wzięła jemu podała kieliszek – bo kiedyś to jednym kieliszkiem się piło – “Ja wypięłam i daj Boże i ty wypijesz.” Jak podała, jeden z boku patrzył na to. Ale on od razu nie wypięł, tylko tak postał z tym kieliszkiem, bo rozmawiał. Jak się obrócił, jemu od razu – trzask! – denko się odkroiło. I wódka się wylała. A ten od razu z boku – on już wiedział: “Ty wiedzmo, ty taka nie taka, co ty zrobiła!” “A ty – mówi – masz szczęście, bo byś był wysechł na skorupę.” Bo to podobno jakiś proszak ze żmii sypali [23].

(Before my husband met me, he went to a wedding on the other side of River Bug. There was a girl there, one of the bridesmaids. She looked at him and gave him a glass. He took it – in those days people drunk from the same glass. She told him “I drank some, now you drink some.” She gave him the glass, and there was another man watching them. So my husband didn’t drink at once, he was just standing with the glass in his hand, talking to someone. And then suddenly the bottom fell off and the vodka spilled. And the man who was watching them said to the girl: “You witch! What were you trying to do?” And he said to my husband: “You’re lucky! If you drank it, you would be dry like a bone.” Because apparently they could put dried vipers in your vodka.)

One of curse formulas quoted above *May the devils take you to hell alive*, along with similar formulas *May the hell take you!* (*Bodaj to piekło pochłoneło*) [NKP: *Piekło*], *May you never escape from hell* ( ) [DWOK 22, *Łęcz:* 11], *May you never scramble out of hell* (*Bodajeś z piekła nie wyjrzał*) [NKP: *Piekło*] illustrate the rule that we have also seen in operation in the story of Gienia the wicked daughter: the sinner joins the dark side, becomes the property of the “bad” sacred. It is confirmed by such proverbs like e.g. *Devil, take what is yours* (*Bierz diable, co twego*) or *What came from the devil returns to the devil* (*Co od diabła wyszło, do diabła powraca*) [NKP: *Diabeł*]. It happens because the sinner gives way to the devil’s temptation and stands on the side of evil, and in opposition to life and therefore goodness. The first step on the way to hell is “sinning in speech”, and especially, as we know, CURSING<sub>4</sub> (swearing), for *who swears, rings the bell for the devil’s mass* [NKP: *Kląc*].

The folk beliefs clearly show the existence of a “chain of evil,” from swearing (CURSE<sub>4</sub>) through sin, the devil and the curse (CURSE<sub>1</sub>) to death. A good illustration of this chain is the folk tale trope T 828 *The devil invents vodka* (*Diabeł stwarza gorzałkę*): “The devil could not lead a virtuous man astray with tricks, teaches him how to make vodka. The man makes it, gets drunk and starts swearing” [PBL 1: 259]. In fact, vodka can be seen as one more link in “the chain of evil”: it is one of the most powerful tools that the devil has at his disposal (besides swearing.)

zły duch ukazuje się człękowi, “który w pijaństwie bardzo się zatowarzyszy” (pijanicy), albo przekleńnikowi (temu, co rad przeklina). Ofiarom swoim odbiera nieraz przytomność, wprowadza ich w moczary, z których wygramolić się nie mogą, lub nawodzi do odebrania sobie życia, np. utopienia, powieszenia, zabicia się [DWOK 48, *TarnRzesz:* 266].

(The evil spirit shows himself to a drunk or to a *przekleńnik* (somebody who swears too much). He often renders his victims unconscious or leads them to the marshes where they stumble and drown, he can also force them to kill themselves, especially to hang themselves or drown.)

The symbolic relationship between vodka and the devil is highlighted in the following proverb: *When you’re drunk like a beast, the devil can steal your soul* (*Jak sie upijes jak zwieze, diobuł ci duse zabieze*) [Połęcki 1976: 40]. No wonder then that there are curse formulas that specifically refer to alcohol: *May you drink yourself to death* (*Ażebyś się zachłał*) [DWOK 22, *Łęcz:* 11].

My interlocutors were convinced that “when you swear, the devil can possess you” (“jak ktoś przeklina, diabeł może go opanować”) [11]. It is not only due to the fact that a sinner is in the power of the devil, but is also required by the iron logic of the magical speech-action: uttering

a name of a power, which is taboo, effects the immediate appearance of the power. When the sinner swears (CURSE<sub>4</sub>), he unconsciously enchants the evil power. And because he is not an experienced magician or healer, but only an ordinary person, inadvertently breaking the taboo, he “falls prey” to the power he had invoked. This is his punishment for breaking the taboo (or, to put it more broadly, for committing the sin. Swearing is the first step on the slippery slope, it seems to be the necessary condition of sin. After all, the devil invented vodka specifically because he wanted men to curse. “Satan was tempting me to leave my wife, but he didn’t succeed, for I didn’t start swearing, and didn’t start quarrelling with her” (“To szatan mnie kusił, żeby się rozstać z żoną, ale nie udało się, bo ja nie przeklinałem, wcale się nie kłóciłem z żoną”) [26]. This quotation from an interview recorded in Podlasie confirms the existence of the “chain of evil.”

Swearing is thus not only the reason, and the symptom of evil, but also a sign of cooperation with the devil. After all speaking is an act of mediation, in this case – between man and Satan. If the order of the universe is disturbed, it leads to anxiety:

To już wszystko w boskich rękach. Jedna rodzina tu dobra, a chłopaka piorun zabił. Dlaczego nie takiego, co przeklina? [18].

(Everything is in God’s hands. There was a family living here, good people. And the boy was struck by lightning and killed. Why didn’t the lightning strike somebody who swears?)

Still, “everything is in God’s hands.” Even if at this point the death in the ostensibly God-fearing family seems random, somehow the balance of the world will be restored. “Somebody who swears” will probably yet be punished by their transgression (for “God is patient, he has all the time in the world” – “Pan Bóg ma czas, on cierpliwý jest” [36]), and the “good boy killed by lightning” (“chłopaka piorun zabił”) was probably killed for a reason – in all likelihood, the family had been cursed.

As the word “devil” itself is so powerful, no wonder that it is often replaced by euphemisms. Sometimes it is simply omitted: *May you eat or drink one!* (*Bodajeś jednego zjadł albo wypił*) or *May they all possess you!* (*Bodaj wszyscy w cię wstąpili*) [Brückner 1980: 297]. It can also be substituted by slightly phonetically modified (and thus safe) variants: *diasek* [NKP: *Diabeł*; cf. Masłowska 1987: 79] or *jabeł* [SGPKarł: *Djabeł*] can replace *diabeł* (the devil). The euphemisms used for the devil are startlingly ambiguous: very often it is not clear whether they refer to the devil or to some other entity belonging to “the bad sacred,” to an illness, or to generalized and undifferentiated evil. This ambiguity

might be troubling for linguists or lexicographers, but not for the folk culture subjects themselves. The folk culture perceives the ambiguity as perfectly understandable: evil exists in many forms and guises, and this fact is reflected in the language. The euphemisms for the devil include:

**bies/bis** (devil): *Go to the devil (Idź do biesa), May the devils take it (Bodaj to bisi wzięli)* [NKP: *Diabeł*; cf. Maślowska 1987: 78];

**boruta** (a forest devil): *May Boruta strangle him, or rip his head off (Żeby go Boruta zdusił, albo mu łeb urwał)* [DWOK 22: *Łęcz*: 258];

**cud/czud** (literally: a miracle; devil, *euph.*): *May a miracle kill you (Bodaj cię cud zabił)* [DWOK 48, *TarnRzesz*: 318], *May a miracle fall on you! (Żeby na ciebie cud)* [SW: *Cud*];

**czart** (devil): *May the devils take him (Niech go czarci wezmą), May the devil snatch you (Bodaj cię czart porwał), May them go to the devil (Bodaj poszły do czarta!)* [NKP, *Diabeł*; cf. Maślowska 1987: 78–79];

**drab** (devil; *euph.*): *May drabs take you! (Niech ich porwą drabi!), May drabs take him! (By go drabi wzieni!)* [SGPKarł: *Drab*], *May you be turned into drabs! (A bodajśta sie w drobów poobracali)* [SGPKarł: *Bodaj*];

**kat** (an executioner): *May you be taken by executioners! (Bodaj cię kaci wzieni!)* [SGPKarł: *Kat*], *May you eat an executioner! (A bojanzes [tak] kata zjadła!)* [SGPKarł: *Bogdaj*], *May executioners take them! (Bodaj jeich byli da pobrali kaci!)* [SW, *Kat*], *May executioners take him and his wiles! (Niech go kaci porwą z jego bałamuctwami)* [SW, *Porwać*];

**korfanty** (devil; *euph.*): *May I eat or drink korfanty! (Bodaj żebym ja był korfantego zjadł abo wypił)* [NKP: *Diabeł*];

**likho** (likho): *May likho take you! (Bodaj cię likho porwało!)* [NKP: *Diabeł*], *May the horrible likho take you! (Bodaj ciężkie likho wzięło!)*, [DWOK 33, *Chełm* 1: 31], *May horrible the likho kidnap you! (Żeby cię likho ciężkie porwało)* [SW: *Porwać*], *May likho carry him into the deep! (Niech go likho niesie na głębinę)* [NKP: *Diabeł*], *May likho have you! (Bodaj cię likho!)* [SW: *Bodaj*], *May your goat eat three hundred likhos! (Bodajby wasza koza trzysta lichów zjadła!)* [SGPKarł: *Licho*], *May you eat likho! (Bodajeś licha zjadł!)*, *Go to likho! (Idź do licha!)*, *May likho take you! (Niech cię likho porwie!)* [SW: *Licho*, cf. Maślowska 1987: 84–85];

**smętek/smutki** (literally: sorrow/sorrows; devil): *May sorrows take you! (Bodaj cię smutki porwały!)* [DWOK 48, *TarnRzesz*: 318], *May sorrow have you! (A niechże was smętek!)*, *May sorrow take him! (Niech go smętek weźmie)* [SGPKarł, *Smętek*];

**wciurnasek** (devil): *May wciurnasek take him! (Niech cię wciurnasek bierze)* [SGPKarł: *Paraliż*];

**zmora** (wraith): *May wraiths take him!* (*Żeby go zmory wzięły*) [SW: *Zmora*] and its variant **kicimora** (**kikimora**): *May kikimora strangle you all night long!* (*Bodaj cię kicimora bez całą noc dusiła!*) [SW: *Kicimora, Kikimora*].

Apart from euphemisms for the devil, the word *devil* can be replaced altogether by reference to “evil,” e.g. *May evil befall him* (*Niech go złe spotka*) [SW: *Złe*], *May evil stand in your path!* (*A bodaj ci (złe) na drodze stanęło*) [DWOK 22, *Łęcz*: 11]. And the term *evil* can also be omitted, and thus we can encounter ambiguous formulas like *May it befall you* (*Azeby cię wodziło (złąkało)*) [DWOK 33, *Chełm* 1: 31]. It can also be replaced by *the evil hour*: *May the evil hour befall you!* (*Kab ciebie nie minęła lichaja godzina!*) [LB 4: 408]. And finally, the meeting with the devil can be called precisely that – *a meeting* (*spotyka*): *May a meeting (spotyka) come to you!* (*Bodaj na tebe spotyka najszła!*) [DWOK 33, *Chełm* 1: 31].

“Something more than bad,” which envelops the cursed person due to the agency of the “bad sacred” can also be presented as *kidnapping*, or *taking* (*by force*.) A curse formula that is especially illuminating in this context is *May you vanish!* (*Bodajęś przepadł!*) that also includes variants *May I vanish if I break my word* (*Bodajem przepadł, jeżeli nie dotrzymam słowa!*) and *May the despicable drunkenness vanish in hell!* (*Bodaj w piekło przepadło obrzydłe pijaństwo!*) [SW: *Bodaj*]. The implication that the verb *przapaść* (*to vanish*) in this context suggests that the cursed person will vanish in hell is corroborated by a range of proverbs, e.g. *Some things vanish so thoroughly that even the devil doesn’t know where they went* (*Niejedno tak przepadnie, że i diabeł nie odgadnie*) or *It vanished like a stone thrown into the depths* (*Przepadł, jak w otchłań wrzucił*) [NKP, *Przepadać*], and also in the commonly used protective formula, used to safeguard the speaker against evil: *Die, vanish!* (*Zgiń, przepadnij!*) which clearly sends the manifestations of the “bad sacred” whence they came.

## 2.3. The Fate of the Cursed

May you be met by a curse.  
(Bodaj cię przekleństwo spotkało.)  
Collected by Kolberg

### 2.3.1. Disease

As testified by the formula *May the evil one bring you cholera!* (*Niech wam jabel cholere przyniesie!*) [SGPKarł: *Djabeł*], a possible activity of the curse executor is causing disease. This possibility is also proved by the existence of the term *chorobnik*, which featured above in one of

the curse formula examples. According to SGPKarł, *chorobnik* is ‘a spirit of disease’ (‘*duch choroby*’). The formulas referring to *chorobnik* include *May chorobnik take them!* (*Bodaj ich chorobnik porwał!*) and *Go to chorobnik!* (*Idź do chorobnika!*) [DWOK 42, Maz 7: 628]. It is impossible to separate the disease, its personification and the agent that brings it. “The boundary between the disease and the demon who causes it is sometimes very fluid” [Budziszewska 1989: 153]. And what do curse formulas tell us about diseases?

How do curse formulas reflect this possibility? Some of them simply express the wish that the cursed should become sick: *May you be sick!* (*Niech cię choroba ciśnie!*) [SW: *Choroba*], *May you be beaten by disease!* (*Niech cię choroba bije!*) [SGPKarł: *Choroba*], *May sickness take him!* (*Żeby go choroba porwała, tego natręta!*) [SW: *Porwać*], *May sickness pummel him!* (*Żeby cię choroba utłukła!*) [DWOK 2, Sand: 246], *May three diseases fall on you!* (*Bodaj cię trzy choroby utłukły!*) [DWOK 16, Lub 1: 26] or that they should lose their health: *May you have no health left!* (*Bodaj zdrowia nie miał!*) [SGPKarł: *Bogdaj*], *You stole my money and now, grant it, Holy Mother, may you spend it all on doctors!* (*Ukrają ty moje hroszy, kab ty, Matka Najświętsza daj, na znachary heto addaą!*) [LB 4: 419].

A popularly invoked specific disease is *cholera*: *May cholera take you!* (*A żeby cię cholera wzięła!*) [SW: *Cholera*], *May cholera strangle them all!* (*A bodaj ich cholera wyduszyła!*) [DWOK 33, Chełm 1: 31], *May cholera, plague, pestilence fall upon you!* (*Niech cię cholera, dżuma, zaraza*) (common saying). Diseases such as cholera or plague are spread by pestilential air: *May the air strike you!* (*A bodaj cię powietrze raziło*) [DWOK 22, Łęcz: 11].

An important characteristic of curse-induced diseases is their suddenness. In one formula, the word “suddenness” (*nagłość*) became in effect a synonym for “disease”: *May suddenness take you!* (*Niech cię nagłości ogarną!*) [SGPKarł: *Nagłość*]. SGPKarł, defines *suddenness* as “sudden pain” and according to SW, *sudden illness* “cholera” [SW: *Nagły*].

Apart from cholera, another disease commonly found in curse formulas is *the fever* (*febra*), which appears under many different names: *May the fever claim him!* (*Żeby go febra porwała!*) [SW: *Porwać*]. It is also called *the cold* (*zimno*): *May you shake with the cold* (*Bodaj cię zimno trzęsło*) [DWOK 7, Krak 3: 163], *the shakes* (*trasca, ograżka*): *God grant it that the shakes shake you for seven years without stopping!* [LB 4: 416]; *May the shakes (ograżka) carry you from the earth to heaven and back again!* (*Żeby cię ograżka nieśla od ziemi do nieba i napowrót bez końca!*) [DWOK 16, Lub 1: 26]. It can also be referenced in a more oblique way: *May you get the shakes, together with your kids* (*Bodaj się zatrzęsła ze swojemi dziećmi!*) [24].

In turn, the formula *May God throw you to the ground like this!* (*Żeby cię Pan Bóg tak rzucił!*) [38], quoted by one of my interlocutors when she was telling me how a wicked son mistreated his mother and “threw her on the ground,” refers obliquely to *epilepsy*, yet another disease in the folk curse repertoire. *Epilepsy* is also called *the great disease* (*wielka choroba*) or just *the disease* (*choroba*): *May the great disease kill you!* ( ) [DWOK 28, Maz 5: 31], *May the disease whack you between heaven and hell* ( ) [DWOK 22, Łęcz: 11]. My interlocutors also referred to it using the word *przypadzisko* (*accident*): “He got *the accident*. He is still alive, he lives here, nearby. And he is still scare of people” [38]. My interlocutors also referred to it as *the case* (*przypadek*):

Jeżeli to się dzieje w rodzinie, to rodzina jednak to ukrywa. [...] Ale jednak coś jest, coś jest. Że to na przykład się tam zaklina – czy tam to, czy tam nie to – i jednak gdzieś, gdzieś jakieś coś jest. Na przykład ja wydałam córkę za męża, i ten zięć miał wypadek. No i oni to ukryli, nie przyznali się. Raz trzy dni po weselu rzuciło go zaraz w sionkach, na trzeci dzień znów rzuciło go na podwórku – sąsiedzi widzieli. No i co – i trzeba było się rozejść [42].

(If it happens in a family, they try to hide it. [...] But it is still there. For example, when my daughter got married, it occurred that my son-in-law has this *case*. And his family hid it, they didn't tell us. Once, just three days after the wedding, he got thrown around in the hall, and three days later – in the backyard. The neighbors all saw it. And what could you do? They had to separate.)

They also called it *St Valentine's disease*:

[Czarownik powiedział:] “Trasi, trasi, budzie ciebie traści aż da śmierci. Póki ty budziesz żyć, to ciebie wsio budzie tak traści.” I tak u jeha było, jeha heta kidała choroba aż da śmierci. Wisz, jaka choroba? Walentowa. Ja nie wiem, jak po polsku nazywa sie. Wot [51].

([The sorcerer said:] “So you will quake and tremble until you die. As long as you live, you will always quake.” And so it happened that he was thrown around by the disease until he died. It was Valentine's disease.)

Another disease in the folk curse repertoire is *paralysis* (*paraliż*): *May paralysis harm you!* (*Bodaj cie paralus naruszył*) [Pleszczyński 1892: 105], *Go to paralysis!* (*Wynoś się do paralusa, Idź do paralusa*) [SGPKarł: *Paraliż*], *May paralysis claim your arms and legs so that for twenty years you shit under you!* (*Żeby tobie paraliż ręce i nogi odjął i żeby ze dwadzieścia lat sobie pod bok robił!*) [Czarnyszewicz 1991: 422]. A person can also be *twisted* (*pokręcony, pokręcić*): *May you be twisted!* (*Niech cię pokręci!*) *I wish it*

*twists you!* ( ) [common sayings]. *Twisting* or *turning* of body parts seems connected with another interesting and as yet under-researched disease which often appears in folk accounts: *the plait* (*plica polonica*, *kołtun*): *May the plait twist you!* (*Bodaj cię kołtun skręci!*) [DWOK 3, *Kuj* 1: 98].

Accidents and physical harm that can befall the cursed person may also result in *disability* (*kalectwo*): *May you be a cripple for life!* (*Obyś został kaleką na całe życie*) [Polaczek 1891: 630], *May your bones break!* (*Ażeby ci kości pogruchołało*) [DWOK 22, *Łęcz:* 11], *May you be cut into pieces* (*Żeb cię żnęli po kawałku*) [13]. Sources often contain examples of curse-induced accidents: “During the ride he got his eye kicked out” (“w drodze koń mu oko wybił”) [13] or “their son had his hand cut off by a chaff cutter” (“w drodze koń mu oko wybił”). Curse formulas can also invoke *blindness*: *May you lose the sight of your eyes!* (*Ażebyś oślepnął*) [DWOK 22, *Łęcz:* 11], *May your eyes fall out!* (*Bodej ci ślepie wylazły*) [SGP: *Bodaj*]. A separate (and quite large) group of curse formulas focuses on losing, hurting or breaking a limb: *May your legs swell!* (*Ażeby ci nogi spuchły*) [DWOK 22, *Łęcz:* 11], *May you break a leg!* (*Bodajś złamał nogę*) [Ligęza, Stoiński 1938: 37], *May you break arms and legs!* (*Żebyś ty ręce i nogi połamał!*) [common saying], *May my arms be twisted like branches of a willow!* (*Kab mnie ręce jak te gałęzie wierzby powykręcało*) [NKP: *Ręka*], *May your arms be twisted like these branches that you had twisted!* (*Żeb ty tak sabie ruki pakruciu, jak ty gałęzie pakruciu!*) [cursing a thief who stole fruit from the orchard; LB 4: 413]. Limbs can also be *taken away* (*odjść*): “And just like that, she can’t do it. If she could, she would. She would even drag herself on her arms. But she couldn’t, and she was sick for five years” (“I ona od razu już nie może. Żeby mogła, tob rękami, nogami szła, a niejaki. [...] Jak zaczęła chorować, to pięć lat chorowała”) [55]. A formula recorded by Kolberg also matches this type: *May you be unable to move arm or leg!* (*A bodajś ręką ni nogą nie ruszył*) [DWOK 22, *Łęcz:* 11].

So far, the diseases invoked by the curses were standard and known to medical knowledge. But some curse formulas reference more obscure or “creative” diseases, for example *losing flesh* (*opadnięcie z ciała*): *May you lose flesh!* (*Obyś z ciała opadł*) [Polaczek 1891: 630]; *May flesh fall from your bones!* (*A bodajś z kości opadł*) [DWOK 17, *Lub* 2: 90]. It could be interpreted as either “losing strength” or “losing weight” [SW: *Opaść*]. This account from Karłowicz’s dictionary merges some features of *losing flesh* and *rotting*:

Ciało lub skóra pada się, czyli psuje, pęka, odpada wskutek ran, chorób, odleżenia. Dotknięcie padalca sprawia, że ciało “pada się,” czyli jąttrzy. Ciało się pada, gdy padalec ukąsi [SGPKarł, *Padac*].

(The body or the skin gives way, it becomes broken, cracks and falls off as a result of disease and being bed-ridden. Touching a blindworm will result in “losing the flesh”: the wounds will fester. A bite of a blindworm will also cause the flesh to fall off.)

This is not the only account that references rotting flesh. There is a group of curse formulas that invoke this outcome: *May you rot!* (*Żeby ty zohnyv!*) [DWOK 33, *Chełm* 1: 31], *May you get the rotting disease (gnijoła)!* (*Bodaj cie gnijoła napadła!*) [DWOK 40, *MazPr*: 11]. Perhaps these formulas are an oblique reference to gangrene, which is also sometimes invoked explicitly: *If you are wounded, may your wounds never heal!* (*Jeżeli ma rany, to ażeby mu do śmierci się nie pogoily!*) [Czarnyszewicz 1991: 354]. Kolberg also noted down a thematically similar formula: *May you be eaten alive by worms!* (*Bodaj cię robaczy za żywa zjedli!*) [DWOK 28, *Maz* 5: 31].

In contrast to the fever, cholera and paralysis, rotting alive is not sudden. The source of horror here lies not in the startling suddenness of the disease, but in the very fact that it is such a protracted and painful process. Verbs used to denote the slow *wasting away* include *pickling* (*kisnąć*) (*May you be pickled – Budaj ty skisła* [SGPKarł: *Bodaj*]), or the Belarusian formula *Kab ty skis* (*May you be pickled* [LB 4: 414; with a note *humorous*]); *swelling* (*puchnąć*) (*May you swell! – Bodajeś spuch* [DWOK 22, *Łęcz*: 11]), *whitening* (*bieleć*) (*May you, so grant God and Holy Mother, be as white as this shirt! – Kab ty, Boża, Matka Najświętsza daj, tak zbialej, jak taja saroczka biała!* [cursing someone who stole the speaker’s shirt; LB 4: 419]), *festering* (*parszywieć*) (*May you fester!* [DWOK 22, *Łęcz*: 11]), *withering* (*usychać*). As for the latter, I have mentioned earlier that it is believed that *drying like a bone* (*wyschnięcie na skorupę*) could be the effect of drinking vodka spiked with magic [23]. Another possible effect of magic is *shrivelling* (*kurczyć się*): *May you wither and shrivel!* (*Żeby wysechł i skurczał*) [DWOK 40, *MazPr*: 51]. Finally, some curses invoke withering of a hand / an arm: *May your arm wither!* (*Niech ci ręka uschnie!*) [common], *May my hand wither if I do it!* (*Bodaj mi ręka uschła, jeśli to uczynię*) [NKP: *Ręka*]. The withering of a hand, which is the standard stipulated punishment for hitting a parent, is also a case in point.

Finally, some consequences of the curse are related to eating and digestion. The curse object cannot eat, or cannot draw nourishment from it, which leads directly to death (in effect, it is death of hunger.) Thus: *May you choke!* (*Bodajeś się udawił!*) [SW: *Bodaj*]; *May food choke you like a bone!* (*Bodaj ci kością w gardle stanęło*) [DWOK 22, *Łęcz*: 11]; *May your spleen hurt!* (*Niech cię wątroba zabol!*) [SW: *Wątroba*], *May your spleen twist!* (*Bogdaj cię wątroba porwała!*) [DWOK 48, *TarnRzesz*: 318]; *May*

*your insides spill out (A bodaj ci bebechy wylazły) [DWOK 22, Łęcz: 11]; May you have colic! ( ) [SGPKarł: Kolka], May you have deadly colic! (Pal go kolka!) [SW: Kolka]; May vomit seize you! (Bogdaj cię wonita cisnęła!) [SGPKarł: Wonity].*

The curse object's tongue may also be afflicted, which would lead to difficulties in speaking and eating. Courses that reference the tongue belong to a group of "special purpose" curses, directed at those who sin "by their mouth" (e.g. lying, gossiping, slandering or even simply spitting). *May you be struck dumb! (A bodajś oniemiał) [DWOK 22, Łęcz: 11], And if I lie, may I be struck dumb and die! (Jeżeli kłamię, bodajem się udawił, bodajem skonał) [SW: Skonać], He lied, and so may he be struck mute! God grant that he may not be able to talk, even to his wife and children (Ni skazaū mni praūdy, kab jon, Boża daj mileńki, ni zahawaryū da swaje żonki i da swaich dzietak!), May his tongue be struck! (Kab jemu tak jazyk wypierło pa jeha praūdzi!), May your tongue stick out if you're not saying the truth! (Kab tabie jazyk na wierch wypierło, jak ty heto praūdu każesz!) [LB 4: 408–409].* a formula illustrating the aforementioned mirror principle: *Who lies in life, will after death walk around with a tongue sticking out of his mouth! – Chto na hetuom świeci łże, to na tuom świeci chodzić jazyk wysałapiūszy [LB 1: 223], You slandered me, so now may you not be able to talk, even to your mother and father! (Nahawaryū ty na minie, kab ty ni hawaryū da swaho bačka, ni da matki!) [LB 4: 408], He slandered me, so now God grant that he would run in the field and in the forest barking! (Abrechau jon minie; kab jon Buoh dau, pa polu i lesi biehajuczcy brechau!) [LB 4: 406], May your tongue turn into a spike! ( ) [Bryl 1979: 44], May your tongue wither! (Żeb tobie język kołkiem stanął) [DWOK 22, Łęcz: 11], If you spit on the forest, your tongue will peel off! (Kab tabie jazyk kołam stał!) [to someone who is spitting, LB 4: 409], A wart on your tongue! (Cipun tobi na jazyk).*

The loss of speech and/or memory (*May you forget all! – Bodajes pamięć zatracił [DWOK 22, Łęcz: 11]*) is yet another possible consequence of being cursed. The cursed people behave in strange ways, and their behavior reminds the behavior of those who are under a spell (CURSE<sub>3</sub>). An enchanted person will behave curiously, and will not show some of definitive characteristics of being human. For example, they may laugh instead of speaking (*Now you will be laughing until you die – Budziesz ty śmiejjacca ū mianie da śmierci [59]*) or sing and play (*You will be playing, child! – Budziesz ty, dzietki, hrać! [50]*): "And the lass goes haha and haha; she laughs and laughs. And she cannot stop. She started playing and singing and dancing and other things as if she were playing the pipe" ("A heta dziewuszka i ha ha ha, i ha ha ha, i śmiejjacca i śmiejjacca. I ścichnuć nie

smożet. Aż wprost jana nie możet”) [50]. Or their behaviour can cease to be human at all: one interlocutor remembered a man who, as a result of a curse, started chasing wagons barking like a dog: “The sorcerer tells him: *Now you will chase the wagon and bark!* And so it was. He barked like a dog” (“A [czarownik] każe na jeho: *Budziesz biehczy za wozam i brachać zamiast sabaki.* I tak u jeho było. Brachou, jak sabaka brachou”) [51].

The above catalogue of “curse-induced” diseases leads to one fundamental conclusion. In accordance with the dualistic folk worldview, the diseases are closely connected to sin and Satan. Within the folk perspective, it is obvious that the devil, who co-created the world together with God, is responsible for diseases. As the folk anthropogenic myth states, in the process of genesis, the devil made holes in the human body and put diseases in the holes [Tomicki 1980].

I have suggested earlier how difficult (or even at times impossible) it is to separate the names of diseases from the names of powers who can cause them. Generally my material yields many proofs of the underlying belief that ultimately, the powers of hell are responsible for all human diseases. This belief leads to obliterating the boundary between diseases and the evil spirits who send them. What is more, on the grounds of folk mythology, the matter is entirely irrelevant.

We can see this for example analyzing curse formulas that evoke *kaduk*. The word quite simply means both ‘the devil’ and ‘a disease’ [Masłowska 1987: 80]. Selected formulas include: *May three hundred kaduks kidnap you!* (*Żeby cię trzysta kaduków porwało*) [NKP: *Diabeł*], *Go to kaduk!* (*Idź do kaduka!*), *May kaduks seize you!* (*Niech cię kaducy wezną!*) [SGPKarł: *Kaduk*]. Brückner links *kaduk* with ‘weakness, epilepsy, *morbus caducus*, from Latin *cadere* ‘to fall’ and notes that when it comes for other diseases (human and even equine), the word *kaduk* is also used to denote the devil who sends the disease [SEBr: *Kaduk*]. Karłowicz writes:

*Kaduk* właściwie znaczy chorobę św. Walentego, tj. epilepsję, którą ponieważ nieoświecony lud uważał za opętanie od czarta, przeto do wyrazu *kaduk* znaczenie złego ducha przywiązane zostało [SW: *Kaduk*].

(*Kaduk* originally meant St Valentine’s disease, i.e. epilepsy, which the uneducated peasants believe to be devilish possession, and for this reason *kaduk* also came to mean the evil spirit.)

He also provides an example of use: “Those who tend to be kidnapped by *kaduk* can sense well beforehand that a bout is coming” (“Których zwykł *kaduk* porywać, wcześniej miarkują, że się niemoc zbliża”) [SW: *Porwać*].

Diseases are an instrument of Satan: they serve him in his mission to exclude the cursed person from the human community. They are at

the same time the foreshadowing, sign and result of the exclusion. Who lives without God, and chooses a life of sin, becomes cursed and has to accept the consequences of being cursed, including disease. And diseases lead to the gravest and most final consequence of curse – to death.

### 2.3.2. Death

The interlocutors were very forthcoming in describing deaths coming as a result of curse. Such deaths have several distinctive features: they are usually sudden and untimely (or, conversely, as we have stipulated above they can be a result of a long disease and “wasting away” caused by the curse.) While analyzing the material, it can sometimes be difficult to ascertain whether the curse formula contains a wish of death or only of disease, or a combination of the two (disease followed by death). But such distinctions are altogether alien to the folk worldview. It is important that the wish contained in the curse involves unhappy, failed life (and disease would be one aspect of failure and suffering wished upon the curse object) and horrific death, in tune with sayings such as *As in life, thus in death (Jakie życie, taka śmierć)* [NKP: *Śmierć*] or *What life you lead, such will also be your end (Jakie kto życie wieździe, taki koniec jego będzie)* [NKP: *Życie*]. Examples from my material include:

Zachorował i umarł szybko, w ciągu paru tygodni [12].

(He fell ill and soon died, within a few weeks.)

I jemu jedną nogę odcięli, potem zaraz drugą, i on od razu umarł [13].

(And he had one leg cut off and right after that another; and then he died soon after.)

Try hoda jon pażył i sam umier [63].

(So he lived three years and died.)

Ona umarła i dziewczynę zostawiła chorą [11].

(She died and left a sick daughter behind.)

I do roku czasu ta córka zmarła – przy porodzie, dzieciaczek ten też [44].

(The daughter was dead within a year. She died at childbirth, her child died, too.)

Chłopakowi, jak deski na stoły robił, piła się wyrwała i przerznięło go na pół [18].

(And so, while he was cutting planks for tables, the saw slipped from his hands and he got cut in a half.)

Tamten zginął, też od motoru [44].

(And the other son is dead too, also in a motorcycle accident.)

Koń dostał ataku jakiejś kolki i wziął zdechł [24].

(The horse had a fit, some kind of colic and died.)

A sinful life or committing a transgression may lead to fulfilment of such formulas like *May you die suddenly!* (*A bodaj cię nagła śmierć spotkała*) [DWOK 17, *Lub* 2: 90], *May suddenness take you!* (*Bodaj cię nagłota spotkała!*) [SGPKarł, *Nagłota*], *I'd rather see you dead than with him at the altar!* (*Wolałabym cię w trumnie widzieć, niż z nią przy ołtarzu!*) [18], *I would rather see you in a casket than at the altar with her!* (*Lepiej, daczuszka, ja ciabie widziały na katafale czym na kabiercy*) [44]. Thus, death as a result of a curse is sudden, unexpected and unnatural. More specific examples also include being killed by a bullet or being executed: *May it please you, dear God, that he knifes his own children! May he who stole my pitchfork get stabbed by it!* (*Kab jon, Boża daj mileńki, dzieci swaje parezał!*, *Ukrał niechto wiły, kab jon na ich prabiysie!*) [LB 4: 408, 412]; *O soldier, may a bullet hit you* (*Bodaj cie, wojoczku, kula trzasła*) [Ligeża, *Stoiński* 1938: 675]; *May the first bullet hit you; May you hang* (*Ażeby cię pierwsza kula nie minęła, A bodajżeś wisiał*) [DWOK 22, *Łęcz*: 11]; *May he go to the scaffold, sooner than see my son!* (*Żeby on szubienicę wprzódy, a nie syna mego ujrzał!*) [Czarnyszewicz 1991: 354]; *Someone stole a piece of string from me, let him hang on that string!* (*Ukrał niechto wierouku, kab jon na joj pawiesiysie!*) [LB 4: 412]; *May horses tear you to pieces* (*A bodaj cię konie rozniesły*) [DWOK 22, *Łęcz*: 11].

But the cause of death can also be more mundane: *May you break your neck!* (*A żebyś kark skręcił!*) [31], *May your blood flood you* (*Bodaj cię krew zalała*) [DWOK 22, *Łęcz*: 11], *May bad blood flood you!* (*Bodaj cię zła krew zalała!*) [SW: *Krew*], *May thunder hit you!* (*Niech cię szlag trafi!*) [common saying], *May I never get up and walk!* (*Żeby ja z tego miejsca nie wsta!*) [Czarnyszewicz 1991: 422]. One curious way of dying is by *bursting* (*pęknąć*): *May you burst!* (*Bodajęś pękł*) [SW: *Bodaj*], *You rascal, may you burst!* (*O ty, chorobny, bodajś pęk!*) [SGPKarł: *Chorobny*]. On the one hand, bursting is clearly linked to expressing emotions (you can burst with laughter, or (in Polish) with anger or envy), but on the other – it is connected to the ethic of speech: *May you burst with your lies* (*Bodajęś pękł ze swoim łgarstwem*) [SW: *Pęknąć*]. But there is one more aspect of the explanation: comments of older lexicographers suggest that *pęknąć* (*to burst*) might be an euphemism for *przepaść* (*to be lost, to vanish*). For example, Karłowicz in several entries defines *pęknąć* by *przepaść*. And

as we know from subchapter 2.2., *przepaść* (to vanish) has its direct links with hell – this is where objects go when they vanish: *May you vanish, burst with your cries!* (*Bodajeś z twoim krzykiem* (w domyśle: *przepadł, pękł*)) [SW: *Bodaj*].

Sudden death constitutes an obvious break of continuity. The horror of sudden death lies in precluding a peaceful end and negating the possibility of dying “the good death,” a death of old age, after playing all the prescribed social roles and going through all rites of passage, after becoming a grandparent (and thus ensuring continuity of one’s family.) A death of old age is “godly,” and is also sometimes termed “one’s own death.” Regrettably, the devil meddles in the world, and for this reason, not all deaths are godly. Some lives are cut short before their time. The crucial distinction between good and bad, natural and unnatural death is cogently expounded by Joanna Tomicka and Ryszard Tomicki in their publications [cf. Tomicka, Tomicki 1975; Tomicki 1976: 82]. The dynamic between good and bad death explains the existence of such formulas as *May you not die your own death!* (*Kab ty, Boża daj mileńki, swajeju śmierciaju ni umior!*) or *May they not ring the bell after you die!* (*Kab pa tabie ni zwanili!*) [LB 4.: 416, 419].

Curse formulas contain a wide range of possibilities for bad death: the general wish *May you not have a happy death* (*Bogdajeś szczęśliwego nie doczekał skonu*) [DWOK 48, *TarnRzesz*: 47] is made more specific in such formulas as: *May you not live to eat an Easter egg!* (*Bodaj ty jajka wielkanocnego nie doczekał!*) [DWOK, 28, *Maz* 5: 31], *May you not live to see anything good happen to you!* (*Bodajś się niczego dobrego nie doczekał*), *May you not live to see tomorrow!* (*Ażebyś jutra nie doczekał*) [DWOK 22, *Łęcz*: 11], *May you not grow up!* (*A żebyś ty się nie wychował!*), *May you not grow!* (*A żebyś ty nie dorósł!*) [8], *May I not live to find solace in wealth, and riches and children!* (*Żeb ja ne doždav potichy w dobytku, i w majątku, i w ditiach!*) [DWOK 33, *Chełm* 1: 32], *May I not wake up tomorrow!* (*Bogdajem nie wstał jutro!*) [DWOK 48, *TarnRzesz*: 318].

Bad death is, most importantly, death in agony: “Often you may hear wishes that the thief should find no peace in his deathbed” (“Często słyszeć można życzenia, żeby złodziej na łożu śmiertelnym spokoju nie znalazł”) [DWOK 40, *MazPr*: 51]. Examples include: *May evil stand in front of your eyes when you die* (*Bodaj ci przy skonaniu wszystko złe stanęło*) [DWOK 22, *Łęcz*: 11], *May vile reptiles lie in your sheets / may snake be your healer / may you long suffer in agony / and look at me begging for death* (*Pościelą twoją niech będą gady / Lekarzem twoim niech będzie wąż / Żebyś ty konał i skonać nie mógł / Konającym wzrokiem patrzył na mnie wciąż*) [45], *May you have a hard time dying!* (*Bodajbys konav a nihdy ne*

*skonaw!*) [DWOK 29, *Pok* 1: 21], or *May they tear off the roof over your head as you lie dying* (*A sztab nad toboju stelu rwały, jak budesz konaty*) [Fischer 1921: 81]. The last example refers to an ancient practice of tearing holes in the (thatched) roof of the house where somebody is dying in agony. The practice was supposed to shorten a protracted agony, and long agony usually befell those who “have truck with the devil.” A similar practice is evoked in the formula *May they put you on straw!* (*Żeby tebe na prostu słomu położyły!*) [DWOK 33, *Chełm* 1: 31], as taking the dying out of the bed and putting them on the floor (or on straw) served the same purpose as tearing holes in the thatch.

Secondly, a bad death is a death without prayer: (*May he not whisper ‘Jesus, Mary’ before he dies!* – *Kab jon ni wyhawaryu Jazus Marja pierad śmierciu [skonaniem]!* [LB 4: 409]), without the last rites (*May he not see God when he’s dying – Żeby Boga przy skonaniu nie oglądał* [NKP: *Bóg*]), without receiving a final blessing on the death bed and asking for forgiveness. Such a death is inhuman, it is akin to the death of an animal. For this reason a common formula is *May you die like a dog!* (*Bodajś zdech jak pies*) [DWOK 22, *Łęcz*: 11]. Other formulas include: *May you die!* (*A żebyś ty zdechł!*) [common saying], *May vapour leave you!* (*Bodaj z ciebie para wyskoczyła!*), *May you exhale your last vapour!* (*A bodajeś ty sia zaśmieła paraju ostatnioju!*) [DWOK 33, *Chełm* 1: 31, 32]: the word *vapour* (*para*) is used here instead of *breath* (*oddech*) because, according to the folk worldview, animals have no soul and this “an animal exhales vapour [and not breath]” [SGP: *Para*].

A bad, inhuman death can also be evoked by the use of the verb *szczeznąć* (to rot, to perish): *May you perish!* (*Bodajeś szczeznął*) [Pleszczyński 1892: 105], *May you perish* (*Żebyś szczeznął!*) [SGP: *Szczeznąć*] and *skapać*: *May you die in misery* (*A żebyś skapiał marnie*) [NKP: *Skapieć*], *May you die like a dog on a leash!* (*Bodajbyś skapiał jak pies na powrozie*) [SW: *Skapać*], *May you perish like this candle!* (*A żebyś ty skapał tak jak ta świeca!*) [20]. The last formula brings to mind the practice of lighting candles in order to curse somebody, and this connection has been remarked on by lexicographers: “An echo of an old custom consisting of lighting a candle in the church wishing for someone’s misfortune” [NKP: *Skapieć*].

A consequence of a bad, ungodly death is prolonging the cursed person’s existence into the afterlife, and the necessity to do penance. A cursed person is thrown into the purgatory (understood as a place where sinners are forced to do penance for a specific time.) Purgatory (or hell) also features in some formulas that seem to cast the curse object directly into purgatory, without any reference to the necessary condition of being in purgatory, i.e., dying. A person cursed in this way

is denied a proper burial: *May you be buried under the fence like a dog!* (*Kab ciebie jak sabaku pad płotam pachawali!*), *May as much pus pour out of him after he dies as much tears I have cried* (*Kolko ja razliła sloz, kab z jeho pa śmierci tak wiele ropy wylitosie!*) [LB 4: 414, 413], *May you be torn by vipers after death* (*Bogdaj cię po śmierci rozszarpały żmije*) [DWOK 48, TarnRzesz: 318], *May maggots eat you* (*Bodaj cię robaki roz-toczyły*) [DWOK 22, Łęcz: 11], *May ravens scatter your bones!* (*Żeby kruky kosty twoje poroznosyły!*) [DWOK 33, Chełm 1: 31], *May dogs howl on your grave!* [Czarnyszewicz 1991: 422], *May your body feed dogs and ravens!* [NKP, Pies], *May wolves dig up his body and scatter his bones!* (*Żeby na jego mogile psy wyl!*) [Czarnyszewicz 1991: 422]. There is also no peace for the cursed in the grave: *May you turn in your grave!* (*A bodajś się w grobie przewrócił*) [DWOK 22, Łęcz: 11]. The cursed person becomes a wraith or a tormented soul, preying on the living: *May you become a ghoul in the other world!* (*Kab ty wuparam chadzię na tom świeci!*) [LB 4: 417], *Even after you die, may you still wander far and wide with my hard-earned money!* (*Żebyś ta jesce po śmierci latał het po polu z moim tak ciężko (or: krwawo) zapracowanym grosem!*) [DWOK 2, Sand: 246]. The sinner is delivered into the power of the devil: he is supposed to “burn in hell” or is “claimed by hell”: *May you never leave hell!* (*Bodajęś z piekła nie wyjrzał!*) [SW: *Bodaj, Piekło*], *May they drink boiling tar!* (*Bodaj sia wony hariczjy smoły ponapówały!*) [DWOK 34, Chełm 2: 219], *May he walk on hot iron in the next world!* (*Żeby on na tamtym świecie po jasnym żelazie boso chodził, jak teraz za dziećmi naszymi chodzi!*) [Czarnyszewicz 1991: 35], *May you burn in the fires!* (*Bodaj cię ognie spiekły!*) [DWOK 28, Maz 5: 31], *May you burn!* (*Bodajś się spalił!*) [DWOK 22, Łęcz: 11].

Sending the sinner into the sphere of the bad sacred is also visible in a group of formulas that refer to religion indirectly: *May the Holy Saints forsake you!* (*Bodaj cię Święci Pańscy opuścili!*), *May you be punished on Doomsday!* (*Bodajś na Boskim sądzie przepad!*), *May you never see the light of the Lord!* (*Bodaj ty jasności boskiej nie oglądał!*) [DWOK 22, Łęcz: 11] *May you never see the light of heaven!* (*Bodajęś światłości niebieskiej nie oglądał!*) [SW, *Bodaj*]. The two latter formulas refer us to another group of curses, those associated with the theme of the Sun: *May you never see the bright sun again!* (*Żebyś słońka nie widział*) [36], *May the bright sun not shine upon you!* (*Bogdaj ci jasne słońeczko nie świeciło!*) [DWOK 48, TarnRzesz: 318], *May I never see sun or light again!* (*Niech nigdy jasności nie oglądam słońca*) [DWOK 6, Krak 2: 418]. As stated in the *Dictionary of Folk Religious stereotypes* “Słońce wchodzi w opozycję ogólną życie:śmierć, oraz opozycje szczegółowe: Bóg:diabeł; jasność:ciemność [...] Sun comes from God...It is a symbol of life, prosperity, happiness and perfection”

[SSiSL 1, *Słońce*: 121, 128; cf. also SLSJ: *Słońce*]. Viewed in this context, the wish that the curse object should not see the sun seems synonymous with wishing them to die (w sensie uogólnionym). The opposition between sun (God) and cursing is seen in the often encountered warning that one should not curse under the sun (in daylight) [KLS: 446]. Also formulas for banishing diseases often implore (or force) the disease to go “where the sun does not shine,” i.e. to the afterlife (“Be gone, you wicked pain! Go where the sun will not warm you, where the wind does not blow...” – “Uciekaj, ty bólu przeklęty! Tam, gdzie słońce nie dogrzeje, gdzie wiatr nie dowieje...” [Kotula 1976: 239]).

There is no place for the cursed under the sun, and they are also rejected by the earth. After all, on the mythical plane, the (feminine) earth is the counterpart of the (masculine) sky. The earth is a mother who gives birth to people and accepts their bodies after death [MNM: *Zemlja*; SD: *Zemlja*]. Curses invoking the earth express the wish of death. Such is the case for example is a song that describes the rejection of the cursed man by both heaven and earth:

“May the earth refuse to support you / May the sun refuse to shin upon you / May you find no place in this world” (“Żeby ciebie Janku nie nosiła ziemia. / Ziemia nie nosiła, słońko nie świeciło, / żeby ciebie Janku na świecie nie było”) [SSiSL 1: 137] or in formulas such as: *May the earth fall upon you* (*Ażeby cię ciężka ziemia przygniotła*) [DWOK 22, *Łęcz*: 11], or *May you sink a hundred feet into the ground* (*Obyś się zapadł sto łokci w ziemię*) [Polaczek 1891: 630]. The formula *May you turn into dust!* (*A bodaj się w proch zamienił*) [DWOK 22, *Łęcz*: 11] is tied to the same perception as the formulas evoking earth. There are also some examples of curses referencing death that also invoke punishment in the afterlife *May the holy earth refuse to receive your body* (*Bodaj cię święta ziemia nie przyjęła!*) or *May the death throw out your bones!* (*Żeby ziemia kosty twoje wykynuła!*) [DWOK 33, *Chełm* 1: 31]. The cursed person thus becomes excluded from the community also in the afterlife, and is forever an outcast, incapable of reconnecting with the universe or being accepted by it.

Był jeden parobek, co miał takie przysłowie, że każdemu powiedział: “żeby cie ziemia nie przyjena!” No i umarł. Jak go chowali, to go ziemia wyrzucała. Co go pochowali, to na drugi dzień już na wierzchu leżał. Dopiero go na wodę puścili, to go dopiero woda wzięła.

(There was a field hand here, and he had this catchphrase for people who made him angry: “May the earth refuse to receive you.” And then he died. And when they were burying him, the earth was pushing him back up. They buried him one day, and the next day he would be on the ground again. So finally they threw his body into the river and the water received him.)

### 2.3.3. Misfortune

Happiness and good fortune (*dola*) are hereditary, and can be passed from one generation to the next, in the same way as earthly possessions [...]. They are states that can appear and vanish, that can be ebb and then restored. The magico-religious rituals is an instrument that keeps a given social group in a state of grace and magical potency, and which ensures good fortune to the group members [Obrębski 2007: 151].

The materials that I have gathered in the course of my research can serve as a *sui generis* verification of Obrębski's hypothesis. The practices and rituals that constitute the focus of my attention belong to the opposite pole than Obrębski's "state of grace." They exemplify the opposite of happiness and good fortune. The curse objects are those excluded from the communal state of grace bestowed by rituals. And the curse ritual is precisely the practice with which the group sanctions their rejection.

In the preceding subchapters we have investigated death, illness and disability as possible results of the curse. But one other possible outcome of the curse is simply misfortune, "loss of luck." In analyzing the story of the wicked Gienia, we have talked about the mundane and down-to-earth quality of her punishment.

Życie nieszczęśliwe, niedostatki, upadki. Takie dziecko żyje długo, ale nie ma szczęścia [36].

(Unhappy life, misfortunes, and failures. A cursed child lives long, but does not find happiness.)

Jest przeklęte do śmierci, nic mu się nie wiedzie, nie szykuje, tylko ma bez przerwy całe życie jakieś upadki [20].

([The cursed child] is cursed until he dies; nothing goes as he wishes, a failure comes after a failure.)

Another account contains the following passage:

Nu, nie powodzi się w życiu. Za co? To może gdzie kto przeklinał, czy jak? Jakoś jest na świecie. Powiadają tak. Różnie bywa na świecie [50].

(He's unlucky in life. Why? Maybe somebody cursed him? Sometimes it is like that. That's what they say. Different things can happen in this world.)

My interlocutors told me about specific cases of misfortune that happened to people they personally knew:

A potem, jak się najpierw kochali, to potem on ją bił, dom na pół rozdzielili, darli mordy [50].

(At first, they were all lovey-dovey, but then he started to beat her and they divided the house in half. They yelled at one another.)

I wot, usio niekaje niedamahańja. Jana biednaja to toje ʘsio, to haława, to ʒałudak, to pieczań, to pazwanocznik, to nierw. [...] Dyk wot nima dabra i nima dabra [64].

(All the time she's poorly: if it's not the head, then it's the stomach, or the spleen, or the back, or her nerves [...]. She's never really well.)

Szczęścia nie miała. Pił bardzo. [...] Ona nie widziała słońca nigdy, ciemnym wiekiem przeżyła [53].

(But she wasn't happy. He drank a lot [...]. She saw no sun, never, she lived in dark times)

No i ani on się niczego nie dorobił, ani jego dzieci, ani jego wnuczki. Majątek wielki, a oni nic sobie nie poradzą. Siebie by nie wyżywili, a mają dwadzieścia kilka hektarów [18].

(And neither he nor his children nor his grandchildren made any money. Despite considerable wealth they cannot cope. They couldn't provide enough food for themselves although they have twenty plus hectares.)

Tak w ʒyźni i nie poszło jej... Mąż chodził do drugich kobiet. I wiecie co: gdzie się nie zlepilo, dobrego nie bylo [54].

(She had a miserable life... Her husband went to other women. As they say, you can't paste your luck together.)

I have already quoted curse formulas associated with misfortune which I have heard from my interlocutors: *May life be hard on you!* (*A ʒeb ci się nie szykowało*) [32]; *May you have nothing, may you keep to your own ways and may no good come out of it* (*Żeb ty nic nie miała, ʒeb ty tak poszła tą drogą swojo i ʒeb nic dobrego ty już nie miała, dziecko*) [30]. They can be supplemented with examples quoted in dictionaries and other printed sources. Many curse formulas collected by Kolberg and quoted by other sources refer to *misfortune* (*nieszczęście*): *May misfortune swallow him!* (*Niech go nieszczęście ogarnie!*), *May misfortune grab him!* (*Bodajby ich nieszczęście porwało!*) [SW: *Nieszczęście*], *May misfortune surround you!* (*Ażeby cię nieszczęście ogarnęło*) [DWOK 22, *Łęcz*: 11]. Some examples also use the verb *go to waste* (*zmarnieć*): *May you go to waste, you sick soul!* (*Żebyś zmarniał, chorobna duszo!*) [SGPKarł: *Chorobny*], *May you go to waste!* (*Bodaj ty zmarnował sia!*) [DWOK 33, *Chełm* 1: 31]. The verb *marnieć* and the perfective form *zmarnieć* both mean 'to waste, to become impoverished, to fall sick by one's own fault' ('niszczyć, ubożać, z własnej winy chorować') [SGPKarł: *Marnieć*].

Naturally, the state of misfortune and a wasted life also preclude achieving “a good death”: *May you never day, but only waste so much that you disappear completely!* (*Kab ty nikoli ni umior, ale tak zmarnawaŭsie, niewiadomo dzie dzieŭsie!*) [LB 4: 416]. An unlucky person cannot possess either health or wealth, happiness nor good, they cannot *live to the full*. Michał Federowski’s collection of Belarusian ethnographic materials contains the following examples: *May you never live to the full!* (*Kab ty, Boża daj mileńki, ni razżyŭsie!*), *May nothing good come to you!* (*Kab tabie dabra ni było!*), *As he didn’t want to give it to me, let God withdraw from him health, happiness and life, and everything that he pines for!* (*Szkadawaŭ mnie jon daci, kab jemu Buoh ni daŭ ni zdarouja, ni szczaścia, ni žycia, ni taho, czaho jon ad Boha žadaje!*) [LB 4: 413, 407, 406]. Whoever loses “happiness and good fortune”, also loses the right to God’s protection: *he forsook me, and so may God forsake him!* (*Wyrekajeca jon minie, kab jeho Buoh wyreksie!*), *He didn’t help me, and so may God refuse to help him!* (*Ni spamuoh jon minie, kab jeho Buoh ni spamuoh!*) [LB 4: 406]. For the rule states: *Who Is with God, has God with them* (*Kto z Bogiem, Bóg z nim*) [NKP: Bóg].

Without God, and excluded from the communal “state of grace,” the cursed person will never *live to the full*, which is exemplified by the following formulas: *May fortune never come your way!* (*Zeby ty sie nicego nie dorobił!*) [13]; *May you and your children not make any money until the end of your life!* (*Żeby ty do śmierci się z dziećmi niczego nie dorobił!*) [18], *May you work your hands to the bone!* (*Bodajś ręce po łokcie wyrobił!*) [DWOK 22, Łęcz: 11], *May all your livestock die* (*Bodaj ci wszystko powyżdychało!*) [DWOK 22, Łęcz: 11]. The lack of prosperity touches the very core of the country way of life: the soil does not yield crops, the livestock dies: the cursed cannot live “off the fat of the land.” In effect, they starve and become beggars. There are formulas that invoke such fate directly: *May you never have a crumb of bread* (*Bodajś okruszyny chleba się nie dorobił!*), *May you never have a drop of water* (*Ażeby ci kropli wody zabrakło!*), *May you walk around with a beggar’s bag* (*A bodajś z torbami chodził!*) [DWOK 22, Łęcz: 11].

The fate of the cursed is inexorable. It is a result of a just punishment for breaking the social norms and for threatening the ties that bind the community together. Our overview of different possible fates reveals a wide range of misfortunes that can befall the curse object through the agency of curse executor. As the catalogue of curses on which I drew is not comprehensive, my overview is definitely not complete. Still, the three possible fates described above (disease, death and misfortune) seem to exhaust all possibilities.

But is curse final? Once you have been cursed, is this it? Is there no hope for the cursed? In the final chapter of the book I will explore the possibilities of lifting the curse.

## 6

# FROM CURSING TO LIFTING THE CURSE

Moža Boh pamohby. To užo boska łaska.  
Chto wiedaje, jak tut da czaho?  
(Maybe God would help? This is God's grace.  
Who knows how it works?)

Walentyna of Radzivonishki

### 1. The Fate of the Cursed One. The State of Being Cursed

We have already established that *happiness* (*szczaście*) and *fortune* (*dola*) are “inherited”; they are passed on from parents to children [cf. Obrębski 2007: 151]. Similarly misfortune. As we read in *A Dictionary of Folk Linguistic Stereotypes*:

The mother passes happiness onto the child provided she is happy herself, i.e. she was not cursed. A cursed mother might only give birth to a cursed baby; she might only pass on some of her misfortune. The fate of the child is inevitable: misery, death, destruction [SLS]: *Matka*].<sup>1</sup>

Human life, in accordance with the folk model, is written in the following opposites: happiness and fortune (hence the blessing) *versus* unhappiness and misfortune (hence the cursed fate), which can be understood more widely as life opposing death. There is no other possibility. Lack of blessing, lack of fortune, unhappiness are signs of the order of

death stepping in the order of life, signs of “phenomena correlated with death,” as Florian Znaniecki [Thomas, Znaniecki 1927:223] describes illness, destruction and misfortune.

This interference shows first of all in infertility: “If a mother curses her daughter, the daughter might not have children because the curse stays there” (“Jak matka przeklnie córkę, córka może nie mieć dzieci, bo klątwa zostaje”) [6]; “So they got married and there are no kids at all” (“No i pożenili się, a tu nie ma i nie ma dzieci”) [28];

Jedna kobieta bardzo klęła, na każdego, na swego, na cudzego, jak coś nie pasuje dla niej, to ona klęła jak nie wiadomo co. No i co z tego wyszło? Jeden syn to się ożenił, a ta reszta – nie pożenili się. I ten majątek przepadł. I córka tam była, i u córki nie było dzieci. I tak wszystko przepadło [28].

(A woman cursed a lot, she would curse everyone, she would curse her own and strangers alike; if there was something she did not like she would curse... And what came out of this? One son got married and the rest didn't. And the property was ruined. And they had a daughter. She didn't have kids. And hence everything got ruined.)

Under the primary myth the struggle of Thunderer and his foe might be compared to the opposition of fertility and infertility: the lord of thunder who sends fertile rains and looks after harvest, human and animal fertility is opposed to the forces destroying life, the forces of death and destruction [cf. Tomicki 1976: 82]. That is why the sinner who is allied with the devil loses the ability to pass on life. When breaching the blessed God's powers they become infertile as life is conditioned upon blessing while a curse takes it away.

Another frequent option of interrupting continuity of generations (the curse might be as follows: *May she not get her son married* (*A żeby ona tego syna nie ożeniła*) [21] or *May I not to see my children* (*Żebym tak swoich dzieci nie oglądał*) [NKP: *Dziecko*], there is slowness, malformations, disability and illness of children:

No i urodziła dzieci bliźniaczki, dwa syny, oboje nierozwinięte. [...] Oni oboje byli takie. Oni niezdatne ni do roboty, ni do mowy, ni do niczego. Więcej nie miała już dzieci, tylko te dwa nieakuratne chłopczyki [41].

(So she had twins, two boys, both retarded. [...] They were both like that. They were unable to work, speak or do any other things. She didn't have more children except for those two unfortunate lads.)

I dziecka żadnego nie urodziła jak należy, umarła bez dzieci. Jedno dziecko urodziło się z dziurą w podniebieniu (wilczą paszczę miało), drugie ryjek miało [18].

(The daughter never gave birth properly, she died childless. One kid was born with a cleft, with a mouth like a wolf, another had a muzzle.)

Starszy chłopiec córki nierozwit. Ot, jak Pan Bóg dał... [65].

(The older boy of her daughter was mentally disturbed. Well, this is what God gave her...)

Ich córka bierkuloz dostała, syn spadł z dachu i zabił się, a trzecie dziecko w gipsie powieźli na Rosję [49].

(Their daughter got lung consumption; their son fell off the roof and got himself killed; the third child was taken to Russia in plaster.)

Rodzi się u nich dziewczynka – wzrostem maleńka. Ładniutka, ale mała. Za mąż nie wyszła. Rodzi się syn, śliczny chłopaczek, duży, czuprynka śliczna, włoski wijące się. Trzy lata przeżył i nawet zabawki nie wziął do rączki – sobą nie władnął. Trzy lata przeżył i leżał. I gdzie oni jego nie wozili! On był taki jakby całkiem jak bez kości. Rósł normalnie – długi, wesoły, ładny chłopaczek na swój wiek – on taki i był. No, ale nic nie pomogło, potem jednak zmarł. Rodzi się u nich jeszcze jedna córka. Ta córka chorowała, chorowała, chorowała i z jednego oczka materia jej idzie. Gnoiło się i gnoiło, aż oślepta. [...] Znowuż oni płaczą! Nie ma komu bogactwa zostawić! Te tylko dwie córki zostały się. Tamta maleńka za mąż nie wyszła, a ta ślepa i dzieci nie ma [44].

(Then they have a girl, a very short but a pretty girl. She didn't get married. They have a son, a fine lad, and a big one with fine wavy hair. He lived three years and didn't even hold a toy; he was not able. He lived three years and he was lying. There was no place they would not take him to. He was, like, boneless. He was growing normally, a long cheerful lad for his age; he was like that. Alas, it did not help and later he died. They have one more daughter. She was ill and ill time after time and then some matter started from her eye. It would fester and then she went blind. [...] They were crying again! They had no one to leave their property to. They were left with only two daughters. The short one didn't get married and the blind one didn't have children.)

Van der Leeuw writes: "Once pronounced, a curse continues to operate until its potency is exhausted" [Van der Leeuw 1938: 409]. It "continues to operate," hence "will run in a family" ("zostaje w rodzinie") [43]. "can be inherited by next generations" ("To później się odziedzicza") [27].

There are also formulas for "custom-made" curses for the whole generations: *May cholera take them all away with the whole family!* (*Żeby ich cholera wydusiła z całym plemieniem!*) or *May all diseases remain with you and your offspring!* (*Żeby ciebie i twoich dzieci francy potoczyli!*) [Czarnyszewicz 1991: 439, 422]. No wonder then "the curse remains for three generations" ("kłątwa zostaje na trzy pokolenia") [41]. "the curse

even falls on the third or fifth generation” (“Na trzecie, na piąte pokolenie nawet spada przekleństwo”) [44]; “the curse works most often until the seventh generation” (“Najczęściej do siódmego pokolenia klątwa działa”) [29]; “As an unjustified vow, the punishment stays in the family. God punishes people in this way even up to the tenth generation” (“Jak niesłuszna przysięga, kara zostaje w rodzinie. Pan Bóg karze ludzi tak, że nawet dziesiąte pokolenie”) [12]; “God punishes to the seventh generation. Whoever got married into this family, they were not blessed by God” (“Pan Bóg karze do siódmego pokolenia. Kto się ożenił w tej rodzinie, też Pan Bóg nie błogosławi”) [11]<sup>2</sup>.

This type of an inherited curse – CURSE<sub>s</sub> – is easy to recognize. It shows as misfortune passed on in the family whose member once became an object of a justified curse. Here is a detailed description of the cursed fate of the family of false witnesses:

Swoje budynki ofajerkasował i spalił i lepsze budował, i potem w sądzie przysięgał. Przestrzegał wujko: “Pamiętaj, że Pan Bóg do dziewiątego pokolenia będzie cię karać.” I oni taki mają ciężki żywot wszystkie, że naprawdę ciężki. Babka odczyniała, nie pomogło. Syn poszedł do milicji, przehulał pieniądze z takimi rozmaitymi, w więzieniu siedział, aż ogłuchł. Dzieci miały wysypkę na buzi – babka odczyniała, coś szeptała, dmuchała... spadła iskierka na koszulę i bardzo mocno były popalone, poparzone. Córka poszła bardzo źle za męża. Tak rodzina męża ją prześladowała, że miała czterdzieści lat i umarła. Pan Jezus nie gorzej był męczony – może się nie godzi równać, ale prawdziwie mówię. I trudno im się dorobić [18].

(He took out insurance for his buildings; then he set them alight and built better ones. Afterwards in court he testified under oath. His uncle warned him: “Remember that God will keep punishing you until the ninth generation.” So they have tough lives, really tough lives. A wise woman was trying to shake it off but in vain. Their son went to work for the police; he squandered away the money with some elements; then he was in prison and went deaf. The children had rash on their faces so the wise woman was trying to undo it. She was trying to undo it by whispering and blowing until a spark fell on a shirt and the children got awfully burnt, scalded. Their daughter didn't marry well. Her husband's family persecuted her so much that she died at the age of forty. Jesus himself wasn't treated worse than her; it might be a disgraceful thing to say but I'm telling the truth. And they didn't find it easy to make big money.)

A curse hanging over a family is written in the circle of evil and sin with whose aspects, logically interrelated, we are very well acquainted. These are the following elements that are repeated in the subsequent generations: no parent blessing, drunkenness, disagreements, unsuccessful

life, being “a bad parent” and “a bad child”, and lastly one’s agony with the devil in the background. This cycle is shown beautifully by one of my Belarusian interlocutors. She told me a story of a mother who “failed to teach her kids their prayers”:

– O teraz syn został sie, to pijak, pije strasznie. [...] On, matka nie nauczyła ni do spowiedzi jego, ni... Ot, tak o ona żyła. I jak ona strasznie umierała... Przyszli do mnie, i: “Mania, ty idzi paczytaj. Ty idzi paczytaj, ty tak fajna czytasz.” [...] Nu, ja poszłam. Wiesz, świeca taka długa była, spaliła sie świeca. Litania do Wszystkich Świętych przeczytali, Anioł Panski, potem różaniec, a ona tak konała i nie mogła skonać. [...] Trzymali rence, nie mogli jej utrzymać.

Ręce jej trzymali? Ona się wrywała, tak?

– Wrywała i tak krepowała to nogi, to tak... Niech Pan Bóg już sondzi jej. A potem jedna domyślała sie, mówi: “Ja pójde przyniose wody świenconej.” Przyniosła wody świenconej i na cztery konty wyświeciła, i potem drzwi otworzyła i jej wyświeciła, i ona skonała. A tak nie mogła skonać. Taki straszny rodzaj śmierci był, że ja nigdy nie widziałam.

A dlaczego to tak dusza nie chciała wyjść?

– Ja nie wiem, co tam było. Musi dusza nie chciała [wychodzić z niej], menczyła jej za coś. Ona niegodna taka kobieta była, niegodna, wiesz. [...] Ja myślę, że ona grzech jakiś miała. No jak to, że ona nie mogła skonać? I świece palili, i modlili sie! No, co to jest? [...] I tego, ja pamientam jeszcze, [że] jej menża matka bardzo nie chciała jej. Bardzo nie chciała, to ona uklenkła, błogosławieństwa nie dała, przeklinała. Ona pojechała do ślubu z nim, a ona przeklinała i nie chciała jej, żeby za jego syna ona szła za monż.

W ogóle nie dała im błogosławieństwa?

– Nie dała. I żyła w takiej niezgodzie ona. [...] No nie chciała, nie chciała, żeby on jej brał. [...]

A jak przeklinała?

– “Kab ty nie razżyłasia! Kab tabie zgody nie było!” – o tak przeklinała. No, nie chciała.

Nie razżyłasia?

– “Kab ty nie razżyłasia!” No, żeby u ciebie nic nie było dobrego, żeby ty i nie żyła dobro, żeby wszystko Pan Bóg nie błogosławił, ale wszystko wyleciałoby z ronk twoich... [53].

(– Now only her son remains, a drunk; he drinks heavily. [...] Mother didn’t prepare him for his first confession, nothing...That’s how she lived her life. And her terrible agony on the deathbed...she was dying but couldn’t die. They were holding her arms but found it difficult.

They were holding her arms? She was trying to break free, wasn’t she?

– She was trying to break free. God Almighty will judge her. And then one woman figured it out and said: “I will go and get some holy water.” She fetched holy water and sprinkled the four corners and then she opened

the door and sprinkled her and she died. Before that she couldn't die. Never had I seen such a horrible agony before.

And why didn't her soul want to leave?

– I don't know what was going on there. Probably her soul didn't want [to leave her]; it was haunting her for something. She was such an undignified woman, you know, undignified. [...] I think she had a sin of some sort. Why couldn't she die in peace? Candles were being burnt; prayers were being said! So what was it? [...] And I also remember [that] her mother-in-law didn't want her at all. She didn't want her so she knelt down but was not blessed but cursed instead. She went to marry him and she was cursing and didn't want her to marry her son.

So she didn't give her blessing at all?

– No, she did not. And she carried on living in this disagreement. [...] Well, she didn't want her, she didn't want her son to marry her [...]

And how did she curse her?

– May you not live a prosperous life! May you not live in harmony!" – that's how she cursed. So, she didn't want. Yes, she didn't want that."

Not live a prosperous life?

– May you not live peacefully! Well, may you not have a good, satisfying life. May God not give His blessing and may your hands be always empty...)

There is another method to recognize that a family has been cursed. There is a Bulgarian belief written down by Moszyński: "If a lightning strikes a person whose innocence is beyond doubt (e.g. a child or a pure, innocent girl) it is a proof that the victims had a curse inherited from their parents" [KLS: 486]. My interlocutors from Belarus confirm this belief:

Czy to prawda, że przekleństwo ciąży na rodzinie przez pokolenia?

– Jest, mówion. A ci ona jest prawda, ci nie? Ja też słyszała, że mówion: «A może dziady tam wredne, to Boh pakarał i dzieci». Jaszczce za dziedy Pan Boh może pakarać dzieci [65].

(Is it true that a curse hangs over a family for generations?

– So they say. But is it true or not? I also heard them say: "Maybe grandparents were mean so God punished the children too." God can punish children even for their grandparents wrongdoings.)

Nu, mońja – eta użo silna hresznaja siemja ż dziadoŭ, z pradziadoŭ. Pała na pakaleńja. I heta Boh nasyłaje, o. [...] Eta Boh! Może ludzi ŭbiwali, może abirali, może szto płachoje dziełali, może dziady, pradziady. I Boh sasłał na pakaleńja: i dzieci, i ŭnuki, i praŭnuki. Boh sasłał eta pakajańje, na rodstwiennikaŭ sasłał [63].

(Well, a lightning means a family has sinned awfully since the times of the grandparents, great-grandparents. It has already fallen on next generations. And it is God who sends it, it is. ... It's God! Maybe those people killed

or stole things; maybe they did something evil; maybe it's grandparents or great-grandparents. And God sent punishment on the generations: both children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren. God sent this atonement, sent it on the relatives.)

When lightning strikes is it still punishment or already an act of liberation?<sup>3</sup> Does it put a stop to the circle of the curse? Does "exhausting its potency" mean? If we refer to the primary myth, we might confirm that lightning is used by the Thunderer for beating the opponent and, at the same time, restoring the balance in the world, facilitating development of life. However, before the lightning strikes, before Goodness shall fully unleash from Evil's superiority, time is needed. The curse must "live itself up", the sinner must repent. The humans who sinned, i.e. put themselves in the state of a curse cannot get back to life (a holy life filled up with blessing) unless they repent and do penance for the treaty with the devil. It seems that the very duration of the curse for generations can be perceived as a sort of repentance. If the sinner failed to make an effort to get the blessing back, then the "higher order" must intervene and do it in their name. How? By forcing the sinner to commit to the act of repentance by living with the consequences of the sin for an appointed period of time (there is no need to mention that 3, 7 and 9 are symbolic numbers), during which the whole evil caused by the sin "burns out" (the sinner repents until the natural end of the process), so, in other words, "until the power of the curse wears off." Moreover, it seems that this process cannot be interfered or interrupted. I asked my interlocutors what they think about saying a prayer for the cursed one lying in agony on the deathbed, and this is a sample reply:

- A ja wam skażu: pa mojemu, jeśli czeławiek podłaść rabił, puska j pamuczajecca.

- Oyszem, kali sahraszyl, to i pakutuj! Prauda?

- A, Boh jaho znaje! To ja budu malicca za jaho, kab jon skarej skanczałsia, a na mienie budzie praklaćje padać, Boh mnie paszle, szto heta praklaćje jaho na mianie padzie... Tak szto ty zarobił - tak ty kanczajsia!

- Kanieszna.

- No, nie prawilna, dzietki? [63, 64].

(- I will tell you: I believe that if the human was mean he should not have an easy death.

- I agree. The sinner should repent, shouldn't he?

- Oh, God only knows! I might be praying for him, for an easy death and then the curse will fall on me? God will send it on me and this man's curse will fall on me...So, if you are guilty, you will pay the price on your deathbed!

- Of course.
- Isn't this true, children?)

The issue of “appointed time” for repentance, punishment or enchantment is very often present in folk tales.<sup>4</sup> This type of repentance must not be interrupted (especially by a profane) before it comes to its natural end. This conviction is mentioned, for instance, in a folk tale of a married princess turned into a bird or a frog whose husband burns the wings or the skin he snatches and in this way makes her comeback to the human world impossible.

I rzekła mu: “Gdybyś był cierpliwy i nie palił teraz skorupy, to byłbyś mnie za rok już widział wolną. A tak, zaklętą na wieki, nie ujrzysz mnie już nigdy; bo wiedz, że zakłęcie moje trwać miało tylko lat siedem, zaś niniejszy rok był już siódmym” [*O żabie (The Story of Frog)*] [DWOK 8, *Krak* 4:7].

(So she said to him: “If you had been patient and hadn't burnt that stuff, one year from now you would see me free. Now, I'm going to stay enchanted here forever; you will never see me again since my spell was supposed to last only seven years and this one is already the seventh.)

“Lifting the curse” takes place either during the appointed time (“I came here to free my daughters since their time of their justified punishment is up” – “Przybyłam tutaj, by moje córki uwolnić, bo upłynął czas ich kary zasłużonej” [*Królowa sów (Queen of Owls)* [DWOK 14, *WKsPozn* 6: 134])) or as a result of magical activities undertaken by the hero.

Do the main actors of the folk curse ritual also have such magical activities at their disposal?

## 2. Possibilities of Lifting the Curse

If the curse is such a powerful tool and an agential word that establishes the world order then there should be no ground for placing the question of the possibility to take that word back and undo its consequences. Yet, sometimes such “out of place” questions can lead us to thought-provoking answers. Shall we give it a try then? The records quoted above still confirm the thesis that a curse cannot be lifted regardless of its type (justified or unjustified, deliberate or not). The inability to undo the curse seems one of its defining features.

When questioned if the mother can undo the curse, the interlocutors answer: “How could she? No, I don't think so. No one will take it back” (“Gdzie ona może? Nie chiba. To już nie wróci nicht”) [39]; “Undo the curse?

I don't think it can be done once the words were uttered" ("Cofnąć – no chyba już to nie można, bo to się rzekło, i tak") [18]; "this cannot be taken back. How can it be lifted if this is real from the very start...." ("To się już nie odwróci. Jak to można odwrócić, jak to od razu już może być takie naprawdę...") [24].

So there is no hope? What if the mother wishes she had never said those words?

Toż każda matka – tak mi się zdaje – że jak nawet dziecko doprowadzi ją do gniewu i zaklnie mu, tak "żeby ty tam zdechło," czy tam jak, no to potem mówi "oj, Boże, żeby tak się nie stało." Mi się zdaje, że tak każda matka, bo to, wiecie – zawsze matka. Ona powie ze złości, jak dziecko ją doprowadzi, ale: "żeby choć Pan Bóg dał, żeby tak się nie stało." I może przez to nie jest już tak najgorzej z tymi dziećmi, z tymi ludźmi. Ja tak sobie sądzę, bo tak jest, że każda ogląda się, jak to się mówi, poniewczasie [31].

(I believe that every mother, even if in the moment of great anger she curses using the following words: "May you die" or with similar words she says soon afterwards: Oh God, I hope this never happens." I believe every mother is like this since she is a mother. She says that in anger, when the child makes her annoyed but then: "May God grant that it never happens." And this might be the reason why it is no longer that bad with those children, with those people. This is my opinion since everyone turns back when it is too late, as they say.)

Jak w tej chwili co przeklęła, powie po prostu: zdenerwowałam się, wypowiedziałam to, och, co ja powiedziałam, przecież to będzie szkodziło, żałuję tego, to wtedy nie będzie szkodliwe [40].

(If at the moment the curse is uttered she simply says: I got angry, I said those things, why did I say that, it is going to hurt them, I wish I hadn't. In this case it will not do any harm.)

Maybe it is an isolated opinion? Or maybe it is an attempt to be rational, to impose on oneself a different way of looking at the world in which it is obvious that "a word once uttered cannot be taken back" ("słowo wypowiedziane nigdy się nie odwróci") [18]? But this is exactly the reality in which one believes that you can "bite your tongue" or "spit the word out" so that the uttered word or the one "on the tip of your tongue" doesn't fulfil. Let's continue listening. To the question whether the curse must always fulfil itself one of the interlocutors said: "Not always. If the mother curses and takes it back straight away it will not fulfil. But if she keeps cursing then it will." ("Nie zawsze. Jak matka zaklnie i zaraz cofnie, to się nie spełni, a jak klnie i klnie, to się spełni") [37].

How does it work for the mother to lift the curse? The interlocutors state that this process consists of two acts: regret and a request for forgiveness:

Kłątwa pozostaje, jeżeli matka nie będzie tego żałować [36].

(The curse remains if the mother has no regrets.)

Czy można klątwę odwrócić?

– Pan Bóg miłośliwy, sprawiedliwy, może się ulitować, jak przeprosi [65].

(Can people lift the curse?

– God gracious and fair might take pity on her, if she apologizes.)

Trzeba się może spowiadać, żałować za swoje słowa, za swoje wyrzeczenia, za swoje czyny, może Bóg przebaczyłby. No, może odwróci, jeżeli Bóg wysłucha pokuty, żalu, spowiedzi [38].

(Maybe she needs to confess, regret her words, her deeds, God might forgive. Well, He might lift it if He listens to the repentance, regret and confession.)

Ksiądz powie, że trzeba się modlić. Jak matka co złego czasem wypowie, później się żałuje – to po prostu Boga uprosi o te przemienienie [18].

(The priest is going to say that one has to pray. If the mother sometimes says something which she later regrets she will simply beg God for taking it back.)

Matka może Boga prosić o przebaczenie [37].

(The mother might ask God for forgiveness.)

To jest duża rzecz; to już musi przejść przez kościół, mszę, żeby to odmówić. Rzucić łątwo. Mądra matka tego nie zrobi, tylko głupia [6].

(This is a big thing; this has to go through the church, the holy mass to pray upon it<sup>5</sup>. It is easy to curse. A wise mother will not do it, a stupid one will.)

Moża chyba Boh iskupić hetu winu. Molićsia, moża, ispawiedawacca treba. Pryznacca tomu ksiendzu, tomu batiuszku, szto prakłała dzicia. Moża Boh pamohby. To ۇžo boska łaska. Chto wiedaje, jak tut da czaho? [...] Treba ispawiedawacca ۇ baciuszki, to moża Boh i znimie [64].

(I believe God might forgive her for this guilt. But one might have to pray, confess. One has to admit to the priest, to the batiushka that she cursed the child. Maybe God would help? This is God's grace. Who knows how it works? [...] One has to confess the sins to the batiushka. Then God might lift the curse.)

Jeśli słowa klątwy się wymkną i matka żałuje?

– To już inna sprawa – pójdzie do spowiedzi, wypowiada się, by Pan Bóg grzechy przebaczył... To cóż zrobić...

A jeżeli słowo niechcący się wymknęło?

– Trudno, różnie bywa... [44].

(What if the curse leaps out and the mother wishes she had never said those words?

– That's a different story– she will go and see the priest in the confessional box. She will confess so that God might forgive her for her sins...What else is there to do?

And what if the word leapt out involuntarily?

– Tough luck, it happens...)

Czy przeklęta córka może wpłynąć na odwrócenie klątwy, jeżeli żałuje?

– To już zależy od tej matki... To coś w tym rodzaju, jak syn marnotrawny [...]. Tego to już ja właśnie nie mogę wyjaśnić... [44].

(Can a cursed daughter influence the process of taking back the curse if she has regrets?"

– It depends on her mother... It's like with the prodigal son .... This I cannot explain...)

I believe the quoted statements allow me to conclude that there is a possibility, except for certain conditions, of the curse not being fulfilled. In that case we are dealing with a serious contradiction: here a curse can be both lifted and it cannot be lifted! How do we understand this?

The hope of “undoing” the curse, of the curse not fulfilling is related to the moment when mother regrets the words and asks God for forgiveness right after the words had been uttered but before the curse gets fulfilled. In fact, there is no turning anything back; we are rather dealing with prevention, a ritual of putting an immediate stop to it. Such rituals involve immediate protective action to safeguard the object in situations when something with undesired consequences occurred. For instance, when we touch wood we do so right after we utter the words and the curse hasn't started working yet. The curse works over time: it is only possible to prevent its successful fulfilment during the initial phase of the whole process, when the uttered words had just left the mediator's mouth and the curse has not started working yet.

This rule seems to be confirmed in the phrase “the curse remains if the mother has no regrets” (“klątwa pozostaje, jeżeli matka nie będzie tego żałować”) [36]. If the cursing party doesn't want “the curse to stay” she might attempt to undertake some kind of appeasing action. However, its result is never certain: “God only knows if our word is going to touch Him and make Him forgive us” (“a Bóg wie, czy to nasze słowo Boga wzruszy i przebaczy”) [38].

Hence, regardless of the intentions and efforts of “the persons involved” the intentions of the agent of the ritual seem not to be up to them. If someone truly deserved to be cursed there is no escape. What then is a curse that can be lifted?

I believe that, firstly, it might be understood as an unjustified curse. In this case the mother sinned when uttering the words of the curse; if she redeems the sin with regret and repentance then “God will forgive.” Thanks to regret and repentance, the child’s mother implements the exception to the following rule: *Who curses, gets cursed himself.*

Secondly, we might presume that the called off curse is a kind of warning for the naughty child; if the child reacts correctly for this “last call” and changes its behaviour, leaves behind the course of sin, then the circumstances of the curse ritual change as well. The child, once it ceases to be “naughty” is no longer the object of the ritual and it is simply no longer cursed: “If the child turns to its mother, if it apologizes to its mother, God might forgive. If it asks its mother to forgive” (“Jak dziecko nawróci się do matki, przeprosi matkę, to może i podaruje. Jak poprosić mamę, żeby to wszystko podarowała”) [22]. “If the child apologized its mother might forgive and then God might forgive too ...” (“Gdyby przeprosić i matka by podarowała, to może i Pan Bóg by podarował...”) [12]. “If children apologized to their mother and the mother would agree for God to forgive, it would be much easier” (“Jakby dzieci matkę przeprosiły, a matka się zgodziła, żeby Pan Bóg podarował, to by łatwiej było”) [13].

This interpretation of calling off the curse is confirmed in the myth in the song of Gienia being cursed. We remember that she didn’t use her last resort, i. e. the possibility of “turning to her mother” (and, at the same time, to God) in the mission in Puchaczewo during the ritual when the sinner might make an effort to make their issue “go through the church, the holy mass to pray upon it” (“przeszła przez kościół, mszę, aby to odmówić”) [6].

Can we then speak about the ritual for reversing the curse? If this is so then it needs to be stressed that potential lifting the curse is impossible without mother’s consent, without her (this time conscious) participation. This is confirmed by a common belief that if the mother who cursed her child has died there is no possibility of lifting the curse: “If mother lived she might lift the curse. No one can help now. It must be lifted by the same person who cast it” (“Matka jakby żyła, to może by odwróciła. Nikt już tu nie pomoże. Musi człowiek odwołać, który rzucił tę klątwę”) [21]. “After mother’s death this child will be crying because it is going to have a compulsion inside. It will be tormenting the child for not listening

to its mother and now that the mother is gone it is left alone and helpless" ("Po śmierci matki będzie płakało to dziecko, bo będzie miało nut w środku. Ono je dręczyć będzie, że ono się nie słuchało matki, a teraz nie ma tej matki i ono już się zostało bezradne") [30]<sup>6</sup>. Confirmation of this ritual is found in old writings of Slavic ethnographers: "In order to lift the mother's curse and ask her for forgiveness the son should eat a handful of soil. 'If you don't eat it,' the mother would say, 'it means you have disrespected me'" [SD: *Zemlja*].

This is the perfect moment to quote the words of van der Leeuw stressing a great significance of confessing the sins followed by forgiveness:

if he openly confesses that he is the doer of the deed, he withdraws from it the life with which he had endowed it. [...] and thus once more the decisive power of the word is shown. With this the confession of sin approximates to purification [van der Leeuw 1938: 441–442].

The possibility of purifying the turbulent relationship between a mother and her daughter is mentioned in songs of the souls damned for breaching the fourth commandment. In one of the songs one says the following words to a "sad" soul because she "was about to hit her mother":

Lecz ty duszo nie bądź smutna,  
przeproś matkę jeszcze jutro.  
Juzem ja ich przeprosiła,  
nóżki wymyła i brud wypila [DWOK 24, *Maz* 1: 145].

(Don't be sad, you soul,  
Apologize to your mother tomorrow.  
I have already apologized,  
I washed her feet and drank the dirt.)

It is worth paying attention to the phrase in the last line. According to Kolberg: "the greatest honor, gratitude, dedication a woman can show is by saying the following words: "I would wash his feet and drink this dirt" since the folk here are pious and eager to show this virtue" [DWOK 33, *Chełm* 1: 18]. According to Karłowicz, this ritual would mean honoring the person while being humble, as well as apologizing and begging for forgiveness [Karłowicz 1904]. At the same time, Uspensky writes:

Ritual 'drinking of water from sacral objects' might have become the basis for the metaphorical phrase: "wash one's feet and drink the water" which is equivalent to being humble almost on the religious level [Uspenskiy 1985: 100].

It seems that this process can be linked to the Slavic customs for making the sacrifice. According to Uspensky, after throwing offerings for the water god (into the water) women “drank this water and poured it all over themselves” [Uspenskiy 1985: 126].<sup>7</sup> Perhaps this kind of ritual drinking of water might be understood as a symbol of the accepted offering? Washing one’s feet would at that point be a sign of apology and begging for forgiveness while drinking the dirt would mean being granted forgiveness. It appears that the following sequence: confessing the sins (accompanied by an apology) – receiving forgiveness might be placed aside another one: sacrifice – accepting the offering. Both of them lead to the act of reconciliation which is introducing some order in the world of chaos. This is the only force that is powerful enough to beat the power of the curse.

A sacral significance of the reconciliation process between a mother and her daughter is confirmed in the folk tale trope T 783A *Wąż na drodze* (*Snake On Road* [PBL 1: 247]), which, according to its field record, would sound as follows:

Raz ludzie szli na odpust i tak ido na procesyjo, patrzą sie, a tu wąż sie rozwinął i nie dał ludziom póść. Ludzie nie wiedzą, co począc, chcieli póść na inszą stroneę, czyli inszą drogą i wrócili sie, ido na inszą drogę, patrzy sie, a tu wąż także sie rozwinął i nie dał ludziom póść. Ludzie znów poszli na tamte droge, na który pierszy raz szli, przyszli tam i tam tagże wąż przeleciał i także sie rozwinął. Książdz mówi: “Tu już pewnie między wami jest taki, co nie jest dobry, albo może się gniewają jeden z drugim.” I książdz mówi: “Jak tu kto między wami taki jest, to sie przeprosicie, bo jak sie nie przeprosicie, to ten wąż nie da wam prześć.” Jak to powiedział, to wyszła jedna kobieta z córko i przeprosiły się. Oni patrzą sie, a tu wąż im gdzieś zginął. [...] Ta matka i ta córka już się nie gniewały i zapomniały o tem, o co się pierwiy gniewały [MAAiE 1900, s. 336].

(One day village folk were going for an indulgence ceremony. They look around and see a snake unfold before them and it didn’t let the folk pass. They don’t know what to do; would like to choose a different route, a different road. So they go back onto a different road. They look and see the snake unfold here too and it doesn’t let them pass. So they go back to the previous road where they were before but the snake flew over there and unfolded. The priest says: “There must be someone wicked among you or maybe there are some disagreements.” And he says: “If this is the case make peace. Otherwise, the snake will not let you pass.” As he said that a woman stepped forward with her daughter and they made peace with each other. They look around but the snake is already gone. [...] This mother and her daughter no longer quarrelled and forgot about the cause of disagreement.)<sup>8</sup>

Theoretically speaking, everything seems clear: the child repents, apologizes and corrects its behaviour while the mother forgives, God forgives and the curse does not fulfil. So much for the theory and the myth. In practice, just like in life, this rule is slightly different. In any of the above-mentioned statements interlocutors' opinions are not absolute and consistent but rather conditional: "God might forgive too" ("Pan Bóg może podaruje") [22], if He forgave "it would be much easier" ("to by lżej było") [13]. A precise example of the reconciliation between a mother and her daughter is shown as follows:

U nas taka jedna była. Chodzili do niej te chłopaki i chodzili, jedno miała dziecko, drugie, jedno poronienie, ale jakoś wyszła za męż. Ona prosiła, żeby matka to wybaczyła. I jak był ślub, to jednak ukłękła i prosiła jednak błogosławieństwa tego, niech ta matka odpuści ten grzech. I powiedziała matka: "niech ci Bóg odpuści." Ale on teraz bije ją i wyzywa i dzieci takimi nazwiskami niedobrymi. A ona taka jest i jest, dla niej coraz to było innego trzeba [30].

(There was a girl here once. Lads would come over frequently. She had one child, then another. She had a miscarriage yet somehow she got married. She asked her mother to forgive her. On her wedding day she knelt down and asked for her mother's blessing and forgiveness for this sin. And the mother said: "May God forgive you." Now her husband beats her and calls her and the children names. But that's the way she is; she needed to change men all the time.)

Practice does not go hand in hand with the theory then. It is not easy for the sinner to improve since "that's the way they are." Interlocutors admit that "the child must apologize to its mother" ("dziecko musi przeprosić matkę """) [36]: "Of course, the child should apologize" ("Pewno, dziecko powinno przeprosić") [39]; "the child must apologize because it has nothing to live for" ("Musi przeprosić, tak, bo dziecko nie ma co żyć") [37]. But the apology is not sufficient: "the child might ask but it is not going to turn back" ("dziecko może prosić, ale to już nie wróci się") [35]. In order to move from the world of the cursed to the world of the blessed, from chaos to the cosmos, one must repent and make offerings. It is not easy for a man turned into stone to become human again or a black princess to whiten.<sup>9</sup>

Therefore, even though my interlocutors allow for "the child's transformation", in their opinion it is strictly theoretical. Even though I asked them I didn't get even one example of a successful lifting of the curse.

This is not the whole truth, however. My interlocutors never heard of lifting the curse "in life." Yet, they know magical folk tales that tell

stories of lifting the curse from the stone cf. SSiSL 1: 397. Let's recall one of such folk tales,<sup>10</sup> recorded from the best singer and story teller in Papernia next to Lida in Belarus. According to her, the power to bring life back lies in an egg, a symbolic personification of life, fertility, creation and recreation of the universe [cf. Toporow 1977].

Czy jak taki kamień zaklęty uderzyć, rąbnąć, to też krew leci?

– Kto jego..., nie wiem. Tego nie słyszała, ale mówią, że tak.

A jak odwrócić? Czy już jak taka córka zamieniona w kamień, to koniec, przepadło?

– Może i przepadło, Pan Bóg wie. Nie wiem, tego nie wiem, nie słyszała tego, jak to jest. Tylko bajka jest, taka bajka opowiadają, że: Było dwanaście synów u jednego i ony zachcieli żenić się. Tak na jich powiedzieli, powiedział ojciec i matka: “Jedź, mówi, i szukaj, żeby było dwanaście córek, będziecie żenić się z jimi.” Pojechali, mówi – ale to już bajka opowiadają, a może i była kiedy prawda, kto jego wie. No, i ony wyjechali. I tam był na to czarodziej na drodze. On wszystkich czarował. No, ony jak pojechali, i rok, i nie ma, aż znaleźli... Znaleźli ony takie dwanaście córek. I piszą, że już my tam i wesela odbawili się, i jedziem do domu.

Już z żonami, tak?

– Z żonami jechali. I jich... A jeden został w domu, tutaj, dwunasty. Jedenastu pojechało i jemu będą żonę wieść tutaj już. Tak, takie było domówienie. No i, mówi, ony jechali, i musieli tam jechać koło tego czarownika, ten czarownik jich w wielki kamień zaczarował. Duży kamień taki, wysoki, mówi... I wszystkich jich tam, jak ony jechali, z końmi, z wozami tymi, czy bryczki tam, wszystko... Ich zaczarował. No, a ten jeden, jemu sen przyśnił się: “Jedź, szukaj swoich braci. I swojej żony.” Jemu sen, i on wyszedł już w świat. Pójdiesz szukać. Wyszedł, idzie, mówi on, aż, mówi, jemu naprzeciw zajac leci. A jeść chciał, dużo dni szedł i głodny był... Tak on, mówi, swoja dostał, i zastrzelić chciał, strzelba swoja, jego. A on mówi: “Paniczyku małady, nie strelaj mienie. Ja budu tobi u wielkaj pryhodzi patrebny.” Ten, mówi, ręce opuścił. Później idzie dalej, mówi, aż, mówi, leci kaczka. On kaczka chciał zabić. Kaczka też mówi: “Małady paniczyku, nie bij mienie, ja tobie budu pryhożaja w darozi.” Też, mówi, opuścił rence. A później, mówi, ryba. Widzi taka ryba ładna, koło rzeki szedł. I ta ryba... On chciał zabić ta ryba. A ryba mówi: “Paniczyku, nie bij mienie, ja tobie budu pryhożaja w darozi.” I tej ryby nie bił. A potem, zdaje się, rak... No, tak tego... I on przyszedł do tego czarownika. Tak on mówi tak... Zaszedł do jego i mówi, szto: “Idu szukać, gdzieś tam, mówi, moje braci, i tak, i, mówi, coś nie ma długo...” A on mówi: “Ja wiem, ja znaju, hdzie jany... I ten kamień leży koło tego, tam w lesie, [gdzie] mieszka stary ten czarownik. Ale,” mówi, “ja zranił, a teraz ja, stary, nie mahu adrabić. Ja jich u wielki kamień...,” on mówi. “Skaży, dzieduszka, jak jich tam, mówi, jak...” A on mówi tak jemu, że: “Idzi, idzi darohaju, wyskoczyć zajac, wielki zajac wyskoczyć taki, i ty da jaho paprasi, i jon

z hniezda wyżenie kaczkę, a kaczka taja palacie na more, budzie na mory pływać, ot, a u toj kaczkcy..” Aha, raka, on jeszcze raka chciał, raka ta kaczka nastraszy... “A u toj, mówi, kaczkki jest, mówi, jajko. Ona żniesie. Trzeba jej złapać i dostać to jajko. Tak ona...,” on mówi tak... A ten wszystko słucha. ‘A u kaczkcy toj jajko. A to jajka pobić i to, mówi, ten kamień smarować, i to odżyje.” I on poszedł znowu w świat. Idzie, idzie, aż zając wyleciał. I on mówi: “Co ty głowa tak spuścił?” – “A, braty maje, tak i tak.” On poleciał, kaczka wypędził z gniazda. Ta kaczka, fr, w góra. Aha, złapał jej, ta kaczka, jemu dał. On ta kaczka wziął, a kaczka, fr, wyleciała. Jak ta kaczka wyleciała i poleciała, tak, prawda, o, kruk był. On kruka chciał... Tak ten kruk, o, jak on idzie, i mówi: “Tak, mówi, ja wsie zrobię, co każesz”. – “Kaczka uciekła, kaczka maja.” Tak on mówi: “Dobrze, zara.” Podniął się i za tą kaczka. I jej w plecy, jak dał – kruk ten, w plecy – ona jajko wyrzuciła. I nad morzem. Do morza jajko wpadło. No, tak ta ryba wzięła w zęby i przyniosła jemu jajka. I on ta jajko rozbił i, mówi, posmarował, i wszystkie przyjechali do domu. O, jak. I, mówi, przyjechali do domu, już tu ich ojciec, matka spotkali, wesele już robili, bawili się, jak my mówili: I my byli, wódkę pili, po baradzie ciakło, w rocie nie było. Wot jak, mileńka moja [50].

(If we hit or punch this enchanted stone does it shed blood too?

– Who knows... I don't know. This I never heard but that's what they say.

And how can it be lifted? Does

it mean that if one's daughter is turned into stone there's no way back?

– Maybe there's no way back, God only knows. I don't know, I don't know that, I never heard what it is like. Folk tell the following fairytale: one guy had twelve sons who wanted to get married. So their parents said: “Go and search for twelve daughters to marry.” They set off –but this is just a folk tale or maybe it was once true once, who knows? So they left. There was a sorcerer on the road. He was doing sorcery on everyone. They were gone for a year and at last they found the girls. They found twelve daughters. And they write that after the wedding they set off for home.

– With their wives, right?

– They went with their wives. And they...one stayed here at home, the twelfth one. Eleven brothers left and they were to bring a wife for the twelfth one. That was the arrangement. Well, they were on the way back and had to go pas s that sorcerer. The sorcerer turned them into a large, tall stone. He performed sorcery on everyone, the horses, the carriages, the carts, everything. Well, that twelfth son had a dream: “Go and search for your brothers and your wife.” And he set off into the world. He went to look for them. He was walking and saw a hare moving towards him. The lad was travelling for many days so he was hungry. So he lifted his rifle to shoot the hare. And the hare says: “Young lad, don't shoot me. I will help you a great deal when you need me.” The lad put the rifle down. He keeps on walking and comes across a flying duck. He wanted to kill the duck. But the duck also says: “Young lad, spare my life and you will find me of use on your way.” He put

down the rifle. And then the fish. He comes across a fine fish when walking along the river. And the fish... he wanted to kill it. The fish says: "Young lad, spare my life and I will be of use on your way." So he spared the fish. And then, I think, the crayfish. So that was it. At last he reached the sorcerer. He approached him and says: "I'm going to look for my brothers in this area because they have been missing for a long time now. And the sorcerer says: "I know where they are...There is a stone in the woods. It's my doing and now I can't undo it. I turned them into this large stone." "Tell me, old man, how to turn it back?" And he says to him: "Go down this road, you will see a hare, a big hare. Ask him to scare the duck out of its nest. The duck will fly towards the sea and it will swim at the sea and in the duck..." Oh, the crayfish. He wanted the crayfish to be scared by the duck. "And in the duck there's an egg," he says. It will lay the egg. You need to catch it and get the egg. Then it..." he says. The lad has been listening intently. "In the duck there's the egg. You need to crack the egg and rub the stone with it. Then they will be brought back to life." And he left again. He was walking when suddenly he saw a hare. The hare asks him, "What's with your long face?" "That's my brothers' story." The hare jumped, scared the duck out of the nest, caught it and brought to him. The lad took the duck but it broke free and flew away. When the duck flew away...Well...There was a crow! He wanted a crow. So the crow says, "Your wish is my command." "The duck is gone, my duck." So the crow says, "Good, right away." He went into the sky after the duck. He pecked the duck into the back, the crow, into the back and the duck let the egg go. Over the sea. The egg fell into the sea. Well, then the fish caught it in between its teeth and brought this egg to him. And he cracked the egg and rubbed the stone and everyone went home.<sup>11</sup> Oh yes. They came home, met their father, and met their mother; they organized the wedding, had fun as we say: and we were there too, had our share of vodka go down the chin until there was none left in the mouth. Oh yes, my dear.)

The magic folk tale shows us the possibilities of taking away the spell on the mythical level. Another, i.e. sacral variation of the fate of the daughter turned into stone is "life suspended" in stone which turns out to be an epiphany of the female goddess (Lada?), the patron saint of women, fertility, love, motherhood, children and harvest. A local collective cult of such "stone girls" for prosperity of rural communities is still being kept alive in Eastern Polesie, cf. Lobachevskaya 2008. Olga Lobachevskaya, a researcher of this phenomenon, writes, "Women [...] perceive a stone 'girl' as alive and when speaking about her they openly pity her. Offerings: eggs, bread, pierogis, money, wildflowers are being brought to "the girl" for Passover [...] They 'dress' the stone by putting aprons around it, they tie scarves and decorate it with [plastic] beads." They ask the stone girl for health and prosperity and tell about her the following story:

Women would take infants to the fields. They would take cradles with them. And there was a girl; she was already 12 years old. So they came to the fields and the mother was reaping stalks. And the heaps were then thrown onto a pile. A cloud. The mother said to her daughter once: "take the heaps onto the pile because the cloud is coming towards us." She didn't listen. The second time she didn't listen. The mother says: "may you turn into a stone." And the girl did turn into a stone [Lobachevskaya 2008: 104].

This is just another alternative of the by now familiar of a daughter who breaches the spirit of collective happiness and fortune and ends up turned into a stone. As noted by the quoted researcher, this myth, alongside the cult of "stone girls", has

important social and moral meaning [...] for the female part of the rural community. The stone "girl" cursed by her mother [...] protects their maternity from the sin of cursing children. [...] The sacred stone changes the course of events; it has the power of directing it in the good or wrong direction [Lobachevskaya 2008: 105].

The life of the disobedient daughter turned into stone goes on as a life-giving divine power and even seems to be key for continuation of group existence.



# APPENDIX: THE BLESSING RITUAL IN FOLK CULTURE, OR ON THE ALLOCATION OF FORTUNE'S GIFTS BY EMPLOYING WORDS

Lepiej się żyło, bo z Bogiem robili.  
Nie ma nic bez Boga – to już prawda.  
(Life was better since it was with God.  
There's nothing without God. That's the truth.)

Interlocutor from Huszcza

Blessing [...] is indeed by no means a mere pious wish, but the allocation of fortune's gifts by employing words. When we were children we were astonished to find that Isaac had no benediction ready for his beloved Esau after the first had been purloined by the cunning Jacob. But Isaac was not expressing any mere wishes: he was blessing, and he could bestow the same blessing only once. [...] Only he who has Power can bless: only he who can create. God alone can bless... For to bless is to decree what exists and is effective... Only God can bless. But we are essentially suppliants [van der Leeuw 1938: 409].

An analysis of Polish, Belarusian and Ukrainian materials collected during contemporary field studies as well as ethnographic records from the nineteenth century allow us to have a closer look at how this the power of the blessing was passed on members of the traditional community at

the time of three key rites of passage, namely: one's birth, wedding and death. The first blessing is given soon after one's birth:

Gdy ktoś z zaproszonych gości na chrzciny przychodzi do chaty, to pochwalwszy Boga jak zazwyczaj i przywitawszy się, pyta ojca lub matki: "A szczoż wam tam Pan Boh dav?" – po odpowiedzi: "syna" lub "doczku", mówi gość dalej: "A nech wam sia hoduje zdorowo, na posłuhu, na potichu: matery, tatkowy i riodnomu i chreszczonemu! daj Hospody!" – Wtedy częstują go wódką; gość bierze kieliszek, pije do połowy lub nieco więcej, a resztę wylewa do góry na pułap, żeby tak dziecię rosło wysoko [DWOK 33, *Chełm* 1: 175].

(When one of the guests invited for baptism comes over to the house, once they praise God with the usual greeting and greet everyone else, they ask the father or mother: "so, what did God give you?", after they get the answer "a son" or "a daughter", they say: "May he/she grow up in good health, be obedient and to the comfort of: his/her mother, father and godfather and godmother! God grant it! Then they give them a glass of vodka which the guest takes and drinks a half of or a bit more and splashes the rest up to the ceiling so that the infant can grow up tall.)

Przed odjazdem do chrztu babka, wzięwszy dziecko na ręce, obchodzi stół trzykrotnie, przemawiając za każdym razem: "Ojczy, matko, bracia, siostry, dziadki i ciotki, sąsiedzi, przyjaciele, bliscy i dalecy – wszystkich pokornie proszę dzieciątko do chrztu pobłogosławić."<sup>1</sup>

(Before leaving for baptism the midwife takes the infant in her hands; she goes round the table three times while saying the following words every time: "Father, mother, brothers, sisters, grandparents, aunts, neighbors, friends and best friends, I humbly ask you all to bless this baby for baptism.")

Rodzice przeżegnają, postawią coś pyty czy jisty, i uże błogosławią' jehó [tj. dziecko]: "Nech Bih da, nech roste zdrowe, dorodneńkie, kob jomu tam nyc... [złego nie było]." Błogosławią' [25].

(The parents make the sign of the cross, prepare some drink and food and bless the baby: "God grant it, may you grow up in good health, fine and may all evil keep away from you." They bless the baby.)

W Mazowszu nad rzeką Bzurą jest zwyczaj, iż dziecię nowonarodzone dziadek ubogi kładzie po chrzcie na chwilę pod ławę i klęcząc nad nią, pacierz odmawia. Zwyczaj ten składania dziecka pod ławę ma być dawny [DWOK 24, *Maz* 1: 215].

(In Mazovia near the Bzura there is a custom that a newborn is placed underneath a bench by a poor old man who then kneels beside it and says a prayer. The custom of placing a baby under a bench is an old one.)

[Po chrzcie chrzestni i goście] idą do domu gazdy, lecz nim wejdą, staną z dziećciem pod oknem i zapytują z podwórza: "A czy dobra dytyna?" – Wtedy odpowiedzą im z chaty: "Dobra, dobra!" i zaraz najstarsza z osób będących w izbie bierze parę bocheneczków chleba i topkę soli, wychodzi na dwór, kładzie chleb i sól dziećciu na poduszce, i zaprasza wszystkich do chaty [DWOK 29 *Pok* 1: 212].

([After baptism the godparents and guests] go to the house but before entering they stand with the baby by the window and ask from outside: "Is this a good child?." Then they hear a reply from the cottage: "Good, good" and the oldest person inside takes a few loaves of bread and a measure of salt, places the bread and salt onto the baby's pillow and invites everyone inside.)

In the accounts quoted above we are dealing both with the actual saying the blessing formula (i.e. a sentence with the semantic structure: "O power, make something good happen to X" whose illocutionary force is described as the power of the blessing) and a number of gestures and activities that accompany the words (which, in accordance with the rule of ritual speech-action, should be repeated three times). Drinking to the health of the ancestors' souls (in the form of pouring out vodka up to the ceiling), circumambulating the table (the altar of the family) three times, placing the baby underneath a bench (hence in the sacred corner on the ground, which relates to the anthropogenic myth featuring human that God made out of soil and hence human body returns to the earth after death) [cf. Tomicki 1980: 49–119], welcoming the newly baptized Christian with bread and salt (the symbols of life); acting out the ceremonial dialogue through the window-the gate to the other world (it is through this gate that the dead are taken out so that they cannot return to haunt the living; the wedding blessing is given by dead parents; a sick child is taken home so that it can lose the illness; or various medical treatments are performed: losing a *hordeolum*, the *nocnitsa*, etc.). Such rituals and others are usually performed by folk intermediaries between this and the other world: a midwife, a poor old man, a guest, the oldest participant of the ritual, and lastly, the blessing parents. Thanks to the acts of blessing that take place after one's physical birth, a newborn does not longer belong to the sphere of death but begins their participation in life both on the physical, social and spiritual level.

This presence of God in human life needs to be established; it requires help and development; hence, the acts of blessing are repeated also after baptism, every day throughout their childhood or even many times on a daily basis:

Kładąc dziecko do kąpeli, wymawiają nad nim z cicha: “w imię Ojca i Syna i Ducha świętego, amen” [Polaczek 1891: 629; a record from Rudawa near Kraków].

(Placing the child for the bath they whisper over them: “In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, Amen.”)

Dziecko kąpiesz, to każdy raz wodę żegnasz. I jak spać kładziesz, to żegnasz, i poduszkę, i dziecko. A kiedyś to opowywali. To zanim włożysz do tego powijacza – tak mama robiła i wszyscy u nas – to przeżegnasz i za nos zdusisz [31].

(When you are giving bath to the baby you cross the water every time. When you lay the baby to sleep you cross the pillow and the baby. They used to swaddle babies so before you put your baby in the swaddle blanket, that is what my mom and others used to do, you cross it and pinch the nose.)

The protective sign of the cross might be made present in the form of a sacred prop:

Dziecko się urodzi, to matka nie wyjdzie z dzieckiem na dwór [...]. A jeżeli już trzeba gdzieś iść, to różańczyk włoży na to dziecko, żeby coś wiatr nie podmuchał, żeby... [53].

(A child is born and its mother will not go outside with it [...]. But if she must go out, she will put a small rosary on the child so that the wind could not blow on it, so that...)

Do we properly understand the gesture of crossing as a blessing? Yes, we do. When we say *crossing* (*przeżegnanie*) we invoke the external physical part of the ritual – one’s hand gesture; when we say *blessing* (*błogosławieństwo*) – we invoke its verbal part and, at the same time, the proper sense, i.e. the allocation of fortune’s gifts by employing words. It is worth noting the etymology of the words included. In all Indo-European languages the words for “blessing” derive from the units meaning either ‘speak well’ or ‘make the sign of the cross’ or ‘bless’ or ‘good fate, happiness, good luck’ [Buck: *Bless*]. The Polish word *błogosławić* is a calque from the Greek *eulogein* meaning ‘to speak well’ (similarly to the Latin *benedicere*). The Polish language incorporated this word approximately in the fourteenth century via the Old Church Slavonic *blagosloviti* and Czech *blahoslaviti*. In the sixteenth century there was also a Polish calque: *dobrorzeczyć* (meaning ‘to honour, to adore, to glorify’ – ‘czcić, wielbić, wysławiać’). *The Dictionary of the Polish Language of the Sixteenth Century* gives the synonym of *błogosławić* as the verb *przeżegnać* [StXVI: *Błogosławić*]. According to Brückner, *żegnać, przeżegnać, pożegnanie* ‘to cross’ and ‘crossing’ is the same borrowing everywhere in the West (Russia and Lithuania borrowed the words from

the Polish language) from the German *segnen*, which in turn is taken from the Latin *signare* from *signum*- 'the sign (of the holy cross)' ('znak (krzyża świętego)') [SEBr: *Żegnać*]. In Polish folk dialects *żegnać* is a much closer equivalent of *błogosławić* than in the general Polish language. For instance Karłowicz's *Dictionary of Polish Dialects* gives only one meaning of *żegnać*, that is 'to bless' ('błogosławić'), while providing us with the following quotations: *May God cross you, may he bless you for the new year; Jesus crosses you and so do I (Żeby was Bóg żegnał, obdarował na ten nowy rok; Żegna Pan Jezus, żegnam i ja)* [SGPKarł: *Żegnać*].<sup>2</sup>

The most ceremonially complex folk blessing ritual in terms of customs is the one related to the wedding. Before the young couple leave for church or Orthodox church to be wed they are ceremoniously blessed by their parents:

Błogosławieństwo to u nas, za Bugiem, tak wyglądało. Jak już mają do ślubu odjeżdżać, to młoda siada za stołem (bo młody u nas nie zajeżdżał po młodą), no i dopiero przychodzi matka z ojcem, kładą bochenek chleba na stole, kładą obraz (Matki Boskiej, czy jakiś tam – no, który już tam dla tej młodej kupili). I teraz bierze drużbant chusteczki taką, młoda bierze się za tą chusteczki i trzy razy naokoło stoła oprowadza tą młodą. A tam, gdzie ona siedziała, to zasiadają rodzice. I teraz ona, każdy raz jak idzie, to sie ukloni przed tym chlebem – normalnie na kolana, takie pokłony, jak to mówią, bije. I całuje ten chleb. I przez obrazem tak samo – całuje obraz. I teraz przez rodzicami klęka i prosi o błogosławieństwo. Rodzice przeżegnają tylko i ręce położą, i: "Jak Pan Bóg błogosławi, to i ja błogosławię," no i więcej nic. A jeszcze jak ona siedzi za stołem przed tym oprowadzaniem, to cała rodzina zrzuca jej pieniądze – kto ile ma, po pare groszy. I ona z tymi pieniędzmi jedzie do kościoła i za drogę ma ich przeliczyć parę razy [31].

(The blessing in our parts, i.e. across the river Bug was as follows. They are ready to leave; the girl sits down by the table (the boy would not come to pick her up) and then her mother and father come; they place a loaf of bread on the table and an icon (depicting God's Mother or a different icon but the one they bought for the girl). The best man presents a handkerchief and the girl grabs it and they go round the table three times. At the same time her parents sit down where she was sitting before. And the girl, every time she passes the bread she bows before it, she simply prostrates. And she kisses the bread. The same with the icon-she kisses it. And then she goes down on her knees in front of her parents to ask for the blessing. The parents make the sign of the cross and place their hands on her and say the following words: "As God blesses you I bless you as well." That's all. Before that, when she is sitting by the table before she goes around it, the whole family give her money, as much as they have, even a few grosz. And she collects the money and takes it to church and she is supposed to count it a few times on the way.)

Drużko do rodziców błogosławi. On trzy razy się kłania i mówi: "Jeszcze raz tym samym słowem mówię, jeszcze się kłaniajcie młode do rodziców." Trzy razy mówi. I to już ta młoda płacze. No, to idzie nasamprzód młoda, idzie do mamusi już się żegnać, do ojca, do chrzesnych, i jeszcze jaka tam jest bliska rodzina, czy brat, czy siostra. Drużko bierze tak za plecy, trzy razy ukłoni, a matka z ojcem przeżegnają – ile razy ukłoni, tyle razy przeżegnają tych młodych. Mówią: "w imię Ojca i Syna i Ducha świętego, amen" i wtenczas się całują [30].

(The parents bestow the blessing. The best man bows three times and says: "Once again I say the same thing, bow the couple before the parents." He says it three times. And the bride is already in tears. So she goes first to her mother to ask her blessing, then she approaches her father, then the godparents and any other close family members, e.g. her siblings. The best takes the bride by the back, like this, and bows her three times, and the father and the mother cross her. They will cross her as many times as many times she bows. They say: "In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, Amen" and then they kiss.)

Wchodzą do domu marszem, dywan rozłożony jest na podłodze, młoda i młody przykłękają przy jej rodzicach i proszą o błogosławieństwo: "Proszę mamusi o błogosławieństwo," "Proszę tatusia o błogosławieństwo." Matka wianuszek jej zakłada i błogosławieństwo rodzice składają. Jak i jego rodzice są, to dopiero potem podchodzą do jego rodziców. "Niech wam Pan Bóg szczęściem całe życie darzy," i po prostu przeżegna, no i ucałują się. Potem rodzina bliższa i chrzestne stają do ukłonu. I wszystkich prosi, żeb błogosławili dla nich [18].

(They march inside; a carpet is spread on the floor; the bride and the groom kneel down by her parents and ask for the blessing with the following words: "I kindly ask you, mommy for the blessing" and "I kindly ask you, daddy for the blessing." The mother puts a wreath on her and the parents bless them. If the groom's parents are present then they are approached by the couple. "May God give you happiness all your lives" and then they simply make the sign of the cross and kiss. Then close family members and godparents are asked for the blessing with a ritual bow. And everybody is requested to bless them.)

Jak ja była szcze dziękajku, tak było. Stawicca łałka, łożycca pościłka pad nohi. Sadziacca bački udwaich. Biaruć abraz u ruki. I maładaja, kali wyłazić z za stała, kruhom trzy razy abyjdzie, praszczajecca z obrazom. A tady padychodzić da baćkou. Bački biaruć toj abraz, katory da szlubu wiazuć. I z tym abrazom siadziać. I jana pakłaniajecca, stanowicca na kaleni na hetu pościłku, całuje abraz i baćkou. I tady uestaje. Biare hety abraz, pieradaje swańcy. Hety abraz użo rucznikom prybrany, tak jak treba jechać da szlubu. I wybiraजूca z chaty. A hetu pościłku, katoraja była ła baćkou pad nahami, biare z saboju maładaja, wynosić na dwor i kidaje na chatu, na strechu. Spad baćkou, spad noh kidaje

na strechu. A dziauczaty starajucca dastać jaje, tu pościłku. Katoraja dastanie, to taja piersza замуż pojdzie. To taki byŭ zwyczaj [52].

(It was like that when I was a girl. They put a bench and a rug underneath it. Both parents sit down holding a holy icon in their hands. The bride walks around the table three times as a way of saying goodbye to the icon [that protects her parental home]. Then she approaches her parents. The parents take the icon, which they will take with them to the wedding and sit with the icon. She bows, kneels down on the rug, kisses both the icon and her parents. Then she stands up, takes the icon and gives it to the matron of honor. The icon is already covered with the rushnyk [a ritual cloth] as it is supposed to be when one is going to get married. And they leave the house. The rug that was beneath the parents' feet is taken outside by the bride who then throws it onto the roof of the house. From beneath of the parents' feet it is thrown to the roof. The girls are trying to get it down and whoever gets it first is supposed to get married first. That's the custom.)

– Muzykanty hrajuć marsza. Małady maładoju wiadzje pa hetych rucznikach. [...] Padychodziać da matki z baćkam. Na ruczniku dziarzyć piroh maci. Baćka dziarzyć na talercy zakryta chustaczkaju dwie czaraczki, chleb i sol. I jany padychodziać, pakłaniajucca baćkam. Maci z baćkam błahasławiać. – Jak pakłaniajucca?

– Padychodziać i tak o, niska kłaniajucca. Tady jany wypiwajuć, małady z maładoju, i bjuć hetaja czarki. Napierad sabie bjuć [71].

(– Musicians are playing a march. The groom is leading the bride on those rushnyks... They approach the mother and father. The mother is holding the pirog on the rushnyk. The father is holding two glasses, some bread and salt on a little plate covered with a piece of cloth. So they approach the parents and bow. The mother and father bless them.

How do they bow?

– They approach them and do it this way, they bow down low. Then they drink vodka, both the bride and the groom and they break the glasses.)

The descriptions show a high number of both holy objects and holy gestures included in the ritual of the blessing, namely: the table – the home altar (in other descriptions also the holy corner: “they used to bow to the corner [...] where in pagan times the home idol used to stand” (“dawniej się jeszcze kłaniano kątowi zwanemu pokutiem, gdzie za czasów pogańskich stał domowy bożek”) [DWOK 28, *Maz* 5: 375]), but also bread (often accompanied by salt), the holy icon covered with the Rushnyk, the cross, the wreath, a white handkerchief (the equivalent of the rushnyk), sacrificial coins and other gifts. These paraphernalia are interwoven into the ritual and play a transitive role between the world of heaven and earth. The situation is similar with the following ritual

activities that are repeated three times: circumambulating the table (always “following the sun”), prostrating (the Orthodox Church tradition states they should go all the way down to the ground), kneeling, kissing (one’s legs, hands, forehead, and the face), kissing holy objects, making the sign of the cross, and lastly a common tradition of breaking the glasses once vodka is drunk up by the couple. All these symbolic acts and objects serve, if I may put it this way, to “thicken the atmosphere of holiness.”

The atmosphere gets “thick” not only because of accumulation of ritual activities and props during the parental blessing, hence coexistence of the verbal, actional and physical codes in their full version [cf. Tołstoj 1992: 21–22], but also multiple repetitions of the blessing act during the whole wedding ceremony. It is, first of all, repeated over time in the subsequent crucial moments of the wedding ceremony. For instance my interlocutors point out preparation of the korovai, leaving the house through the door marked with the magical and protective sign of the cross and obviously the capping ceremony.

Jak korowaja miesiat’, nacznut’ miesiti, to puzywajut’ bat’ka i matieru pobłahosłowiti. Bat’ko i mati howorat’: “Boh błahosłowit’ i ja błahosłowlu.” I wże naczynajut’ miesiti. [...] To wże: “Bat’ko i mati, rozreszytie korowaja miesiti?” To wże naczynajut’ i misiat’. [...] A jak wychodiat’ mołodyje wże z za stoła, pojut’: “Stupitiesia, worohi, z dorohi, / niachaj perejdie bat’ko swuj, / da niachaj perejdie Hospod’ Boh.” Na porohi kresta położat’, szob wrodie kob nihto nie pryrobiw. [...] Na dwieriach stuknie tak, a potom tak: nizko, w horu, w niz i po bokam. [...] I wony poszli [72].

(When they are making the korovai, when they are beginning to make the dough they invite the father and mother for the blessing. The father and mother say: “As God blesses you I bless you as well.” And then they get down to making the dough. [...] They ask: “Father and mother, do you allow to make the korovai?” And then they start and make the dough. [...] And when the couple leave the table they sing: “Get out of the way, foes,/ may our father go past,/ may God go past.” On the threshold they make the sign of the cross so that no one can do any sorcery no one can fake it. By the door they knock like this and then low, high, low again and on the sides. And so they go.)

– Chryszczonyja błahasławilisia: «Błahasławicie, aciec i maci, maładoj wianka zniaci». A jany uże atwiaczajuć: «Boh błahasławić». Try razy haworać. Chto wam zdymaŋ wianok?

– Chrosna. Chrosna nada szto b zdymała.

I szto na haławu potym kłali?

– Płatok, jaki pryhatowiła swiakrou. Zniali wianka, płatka nakinuli na hoławu i zawiązali. I śpiawajuć uże: “Szto my chacieli, toje my zrabili / adzieli maładzicu...” Użeż jana u chustcy, nie u wianku, znaczyć, jana maładzica [80].

(– Godparents gave the blessing with the following words: “Bestow your blessing, father and mother so that the bride might take off the wreath.” And they respond with the following words: “God blesses.” They repeat that three times.

Who took off your wreath?

– My godmother. It must be the godmother.

And what would they put on the head afterwards?

– A headscarf prepared by the mother-in-law. They took off the wreath, put the headscarf on the head and tied it. And then they would sing: “We did what we wished to do/a young wife we dressed up...” She is wearing a headscarf, not a wreath anymore, which indicates she is a young wife.)

Secondly, the acts of the blessing are repeated by a high number of people; in fact, the young couple ask everyone for the blessing: wedding guests, other guests and even onlookers.

Jak do ślubu odchodzą, to klękają przed rodzicami [...] i potem wszystkim – pół wsi przyjdzie – wszystkim się kłaniają. I każdy mówi: “Niech was Pan Bóg błogosławi, jak najlepiej da” [11].

(When they leave for the wedding ceremony, they kneel before their parents... and then they bow before everyone and half a village will come. And everyone says: “God bless, God grant you all the best.”)

The same process is repeated when the wedding procession is going to church or Orthodox church:

Jak jadą do ślubu, młodzi się kłaniają przechodniom. Przechodnie żegnają i mówią: “Niech was Pan Bóg błogosławi” [12].

(On the way the young couple bow to passersby who make the sign of the cross and say: “God bless you.”)

Po drodze – dziad, Żyd, pan, cham – każdemu kłaniają się i proszą o błogosławieństwo. Oni żegnali: “Niech cię Pan Bóg błogosławi, ja cię błogosławię” [17].

(Along the way – a beggar, a Jew, a lord, a serf; they bow to everyone and ask them for the blessing. And they make the sign of the cross and say: “As God blesses you I bless you as well.”) [17].

Therefore, it is important that the young couple collect the blessings from as many people as possible; in the symbolic sense—from the whole community. Saying the words of the blessing formula by everyone, without excluding anyone, should prevent the powers related to the devil from doing the young couple harm,<sup>3</sup> for instance the possibility of turning the wedding guests into stone. An accumulation of the blessings means little or no space for a curse.

Let us analyze the words uttered by the person bestowing the blessing. In this ritual, similarly to the ritual of the curse, there is not just one, established, obligatory formula that the person needs to say. The interlocutors, while giving examples of the formula, often stress that they say “whatever words they put together” (“jak kto ułoży sobie”) [21], “from the bottom of one’s heart” (“co serce dyktuje”) [19], “if one can speak longer” (“jak kto potrafi dłużej mówić”) [13] or “everyone using their own words” (“każdy po swojemu”) [52].

Szto bački haworać u czas taho błahasławieńnia?

– Szto mohuć skazać bački? Každy pa swojemu, szto moža wyskazać. Szczacia, zdarują pażełajuc, nu i usio. Szto bolejš nužna ʌ žyzni? Lisz by było szczaście i zdaruje [52].

(What do parents say during the blessing?

– What can parents say? Everyone says what they want to say, what they can say. They wish happiness, health, that’s all. What else one needs in life? Happiness and health is enough.)

Szto haworać?

– Niczoha nie haworać. A sztož haworać? Žahnaje i kaža: “Błahasławić ciebia Boh.” Usio [61].

(What do they say?

– They say nothing. What is there to say? They make the sign of the cross and say: “God bless you.” That’s all.)

Młodzi klękają, wszyscy podchodzą – rodzice, dziadkowie. Znak krzyża czynią nad głową, mówią: “W imię Ojca i Syna i Ducha świętego, amen.” Całują się, i życzenie każdy powie, jakie mu serce dyktuje, na przykład: “Niech Pan Bóg błogosławi, żebyście w zdrowiu żyli” [19].

(The young couple kneel down and everyone approaches: the parents, the grandparents. They make the sign of the cross over the head and they say: “In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, Amen.” They kiss and everyone says their wishes from the bottom of their hearts, for example: “May God bless you with good health.”)

Błahosłowlat’ chlibom i matka każe: “Nech Bih czastyti, błahosłowyt’ wsim dobrym, czastiom i zdorowiom i dołuju dobruju” [25].

(They bless with the bread and the mother says: “May God give you happiness and bless everyone with goodness, happiness, health and good fortune.)

– Podchodiat’ do bat’ka, do matyry, pryhnucca i bat’ko krestit tak o, błahosłowit’ i pocełujecca.

Szto haworyć bačka?

– Bat’ko błahosłowit’: “Daj, Boże, dobre.” I wsio” [72].

(– They approach the father and mother, they bow and the father makes the sign of the cross, he blesses them and they kiss.

What does the father say?

– The father bestows the blessing with the following words: “May God give you all the best.” That’s all.)

Filling up the wishes with content ranges from the most basic forms, e.g. *God bless you* to the complex speeches, in their lexical and stylistic nature more closely related to the ritual speeches of the master of the ceremony, for instance:

Błogosławię was i życzę wam wszystkiego najlepszego, żebyście byli sobie dobrzy nawzajem i wychowywali dzieci, i na całe życie jeden drugiego żeby szanował, żeby kochał [21].

(I bless you and wish you all the best so that you can be good for one another and bring up children, and one can respect and love the other till the end of your lives.)

Żeb wam Pan Bóg błogosławił, żeb w życiu dobrze było, powodziło się, żebyście dzieci wychowali Bogu na chwałę i ojcu na pożytek, i żebyście kiedyś na Sądzie Ostatecznym ze swymi dziećmi zaśpiewali “Hosanna Synowi Dawidowemu” [13].

(May God bless you to have a good and prosperous life, to bring up the children for the glory of God and to be their father’s support; and so that once you are during the Last Judgment you will be able to sing together with your children “Hosanna to the Son of David.”)

The blessing formula, regardless of its content chosen by the performer of the ritual, as long as it was uttered in the appropriate ritual context, it is fulfilled, similarly to the curse, irrespectively of the speaker’s intentions. “During the wedding, even if they are not fond of each other, there must be the blessing” (“Na weselu, nawet żeby się nie lubieli, to musi być błogosławieństwo”) [11]. The speaker might even be unfriendly towards the young couple; it does not matter for the factual blessing agent of the blessing ritual. Neither does it matter what lexical means are used for the implementation of the blessing formula. These formulas have a different syntax and a different word composition but underneath their semantic structure is the same. The person who utters the blessing formula summons the power of sacrum and asks it to fill the party being blessed (they use the phrase meaning: “O power, make X experience something good happen to X”). The speaker plays the role of a mediator (let us recall that: “Only God can bless. But we are essentially suppliants” [van der Leeuw 1938: 409]), even though they can also (since it is not obligatory) add to

God's blessing their own, in the form of a "distance formula" [Tolstaya 2001: 121] *As God blesses you I bless you as well ...* Therefore, here we are dealing with a verbal ritual through which God blesses human through the lips of the selected mediatory. This is a ritual during which three actors play their roles, namely: the object of the ritual, i.e. the blessed party, its performer, i.e. the blessing party (the speaker of the verbal formula) and the actual agent- the sacrum that bestows the blessing.

And *in the name of the Father and the Son?* This formula does not explicitly state that God blesses the human. Yet, the words are accompanied by the gesture of the hand making the sign of the cross while *to make the sign of the cross* means "to bless." Moreover, it is enough to simply utter the very name of the Creator (which is, as the rules of the ritual speech-action indicate a way to summon or evocate Him) for the creating process to commence. Since God is the highest goodness, summoning Him by uttering His name is at the same time summoning goodness itself. Without God being present at the wedding there is no "good life" as only He can create goodness.

This truth is shown in folk tales describing the creation of the world by God and the devil. Such folk tales often include the following trope: God sends the devil to the bottom of the sea to fetch a handful of clay for creation of the earth. When taking the clay the devil is to say *in God's name*. He avoids uttering God's name twice so he gets back empty-handed. At last, the third time he says *in God's name and mine* and he takes some clay underneath his fingernails [cf. Tomicki 1981: 41–42]. Since, as van der Leeuw puts it: "Only he who has Power can bless: only he who can create"[van der Leeuw 1938: 409].

What is the content of the wishes uttered by the parents during the wedding blessing of the children? Let us recall the ones that were cited previously: *May God give you happiness, health and so that you can live peacefully for many years to come* (*Niech Bóg da szczęście, zdrowie, i żebyście w zgodzie długie lata żyli*); *may God give you good health, happiness and good life* (*Daj Boże zdrowieczko, szczęście i dobre życie*); *may God give you happiness all your lives* (*Niech wam Pan Bóg szczęściem całe życie darzy*); *may God bless you with good health* (*Niech Pan Bóg błogostawi, żebyście w zdrowiu żyli*); *may God give you all the best* (*Niech was Pan Bóg błogostawi, jak najlepiej da*); *I wish you all the best so that you can be good for one another and bring up children, and one can respect and love the other till the end of your lives* (*Życzę wam wszystkiego najlepszego, żebyście byli sobie dobrzy nawzajem i wychowywali dzieci i na całe życie jeden drugiego żeby szanował, żeby kochał*); *may God give you happiness and bless everyone with goodness, happiness, health and good fortune*

(*Niech Bih czastyt', błahosłowyt' wsim dobrym, czastiom i zdrowiom i dołuju dobruju*).

Blessing words that create goodness result in a fulfilled blessing, the state of the blessing, or good fortune, living one's life in God's way, happiness and health as opposites of the state of the curse: misfortune, unhappiness, illness and death. CURSE<sub>s</sub> is contradictory to BLESSING<sub>s</sub>.

*Happiness and fortune* are "inherited"; they can be passed on by ancestors onto descendants, similarly to tangible heritage, like family property and wealth is passed on. [...] But happiness and fortune are not permanent states, given once and for good by the tradition of one's background or the stability of the family fate. They are states that can come and go, that can be created and destroyed. The magical and religious ritual that accompanies household works and activities; an extensive code of prohibitions and moral, sacral and magical orders; diverse religious customs in the form of the whole system of sacral or semi-sacral activities are a tool to keep the community in the state of grace and magical power and to provide the community members with good fortune [Obrębski 2007: 151]

writes Józef Obrębski in relation to the traditional culture of Polesie.

One of the ritual methods to "create" the state of the blessing during the wedding ceremony is through an act of apology:

Pan młody i panna młoda [...] klękają przed siedzącymi rodzicami, a kładąc im głowy na kolanach i płacząc, proszą o błogosławieństwo. [...] Następnie starosta lub marszałek przepraszają rodziców w tych słowach: "Mój miły panie ojczy, moja miła pani matko, odpuśćcie mi grzechy moje, winy moje, nieposłuszeństwa moje, bo ja teraz zbieram się do kościoła bożego, do stanu małżeńskiego, do ślubu wiecznego." Tak więc przy odgłosie płaczu i jęku, odebrawszy błogosławieństwo, udają się do kościoła [DWOK 16, *Lub* 1: 157].

(The bride and the groom [...] kneel before the seated parents, put their heads in their laps and crying ask for the blessing. [...] Then the master of the ceremony apologizes to the parents in the following manner: "My dear father, my dear mother, forgive me for my sins, my wrongs, my disobedience because now I'm going to God's church, to the marriage, to the eternal vow." Therefore, accompanied by the cries and groans, and having been bestowed the blessing they leave for church.)<sup>4</sup>

The act of apology-forgiveness whose great power is even able, as we know, to alter the fate of the cursed individual has a purifying effect and it prepares the surface for the blessing.<sup>5</sup> The girl stands before her parents with a pure and open heart, hence, as if she were reborn in a symbolic sense or perhaps rather ready to be reborn: she is about to start a new life which, thanks to the blessing she is bound to receive, is to

become a holy life. As reconciliation, unity and peace are a state of mind that makes it possible for the blessing to be fulfilled. My interlocutors are fully aware of this: “consensus is the basis thing. If they marry and live in harmony, it means they have a good life” (“Grunt zgoda. Jak tylko pożenio sie i majo zgode, to dobre życie”) [22].

Can parents refuse to give their children the blessing? As a rule they cannot:

Bez błogosławieństwa? To jakiś wyjątek, bo to już naprawdę nie można tego wyobrazić sobie, żeby nie pobłogosławili rodzice. To jest coś bardzo ważnego, to jest coś na całe życie. Nic gorszego nie może w życiu spotkać niż brak błogosławieństwa. Czasami nie chcą go rodzice dać, ale w ostatniej chwili zechcą, jak już odjeżdżają do ślubu [21].

(Without the blessing? It is some kind of exception as one cannot imagine not being blessed by their parents. It is of great significance; it lasts one's lifetime. There is nothing worse in one's life than lack of blessing. Sometimes parents do not want to give it but they change their mind in the last minute, before they leave for church.)

To swoje dzieci, to trzeba pobłogosławić. Co by to za matka czy ojciec, ojcowieb takie byli, żeb nie pobłogosławili. Trzeba dać błogosławieństwo dzieciom. To dużo zależy od tego. To jest boże wszystko. Bo gdzie jest zgoda, tam Bóg jest, tam dobro jest, tam wszystko jest. Gdzie zgoda – buduje, gdzie niezgoda – rujnuje. I faktycznie, to jest doświadczone, ja siedemdziesiąty rok już mam, to ja już przeżyłem i już wiem, jak jest [27].

(These are their children; one has to bless them. What kind of mother or father would not bless their children? One needs to give the blessing. A lot depends on it. The blessing is everything since where is harmony, God is, goodness is, everything is there. United we stand; divided we fall. It's all true; it's confirmed in our experience. I'm seventy already so I've seen a lot and I know what it is like.)

Jak rodzice nie pobłogosławią, to i Pan Bóg nie pobłogosławi. Muszą – jacy by to rodzice byli [17].

(If parents don't bless the child neither will God. So they must no matter what kind of parents they are.)

However, sometimes it happens that parents refuse to bless the child. Hence, undoubtedly God will not grant His blessing (in fact, the sequence is reversed: where there are no favourable conditions for God's blessing, human will do nothing):

Błogosławieństwo to się bardzo liczy. Rodzice nie wiedzieli o ślubie, nie pobłogosławili, i oni potem źle żyli, rozłączyli się, on umarł, dzieci też matkę

gdzieś mają. To, że nie pobłogosławią rodzice, to jest takie złorzeczenie. Potem to życie tak się nie układa [12].

(The blessing counts a great deal. One time the parents didn't know about the wedding; they didn't give the blessing and the couple lived wrong; they got separated; he died and the children don't give a damn about their mother. The fact they were not blessed is some kind of a curse. Later one's life is not successful.)

Hela [...], ona poszła za prawosławnego, tego, i wiesz – ona nie ma błogosławieństwa. Poszła za prawosławnego, bez ślubu żyła. Jeden [syn] rzucił żona, dwoje dzieci. Kradnie, obiera ludzi. Jego się bojon teraz. A drugiemu noge urwało. A trzeci ożenił się z [...] nauczycielkon, to jednego syna ma. To też o, troszke żyje, ale nie tak bardzo. [...] Ona w rodzinie, to my jak widzimy, to nie ma błogosławieństwa od synów. Ten cionga się, obiera ludzi i ludzie się bojon. Tamtemu noga urwana i żona wypeńdziła. [...] No, coś jest na świecie, tylko Pan Bóg Świenty wie [53].

(Hela ... married an Orthodox Christian man and, you know, she didn't receive her blessing. She married an Orthodox Christian, she had no wedding. One son abandoned his wife and two children. He got into theft and robbery. People are afraid of him now. The other lost one leg. The third one married a teacher and has a son. He has a decent life but not very much decent. In the family, as we see it, her sons are not her blessing. One steals and people are afraid of him. The other lost his leg and his wife kicked him out... Only God knows what is happening in this world but something is.)

Rodzice jego odmawiali od ślubu, myśleli, że on nie naprawdę chce. A on naprawdę. Zajszed prosić o błogosławieństwo, a matka za miotłe i miotło jego... A już musowo było żenić się. I poszedł tak. Nie najlepiej żyli, ale czy dlatego, czy nie dlatego, to nie wiem. On w niedługim czasie umarł i ona została sama z dziećmi. Córka jakieś tam niepowodzenia miała. A czy to to zaszkodziło, czy nie to, to nie wiem [33].

(His parents did not allow him to get married. They thought he was not truly committed. But he was. He came for the blessing and his mother grabbed a sweeping brush and started beating him... And he had to get married so he did. They didn't live happily but I'm not sure if this was the reason. He died soon after that leaving her alone with the children. One daughter had some kind of misfortune but if this was the reason I don't know.)<sup>6</sup>

Loss of virginity that takes place in a different situation than the one envisioned in the ritual wedding scenario makes the act of bestowing the parental blessing impossible. Having committed the sin they cut themselves off the possibility to ritually inherit the family good fortune. Józef Obrębski comments:

The parental blessing, mainly the father's blessing during the wedding ceremony is a ritual through which there takes place an act of introducing the successors or descendants to the family "happiness" included in the person of the father and also by him represented. Incessant parental blessings accompany particular actors at the wedding. The peak falls at the ceremony of the seating during which they used to test both girl's and boy's innocence. The youngsters who committed an act of breach of the strict patriarchal custom, which only allows for marital sexual relations, were not allowed to participate in the ceremony of the seating and its blessings, including the father's [Obrębski 2007: 152].

Because:

Miłość wbrew woli starszych jest zaślepieniem spowodowanym przez czarta. Stało bez błogosławieństwa rodziców lub opiekunów zawarte – jego dziełem, i zazwyczaj bywa nieszczęśliwym [DWOK 48, *TarnRzesz*: 89].

(Love against the elders' will is their blindness brought about by the devil himself. A marriage with no parental or guardian blessing is the devil's work and this marriage is usually unhappy.)

Here we give the name to the force which works wherever the blessing is missing. Bad life, divorce, premature death, lack of respect for the parents, failures, unhappiness – this is all "devil's work." Wherever the devil beats God; wherever the blessing is missing, we enter the cursed world because human life, in accordance with the folk model, is written in the oppositions, such as: happiness and fortune (in other words the state of blessing) *versus* unhappiness and misfortune (in other words the cursed fate), which can be more widely understood as the opposition of life and death. There is no intermediate possibility. No blessing, no fortune and unhappiness is reflected in a number of interferences of the order of death into the order of life. In most cases, however, no human is consciously on a lookout for the curse. Everyone is trying to be given the blessing even when it is difficult. This situation is portrayed in a special case of the wedding blessing bestowed upon the orphans by the deceased parents:<sup>7</sup>

Muszą zejść na cmentarz. [...] Ot, ona przyjdzie, kwiatki złoży... Stoi tak, zapłacze. I pomyśli sobie, odda cześć dla tej ziemi, co matka czy ojciec leży. Zajdą. Żeby pobłogosławiła [53].

(They must go to the graveyard. [...] She will come, lay down some flowers. She will be standing there and crying. She will think about giving honor to this soil where her mother or father lie buried. They will come to receive the blessing.)

Mołodaja chodit' prosit' na mohiłku mamu swoju czy otca, szo: "Prychod' swad'bu robiti, poradok robiti." Eto i spewali "Wsiu rodinońku obyszła, swojej mamoińki nie naszła" [72].

(The bride visits her mother's or father's grave: "Come organise the wedding and tidy up the place." They would sing: "She visited every relative. She didn't find her mommy.")

Jeśli młody jest sierotą po ojcu i matce, to mając iść z domu do spowiedzi i komunii w sobotę, wychodzi na czczo z chaty i pod oknem obróciwszy się ku miejscu, gdzie stół stoi w chacie, kłania mu się i wzywa nieżyjących rodziców o błogosławieństwo. Nikt wprawdzie głosem nie odpowiada; mimo to w wyobraźni sieroty ojciec i matka stoją z błogosławieństwem za oknem w tej chwili [DWOK 33, *Chełm* 1: 260].

(If the groom is a parental or maternal orphan on the way to the confession and communion on Saturday, he leaves the house on an empty stomach and by the window he turns to the place where the table is; he bows and summons his dead parents to give him the blessing. While there's no voice to be heard, nevertheless in the orphan's imagination his father and mother are standing in the window and blessing him at that moment.)

One of my interlocutors in Choroszczyńka in Podlasie told me about a wedding of an orphan she participated in:

Portret matki postawiła na stole i kłaniała się do portretu i błogosławieństwa prosiła. I wszystkie stały, cały dom, i płakały, jak ona się kłaniała [33].

(She placed mother's portrait on the table and bowed before it asking for the blessing. Everyone was standing there, the whole household, and they were crying to see her bow.)

Mother and father bestow God's blessing onto the child but, at the same time, they give them their own wishes: happiness and fortune of the whole family. They act as mediators, not only but **so much as** mediators. Their mediation is necessary. God needs the human for the continuation of the creative process. That is why it seems that the souls of dead parents are somehow present at the orphan's wedding. This trope, common in wedding songs for the orphan, in some pieces of two songs that I recorded at Polish-Ukrainian borderlands is as follows:<sup>8</sup>

Ne perechod'te worohy,  
ne perechod'te dorohy.  
Nechaj perejde Hospod Bih,  
a moj bateńko najpyryw,  
iz zołotymy kl'uczamy,  
iz woskowymy swiczamy [25].

(Foes, you shall not pass  
 You shall not cross the road  
 God shall cross the road  
 but first my dear father  
 with gold keys  
 with wax candles.)

Oj, nie ma, nie ma Handz'uli w doma,  
 oj, poszła wona do Hospoda Boha,  
 prosyty tatusia na wesel'eczko, prosyty ridnoho.  
 "Tatusiu moj ridnyj, proszu do sebe,  
 Proszu do sebe, wesilje u mene."  
 "Jaj sam ne pujdu, anioły wyszlu,  
 nech tebe porad'at', na posah posad'at'" [25].

(Hanusia is not at home, not at home  
 She's gone to see Almighty God,  
 to invite her daddy for the wedding.  
 "Daddy, my daddy please come and see me  
 Please come and see me at my wedding."  
 "I will not go myself, I'll send the angels  
 They will manage; they will organize the seating.")

In a Belarusian record from Lida county the wedding song for the orphan takes on some features characteristic of the funeral lament, which is even more distinctive as those songs are always accompanied by the ritual cry of the wedding participants.

Czerwona kalina, a biełyje ćwiety.  
 Na szto toj sirocie żyć na hetym świeci?  
 Bidnaja sirotka, a sierot jeść bolsze,  
 Kab ja mieła tatu, byłab ja wasolsza.  
 Kab ja mieła tatu, jak ja maju mamu,  
 Pryniasłab wadzicy z cichaha Dunaju.  
 Pryniasłab wadzicy, sama napiłasieb,  
 Kab ja mieła tatu, ja nie smuciłasieb.  
 Oj, tam u dalini kazak siena kosić,  
 Bidnaja sirotka na wiesela prosić.  
 Chodzić jena, chodzić, ad chaty da chaty.  
 Zabyła stupici na cmentar da taty.  
 Oj hości, wy hości, adkul wy jechali?  
 Ci wy maho taty nihdzie nie wstreczali?  
 Oj, my pryjechali z horki u dalinu,  
 My widzieli taty wysoku mahiłu.

Oj tato, moj tato, a ja wasza doczka,  
 Popraucież na majoj haławie wianoczka.  
 Oj, ja nie popraǔlu, bo ja ni mahu wstaci.  
 Niechaj tabie paprawić twaja rodna maci.  
 Oj tata, moj tata, a ja wasza doczka,  
 Popraucież na majoj haławie wianoczka.  
 Oj, ja nie popraǔlu, bo na mnie ziamlica.  
 Niechaj tabie poprawić rodnaja siasstryca.  
 Oj tato, moj tato, a ja wasza doczka,  
 Popraucież na majoj haławie wianoczka.  
 Oj, ja nie popraǔlu, bo na mnie piasoczek.  
 Niechaj tabie poprawić twój radny bratoczek.  
 Oj tato, moj tato, a ja wasza doczka,  
 Popraucież na majoj haławie wianoczka.  
 Oj, ja nie popraǔlu, bo na hrudziach hrudka.  
 Chaj tabie poprawić twaja piersza družka.

(Red viburnum and white flowers.  
 Why should an orphan live in this world?  
 I'm a poor orphan, and there are many orphans,  
 If I had a father I would be happier.  
 If I had a father as I have my mother,  
 I would fetch some water from the still Danube  
 I would fetch some water, I'd drink it myself,  
 If I had a father I'd not be sad.  
 Over there by the valley a Cossack is mowing hay,  
 A poor orphan is inviting for the wedding.  
 She is walking from one house to another.  
 She forgot to visit her dad at the graveyard.  
 My guests, my guests, where did you come from?  
 Didn't you see my dad on the way?  
 Well, we came down the mountain to the valley,  
 We saw your dad's high grave.  
 O dad, my dad, it is your little daughter,  
 Adjust the wreath on my head.  
 Oh, I won't adjust it cause I can't stand up,  
 Make your mother adjust it for you.  
 O dad, my dad, it is your little daughter,  
 Adjust the wreath on my head.  
 Oh, I won't adjust it cause soil covers my head,  
 Make your sister adjust it for you.  
 O dad, my dad, it is your little daughter,  
 Adjust the wreath on my head.  
 Oh, I won't adjust it cause sand covers my head,  
 Make your brother adjust it for you.

O dad, my dad, it is your little daughter,  
 Adjust the wreath on my head.  
 Oh, I won't adjust it cause on my chest lies a lump of soil,  
 Make your bridesmaid adjust it for you.)

The interlocutor commented:

To wychodziła za monż i te już śpiewali. A u niej ojciec zabrany na wojne. I ona wychodziła za monż. Zaczeli śpiewać ton piosenke, potem wnieśli wódki, już jak to na weselu. I mówion: "Nacie, wypijcie tej wodka, kańczajcie wy hetu pieśniu, bo to [...] wsie płaczuć." A u niej ojca nie było [53].

(They sang this song when she was getting married. Her father had gone to war. And she was getting married. They began to sing it and then brought some vodka, just as at a wedding. And they said, "Come, have some vodka and finish the song since everyone is in tears." And her father wasn't there.)

The folk culture finds it hard to imagine life without a blessing. "the blessing is important to start your life with God and to live your life with God" ("Błogosławieństwo jest ważne, żeby z Bogiem życie rozpoczynać, żeby z Bogiem było prowadzone") [20]. In the subsequent rites of passage the human accumulates its "portions"; they fill themselves up with it so that they will not become the ally of the devil, death and no-life. The folk norm is life "with God," doing everything with God: "life was better since it was with God. There's nothing without God. That's the truth" ("Lepiej się żyło, bo z Bogiem robili. Nie ma nic bez Boga – to już prawda") [11].

The blessing then becomes an enchantment of one's prosperous future in line with the folk ideal according to which one's long life of good health and wealth, and one filled with good fortune should end with good death followed by one's soul's happiness in the other world. In folk culture one's parents' death is a moment when the child receives the parental blessing for the last time.

Przed śmiercią, jak już umierają, aby najstarsze dziecko było i podeszło i prosiło o błogosławieństwo. I błogosławili. Przychodzą dzieci, które są. Błogosławi, Chrystusa prosi, żeby darował im to wszystko na przeżycie, żeby dobre życie mieli [22].

(Before one's death or already on the deathbed the eldest child would come over and ask for the blessing. And they did bless them. All the children come over. The parent gives their blessing. They ask Jesus Christ to forgive them for everything and to give them good lives.)

Jak matka umierała, to miała lat ja pięć, to pamiętam; to nas mama błogosławiła. Mówiła: "Żeby powodziło się, żeby szczęście świeciło wam w życiu, ja umieram, odchodzę" – no i tyle tego. Moja mama to robiła. Każda matka z dziećmi się żegna jak może. Każda, co umiała, to powiedziała tam po swojemu [33].

(When mother was dying I was five years old; I remember that. Mother would give us her blessing. She said: "May you have prosperous lives and may happiness brighten up your days; I'm dying, going away" and that's all. My mom did that. Every mother would say goodbye to her children as well as she could. Every mother would say something in her own words.)

Ona leży, wie, że już nie będzie, te dzieci pozwołuje wszystkim, oni pouklękają koło matki i wtenczas ona ich błogosławi: "Dzieci kochane, już ja się z wami żegnam." A te dzieci płaczo, matkę całują. Toż matka żegna wszystkich, jak najlepiej żeby żyli, żeby nic nie było takiego. Ja to pamiętam dobrze, że jak matka umierała, już mało była przed śmiercią, to już dzieci wszystkie zwołała i oni poklękali i żegnała ich i mówiła: "Dzieci kochane, już ostatni raz, już ja was nie zobaczę. Życie wszystkie dobrze" [30].

(She is lying there; she knows she's not going to stay here long. So she summons all the children who then kneel beside their mother and then she gives them her blessing: "My darling kids, it's time for us to part." And the kids burst out crying and kiss their mother. Then the mother makes the sign of the cross so that they will live as best as they can. I remember it vividly when my mother was dying. She was about to die and summoned all the kids who knelt and she said her goodbyes with these words: "My darling kids, it's our last time together. I will never see you again. Have good lives, all of you.)

A good death requires not only bestowing blessings on the children and grandchildren since, as we remember, the blessing is conditioned upon the state of reconciliation, on peace of mind, and on love. That is why:

The dying person is saying their final goodbyes to the relatives and friends who are asked for forgiveness and who are also granted forgiveness for the most serious crimes so that the dying person can die in peace. If one fails to do that their death will be torment [*będzie miał ciężkie konanie*] [Biegeleisen 1930: 203].

Umierającego każdy pozna. Wiara wtedy dużo może. Jak umierający się gniewa, a chce przebaczyć, Pan Bóg mu da łaski, bo wie, że jak pójdzie z tym, to będzie mu ciężko. Jeden umierał, kazał mnie zawołać, i przyznał się, że nam ukradł młotek do klepania kosy. Powiedziałam: "Niech ci Pan Bóg daruje" [6].

(Anyone can recognize a dying person. One's faith can help immensely in that situation. When the dying person is angry and they want to grant forgiveness, God will give them the grace since they are aware how hard it is going to be leaving with this burden. A man was dying and he called for me. He admitted to stealing our tool for hammering. I said: "May God forgive you.")

Nawet mój mąż teraz umierał, i, o, siostra była, i zawołał ją, i mówi: "Danusiu, wstań, przyjdź tutaj." I przyszła, a ja przy nim była, i, o, jak się żegnał. I przebaczyć – może jedno drugiemu coś kiedyś powiedziało, jak to rodzina. Żeby jedno drugiemu przebaczyło – że i on przebacza, i żeby i jemu przebaczyć [34].

(Even my husband was dying recently and my sister was here. He called for her and said: "Danusia, stand up, come closer." She did as he said and I was there as well as he was bidding us goodbye. And to forgive as one might have said something to the other, the usual family story. In order to forgive one another, so that he forgives everyone and so is he forgiven.)

Both acts, i.e. the apology-forgiveness and the blessing seem to be indispensable elements of the last human rite of passage. A great significance of the first one shows in the fact that it is a necessary element built in the structure of the funeral ritual:

Gdy mają być pochowani rodzice, wtedy dzieci kłaniają się nisko wszystkim obecnym i w imieniu zmarłych rodziców mówią do każdego: "Darujcie im i wybaczcie, co wam kiedy rodzice nasi w życiu swym zawinili" [DWOK 27, *Maz* 4: 148].

(When the parents are about to be buried then the children bow down low before everyone present and on behalf of their deceased parents say to everyone: "Forgive our parents for whatever wrong they did you in their lives.")

Zawdy jest taki człowiek, który najczęściej na pogrzebach bywa i do zgromadzonych przyjaciół i sąsiadów przemówi następujące słowa do trzech razy: "Oto ta osoba, która się znajduje na ostatnich stopniach gradusa, proszę ja w jej imieniu was, tu wszystkich zgromadzonych przyjaciół i sąsiadów, o win jej darowanie." A obecni odpowiedzą: "Niech jej Pan Bóg daruje!" [Pleszczyński 1892: 78].

(There is always a person who is most often present at funerals and who will repeat the following words three times for the friends and neighbours who gathered there: "Here is the person who is standing on the last steps of the gradus. I ask you, his friends and neighbors, on behalf of this person to forgive him for his sins." And the ones present respond: "May God forgive him!")

In 1993, in a village in Lida county in Belarus, I took part in a ritual of bidding farewell to the dead beneath the village cross. I had the opportunity to experience its living tradition that is a proof of the cited record of ethnographers of long ago. The person who was speaking on behalf of the dead,<sup>9</sup> said among other the following things:

Żegnam [...] moja rodzina, moje przyjaciele, was wszystkich, wszystkich obecnych. Żegnam was i błogosławiąc ja was wszystkich, chociaż ja żyłem na tym mizernym świecie osiemdziesiąt pięć lat, a tak mi życie przeszło jak jedna godzina. [...] A teraz przepraszam rodziny, przepraszam przyjaciół, przepraszam wszystkich sąsiedzi. Możeż kiedy ja kogo słowem lub uczynkiem jakim obraził, to proszę dla mnie darować. Czy darujecie? ["Darujemy. Darujemy. Darujemy" – odpowiedzieli chórem wszyscy zgromadzeni.] „Darowaliście dla miłości Chrystusa Pana, bo już widzieć nie będziemy mogli, tylko na Józofatowej dolinie. Tam się obaczymy. [...] Kochany sąsiedzie, kochani przyjaciele, za wasze to przeprowadzenie na drogi wieczności, kochana rodzina, za wasz tu przybył na ten pogrzeb, za wasze troski, za wasza pomoc, za wasze wszystkie uczynki, za wasze kwiaty i za wasze wianki, wszystkim, wszystkim serdecznie dziękuję. [...] Ostańcie z Bogiem. Wszystkich was winszuję. Życzę wam pomyślności waszych rodzin, opieki Matki Boskiej. Bądźcie wszyscy zdrowi. Ostańcie z Bogiem. Niech będzie pochwalony Jezus Chrystus. ["Na wieki wieków, amen"] [58].

(I say my goodbye to [...] my family, my friends, all of you, everyone present here today. I say my goodbye and I bless you all. Even though I lived 85 years in this miserable world, it all passed as if it was one hour. [...] And now I apologize to my family, I apologize to my friends, and I apologize to all my neighbours. I might have offended someone verbally or through some deeds. In that case, please forgive me. Will you forgive me?" [We forgive you. We forgive you. We forgive you," all the present respond unanimously.] And then: "You forgave me for the love of Jesus Christ since we are not going to be able to meet here, only in the valley of Josaphat. We will meet there. [...] Dear neighbours, dear friends, for your sendoff to the way to eternity; my dear family, for your presence here at this funeral, for your efforts, for your help, for all your deeds, for your flowers and your wreaths, I wish to thank you all. [...] Stay with God. I bow my head before all of you. I wish you and your families prosperity and to remain in care of God's Mother. May you be in good health. Stay with God. Praised be Jesus." ["For ever and ever, amen"].)

This is how a person leaving this world bestows their blessing (accompanied by an apology and gratitude) in the form of a ceremonial dialogue in their goodbye letter onto those who stay here. When this person came into this world they would be part of a similar ritual of welcoming-blessing.

The material shows how difficult it is to leave for the other side without having bestowed the blessing onto the living; even more, only after having left it in the world of the living can one peacefully enter the world of the dead:

To dobrze jest, jak dzieci błogosławią. Tu jedna babka pragnęła, żeby wnuczek przyjechał. A on, nie wiadomo skąd, co: "Pojeżdżem do babki." Ona ceka i ceka, nie ma ich. A to siła wsechmocna taka działa. Przyjechali, zajechali, przezegnała jech, pobłogosławiła, i już umiera. Tak, tak, przez Boga ni do proga [13].

(It is good when kids receive the blessing. Here one woman wanted her grandson to visit her. And he said out of the blue: "Let's go visit grandma." She was waiting and waiting and they are not coming. And it was the Almighty's power. They arrived, came in, she made the sign of the cross, she blessed them and died. Yes, yes, without God in the house there is nothing.)

Moreover, in a magical folk tale included in Kolberg's collection from Mazovia we read about a boy kidnapped by the servants who many years later finds his mother walled up in a tower by her perpetrators.

I przyszed do matki i pyta: "Czy żyjesz jeszcze, kochana matko?" A ona odpowie: "Żyję, bom ci jeszcze nie dała błogosławieństwa macierzyńskiego." I wtedy dopiero rozsypała się w proch [DWOK 42, *Maz* 7: 547].

(He comes over to her and asks: "Are you still alive, dear mother?" And she answers: "I am alive cause I haven't bestowed my maternal blessing on you yet." And only then did she turn into dust.)

The blessing is power in the human's soul that is a guarantee of fertility and happiness and it belongs to the world of the living; it creates "good life" here on earth. Hence, the human cannot take this power to the other side. What they have to take, though, are the effects of the blessing, in other words spiritual merits they collected thanks to "good life." It seems that the only thing the dying person needs is the metaphysical aspect of the blessing; the physical aspect, i.e. the power of creating life belongs to the world of the living. In order to be able to die fully and move to the metaphysical life one needs to disconnect from the earth, physical life. One must leave behind their "happiness and fortune" for their children, the family, the cattle, the fields, in other words for the whole ancestry, the whole household. This shows among others in the custom of blessing the cattle and the fields when the remains of the master are being taken out. I came across this tradition in Belarus. My interlocutor, when her

father's casket was being carried out from the house, "made the sign of the cross over everything, including the cattle" ("pierachryściła wsio, etu skatinu") and she said: "Heaven grant it that my cattle multiplies and my fields produce wheat. He lived his entire life till the end" ("Daj Boh, mnie skatinka pładziła i maja niūka radziła. Jon prażyū usio swajo życieczka") [71].

We might try to imagine the blessing as a kind of a magnet which attracts people to life and makes them remain in the "circle of life"; it also protects them from being "pulled" towards the side of no-life by the forces of evil, destruction and death. It is especially visible in critical moments around which rites of passage evolve. When the human is already on the deathbed after a harmonious life lived in accordance with the folk culture model; when they "walked the whole circle" and fulfilled the life roles expected by this model, namely: he/she was a child, then a youth, a parent and an old person, they are filled up with the powers of the blessing they were given and those they developed throughout the course of their life. Now the time has come to pass them onto their successors, those who carry on their worldly lives.

A mythical precedence that results from a Slavic cosmogonic myth of two clashing rituals of the blessing and cursing is common creation of the world by the antagonists in the form of the benefactor of the blessing: God and the master of the curse: the devil. The former is the master of goodness and life while the latter rules over the evil and death. Human life takes place between these two poles; the human should, however, opt for the blessing if they wish to participate in the act of creation, in *creatio continua*, which is their vocation.

As Rabbi Nachman of Breslov puts it:

the light of the Almighty has no form and takes on a shape, either good or bad, only in the recipient. Hence, everything depends on us. We must try to do our best to give the divine light the form of the blessing and not the one of the curse [Rabi Nachman z Braclawia 1996: 59].



# CONCLUSION

## 1. Final Remarks

In this overview of the structure of the folk ritual I have distinguished three parties to the ritual: its object, its performer and the agent. Further considerations, beginning with an analysis of a particular case in the form of the “true story” of the daughter cursed by her mother and concluding with an insight in a lexical content of cursing formulas that foretell the cursed one’s fate, lead me to the conclusion that the list of the roles should be extended.

The cursing ritual has four actors. In the final version the division of roles is as follows:

- (1) The object of the ritual, i.e. the cursed one.** The presented material shows a number of images of the person playing this role: we could see this actor as a disobedient child, a person excessively using the curse (in case of an unjustified curse), as a person doing harm to the cursing party; hence, generally speaking, as a sinner breaching the norms established by a higher order and those existing in a given community. The object of the ritual is a person who subjected to the devil’s temptation and, at the same time, became his ally in the struggle against God and His order. It was bound to be because “the heavenly community [...] exclude[s] those who are not solidary” [Thomas, Znaniecki 1927: 272]. A mythical prefiguration of the curse object is a foe thrown down by God’s divine power and consumed by the split earth, cf. Tomicki 1976: 66–68.
- (2) The ritual agent i.e. the punitive judge.** The **agent** is the sacrum represented as the folk God. He established the world order and He is maintaining it. It was Him who, when creating the world with His words, established the mythical pattern of the agential speech. He is still the source of the magical agential power which makes people

use the mechanisms of magical speech-action, i.e. among others the ritual of the curse. God “hears” the words of the curse (from the formal point of view He is the recipient of the CURSE<sub>r</sub>, for instance the formula *May God punish you!*). As a result, He ‘decides’ about the occurrence of the cursing act (CURSE<sub>a</sub>) i.e. He issues a judgment on the sinner. At last it is He who sends the punishment (the CURSE<sub>s</sub> state) onto the object of the ritual. The agent of the ritual is in the state of permanent war for its object (i.e. the human) with His opponent who temporarily wins the battle becomes, as a result of the God’s judgment, the executor of the curse.

- (3) **The executor of the curse, i.e. the one who executes the punishment.** God’s opponent who disrupts His plans and intentions and keeps fighting with Him for the human soul is the devil who can show in his many guises (e.g. as *likho* or a *mare*)<sup>1</sup>. But the devil himself cannot curse; it is God who decides about the curse. Punishment can only come from God, never from the devil. Therefore, in the ritual of curse the divine opponent can only be the executor as he is responsible for the perlocutionary sphere of the curse, for its effects. He is the executor of the punishment decided by the highest Judge. He is the one whom the agent gave the object into possession. There are situations in which the agent himself “takes possession” of the object while imposing the punishment. In that case God takes on both the role of the agent and the executor (sometimes this agent-executor is the Mother of God herself, which seems to be an exceptional case).
- (4) **The performer of the ritual, i.e. the cursing party (the speaker of CURSE<sub>r</sub>).** The **performer** acts (consciously or not) in accordance with the rules of the mechanism of magical speech-action, which was established in a mythical precedence act. The **performer** of the ritual of the curse is predominantly the mother (punishing, wronged or careless) but also the father or other persons wronged by devil’s allies. As **performers** of the justified curse (the **performers** of the act of CURSING<sub>a</sub>), inspired by God, they are mediators (God’s helpers). We are dealing with a special case of the ritual **performer** when this role is played by someone “in the know”, either a sorcerer (*wiedźmar*) or a healer (*znachor*), i.e. the one who is capable of obliging the power to act as he/she wants (i.e. the one who can ENCHANT). The **performer** might also be the object of the same curse, which occurs in case of an unjustified curse. He or she might be at the same time its agent, which is shown in the mythical precedence when God was roaming the earth while establishing the world order and he personally cursed the creatures, which were guilty of disobedience.

But the act of creation had already taken place. Nowadays God does not speak. Hence, He needs mediators. "Participation of a 'God's helper' is necessary, since God is helpless with regard to the devil. While he is powerful enough to create life, he [...] himself cannot do anything" [Tomicki 1976: 78].

What is then the folk ritual of the curse?

First of all, I understand a curse as a process, a process of cursing that consists of the following stages: the cause, i.e. the sin (preliminary conditions), the consequence of the sin, i.e. the act of speaking out the words of the curse (illocution with an inbuilt locution) which is the highlight of the ritual; and the necessary result, i.e. the implemented curse (perlocution).

Secondly, when discussing the ritual of the curse on the social and cultural level I perceive it as a sanction used by a group towards an individual who does not respect its norms. It is a way of excluding this individual from the community. The community 'must' implement this sanction in order to protect the consistency and sustainability of its own culture. In order to achieve these goals the group makes use of the performer-mediator who 'must' utter the formula of curse. It is decided not by the performer her- or himself but by the rules of the social order existing in the group<sup>2</sup>.

Thirdly, in the mythical sense I believe that the ritual of the curse speaks about the temporary defeat of God in the battle with the devil over the soul of the human who changed the role of God's ally for that of the devil's accomplice. God casts the cursed one into the sphere of devil's activity and in this way the punishment He imposed on the sinner is executed. The execution of this punishment requires certain amount of time. After this time the sinner, having repented, may once again stand on God's side and give Him the chance to defeat the devil since the function of the curse, similarly to any ritual, is to "maintain general life order" [Tolstaya 1994: 96] while making sure that the world does not change into chaos conquered by the evil powers. As a tool in the hands of "pious folk" it is even used as protection against evil. Where there is no curse, there is no God and His opponent rules. "they said that first the curse... now the devil rules. In the world nobody curses because the devil himself rules the human. Folk used to be more pious before" ("Mówili, że wprzód przeklenstwo... A teraz diabeł panuje. Po świecie to i nie przeklina nikt, bo sam diabeł rzondzi człowiekiem. A wprzód pobożniejsi ludzie byli") [53].

In the ritual of the curse we are dealing with an archaic mythical structure. "The myth of the curse" is woven into the wide context of the myth of human condition, the one indicated by the opposition of good and evil, life and death, fall and liberation.

## 2. Further Research Questions

An attempt to understand the phenomenon of the folk curse I have undertaken in this book leaves a number of hypotheses not fully accounted for and a high number of open questions. Apart from being able to master the presented overview, I also notice several research areas that might be its interesting development.

First of all, lifting the curse, hence the question of *if* and *how* it is possible to get liberated from a curse. Lifting the curse after being turned into stone might occur similarly to spring taking place after the winter time. Is it the natural course of things after the curse “has played,” after its potency has been exhausted? Is the possibility of overcoming the state of the curse conditioned upon something? If this is the case then we cannot deliberate over lifting the curse without entering the complex issue of repentance and offering. Searching for answers to those questions should take into account the mythological context, especially the cosmogonic and anthropogenic myth. They should refer to the mythical vision of the cycle of eternal comeback of death and rebirth. In my opinion, an inspiration for this quest might be magical folk tales whose central thread is the very lifting of the curse. It is hard not to notice how symmetrical the following sequences are: the devil-his activity, i.e. tempting the human-breaching the ban by the human-the state of sin-punishment-repentance and the structure of the magical folk tale. [cf. Propp 1976]. In a magical folk tale the commencement of the plot is the breaching of a ban which results in the main character’s quest, meaning going through subsequent trials, in search for a method to get rid of the results of breaching the ban.

Another topic which is actually strictly related to the first one is the ritual standing in opposition to the curse: “equal in its power to the [curse] is the blessing, ‘word-salvation’” [van der Leeuw 1938: 409]. There is a high number of folk blessing rituals and they are diversified and remain vivid. In the Appendix the reader can find my outline of their features. However, folk blessing rituals (blessing before the wedding, on the deathbed, with other rites of passage, in various situations of beginnings and endings) deserve a deeper analysis. I believe that an analysis of the blessing-curse opposition (that Magdalena Zowczak likens to the conflict between “grace and punishment of divine providence” [Zowczak 2013:282]) should take into account the context of the Slavic cosmogonic myth as the mythical precedence of these rituals in creating the world by two antagonists: the giver of the blessing (God) and the lord of the curse (the Devil). A significant reference in the overview of this opposition must

also be the biblical myth, especially the ties with the Judaeo-Christian vision of sin-punishment-repentance-redemption. The issues related to biblical blessings and curses have been undertaken on numerous occasions by biblical researchers and Hebrew scholars [cf. e.g.: Blank 1950/1951; Bruce 1982; Coats 1981; Fensham 1987; Minear 1991]; considerations of these authors might constitute an inspiring starting point for researchers of influences and biblical analogies in the folk tradition.

Thirdly, the blessing-curse opposition indicates a need for a systematizing (typology) of the folk verbal rituals. I have defined a blessing as a ritual opposing a curse. Undoubtedly, they constitute a “positive” and a “negative” implementation of one type of verbal rituals and this point has already been raised by scholars. In the past [cf. Engelking 1991], having adapted as the criterion the pragmatic purpose of the ritual, I termed this metalevel in relation to the rituals of curse and blessing – enchantments (“creating rituals”), and I defined its relation towards the other types of magical speech-action: “protecting rituals” – which I divided into rituals of avoidance (linguistic taboos and the use of euphemisms) and preventive rituals (which include for instance spell protective formulas) – as well as “undoing rituals,” which include predominantly cure spells.

I have formulated the ritual intentions of these three types of verbal activity as follows: 1. ‘somebody wants something to happen’; 2. ‘somebody does not want something to happen’; 3. ‘somebody wants something to be “undone.”’ Svetlana Tolstaya, when commenting on this proposal at a later stage, stressed the point I simply cannot disagree with, namely that in every type we can distinguish two poles: the positive one and the negative one.

The “creating” rituals can create something “good” for the recipient but they might also aim at wrongdoing. Prevention might be preventing “the wrong” (in such case we are dealing with a sacrificial offering) or preventing “the good” (in this case we are dealing with doing harm). Finally, disposing of “the wrong” is a positive function, while disposing of “the good” is a negative one [Tolstaya 1994: 97].

At the same time, Anna Chudzik proposes a typology of verbal magical behaviors based on the pragmatic and axiological criteria. As a result, she distinguishes a fourth type, apart from the creating, undoing and protecting, namely verbal magical destructive behaviours which she also calls “negatively creative” (here she places the curse), [cf. Chudzik 2002: 83–116]. All typology proposals obviously call for further development in terms of pragmatic and semantic analyses of verbal rituals seen in a diversified cultural context.

Fourthly, when dwelling on some thoughts from the previous point we might come upon several detailed issues. I mean for instance a relation of the folk verbal rituals to genres of religious speech (enchaining *versus* prayer), as well as a clearly emerging issue of cure spells; and lastly, links between folk verbal rituals and witchcraft. We entered this area when the sphere of ENCHANTING was highlighted in the conceptual field of “cursing.” Yet, this is just to indicate the direction on the way.

The fifth point is that a lot of new things could be said about linguistic and cultural connections between CURSING<sub>1</sub> (to curse) and CURSING<sub>4</sub> (to swear), both in the synchronous and diachronic aspect. Hence, a question arises regarding the continuation (transformation) of the form and function of folk (and biblical) curse in the contemporary Polish language, namely: in everyday language and sociolects. Playful curses, like *May the goose kick you* (*Niech cię gęś kopnie*) are without a doubt worthy of description and (with reference to Grochowski’s findings [Grochowski, 1990, 1991, 1995]) the issue of swear-words deserves further exploration, also in psycho and sociolinguistic terms.

The sixth point is that comparative studies of “cursing” material might lead to interesting conclusions, i.e. especially the relation between Polish and Jewish culture (both high, i.e. Hebrew, biblical and folk and common). Here an excellent starting point is James Matisoff’s monograph on “psycho-ostensive phrases” in Yiddish. [Matisoff 1979]. It is worth following mutual influences at the Polish-East Slavic borderland. Uspensky’s paper provides us with interesting hypotheses calling for verification on the Polish material [Uspenskiy 1983, 1987].

The seventh point is that the topic I find very interesting both for linguists and anthropologists is folk speech ethics. It seems that if we “deciphered the language” [Gurevich 1988: 320] of folk rules regarding “proper speech” we would see a different picture from the one governed by the familiar “conversational maxims” relating to standard language [Grice 1980].

And the final eighth point is that a high number of novel observations might come about shall we explore the research field in the form of contemporary popular culture. Viability of the traditional verbal magic in this area has recently been presented by Zuzanna Grębecka on the example of practices of post-Soviet popular culture. [Grębecka 2006] A paper on functionality of the curse and blessing in pop culture where the folk type of thinking continues, remains yet to be written. I have no doubt that in the researching on existential rather than communicative linguistic dimension [cf. Tokarska-Bakir 2000: especially 131–180] new voices, novel approaches and new inspirations are needed.

# ENDNOTES

## INTRODUCTION. TOPIC, SOURCES, METHOD

<sup>1</sup> Biblical scholars who studied the phenomenon of the curse include Herbert Chanan Brichto (*The Problem of "Curse" in the Hebrew Bible* [Brichto 1963]), Frank Charles Fensham (author of many articles on the subject), Stanley Gevirtz (*Curse Motifs in the Old Testament and in the Ancient Near East* [Gevirtz 1959] and multiple dictionary and encyclopaedia entries) and Delbert R. Hillers (*Treaty-Curses and the Old Testament Prophets* [Hillers 1964]). The role of the curse in Ancient Eastern cultures and in Antiquity was studied by Timothy G. Crawford (*Blessing and Curse in Syro-Palestinian Inscriptions of the Iron Age* [Crawford 1992]), John G. Gager (*Curse Tablets and Binding Spells from the Ancient World* [Gager (ed.) 1992]) and Paul Arden Keim (*When Sanctions Fail. The Social Function of Curse in Ancient Israel* [Keim 1992]). Among many historians who researched the subject, special mentions are due to Marc Drogin (*Anathema! Medieval Scribes and the History of Book Curses* [Drogin 1983]), Lester K. Little (the author of *Benedictine Maledictions. Liturgical Cursing in Romanesque France* [Little 1993], and many other articles and encyclopaedia entries) and Elisabeth Vodola (*Excommunication in the Middle Ages* [Vodola 1986]). The most notable anthropological studies of the curse include Edward Evan Evans-Pritchard ("Nuer Curses and Ghostly Vengeance" [Evans-Pritchard 1949]), Raimo Harjula ("Curse as a Manifestation of Broken Human Relationships among the Meru in Tanzania" [Harjula 1989]), Corinne A. Kratz ("Genres of Power. A Comparative Analysis of Okiek Blessings, Curses and Oaths" [Kratz 1989]), Pieter Middelkoop (*Curse, Retribution, Enmity as Data in Natural Religion, Especially in Timor, Confronted with the Scripture* [Middelkoop 1960]) and Dieudonné Ngankam Fogue (*La malédiction chez les Bamiléké du Cameroun. Une analyse philosophique* [Ngankam Fogue 1985]). A mention is also due to a seminal classic monograph of the curse in Palestinian folklore, authored by Taufik Canaan ("The Curse in Palestinian Folklore" [Canaan 1935]). A full bibliographical record of all the abovementioned sources can be found in the References section at the end of this volume.

<sup>2</sup> Patrick C. Power, *The Book of Irish Curses* [Power 1974] and Marko Kitevski, *Na kletva lek nema (There is No Cure for Curse* [Kitevski 1991]). A comprehensive bibliography of Yugoslavian works on the curse was completed by Dejan Ajdačić [1992].

<sup>3</sup> The work of Matisoff was referenced by Anna Wierzbicka [cf. Wierzbicka 1986, 1992].

<sup>4</sup> Cf. “Metamorfozy. Kłątwa i kara boża” (“Metamorphoses. God’s Curse and Punishment” [Zowczak 2013: 124–144]).

<sup>5</sup> I refer here to the distinction between primary (solicited [wywołane]) and secondary (pre-existing [zastane]) sources as defined in historical sciences and ethnography, cf. Szymański 1983: 28–31, Kopczyńska-Jaworska 1971.

<sup>6</sup> Information about all interlocutors can be found in the “List of Interlocutors” section at the end of this volume. Quotes from interlocutors in the text can be identified by interlocutor number in the list.

<sup>7</sup> The full title of Oskar Kolberg’s monumental nineteenth century work is *Lud. Jego zwyczaje, sposób życia, mowa, podania, przysłowia, obrzędy, gusła, zabawy, pieśni, muzyka i tańce* (*The Folk. Its Customs, Way of Life, Speech, Legends, Proverbs, Rituals, Superstitions, Amusements, Songs, Music and Dances*). In this monograph, I used a newer edition, edited and published by the Polish Ethnological Society as *Dzieła wszystkie* (*Complete Works*), Wrocław–Poznań, starting from vol. 1 published in 1961 (hereinafter referred to as DWOK).

<sup>8</sup> Michał Federowski, *Lud białoruski na Rusi Litewskiej. Materiały do etnografii słowiańskiej zgromadzone w latach 1877–1905* (*The Belarusian Folk in Lithuanian Ruthenia. Sources for Slavic Ethnography Gathered in the Years 1877–1905*), vol. 1–8, Kraków 1897–Warsaw 1981, hereinafter referred to as LB.

<sup>9</sup> Detailed bibliographical records to be found in the “References” section at the end of this volume.

<sup>10</sup> I use the term “research subjects” in my work in the meaning with which it was imbued in the writings of Anna Wyka, who says:

“The relationship between the researcher and the interlocutor is in every case a relationship between two subjects. [...] The subjectivity of the research relationship [...] involves not ‘objective’ observation of the research subject by the researcher, but on the contrary, the researcher’s attempts to establish intentional closeness, which can be achieved in many different ways” [Wyka 1993: 25, 51].

<sup>11</sup> In using this term, I have been inspired by the following insight of Aron Gurevich: “I am not interested in the development of a culture [...] but in its internal system, which remained fairly immobile and which reproduced its basic features over and over again” [Gurevich 1988: XVIII].

## PART ONE. MAGIC

### 1. MAGIC: IN SEARCH OF THE MEANING OF THE WORD AND THE CONCEPT

<sup>1</sup> This typology of magic is by no means comprehensive, it should only be treated as a list of examples.

<sup>2</sup> According to Trubachov, in Germanic and Slavic languages there are no traces of the \**māgh-* root. The PIE root \**mogt’i* (‘to be able to’) is unrelated despite ostensible similarity. Cf. ESS: \**Mogt’i*; Vasmer: *Mogu, możesz*.

<sup>3</sup> This etymology is not universally accepted. Some scholars of ancient Eastern magic [e.g., Moulton 1915, Gnoli 1987] argue that the etymology of *magu* is unclear (some scholars derive it from roots meaning 'tribesman,' 'priest,' 'gift' or 'servant').

<sup>4</sup> Jan Mączyński wrote:

"Magus dictio est Persica, qua apud eos sapiens significatur – mądry. Eos enim Persae magos appellant, quos Graeci philosophos, Latini sapientes, Aegypti prophetas seu sacerdotes, Galii druidas, nos – mędrce uczone" [Maczinsky 1564: 204, quoted in: SXVI: *Magus*]. ("Magus is a Persian word, which they use to denote a wise man. For the Persians call magi the people whom the Greeks call philosophers, the Romans – wisemen, the Egyptians – prophets or priests, the Galls – druids, and we – learned sages," translation from Latin by Ewa Wróblewska-Trochimiuk.)

<sup>5</sup> *The Dictionary of Sixteenth-Century Polish* contains the following quotations:

"Otóż Magi, o których tu Ewanielista mówi, nie czarnoksiężnicy, ale ludzie mądrzy byli" (Białobrzeski) [SXVI: *Magus*];

("An so these Magi, of whom the Evangelist speaks, were not sorcerers but sages")

"Z tej przyczyny w Egipcie i w Persyjej króle zwano Magi, iż musiał być król ich gwiazdarcz mądry i uczony. Przeto Pismo Święte zowie je [tj. Trzech Króli] Magi, to jest wieszczkowie, iż się wieszczbą sprawowali, widząc gwiazdę nad inne jasną" (Bielski) [SXVI: *Magus*].

("In Egypt and Persia, kings were called Magi for this reason that the king also had to be an astronomer [literally, "a star-gazer" – Pol. "gwiazdarcz" – A.E.], a man of wisdom and learning. Thus, the Holy Bible calls them Magi, i.e., seers, as they watched the skies and foretold things to come, seeing one star brighter than the others.")

<sup>6</sup> "Termin *czarna magia* został wprowadzony w średniowieczu przez zniekształcenie słowa greckiego *nekromancja* (*nekros* – 'martwy' i *manteia* – 'przepowiedanie'), przez które Grecy rozumieli sztukę wróżenia, polegającą na wywoływaniu duchów zmarłych w celu pytania ich o przyszłość. W kościele chrześcijańskim pod pojęcie to podciągnięto zakazane czarnoksiężstwo. Słowo *nekromancja* przeobraziło się wtedy w *negromancję* lub *nigromancję* (łac. *niger* – 'czarny'), oznaczające czarnoksiężstwo, czary" [Bugaj 1986: 281]. ("The term *black magic* appeared in the Middle Ages, as a corruption of the Greek word *nekromancy* (*nekros* – 'dead' and *manteia* – 'divination'), which the Greeks used to refer to a branch of divination in which the practitioner called on the spirits of the dead in order to ask them about the future. The Christian Church widened the scope of the term to include the forbidden practice of sorcery. The word *nekromancy* was then transformed to *nigromancy* (Latin: *niger* – 'black'), that came to mean wizardry and sorcery.")

<sup>7</sup> I believe it is not possible to conduct such an analysis without studying the whole vast semantic field of magic-related terms, which include *sorcery*, *witchcraft*, *wizardry*, *divination*, *superstition*, *miracle*, *mystery* and others.

<sup>8</sup> Doroszewski defines *jugglery* (*kuglarstwo*) as: "1. 'tricks of a juggler, clownish pranks,' 2. 'cheating'" ("1. 'sztuczki kuglarza, błazeńskie figle,' 2. 'oszukiwanie'") [SJPDor: *Kuglarstwo*].

<sup>9</sup> Murray and Rosalie Wax comment on such attitude in their classic article:

"The rational world view of the West is not merely distinct from the magical world view, it is inimical to it, as demonstrated by the long history of religious and moral crusades and missions from the West to other peoples. Judaeo-Christian prophets have regarded

magical rites and magical mentality as immoral and blasphemous; Western philosophers have regarded the magical organization of experience as superstition, 'a monstrous farrago.' Accordingly, the inner structure of the magical world was concealed from the Western observer by his own Kulturbrillen" [Wax, Wax 1963: 502].

Middleton concurs:

"In most known societies magic forms an integral part of the sphere of thought and behaviour [...]. In some societies, especially in the industrialized West, it is generally accepted as superstition and even as a form of sleight of hand used for entertainment. [...] [The] approaches [of nineteenth century scholars] were essentially psychological in the sense that they depended upon their own assumptions about what might have been the behavior of other peoples rather than on categories formulated by those peoples themselves" [Middleton 1987: 82–83].

O'Keefe adds:

"The difference between modern and primitive societies is not that they had magic and we do not. The difference is that they accepted the magic around them, whereas we deny it" [O'Keefe 1982: XV].

<sup>10</sup> The phrase in brackets is absent in Szymczak and Skorupka.

<sup>11</sup> The phrase in brackets is absent in Skorupka.

<sup>12</sup> More information about other Polish words that form the semantic field of *magic* can be found in Pisarkowa 1998: 151–154.

<sup>13</sup> *Czarownik* (čароуѳникъ) is, according to SPsł, "one who does magic and casts spells, *magus, veneficus, incantatory*" ("ten, kto czyni czary, guśła, *magus, veneficus, incantatory*"). It is a *nomen agentis* derived from *čarovati:čariti* or a substantive derived from the adjective *čarovънь:čarънь*. *Czarodziej* (čarodějъ – 'one who does sorcery and performs rituals, *magus, veneficus, incantatory*' ("ten, kto czyni czary, guśła, czarownik, *magus, veneficus, incantator*")) is a compound of *čarъ* 'sorcery, charm' and *dějati* 'to lay/put something somewhere, *ponere, collocare,*' 'to make, to do, to create, to perform something, *facere,*' 'to speak, *dicere*' ('kłaść, stawiać coś gdzieś, *ponere, collocare,*' 'robić, czynić, wykonywać coś, *facere,*' 'mówić, *dicere*').

<sup>14</sup> Moszyński writes: "Spells [*czary*] were quite commonly given [*zadawane*] in food or drink (mixing into the latter, for instance, pounded and ground dried snakes, frogs etc., or their blood)" [KLS: 341]. My interlocutor from Podlasie told me:

"Miała już dziewczynka pięć lat, listki zbierała, przemieniała w żaby, miała zadane, coś jej się w rączkach robiło. Książd tę dziewczynkę drugi raz przechrzczył, potem już tego nie robiła" [8].

("The girl was already five, she would pick up little leaves and turn them into frogs, this was given to her [*miała zadane*], something was happening in her little hands. The priest baptised her for the second time and afterwards she no longer did this.")

<sup>15</sup> Moszyński explains this choice of verbs in the following passage:

"Spells [*czary*] could be *laid on* or *poured out*, for example by placing an object onto a road or on a threshold, or by pouring some magical (beneficial or harmful) liquid on the ground. When a person stepped in the liquid or walked over the object, they would become enchanted (*oczarowana*)" [KLS: 341].

<sup>16</sup> “Pospolicie *rzucano* też na upatrzoną osobę czary ręką z piaskiem, z popiołem, z liściem etc. (inaczej: *obsypywano czarami*)”

“It was common to *cast, throw* spells [*czary*] on somebody, in a handful of sand or ashes, or leaves, etc. This could be called *sprinkling spells over somebody* [*obsypywanie czarami*]” [KLS: 342].

<sup>17</sup> “The term for *zamawianie* [using cure spells, literally ‘speaking away’ an illness] was used a long time ago by some of the Slavs to create names for the action of healing. The Old Bulgarian word *balsji* ‘medicine doctor’ along with the Old Church Slavonic words *balbstvo* – ‘a medicine,’ *balovati* – ‘to heal’ and the Slovenian *bali* – ‘medicine doctor,’ *balovanije* – ‘healthcare,’ are moulded from the now obsolete Balkan word \**balb*, which derives from *bajati*, meaning ‘to speak away’ (to this day the Bulgarian *bájuvam* means ‘I cure with sorcery [*czary*]’). Similarly the Old Bulgarian *vračb* – ‘medicine doctor,’ *vračbba* – ‘cure, curing,’ Slovenian *vrač*, Great Russian *vrač* – ‘medicine doctor,’ go along with the Great Russian *vrat*’ in the now obsolete meaning ‘to speak away’ (nowadays only ‘to lie,’ ‘to fantasize’). As a matter of fact, *vračb*, according to the word’s etymology, for some Slavs denotes also a sorcerer or diviner (Serbo-Croatian *vrač* – ‘sorcerer, diviner’; Bulgarian *vrač* – ‘same’)” [KLS: 231].

<sup>18</sup> “Nie wiem, jak gdzie indziej, lecz w górach tarnowskich czary wielce się różnią od *uczynku*. Czary wyłącznie do krów się odnoszą; *oczarować* je jest to odjąć lub zepsuć mleko. *Uczynić zaś* komu – jest to sprowadzić mu chorobę, niemoc lub kalectwo. [...] *Uczynienia* komu czego rozmaite bywają sposoby. I tak np. czyni się temu lub owemu, aby się zenił...” [DWOK 48, *TarnRzesz*: 271, 297].

“I do not know about other places, but in the Tarnów Mountains there is a big difference between *czary* [sorcery, charming] and *uczynek* [a deed]. *Czary* is only to do with cows. Charming (*oczarowanie*) just means turning the milk sour or causing the cow to stop giving milk. But *doing* [*uczynić*] *something to someone* means causing this person’s illness, accident or disability. [...] There are different ways of *doing* [*uczynienie*] something to someone. For example, you can do something to somebody so that he will want to marry.”

<sup>19</sup> “Byli takie, że umieją **zrobić i odrobić**. Czarowniki. Jak poproszą jego goście weselne, czy tam ojciec, to on odrobi [jeśli zrobił pannie młodej]. A inny nie mógł odrobić – nie wszyscy umieli zrobić i odrobić. Wtedy trzeba już szukać kogoś, i to prędko, bo tam jakieś terminy naznaczają [te, co zrobią]; naznaczają dni, dwa tygodnie, czy coś. I jak w tym czasie – to odrobi, a jak ten czas przejdzie – to już trzeba czekać te lata, na które porobione [i wtedy już samo przejdzie]” [31].

“There are those who can **do and un-do** [**zrobić, odrobić**]. Witches [*czarowniki*], they are. If one is asked by the wedding guests, for example by the father of the bride, he can undo [if he earlier did sorcery to the bride]. But some witches may not be able to undo. Not everybody will be able to do and undo. So then you need to find someone who will be able to undo – and you need to be quick about it, because there are some dates set [by those who do sorcery]. If you manage to undo it before the date passes, it is undone, but if you are late, you need to wait for as many years as it was done for [and then maybe it will pass of its own accord].”

<sup>20</sup> Different names and functions of the practitioner, the specialist, “the one who knows,” are discussed in: Thomas, Znaniecki 1927: 232–234, Libera 1995: 227–274, Libera 2003.

<sup>21</sup> According to Brückner, it is a calque of the German term *Schwarzkünstler*, which entered Polish indirectly, mediated through the Czech word *černokněžník* [SEBr: *Czarny*]. The word's etymology suggests that sorcery is practiced by those who perform "black tricks" or who study "black books" – the word "black" (German *Schwartz*, Czech *černy*) suggests here a connection to the devil. The etymology of the term is confirmed in SESŁ [*Książnik:Księżnik*]. Sławski's dictionary contains examples of usage of *czarnoksiężnik: czarnoksiężnik*, meaning "someone who does magic" dating back to the fourteenth century. My interviews also yield many examples of such usage, e.g.,

"Jak my byli w Rosji [w czasie I wojny światowej], u jednych sąsiadów ja zobaczyła – leży tak dużo książek. A już ja chodziła do szkoły. W tych książkach było wszystko! Ja zajrzała do tej książki, to jeszcze nieraz mówię: 'Oj, żeb była przepisana, to by i ja co znała!' Było i od uroków, było żeb chłopak dziewczynę polubiał; tam wszystko było, takie były grube książki! Tych, co takie książki mają, to nazywają czarnoksiężnikami" [27].

("When we were in Russia [during the First World War], I went to our neighbours' house, and I saw they had many books. I was already in school then, and I knew that there was everything one needs to know in these books. I peered inside one, and even today, after so many years, I often tell myself: 'If only I copied something from those books then! I would know so much more now!' There were spells there, and how to make a boy love a girl... everything was there, because the books were very thick! So people who have books like these, they are called 'czarnoksiężniki' [wizards, sorcerers].")

"Czarne książki jest. Czarne książki. Że diabła wyzwiesz. Nie słyszeli 'czarne książki'? [Nie, a co to?] Takie czarne, a białe litery, czarne tło, białe litery. Tak czarta i wyźwie. [...] [A kto takich książek używał?] O, to, no, czarnoksiężniki. Ja i nie chciałaby jej mieć i nie chciałaby widzieć jej. A teraz nie ma. A mnie, ot, mówił jeden człowiek taki, mówił, że syn bardzo wysoka szkoła ukończył i mówił ojcu, że jest i teraz, zamknięte. Wszystkie zamknięte te czarne książki, nie wypuskają. [A gdzie zamknięte?] A gdzie... gdzieści w rządach zamknięte. Jest, mówili" [76].

("Black books' they are called. Black books. They are for summoning the devil. Haven't you heard about black books? [No, what are they?] The books are black. They have white letters and black pages. White letters, black pages. A book like this can summon the devil... [And who would use a book like this?] Well, a sorcerer [*czarnoksiężnik*] would. I wouldn't want to have one, I wouldn't even want to see one. But there are no books like this no more. One man told me that his son went to a very high school, and he told his father... he told him that they are still there, even today, only they locked all these black books up. They are under lock and key now. [Where did they lock them?] Somewhere... somewhere in some government buildings. So he told me.")

Some dialects show proof that the meaning of *czarnoksiężnik* is not lexicalized, or that a process of folk etymologization has occurred. Kolberg noted fairy tales which include interesting dialect forms of the word: *czarny księżnik, czarnaksięznica* ("Przyszed do tej czarnejksiężnicy ten sużący [...] wzion go za nogi i przyniós na plecach do tej czarnejksiężnicy. [...] A ten-że kupca syn tak sie cował od niej, bo ona cała czarna jes..." – "The servant came to this sorceress [...] took him by the legs and fetched him on his back to this sorceress. [...] And the merchant's son hid from her because she'll all black...") [DWOK 14, *WKS*Pozn 6: 46, 79]), *car-księżnik, car-księżnicka* ("Ociec księżnicki widział, ze mu brakowało córki, i jako car-księżnik wiedział ze poleciała za królewicem..." – "The princess's father saw that his daughter was missing and as a *car-księżnik* [sorcerer? *tsar-prince?* *tsar-sage?* *charm-prince?* *charm-sage?*]") [DWOK 8, Krak 4: 8–9]). More information on the motif of "black books" in the Vilnius region can be found in: Zowczak 2013: 481–482. Tokarska-Bakir's

thought-provoking monograph contains a comprehensive account of the place of magical books in folk culture [Tokarska-Bakir 2000: 175–177].

<sup>22</sup> These terms are in common use in Belarus.

<sup>23</sup> The term *ciota* ( *aunt*) is used commonly in Greater Poland. Brückner posits that it is an euphemism for the word “witch” [SEBr: *Ciotka*]. This interpretation seems likely, as in other regions of Poland the same word is used to refer – again, in an euphemistic way – to various diseases. The mechanism of euphemization would therefore be the same:

„Ciotą eufemistycznie przezywano febrę (ciotuchna)”; „Febra zowie się tutaj [w okolicy Suwałk i Augustowa] ciotuchą albo ciotką. *Ciotucha go wzięła łomotać* – dosadnie wyraża się wieśniak” [DWOK 42, *Maz* 7: 324].

(“*Ciota* ( *aunt*) and *ciotuchna* ( *auntie*) are euphemisms for fever”; “In these parts [the region of Suwałki and Augustów], they call the fever *ciotucha* or *ciotka*. ‘*Auntie is whacking him something cruel*,’ a peasant would say.”)

“Serbs, Croats, Bulgarians and Ruthenians would refer to dangerous or vexing illnesses as *mothers*, *aunts* or *goodwife* (*goody*) [...] In Russia one could hear villagers refer to the fever as [...] *t’otuška*, in Belarus – *ćaćucha*, and in Ukraine – *titka*” [KLS: 181].

<sup>24</sup> Popowska-Taborska’s monograph contains an interesting passage wherein she proposes her own etymology for the Kashubian term *kutin*, linking it with the PIE \**kutiti* – ‘to act, to do’ [Popowska-Taborska 1987: 212; cf. also Popowska-Taborska 1989: 22].

<sup>25</sup> On the following list, the terms not followed by a reference were either collected by me personally during my research, or are commonly known.

<sup>26</sup> The Belarusian word *znachar* is positive, it refers to someone who can *undo* (*odrobić*) harmful sorcery, as opposed to *wieźmar*, one who would *do* (*podrabiać*) such sorcery.

“Ludzie nazywają wieźmarem takiego, który chce tylko źle robić, a odrobić nie umie albo nie chce. A są tacy, którzy potrafią zrobić źle co tylko chcą, ale im sumienie nie pozwala, to oni ratują ludzi i odrabiają źle, to takich, panoczku, ludzie wystrzegają się nazywać wieźmarami, ale nazywają znachorami” [LB 1: 101].

(“People call those who would do nought but ill *wieźmar*. Someone like this doesn’t know how to undo – or doesn’t care to. But there are also some who could do ill if they wanted, but their conscience will not allow them to. Those will not be called *wieźmar*, people call them *znachor*.”)

My interview transcripts contain many similar differentiations:

– Czy są tacy *szeptuny*, którzy szepczą na źle?

– [Mąż:] Tak, są tacy.

– I oni też robią to, modląc się?

– [Żona:] Tego to ja już nie wiem, oni na pewno i diabła wspominają.

– [Mąż:] Na rzecz dobra to mało [robią], a na źle, to ho, ho!

– I jak szeptali na źle, to co się działo?

– [Żona:] To już człowiek chory, i potem umrze. A bywało, że będzie żył, tylko choruje i choruje.

– A co trzeba zrobić, żeby to odrobić?

– [Żona:] Czemu nie, odrabiali. Chodzili do innych, szukali szeptunów czy znachorów silniejszych. Tacy silniejsi to odrabiali.

– A od czego zależy siła szeptuna? Który silniejszy?

– [Żona:] No, są może tacy, którzy więcej rozumieją, lepiej nauczyli się znachorować. I są też tacy mniejsi” [70].

(“– So are there any *szeptuny* [whisperers] who whisper to evil?

– [Husband:] Yes, there are.

– And they even do it while praying?

– [Wife:] I wouldn't know about that, but for sure they also mention the devil.

– [Husband:] They don't do too much good, but they sure do a lot of evil.

– So what happened when they whispered to evil?

– [Wife:] If someone's sick, they die. Or sometimes they can live on, but they will be sick all the time, with no improvement.

– So what can you do to undo (*odrobić*) it?

– [Wife:] Why not, you can undo it. You can go around, asking for a stronger whisperer (*szeptun*) or healer (*znachor*). A strong one can undo it.

– So what does a whisperer's strength depend on? Why are some of them stronger than others?

– [Wife:] Well, maybe the stronger ones understand more, they are better at healing (*znachorować*). And there are lesser ones as well.”)

<sup>27</sup> A comprehensive discussion of magic-related vocabulary, including the terms used for the magic practitioner and for the act of doing magic can be found in: Krawczyk-Tyrpa 2001: 66–72.

<sup>28</sup> Multiple examples particularizing these three fields (associating words from the semantic field of magic with the concepts of 'singing,' 'calling,' 'beseeching,' healing,' 'lot, fate,' 'divination,' 'soothsaying,' 'sign,' 'formula,' 'godhead, godliness,' 'seeing') are presented in C.D. Buck's *A Dictionary of Selected Synonyms in the Principal Indo-European Languages* [Buck: *Magic, Witchcraft, Sorcery; Witch, Sorceress*]. These semantic connections seem universal, or at least very widespread. They were noticed by many scholars of magic, including the forerunners of research in this field:

“In some cases...ritual derives its name from a reference to these effective characteristics: in India the word which best corresponds to our world ritual is *karman*, action; sympathetic magic is the *factum, krtyâ* par excellence; the German word *Zauber* has the same etymological meaning, in other languages the words for magic contain the root *to do*” [Maus 2001: 24].

<sup>29</sup> Interestingly, *magic* is altogether missing from SGPKarł. In the ethnographic records that I have analyzed, the word is used only in the editors' or collectors' commentaries (that is to say, in “the language of the observers”), and not in the quotations from interlocutors. Neither was the word *magic* used by my own interlocutors. The materials I have collected demonstrate that the term *magic* is not part of the folk culture linguistic image of the world – though of course this is not to say that persons living in rural areas today may not know the word from standard Polish.

<sup>30</sup> The assumption that the perspectives of the researcher (observer) and the research subject (interlocutors) are disparate is widely accepted in contemporary scholarly literature on magic, which can be demonstrated by the following three examples: The historian Henry Maguire, the editor of *Byzantine Magic*, uses the terms *external definition* (“what we might wish to call magic”) and *internal definition* (“what the *Byzantines*, at any place or time in their history might call magic”) [Maguire 1993: 3]. Marvin Meyer and Richard Smith, the editors of *Coptic “texts of ritual power,”* write thus:

“The texts [...] rarely use the word *mageia*, or other Greek and Coptic words we translate as ‘magic’ and ‘sorcery.’ Our texts are frequently invocations of the powers to protect the person from ‘magic,’ from sorcery, and against the evil eye. The users did not, therefore, consider themselves practitioners of ‘magic,’ which they regarded as a negative term. The terms of positive description they use, *phylakterion* and *apologia*, ‘amulet’ and ‘spell,’ really just mean ‘protection’ and ‘defense’” [Meyer, Smith 1994: 2].

Richard Kieckhefer, a scholar of medieval magic, also defines the term from the perspective of the actor. In his analysis of medieval German handbooks of magic he muses on what their original readers would have said:

“What would medieval Europeans have said about these questions? [...] few of these people would have asked themselves whether the term ‘magic’ applied to these practices. They might have said that the Wolfsthurn book contained ‘charms,’ ‘blessings,’ ‘adjurations,’ or simply ‘cures,’ without calling them specifically “magical.” They might have called the Munich handbook a book of ‘necromancy’ or ‘sorcery’ rather than of ‘magic.’ Only the theologically and philosophically sophisticated elite bothered greatly about questions of definition” [Kieckhefer 1990: 9].

<sup>31</sup> “The American nominalists (e.g., Goldenweiser) tell us that things like totemism or magic do not exist. They are just ‘constructs,’ words we make up [...] the social world is largely made up of over-determined symbolic complexes like these.” It is interesting to note that O’Keefe’s list of “constructs” includes *the caste system, totemism and magic*” [O’Keefe 1982: XVII].

“The concept of magic is in itself empty of meaning and thus susceptible to the recognition of any meaning that we can give to it; following this, Lévi-Strauss has implied that the category of magic must be ‘dissolved’” [Middleton 1987: 88].

In the Polish literature on the subject, the question “does magic exist?” was posed by Ludwik Stomma, the author of a critical survey of ethnological theories of magic [Stomma 1978] and of a structural study of some aspects of magical thinking [Stomma 1979].

<sup>32</sup> The term comes from Melanesian languages.

<sup>33</sup> “[*Magic* is] a set of ritual actions, directed towards the supernatural, animate and mysterious dimension of reality and striving to introduce desired change into the environment by influencing and manipulating the said supernatural and mysterious dimension. Magic is based on the socially shared belief in its efficacy, and is supposed to achieve some of the same goals as industry, technology, science and art. [...] A characteristic feature of magic is an assumption that that meticulously following prescribed steps of magical procedure in a specific time and place and fulfilling some conditions regarding the psycho-physical condition of the magic practitioner, must bring about the desired effect” [Wierciński 1997: 103].

<sup>34</sup> “Magic – a set of actions practiced in traditional (archaic, primitive) societies that are mostly non-empirical and symbolic in nature, and that are directed towards achieving in the natural or social environments desired effects that are impossible to achieve through purely practical means. [...] The intellectual background for magic is magical thinking, a system of thought that comprehensively correlates the most important components of the dominant worldview of the given culture [...]. Magic is a form of acting and thinking that occupies a fundamental position in the spiritual culture of all preliterate societies.” [Wasilewski 1998: 24].

<sup>35</sup> The literature on the subject yields examples of diverse terms to denote this phenomenon, including mythical thinking, mythological thinking, mythological-poetic thinking, archaic, symbolic, primitive or savage thinking, mythical consciousness, mythopoetic consciousness, folkloristic or magical consciousness, archaic or religious worldview, mytho-logic, etc. [cf. Tomicki 1987].

<sup>36</sup> In the traditional alchemy this principle is expressed thus: "Each is the whole and it is through it that the whole is formed." Commenting on this maxim, Marcel Mauss muses: "This whole, which is contained in everything, is the world. And we are sometimes told that the world is conceived as a unique animal, whose parts, however disparate they may seem, are inextricably associated. Everything has something in common with everything else and everything is connected to everything else" [Mauss 2001: 91].

<sup>37</sup> This relationship has been analysed by many scholars, especially by Mauss [2001], Lévy-Bruhl [1910]; cf. also Thomas, Znaniecki 1927 and Tomicki 1987.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. Stomma 1986, especially the chapter "Tablice Mendelejewa" ("Mendeleev Tables" [Stomma 1986: 151–203]) as well as works by Claude Lévi-Strauss, Edmund R. Leach and others.

<sup>39</sup> This mechanism finds its perfect illustration in a medieval anecdote, quoted by Gurevich: "...during one deceased man's embalming no heart was discovered in his chest. After all, it says in the scripture: 'For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also' [Matt 6: 21]. They actually searched his moneybox and found his heart lying with his money" [Gurevich 1988: 195].

<sup>40</sup> "In the case of European folk cultures, the expression 'a system of magical and religious beliefs' inexorably brings to mind the Christian doctrine, disregarding the degree of its transformation or corruption in by the receiving peasant culture. But this automatic association, which has its roots in insufficient knowledge of the folk culture, often leads to erroneous conclusions." [Tomicki 1983: 16].

<sup>41</sup> The problems of folk mythology are also the focus of Magdalena Zowczak's work; cf. Zowczak 1994; 2013.

## 2. MAGIC OF FOLK VERBAL RITUALS

<sup>1</sup> Whereas the habit of knocking or touching on wood exists in many non-Slavic cultures (as testified e.g., by the English expression *touch wood*), the latter habit (not saying "thank you" after somebody wishes us luck in order not to jinx it) seems to be a Polish speciality [translator's note].

<sup>2</sup> Interestingly, it seems that many examples quoted by the authors are in fact not taken from actual linguistic usage but borrowed from earlier literature on the subject. One blatant example is

"a very popular anecdote about a German, an Italian and a Hungarian who quarrelled when each was trying to convince the others that his language was the most superior. 'Well,' says the German, 'what do you call water (*Wasser*)?' The Italian replies '*Acqua*,' and the Hungarian: '*Viz*.' And the German says triumphantly: 'And we Germans call it water (*Wasser*) and it truly is 'water.'" [Rozwadowski 1921: 100].

Other variants of the anecdote use different objects, e.g., a horse or a glass.

<sup>3</sup> The equivalent English expression is “let sleeping dogs lie.”

<sup>4</sup> Bogdan Walczak’s article “Magia językowa dawniej i dziś” (“Language Magic Then and Now” [Walczak 1988]) offers a valuable and comprehensive overview of many linguistic phenomena deemed magic which feature in the literature on the subject. Walczak argues that “the foundation of the phenomenon which we call language magic is identification, or equating the word with the object it denotes, and the resultant belief in the real causative power of words” [Walczak 1988:54].

In his article, he focuses on linguistic taboos and euphemisms and argues that euphemisms in modern Polish are associated with linguistic manipulation.

<sup>5</sup> Jakobson took interest in language magic, touching on the instances of “natural similarity association between sound and meaning” [Jakobson, Waugh 2002: 182] and offering an overview of the recurring references to this phenomenon in the works of Plato, Humboldt, Jespersen, Bloomfield and Benveniste. “The Spell of Speech Sounds,” co-authored with Linda R. Waugh [Jakobson, Waugh 2002], is devoted to linguistic experiments in poetry, which he termed “akin to the magic ingredient of the oral tradition” [Jakobson, Waugh 2002: 234]. Analyzing the instances of phonetic symbolism in poetry and onomatopoeic utterances, reduplication, taboos, glossolalia and children’s counting-out rhymes he concluded “that spell of the ‘sheer sound of words’ [...] bursts out in the expressive, sorcerous, and mythopoeic tasks of language” [Jakobson, Waugh 2002: 234].

<sup>6</sup> “‘May this sty dry up, *tfu, tfu, tfu, tfu*’ (Lithuanian spell). ‘Water, queen river, day-break! Send grief beyond the blue sea, to the sea-bottom, like a grey stone never to rise from the sea-bottom, may grief never come to burden the light heart of God’s servant, may grief be removed and sink away’ (North Russian incantation). ‘Sun, stand thou still upon Gibeon; and thou, Moon, in the valley of Aj-a-lon. And the sun stood still, and the moon stayed’ (Josh. 10:12)” [Jakobson 1985: 115].

The Polish edition of this Jakobson’s article is based on a different version which quotes the above North Russian text preceded by two “Polish incantations”:

“Niech mu ręka uschnie!

Zgniło wodo, pili-ma, pili-mu, pili-mi, zdejm brodawkę, zdejm brodawkę zaraz mi! (polskie ‘zamawiania’)” [Jakobson 1989: 84].

(“May his arm wither!

Stale water, pili-ma, pili-mu, pili-mi, remove this wart, remove this wart instantly!” (a Polish ‘incantations’).”)

<sup>7</sup> Jakobson defines the conative function in the following way:

“Orientation toward the addressee, the conative function, finds its purest grammatical expression in the vocative and imperative, which syntactically, morphologically, and often even phonemically deviate from other nominal and verbal categories” [Jakobson 1985: 114].

<sup>8</sup> Malinowski outlined his ethnographic theory of language in *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* [Malinowski 1922], and elaborated on it in *The Problem of Meaning in Primitive Languages*, which appeared as a supplement to Ogden and Richards’ seminal *The Meaning of Meaning* [Malinowski 1923]. He then further developed his theory and presented it as the second volume of *Coral Gardens and Their Magic* [Malinowski 1935]. A detailed analysis of Malinowski’s valuable contribution to linguistics, presented in the context of his biography and against the background of modern developments in the field, can be found in: Pisarkowa 2000.

<sup>9</sup> J. L. Austin's theory of speech acts became an important inspiration for anthropologists, who used it especially to interpret speech behaviours in simple societies. Apart from Tambiah, among the first authors who "discovered" Austin for anthropology was Ruth Finnegan (*How to Do things with Words: Performative Utterances among the Limba of Sierra Leone* [Finnegan 1969]). Other proponents of Austin's paradigm in anthropology include Benjamin Ray [1973], Philip L. Ravenhill [1976] and Sam D. Gill [1977].

<sup>10</sup> Peirce's division of signs into three categories, which became an inspiration for Tambiah, is analyzed by Jakobson in the following passage:

"The most widely known of Peirce's general assertions is that three kinds of signs exist. Yet the things which are the best known quite easily undergo various distortions. Peirce does not at all shut signs up in one of these three classes. These divisions are merely three poles, all of which can coexist within the same sign. The symbol, as he emphasized, may have an icon and/or an index incorporated into it and 'the most perfect of signs are those in which the iconic, indicative, and symbolic characters are blended as equally as possible'" [Jakobson 1977: 1031, quoting Peirce 1933: 448].

He covered the same ground also in his essay "Quest for the Essence of Language":

"One of the most important features of Peirce's semiotic classification is his shrewd recognition that the difference between the three basic classes of signs is merely a difference in relative hierarchy. It is not the presence or absence of similarity or contiguity between the *signans* and *signatum*, not the purely factual or purely imputed, habitual connection between the two constituents which underlies the division of signs into icons, indices and symbols, but merely the predominance of one of these factors over the others" [Jakobson 1965: 26].

<sup>11</sup> We should also refer here to the highly regarded student of the opposition between oral and literate cultures, Walter J. Ong, who wrote extensively on the psychodynamics of orality. Ong argued that in oral cultures, words, as sounds and therefore phenomena impossible to capture and record in any physical form, are in fact events. Commenting on Malinowski's statement that "language is a mode of action rather than a countersign of thought", Ong remarks:

"For anyone who has a sense of what words are in primary oral culture [...] it is not surprising that [...] 'primitive' (oral) peoples [...] consider words to have great power. [...] In this sense, all sound, and especially oral utterance, which comes from inside living organisms, is 'dynamic.' [...] The fact that oral peoples [...] consider words to have magical potency is clearly tied in, at least unconsciously, with their sense of the word as necessarily spoken, sounded, and hence power-driven. Deeply typographic folk forget to think of words as primarily oral, as events, and hence as necessarily powered: for them, words tend to be assimilated to things, 'out there' on a flat surface. Such 'things' are not so readily associated with magic, for they are not actions, but are in a radical sense dead, though subject to dynamic resurrection" [Ong 2002: 32].

<sup>12</sup> The terms *genres of power* [Kratz 1989] and *texts of ritual power* [Meyer, Smith 1994] are also used in literature on the subject. Though I think both of them are quite apt, none gained widespread popularity. One could also borrow the Bakhtinian term *ritual speech genres*. For Bakhtin, a speech genre is "action, not product (or, strictly speaking, a codified form of action)" [Wierzbicka 1983: 127]. He writes, "Even in the most free, the most unconstrained conversation, we cast our speech in definite generic forms" [Bakhtin 1986: 78].

<sup>13</sup> An overview of academic approaches to the connection between magic actions, gestures and verbal formulas (as exemplified by incantations (*zamawiania*)) can be found in: Niebrzegowska-Bartmińska 2001: 102–104.

<sup>14</sup> The motif of the little finger would be worth a separate analysis. Many dictionary entries [Linde: *Palec*; SW: *Palec*] mention the connection between the little finger and the ear (in fact, the little finger was sometimes called *the ear finger* (*palec uszny, uszkowy, do ucha*). It seems that this term is a linguistic Europeanism, which appears in many European languages. Troc references the French and German examples, whose roots can be found in the Latin expression *digitus auricularis* [SW: *Palec*]. The little finger was also called *a poking finger* (*dłubiuch*). Troc and all many lexicographers recorded the expression “my little finger told me” (“mały palec mi to powiedział”), meaning “*I made a guess, I guessed it*” [SW: *Palec*; SFraz: *Palec*]. It seems that this expression was in common use in the nineteenth century, as apart from Kolberg’s record (quoted above), it can be found in Adam Mickiewicz’s important epic poem *Pan Tadeusz* (“Or so my little finger whispered in my ear” – “Już w ucho szepnęła o tym mnie mój palec mały”) and in Klementyna Hoffmanowa’s poetry – albeit in a non-standard version (“‘Who told them?’ ‘My ring finger’” – “Kto im to wszystko powiedział? Serdeczny paluszek”) [both citations: NKP: *Palec*]. A finger (little finger, ring finger, index finger) is a recurring motif in folk tales, e.g., displaying a heart and a little finger of a murder victim can serve as a proof that the deed has been done (cf. *Wierna córka i żona* [*A Faithful Daughter and a Wife* [DWOK 32, Pok 4: 46]), binding together a brigand’s two little fingers robs him of all his strength (cf. *Zdradliwa siostra* [*A Treacherous Sister* [DWOK 32, Pok 4: 73]), crunching fingers in a carpenter’s vice would be used as a method of extorting confessions (cf. *Zbój Ywan* [*Yvan the Bandit* [DWOK 32, Pok 4: 151]), a strongman can throw a stone to a considerable distance with just his little finger (cf. *Pogromca smoków* [*The Dragon Tamer* [DWOK 32, Pok 4: 90]), a cuckolded husband persuades the wife’s lover’s to stick his index finger into a keyhole and cuts it off (*Syn niedźwiedzicy* [*The Son of a She-Bear* [DWOK 32, Pok 4: 184; cf. T 1358C and T 1360B, PBL 2: 51–52]). In the last folk-tale, the index finger is an obvious euphemism for a phallus which features in other variants of this folk-tale. The association between a finger and a ring is also very widespread: e.g., a dragon tamer wrestles a ring of a dragon’s claw, which saps the dragon’s strength (cf. *Królowna i pastuch* [*A Princess and a Herdsman* [DWOK 32, Pok 4: 98]), a common motif is using a ring on a finger (or just a ring) to identify a disguised or magically transformed hero. It should also be added that the compact with the devil is traditionally signed with blood from one’s ring finger. All the above mentioned examples point to the fact that in the folk worldview, the finger is seen as a mainstay of vitality and life force, as well as of spiritual power. This assumption finds additional confirmation in an analysis of Latvian folk tales, conducted by Svetlana Ryzhakova, where she demonstrates that hands, fingers and nails belong to the category of “extremities,” body parts that have special significance for man’s contacts with the outside world, and that they have a power of metonymic representation of the whole human body, *pars pro toto* [cf. Ryzhakova 2001].

<sup>15</sup> Rich comparative material for other languages, starting from the Biblical Hebrew *dābhār* – ‘word, thing, matter, action, deed’, can be found in: Izutsu 1956; cf. also Tokarska-Bakir 2000: 147.

<sup>16</sup> Archaic cultures also include other variants of this motif: Mauss notes that the Lapps used to sell to European sailors sacks full of wind [cf. Mauss 2001: 39]. Cf. also the folk tale trope T 1245 *Bringing sunlight into the house*: “A stupid man builds a house, but forgets about the windows. So he tries to bring sunlight into the dark house using a sack, a bucket or a sieve” [PBL 2: 33–34].

<sup>17</sup> A Belarusian equivalent is: *Klanie, aż trawa wianie* [LB 4: 145].

<sup>18</sup> But judging by the existence of the proverb *A word flies out as a sparrow and returns as an ox* (*Słowo wyleci wróblem, a wróci wołem*), the situation is more complicated: an oath-breaker should be prepared for dire consequences of his action.

<sup>19</sup> Mockery is a serious offence against the folk ethic of speech. One of my interlocutors said: “You should not mock evil, or jeer at it, or say that it doesn’t exist – for it will come for you” (“Nie wolno ze złem szyderować, igrać, mówić, że nie ma – bo się tego dozna”) [10].

<sup>20</sup> More examples in: Krawczyk-Tyrpa 2001: 104.

<sup>21</sup> This mechanism is also visible in the sixteenth century proverb *Don't speak of vinegar when you brew beer* (*Nie mień octu, piwo warząc*) [NKP: *Oceť*]. Why is mentioning vinegar forbidden during brewing beer? Because if the word is uttered, the beer could take on the properties of vinegar, it could turn sour.

<sup>22</sup> The magical speech-action influences anyone who hears it, or everyone who is within hearing range, even random or unintended persons. The examples of this mechanism (e.g., the custom of covering one’s ears in order not to hear curses uttered in one’s hearing) are cogently discussed by Tafik Canaan in his monograph of the curse in Palestinian folklore [cf. Canaan 1935].

<sup>23</sup> It is worth pointing out that researchers who study the connection between Indo-European mythology and language draw attention to a link between frogs and the underworld, and – by extension – sickness and death. One should also note the Russian etymology of the Russian word for frog – *liagushka* – which is derived from the root “to leap” [Gamkrelidze, Ivanov 1984: 534].

<sup>24</sup> Incidentally, a perfect illustration of the importance of proper names in traditional societies can be found in the Ursula K. Le Guin’s classic cycle of fantasy novels, *Earthsea* [1968–2001]. Le Guin’s work is often praised for its anthropological insight, and it is perhaps worth mentioning that she is the daughter of the distinguished anthropologist Alfred L. Kroeber. In the fictional world of *Earthsea*:

“The gift for magic is empowered mainly by the use of the True Speech, the Language of the Making, in which the name of a thing is the thing. Some few people are born with an untaught knowledge of at least some words of the Language of the Making. The teaching of it is the heart of the teaching of magic. The true name of a person is a word in the True Speech. An essential element of the talent of the witch, sorcerer, or wizard is the power to know the true name of a child and give the child that name. [...] Since the name of the person is the person, in the most literal and absolute sense, anyone who knows it has real power, power of life and death, over the person. Often a true name is never known to anybody but the giver and to the owner, who both keep it secret all their life. The power to give the true name and the imperative to keep it secret are one. True names have been betrayed, but never by the name giver” [Le Guin 2001: 358–359].

<sup>25</sup> The words “zdrowaś” (*hail*) and “zmoraś” (*ghost*) sound similar and thus can easily be confused. A lot of interesting material connected to ghosts and apparitions can be found in Wanda Budziszewska’s article *Polskie nazwy zmór i niektóre wierzenia z nimi związane* (*Polish Names for Apparitions and Some Beliefs Regarding Them*) [Budziszewska 1991a]), cf. also the draft entry *Zmora* (Apparition) in SSIŚL [Czyżewski 1988].

<sup>26</sup> Similar beliefs are very widespread in north-eastern Poland. Kolberg records: "There is a belief that a child whose godparents stumble or make mistakes in their responses to the priest during baptism will become a wraith" [DWOK 40, *MazPr*: 71]. For more examples cf. Krawczyk-Tyrpa 2001: 63.

<sup>27</sup> The special properties of *r* as a sonorant sound are discussed by Jerzy Wasilewski, who notes its symbolic animalistic associations. According to Wasilewski, (*r*) is "an animalistic sound in human speech," connected to the world of nature rather than culture [Wasilewski 1989: 287–290], the fact that the sound (*r*) features strongly in Polish swear words has been noticed by Anna Krawczyk-Tyrpa (Krawczyk-Tyrpa 2001: 254).

<sup>28</sup> Many examples of this can be found in: Wasilewski 1989: 287–288.

<sup>29</sup> This belief is confirmed by the attention that is paid to the exact pronunciation of magic formulas, cf.

"Do wszelkich czynków dołącza czarownik sobie tylko wiadomą, od diabła wyuczoną, formułę oratorską, czyli tajemniczy pacierz, który jednak przed ludźmi tylko świeckimi (światowemi) ukrywany, dla innych czarowników, jego kolegów, tajemnicą nie jest, i gdyby wygłaszając ją, pomylił się opuszczeniem lub przekręceniem choć jednego słowa, czar będąc niezupełnym, nie może być skutecznym, i wcale się już nie uda" [DWOK 7, *Krak* 3: 83].

("And to all these gestures, a sorcerer needs to add a secret verbal formula, which only he knows, and which he has learned from the devil. This formula is like a devilish prayer, which has to be kept secret from worldly (secular) people, but which is known to other sorcerers. And if, while reciting the formula, he makes a mistake, either by stumbling over some words or mispronouncing even one single word, the magic ritual will not be completed and it will be ineffective.")

Similarly, Brückner notes that an oath would be null and void if the person who swears it makes a mistake while reciting the formula ("woźny przedpowiadał, strona powtarzała bez myłki (myłka pociągała przegrana)") [SEBr: *Rota*].

<sup>30</sup> The author gives some examples of summoning the devil by mistake:

"Father Stefan came home tired and he hollered for his servant: "Come here, you devil, and take off my boots!" And suddenly the fastenings of his boots became loose and started to untie themselves, as if of their own volition – but it was obvious for the priest that his boots were being removed by an evil spirit whom he had inadvertently summoned himself. So he called: 'Away, accursed spirit, away! I wasn't calling for you but for my servant.' Hearing this, the devil went away (based on Gregory the Great's *Dialogues*)" [Gurevich 1988: 189]. He also relates another similar story:

"A peasant wanted to 'know' his wife when she was menstruating. He threatened her with force, and she said angrily: 'Satiating your lust, in the devil's name.' She conceived and gave birth to a frightful monster" [Gurevich 1988: 189].

<sup>31</sup> Cf. also:

"Kto po raz pierwszy usłyszysz grzmot na wiosnę, ten wzięwszy kamień do rąk lub ku ziemi do kamienia się schyliwszy, uderzyć w niego trzy razy powinien, mówiąc przytem po trzykroć: *Kamiń-hołowa!* – a odtąd przez rok cały głowa go boleć nie będzie. Kamienia tego atoli rzucać następnie na wodę się nie godzi" [DWOK 31, *Pok* 3: 91].

("He who hears the first thunder in the spring should take a stone in his hands, or should bow down over a stone and strike it three times, saying three times *Stone-head!* [*Kamiń-hołowa*] The person who does this will not be troubled by headaches for an entire year. And there is one more thing to remember – this stone should not be thrown into water afterwards.")

More in the entry *Kamiń piorunowy* (*Thunder Stone* [SSiSL 2: 373]).

<sup>32</sup> Maybe the wart is magically transferred to the tongue of the offender, if his name is guessed correctly?

<sup>33</sup> This trope is called T 4025 *Ptaszki ochrzczone (Latawce)* (*Baptized birds (Flyers)*); Krzyżanowski collected fifteen variants of the story in Poland and recorded one from Norway [PBL 2: 205].

<sup>34</sup> This type of *voces magicae* structure was also pointed to by Joanna Tokarska-Bakir, cf. Tokarska-Bakir 2000: 156.

<sup>35</sup> This trope is identified as T 2503 *Koń zawsze głodny* (*The Ever-Hungry Horse* [PBL 2: 180–181]). Cf. also T 2502 *Młynarz niedźwiedziem* (*Miller Turned into a Bear* [PBL 2: 180]): "Gdy Pan Jezus chadzał po ziemi, przysed do jednego młynarza, ale on myśląc, że Pan Jezus ubogi, chce jałmużny, wdział na się wełną do góry kozuch i straszyl Pana Jezusa, a Pan na to: 'Bądź-ze strasydłem do sądu ostatecznego.' I tak się stało; młynarz został odmieniony w niedźwiedzia" [Pleszczyński 1892: 155].

("When Lord Jesus was walking the earth, he went to the house of a miller. The miller thought that Jesus was poor and that he was begging for alms, so he put his sheepskin coat on, inside out, and tried to scare Jesus away. And Jesus told him: 'You wanted to scare me, so now you will be a monster, scaring people until Doomsday.' And so the miller was turned into a bear.")

<sup>36</sup> Such apocryphal stories are common in folklore and folk tales (e.g., T 2442 *Ucieczka Św. Rodziny do Egiptu* (*Holy Family's Flight to Egypt* [PBL 2: 171–172] and T 2651 *Osika i leszczyna* (*Aspen and Hazel* [PBL 2: 190]), and in songs, e.g.,

"Ale Maryja niedaleko była, / Boć pod osiką spoczynek miała. / Osika się zatrzepotała – / O Maryji Synie wyjawiała. / Żebyś ty się osiko na wietrze trzepała, / Co ja się o swego Synaczka nabała" [Kotula 1970: 87].

("And Virgin Mary was not far away / For she was resting under an aspen tree. / The aspen trembled / Telling Mary about her son. / Oh aspen why you tremble so? / I am so afraid for my son now!")

<sup>37</sup> Such tropes are especially popular in aetiological folk tales (cf. tropes from T 2441 to T 2999 [PBL 2: 171–191]). They are cogently analyzed by Magdalena Zowczak in her *Biblia ludowa* (*The Folk Bible* [Zowczak 2013]).

<sup>38</sup> Irena and Krzysztof Kubiak describe this custom in the broader context of springtime fertility magic:

"On this day [i.e., the Feast of Annunciation] it was expected that storks would fly back, and for this reason everybody made special sourdough cookies, so-called stork's legs, and also other cookies, shaped like miniature farming equipment: harrows, sickles and ploughs. Children would take these cookies outside and wait for the storks, and when the storks appeared, they would wave the cookies in the air above their heads, calling: "Stork! Stork!" [*"Bocian! Bocian!"*] Baking little, specially-shaped cookies on the day when

the earth reawakens, and using them to attract the stork, a symbol of prosperity and fertility once again proves that sourdough bread was the symbol of growth, vegetation and the beginning of life" [Kubiak 1981: 34–35].

Góra lists some examples of invocations and entreaties directed at the stork coming from various regions of Poland: *Storky, storky, bring me a baby brother!* (*Bocuś, kliczka, przynieś mi braciszka!*) (Kielce region); *Stork, fly around and bring me a baby from the church* (*Bociek dokoła, przynieś mi dziecko z kościoła!*) (Kalisz region); *Dear Mr. Stork, bring me a child on your tail!* (*Panie (Janie) bocianie, przynieś dziecko na ogonie!*) and *Storky, storky, bring me a baby and I'll give you three pennies* (*Panie (Janie) bocianie, przynieś dziecko na ogonie!*) (Poznań region) [Góra 1995: 41].

<sup>39</sup> Other stork invocations include: *O stork, your beak is so sharp, bring me two sisters for a start* (*Bocian ostry, przynieś mi dwie siostry*) and *Stork-scissors, bring me some sisters* (*Bocian-nożyce, przynieś mi siostrzyce*) (Lublin region) [Adamowski, Bartmiński, Niebrzegowska 1995: 140].

<sup>40</sup> Cf. for example the jocular expletive: *May he be fucked by a thin stork* (*Jechałby go chudy bocian*) [NKP: *Bocian*]. The phallic symbolism of stork's beak is also discussed by Aleksander Góra [1995: 42].

<sup>41</sup> Cf. trope T 2521 *Przemiana człowieka w bociana* (*Man Turned into Stork* [PBL 2: 181–182] and *Pochodzenie bociana od człowieka* (*Stork Descended from Man* [Góra 1995: 34–36]). Beliefs that storks are transformed humans and that for this reason a stork can be an intermediary between the world of the living and the world of the dead are discussed in: [Matusiak 1908]. Similarly, Federowski notes down a belief that a human soul can take the form of a stork [LB 1: 221].

<sup>42</sup> In the entry for *Bowel* in Karłowicz quotes the following riddle: "It is standing next to a wall, covered with a hood/ Anybody can come by/ And put his bowel in her stomach" ("Stoi pod murem nakryta kapturem, / Przyjdzie do niej żywy duch / I wsadzi jej kichę w brzuch") (the answer is "a locked box" – "kufer z kłódką") [SGPKarł: *Kicha*]. Kolberg quotes a similar riddle: "A holy place with a hole in it, a holy man comes and puts his bowel inside its stomach" ("Święta Pokrowa – a w niej dziura gotowa; przyszedł święty duch – wbił kiszkę w brzuch") (the answer is: "an Orthodox church, a keyhole in the church door, and a priest who opens the door" – "cerkiew, dziurka od klucza we drzwiach, ksiądz otwiera") [DWOK 32, *Pok* 4: 307]. The presence of euphemisms as a defining feature of obscene riddles is discussed by Jan Mirosław Kasjan [1983].

<sup>43</sup> It would be tempting to analyze the semantic structure of magic spells using a broader body of magical and religious texts. The obvious association here is the opening invocation of the Lord's prayer.

<sup>44</sup> It is significant here that the speakers in this story are children. The special intermediary status of children (as immature, not fully initiated into life), that are positioned between the sacred and the profane is often highlighted within the folk worldview.

<sup>45</sup> The magical power of evil thoughts is also mentioned by Moszyński [cf. KLS: 342]. Izutsu, analyzing the relationship between language and magic, quotes H. H. Price: "[the human mind's] native element, so to speak, would be a world in which everything desired was *ipso facto* fulfilled, and all propositions verified by the mere fact of being thought of" [Izutsu 1956: 4].

## PART TWO. THE CURSE

3. THE CONCEPTUAL *FIELD* OF “CURSING”

<sup>1</sup> In writing this chapter I have incurred a special debt of gratitude to Prof. Jadwiga Wajszczyk, who generously answered my questions and explained differences between terms.

<sup>2</sup> The interlocutor is referring to a folk-tale trope of Queen Sheba (Sybil, Saint Helen) and the Holy Cross cf. T 2445 *Drzewo Krzyża Świętego* (*The Holy Cross* [PBL 2: 172]) [Wrocławski 1985: 64–69; Zowczak 2013: 223–241].

<sup>3</sup> The monograph of the Belarusian scholar Mariya Koniushkevich (cf. Koniushkevich 2001) contains an overview of the field with respect to the Belarusian language, but to my knowledge no such comprehensive overview exists for Polish.

<sup>4</sup> The goal of this chapter is not to offer an in-depth semantic analysis of the curse. A more detailed explication of the formula “Y cursed X” can be found in Chapter V, subchapter 1.3.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Ukrainian *proklin*, *proklon* and Belarusian *praklon*.

<sup>6</sup> *Słownik białoruskich haworak* lists the use of *klon* in the neighbourhood of the village of Mosty [SBH 2: 476]; Federowski in Vaukavysk county [LB 4: 146].

<sup>7</sup> It is worth noting here the characteristic feature of the Polish language of the Vilnius Region that is the peculiar usage of the noun *klęska* (*defeat, disaster* in general Polish) in a meaning close to CURSE<sub>s</sub>; undoubtedly this so not without connection with the phonetical similarity between *klęska* and *klątwa* (*curse*; an intermediary variant, *klęstwo*, is noted in the Hrodna Region) as well as with the fact that both are associated with God's punishment, e.g.,

“To już matka ta właśnie płakała: ‘Żeby on spalił się z tym placem, żeby on zginął w końcu, bo już taka *klęska* spadła może przez to na naszą rodzinę, że ona użę przeklęła...” [44] (“And this mother would later cry: ‘May he burn down along with this plot, may he die already, such disaster [*klęska*] befell our whole family because of it that she cursed him at the end...”)

“Żydzi mówią, że to naród od Boga wybrany. No, ale oni przed Bogiem, przed Panem Jezusem zgrzeszyli mocno. [...] Cosi pisze, że wot na nich *klęska* padnie. I wot kiedyś w Wasiliszkach wypędzili [Niemcy] tych Żydów...” [54].

(“Jews, they say, are a people chosen by God. By the sinned greatly against God, against Jesus. [...] And it is written somewhere that: there, a disaster (*klęska*) will befall them. And there [you have it], once they [the Germans] chased them out, these Jews...”)

<sup>8</sup> Jako komentarz do tej konstatacji nasuwają się słowa Buchowskiego:

„Każdy zabieg translacji wypowiedzi regulowanych zasadami myślenia synkretyczno-magicznego będzie co najwyżej próbą przybliżenia któregoś z aspektów jego złożonej natury. Nie jesteśmy bowiem w stanie oddać w języku nauki, będącym w jakimś sensie odzwierciedleniem typu reprezentowanej przez nas świadomości, jednocześnie sensu metaforycznego i metonimicznego. Każda próba takiego przekładu jest jedynie częściową parafrazą. Jesteśmy zmuszeni powiedzieć, że to, co w metajęzyku oddajemy jako x, dla podmiotów magii znaczy zarazem owo x i jeszcze coś, np. y; albo że to, co my jesteśmy

w stanie opisać jako oddzielne  $x$  i  $y$ , dla nich znaczy syntetyczne « $xy$ », które tworzy w gruncie rzeczy odmienną jakość niż suma ich składowych” [Buchowski 1993: 62].

<sup>9</sup> The duality between “wishing something bad to happen to someone” and “expressing one’s anger and hostility” is also present in the Timothy Jay’s discussion of the English verb *to curse* [Jay 1992]. Among all explications and definitions of *curse* that I have encountered, the one offered by Wierzbicka is by far the most detailed. Some classic definitions include:

“A curse is a wish expressed in words that some evil may befall a certain person, or it is an insult to his honor and prestige” [Canaan 1935: 235];

“The ritualized curse, or *klole* (*Heb.*): petitive expressions that call down misfortune, disease or death on their intended victims” [Matisoff 1979: 59];

“By the term curse...we understand not the interjectory exclamation, the profane oath, or blasphemy, but rather the deliberate, considered expression of a wish that evil befall another” [Gevirtz 1961: 140].

Sheldon H. Blank offers a succinct and yet cogent definition: “Curse is an imprecatory prayer” [Blank 1950–1951: 73]. In his study of the Biblical curses, Blank concluded “the curse was automatic or self-fulfilling, having the nature of a *spell*, the very words of which were thought to possess reality and the power to effect the desired results” [Blank 1950–1951: 78]. Finally, the Belarusian scholar Mariya Konyushkyevich defines the curse (*praklaćcie/praklon*) through its perlocutionary effects as a “final and irreversible condemnation of somebody for their deeds” (Konyushkyevich 2001: 165).

<sup>10</sup> Interview no S/176 in the IEiAK UW archive. The interlocutor used the verb *przekląć*.

<sup>11</sup> On the differences between excommunication and anathema cf. *Anatema* [Stępień, Wycisk, Paprocki 1973] and *Ekskomunika* [Krukowski 1983]. The subject is also covered by Lester K. Little [cf. Little 1993: 30–44].

<sup>12</sup> Curiously, the phenomenon of the ecclesiastical curse is primarily the domain of medievalists. A classic study of the ecclesiastical curse in the Polish church during the Middle Ages is Przemysław Dąbkowski’s *O przysiędze i klątwie* (*On Oath and Curse* [Dąbkowski 1906]). Newer monographs on the subject include Lester K. Little’s *Les maledictions monastiques au Moyen Age* [Little 1979] and *Benedictine Maledictions. Liturgical Cursing in Romanesque France* [Little 1993] as well as Elisabeth Vodoli’s *Excommunication in the Middle Ages* [Vodola 1986] and Hanna Zaremska *Banici w średniowiecznej Europie* (*Outlaws in Medieval Europe* [Zaremska 1993]). A wealth of information about the excommunication can also be found in religious and Biblical encyclopaedias and companions and in the work of scholars of religion. The details of the relevant publications can be found in Bibliography at the end of the volume.

<sup>13</sup> *Ring out* (*wydzwonić*) – “excluding from community by ringing bells” (SW). Zygmunt Gloger gives an example:

“There was a custom that wherever an excommunicated man would set foot, bells would ring, so as to let know the villagers that they should lock their homes. This practice gave rise to the expression *wydzwonić kogo* (*to ring somebody out*), i.e., to force somebody to leave a place by ringing the bells” [ES 4: 469].

<sup>14</sup> This account comes from an Orthodox interlocutor, but Catholics also share similar stories:

“Jedno z drugim tak i było. Staranie tu takie było. Dlatego, że nawet księżę krzyczali, żeby, znaczy się, swojej wiary nie taptali, swego różańca, swego wszystkiego, a żeby [zostawali] w swoim, znaczy, w swoim chrześcijaństwie. No, wydarzało się. [...] Dlatego że księżę nasze chrześcijańskie miały wielką siłę w państwie. Księżę nie chcieli, bardzo nie chcieli, żeby łączyły się z prawosławnym” [54].

(“That’s how it was, how they tried to do it. The priests would holler at people, telling them not to forsake their faith, not to stomp on the rosary, and on all that. They would tell them to stay Christians, like they were born and raised [...]. But still it would happen. And Christian priests had great power in the state. They didn’t want people to join the Orthodox church.”)

<sup>15</sup> *Candling off* (*wyświecenie*) was a punishment prescribed in medieval municipal law. It would accompany public whipping at the pillory, and escorting the criminal out of the city in a procession with burning candles or torches. Thus *to candle somebody off* (*wyświecić*) would signify ‘exiling somebody in an acrimonious manner by candlelight’ (‘wypędzić sromotnie przy świecach’) [SW].

<sup>16</sup> “The ceremony of excommunication is popularly known as bell, book and candle: the book from which the curse was read was closed, a bell was tolled as for a dead man, and candles were extinguished, symbolizing the removal of the offender’s soul from the sight of God” [*Curse* 1983: 582].

<sup>17</sup> I discuss the telling use of the word *allegedly* in the definitions of magic in Chapter one above, subchapter 1.1.2. The word *magic* in contemporary Polish.

<sup>18</sup> An account recorded in Choroszczyńska, Lublin voivodship, in 1980 [IEiAK UW Archive, interview no 119/P].

<sup>19</sup> The identification of casting spells with “binding” finds confirmation in etymology, e.g., the PIE root *\*lejk-*, from which e.g., is derived the Latin *obligatio*, means “to bind, to oblige, to swear an oath, to bind with an obligation” [Gamkrelidze, Ivanov 1984: 806].

<sup>20</sup> There is a wide range of classic and modern linguistic research into swearing. A comprehensive bibliography can be found in Maciej Grochowski’s *Słownik polskich przekleństw i wulgaryzmów* (*A Dictionary of Polish Swearwords and Obscenities* [Grochowski 1995]). It is also worth mentioning a pioneering American journal edited by Reinhold Aman and entitled *Maledicta. The International Journal of Verbal Agression* (1977–1985, Vol. 1–8).

<sup>21</sup> The speaker refers to the Russian Tsar’s bill of religious toleration of 1905.

<sup>22</sup> This definition is matched by the following explication:

X CURSES Y for Z:

Thinking of Y, X feels anger because of YZ;

X says that it is bad that YZ happened” [Grochowski 1991: 6].

<sup>23</sup> The explication for this definition is as follows:

X CURSES:

“X utters some words, because he feels something thinking about the people/objects/events to which his/her words refer;

In saying the words, it is not X’s goal to transfer information” [Grochowski 1991: 7].

<sup>24</sup> According to Maria Koniushkevich, using swear words is “the most natural (due to stress) and the most appropriate (for semiotic reasons) linguistic reaction to physical or verbal abuse or aggression, which does not fulfil the principle ‘blood for blood’ or ‘an eye

for an eye' but instead fulfils the principle 'pain for pain'" [Koniushkevich 2001: 160]. At the same time, Konyushkevich claims (in contrast with other scholars of the subject, who connect it solely with negative emotions) that CURSING<sub>4</sub> can in fact be used to express positive emotions:

"The Belarusian habit to use expletives whether there is a justification for them or not led to a shortening of their forms: (e.g.,: *A kab ciabie!*, *A badaj ciabie!*, *A niachaj ciabie!*), which in turn made them ambiguous, capable of expressing also positive emotions such as admiration or awe" (Koniushkevich 2001:161).

This phenomenon does not only occur in Belarusian, cf. the use of *A niech to!* (*Damn it!*) or *Do cholery!* (*What the hell!*) in Polish for applause.

<sup>25</sup> More on this subject in: Grochowski 1991.

<sup>26</sup> *Maty* (plural, the singular form is *mat*, as used in the next interview) are terms of abuse directed against the addressee's mother. *Maty* (derived from the Old Slavic root \**mati* (mother) have archaic religious roots. They are the strongest, most inexcusable terms of abuse in the repertoire of folk swear words. Cf. SD: *Brań*, *Uspienskij* 1983.

<sup>27</sup> Consciousness that swearing is a sin was doubtlessly reinforced by the teaching of both the Orthodox and the Catholic church. Interestingly, it appears that in the folk worldview it is considered one of the gravest sins, second only to murder. In the highbrow culture, permeated with the belief that words are "just words," swearing is relatively a much lesser offence. My interlocutors outspokenly described swearing as the opposite of goodness, cf. e.g.,:

"Baptysty – jak oni modlą się! [...] **Nie przeklnie**, nie zabije, nie uderzy – oni taka wiara mieli. Ty jego bij, on ciebie nie poruszy. Byli nadto wierzący, [...] nadto byli dobre" [48]. ("The Baptists, how they prayed! **They don't swear**, they don't kill, they don't fight – such is their faith. You can strike them, and they will never strike back. They were very devout and very good.")

<sup>28</sup> "And if the sin as such leads to hell, it is because of its magical influence, of the break of the magical solidarity with the heavenly powers and the establishment of a magical solidarity with the devil. The only sins to which the devil really instigates his followers are those which have immediately this magical consequence — sacrilege, denial of the heavenly powers, recognition of the devil, and rites whose effect is to establish a magical affinity with him" [Thomas, *Znanięcki* 1927: 248–249].

<sup>29</sup> *Maty* – see footnote 30 above.

<sup>30</sup> Similarly, the relationship between the devil and sin is also inscribed in the language: SGP records that the word *grzech* (*sin*) can also mean 'evil spirit,' and there exist such swear words as e.g., *Do grzycha!* (*To sin (with you)!*), cf. *Masłowska* 1987.

<sup>31</sup> The folk ethic of speech is a fascinating subject well worth of more in-depth study. An analysis of proverbs that exemplify consequences of rule-breaking seems especially pertinent: *When you swear like a field hand, your tongue will turn to a spike in your mouth* (*Kiedy zaklnies świjsko jak jakiś pachotek, to ci jezor stanie w twy gymbie jak kołek*); *Don't gossip about others behind their backs, or you will dream of the devil every night* (*Nie obgaduj drugiego nigdy za plecamy, bo ci sie diabał śnił będzie bez przerwy nocamy*) [Połęcki 1976: 40]. My interlocutors were also full of information on the subject, e.g.,:

"Gdzie, jak mówią, diabeł, to diabeł – pewnie, że diabeł. A kto ten diabeł? Same diabły! Bo trzeba wziąć dobro do serca swego i myśleć o dobrym, nie o złym. I będzie dobrze. Nie

trzeba mścić się na kogoś bez racji – po co? To jest kuźdy człowiek. Jak masz coś do niego, wytłumacz jemu, czy on niech ci wytłumaczy, o, te fakty. Ale sie nie mścij. Czy ty wiesz, czy to słusznie, czy niesłusznie? Plotkować, ubliżać człowieka, na darmo, i w ogóle, to nie jest sens! To jest niedobre. Tylko żyć trzeba, jak to sie mówi, jak Bóg przykazał” [27]. (“They say it’s the devil and for sure it is. But who’s the devil? Them themselves are the devils. For one should take the goodness out of one’s heart and think about the good, not about the bad. And everything will turn up well. You shouldn’t take it back on people without a good reason. Why would you do that? If somebody wronged you, talk to him, and let them explain why they did it. But do not take revenge. How do you know if something is justified or not? Gossiping, or maligning others out of spite, this doesn’t make sense. It’s a disgrace. You should live, as they say, according to God’s commandments.”)

<sup>32</sup> To read more about the negative attitudes towards swearing, and its relationship with the sin and the devil, consult (Krawczyk-Tyrpa 2001: 251–254).

<sup>33</sup> An interview recorded in 1978 in Radomyśl upon San, Subcarpathian voivodship, speaker Jan Geneja [IEiAK UW archives].

<sup>34</sup> Florian Znaniecki wrote on the subject thus:

“the magical importance of the devil himself within the whole magical system still remains great enough to make the question of belonging to the community of God or of the devil the main religious problem. Indeed it is not only by voluntary and conscious choice that men can become members of the devil’s community; every act which is as such contrary to the divine solidarity, every ‘sin,’ if not expiated, causes a temporary or durable exclusion of the man from the community of heaven and automatically makes him a member of the community of hell. The man passes many times during his life from one community to the other, not because he does not want to be a member of the divine world, but because the limitations and the duties which this membership imposes upon him are numerous and difficult to keep. The devilish community, in this magical religious system, is an indispensable condition of the existence of the divine solidarity itself” [Thomas, Znaniecki 1927: 271].

<sup>35</sup> Such a transition from “good” to “bad” pole of the sacred, from God to the devil can happen in a blink of an eye: all it takes is e.g., to forget to cross oneself in the morning after waking up (not to start the day in a godly fashion): “If somebody forgets or omits to cross oneself when they wakeup, the devil can attach himself to this person on this day” (“Kali czeławiek zabyżyszysie, czy ni chcuczycy, nie pierażegnajećsie ũstajuczycy, to u taki dzieñ może czort uchapićsie”) [LB 1: 104].

<sup>36</sup> A compelling analysis of the mythico-ritual roots of swear words (CURSE<sub>4</sub>) can be found in Boris Uspensky’s *Mifologicheskiy aspekt russkoy ekspressivnoy frazeologii* [Uspenskiy 1983, 1987].

<sup>37</sup> A semantic and syntactic analysis of expressions containing the words *cholera* and *devil* (*diabeł*) in modern Polish can be found in: Bera 1997. Małgorzata Bera’s study shows the conventionalization of swear words which have become semantically empty.

<sup>38</sup> Grochowski identifies a lexical unit *X beseeches Y so that S*: “somebody begs somebody else for something” [Grochowski 1990: 97].

<sup>39</sup> The Polish verb *kląć się* contains the semantic fields of two English verbs: *to pledge oneself* and *to vow*, which are near synonyms in contemporary everyday English usage.

However, Wierzbicka introduces a distinction between *a pledge*, a solemn promise taken in public in front of witnesses, and *a vow*, a promise taken in a private situation, without witnesses or an audience (cf. Wierzbicka 1987: 208–209). (Translator's note). Ale zginęła mi oath!

<sup>40</sup> Wierzbicka uses the term “conditional curse” in relation to “wishes directed at the speaker themselves and intended to render credibility to one's words” and explains their illocutionary structure in the following way: ‘I say: I won't do it/ I know that you can think that I will do it/ for this reason I say:/ if I do it, I want something bad to happen to me’ (Wierzbicka 1992: 21). Określenia „przekleństwo warunkowe” używa Anna Wierzbicka w odniesieniu do „rodzaju życzeń, skierowanych ku sobie i używanych dla przydania wiarygodności własnemu słowu”, których schemat illokucyjny formułuje następująco: „mówię: nie zrobię tego / wiem, że możesz myśleć, że to zrobię / dlatego mówię: / jeżeli to zrobię, to chcę, żeby stało mi się coś złego.”

<sup>41</sup> Wierzbicka writes:

“What is most curious about *swearing*<sub>1</sub> is that while it doesn't imply any religious faith, it does seem to imply a faith in the inherent, semi-religious and semi-magical power of speech, a power whose logical basis is not altogether clear. *Swearing*<sub>1</sub> does seem to assume that by giving the same status to an untruth as to anything else one might say...the speaker exposes himself to some obscure danger...He imagines that he is entering into an obscure pact with reality and that if he offends and violates the reality with his solemnly pronounced untruth, then he can expect the reality to take revenge upon him. The magical power of words, if not actually acknowledged in earnest, is at least entertained as a possibility, and one which is sufficiently real to be counted upon as a way of influencing the addressee's assessment of the speaker's truthfulness” [Wierzbicka 1987: 211].

<sup>42</sup> Wierzbicka analyzes the connection between *swear*<sub>2</sub> and *swear*<sub>1</sub> (the equivalents of the Polish CURSING<sub>4</sub> and CURSING<sub>6</sub>) in the following passage:

“The historical connection between *swear*<sub>2</sub> and *swear*<sub>1</sub> is not difficult to understand originally, when breaking verbal taboos the speakers assumed that they are inviting the wrath of God or some revenge from reality, in the same way in which a person taking an oath was involving the sacred in his speech, and was therefore exposing himself to terrible dangers should the oath be broken” [Wierzbicka 1987: 253].

<sup>43</sup> The interdiction against oath-taking and the fear of oaths are not limited to folk culture. They are also present in the Old Testament [cf. Blank 1950–1951: 87–92]. The attitude to oaths in the Bible may have become one of mythical models for the folk oath – the ritual of taking a vow.

<sup>44</sup> In order to provide some context for argument, we should peruse the etymology of “curse” and related lexemes in other Indo-European languages. Buck writes:

“One group of words for ‘curse’ is the exact pendant, in form as well as sense, of those for ‘bless’, namely the ecl. Lat. *maledicere* with its descendants, orig. ‘speak ill of’ vs. *benedicere*, orig. ‘speak well of.’ The Grk. word (*kataráomai*) means literally ‘pray against’ and the class. Lat word (*exsecrāri*) is an opposite of ‘consecrate’ (*sacrāre*). Some verbs meaning ‘prayer’ or ‘blessing’ can also be used for a ‘curse’ (e.g., Gr. *ará* ‘prayer’). Other verbs derive from ‘reject, send away’ or ‘forbid’, or they are derivatives of words meaning ‘misfortune, evil’, whereas they also contain references to ‘summoning.’ A few are connected to ‘yelling and barking’ or ‘sound, noise’” [Buck: *Curse*].

Buck's discussion of the etymology of swearing contain the following passage:

"Verbs for 'swear' include a deriv. of the word for 'law', words for 'speak', which have been specialized in a legal sense, 'touch' (through practice of touching an object in taking an oath), and 'curse' (through 'curse oneself' if the statement be not true)" [Buck: *Swear*].

<sup>45</sup> Moszyński wrote: "The oath taken on the earth is considered one of the most binding. It was very widespread among Eastern and Southern Slavic peasants, where it too many forms: a quantity of earth could be consumed during taking the oath, or alternatively the speaker could kiss the ground or hold a handful of earth in his palm. What is especially fascinating is that in some parts of Belarus only men were allowed to eat earth while taking an oath, women could only kiss it. In Bulgarian folk judicial system, swearing on the earth could replace the formal oath. A witness who would hold a palmful of earth would not be able to lie, and thus it was possible to dispense with a formal oath" (KLS:512). Boris Uspensky analyzes the curse ritual in the context of the mythical of earth with Virgin Mary w kontekście mitycznej ekwiwalencji: święta ziemia = Matka Boska [Uspenskiy 1983: 52–54, 63]. Cf. also: [MNM, *Zemlja*; SD, *Zemlja*].

<sup>46</sup> One should however be aware that in the case of many swear words their original relationship with powers is all but lost, and the speakers are not aware of its existence. But for the most part it can be traced back if one studies the history of a given formula. Euphemisms are very common (e.g., *diasek* for *diabeł* (*devil*), *cholewa* for *cholera*, *jasny gwint* darn for *damn*); the role of euphemisms is protecting the speaker from "being struck by the power." They enable the speaker to speak safely [cf. Dąbrowska 1993: *passim*, but esp. 177–214].

#### 4. THE FOLK RITUAL OF THE CURSE

<sup>1</sup> Maria Koniushkevich, describing curses with such a structure (where the time vector is directed towards the past, as in *it would have been better if you had never been born!* points out that they contain "a model of a possible world" where a different misfortune should have prevented the "real misfortune" that actually happened, cf. Koniushkevich 2001: 166.

<sup>2</sup> "The folk deem to be true only what they inherit in tradition after their ancestors; they believe only in what their fathers believed" [DWOK 9, *WKS*Pozn 1: 57].

<sup>3</sup> Describing typical features on oral transmission of tradition, Gurevich writes: "This means of communication [...] is characterized by: uncritical acceptance of information, 'taking one's word for things'; (it is) liable to distortion. As it was exactly and unambiguously recorded, incoming information was readily reshaped by the mechanism of collective perception, in accordance with the laws of folkloric consciousness. It was brought into line with previous ideas and made to fit the usual clichés...Willingness to accept any kind of fantastic news, inclination to believe in the supernatural, organization of received information in accordance with the canons of story and legend were characteristic of collective consciousness in the age of saints and thaumaturges" [Gurevich 1988 :11].

<sup>4</sup> According to a different version of the story, the transformation into the cuckoo is performed by Virgin Mary and Jesus, who utter a curse against the girl: "Według innych wersji powstanie kukułki związane jest z osobami Matki Boskiej i Pana Jezusa, z których ust padają słowa przeklinające dziewczynę: „Mówią, że kukułka jest

z panny, i prawda, że mięsa jej jeść nie można, bo ona taka słona jak człowiek, a wiadomo, że człowiek dlatego jest słony, że słono je. Podobno, że jak Matka Boska chodziła jeszcze po ziemi, przyszło jednej pannie coś do głowy, żeby figlować, więc skryła się za płotem i zaczęła na nią wołać: 'Kuku, kuku!' – 'A kukajże, kukaj, i bądź teraz za kukułkę!' – powiedziała jej Matka Boska. Ona się stała kukułką" [DWOK 19, *Kiel* 2: 203].

("They say that the cuckoo comes from a girl, that's true that people can't eat cuckoos because their meat is too salty, as salty as human flesh, and everybody knows that human flesh is salty because people eat a lot of salt. They say that at the time when Mary was walking the earth, one girl wanted to play a prank, so she hid behind a fence and started to call "cuckoo, cuckoo". Mary said: "cuckoo as much as you want and turn into a cuckoo". And the lass turned into a cuckoo.")

"Jest legenda, że gdy Pan Jezus chodził jeszcze po ziemi, to panny w jednym miejscu wyglądały raz po raz zza krzaków i przypatrując się jego męskiej postaci, wołały przez swawolę: 'a kuku! a kuku!' Za to Pan Jezus je ukarał, mówiąc: 'wiecznie tak kukać będziecie!' I w kukułki je przemienił" [DWOK 34, *Chełm* 2: 178].

("There is a legend that in the times when Jesus was walking the earth, girls would stare at him from behind the bushes and make cuckoo calls: 'cuckoo, cuckoo' at him. And Jesus punished them for that, saying 'may you cuckoo like this forever!' and he turned them into cuckoos.")

The motif of disobedient daughters being turned into animals as a result of a mother's curse is relatively common; we should mention here a folk tale type T 2504 *Kret* (The Mole) ("A girl cursed by her mother for not wanting to marry a boy changes into a mole") and a well-known Slovakian song about a daughter changed into a doe (Kazimierz Moszyński writes about it in depth, cf. [KLS: 746–747]. For more information about the motif of transformation into a cuckoo, also cf. Zowczak 2013: 109–113.

<sup>5</sup> The accounts concerning marrying without the parents' consent are a good example of overlapping motifs from "real life" and folklore. There is a clear similarity to the song trope *The groom dies on the way to his wedding, the bride commits suicide*, which follows the outline:

"Syn chce się żenić wbrew woli matki (lub siostry), która wyruszającemu na ślub źle życzy. Syn w drodze do narzeczonej ginie. Niedoszła żona, widząc krew na drodze i słysząc bicie dzwonów w kościele, pyta drużbów, co się wydarzyło. Udzielają oni wykrętnych odpowiedzi o wypadku, wreszcie przyznają, że naręczony nie żyje. Dziewczyna popełnia samobójstwo. Wyraża życzenie, by została pochowana w jednym grobie z niedoszłym mężem, pod tablicą upamiętniającą ich miłość" [KPBL: no 53: 151–154].

("The son wants to marry against his mother's (sister's) will, so she curses him when he sets off for his wedding. The son dies on his way to his future bride. The would-be bride, having seen blood on the road and having heard the bells asks the best men what happened. They give various evasive answers but finally admit that the groom is dead. The girl commits suicide. She expresses the wish to be buried with her would-be husband in the same grave, under an inscription commemorating their love.")

Here is an example:

"Chciał się Jasiak żenić, matka mu broniła, / A gdy zabronić nie mogła, tak doń przemówiła: // Jedźże synu z Bogiem, bodajś złamał nogę. / Inszego ja pożegnania tobie dać nie mogę. // Niech się dzieje co chce, ja pojedę przecie. / Zabierajcie się drużbowie, ja pojedę przecie. // Gdy wyjechał w pole, tak zaśpiewał sobie, / I bez matki pozwolenia wesele ja zrobię. // I śpiewa, i jedzie, ujechał pół drogi, / Koń się potknął, on spadł z niego, złamał

obie nogi. // [...] Druźbowie, druźbowie, komuż to tu grają? / Cóżbyśmy się zapierali, miłego chowaj” [Ligęza, Stoiński 1938: 37].

(“Jasiek wanted to marry/ his mother forbade him / when she couldn’t prevent him from marrying, she said // Go my son, good luck, may you break your leg/ I can’t say farewell in a different way.// Be it what it may, I am going to marry / Come my groomsmen, come, I am going to marry. // Riding in the fields he would sing/ There will be the wedding, this I swear, even if my mother doesn’t approve // And so he was riding and singing like this // but he didn’t even reach half-way / when his horse stumbled and he fell breaking both legs // [...] Oh groomsmen, groomsmen, who are these bells for? / they are burying the groom.”)

Commenting on one of the versions of this song, Jan Stanisław Bystroń wrote: ‘the motif of a fatal fall from the horse caused by a curse [...] is commonly known; probably it is an example of deployment of a very ancient trope’ [Bystroń 1927: 52].

<sup>6</sup> The topic of conversion to different faith in connection with marriage and the consequences of the change of faith in the form of unhappy life has been raised in almost every conversation that I conducted in the border area inhabited by the Catholic and the Orthodox. My interlocutors encountered the issues related to mixed marriages in their daily life, dealing with their practical and normative aspects. The subject of the attitudes of the inhabitants of borderland to the problems of mixed marriages has been analyzed by many anthropologists; cf. among others Engelking 2012: 317–319, 506–509, 696–702; Stracuk 2006: 100–102, 105–107 and *passim*; Życzyńska-Ciołek 1996.

<sup>7</sup> Kolberg distinguishes a separate group of songs about “losing the garland” (loss of virginity) [DWOK, *passim*]; as do the publishers of Silesian songs: Bystroń 1927; Ligęza, Stoiński 1938.

<sup>8</sup> In my research, I often encountered such songs, usually structured as a dialogue between the mother and the daughter. In the region of Grodno, there is a song called *Nie przytulaj mnie do siebie*, (*Do Not Hug Me*) in which the mother curses her daughter coming back from a tryst, one version of the text can be found in: Adamowski, Kodis, Prokopowicz, 1991: 56. For similar songs, cf. SLSJ *Matka*. KPBL records a song motif no 68 *Nowo zaślubiona dziewczyna umiera* (*A Newly-Wed Girl Dies*): “(A girl) gets married against her mother’s will and the mother curses her. The girl dies immediately upon entering the house of her husband” [KPBL: 180–182].

<sup>9</sup> Songs featuring a girl who curses her unfaithful lover or takes revenge on him in a different way are always present in the repertoire of folk singers. The song from a minor gentry village Rouby near Lida in Belarus features a folk curse uttered by an abandoned girl:

“Tyś mi przysięgał, usta całował, / mówił przed ludźmi, że kochasz mnie, / a teraz z moją rywalką chodzisz / i z mego losu naśmiewasz się. / Pościelą twoją niech będą gady, / lekarzem twoim niech będzie wąż, / żebyś ty konał i skonać nie mógł / konającym wzrokiem patrzył na mnie wciąż” [45].

(“You told me you loved me, kissed my lips/ told other people about your feelings/ and now my rival has taken my place/ and you only laugh at my fate./ May vile reptiles lie in your sheets/ may snake be your healer/ may you long suffer in agony/ and look at me begging for death.”)

A similar song comes from Papyernya, a neighbouring village:

“Już panna przeklinała, bo ona jego kochała, a on jej zostawił, a poszed do innej: ‘A gdy mu beńdzie ksiondz ton obronczke wkładał, / Bodajże on już wiencej ton ronczo nie władał.’ Potem: ‘Walcie wy, pioruny, walcie bez ustanku, / Która bendzie stała przy moim kochanku! / Która bendzie stała i szlubowała, / Bodajże po wieki kochania nie znała” [53].

(“And when the priest puts that wedding band on his finger/ May his hand wither” and, ‘may the thunder strike, strike incessantly / at the one who stands beside my lover!/ The one who will be standing there, tying the knot/ May she never know what it is like to be loved.”)

<sup>10</sup> When asked to comment on this saying, the interlocutor said: “that’s what’s written in the book” (i.e., in the Bible). Cf. proverb collected by Federowski: *Bačkau klon strachu zrywaje, a macieryn chatu z karenim wywaraczaje* (*The father’s curse strips off the thatch, and the mother’s curse tears down the house to its very foundations*) [LB 4: 146]. Some light is shed on this cryptic saying by two proverbs: *A mother’s blessing builds houses and a father’s curse tears them down* (*Błogosławieństwo matki buduje domy, przekleństwo ojca obala je*) [NKP, *Błogosławieństwo*], and especially: *A parent’s blessing builds houses, a mother’s curse tears them down* (*Błogosławieństwo rodziców buduje domy, a przekleństwo matki rozwała je*) [Marcinek 1947: 195].

<sup>11</sup> A similar proverb concerns the parental curse (*The parent’s curse will not fly away with the wind – Radzicielski klon na zwiej wiecier ni puojdzie*) [LB 4: 146].

<sup>12</sup> This relationship can be analyzed on a deeper mythological level. Boris Uspensky analyzes the mythical and ritual equivalence between a biological mother, the Mother of God and mother earth (holy ground) using the Slavic curses against mother (*matyernaya rujan*) (Uspenskiy 1983). In light of his findings one may say that the special power of the mother’s curse originates from these deep mythical layers of meaning, and maybe also from the fact that in Slavic culture women were forbidden to curse:

“Mama mówiła: na 25 sażeń ziemia pali się pod kobietą, jak matem gnje. Dzieatki, nie ruhajcie, nie można, nie można. Nadta ziamliczka haryć pad czeławiekam takim. Maty hnuć nielzia. Toż grzech wielki. Za słowa te ciężko. Jak to tak, żeby kobieta gnuła maty co słowo” [65].

(“My mom used to say: ground is burning twenty five feet deep under a women when she curses [using *maty*; cf. footnote 30 of the previous chapter]. Children, you cannot curse. The ground burns under the one who curses. This is a great sin. There is heavy penance for such words. How can a women curse every second word?”)

A cursing woman violates a very strong taboo, maybe also for this reason a mother’s curse is deemed more powerful than the father’s.

Józef Obrębski noticed another aspect of difference between female and male competences concerning casting a curse (based on material from Macedonia), he points out to the division of gender roles concerning the power to administer social sanctions:

“The right to curse is not an impersonal privilege for everybody. It is vested only in women, similarly to the use of black magic rituals (like all black magic, secret and officially condemned) which reveal who is a witch and, if the woman is guilty, bring death upon her. Men should settle accounts with each other in a different way, without reaching for supernatural sanctions: by way of court litigation (or) lynch – from murder through beating to setting fire to the opponent’s house or outhouses or slandering him” [Obrębski 2005: 66–67].

<sup>13</sup> It is worth noticing folk customs concerning the length of mourning: the mother is mourned for the longest time.

“Żałobę się nosi przez rok?

– No. Po matce rok, a po ojcu można i pół roku. A po mężu nie, i po żonie nie. I po siostrze nie, i po dziecku też nie. Tylko po matce. To najważniejsze” [67].

(“Mourning should be worn for a year?

– Yes. For the mother for a year, for the father it can be half a year. For the husband or wife not. And not for sister or a child. Only for the mother. This is the most important.”)

<sup>14</sup> Jadwiga Jagiełło, the author of the entry *Mother* [SLS]: *Matka*, distinguishes the following “mother figures,” constituting a model typical of folklore: mother-nanny, educator, carer, ruler, advisor. Analysing the opposition good mother/bad mother she writes: “[Biological mother] is good which stems from the very nature of motherhood and she manifests this nature from the birth of the child until the child’s wedding The world depicted in folk songs distinguishes a good mother from a bad mother according to the general rule: whether or not the mother is present in child’s life regardless of the circumstances” [SLS]: 176]. A bad mother is identified with a step-mother and a mother-in-law. In folk songs about unjustified curse against a child the curse is often cast by a step-mother or husband’s mother. Cruel step-mothers and mothers-in-law are common characters in beggars’ songs (*pieśni nowiniarskie*) [cf. Nyrkowski 1973, *passim*], in which they often kill innocent orphans or daughters-in-law. Usually, in line with a didactic character of such texts they are punished by God.

<sup>15</sup> The comment recorded in Smólsk Duży near Biłgoraj, by Bartmiński [1989: 141].

<sup>16</sup> Kolberg’s conclusion is confirmed by Józef Obrębski’s comment on Macedonian folk beliefs concerning a curse:

“Each day contains one moment, short like a flash of lightning, in which the curse is fulfilled. Nobody knows when this moment comes. All that is known is that this moment is the longest on Tuesdays and Saturdays. This is why these days are “curse days”. If someone wants their curse to befall the opponent he shall keep casting curses against that person continuously, from the sunrise till the sunset – only this can guarantee that the curse will fall upon “evil hour”, will “catch” and its words will be fulfilled” [Obrębski 2005: 68].

<sup>17</sup> It is further confirmed by the motif of a tale A 813 *Przeklęta córka* (*Nieostrożne słowo*) (*The Cursed Daughter* (*The Careless Word*)): “A man wants to have a wife, even from the devil, and he gets a girl who had been caught by the devil as a result of her mother’s careless words “go to hell” [Barah 1978: 130].

<sup>18</sup> I have received only two replies taking into account the role of the intentions of the person casting the curse < nadawca: “Maybe an honest curse. If one curses from the bottom of one’s heart, then this is a curse” (“Może taka szczerza kłątwa. Jeżeli ze szczerości klnie się, ze swojego serca, to to jest kłątwa”) [38] and “if she starts in a spiritual way, from a prayer to God, maybe then it will be successful” (“No, jeśli ona tak duchowo nacznie, z modlitwy z Panem Bogiem, to może coś i pałuczyćsia”) [64].

<sup>19</sup> “The special hour” in beliefs and folklore is the subject of a monograph by Helena Kapełus “*Bożeć pošli dobrą godzinę.*” *Przyczynek do związków Jana Kochanowskiego z folklorem* (“*God, Send Me a Good Hour.*” *Jan Kochanowski and his connections to folklore* [Kapełus 1987]).

<sup>20</sup> This account contains a concise presentation of a mythical sequence: the first spring thunder- a stone- conquering the opponent of the lord of heaven. I will refer to it in the further parts of this book.

<sup>21</sup> “Nad zagrodą przelatywała kracząca sroka, wtedy ojciec informatora powiedział: ‘obyś zdechła!’. Kiedy powiedział te słowa, sroka spadła na ziemię. Działo się to w południe, dlatego informator uważa, że wszystkie zaklęcia wypowiedziane w południe spełniają się” [recorded in Lipa village, gmina Radomyśl nad Sanem, Podkarpackie Province, interview 375 in the IEiAK UW archive].

(“A crowing magpie was flying over the homestead, when the father of the interviewee said: ‘may you die!’. When he spoke these words, the magpie fell to the ground. It happened at noon, this is why the interviewee believes that every curse cast at noon comes true.”)

<sup>22</sup> Recorded in Radomyśl nad Sanem, Podkarpackie Province in 1978; the interviewee: Jan Geneja [IEiAK UW archive].

<sup>23</sup> Conjuring a good hour is a frequent formula at the beginning or the end of an incantation (*zamawianie*), for example:

“Zeby ja na szczęśliwą godzinę trafiła, / Zeby ja ten wytyc szczęśliwie zmówiła” [Kotula 1969: 94]. (“May I fall upon a good hour/ May I be lucky in banishing this illness (*wytycz*)” [*wytycz* is a folk term for an illness afflicting horses, dogs and cattle]).

<sup>24</sup> This is very likely. We can read in Kolberg’s work:

“zła godzina (chwila, pora dnia) niesłychanie ważną rolę odgrywa w żywocie ludu. W złą godzinę przyszłe na świat lub odłączone dziecko czy bydłę nie chowało się wcale lub chowało nędznie, wkrótce schnąc lub doznając kalectwa, w złą godzinę posiane, zżęte lub zebrane zboże wydaje plon lichey, niepoczesny, o chorobę ludzi przyprawia i gadzinę; w złą godzinę nabyte bydłę lub inny towar nie darzą się i trzeba je przetargować, bo zginą lub zmarnieją; w złą godzinę mają moc nad człowiekiem, bydłciem lub innym przedmiotem czarownicy i czarownice; w złą godzinę tylko śmierć, kalectwo, choroby lub zniszczenie ludziom, gadzinie i innym żyjątkom lub zbożu ludzie uroczeni oczyma sprowadzają swemi; w złą godzinę planety i złe gwiazdy ściągają się nad człowiekiem lub innymi twory i wpływ swój na nie wywierają złowrogi” [quoted in: Swienko 1983: 127–128].

(“evil hour (a moment or time of the day) plays a very important role in folk’s lives. The child or animal that has just been born or detached from the umbilical cord at evil hour would die or become lame, wither or become crippled; the crops sown, cut or harvested at evil hour would give poor yield, make people and animal sick; an animal or other goods bought at evil hour proved useless and had to be sold as otherwise they would die or deteriorate, at the evil hour humans, animals, and things are in the power of witches; at the evil hour those who cast spells with their eyes [*ludzie uroczeni*] bring death, lameness, illnesses and destruction upon people, livestock, little living creatures, and crops; at the evil hour the planets and bad stars gather over a human or other living creatures and exert their malevolent influence.”)

<sup>25</sup> An interlocutor from Belarus expressed this belief in the following way:

“[Czy Pan Bóg może człowieka przekląć?] Pan Bóg może na mieście skarać człowieka. [Skarać?] Pewno. [W jaki sposób?] U nas chodził jeden chłopiec do dziewczyny dwanaście lat, za Polski. Nie obiecał brać. Jak tylko ona stanie w poważnym stanie, on joj tak podmówi, podmówi, ona to dziecko zmarnuje. Już nie rodzi. No, nic. On pomyślał, że już bende brać. Podkreściła sie do niego druga. Tamta płakała, chodziła prosić do matki, wszystko, żeby

on jej brał już. A on nie. Wszystko jedno, ożenił się z tamton. To jej odebrała nogi, ona teraz nie chodzi. Ci od tego? Może taja przeklinała, płakała? Ot, i teraz nie chodzi, sama sobie wody nie może przynieść. [...] W Krasnowcach to mówion: “Boh pokarał za to, że ona uleżała. Nie trzeba było. On jej ciongał, chodził do niej, to nie trzeba było za niego iść, każa. A jak poszła, o, teraz pakuta ma.” A tamta zmarła. [...] On zmarł, [...] syn pjanica i wody nie ma komu podać. [...] [Długo już tak?] Długo. Lat cztery, pieńć, jak... A jescze nie wiadomo, ile beńdzie. Bo ona jest zdrowa, a nogi odebrana. [...] Sama mówi, każa, że: “Mnie tylko Pan Bóg pokarał za to, że ja za Józiuka paszła” [65].

(“[May God curse a person?] God may punish a person on the spot. [Punish?] Sure. [How?] One man here was going out with the girl for twelve years. He didn’t promise to marry her. When she got pregnant, he persuaded her not to keep the baby and she didn’t. Soon, there was another girl. And that first girl would cry and ask his mother to get him to marry her, but he didn’t want to. He married the other one and she lost power in her legs, she can’t walk now, she can’t even fetch herself some water. Maybe the first girl cried, cursed? Maybe it was because of that? [...] People say: “God punished her, she shouldn’t have got into it. Even though he came to her, insisted, she shouldn’t have married him, they say. But she did and now she does her penance.” The first girl died. [...] He died, [...] his son is a drunk and she has nobody to take care of her.[...] [How long has this been going on?] For a long time. Four, five years. And how many yet to come? She is in good health, only can’t walk [...]. She says herself: “God punished me for marrying Józiuk.”)

<sup>26</sup> Such an impasse is described in *Słownik stereotypów i symboli ludowych* (*The Dictionary of Folk Stereotypes and Symbols*) under the entry *Skamieniałość* (*Fossil*) indicating that the object (here: the object that is turned into a stone) violates universal norms by committing offenses against life and against God, cf. SSiSL 1: 395. For legends and folk tales documenting this, cf. SSiSL 1: 398–401.

<sup>27</sup> Joanna Tokarska-Bakir notes that the category of “true story” is still awaiting proper analysis it deserves [Tokarska-Bakir 2000: 362].

<sup>28</sup> Among the authors who wrote about religious authority of beggars, are Jan Stanisław Bystroń [1936], Ryszard Tomicki [1981] and, recently, Piotr Grochowski [2009] and Katia Michajłowa [2010]. Also cf. SFP: *Dziad*.

<sup>29</sup> Proverbs are an important genre containing folk ethical norms. Some examples of proverbs connected with the Fourth Commandment include: *Kto czci rodziców i Boga, temu się nie powinie noga* (*The one who honours parents and God will walk on even ground*), *Kto swych rodziców poważa, tego Bóg szczęściem obdarza* (*God will bestow happiness on those who honour their parents*), *Ze wszech cnót siebie odziera, kto swych rodziców nie wspiera* (*One who fails to support the parents has no virtues*) [NKP: *Rodzice*].

<sup>30</sup> Jerzy Wasilewski, analysing cultural prohibitions wrote that “they may be treated as a way of remedying odczyniania the flaws of the world” [Wasilewski 1989: 8]. This apt comment may also be applied to the function of the curse ritual.

<sup>31</sup> These motifs can be found in a commonly known wedding song, *Siadany*, sung to the girl before she leaves for her wedding, which contains the lines “thank you mother / who raised me well / punishing properly” (“Dziękuję wam pani matko, / coście mnie chowali gładko / – w karze”) [SLSJ: 197]. The motif of raising children in proper discipline also returns annually, in New Year’s carols; the carols containing New Year’s greetings treat it as a necessary condition that must be met if the year is to be happy and prosperous:

“Do you live peacefully here? / Do you raise children in faith / and in discipline?/ If you do, your life will be good” (“Czy wy tu żyjecie w zgodzie? / Czy nie zamącicie w wodzie? / Czy chowacie dzieci z wiarą, / W karantności i pod miarą? / Gdy tak wszystko wypełnicie, / będziecie mieć miłe życie”) [Kotula 1970: 322].

<sup>32</sup> Aron Gurevich gives many examples of the ‘mirror principle’ in the images of the other world on the basis of Medieval texts:

“False witnesses and perjurers are struck by demons in their tongue, gluttons are tormented by hunger, drunkards by thirst, ill-begotten children killed by their mothers loom continually before their eyes as reproach and accusation .... Delight in this world is transformed into torment in the other, the tormentor becomes tormented” [Gurevich 1988: 112].

<sup>33</sup> For more examples cf. Rak, Grębecka-Ćwiek 1998.

<sup>34</sup> Magdalena Zowczak in her monograph of folk bible also notices this rule; referring to “old-testamentary and folk principle of analogy between the guilt and the punishment” [Zowczak 2013: 106] which she terms in her analysis “principle of retribution”.

<sup>35</sup> Federowski records similar belief: “ a drunkard will carry around a barrel with tar and will drink from it” [LB 1: 223].

<sup>36</sup> See also, “Admonishing [a person] for lying, [people] curse: *may you bark like this bitch!*” (“Łając za kłamstwo, klną: *bodajś ty szczekała jak ta suka!*”) [DWOK 34, *Chełm* 2: 219]; “When someone is laughing in the wrong moment or interrupts others, they cast a curse against him, saying: *may you laugh with you last breath!* [DWOK 33, *Chełm* 1: 32]]. “They [curse] a debtor who doesn’t keep his word: *May you long after you die run around the fields with my hard-earned cash*” (DWOK 2, *Sand*: 246).

<sup>37</sup> Blessing are based on the same principle: *You did not forget about me, may God not forget about you* (*Nie zapomnieliście o mnie, żeby o was Bóg Najwyższy nie zapomniał*), *You consoled me, may God console you* (*Nie zapomnieliście o mnie, żeby o was Bóg Najwyższy nie zapomniął*) [LB 4: 376].

<sup>38</sup> The formula: *May God repay you* seems particularly interesting as it obliges God to react to the sinner’s deed, without indicating neither the kind of punishment, nor whether or not the sinner is to be punished at all. It appeals to God’s justice and assumes that God sees also the things hidden from people’s eyes. Trope T 751C *Koszula i święty Piotr* (*St. Peter and the Shirt*) [PBL 1: 232] illustrates the opposition between this formula as a proper curse which should be used by God-fearing people and the formulas which constitute an abuse of the institution of the curse, invoking negative sacrum. By the same token, it illustrates semantic difference between CURSING<sub>1</sub> and CURSING<sub>4</sub> (SWEARING). CURSING<sub>4</sub> should be understood as an abuse of CURSING<sub>1</sub>.

“Idzie Pan Jezus z Apostołami, a św. Jan nie miał koszuli. Ale na płocie jednym suszyły się wyprane czyściutko szmaty, a św. Jan wziął sobie jedną koszulę i spytał się Mistrza, czy to wolno? A Bóg powiada: Idź, a przysłuchaj się, co na to powie ten, co jego koszula. [...] Stareńka wdowa [...] powiedziała: Niech mu to Pan Bóg zapłaci! Te słowa doniósł św. Jan Panu Jezusowi. A ten mu na to: Idź, odnieś Janie koszulę, bo wielka by była zapłata moja”. [W drugim miejscu sytuacja się powtarza:] „...kobieta zamiast czego zaczęła wymyślać, pomstować i wyklinać okropnie. Kiedy św. Jan to doniósł Panu Jezusowi, nie kazał on jej odnosić tej koszuli, ale nakryć nią nagość biednego, bo ta kobieta nie wspomniała Boga, tylko czarta” [DWOK 17, *Lib2*: 207].

(“Jesus was going with the Apostles and St. John didn’t have a shirt. There were clean clothes drying on the fence, St. John took one shirt and asked the Master if he could take it. And God told him: Go and listen to what the shirt’s owner will say about it... A very old widow ... said: *May God repay him for this!* St. John passed her words to Jesus, who then said: “*Give the shirt back as huge would be my repayment*”. [The same situation repeats in a different place:] “the woman started to swear and curse terribly. When St. John told Jesus about it, Jesus didn’t tell him to give the shirt back, but asked him to give the shirt to a poor man, as the woman did not invoke God, but devil.”)

In another version of this story [Świętek 1893: 325–326] Jesus hears a swearing, cursing woman and comments: “Do not give the shirt back, she has already repayed herself!” (“Nie oddaj [koszuli], bo óna sama se juz zapłaciła!”). We see here CURSE<sub>4</sub> as an unjustified curse, the curse whose consequences befall the person who breaks the rules of cursing.

<sup>39</sup> The most prominent works concerning, inter alia, the primary myth include: Gieysztor 1982, Iwanow, Toporow 1974, Tomicki 1976, Uspieński 1985.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. SSiSL 1: *Ogień piorunowy, Kamień piorunowy* (*Thunderfire and Thunderstone*). The role of lightning as an attribute of the Lord of lightning as an instrument of punishment and at the same time an equivalent of a curse is analyzed by Boris Uspensky, cf. [Uspieński 1985: *passim*].

<sup>41</sup> This formula seems to be analogous to the invocation *So help me God!*, present in oaths.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. Tomicka, Tomicki 1975; Tomicki 1976. In the version told by one of my female interlocutors in Belarus the motif of lightning is accompanied by a story of the resurrection of Christ:

“Na Wialikdzień, w dwienadcać czasow, zły duch rwie łańcuchy i on nie może nikak adarwać. Isus Chrystos wa hrobie lażył, zasypany, i jany dumali, szto jon nie waskresnie, kamień ciazki pałożyli, straż postawili. A jak w dwienadcać czasow zahremieł silnyj hrom, patrestłasia ziemia i adkryłasia mahiła i hetyje straży usie papałochalisie. [A co się stało z tymi łańcuchami?] Diabli byli na łańcuchach! Rwali sie, żeby zawładzieć usiem hetym carstwom, ale usio prapało. Chrystos waskres!” [61].

(“At Easter at the twelfth hour, an evil spirit tries to break his chains but cannot do it. Jesus Christ is lying in his grave and they believed he will not raise from it, they put a heavy stone [on his grave] as well as the guards. At the twelfth hour the thunder sounds, the earth shakes and the grave opens, all the guards are scared. [And what happened to those chains?] Devils were attached to them! They were eager to take the entire realm in their possession but it all came to nothing! Christ was resurrected!”)

<sup>43</sup> “The number *three*, which in almost all cultural traditions constitutes an image of ‘an absolute perfection’, ‘is a perfect structure with the beginning, the middle and the end.’ This is why ‘number three may serve as a perfect model of any dynamic process, as it begins, develops, and ends, or – on a different plane, it may represent a thesis, antithesis and synthesis’” [W. N. Toporow *O modelach liczbowych w kulturach archaicznych* (*On Numerical Models in Archaic Cultures*), quoted in Tomicki 1976: 80].

<sup>44</sup> As shown in the folk tale trope T932 *Syn ukryty przed piorunem w piwnicy* (*A Son Hiding from Lightning in the Cellar*), an honest prayer may help a person to avoid death from a thunder sent by God, cf. PBL 1: 282–283, Barah 1978:152–153.

<sup>45</sup> The sequence *suicide-sin-devil-curse* is an obvious chain of events in the folk worldview. "Suicide is often deemed a great felony, which brings calamity upon the entire village in which it was committed. It is a sin to pray for the soul of a suicide. When a suicide's name is uttered, it is always accompanied by a curse, and his/her body, buried in unconsecrated ground, brings upon the village illnesses, hail storms, etc." [DWOK 51, *SanKr* 3: 38].

<sup>46</sup> We should here devote some attention here to the classic protagonist of magical folk tales, Johnny the Fool (Polish *Głupi Jaś*, called Ivan the Fool in Russian folk tales), whose life reflects the belief that an innocent person has a particularly close contact with God, as it is not yet distorted by sin – a predecessor of curse. It is worth recollecting here also a popular folk tale trope T827 *Modlitwa prostaczka* (*A Simpleton's Prayer*): "A shephard crosses a river walking on water because he is without sin" [PBL 1: 258].

<sup>47</sup> In tales, we can often note that the characters of an innocent boy and an angel are in fact interchangeable. For example, in the above-mentioned folk tale trope T827 there is a motif of an innocent boy who sees the devil writing down people's sins in the church; in a tale *Anioł w służbie na ziemi* (*An Angel Serving on Earth* [DWOK 32, *Pok* 4: 200]) there is the same motif but the character is an angel. It is also worth mentioning a belief common in Middle Ages according to which "Two angels are appointed for each man, a good one to protect him, and an evil one to test him" (Gurevich 1988: 186). In Polish folk culture, the motif of two guardians accompanying a human is also present, cf. for example a fragment of a song about an orphan: "Jesus sent you two angels from heaven / they are leading the orphan with them to heaven / Jesus sent you two demons from hell / they are leading the step-mother so that she can't escape" ("Oj, posłał ci Pan Jezus dwóch aniołków z nieba, / Oj, prowadzą sierotkę ze sobą do nieba, / Oj, posłał ci Pan Jezus dwóch szatanów z piekła, / Oj, prowadzą macochę, żeby nie uciekła") [Kotula 1976: 278]. Tomicki [1980: 106] also mentions it, as well as my interlocutor from Radziwoniszki in Belarus who was convinced that each of us has "a guardian angel and a guardian demon" ("angiel chranitiel i diawół chranitiel") [63].

<sup>48</sup> SSiL records a belief in two thunderbolts, one of a fiery thunder and one of a watery thunder, "the first one starts the fire, the second one puts it out" [SSiSL 1: 292].

<sup>49</sup> "In folk religiosity, the notion of sin included the deeds which were seen as violation of the principle of solidarity with the nature or God, which could always lead to negative consequences for a larger group of people [...]. The biggest sin was betraying one's community and God, selling oneself to the Devil and conducting activity directed against others" [Tomicki 1981: 52–53].

<sup>50</sup> Moszyński recorded in Polesie:

"Gdy piorun bije, mówią: 'Ot, strielaje u nieswoho ducha' – 'Nieswoho ducha zabię hrom!' – 'hrom u nieswoho ducha bje.' O piorunie opowiadają: 'Nieczysta siła cwielić (drażni) Boha, a Boh tohda puskaje strietfu. Jak on pod czołowieka schawajecca, to czołowieka ubje; jak u dzierewo, to dzierewo pobje.' Wierzą, że Bóg i św. Eliasz pioruny w złe duchy ciska" [Moszyński 1928: 52–53].

"When lightning strikes, people say 'it strikes an evil spirit,' 'Evil spirit was killed by lightning!', 'Lightning is striking an evil spirit!'. They say about lightning: 'Evil powers anger God and then God sends an arrow. When *he* hides in a man, it will kill the man, if *he* hides in a tree, it will strike the tree'. They believe that God and St Elias use lightning to "shoot the devil"

Cf. also the belief that St Eliah por. też wierzenie, że św. Eliaz ( "shoots after the devil") "strzela za diabłem" [Bartmiński 1989: 122].

<sup>51</sup> Blackening as a result of a curse has its mythical precedent in the form of Cain cursing the earth which, before his murderous act was luminous and transparent, cf. Zowczak 2013: 147-148.

<sup>52</sup> Krzyżanowski records 25 variations of this theme that occur in all parts of Poland [PBL 1: 90-92].

<sup>53</sup> Kolberg gives two versions of the tale quoted above, cf. DWOK 14, *WKsPozn* 6: 72-77.

<sup>54</sup> "But there is also a belief that a man struck by lightning is without sin and goes immediately to heaven because fire in the naturalistic system is the purifactory instrument of regeneration. A mixture of both elements is found in another belief – that lightning is turned mainly against the souls of children who died without christening. There is present the idea of punishment and also of regeneration" [Thomas, Znaniecki 1927: 235].

Lightning in folk mythology can be either good or bad: "The fire ignited by the strike of lightning is considered as holy as it comes from heaven, is seen as divine means of punishment or grace" [SSiSL 1:291]. My interlocutors from Belarus said about a person killed by lightning:

"Może jon nadta hreszny, szto jaho Boh zabje, a może jon nadta szczaśliwy. A chtoż wiedaje? Heta nichto nie skaża" [60]

("Maybe he sinned so badly that God kills him, but maybe he was very happy. Who knows? Nobody can tell.")

and:

"[Boh karaje ludziej pierunami?] A Boh jeho znaje! Nawierna. Ale użo heta dusza – pisze pa pisañji – użo jana ũsiu pakutu projdzie. Użo u jaho pakuty niet" [63]

("[Does God punishes people by lightning?] Only God knows! For sure. But his soul – the Scripture says – has done all penance. It does not do penance any more."),

or :

"[Szto każuć pra takich ludziej, czamu ich zabiwaje małanka?] Szto każuć pra takich ludziej? Szto jon dostojny u Boha. Dostojny u Boha. Dak jaho ũbiwaje małanka – eta adno. A druhoje, każuć, czołowiek... – nie chocz pry was kazać – zowiecca nieczysta siła, u czołowieka chawajecca. Dak małanka ub'je czołowieka, tak kazali, a duszu biare da siabie użo Boh. A eto ub'je, jesli ũ jom uże je, chawajecca eta niecharoszaje. Duch. Iszła chmara z Mozyra i z Łozak, da jak syszlisia, da jak stuknulisia, dak aż iskry lecieli pa ũsiamu bałotu. I ja była jak raz tut za chlawom, za sarajem. I etu ženszczynu ubiła. A chto jaje wiedaje, dzietki? Bywaje, kanieczna bywaje" [81].

("[What do people say of such people, why are they killed by lightning?]. What do people say? That they deserved it from God. Deserved it from God. So lightning kills somebody – that's one thing. Secondly, they say, the man – I don't want to say this in your presence – has inside him an evil power, which hides in a man. So thunder kills a man, they say, and then God takes his soul with him to heaven. *Who* is killed is him, *the one* who hides in such a man, the evil power. The demon. There were clouds coming from Mozyr and Łozki, when they met and hit into each other, there were sparks over the marshes. I was standing here, behind the barn. A woman was killed. Who knows why? It happens, well, so it does.")

<sup>55</sup> My interlocutors seemed to be aware of this too, as they were convinced that, although the place where lightning struck, becomes dead as a result, it has at the same time power to cure illnesses, and after some time it regenerates.

“Hrom i ǫ ziemi u stukaje, użo na tum mieście niszo raście nie chocia. Tolki, każuć, jak nohi balać, kab na teje miesta pastajaŭ da pasiadzieŭ, dak nie tak buduć nohi baleć. Tam niczoha nie raście. [A wialikaje toje miesca budzie, dzie nie raście niczoha?] Ot, jak at moich ganak da darohi, moża bolejš. [A jość u waszych niedzie bliska?] Takie miesta? Użo pazarastali. Pierwyj hod, dwa hody nie raście, patom zarastaje” [81].

(“Lightning hits the earth and nothing will grow there. But, they say, when your legs hurt it is good to stand or sit there and they stop hurting so much. Nothing grows there. [How big are the areas where nothing grows?] Well, like from my porch to the road, maybe a bit bigger. [Is there such a place nearby?] Such a place? No, there are plants there now. Nothing grows for a year, or two, then the plants come back.”)

<sup>56</sup> Recorded in Radomyśl on the San, Podkarpackie Province in 1978, interlocutor Jan Geneja [IEiAK UW archive].

<sup>57</sup> Many examples of such misfortunes seen as a result of divine punishment for human’s sins are given by Joanna Rak and Zuzanna Grębecka on the basis of the material collected in the region of Braslav, cf. Rak, Grębecka-Ćwiek 1998.

<sup>58</sup> This rule is obvious: “I have lived a long time. Those who honoured their old folks, lived to be old. If they didn’t, they died young” (“Ja juz przeżył parę lat. Jak kto starych sanowali, starych lat docekali. Kto nie sanowali, to nie docekali”) [13].

<sup>59</sup> *Straszna kara Boża spadła na niegodziwego syna, który mścił się nad swoim ojcem staruszką, a gdy uderzył ojca staruszka w twarz, to obie ręce mu nagle skostniały* (*God Punished Terribly a Heartless Son Who Mistreated His Old Father And When the Son Hit the Father on the Face, Both His Hands Went Stiff and Numb* [Nyrkowski 1973: 164]).

<sup>60</sup> The field record from the nineteenth century expands the list of the cases in which the “sinful hand” is punished: “For perjury and harming the orphan God punishes in such a way that the sinner’s hand withers, the same happens to the child who dared to raise his hand against the parent” (“Za krzywoprzysięstwo i krzywdę, wyrządzoną sierocie, karze Pan Bóg w ten sposób, że grzesznikowi usycha ręka. Również usycha ręka dziecku, które śmiało wyciągnąć ją na ojca lub matkę”) [Polaczek 1891: 629]. NKP records the proverb *The hand that does wrong gets cut (punished)* (*Ręka broi, rękę ucinają (karzą)*) with a comment that “it is a reflection of the medieval law providing that the thieves who had been caught red-handed had their hand cut off” (“pogłos prawodawstwa średniowiecznego, wedle którego złodziejom, schwytanym na gorącym uczynku, ucinano rękę”) [NKP: *Ręka*]. We may well risk saying that medieval lawmakers based this punishment on the ‘mirror principle’. This principle is also present in medieval moral tales:

“The Lord punishes a sinner by striking the organ with which he sinned. During a storm in the region of Trier the genitals of the bell-ringer were set on fire by lightning, for he was a fornicator. A litigious fellow, who ‘sold his tongue’ in lawsuits died with a gaping mouth, which could not be closed by any means” (Gurevich 1987: 196 and 254).

Let us recollect the words of an interlocutor about a man “punished for perjury”, quoted in the passage concerning CURSING<sub>6</sub> (SWEARING AN VOW): “When he died, he looked a sorry sight: his eyes were open and his tongue was sticking out. [...] God punished him” (“Jak umarł, to strasznie było patrzeć na niego, oczy miał otwarte i język wywalony.

[...] Pan Bóg go skarał” [7]. Because the organ with witch the person sinned belongs to the devil: “there was one [wizard] here, he was dying and the priest went to him with the Holy Sacrament and he said that when the wizard was confessing his sins, the devil drew his tongue out, he was in devil’s power” [Zowczak 1994: 9].

<sup>61</sup> *Zdarzenie prawdziwe jak starego ojca zatrula synowa grzybami w B.* (A True Story From B. About a Woman Who Poisoned Her Father-in-Law with Mushrooms [Nyrkowski 1973: 171]).

<sup>62</sup> *Zdarzenie o wyrodnym synu jak ojciec padł ofiarą zemsty własnego syna w wiosce Putygóry* (A Story From Putygóry Village About a Heartless Son and the Father Who Fell Prey to His Own Son’s Revenge [Nyrkowski 1973: 168–170]).

<sup>63</sup> SFP in the entry *Brzoza gryżyńska* (*The birch of Gryżyna*) lists other interpretations of this trope and points to the medieval preacher’s literature as its source, cf. also Karłowicz 1888. Federowski notes a Belarusian version from the city of Kletsk [LB 3/2: 19].

<sup>64</sup> Adam Fisher, among others, provides ethnographic material on this subject, cf. Fisher 1937. SD notes: “beating – ritual magical act, aimed at ensuring fertility and protection. It ensures fertility (in people and livestock), good harvest (by rain, good crops), growth, health and good fortune” (“bicie – rytualne działanie magiczne, pełniące przede wszystkim funkcję płodnościową i ochronną. Prowokuje płodność (rodzenie się dzieci i bydła), urodzaj (sprowadzanie deszczu, zapewnienie plonów), wzrost, zdrowie i powodzenie”) [SD, *Bit’*, for more cf. *passim*]. A semiotic analysis of the ritual of beating with a twig was carried out by Nikita I. Tolstoj, cf. Tolstoj 1995.

<sup>65</sup> It is worth noticing that it distinguishes between the agent and the performer in a way that is analogical to the agent and performer in the ritual of the curse, to which the following may also be applied: “God curses, not me” (I am only uttering the words, in the case analyzed above, I am only hitting with a willow twig). Let us recollect typical formulas ending beseeching rituals: “Not with my power, by the power of God! Aided by the power of Jesus Christ, all the saints, angels, and the apostles!” (“Nie moją mocą – Boską mocą! Pana Jezusa, wszystkich świętych, aniołów, apostołów dopomocą!”) or “I am not doing it with my powers but by the power of Jesus Christ and the Mother’s of Jesus aid” (“Ja nie robię swoją mocą, tylko Pana Jezusa, Matki Boskiej dopomocą”) [Kotula 1976: 285, 259], accompanied by the conviction that the formulas are “Jesus’s words,” and linked with the mythical model according to which devil, who created the world along with God, retrieved the sand from the pre-ocean in “His name” [cf. Zowczak 2013: 311–317]. Similar formulas (e.g. “Not by my power, but by the power of Sabaoth”) can be found in Coptic curses, collected by Meyer and Smith [Meyer, Smith 1994: 183–225]. Svetlana Tolstaya calls these negation-based magic formulas „distancing formalms”. She writes:

“This rhetorical figure is typical of and curses enct formulas; related to communicative features of sacred texts, specifically, with the fact that their sender, i.e. the person who incants the formulas, does not consider themselves to be neither their author, nor even their real performer (in the same way as they do not consider themselves the “author” of the magical ritual’s during each the text). Healers, ‘whisperers,’ are aware of the fact that they serve as a substitute, an intermediary between the deity and the higher power (along with the patient) and the evil power that is being expelled from the patient [...] ‘Distance formulas’ ae typical not only of beseeching but also words and dialogues dla rytualnych słów i dialogów towarzyszących obrzędom...; the ultimate agents of the acts are not only God, the Mother of God or saints, but also the objects of cult, symbolizing

magical power” [Tołstaja 2001: 121–122]. Positive formulas, e.g. the forgiving and blessing ones are built in the same way – by incanting the presence of the performer and agent of the ritual (I forgive/ bless, may God forgive/bless); we will come to them later.

<sup>66</sup> The following proverbs talk about it: *Those whose parents spared the rod are not spared a headsman’s sword* (*Kogo rodzice nie karzą różgą, tego kat mieczem karze*); *Holy hand that beats you* (*Święta ręka, co bije*) and *Mother beats hard but gives a lesson at the same time* (*Matka tłucze, ale uczy*) [NKP: *Różga, Ręka, Matka*], *If one is deaf to parents’ words he will listen to headsman’s sword* (*Chto ni słuchaje mamy i tata, to pasłuchaje kata*) [LB 4: 177] as well as a popular saying: *Holy ghost tells us not to spare the rod on children* (*Duch święty różeczką dziateczki bić każe*), an anonymous sentence from the times of Augustus III. Henryk Markiewicz and Andrzej Romanowski found the versions: *As Holy Ghost advises the parents not to spare the rod on children / Rod is good for health* (*Różdżką Duch Święty dziateczki bić radzi, / Różdżka bynajmniej zdrowiu nie zawadzi*) [Markiewicz, Romanowski 1990: 832] in a marketplace leaflet from 1769: *Czytania pisma polskiego, teraz nowo z przydatkiem i katechizmem dla małych dzieciaków krótko zebrane* (*Collected Polish Readings Now With an Appendix and the Catechism for the Small Ones*).

<sup>67</sup> This idea was not foreign to the medieval theological thought. We can give an example of *Elucidarium*, a popular treaty by Honorius from Augustodunum, from turn of the eleventh and twelfth century, analyzed by Gurevich, which states: “sinners strąceni do piekła will be given over to ceaseless flagellations for having rejected the punishments they deserved in their earthly lives” [Gurevich 1988: 160]. Apart from this quotation, Gurevich gives many examples from medieval literature in which the heavenly powers administer physical punishments to sinners: the cases of “a kicking Saint and a violent Christ giving a violent blow on the jaw” may be seen not only as “the simultaneous spiritualization of the bearers of the sacred principle and their secularization and bringing down to earth was recurrent feature of medieval consciousness” [Gurevich 1988: 204] but also – and maybe more importantly – as the opposition of two symbolic sequences: beating – blood – life – holiness and sin – death.

<sup>68</sup> We should mention here a folk ballad called *Dzieciobójczyni porwana do piekła* (*Child Killer Mother Snatched to Hell* [KPBL: no. 113]) whose protagonist writes from hell a letter to her mother, asking her to take a better care of her two younger sisters: “Dear mother, you have two of them/ hit them harder than you hit me.// – But I told you what to do but I was never listened to// I beat you but you chose evil” (“Moja matko, mas ich dwie, / bij je lepiej niżli mnie. // – A ja tobie gadała, / tyś do złego latała. // A ja ciebie bijała, / tyś do piekła sięgała”) [Czernik 1958: 218]; in another version of the song: “You have two, two are left, punish them hard so that they will stay // you punished me once a week / I needed beating everyday” (“Jeszcze ich macie, jeszcze dwie, / Karajcież je lepiej niżli mnie. // Boście mnie karała raz w tydzień, / Mnie trza było bić każdy dzień”) [*Dziewczyzna topi nieślubne dziecko. Burmistrzanka* (*The Girl Drowns Her Bastard Child. The Daughter of Mayor*) [KPBL: no. 33; Ligeża, Stoiński 1938: 49]. Magdalena Zowczak links the cycle of songs about a Child killer mother with legends about Great Thursday, featuring ‘the oppositions between God and devil, redemption and condemnation” cf. Zowczak 2013: 363–370.

<sup>69</sup> *Pieśń o wyrodnym dzieciach* (*The Song of Heartless Children*) [Nyrkowski 1973: 170].

<sup>70</sup> In one of the versions of a ballad: *Dzieciobójczyni porwana do piekła* (*Child Killer Mother Snatched to Hell* [KPBL: no. 113]) the condemned daughter says about her mother: “she didn’t beat me enough / So I end up in hell” (“Boć ona mnie źle ćwiczyła / Boch się

do piekła dostała”) and the mother is immediately punished: ‘she barely finished saying these words / as her mother opened the hell’s doors’ (“Ona te słowa mówiła / Matka już przed piekłem stała”) [Bystroń 1927: 94].

<sup>71</sup> The consequences of failure to follow this imperative are described in folk tale tropes T 838 *Syn skazaniec odgryza matce nos* (*The Son Sentenced to Death Bites off His Mother’s Nose*) about “the son who was not punished by his father [mother] for stealing becomes a thief; as he is being led to the gallows, he pretends that he wants to give his father the final goodbye and bites the father’s nose [ear] off” and T 838A *Syn ojcobójca* (*The Son Who Killed His Father*) is about “the son reproves his father for not beating him in childhood, and when the father wants to accompany him in a robbery, the son kills him” [PBL 1: 261–262].

<sup>72</sup> The moral of one of the versions of the ballad *Dzieciobójczyni porwana do piekła* (*Child killer mother snatched to hell*) treats about the relationship between disobedience and a curse: “I didn’t obey / And now I am in hell” (“Jo posłuchać nie chciała, / Do piekła się dostała”) [Ligęza, Stoiński 1938: 61].

<sup>73</sup> The motif of a son cursing his mother for marrying him with an unloved girl (“may my mother pay/for telling me to marry the unloved girl // May my mother perish // as she took me away from the one I loved” – “Bodaj mojej matce taka doła była, / oj, jak mnie nie z lubą młodego żeniła. // Bodaj moja matka na świecie nie była, /jak mnie młodzieuchnego z pary rozłączyła”) can be found in a ballad trope no 112 *Żona zakłęta w drzewo* (*Wife Turned into a Tree* [KPBL: 266–267]).

<sup>74</sup> The conviction that a parents’ curse is a sin and at the same time constitutes a magical act of “biding” God is confirmed by the findings of Florian Znanięcki: “The father’s or mother’s curse is particularly powerful because of the relation between parents and children; God **must** fulfil it. A priest has communicated to us that an old peasant confessed the cursing of his son as the most heinous sin of his whole life. The son went to the army and was killed, and in his confession the peasant said: “Why did I interfere with the business of God?” He felt that God **was obliged** to see to it that the son was killed” [Thomas, Znanięcki 1927: 263; emphasis A.E.].

<sup>75</sup> In accounts on cursing I heard from my interlocutors the curse is shown almost exclusively as a verbal ritual. The gestures accompanying the words were hardly ever mentioned. One example is *Jeden z przykładów do przytoczona tu opowieść o klątwie wypowiedanej w pozycji klęczącej, drugi – o matce, która przeklinała syna, żegnając się przed ikoną*: the quoted story of a mother who cursed her son while making the sign of the cross before the icon:

“Tu, czerez etu chatu, to tut syn utapiłsia. Matka nadto praklinała, z Bogiem żegnała, ruki złożywszy piered ikonou. [Czemu go przeklinała?] No, kab on nie żeniłsia, szto ona nie z pięknej rodziny. A on żeniłsia [...] i on utapiłsia” [64].

(“It was in the house next door that the son drowned. His mother cursed a lot while making the sign of the cross and pressing her hands together before the icon. [Why did she curse him?] Well, she didn’t want him to marry because the girl wasn’t from a proper family. But he did marry her and so he drowned.)

There is no doubt that the gestures indicating the cursing party (God) are to strengthen its efficiency.

<sup>76</sup> The folk culture legitimises this possibility in the form of the public ritual of curse < rytuał publicznego przeklinania.. It was observed in the 1930s in Polesie by Józef Obrębski:

“In minor disagreements involving neighbours the community let the victim take over the initiative and have their justice. In most cases it came down to public swearing with use of curses to insult the goodman/farmer dignity and family honor of the perpetrator. Najczęściej sprowadzało się ono do publicznego zwymyślenia winnego przez poszkodowanych. Publiczne zwymyślenie przy użyciu przekleństw, uwłaczających godności gospodarskiej i czci rodzinnej winnego, z indywidualnego zatargu czyniło sprawę publiczną i równocześnie przez poniżenie winnego w oczach gromady, przez moralne unicestwienie jego osoby społecznej, stanowiło samo przez się karę. At the same time a private disagreement would turn into a public matter and humiliation of the perpetrator in the eyes of the community and moral destruction of his social self was a punishment in itself. Up to this day the street in Polesie, the centre of the village life, is a permanent stage for this type of neighbour revenge. It’s enough to hear shouting, cursing and swearing to figure out that somewhere outside or in the front yard there is a woman informing everyone about the wrongs and disloyalty of a neighbour” [Obrębski 2007: 175–176].

Existence of this ritual was recorded by Kolberg:

“Przeciw złodziejom używa się rozmaitych czarów i zaklęć. Czasem się zdarza, że okradziony przeklina złodzieja w sposób straszliwy na każdym rogu ulicy. Często słyszeć można życzenia, żeby złodziej na łożu śmiertelnym spokoju nie znalazł, żeby wysechł i skurczał” [DWOK 40, *MazPr*: 51].

(“They make use of various magic spells and enchantments against the thieves. Sometimes a robbed person is cursing the thief with horrible words on every corner of the street. You can often hear wishes that the thief may not find his peace on the deathbed, that he may dry up and shrink.”)

The ritual of public cursing was legitimized by a law from the Middle Ages as a tradition of “scolding.” This custom and the ‘traces of curse’ within are discussed by Dąbkowski, cf. Dąbkowski 1904.

<sup>77</sup> The words recorded in Radomyśl upon San, Podkarpackie Province in 1978; interlocutor Jan Geneja [the archives of IEiAK UW].

<sup>78</sup> This order finds confirmation in other proverbs: *Don't wish for someone's wrong if you don't want it yourself* (*Nie żądaj złego nikomu, byś tego nie doznał w domu*) [NKP: *Złe*], *The one who curses the innocent curses himself* (*Chto kaho niwinno praklinaje, to sam sabie zabiraje*) [LB 4: 243], or *The one who asks for someone else asks for himself* (*Kto na kogo prosi, ten na siebie wnosi*) [from the records from the Sanu riverside in 1981 in the archives of IEiAK UW]; and in folk tales. Trope T 773 *Odwrócone przekleństwo* (*A Reversed Curse*) says: “A tailor who knows ‘the evil moment’ advises a woman to say the words of a curse directed at a child; she curses the advisor who dies” [PBL 1: 245].

<sup>79</sup> This law finds its origin in the Bible: *As he loved cursing, so let it come onto him*, says the psalm [Ps. 109:17].

<sup>80</sup> Federowski recorded: ‘they curse the thief so that his name can be cursed by the Jews in the synagogue: *May he get to a Jewish school!*’ (LB 4: 419).

<sup>81</sup> According to Magdalena Zowczak: “when doing wrong and cursing one used objects or activities usually associated with the religious cult (e.g. one lights a candle for someone before the painting of Our Lady of the Gate of Dawn or one makes a donation in the church so that God will beat his enemy), but there is also a common belief that such rituals are like a double-edge sword: in that case God punishes the one who is actually guilty; if it was the one who asked then

the punishment he wanted for his neighbour falls on him. This is therefore some kind of God's judgment'. And she quotes an interlocutor from the region of Vilnius: "...she put some money into the box on you; there before the painting of God's Mother. If it is a serious act of revenge then the altar will be [covered] with black linen in your intention. If it is unjustified then it turns on you, the black ones and everything. One covered and now she's been in mourning all her life [...] This is very bad, God's name for your own use'" [Zowczak 1994: 8].

<sup>82</sup> "A witch (*wieźmar*) or a witch always knows the devil! Because without his help they wouldn't be able to do anything. The devil teaches them how to wrong people and he takes away from men and gives to witches" [LB 1: 89].

<sup>83</sup> My interlocutors talk eagerly and in great detail about doing and undoing, sorcerers, witches and healers. A high number of these stories jest kontynuacją wątków wierzeniowych i bajkowych, notowanych przez badaczy. . It is enough to look through some pieces of Federowski or Kolberg's works and compare them with Krzyżanowski's typology of tales (e.g. tropes T 341 *Zemsta czarownika* (*Sorcerer's Revenge*) and T 342 *Czarownik ukarany* (*Sorcerer Punished*) [PBL 1: 118–119]) or those of Arne and Thompson to outline the problem of more than one separate overview. The topic of the *szeptun-czarnokniźnik* (healer-sorcerer) opposition on the basis of contemporary research in Belarus is more widely discussed by Zuzanna Grębecka, cf. Grębecka 2006: 283–292.

<sup>84</sup> Let's notice the similarities between these tales and etiological tales dealing with turning naughty children into animals (a cuckoo or a mole).

<sup>85</sup> Recorded in August 1936 in Perebrody, Stolin county (now Ukraine), interviewee: Mitrofan Gołod, researcher: Zygmunt Kapałczyński; materials from the archives of Józef Obrębski at Amherst University, Massachusetts.

<sup>86</sup> The wedding, similarly to other rites of passage, is a period which is especially prone to magical metamorphosis. Apart from being turned into stone there is also the possibility of "letting" the wedding go with the wolves or werewolves [cf., e.g., LB 1: 90–99] or getting someone killed by a lightning (T 949 *Wesele zabite piorunem* (*Wedding Killed by Lightning*): "A girl forced into marriage prays for a lightning; the requests gets fulfilled and the whole party dies" [PBL 1: 289]). My interlocutors also know stories of turning all wedding participants into stone, e.g.:

– A wot, dziecko moje, takie byli, czarnokniźniki takije. W jednej wsi była wesele, swadźba. I jechali, od ślubu już jechali, z kościoła, cała cała swadźba jechała. Tam eta, gdzie ja była, [...] tam leżała aż siedem dużych kamienioŭ. Wot. I wsie nazywali ich zwanczastyje kamienie. Zwanczastyje. [...] I ony dzwonić: dzyn-dzyn-dzyn-dzyn... I tak nazywali – zwanczastyje kamienie. I jak [...] jany jechali z kaścioła, od ślubu, to ten zrobił im tak, żeby oni wszystkie stali kamieñmi. Ze ślubu jechali do domu. Żeby ony wszystkie stali kamieñmi. I jak konie byli, i jak cała swadźba była, wsie stali kamieñmi. I nikt żywy [nie został]. I nikto nie adrabił.

– [sąsiadka:] To ony na pewno jemu coś nie dali, czegoś tam chcieli one...

– I nie adrabili

– [sąsiadka:] On chciał tamten coś, oni nie dali jemu...

– I niczoho nie zrabili. I stali i tam pa wiek wiekam, paka nie zaszła sawiecka właść, nie wywieźli tych kamienioŭ. To tak nazywali sień – zwanczastyje kamienie" [51, 50].

("Well, my dear, there were sorcerers. And there was a wedding in a village. They were on the way, on the way back from the church, the whole party [...] And there were seven large

stones on the ground. Yes. And everyone called them “ringing bells”. Ringing [...] They were ringing: tim-ling, tim-ling [...] As everyone was on the way back from the church, from the wedding ceremony, he made them all turn into stone. The horses and everyone; they all turned into stone. And no one [was] spared. And nobody undid it.

“[neighbour:] They must have refused to give him something that he wanted...’

“And nobody undid it ...’

“[neighbour] He wanted something; they didn’t give it to him...’

“And they did nothing. They used to be standing there for ages but once the Soviet authority came they took them away. That was their name: “ringing stones.”)

<sup>87</sup> It is hard not to spot some analogy between the “old man’ and God walking on the face of the earth not only in the mythical times of the beginning but also up to this day, cf. the chapter “Wędrowki Boga po ziemi” (“God Roams the Earth”) in: [Zowczak 2013: 304–323]. According to Zowczak, Jesus is the mythical model of the healer (*szeptun*) and the exorcist.

<sup>88</sup> Wanda Budziszewska’s account, 1992.

<sup>89</sup> Another interlocutor justified the prohibition of cursing the cow with a reference to the religious order:

“Skaciny nie można przeklinać. Krów. Też grzech. Krowa beńdziesz przeklinać, trzeba iść do spowiedzi, ksiendzu też mówić, że przeklinałem krowe. Krowa też jest święcona” [65]. (“Cattle cannot be cursed. Cows. Also a sin. If you curse your cow you need to go and confess your sin, tell the priest that you cursed the cow. A cow is sacred too.”)

<sup>90</sup> The mythical beginnings are related not only to God, Jesus and God’s Mother’s creation of plants and animals and assigning them with various functions (an element which is present in etiological tales) but they are also linked with God walking on the face of the earth and with His just verdicts turning into moral guidelines. The situation of the justified curse and unjustified swearing takes its origin in tales of God walking on the face of the Earth (e.g. in the above-quoted folk tale trope T 751C *Koszula i święty Piotr* (*Shirt and Saint Peter* [PBL 1: 232])).

## 5. SEMANTICS OF THE CURSE

<sup>1</sup> Anna Chudzik also suggests that at a basic level, magical speech acts are directives. For her approach to the structure and semantics of magical speech acts please consult: Chudzik 2002:63–74.

<sup>2</sup> Or, to be more precise, according to Grochowski *bodaj*<sub>1</sub>, which should be differentiated from the particle *bodaj*<sub>2</sub> [Grochowski 1986].

<sup>3</sup> *Żeby*<sub>2</sub> which should be differentiated from the conjunction *żeby*<sub>1</sub>.

<sup>4</sup> I am referring here to: Koseska-Toszewa 1981, Pisarkowa 1978, Puzynina 1971, Topolińska 1986.

<sup>5</sup> “The modal framework is an indicator of the utterance’s content, not of the utterance itself. For example, the modal framework *I want* may be represented in a given utterance by a verb in the imperative, a vocative, a particle or an interjection” [Wierzbicka 1971: 180].

<sup>6</sup> Pisarkowa's opinion is also confirmed by Grochowski in his analysis of the meanings of *bodaj* to which I have referred above. "The popular contention that *bodaj* expresses a wish and thus is an operator of the optative mode should be regarded as very simplistic. It appears that utterances containing *bodaj*<sub>1</sub> can express a broad array of speech acts, including a desire, a request, a curse, anger, a prohibition, an order and a warning" [Grochowski 1983: 183].

<sup>7</sup> The unlexicalized *bog daj* (*God grant*) features in many Belarusian curses collected by Federowski, where it is present at the surface, e.g.: *May dear God grant that you don't live a happy life* (*Żebyś ty, Boże daj mileńki, nie żył szczęśliwie!*); *May dear God grant that you don't die your own (i.e. natural) death* (*Żebyś ty, Boże daj mileńki, własną śmiercią nie umar!*) [LB 4: 413, 416]. Federowski also noted that "almost all curse formulas contain the phrase *Boże daj* [*God grant*] and its variants *Boże daj mileńki* [*Grant dear God*] and, *Mateczko Najświętsza daj!* [*Grant, Holy Mother*]" [LB 4: 405].

<sup>8</sup> In comparison, SW defines *bodaj* and its variant forms *bogdaj*, *bodajże*, *bogdajże*, [SW: *bodej*, *bodaj*, *daj*]) by paraphrases: *God grant that (daj Boże, aby...)*, *May God grant that... (dałby Bóg, aby...)*.

<sup>9</sup> This example comes from: Pisarkowa 1972: 38.

<sup>10</sup> *Chorobnik* is 'a spirit of disease.'

<sup>11</sup> In turn, Maria Koniushkevich's list of "the most horrific Belarusian curses (*praklony*)" contains examples of explicit performatives: (e.g. *Ja praklinaju ciabie!* (*I curse you!*), *Budź ty praklaty!* (*Be cursed!*)). "A Belarusian would use these curses to curse his hard life, his dog's life, or the war. Parents can use them to curse children, when the latter break the most important commandments." Koniushkevich goes on to stress that such curses are used very rarely: "which in itself testifies to the fact that their users understand the sacred power of curses, whose formulas, just as the name of the Almighty, should not be taken in vain," cf. Koniushkevich 2001: 163. Whereas the conclusions from my material are at variance with Koniushkevich's findings undoubtedly requires further research.

<sup>12</sup> This explication took shape in the course of my conversations with Jadwiga Wajszczuk.

<sup>13</sup> This was noticed already by Florian Znaniński, who aptly remarked: "The blessing or curse is efficient whatever its form, which proves that it is the intention, not the expression, which is essential" [Thomas, Znaniński 1927: 259].

<sup>14</sup> The similarities and differences of "the fate of the cursed" in different cultures are a fascinating topic which gives rise to fascinating questions. Within Slavic folk culture, the fate of the cursed shows understandable affinity with the Biblical and classical traditions, but also to other cultures. Many interesting insights regarding this problem and its particular aspects such as refusing proper burial, leaving the body for scavengers to feed upon, exclusion from the community, natural disasters, diseases, bad death, and discontinuity of one's family line and family name can be found in the work of theologians, ethnographers, Orientalists specialized in the ancient East and scholars of classical antiquity, e.g., Canaan 1935, Fensham 1962, 1963, 1987, Gevirtz 1961, Greenfield, Shaffer 1985, Meyer, Smith 1994.

<sup>15</sup> I wrote about the resistance of Belarusian peasants against the state-decreed atheization, and its traces in their mythical worldview (including the concept of God's punishment for it) in: Engelking 2012: 717–757.

<sup>16</sup> The motif of the curse understood as God's punishment for sins, its presence in the folk Bible and its references to the Bible are analyzed by Magdalena Zowczak in a chapter entitled "Metamorfozy: klątwa i kara boża" ("Metamorphoses: Curse and God's Punishment" [Zowczak 2013: 124–143]).

<sup>17</sup> "Ja myślę, dlaczego to, znaczy, te wiary. Dlatego, że ludzi było dużo zebranych przy mordowaniu Pana Jezusa. Jedni wierzyli [w] Pana Jezusa, niewinny człowiek, tak, a jego krzyżują, drudzy w takiego koguta – był martwy, a ożył, trzecie tam może być, ot, było zaćmienie, a może pokazał się księżyc, to w księżyc wzięli, i ot, takie grupki... To tak zaczęły się te wiary wszystkie, te nacje" [54].

("How did all these different faiths begin? Well, I think, when they were murdering Jesus Christ, many people gathered there. Some believed in Jesus, and though that he's an innocent man who is being crucified. Others believed in a rooster, who was dead and then sprung back to life, and some also believed in the eclipse...or maybe the moon was there...and they believed in it. So there were those little groups...and this is how different faiths started, these different nations.")

My interlocutor was referencing three religions: the Catholics (and Orthodox Christians), the Lutherans and the Muslims. I write about the folk mythological justifications for religious differences in: Engelking 2012: 620–650, and in: Engelking 2015: 4–13.

<sup>18</sup> I write more broadly about the motif of curse/God's punishment on the Jews and its connection to Shoah in: Engelking 2012: 561–574.

<sup>19</sup> References to two existing printed versions of the song can be found in SSiSL in an entry entitled *Skamieniałość (Petrification)* [SSiSL 1: 397].

<sup>20</sup> Turning to stone also features in the following formulas: *May you turn into stone! (Bogdajeś się kamieniem stał!)* [DWOK 48, TarnRzesz: 318; Brückner 1980: 297], *May you turn into stone! (A żebyś ty się w kamień obrócił!)* [20, 34], *May you become a stone! (Kab ty kamieniem stała!)* [50], *May you turn into stone together with your cow! (Kab ty tu kamieniem stał i ze swaju karowu!)*. [61]. An indirect reference to petrification is contained in *May your feet grow into the earth (Bodaj ci nogi w ziemię wrosły)* [DWOK 22, Łęcz: 11] and *May you not be able to move from this spot! (Żeb ja z miścia sia nie ruszyv!)* [DWOK 33, Chełm 1: 32]. The equation of petrification with death can also be found in a lament noted down by Federowski: "O God, why have you created me? Why did you not turn me into a stone in my mother's womb?" [meaning: "why didn't I die in my mother's womb?"] ("Ach Boża! ach Boża! na szto minie stworyu? czamu ja u matcy kamieniam ni stała?") [LB 4: 392] and in beliefs concerning the punishment of murderers after death: "Who kills innocent people in this world, will split stones in the next" ("Chto na hetuom świecie bje ludzi niewinnie, to na tuom świecie kamieni budzie bić") [LB 1: 223]. The role of petrification would definitely merit from a more in-depth study. So far, it became the object of attention of Małgorzata Mazurkiewicz-Brzozowska [Mazurkiewicz 1986, 1987] and Magdalena Zowczak [2013: 136–144]. But this fascinating trope should not be studied in separation from the rich symbolism of stones or from the complex issue of magical transformation (metamorphosis) which involves changing a person not necessarily into a stone, but also into an animal, an object (e.g. a tree) or a supernatural, demonic being, as testified by the following formulas: *May you be turned [into a werewolf] (A bodaj cię*

*przemieniło [w wilkołaka]*) [DWOK 22, Łęcz: 11] or *May you turn into an oak! (Bodaj ty odubyla! dubom stała!), May I turn into a tree trunk! (Żeby ja pniom stanuv!) [DWOK 33, Chełm 1: 31]*; these formulas are linked to CURSING<sub>3</sub> (ZAKLAĆ – ENCHANT). In entries for *Kamień (Stone)* and *Skamieniałość (Petrification)*, SSiSL characterises the stone as an object which is on the boundary between the two worlds: alive and dead at the same time, capable of both transmitting and blocking evil, and also connected to the devil [SSiSL 1].

<sup>21</sup> The notion of God's punishment can also be encountered in songs about the loss of maidenhead. In one such song, the disgraced girl curses her faithless lover in the following words: "May you be surrounded/ may you be preyed upon/ By grave misfortune" ("bodaj cię opadło, / bodaj cię obsiadło / srogie nieszczęście!") and then turns to address God: "O God, I demand vengeance / I want to see / God punishing you" ("Boże! zemsty żądam, / niech ja to oglądam, / ze cię Bóg skarże") [DWOK 16, Lub 1: 279–280].

<sup>22</sup> The belief that God's just vengeance (*boża pomsta*) is unavoidable is expressed in the proverb *Vengeance will reach you even if it has to ride a lame horse (Pomsta i na chromym dojedzie)* [SW: *Pomsta*]. Interestingly, NKP does not contain any proverbs related to *pomsta*.

<sup>23</sup> Interestingly, this type of cursing is sometimes called *pomstowanie (cursing/swearing)* which contains the root *pomsta (vengeance)*.

"Złorzeczenia, z namysłem wymawiane, np. *obys się zapadł sto łokci w ziemię, obys z ciała opadł, obys został kaleką na całe życie* itp., są u nich rzadko w użyciu i zowią się pomstowaniem" [Polaczek 1891: 630].

("Malediction, spoken with intent, e.g. *May you sink one hundred feet into the earth, may flesh fall from your bones, may you be crippled for life* etc. Such expressions are used very rarely and are called pomstowanie.")

SW adds: "As late as in the fifteenth century, the punishment for death was called *mszczenie* or *pomsta (vengeance)*" [SW: *Pomsta*]. According to SGP *pomstować* means 'to inveigh, to curse, to call for vengeance' ('złorzeczyć, przeklinać, wzywać pomsty'), 'to rail loudly, to malign, to fulminate' ('użalać się głośno, lżyć, wygadywać'), 'to wish somebody ill because of a hurt they have caused the speaker' ('źle komu życzyć za wyrządzoną sobie krzywdę') 'to call for revenge' ('wzywać zemsty').. SGP also contains a noun *pomstownik*: 'a bad-tempered, irascible person, who rails against others in anger,' ('złośnik, złorzeczący w gniewie'), 'a person who curses often' ('człowiek, który często przeklina') [SGP: *Pomstować, Pomstownik*]. In 1997, in the Mazowsze region, I noted down a phrase *He avenged himself on me a great many times! (A ile razy on mnie zemści!)*, which was used in an account about a father who "cursed in anger" [interlocutor: Stanisława Kwiatkowska, born 1913, Powielin, commune of Winnica].

<sup>24</sup> Cf: *It's all in God's hands (Wszystko w ręku Boga), May God's hand protect us (Niech ręka boska broni), Whether in fair time or foul, the hand of God protects us all (Czy to bieda, czy troska, jest nad nami ręka boska), Whoever is protected by God's hand, should fear nothing (Kogo boża ochroni ręka, ten się niczego nie lęka)* [NKP: Bóg].

<sup>25</sup> In one formula noted by Kolberg: *May God's passion kill you! (A bodaj cię Boża męka zabiła!)* the word *passion* is taken to mean "a holy cross" (a cross with the Christ's figure), but it can also be considered as a corruption of the "hand of God" trope, as it is easy to imagine a confusion between *męka (passion)* and *ręka (hand)* [DWOK 22, Łęcz: 11].

<sup>26</sup> More about the trope of curse and death by thunder in SSiSL 1: *Ogień, Kamień piorunowy* (*Fire, Thunderstone*).

<sup>27</sup> For example, in a popular song *Lo, the soul has left the body* (*Wyszła, wyszła dusza z ciała*): “Virgin Mary heard it / and called to Jesus Christ: / O Jesus, my beloved son / Take mercy upon these souls” (“Matka Boska usłyszała, / do Jezusa zawołała: / Mój Jezusie, syn kochany, / ulituj się nad duszami”) [50].

<sup>28</sup> This topic caught the attention of Boris Uspensky, who writes very interestingly about the analogies between one’s birth mother, Mary Mother of God, and mother earth (the holy earth) [Uspenskiy 1983].

<sup>29</sup> The punishing aspect of Virgin Mary is well known to the ethnographers who studied the veneration of Our Lady of the Gate of Dawn (a painting of Virgin Mary displayed in Vilnius). Zowczak also mentions magical practices (such as money offerings) that were used to bring Virgin Mary’s punishment on a designated person, cf. [Zowczak 2013: 122].

<sup>30</sup> It is also important to note that, according to etiological narratives, Virgin Mary is a helper of God/Jesus Christ in the process of genesis. Her blessings and curses give the final shape to many phenomena and elements of reality (cf. tropes T 2441-T 2999 [PBL 2:171–191]). This role of Virgin Mary is studied in detail by Magdalena Zowczak, who points out that in the folk Bible, Virgin Mary takes on the role of a mediator/intermediary [Zowczak 2013: 73–79, 485].

<sup>31</sup> Noted down in Radomyśl on San in 1978. Interlocutor Jan Geneja [IEiAK UW archives].

<sup>32</sup> According to Kolberg:

Środkami do zadania czarów skutecznymi są: użycie właściwe zebranych ziół, traw, mchów, prochów i kości z cmentarzy [...], zwite włosy i paznokcie wzięte z umarłego [...], ucinane członki, palce z wisielców i воск ze świecy zwanej paskałem. [...] Zadanie tych rzeczy wewnątrz z wódką lub czemkolwiek przy wiadomości dnia urodzin pacjenta, ma sprowadzać śmierć na osobę oczarowaną, czy to po dłuższej, czy po krótszej chorobie” [DWOK 7, *Krak* 3: 83].

(“the list of efficacious spell components includes herbs, grass and moss (collected in a prescribed fashion), as well as dust and bones from cemeteries... braided hair and nails taken from corpses [...] limbs cut from corpses, fingers of the hanged and wax from the paschal candle [...]. Pouring vodka or some other liquid over any such object, when one knows the birth date of the intended victim, is supposed to cause death, either instantaneous or after a long illness.”)

Naturally, there also exist counter-spells: it is enough to make the sign of cross over a glass of such vodka (even “in thought”). There is a widespread belief that if the vodka has been magically tampered with, then – upon the sign of the cross – the bottom of the glass will fall off. It seems that the ritual exchange of good wishes while drinking serves the same purpose: “When drinking, the drinkers will address one another saying *Into your hands!* (*W ręce wasze!*), to which the proper response is *May you drink healthily!* (*Pijcie zdrowi!*) or *I wish you good health!* (*Zdrowia życzę dobrego*)” [DWOK 48, *TarnRzesz*: 38].

<sup>33</sup> And that is not all: as a result of sinning, a sinner can become a devil, which can be treated as a logical consequence of being claimed by the negative sacred:

“To diabeł z człowieka zmienia się. [Co?] Z człowieka. Jak człowiek umrze, jak już leży, on dostaje się w piekło, jemu już rogi wyrastają, on zostaje diabłem [To taki człowiek, który grzeszył?] Grzeszył?” [78].

(“A devil is a man turned [...]. When a man is dying, when he’s on the deathbed, he goes straight to hell. His horns grow straight away and he becomes a devil. [Does this happen to someone who has sinned?] Yes.”)

<sup>34</sup> Analyzing the euphemisms used for taboo words in different Polish dialects, Anna Krawczyk-Tyrpa, noticed that the euphemisms for the devil constituted the largest group in her material, cf. Krawczyk-Tyrpa 2001: 44–58.

<sup>35</sup> Ewa Masłowska published a detailed study of linguistic taboos pertaining to naming the devil in Polish folk dialects, cf. Masłowska 1987. My own list enumerates only the euphemisms that are found in curse formulas and does not offer their etymological analysis.

<sup>36</sup> “In folk tales, Boruta is a spirit of the woods and marshes, a spirit of mud (błotnik). Boruta and his counterpart Rokita used to be spirits of the forest, until the folk imagination turned them into devils” [Adam Fischer, quoted in: SFP: *Boruta*].

<sup>37</sup> *Drabi* (plural, singular: *drab*) – 1. ‘euphemism for devils’ (‘euf. zamiast diabli’), 2. ‘a type of wassailers’ (‘rodzaj jasełkarzy’). “Among wassailers who go from house to house in the carolling season are the so called *drabi*. They are adult men, covered from head to toe in straw” [SGPKarł, *Drab*].

<sup>38</sup> Brückner notes that *korfanty* is a corruption of the Czech word *kornifel*, derived from the Latin *Corniferus* (meaning *the horned one*) [cf. Brückner 1980: 297].

<sup>39</sup> “An even more bizarre figure in the Kashub demonology is the completely inchoate Smętk, who is either a devil or not, either evil or good, and is primarily a helpless and aimless wanderer” [Pełka 1987: 191–192, cf. Masłowska 1987: 83].

<sup>40</sup> Wanda Budziszewska writes about linguistic units in folk dialects that are used to denote “a meeting with the evil power” in: Budziszewska 1990.

<sup>41</sup> The folk views on diseases, their etiology, localization and relevant taboos are comprehensively discussed by Zbigniew Libera in: [Libera 1995: 15–65]. For examples of personification of diseases and death confer: LB 1: 140–147.

<sup>42</sup> The magicity of the folk speech-action is evident in the beliefs and practices related to the fever (*febra*):

“Na febrę kłąc się nie godzi, bo nie wiemy, gdzie się znajduje. Usłyszawszy ją nazwaną, gotowa przyjść i ucześcić się tego, kto ją wspomina” [DWOK 34, *Chełm* 2: 209].

(“It is not meet to curse the fever, because no one knows where it is. When it hears its name pronounced, it can come and stick to the person who uttered its name.”)

“Nim febra zacznie brać, winien ktoś napisać kredą na drzewiach np. stajni: ‘Nima Wojtka w domu’ (tj. np. imię chorego); chory zaś wlezie wtenczas w ostatni kąst stajni i przykryje się tak, aby go nie było widać. Tym sposobem niby przeczeka i zmyli febrę, która nie mając do kogo się przyczepić, odejdzie jak niepyszna [...] Na febrę. Niech chory wlezie do pieca lub w komin na dachu i woła: «Ty mnie szukasz, a ja sa! (tu)» – a febra go ominie” [DWOK 3, *Kuj* 1: 97].

("Before the fever takes you, you should take a piece of chalk and write on the door (for example of the stable) the words e.g., 'Wojtek is not at home' (using the name of the sick person). Then you take the sick person to the darkest corner of the stable and cover him, so that nobody can see him. Thus he should wait in order to confound the fever, which will not be able to find a person to whom it could attach itself. It will wait for some time and then leave disappointed. [...] For the fever. Let the sick person creep into the fireplace or into the chimney on the roof and shout 'You look for me, and here I am!' and he will not get the fever.")

For more information on the fever confer Iudin 2001b.

<sup>43</sup> SGPKarł defines *paralysis* (*paraliż*) as 'a touch of wind' ('trącenie wiatru') [SGPKarł: *Paraliż*].

<sup>44</sup> Twisting or turning can probably be linked to the magic practice of twisting a candle in order to curse someone.

<sup>45</sup> SW defines plait as 'a disease, *trichoma, plica polonica*' [SW: *Kołtun*]. A plait could be caused by magic (by a ritual of CURSING3) and by performing certain gestures such as twisting:

"Robi się 'zawitkę' przez odpowiednie skręcenie i zagięcie kłosów oraz wymawianie pewnych słów szeptem. 'Zawitka' przyniesie jakieś nieszczęście w rodzinie lub bydło. Chłopi 'zawitki' nigdy nie ścinają i pozostawiają ją do jesieni. Zwykle po 'zawitce' robi się w takiej rodzinie kołtun."

("You can make a 'braid' (zawitka), twisting and bending ears of corn, and whispering certain words. The braid would bring misfortune to a family or to cattle. Peasants never cut down a braid, they leave it in the field until autumn. Usually, after [finding] a braid, someone in the family has the plait.")

[recorded in August 1936 in the village of Perebrody, district of Stolín (then Poland and now Ukraine). Interviewee: Mitrofan Gołód, interviewer: Zygmunt Kapalczyński; in Józef Obrębski collection held in the University of Massachusetts Amherst Archives].

<sup>46</sup> Recorded in Radomyśl on San in 1978. Interlocutor Jan Geneja [IEiAK UW archives].

<sup>47</sup> Maria Koniushkevich counts the Belarusian formulas such as *May you be pickled!* among jocular curses, often addressed to children, many of which are palpably fantastic or surreal, cf. Koniushkevich 2001:163.

<sup>48</sup> Formula mentioned by Helena Kapełusz.

<sup>49</sup> The equivalence between a barking dog and a cursing man, and a mythical trope of a transformation of a human into a dog as a punishment for lying are discussed by Boris Uspensky [Uspenskiy 1987:40–44]. Cf. also the saying *Dogs' voices are not heard in heaven* (*Psie głosy nie idą pod niebiosa*) [NKP: *Pies*]; Federowski relates that this saying could be used as a retort to "a person who is cursing" [LB 4: 270].

<sup>50</sup> A dictionary notes that *sudden death* (*nagła śmierć*) is a synonym of *apoplexy* [SW: *Nagły*].

<sup>51</sup> *Suddenness* (*nagłota*) 'sudden death' ('nagła śmierć') [SGPKarł: *Nagłota*].

<sup>52</sup> SW explains this formula with a note: 'may apoplexy strike you' ('bodaj cię apopleksja raziała') [SW: *Krew*].

<sup>53</sup> Bells would not be rung if the person had committed suicide.

<sup>54</sup> It is significant that the verb used here is *zdechnąć* and not *umrzeć*. While both verbs mean to die, *zdechnąć* is only used to refer to dying animals, while *umrzeć* is normally used for people. SW also contains a note on the use of *zdechnąć* for people: "Zdechnąć means to die like an animal that has no soul" ("*Zdechnąć, jak zdychają bydła, co ducha nie mają*") [SW: *Zdechnąć*].

<sup>55</sup> Cf. the expletives: *dog's vapour (psia para)*, *dog's soul (psia dusza)*, *you dog vapour! (ty paro sobacza!)*, *ty paro przeklęta, nieszczęsna!* (*you cursed, miserable vapour*) [SW: *Para*].

<sup>56</sup> Brückner derives *czeznąć* (*to perish, to vanish*) from *s-częście* (participation in something), which is a synonym of *dola* (*good fortune, one's lot*) [SEBr: *Czeznąć, Czysty*].

<sup>57</sup> SGPKarł defines *skapieć* thus: "to fall, to fail, to become abjectly poor. It can be said with disdain about a Jew: *skapał* means "he died." "*Skapać = zdechnąć, to perish, to die, to fail: Niczego się nie dorobił, skapał marnie* (*He never succeeded in anything and he perished miserably*); *Skapał = he failed completely, he became destitute*" [SGPKarł: *Skapać*].

<sup>58</sup> Interestingly, there is a well-defined group of curses where the role of the executor is played by either a dog (*pies*, plural *psi*) and a wolf (*wilk*, plural *wilcy*), which can be directed either at people or at livestock and domestic animals [LB 4: 417]. Examples include *May dog eat you! (Bogdaj cię psi zjedli!)* [DWOK 48, *TarnRzesz*: 318], *May the dog weep for him (Niech go tam pies pożałuje)* [NKP: *Pies*], *May wolves eat him! (Bodaj go wilcy zjedli)* [NKP: *Wilk*], *May wolves eat you! (Oby cię wilcy zjedli!)* [DWOK 48, *TarnRzesz*: 264], *May wolves strangle you! (Kab ciebie wąki uduszyli, nawiernuli i ukacili!)*, *May wolves spill your guts! (Kab ciebie wąki wytrybuszyli!)* [LB 4: 417]. These curses, which often reference eating the curse object or dismembering him/her may be connected with the trope of tearing the body into parts after death, which is a result of the fact that the curse object will not be buried in holy ground. Additionally, formulas such as e.g. *May dogs take you (A bodeże cie psi wzini)* [SGP: *Bodaj*], *May dogs surround you when you don't have a stick (Bodaj cię psiska bez kija opadły)* [NKP: *Pies*], *May wolves block your path (Bodaj ci każdą drogę wilki zastępował)* [NKP: *Wilk*] suggest that both dogs and wolves can embody the negative sacred. Both these aspects of the dog- and wolf-curses seem complementary. The role of the dog as a mediator between life and death, and the mythical cause of the loss of eternal life by humans is discussed in: Tomicki 1980: 70–92. The role of the dog as the Thunderer's adversary, and also the subject of Slavic curses against the mother is analyzed by Uspensky [Uspenskiy 1987].

<sup>59</sup> "The souls of the cursed wander the world for penance, and getting lost among humans, they attack them, tear their clothes, molest travellers in forests, on steep mountain sides or in marshlands" [Biegeleisen 1930: 78].

<sup>60</sup> This trope can also be found in songs cf. SSiSL 1: 137.

<sup>61</sup> The last formula serves as a self-curse (CURSE6), a remnant of the Slavic custom of taking the sun as a witness of an oath, cf. SSiSL 1: 126 and Semkowicz 1916.

<sup>62</sup> Just as in the Biblical story of the curse of Cain [Gen. 4:11–14], which is one of the mythical sources of the folk curse.

<sup>63</sup> The belief that the earth will “spit out” the body of the cursed testifies to a close connection between CURSING1 and CURSING6. “The earth throws out the bodies of those, who broke an oath given on the earth” [SD: *Zemlja*].

<sup>64</sup> Interview no. S/176 in IEiAK UW archives.

<sup>65</sup> The complex relationship between the cursed and the earth (and between the cursed and stones and thunder) would merit from a more detailed analysis. Here I would only like to point to the existence of the folk tale trope 760A *Ziemia wyrzuca zwłoki grzesznika* (*Earth Throws out the Corpse of a Sinner* [PBL 1: 241]). A similar trope consists of a wide range of stories of cursed places and buildings (churches, roadside inns) that fall into the ground or are swallowed by the earth. On the grounds of folk mythology, these stories are connected both to God’s punishment and to cosmogony [cf. Zowczak 2013: 109–128]. Boris Uspenskiy offers a comprehensive analysis of the mythical trope of holy earth: the mother of humankind, which gives birth to people and accepts their bodies after death, and which can be angered by human sins [Uspenskiy 1983]. Cf. also the entry *Ziemia* in: [SSiSL 2: 17–56].

<sup>66</sup> A quotation from Kazimierz Moszyński can serve as an apt illustration: “The word *dola* is [etymologically] connected to *dělit* “to divide,” which originally meant a share, a part.’ The etymology of the word \**sz-čestbje* (modern Polish: *szczęście* (*happiness*)) is similar as it derives from *čestb* (modern Polish *część*, meaning ‘a part, a morsel’) [...] And happiness (*szczęście*), and not only good fortune (*dola*) is an extremely popular topic of conversation in Slavic villages” [KLS 2: 710–711].

<sup>67</sup> SW defines *nieszczęście* (*misfortune*) in this context as ‘devils’ and ‘likho’ [SW: *Nieszczęście*].

<sup>68</sup> Cf. *To exit the world miserably* (*Marnie pójść ze świata*) – ‘to bring death upon oneself by one’s own fault’ [SGPKarł: *Marnie*], *to come to naught* (*ześć* [a variant of *zejść*] *na marnie*): ‘to become impoverished due to one’s own actions’ [SGPKarł: *Marny*], *to come to waste* (*zmarnić się*): ‘denotes for the most part death by one’s own hand’ [SGPKarł: *Zmarnić*], *waste* (*marnota*): ‘penury, want, poverty, unhappiness, misery’ [SGPKarł: *Marnota*], *a wastrel* (*marnik*): ‘a person whose life is useless, a waster’ [SGPKarł: *Marnik*].

## 6. FROM CURSING TO LIFTING THE CURSE

<sup>1</sup> The fate of a child of “an unhappy mother” is mentioned e.g. in a recruit song of a soldier fatally beaten with batons; the boy complains that:

“Nieszczęśliwa matka była, / co mnie na świat porodziła, / zem się dostał w takie męki,  
/ będe baczył pruskiej ręki, / póki żyć będe”

(“the mother was unhappy / the one who gave birth to me / that I got so much tormented  
/ I’ll be watching out for Prussian hands / as long as I’m alive” [DWOK 40, *MazPr*: 412];  
cf. also, e.g.

Nieszczęśliwa rodyłasia, nieszczęśliwa zhinu, / porodyła mene maty w nieszczęstniu hodynu  
“I was born unhappy, and unhappy I will die / my mother gave birth to me in an unfortunate hour” [DWOK 52, *BiałPol*: 336],

or:

“Będziez ci tam na wieki płacz i zębów zgrzytanie, / Oj, na ojca, na matkę wielkie narzykanie. // Nieszczęśliwo ta matka, ktoś mi rodziła, / I ty, ziemio nieszczęsno, ktoś

mie nosiła. // Nieszczęśliwe te rzeczy, co ja ich używoł, / Teraz będę na wieki w piekle odpoczywoł” (*Pieśń o straszliwym sądzie – Song on Horrible Judgment*” [Kotula 1970:275]). (“there will be cries and teeth will be gritted, / Oh, there will be complaints about the father and the mother. / Unhappy is the mother who gave birth to me, / And you, unfortunate earth which carried me. / Unfortunate are the things that I used, / Now I’m going to dwell eternally in hell”)

<sup>2</sup> On offending, defiling the whole family as the aim of the curse cf. Uspenskiy 1983: 57–58.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. an example of interpreting a lightning strike as an act of liberation from repentance:

“W Radecznicy lud mówi, że gdy grzmi, to dusza niechrzczonego dziecięcia po siedmiu latach pokuty ucieka i woła ‘chrztu!’ Kto to z ludzi żyjących usłyszcy, powinien prędko chmurę przeżegnać znakiem krzyża świętego i wyrazy chrztu wymówić [...], a wtedy z niej usłyszcy znów wymówioną odpowiedź: ‘dziękuję,’ poczem burza ustaje i zbawiona tem dusza z chmur ulata do nieba. Jeżeli zaś ten ktoś na ziemi słów wspomnionych nie wyrzeknie i znaku krzyża nie zrobi, to wtedy chmura goni za uciekającą dziecięcia duszą i strzela do niej piorunem” [DWORK 17, *Lub 2*: 77].

(“In Radecznicza folk say that when you hear a thunder it is a soul of a child that died not baptized. After seven years of repentance this soul gets away and calls to be baptized. If a human hears the call they should quickly make the sign of the cross and say the baptism formula [...] and then they will hear ‘thank you,’ the storm will stop and the saved soul will fly to heaven. If the human fails to say the formula and to make the sign of the cross then the cloud follows the soul of the child and strikes it with the lightning.”)

<sup>4</sup> Cf. especially the following folk tale tropes T 400–T 459: *Nadprzyrodzeni: mąż, żona, krewni* (*Supernatural: husband, wife, relatives* [PBL 1: 126–143]).

<sup>5</sup> An example of “going through the church, the holy mass” might be a tradition from the Catholic-Orthodox borderland of returning to the Church after abandoning it (*pendant* of the ritual of “ringing the bells” during a wedding of a Catholic woman and an Orthodox Christian man). My interlocutors from Belarus know numerous stories like this, e.g.:

“Kochanie zaprowadziło, że z ruskim chłopcem poszła za męża, ale jak szła, to dzwony na nią dzwoniły, i ona w cerkwi za męża poszła, a potem chciała wrócić do kościoła. Męża partyzanty zabili i ona chciała wrócić na katoliczkę i poszła do księdza, żeby ją wrócił, ale ksiądz nie mógł i napisał list do Ojca Świętego i Ojciec Święty pozwolił, żeby się wróciła i wszystkie posty i wszystko utrzymywała [50].

(“Love made her marry an Orthodox man but when she was going to be married the bells were ringing for her. Then she wanted to return. Her husband was killed by the partizans and she wanted to be Catholic again. So she went to the priest but the priest couldn’t do that. He wrote a letter to the pope and the pope gave his permission and let her keep her fasts, etc.”)

“Ona była polska i poszła za prawosławnego; bogaty był. Ale on był chory i prędko zmarł. No, i trzeba znów przechodzić na polska wiara z powrotem. Pojechała do Murowanki, tam był kościół. No to ksiądz każe: «Ty przeproś wszystkich parafijanów, że ty różaniec pod nogi podeptała; ty chrześcijanka, trzeba było myśleć». Mówi: «Przeproś Boga, Matkę Boską, że ty deptała różaniec, a teraz pożałuj, teraz znów idziesz na polska...» Dawał jej tu, dawał...” [54].

("She was Catholic and married an Orthodox man; he was rich. But he was ill and died. So she had to convert again. She went to Murovanka to the church. And the priest said: "You should apologize to all the parishioners for treading on the rosary; you, a Christian woman, you should have known better." He says: "Apologize to God, God's Mother that you trod on the rosary, now you need to repent, now you want to be Catholic again..." He kept shouting at her...")

<sup>6</sup> The death closes the possibility of an apology-forgiveness and reconciliation. It seems, however, not to be a permanent closure. From a story of a Gryżyna birch we learn that a naughty child might even be spanked after one's death in order to open its road to salvation. There are more examples in which the dead is asking the living for forgiveness. An interlocutor in Belarus told us a story of her stepmother who treated her very badly. After her death she came to her in a dream (in accordance with the sequence: sinful-black-devilish) and she was black.

"Taka, o, twarz jej brązowa i patrzy na mnie. I nieboszczyk nie ma prawa pytać się, tylko patrzy. A ja mówię: 'Czemuż taka czarna i taka zbrzydzy?' A ona mówi: 'Bo na ciebie źle mówiła' [Z kolei umierający ojciec, którym opiekowała się rozmówczyni:] "raz mówi: 'Jadzia, daruj mnie za wszystko.' I zrozumiał swoje grzechy. 'Daruj, mówi, mnie za wszystko.' To ojca nie przyśniła, bo darowała" [79].

("So she had a brown face and looked at me. The dead cannot ask questions. They can only look. So I asked her: 'Why are you so black and ugly?' And she replied: 'Because I said those awful things about you.'" [At the same time, her dying father she was taking care of says once:] "'Jadzia, forgive me for everything.' He understood his sins. He did not come in a dream cause I forgave him.")

<sup>7</sup> An interesting ritual of washing one's feet-drinking the water (pouring it over oneself or sprinkling oneself with it) was recorded in mid-nineteenth century in Polesie by Romuald Zienkiewicz:

"Nowozamężną, po trzykrotnym oprowadzeniu około stołu i około ognia, sadzano naprzeciw rozpalonego ogniska, umywano jej nogi, a wodą tą skrapiano wszystkich obecnych i bydło (zapewne przez cześć, jaką mieli dla niepokalanej czystości i niewinności obyczajów)" [Zienkiewicz 1852: 526].

"A bride, once she goes round the table and the fire three times, is seated opposite the burning fire and her feet are washed while the water is then sprinkled on all those present and the cattle (probably because of the respect they had for unspoiled purity and innocence)." [Zienkiewicz 1852: 526].

In turn, Joanna Tokarska-Bakir draws our attention to the ritual drinking of the water in which a piece of paper was soaked with either the cursing formula or wishes written on it [cf. Tokarska-Bakir 2000: 146]. Water is a universal cultural medium with transitive functions – it can move characteristics from one object to another, it acts as a mediator, sets their similarities and unity.

<sup>8</sup> A similar message is included in a folk tale from the Wielkopolska region entitled *Salvation of Two Ghosts*. It tells a story of a young farmhand who moves a repenting ghost from the graveyard to the church where another ghost is kneeling by the altar.

"Czy widzisz tę białą osobę, co tam kłęczy przed wielkim ołtarzem? Jest to mój kumotr, z którym zwaśniwszy się za życia, pomarliśmy obaj w zagniewaniu. Już pięćdziesiąty rok tutaj pokutujem, a prędyż zbawionemi być nie możemy, dopóki nas kto na tej ziemi,

z którejśmy w gniewie odeszli, znów nie połączy. W twojej dziś mocy zbawić lub zgubić nas na wieki” [DWOK 14, *WKsPozn* 6: 182].

(“Can you see the white person kneeling by the great altar? He is a relative of mine. We had a row and died in anger. We have been repenting here for fifty years now and no earlier can we be saved than someone from the earth that we left in anger puts us back together. It is in your power to make us be saved or lost forever.”)

<sup>9</sup> Similarly to the devil’s fate which, despite a theoretical possibility of salvation, is sealed: “A devil came for the holy confession. He also would like to have his sins forgiven! The priest gave one condition: his sins might be forgiven if three times per day he will ask God for forgiveness. It was too much for the demon; he was not able to be humble before the Almighty” [Gurevich 1987: 281; according to *Dialogues* by Caesarius of Heisterbach].

<sup>10</sup> The text recorded in Papiernia needs to be regarded as a variation that contaminates elements of Belarusian magical folk tale tropes 300 (*Pogromca smoka – Dragon Tamer*), 301 (*Trzy podziemne królestwa – Three Underground Kingdoms*), 302 (*Śmierć Kościeja – Kościej’s Death*) and 303 (*Dwaj bracia – Two Brothers*), cf. Barah 1978: 45–51. As folk tale researchers claim, these tropes that include e.g. a motif of bringing a princess back to life with use of an animating egg and getting magical powers from supernatural helpers-animals, are very often contaminated, cf. also Afanasjew 1957, v. 3: 464–465, 558, 562, PBL 1: 81–87.

<sup>11</sup> In magical folk tales other magical props that bring those turned into stone back to life are sometimes magical apples, living (enchanted, holy) water, tears, blood, a green branch, cf. “Procedures for reversing petrification” [SSiSL 1: 396]. Moszyński writes about the magical treatment involving an egg being rolled in order to transfer to the object the egg’s health and life, cf. KLS: 280–281. My interlocutors, however, in the spirit of the Christian myth, associate cracking eggs (known from an Easter “egg game”) with Christ’s Resurrection:

“Te jajka rozbijają, że Pan Bóg zwyciężył. Grób rozbił się i kamień taki duży był przywalony dla Pana Jezusa. A ten grób rozpadł się i nic nie znaleźli, tylko szaty, i Pan Jezus w niebo wstąpił” [53].

(“They crack these eggs to show that God won. The grave broke into pieces, a big grave with a big stone for Jesus. But the grave broke into pieces and they found nothing but some clothes and Jesus was taken to heaven.”)

## CONCLUSION

<sup>1</sup> About the opposition: the unholy spirit using a curse *versus* Christian God, cf. Uspenskiy 1983: 42.

<sup>2</sup> “Obeying the generally accepted religious norms was a criterion for one’s belonging to a given social group while, at the same time, it created ties to strengthen solidarity and unity of the community. [...] A factor that strengthens this connection was on the one hand collective responsibility for individual deeds in a rural community and, on the other hand, a series of sanctions for a given individual, also getting excluded from ‘their own’ community” [Tomicki 1981: 54].

## APPENDIX

<sup>1</sup> Interview No. S/176 in the archives of IEiAK UW.

<sup>2</sup> A legend from Bessarabia entitled *Koniec przyjaźni Pana Boga z diabłem* (*End of Friendship between God and Devil* [Wrocławski 1985: 21, 25]) touches on the subject of the relation between the cross and the blessing. As we know, God and devil got down to the creation of the earth together. Yet, the devil wished to outwit God in order to be regarded as the only creator of the world. When one day God fell asleep

“the devil grabbed Him by His arms and started dragging Him into the water to push Him into it. The devil was walking towards the water while the earth stared growing and he couldn’t reach the water. He turned around and there the situation was the same. [He tried the other directions but in vain. The devil wasn’t successful so he woke God up and said: ‘Wake up. God, let’s bless the earth. Look how much it had grown while we were asleep!’ ‘When you were dragging me towards the water in order to push me into it you made the sign of the cross with my body and hence I blessed the earth,’ said God. The devil got angry, he left God alone and ran away from Him” [according to: Ivanov 1925; cf. folk tale trope T 2450].

<sup>3</sup> For example:

“Jak młoda jedzie do ślubu i nie pokłoni się, bo chłopcy stoją [a ona się ich wstydzi], to czarownik tak zrobi, że będzie za stołem haukać.”

(“When the bride is on the way to her wedding and she fails to bow because there are young lads standing [and they make her feel embarrassed], the sorcerer will make her bark at the table.”)

<sup>4</sup> It’s worth citing some parts of the songs for the apologizing ceremony, e.g.:

“Przeproś Marysiu swoją mateńkę / jeśliś ją przegniewała, / jak nie przeprosisz, jak nie przebłagasz / nie będziesz doli miała. / Przepraszę ja cię moja mateńko / jeśliś cię przegniewała, / oj, może by ja od Pana Boga / lepszą doliczkę miała” [DWOK 16, *Lub* 1: 157].

(“Marysia, apologize to your mommy /if you made her angry, / if you don’t apologize to her, if she doesn’t forgive you / you will not have good fortune. / I will apologize to you, mommy / if I made you angry, / oh, God might give me / better fortune.”)

“Z dunaju wodę bierzcie, / Ojca, matkę przeproście. / Przeproście ojca, matkę / I całą rodzineckę, / Do wom Poniezus, do wom / Scęśliwą godzineckę” [Kotula 1969: 31].

(“Take some water from the Danube, /apologize to your father and mother. /apologize to your father and mother /And the whole family, /Jesus will give you, will give you / A happy hour.”)

<sup>5</sup> A ritual thanking “for the hardships of my upbringing during your entire lives” is performed by the bride and it has a similar function. [Kotula 1969: 34]. This is perhaps best manifested by the wedding song commonly known as *Siadany*.

<sup>6</sup> Only one interlocutor provided me with an example (her personal experience) of the marriage ceremony with no parental blessing which she commented on as “nothing to be afraid of”. In her case, however, it was followed by a reconciliation with her parents:

“Ja i sama prociū woli bačkoū zamuż pajszła. [Jak?] Uziała czamadana u ruki i paszła biez błahasławienstwa. Baćki płakali. Moża i klali, Boh ich znaje. [Potym żyli ū zhodzie z baćkami?] Kanieszno ū zhodzie. Paszła, dy i paszła. Kuda baćki dzienucca prociū swajej dziciaci? Nu, mnoha takich bywaje słuczajew” [52].

(“I got married against my parents’ will”. [How?] I took a suitcase and left without the blessing. My parents cried. They might have cursed too, God only knows. [Did you get

on with your parents after that?] Of course I did. She got married, a big deal. What can parents do against their child's will? Well, there are many cases like mine.")

<sup>7</sup> The scenario of the wedding ritual is bound to include playing the roles of the absent (deceased) parents by other actors of the ritual, cf.

"Jak nie żyją rodzice, to błogosławią chrzestni, sąsiedzi, ktoś starszy zżyty z tą rodziną, czy ktoś z dalszej rodziny" [21].

("If the parents are deceased the blessing is given by the godparents, neighbors, an elder with close ties to the family, or a distant relative.")

"Chto-ta i siratu wyprałaje. Chto-ta skaża, swaty. Ci, bywaje, chryszczonyja bački wyprałajuć. Balszynstwo chryszczonyja dałżny wyprałać. No takija ludzi dałżny wyprałać, szto b jany nie byli ɯdowami ci ɯdaɯcami. Dałżny wyprałać parnyja ludzi. I z szlubu jak prynimajuć u chatu maładych, teź dałżny paraju prynimać. Adzinokaja nie dałżna prynimać baba, ci mužczyna. To taki zwyczaj" [52].

"Somebody is preparing the orphan for the wedding. Someone is giving the speech (match-makers). Or it might be the godparents who prepare the wedding. It is usually the godparents, it should be them. But it should not be widows or widowers. It should be a couple. And when they welcome the newly married couple at home they should do so together, as a couple. A single man or woman should not welcome the young couple. That's the tradition.")

<sup>8</sup> Diversified versions of wedding songs for the orphan can be easily recorded these days in the field; they are also very often encountered in printed sources, e.g.:

"Jeżeli młoda jest sierotą, wtedy śpiewają pieśń niby od zmarłych rodziców do Boga: 'Spuść mię, Boże, na ziemię, / sprawię córce wesele. / – Są tam przyjaciele, / sprawią córce wesele. / Ja ci się, Boże, skradnę, / z drobnym deszczykiem spadnę. / – Je tam przyjaciele, / sprawią córce wesele. / Żebym ja tam, Boże, była, / lepsze-by ja jej sprawiła'" [DWOK 16, *Lub* 1: 168].

("If the bride is an orphan then they sing a song for her as if it was sung by her deceased parents for God: 'God, let me go down to the earth/I will prepare my daughter's wedding./ There are friends, / they will prepare my daughter's wedding./ God, I will let myself be kidnapped, /I'll fall down with the drizzle. / There are friends, /they will prepare my daughter's wedding. / God, if I were there, / I'd prepare her a better one.'")

"A co tam w komorze stuka? / Marysia mateńki szuka: / – Oj odezwi się mateńko, / Oj, bo mi bez ciebie ciężko. / – Nie odezwę się, dzieciątko! / Zbudowali mi wieczny dom, / Ni tu słońeczko dogrzeje, / Ni tu wiaterek dowieje. / Oj, puśćże mnie dzisiaj Boże / Małą chmurką do ziemicy, / Drobnym deszczem do świetlicy. / Oj, niechże ja napatrzę się, / Czy dobrze tam urządzono, / Czy na dzieży posadzono? / Oj, niedobrze urządzono, / Oj, niedobrze posadzono. / Marysia żałośnie płacze, / Jako kukaweczka kuje, / Jak słowiczek wyśpiewuje, / Na sadeńku wiśniowym" [Gloger 1901: 49].

("What is that noise in the chamber? / Marysia is looking for her mommy: / Oh, speak to me, mommy, / Oh, it's so hard without you. / I won't speak to you, my dear! / They built me an eternal home, / No sun makes me warm here, / No wind makes me cool here. / Oh God, let me go today, / on a little cloud to the earth, /with drizzle to the living room. / Oh, let me have a good look, / If they prepared everything well, / Did they put her on the kneading bowl? / Oh, they did it wrong, / Oh, they put her badly on. / Marysia is weeping, / Like a cuckoo she is calling, /Like a nightingale she is singing, /In the cherry orchard.")

<sup>9</sup> More examples of similar funeral speeches recorded in current times in the region of Grodno can be found in: Adamowski, Doda, Mickiewicz 1998: 275–278.

## THE INTERLOCUTORS

1. Paweł Piwoni, born ca. 1900, commune of Tuczna, powiat of Biała Podlaska, Lublin voivodship, Poland; August 1980 and May 1983.
2. Józefa Romaniukowa, born ca. 1910, Połoski, commune of Piszczac, powiat of Biała Podlaska, Lublin voivodship, Poland; August 1980.
3. Ms Kłosowa, born ca. 1900, Popielewo, commune of Liw, powiat of Węgrów, Mazovia voivodship, Poland; November 1980.
4. Helena Michałowska, born ca. 1920, Popielewo, commune of Liw, powiat of Węgrów, Mazovia voivodship, Poland; November 1980.
5. Salomea Staniszevska, born ca. 1900, Popielewo, commune of Liw, powiat of Węgrów, Mazovia voivodship, Poland; November 1980.
6. Aniela Strąkowa, born ca. 1905, Popielewo, commune of Liw, powiat of Węgrów, Mazovia voivodship, Poland; November 1980.
7. Helena Strąkowska, born ca. 1925, Popielewo, commune of Liw, powiat of Węgrów, Mazovia voivodship, Poland; November 1980.
8. Marianna Szczepanikowa, born ca. 1925, Popielewo, commune of Liw, powiat of Węgrów, Mazovia voivodship, Poland; November 1980.
9. Zofia Wolska, born ca. 1910, Popielewo, commune of Liw, powiat of Węgrów, Mazovia voivodship, Poland; November 1980.
10. Stanisława Gwoździowa, born 1923, Ubieszyn, commune of Tryńcza, powiat of Przeworsk, Subcarpathian voivodship, Poland; July 1981.
11. Ms Czarnacka, born 1905, Huszcza, commune of Łomazy, powiat of Biała Podlaska, Lublin voivodship, Poland; May 1983.
12. Ms Czarnacka and her daughter, born ca. 1920 and ca. 1950, Wiski, commune of Tuczna, powiat of Biała Podlaska, Lublin voivodship, Poland; May 1983.
13. Józef Hołownia, born 1903, Huszcza, commune of Łomazy, powiat of Biała Podlaska, Lublin voivodship, Poland; May 1983 and July 1985.

14. Andrzej Kowieski, born 1898, Huszcza, commune of Łomazy, powiat of Biąła Podlaska, Lublin voivodship, Poland; May 1983.
15. Helena Mikulska, born ca. 1920, Choroszczynka, commune of Tuczna, powiat of Biąła Podlaska, Lublin voivodship, Poland; May 1983.
16. Stanisław Ołędzki, born 1913, Wiski, commune of Tuczna, powiat of Biąła Podlaska, Lublin voivodship, Poland; May 1983.
17. Józefa Pietraszuk, born 1900, Koszoły, commune of Łomazy, powiat of Biąła Podlaska, Lublin voivodship, Poland; May 1983.
18. Ms Przesmycka, born 1923, Huszcza, commune of Łomazy, powiat of Biąła Podlaska, Lublin voivodship, Poland; May 1983 and July 1985.
19. Ms Czapska, born ca. 1900, commune of Tuczna, powiat of Biąła Podlaska, Lublin voivodship, Poland; January 1984.
20. Albin Skutnik, born 1902, Bagno, commune of Jaświły, powiat of Mońki, Podlaskie voivodship, Poland; July 1984.
21. Conversation with a group, commune of Jaświły, powiat of Mońki, Podlaskie voivodship, Poland; July 1984.
22. Eudokia Babkiewicz, born 1896, Zahorów, commune of Kodeń, powiat of Biąła Podlaska, Lublin voivodship; July 1985.
23. Luba Czerżan and Wiera Zinzuk, born ca. 1925, Zabłocie, commune of Kodeń, powiat of Biąła Podlaska, Lublin voivodship, Poland; July 1985.
24. Helena Filip and Adolf Filip, born ca. 1915 and ca. 1925, Choroszczynka, commune of Tuczna, powiat of Biąła Podlaska, Lublin voivodship, Poland; July 1985.
25. Ms Maksymiukowa, born 1897, Dobratycze, commune of Kodeń, powiat of Biąła Podlaska, Lublin voivodship, Poland; July 1985.
26. Szczepan Makuła, born 1911, Choroszczynka, commune of Tuczna, powiat of Biąła Podlaska, Lublin voivodship, Poland; July 1985.
27. Mikołaj Martyniuk and his wife, born ca. 1915, Wólka Zabłocka, commune of Kodeń, powiat of Biąła Podlaska, Lublin voivodship, Poland; July 1985.
28. Joanna Mielezko, born 1905, Choroszczynka, commune of Tuczna, powiat of Biąła Podlaska, Lublin voivodship, Poland; July 1985.
29. Maria Mielezko, born 1925, Choroszczynka, commune of Tuczna, powiat of Biąła Podlaska, Lublin voivodship, Poland; July 1985.
30. Antonina Nazaruk, born ca. 1925, Zabłocie, commune of Kodeń, powiat of Biąła Podlaska, Lublin voivodship, Poland; July 1985.
31. Ms Piasecka, born ca. 1925, Dobratycze, commune of Kodeń, powiat of Biąła Podlaska, Lublin voivodship, Poland; July 1985.

32. Maria Szulc, born ca. 1915, Choroszczyńska, commune of Tucznia, powiat of Biała Podlaska, Lublin voivodship, Poland; July 1985.
33. Marianna Ślazona and Marianna Szutkowska, born approx. 1895, Choroszczyńska, commune of Tucznia, powiat of Biała Podlaska, Lublin voivodship, Poland; July 1985.
34. Two women, born ca. 1925, Korzanówka, commune of Kodeń, powiat of Biała Podlaska, Lublin voivodship, Poland; July 1985.
35. 35. Stefania Baranowska, born 1908, Makowlany, commune of Sidra, powiat of Sokółka, Podlaskie voivodship, Poland; August 1988.
36. Franciszek Krahel and Stanisława Krahel, born 1921 and 1930, Wesołowo, commune of Dąbrowa Białostocka, powiat of Sokółka, Podlaskie voivodship, Poland; August 1988.
37. Stanisława Krzywicka, born 1906, Krasnybór, commune of Sztabin, powiat of Augustów, Podlaskie voivodship, Poland; August 1988.
38. Maria Sankowska, born 1914, Skieblewo, commune of Lipsk, powiat of Augustów, Podlaskie voivodship, Poland; August 1988.
39. Maria Żuk, born 1913, commune of Nowy Dwór, powiat of Sokółka, Podlaskie voivodship, Poland; August 1988.
40. Two women, born 1913 and ca. 1945, Hanna, commune of Sławatycze, powiat of Biała Podlaska, Lublin voivodship, Poland; July 1989.
41. Man and woman, born ca. 1920, Huszcza, commune of Łomazy, powiat of Biała Podlaska, Lublin voivodship, Poland; July 1989.
42. Woman, born ca. 1920, Łomazy, powiat of Biała Podlaska, Lublin voivodship, Poland; July 1989.
43. Woman and man, born approx. 1925, Ogrodniki, commune of Tucznia, powiat of Biała Podlaska, Lublin voivodship, Poland; July 1989.
44. Biblis, born ca. 1920, Lida, Hrodna oblast, Belarus; April 1993.
45. Biernacki and Teresa Biernacka, born ca. 1930 and ca. 1935, Rovby, commune of Mazheykava, Lida raion, Hrodna oblast, Belarus; April 1993; talking to Danuta Życzyńska-Ciołek.
46. Federowicz, born 1930, Navitskii, Lida raion, Hrodna oblast, Belarus; April 1993; talking to Jacek Cichocki.
47. Rouba, born ca. 1920, Rovby, commune of Mazheykava, Lida raion, Hrodna oblast, Belarus; April 1993; talking to Piotr Piszczatowski.
48. Szurmiej, born 1911, Krupovo, commune of Navitskii, Lida raion, Hrodna oblast, Belarus; April 1993; talking to Tatiana Latusek.
49. Bernarda Szymulewicz, born 1923, commune of Myto, Lida raion, Hrodna oblast, Belarus; April 1993.

50. Gabis, born 1917, Papernia, commune of Vaviorka, Lida raion, Hrodna oblast, Belarus; July 1993, June 1995.
51. Mozgiel, born 1913, Papernia, commune of Vaviorka, Lida raion, Hrodna oblast, Belarus; July 1993; talking to Katarzyna Dąbek.
52. Tarkhonina, born ca.1935, Feliksava, commune of Mazheykava, Lida raion, Hrodna oblast, Belarus; July 1993.
53. Siewruk, born 1922, Papernia, commune of Vaviorka, Lida raion, Hrodna oblast, Belarus; July 1993, May and November 1994, February 1997.
54. Wasilewicz and Jadwiga Wasilewicz, born ca. 1920, Papernia, commune of Vaviorka, Lida raion, Hrodna oblast, Belarus; July and November 1993; talking to Anna Engelking and Danuta Życzyńska-Ciołek.
55. Bobrownik, born 1906, Radzivonishki, commune of Mazheykava, Lida raion, Hrodna oblast, Belarus; November 1993; talking to Justyna Straczuk.
56. Bójko, born 1930, Bilitaŭtsy, commune of Mazheykava, Lida raion, Hrodna oblast, Belarus; November 1993 and September 1997; talking to Anna Engelking and Dorota Kołakowska.
57. Dąbrowska, born 1922, Vaviorka, Lida raion, Hrodna oblast, Belarus; November 1993.
58. Zuzanna Kozłowska, born 1930, Papernia, commune of Vaviorka, Lida raion, Hrodna oblast, Belarus; November 1993.
59. Jan Kucharewicz, born 1951, Meyry, commune of Vaviorka, Lida raion, Hrodna oblast, Belarus; November 1993; talking to Katarzyna Kolasa.
60. Wiera Nowicka, born 1938, Radzivonishki, commune of Mazheykava, Lida raion, Hrodna oblast, Belarus; November 1993, February 1997.
61. Anna Rychlicka, born 1912 and her daughter Wiera Nowicka, born 1938, Radzivonishki, commune of Mazheykava, Lida raion, Hrodna oblast, Belarus; November 1993, May 1994.
62. Jelena Ryszkiewicz, born 1911, Lebiada, commune of Mazheykava, Lida raion, Hrodna oblast, Belarus; November 1993; talking to Jacek Cichocki.
63. Taisa Szurmiej, born 1921, Radzivonishki, commune of Mazheykava, Lida raion, Hrodna oblast, Belarus; November 1993, May 1994, June 1995.
64. Walentyna Zajko, born 1935, Radzivonishki, commune of Mazheykava, Lida raion, Hrodna oblast, Belarus; November 1993, April 1994.
65. Maryia Zhevatel, born 1925, Krasnouŭtsy, commune of Vaviorka, Lida raion, Hrodna oblast, Belarus; November 1993, November 1994.
66. Feliks Kowza and his wife, born 1924, Piliuntsy, commune of Bolt-sishki, Voranava raion, Hrodna oblast, Belarus; May 1994; talking to Justyna Straczuk.

67. Janina Patrason, born 1912, Surkanty, commune of Boltsishki, Voranava raion, Hrodna oblast, Belarus; November 1994.
68. Waleria Stacewicz, born 1916, Surkanty, commune of Boltsishki, Voranava raion, Hrodna oblast, Belarus; November 1994.
69. Woman, born 1920, Almany, commune of Stolin, Stolin raion, Brest oblast, Belarus; January 1995.
70. Mr and Mrs Leszkiewicz, born 1933 and 1935, Veliamichy, commune of Davyd-Haradok, Stolin raion, Brest oblast, Belarus; June 1995; talking to Lubomira Trojan.
71. Walentyna Rychlicka, born 1942, Radivonishki, commune of Mazheykava, Lida raion, Hrodna oblast, Belarus; June 1995.
72. Wiera Tiuchaj-Lipska, born ca. 1935, Alpen', commune of Davyd-Haradok, Stolin raion, Brest oblast, Belarus; June 1995.
73. Helena Kiepuszko, born ca. 1930, Meyry, commune of Vaviorka, Lida raion, Hrodna oblast, Belarus; September 1997; talking to Dorota Kołakowska and Michał Orgelbrand.
74. Woman, born 1932, Beshenki, commune of Mazheykava, Lida raion, Hrodna oblast, Belarus; September 1997; talking to Przemysław Kordos.
75. Teresa Kostusik, born 1928, Chesheyki, commune of Vaviorka, Lida raion, Hrodna oblast, Belarus; September 1997; talking to Marcin Krzanowski.
76. Anna Rouba, born ca.1933, Rovby, commune of Mazheykava, Lida raion, Hrodna oblast, Belarus; September 1997; talking to Dorota Kołakowska.
77. Maria Sawras, born 1930, Feliksava, commune of Mazheykava, Lida raion, Hrodna oblast, Belarus; September 1997, talking to Małgorzata Just.
78. Alfred Derengowski, born 1929, Hineli, commune of Nacha, Voranava raion, Hrodna oblast, Belarus; July 1998.
79. Jadwiga Sadowska, born 1921, Shaury, commune of Nacha, Voranava raion, Belarus; July 1998; talking to Dorota Kołakowska.
80. Maryia Denisiuk, born 1929, Aleksichi, commune of Hlinishcha, Khoyniki raion, Homel oblast, Belarus; May 2003.
81. Hanna Dułub, born 1923, commune of Malyia Aŭtsiuki, Kalinkavichy raion, Homel oblast, Belarus; May 2003; talking to Raman Likhshapka and Iryna Maziuk.
82. Hanna Kowalczuk, born 1925, Aleksichi, commune of Hlinishcha, Khoyniki raion, Homel oblast, Belarus; May 2003; talking to Iryna Alunina and Olga Linkiewicz.

83. Halina Kuszniar, born 1933, Aleksichi, commune of Hlinishcha, Khoyniki raion, Homel oblast, Belarus; May 2003; talking to Anna Engelking and Roman Kabachij.
84. Tatiana Maiushchenko, born 1932, commune of Malyia Aŭtsiuki, Kalinkavichy raion, Homel oblast, Belarus; May 2003; talking to Dominika Diakiewcz.
85. Maryia Putsenka, born 1922, commune of Malyia Aŭtsiuki, Kalinkavichy raion, Homel oblast, Belarus; May 2003.
86. Zhenia, born ca. 1930, Karaniouka, commune of Hlinishcha, Khoyniki raion, Homel oblast, Belarus; May 2003; talking to Dominika Diakiewicz.

## REFERENCES

### List of Abbreviations

- Buck: Buck Carl Darling, 1988, *A Dictionary of Selected Synonyms in the Principal Indo-European Languages*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- DWOK: Kolberg Oskar, 1961–, *Dzieła wszystkie* [Complete Works], vol. 1–, Poznań–Wrocław: Instytut im. Oskara Kolberga, Polskie Towarzystwo Ludoznawcze.
- BiałPol: *Belarus and Polesie*,
- Chełm: *Chełm region*,
- Kiel: *Kielce region*,
- Krak: *Krakow region*,
- Kuj: *Kujawy region*,
- Łęcz: *Łęczycza region*,
- Lub: *Lublin region*,
- Maz: *Mazovia region*,
- MazPr: *Prussian Masuria region*,
- Pok: *Pokucie region*,
- Sand: *Sandomierz region*,
- SanKr: *Sanok and Krosno region*,
- TarnRzesz: *Tarnów and Rzeszów region*,
- WKsPozn: *Grand Duchy of Poznań*.
- ES: Zygmunt Gloger, 1902–1903, *Encyklopedia staro-polska ilustrowana* [An Illustrated Old Polish Encyclopaedia], vol. 1–4, Warszawa: Piotr Laskauer i S-ka.
- ESS: Oleg N. Trubachev (ed.), 1974–, *Etimologicheskii slovar' slawianskikh iazykov. Praslavianskiy leksicheskiy fond* [An Etymological Dictionary of the Slavic Languages. The Proto-Slavic Vocabulary], vol. 1–, Moskva: Akademiia nauk SSSR / Rossiyskaia akademiia Nauk – Institut russkogo iazyka im. V. V. Vinogradova.
- IEiAK UW: Instytut Etnologii i Antropologii Kulturowej Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego [Institute of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology, University of Warsaw].
- KLS: Kazimierz Moszyński, 1967, *Kultura ludowa Słowian* [Slavic Folk Culture], vol. 2, pt. 1: *Kultura duchowa* [Spiritual Culture], Warszawa: “Książka i Wiedza.”
- KPBL: Elżbieta Jaworska, 1990, *Katalog polskiej ballady ludowej* [Catalogue of Polish Folk Ballads], Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich.

- LB 1: Michał Federowski, 1897, *Lud białoruski na Rusi Litewskiej. Materyały do etnografii słowiańskiej zgromadzone w latach 1877–1891* [The Belarusian Folk of Lithuanian Ruthenia. Materials for the Study of Slavic Ethnography Collected in the Years 1877–1891], vol. 1: *Wiara, wierzenia i przesądy ludu z okolic Wołkowyska, Słonima, Lidy i Sokółki* [Religiosity, Beliefs and Superstitions from the Regions of Vaukavysk, Slonim, Lida and Sokółka], Kraków: Komisja Antropologiczna Akademii Umiejętności.
- LB 3: Michał Federowski, 1903, *Lud białoruski na Rusi Litewskiej. Materyały do etnografii słowiańskiej zgromadzone w latach 1877–1894* [The Belarusian Folk of Lithuanian Ruthenia. Materials for the Study of Slavic Ethnography Collected in the Years 1877–1894], vol. 3: *Baśnie, przypowieści i podania ludu z okolic Wołkowyska, Słonima, Lidy, Nowogródka i Sokółki*, [Folk Tales, Fairy Tales and Stories from the Regions of Vaukavysk, Slonim, Lida and Sokółka], Kraków: Komisja Antropologiczna Akademii Umiejętności.
- LB 4: Michał Federowski, 1935, *Lud białoruski na Rusi Litewskiej. Materyały do etnografii słowiańskiej zgromadzone w latach 1877–1905* [The Belarusian Folk of Lithuanian Ruthenia. Materials for the Study of Slavic Ethnography Collected in the Years 1877–1905], vol. 4: *Przysłowia, żarciki, wyrażenia stałe oraz zagadki ludu, mieszczan i zagrodowców z okolic Grodna, Sokółki, Białegostoku, Bielska, Wołkowyska, Słonima, Nowogródka, Słucka, Lidy, Wilejki, Świecian i Oszmiany* [Proverbs, Jokes, Fixed Expressions and Riddles of the Peasants, Town-Dwellers and Petty Noblemen from the Regions of Hrodna, Sokółka, Białystok, Bielsk, Vaukavysk, Slonim, Navahrudok, Slutsk, Lida, Vileyka, Śvenčionys and Ashmiany], Warszawa: Towarzystwo Naukowe Warszawskie.
- Linde: Samuel Bogumił Linde, 1951, *Słownik języka polskiego* [A Dictionary of the Polish Language], vol. 1–6, Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy.
- MAAiE: *Materiały Antropologiczno-Archeologiczne i Etnograficzne*, [Anthropologico-Archaeological and Ethnographic Materials], 1896–1919, vol. 1–14, Kraków: Akademia Umiejętności.
- MNM: *Mify narodov mira*, 1987, ed. Sergey A. Tokarev, vol. 1–2, Moskva: Sovetskaiia Enciklopediia.
- MSJP: *Mały słownik języka polskiego* [A Concise Dictionary of Polish], 1968, ed. Stanisław Skorupka, Halina Auderska, Zofia Łempicka, Warszawa: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe.
- NKP: *Nowa księga przysłów i wyrażen przysłowiowych polskich* [A New Book of Polish Proverbs and Proverbial Expressions], 1969–1978, ed. Julian Krzyżanowski, vol. 1–4, Warszawa: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe.
- PBL: Julian Krzyżanowski, 1962–1963, *Polska bajka ludowa w układzie systematycznym* [Polish Folk Tales in a Systematic Arrangement], vol. 1–2, Wrocław–Warsaw–Kraków: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich.
- Pokorny: Julius Pokorny, 1959–1969, *Indogermanisches Etymologisches Wörterbuch*, vol. 1–2, Bern–München: Francke.
- SBH: *Słownik belaruskikh havorak paŭnochna-zakhodniay Belarusi i iaię pahranichcha* [A Dictionary of Belarusian Dialects of North-Eastern Belarus and Its Borderland], 1979–1986, ed. Iuzefa F. Matskevich et al., vol. 1–5, Minsk: “Navuka i Tekhnika.”

- SD: *Slavianskiiie drevnosti. Etnolingvisticheskiy slovar' w 5 tomakh* [Slavic Antiquities. An Ethnolinguistic Dictionary in 5 Volumes], 1995–, ed. Nikita I. Tolstoy et al., Moskva: Mieżhdunarodnyie otnosheniia.
- SEBr: Aleksander Brückner, 1970, *Słownik etymologiczny języka polskiego* [An Etymological Dictionary of the Polish Language], Warszawa: Wiedza Powszechna.
- SESł: Franciszek Sławski, 1952–1982, *Słownik etymologiczny języka polskiego* [An Etymological Dictionary of the Polish Language], vol. 1–5, Kraków: Towarzystwo Miłośników Języka Polskiego.
- SFP: *Słownik folkloru polskiego* [A Dictionary of Polish Folklore], 1965, ed. Julian Krzyżanowski, Warszawa: Wiedza Powszechna.
- SFraz: Stanisław Skorupka, 1974, *Słownik frazeologiczny języka polskiego* [A Phraseological Dictionary of the Polish Language], vol. 1–2, Warszawa: Wiedza Powszechna.
- SGP: *Słownik gwar polskich* [A Dictionary of Polish Dialects], 1979–, vol. 1–, ed. Mieczysław Karaś et al., Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich.
- SGPKarł: Jan Karłowicz, 1900–1911, *Słownik gwar polskich* [A Dictionary of Polish Dialects], vol. 1–6, Kraków: Akademia Umiejętności.
- SJPDor: *Słownik języka polskiego* [A Dictionary of the Polish Language], 1958–1969, ed. Witold Doroszewski, vol. 1–11, Warszawa: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe.
- SJPSz: *Słownik języka polskiego* [A Dictionary of the Polish Language], 1983, ed. Mieczysław Szymczak, vol. 1–3, Warszawa: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe.
- SLSJ: *Słownik ludowych stereotypów językowych. Zeszyt próbny* [A Dictionary of Folk Linguistic Stereotypes. Trial Issue], 1980, ed. Jerzy Bartmiński, Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego.
- SPsł: *Słownik prasłowiański* [A Proto-Slavic Dictionary], 1974–2001, vol. 1–8, ed. Franciszek Sławski, Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich.
- SSISL: *Słownik stereotypów i symboli ludowych* [A Dictionary of Folk Stereotypes and Symbols], 1996, 1999, ed. Jerzy Bartmiński, vol. 1: *Kosmos* [The Universe], pt. 1–2, Lublin: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Marii Curie-Skłodowskiej.
- SSS: *Słownik starożytności słowiańskich. Encyklopedyczny zarys kultury Słowian od czasów najdawniejszych* [A Dictionary of Polish Antiquities. An Encyclopaedic Outline of the Slavic Culture from the Most Ancient Times], 1961–1997 ed. Władysław Kowalenko, Gerard Labuda, Tadeusz Lehr-Spławiński, vol. 1–8, Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich.
- SStp: *Słownik staropolski* [A Dictionary of Old Polish], 1953–2002, ed. Kazimierz Nitsch, Stanisław Urbańczyk, vol. 1–11, Warszawa–Kraków: Polska Akademia Nauk, Instytut Języka Polskiego.
- SW: *Słownik języka polskiego* [A Dictionary of the Polish Language], 1900–1927, ed. Jan Karłowicz, Adam Antoni Kryński, Władysław Niedźwiedzki, vol. 1–8, Warszawa: Kasa im. Mianowskiego.
- SWil: Aleksander Zdanowicz, 1861, *Słownik języka polskiego, obejmujący oprócz zbioru właściwie polskich, znaczną liczbę wyrazów z obcych języków polskiemu przyswojonych* [A Dictionary of the Polish Language, Comprising, Apart from the Collection of Polish Words, also Large Quantities of Foreign Words Adopted into Polish], vol. 1–2, Wilno: M. Orgelbrand.

- SXVI: *Słownik polszczyzny XVI wieku* [A Dictionary of Sixteenth Century Polish], 1966–2004, ed. Maria Renata Mayenowa, vol. 1–32, Wrocław–Warszawa: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, Wydawnictwo IBL PAN.
- Vasmer: Max Vasmer, 1986, *Etimologicheskij slovar' russkogo iazyka*, ed. Oleg N. Trubachev, vol. 1–4, Moskva: "Progress."

## Other Works Cited

- Aarne Antti, 1961, *The Types of the Folktale. A Classification and Bibliography*, trans. Stith Thompson, Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia, Academia Scientiarum Fennica.
- Adamowski Jan, Bartmiński Jerzy, Niebrzegowska Stanisława, 1995, Ptaki, zwierzęta i rośliny w relacjach gwarowych z okolic Biłgoraja [Birds, Animals and Plants in Dialect Accounts From the Biłgoraj Area], *Etnolingwistyka*, vol. 7, pp. 135–178.
- Adamowski Jan, Doda Jadwiga, Mickiewicz Halina, 1998, *Śmierć i pogrzeb w relacjach Polaków mieszkających na Białorusi* [Death and funeral in the Accounts of Poles Living in Belarus], *Etnolingwistyka*, vol. 9–10, pp. 253–318.
- Adamowski Jan, Kodis Irena, Prokopowicz Anna, 1991, *Materiały do folkloru Polaków okolic Wilna* [Materials for the Study of Folklore of the Vilnius Region], *Twórczość Ludowa*, no. 3–4, pp. 56–60.
- Afanasiev Aleksandr N., 1957, *Narodnyie russkie skazki A. N. Afanasieva* [A. N. Afanasiev's Russian Folk Tales], ed. Vladimir Ia. Propp, vol. 1–3, Moskva: Gosudarstvennoe Izdatelstvo Khudozhestvennoy Literatury.
- Ajdačić Dejan, 1992, Kletva u kontekstu žanrova usmene književnosti [The Curse in the Context of Oral Literature Genres], *Književna istorija*, no. 24, pp. 193–203.
- Austin John L., 1962, *How to Do Things with Words. The William James Lectures Delivered at Harvard University in 1955*, ed. James O. Urmson, Marina Sbisà. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Bakhtin Mikhail, 1986, Speech Genres, in: Mikhail Bakhtin, *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, trans. Vern W. McGee, ed. Caryl Emerson, Michael Holquist, Austin: University of Texas Press, pp. 60–102.
- Barah Leŭ R., 1978, *Siuzhety i matyvy belaruskikh narodnykh kazak. Sistematychny pakazalnik*, ed. Ivan U. Salamevich, Minsk: Navuka i tekhnika.
- Barthel de Weydenthal Maria, 1922, *Urocne oczy* [Evil Eyes] (Archiwum Towarzystwa Naukowego we Lwowie 1), Lwów: Towarzystwo Naukowe we Lwowie.
- Bartmiński Jerzy, 1975, Wokół Lordowskiej koncepcji formuły [On Lord's Concept of Formula], *Literatura Ludowa*, no. 6, pp. 3–11.
- Bartmiński Jerzy (ed.), 1989, Relacje o kosmosie. Teksty gwarowe z okolic Biłgoraja [Accounts about the Universe. Dialect Texts from the Biłgoraj Area], *Etnolingwistyka*, vol. 2, pp. 95–149.
- Bartmiński Jerzy, 1998, Dusze rzewnie zapłakały. Odmiany gatunkowe pieśni o wędrowce dusz szukających miejsca wiecznego spoczynku [The Souls Shed Bitter Tears. Generic Variations of the Song about Souls Looking for a Final Resting Place], *Etnolingwistyka*, vol. 9–10, pp. 149–168.

- Baudouin de Courtenay Jan, 1984, *Charakterystyka psychologiczna języka polskiego* [Psychological Characteristics of the Polish Language], in: Jan Baudouin de Courtenay, *O języku polskim* [On the Polish Language], ed. Jan Basara, Mieczysław Szymczak, Warszawa: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe.
- Bera Małgorzata, 1997, *Jednostki z wyrażeniami "cholera" i "diabeł." Próba analizy semantycznej* [Linguistic Units Using the Words "Cholera" and "Devil." A Tentative Semantic Analysis], *Polonica*, vol. 18, pp. 125–140.
- Betz Hans Dieter, 1987, Magic in Greco-Roman Antiquity, in: *The Encyclopaedia of Religion*, ed. Mircea Eliade, vol. 9, New York–London: Macmillan Publishing Company, pp. 93–97.
- Biegeleisen Henryk, 1930, *Śmierć w obrzędach, zwyczajach i wierzeniach ludu polskiego* [Death in the Rituals, Customs and Beliefs of the Polish Folk], Warszawa: Dom Książki Polskiej.
- Blank Sheldon H., 1950–1951, The Curse, Blasphemy, the Spell, and the Oath, *Hebrew Union College Annual*, vol. 23, no. 1, pp. 73–95.
- Bogusławski Andrzej, 1974, O rozkazniku [On the Imperative], *Prace Filologiczne*, vol. 25, pp. 191–198.
- Bogusławski Andrzej, 1994, Czy wiedza, że P, pociąga za sobą inny stan mentalny [Does Knowing that P Bring About a Changed Mental State?], in: *Znaczenie i prawda. Rozprawy semiotyczne* [Meaning and Truth. Semiotic Writings], ed. Jerzy Pelc, Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, pp. 391–411.
- Brichto Herbert Chanan, 1963, *The Problem of "Curse" in the Hebrew Bible*, Philadelphia: Society of Biblical Literature and Exegesis.
- Bruce Frederick Fyrie, 1982, The Curse of the Law, in: *Paul and Paulinism. Essays in honour of C. K. Barrett*, ed. Morna Dorothy Hooker, Stephen G. Wilson, London: SPCK, pp. 27–36.
- Brückner Aleksander, 1980, *Mitologia słowiańska i polska* [Slavic and Polish Mythology], Warszawa: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe.
- Bryl Janka, 1979, *Bajdy Dolne* [Bajdy Dolne], Łódź: Wydawnictwo Łódzkie.
- Buchowski Michał, 1986, *Magia, jej funkcje i struktura* [Magic: Its Function and Structure], Poznań: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu im. Adama Mickiewicza.
- Buchowski Michał, 1993, *Magia i rytuał* [Magic and Ritual], Warszawa: Instytut Kultury.
- Buchowski Michał, Burszta Wojciech, 1986, Status języka w świadomości magicznej [The Status of Language in Magical Consciousness], *Etnografia Polska*, vol. 30, no. 1, pp. 31–40.
- Buchowski Michał, Burszta Wojciech, 1992, *O założeniach interpretacji antropologicznej* [On the Tenets of Anthropological Interpretation], Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN.
- Budziszewska Wanda, 1989, O niektórych nazwach chorób i związanych z nimi demonów w językach słowiańskich [About Some Names of Diseases and Related Demons in Slavic Languages], in: *Paralele w rozwoju słownictwa języków słowiańskich* [Parallels in Vocabulary Development of Slavic Languages], ed. Hanna Popowska-Taborska, Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, pp. 153–160.

- Budziszewska Wanda, 1990, Z semantyki magii [From the Semantics of Magic], *Etnolingwistyka*, vol. 7, pp. 7–19.
- Budziszewska Wanda, 1991a, Polskie nazwy zmór i niektóre wierzenia z nimi związane [Polish Names for Wraiths and Some Beliefs Pertaining to Them], *Studia z Filologii Polskiej i Słowiańskiej*, vol. 27, pp. 17–23.
- Budziszewska Wanda, 1991b, Z problematyki obcości w języku magii [On the Problems of Strangeness in the Magical Language], in: *Język a kultura* [Language and Culture], vol. 4: *Funkcje języka i wypowiedzi* [Functions of Language and Utterances], ed. Jerzy Bartmiński, Renata Grzegorzczkova, Wrocław: Wiedza o Kulturze, pp. 88–92.
- Bugaj Roman, 1986, *Nauki tajemne w dawnej Polsce – mistrz Twardowski* [Secret Arts in Early Modern Poland: Master Twardowski], Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich.
- Burszta Wojciech, 1986, *Język a kultura w myśli etnologicznej* [Language and Culture in Ethnographic Thought], Wrocław: Polskie Towarzystwo Ludoznawcze.
- Burszta Wojciech, 1991, Mowa magiczna jako przejaw synkretyzmu kultury [Magical Speech as a Sign of Cultural Syncretism], in: *Język a kultura* [Language and Culture], vol. 4: *Funkcje języka i wypowiedzi* [Functions of Language and Utterances], ed. Jerzy Bartmiński, Renata Grzegorzczkova, Wrocław: Wiedza o Kulturze, pp. 93–104.
- Bystron Jan Stanisław (ed.), 1927, *Pieśni ludowe z polskiego Śląska. Z rękopisów zebranych przez Emila Szramka oraz zbiorów dawniejszych A. Cinciały i J. Rogera* [Folk Songs of Polish Silesia. From the Manuscripts Collected by Emil Szramek and from Older Collections of A. Cinciała and J. Roger], Vol. 1: *Pieśni balladowe* [Ballad Songs], ed. Jan Stanisław Bystron, Kraków: Polska Akademia Umiejętności.
- Bystron Jan Stanisław, 1936, *Kultura ludowa* [Folk Culture], Warszawa: Nasza Księgarnia.
- Bystron Jan Stanisław, 1980, Przeżytki wiary w magiczną moc słowa [Remnants of Belief in the Magic Power of the Word], in: Jan Stanisław Bystron, *Tematy, które mi odradzano. Pisma etnograficzne rozproszone* [On Topics I Have Been Warned Against. Miscellaneous Ethnographic Writings], ed. Ludwik Stomma, Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, pp. 204–218.
- Canaan Taufik, 1935, The Curse in Palestinian Folklore, *The Journal of the Palestinian Oriental Society*, no 3–4, pp. 235–279.
- Caraman Piotr, 1933, *Obrzęd kołędowania u Słowian i Rumunów. Studium porównawcze* [The Practice of Wassailing among Slavs and Romanians. A Comparative Study], Kraków: Polska Akademia Umiejętności.
- Chudzik Anna, 2002, *Mowne zachowania magiczne w ujęciu pragmatyczno-kognitywnym* [A Pragmatic-Cognitive Approach to Magical Speech Behaviours], Kraków: Universitas.
- Coats George W., 1981, The Curse in God's Blessing, in: *Die Botschaft und die Boten. Festschrift für Hans Walter Wolff zum 70. Geburtstag*, ed. Jörg Jeremias, Lothar Perlitt, Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag.
- Crawford Timothy G., 1992, *Blessing and Curse in Syro-Palestinian Inscriptions of the Iron Age*, New York: Peter Lang.

- Curse, 1983, in: *Man, myth and magic. The illustrated encyclopaedia of mythology, religion and the unknown*, ed. Richard Cavendish, Yvonne Deutch, New York-London: Marshall Cavendish, pp. 579–582.
- Czarnowski Stefan, 1982, Kultura religijna wiejskiego ludu polskiego [Religious Culture of Polish Peasants], in: Stefan Czarnowski, *Wybór pism socjologicznych* [Selected Sociological Writings], ed. Janusz Sztumski, Warszawa: Książka i Wiedza.
- Czarnyszewicz Florian, 1963, *Chłopcy z Nowoszysek* [The Boys from Nowoszycki], London: Polska Fundacja Kulturalna.
- Czarnyszewicz Florian, [1991], *Nadberezyńcy* [From upon the Berezina], Lublin: Wydawnictwo FIS.
- Czernik Stanisław, 1958, *Polska epika ludowa* [Polish Folk Epic], Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich.
- Czyżewski Feliks, 1988, 'Zmora' [Wraith], *Etnolingwistyka*, vol. 1, pp. 133–143.
- Czyżewski Feliks, Tyrpa Anna (eds.), 2008, *Tabu językowe i eufemizacja w dialektach słowiańskich* [Linguistic Taboo and Euphemization in Slavic Dialects], Lublin: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Marii Curie-Skłodowskiej.
- Dąbkowski Przemysław, 1904, *O utwierdzeniu umów pod grozą łajania w prawie polskim średniowiecznym* [On Confirming Contracts under the Pain of Berating in Medieval Polish Law], Lwów: Towarzystwo dla Popierania Nauki Polskiej.
- Dąbkowski Przemysław, 1906, O przysiędze i kłątwie [On the Oath and the Curse], in: Przemysław Dąbkowski, *Litkup. Studium z prawa polskiego* [The Litkup. A Study of Polish Law], Lwów: Towarzystwo dla Popierania Nauki Polskiej.
- Dąbrowska Anna, 1993, *Eufemizmy współczesnego języka polskiego* [Euphemisms in Modern Polish], Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego.
- Dąbrowska Anna, 1998, *Słownik eufemizmów polskich, czyli w rzeczy mocno, w sposobie łagodnie* [A Dictionary of Polish Euphemisms, Or, Strong Content, Mild Words], Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN.
- Doroszewski Witold, 1974, Parę uwag o magicznym myśleniu [Some Remarks on Magical Thinking], *Poradnik Językowy*, vol. 6. pp. 294–295.
- Drogin Marc, 1983, *Anathema! Medieval Scribes and the History of Book Curses*, Totowa: Allanheld and Schram.
- Eliade Mircea, 1958, *Patterns in Comparative Religion*, trans. Rosemary Sheed, London–New York: Sheed & Ward.
- Engelking Anna, 1988, Z pogranicza etnografii i językoznawstwa. Analiza rytuału błogosławieństwa przedślubnego [From Between Ethnography and Linguistics. An Analysis of the Pre-Marital Blessing Ritual], *Polono-Slavica Varsoviensia. Studia nad językiem polskim*, ed. Renata Grzegorzczkowska, Barbara Klebanowska, Warszawa: Wydawnictwa Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, pp. 181–191.
- Engelking Anna, 1989, "Kląć na czym świat stoi"... według "Księgi przysłów" i słowników języka polskiego ["To Curse the Very Foundations of the World..." Cursing in the Light of "The Book of Proverbs" and Dictionaries of the Polish Language], *Przegląd Humanistyczny*, no. 7, pp. 83–93.
- Engelking Anna, 1991, Rytuały słowne w kulturze ludowej. Próba klasyfikacji [Verbal Rituals in Folk Culture. An Attempt at Classification], in: *Język a kultura* [Language and Culture], vol. 4: *Funkcje języka i wypowiedzi* [Functions

- of Language and Utterances], ed. Jerzy Bartmiński, Renata Grzegorzczkova, Wrocław: Wiedza o Kulturze, pp. 75–85.
- Engelking Anna, 2002, Udzielanie dóbr za pomocą słowa, czyli o rytuale błogosławieństwa w kulturze ludowej [Granting Gifts By Means of Words. About the Blessing Ritual in Folk Culture], in: *Fascynacje folklorystyczne. Księga poświęcona pamięci Heleny Kapełuś* [Fascinated with Folklore. Essays Dedicated to the Memory of Helena Kapełuś], ed. Magdalena Kapełuś, Anna Engelking, Warszawa: AGADE, pp. 31–40.
- Engelking Anna, 2012, *Kołchoźnicy. Antropologiczne studium tożsamości wsi białoruskiej przełomu XX i XXI wieku* [Kolkhoz Workers. An Anthropological Study of Identity of Belarusian Villagers at the Turn of the Twenty-First Century], Toruń: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu Mikołaja Kopernika.
- Engelking Anna, 2015, The Myth of the Tower of Babel and Its Consequences. The Indigenous Grammars of the Mixed World. A Contribution to the Anthropology of Borderlands (Based on Research in Belarusian-Lithuanian Borderlands), *Český lid*, no. 1, pp. 1–26.
- Evans-Pritchard Edward Evan, 1937, *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic among the Azande*, foreword Charles G. Seligman, Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Evans-Pritchard Edward Evan, 1949, Nuer Curses and Ghostly Vengeance, *Africa*, no. 4, pp. 288–292.
- Evans-Pritchard Edward Evan, 1967, *The Morphology and Function of Magic. A Comparative Study of Trobriand and Zande Ritual and Spells*, in: *Magic, Witchcraft and Curing*, ed. John Middleton, Garden City: The Natural History Press, pp. 1–22.
- Fensham Frank Charles, 1962, Malediction and Benediction in Ancient Near-Eastern Vassal-Treaties and the Old Testament, *Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft*, vol. 74, no. 1, pp. 1–9.
- Fensham Frank Charles, 1963, Common Trends in Curses of The Near Eastern Treaties and Kudurru-Inscriptions Compared with Maledictions of Amos and Isaiah, *Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft*, vol. 75, no. 2, pp. 155–175.
- Fensham Frank Charles, 1987, The Curse of the Dry Bones in Ezekiel 37: 1–14 Changed to a Blessing of Resurrection, *Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages*, vol. 13, pp. 59–60.
- Finnegan Ruth, 1969, How to Do Things with Words. Performative Utterances among the Limba of Sierra Leone, *Man, N. S.*, vol. 4, pp. 537–552.
- Fischer Adam, 1921, *Zwyczajowe pogrzebowe ludu polskiego* [Funeral Customs of the Polish Folk], Lwów: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich.
- Fischer Adam, 1937, Drzewa w wierzeniach i obrzędach ludu polskiego [Trees in Beliefs and Customs of Polish Folk], *Lud*, t. 35, s. 60–76.
- Gager John G., 1990, Curse and Competition in the Ancient Circus, in: *Of Scribes and Scrolls. Studies on the Hebrew Bible, Intertestamental Judaism, and Christian Origins, Presented to John Strugnell on the Occasion of His Sixtieth Birthday*, ed. Harold W. Attridge, John J. Collins, Thomas H. Tobin, Lanham: University Press of America, pp. 215–228.
- Gager John G. (ed.), 1992, *Curse Tablets and Binding Spells from the Ancient World*, New York: Oxford University Press.

- Gamkrelidze Tamaz V., Ivanov Viacheslav V., 1984, *Indoevropskiy iazyk i indoevropytsy. Rekonstruktsija i istoriko-tipologicheskiy analiz praiazyka i protokultury* [The Indo-European Language and Indo-Europeans. A Reconstruction and Historico-Typological Analysis of the Protolanguage and Protoculture], foreword Roman O. Jakobson, vol. 1–2, Tbilisi: Izdatelstvo Tbilisskogo universiteta.
- Gervitz Stanley, 1959, *Curse Motifs in the Old Testament and in the Ancient Near East*, PhD dissertation, Chicago: University of Chicago.
- Gervitz Stanley, 1961, West-Semitic Curses and the Problem of the Origins of Hebrew Law, *Vetus Testamentum*, vol. 11, no. 2, pp. 137–158.
- Gieysztor Aleksander, 1982, *Mitologia Słowian* [Slavic Mythology], Warszawa: Wydawnictwa Artystyczne i Filmowe.
- Gill Sam D., 1977, Prayer as Person. The Performative Force in Navajo Prayer Acts, *History of Religions*, vol. 17, no. 2, pp. 143–157.
- Gloger Zygmunt, 1901, *Obrzęd weselny polski z pieśniami i przemowami* [Polish Wedding Feast Rituals, Including Songs and Speeches], Warszawa: Księgarnia Polska J. Sikorskiej.
- Gnoli Gherardo, 1987, Magi, in: *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, ed. Mircea Eliade, vol. 9, New York–London: Macmillan Publishing Company, pp. 79–81.
- Gonet Szymon, 1896, Kilka szczegółów z wierzeń ludu [Some Particulars of Folk Beliefs], *Lud*, vol. 2, pp. 221–235.
- Góra Aleksander, 1995, Bocian w słowiańskich wyobrażeniach ludowych [The Stork in Slavic Folk Imaginary], *Etnolingwistyka*, vol. 7, pp. 33–46.
- Greenfield Jonas C., Shaffer Aaron, 1985, Notes on the Curse Formulae of the Tell Fekherye Inscription, *Revue Biblique*, vol. 92, no. 1, pp. 47–59.
- Grębecka Zuzanna, 2006, Słowo magiczne poddane technologii. Magia ludowa w praktykach postsowieckiej kultury popularnej [Magical Word Meets Technology. Folk Magic in the Practices of Post-Soviet Popular Culture], Kraków: Nomos.
- Grice Paul H., 1980, *Logic and Conversation*, in: *Syntax and Semantics*, vol. 3: *Speech Acts*, ed. Peter Cole, Jerry L. Morgan, San Diego: Academic Press, pp. 41–58.
- Grochowski Maciej, 1983, Kryteria rozróżniania znaczeń wyrażenia “bodaj” [The Criteria for Distinguishing the Meanings of “Bodaj”], *Polonica*, vol. 9, pp. 179–194.
- Grochowski Maciej, 1986, *Polskie partykuły. Składnia, semantyka, leksykografia* [Polish Particles. Syntax, Semantics, Lexicography], Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich.
- Grochowski Maciej, 1990, Wprowadzenie do analizy pojęcia przekleństwa [An Introduction to the Analysis of the Term “Curse” (Przekleństwo)], *Acta Universitatis Nicolai Copernici. Filologia Polska*, vol. 34, *Nauki Humanistyczno-Społeczne*, vol. 221, pp. 83–99.
- Grochowski Maciej, 1991, Przekleństwo i wulgaryzm jako kwalifikatory pragmatyczne jednostek leksykalnych [Curses and Expletives as Pragmatic Indicators of Lexical Units], *Acta Universitatis Nicolai Copernici. Filologia Polska*, vol. 36 *Nauki Humanistyczno-Społeczne*, vol. 230, pp. 3–25.
- Grochowski Maciej, 1995, *Słownik polskich przekleństw i wulgaryzmów* [A Dictionary of Curses and Expletives], Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN.

- Grochowski Piotr, 2009, *Dziady. Rzecz o wędrownych żebrakach i ich pieśniach*, Toruń: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu im. Mikołaja Kopernika.
- Grochowski Piotr, 2010, *Straszna zbrodnia rodzonej matki. Polskie pieśni nowinarskie na przełomie XIX i XX wieku*, Toruń: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu im. Mikołaja Kopernika.
- Grzegorzczkova Renata, 1990, *Wprowadzenie do semantyki językoznawczej* [An Introduction to Linguistic Semantics], Warszawa: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe.
- Grzegorzczkova Renata, 1991, Problem funkcji języka i tekstu w świetle teorii aktów mowy [The Problem of the Function of Language and Text in the Light of the Speech Act Theory], in: *Język a kultura* [Language and Culture], vol. 4: *Funkcje języka i wypowiedzi* [Functions of Language and Utterances], eds. Jerzy Bartmiński, Renata Grzegorzczkova, Wrocław: Wiedza o Kulturze, pp. 11–28.
- Gurevich Aron, 1988, *Medieval Popular Culture. Problems of Belief and Perception*, trans. János M. Bak, Paul M. Hollingsworth, Cambridge–New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Harjula Raimo, 1989, Curse as a Manifestation of Broken Human Relationships among the Meru in Tanzania, in: *Culture, Experience and Pluralism. Essays on African Ideas of Illness and Healing*, ed. Anita Jacobson-Widding, David West-erlund, Uppsala: Academiae Upsaliensis, pp. 125–137.
- Heinz Adam, 1978, *Dzieje językoznawstwa w zarysie* [An Outline of the History of Linguistics], Warszawa: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe.
- Hillers Delbert R., 1964, *Treaty-Curses and the Old Testament Prophets*, Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute.
- Ivanov Viacheslav V., Toporov Vladimir N., 1974, *Issledovaniia v oblasti slavianskikh drevnostey. Leksicheskie i frazeologicheskie voprosy rekonstruktsii tekstov* [Research on Slavic Antiquities. Lexical and Phraseological Questions in the Reconstruction of Texts], Moskva: Nauka.
- Izutsu Toshihiko, 1956, *Language and Magic. Studies in the Magical Function of Speech*, Tokyo: Tokyo Keit Institute of Philological Studies.
- Jakobson Roman, 1965, Quest for the Essence of Language, *Diogenes*, no. 51, pp. 21–37.
- Jakobson Roman, 1977, A Few Remarks on Peirce, Pathfinder in the Science of Language, *MLN*, vol. 92, no. 5, pp. 1026–1032.
- Jakobson Roman, 1984, Shifters, Verbal Categories, and the Russian Verb, in: Roman Jakobson, *Russian and Slavic Grammar. Studies 1931–1981*, ed. Linda R. Waughn, Morris Halle, Berlin–New York–Amsterdam: Mouton Publishers, pp. 41–58.
- Jakobson Roman, 1985, Metalanguage as a Linguistic Problem. In: Roman Jakobson, *Selected Writings*, vol. 7, Berlin–New York–Amsterdam: Mouton Publishers, pp. 113–121.
- Jakobson Roman, Waugh Linda R., 2002, The Spell of Speech Sounds, in: Roman Jakobson, Linda R. Waugh, *The Sound Shape of Language*, Berlin–New York: Mouton de Gruyter, pp. 181–234.
- Jay Timothy, 1992, *Cursing in America. A Psycholinguistic Study of Dirty Language in the Courts, in the Movies, in the Schoolyards and on the Streets*, Philadelphia: J. Benjamins Pub. Co.

- Jodłowski Stanisław, 1976, *Podstawy polskiej składni* [The Basics of Polish Syntax], Warszawa: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe.
- Judin Aleksiej B., 2001a, Magicheskie performatiwy w zagovorakh i kalendarnykh pesniakh vostochnykh slavian, *Etnolingwistyka*, vol. 13, pp. 139–148.
- Judin Aleksiej B., 2001b, Personifitsirovanie likhoradki v vostochnoslavianskikh narodnykh predstavleniakh (na materiale zagovorov), *Etnolingwistyka*, vol. 13, pp. 169–178.
- Kairski Mariusz, Wołodźko Marek, 1995, Antropologizacja etnologii a badania kultur pierwotnych. Dyscyplina w okresie przełomu [Anthropologization of Ethnography and the Study of Primitive Cultures. A Discipline in Transition], in: *Etnologia polska między ludoznawstwem a antropologią* [Polish Ethnology Between Folkloristics and Anthropology], ed. Aleksander Posern-Zieliński, Poznań: Drawa, pp. 69–81.
- Kairski Mariusz, 1996, *Doświadczać, rozumieć, wyjaśniać – problemy interpretacji współczesnej kultury pierwotnej* [To Experience, to Understand, to Explain: Problems of Interpretation of Contemporary Primitive Culture], an audio recording of an interview.
- Kamiński Maciej, 1987, *O lokalistycznej interpretacji świata w magii* [On the Localistic Vision of the World in Magic], notes from a conference paper.
- Kamiński Maciej, 1988, *O lokalistycznej interpretacji świata w magii* [On the Localistic Vision of the World in Magic], *Język a kultura*, vol. 1, ed. Janusz Anusiewicz, Jerzy Bartmiński, Wrocław: Uniwersytet Wrocławski, pp. 279–287.
- Kapełuś Helena, 1987, “Bożeć pošli dobrą godzinę.” Przyczynek do związków Jana Kochanowskiego z folklorem [O God, Give Us a Good Hour. Some Remarks on the Connections Between Jan Kochanowski and Folklore], *Rocznik Komisji Historycznoliterackiej*, no. 24, pp. 123–131.
- Karłowicz Jan, 1888, Brzoza gryżyńska [The Birch in Gryżyna], *Wista*, vol. 2, no. 4, pp. 817–821.
- Karłowicz Jan, 1903, *O człowieku pierwotnym. Siedm odczytów* [On Primitive Man. Seven Lectures], Lwów: Towarzystwo Wydawnicze.
- Karłowicz Jan, 1904, Mycie nóg [The Washing of Feet], *Lud*, vol. 10, pp. 369–373.
- Kasjan Jan Mirosław, 1983, *Polska zagadka ludowa* [The Polish Folk Riddle], Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich.
- Keim Paul Arden, 1992, *When Sanctions Fail. The Social Function of Curse in Ancient Israel*, PhD dissertation, Cambridge: Harvard University.
- Kieckhefer Richard, 1989, *Magic in the Middle Ages*, Cambridge–New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Kitevski Marko, 1991, *Na kletva lek nema. Kletvite vo makedonskoto tvoreshtvo* [There is No Cure for a Curse. Curses in Macedonian Arts], Skopje: Makedonska kniga.
- Kmita Jerzy, 1984, Mowa magiczna – język – literatura [Magical Speech – Language – Literature], *Odra*, no. 12, pp. 32–37.
- Kołąkowski Leszek, 1982, To Speak of the Unspeakable. Language and the Holy. The Need for Taboos, in: Leszek Kołąkowski, *Religion. If There is no God... On God, the Devil, Sin and other Worries of the so-called Philosophy of Religion*, Glasgow: Fontana Paperbacks, pp. 152–195.

- Koniushkevich Mariia, 2001, Proklatiia w rechevom povedenii belorusov, *Etnolingwistyka* vol. 13, pp. 155–168.
- Kopczyńska-Jaworska Bronisława, 1971, *Metodyka etnograficznych badań terenowych* [Methodology of Ethnographic Fieldwork], Warszawa–Łódź: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe.
- Koranyi Karol, 1927, *Czary w postępowaniu sądowym* [Magic in Court Procedure]. Offprint of the journal *Lud*, Lwów: Towarzystwo Ludoznawcze.
- Koseska-Toszewa Violetta, 1981, Uwagi na temat optativu w bułgarskim, polskim i rosyjskim [Some Remarks on the Optative in Bulgarian, Polish and Russian], *Studia z Filologii Polskiej i Słowiańskiej*, vol. 20, pp. 129–134.
- Kotula Franciszek, 1969, *Folklor słowny osoblwy Lasowiaków Rzeszowiaków i Podgórczan* [Verbal Folklore Characteristic to the Lasowiaks and the Inhabitants of Rzeszów and Podgórze Regions], Lublin: Wydawnictwo Lubelskie.
- Kotula Franciszek, 1970, *Hej, leluja – czyli o wygasających starodawnych pieśniach kołędniczych w Rzeszowskim* [Hey Leluya. On Vanishing Carolling Songs in the Rzeszów Region], Warszawa: Ludowa Spółdzielnia Wydawnicza.
- Kotula Franciszek, 1974, *Po rzeszowskim Podgórzu błędząc. Reportaż historyczny* [Wanderings in Podgórze Region Near Rzeszów. A Historical Travel Account], Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie.
- Kotula Franciszek, 1976, *Znaki przeszłości. Odchodzące ślady zatrzymać w pamięci* [The Signs of the Past. Keeping the Vanishing Sights in Memory], Warszawa: Ludowa Spółdzielnia Wydawnicza.
- Kozarzewska Emilia, 1990, *Czasowniki mówienia we współczesnym języku polskim. Studium semantyczno-składniowe* [Speech Verbs in Modern Polish. A Semantico-Syntactic Analysis], Warszawa: Wydawnictwa Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego.
- Kratz Corinne A., 1989, Genres of Power. A Comparative Analysis of Okiek Blessings, Curses and Oaths, *Man*, N. S., vol. 24, pp. 636–656.
- Krukowski Józef, 1983, *Ekskomunikacja* [Excommunication], in: *Encyklopedia katolicka* [The Encyclopaedia of Catholicism], ed. Feliks Gryglewicz at al., vol. 4, Lublin: Katolicki Uniwersytet Lubelski, Towarzystwo Naukowe Katolickiego Uniwersytetu Lubelskiego, pp. 804–806.
- Krawczyk-Tyrpa Anna, 2001, *Tabu w dialektach polskich* [Taboo in Polish Dialects], Bydgoszcz: Wydawnictwo Akademii Bydgoskiej im. Kazimierza Wielkiego.
- Krzyżanowski Julian, 1977, *Norwidowa paralela o zamarzłym słowie* [Cyprian Kamil Norwid's Parallel of the Frozen Word], in: Julian Krzyżanowski, *Paralele. Studia porównawcze z pogranicza literatury i folkloru* [Parallels. Comparative Studies on the Bounders of Literature and Folklore], Warszawa: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, pp. 643–650.
- Kubiak Irena, Kubiak Krzysztof, 1981, *Chleb w tradycji ludowej* [Bread in the Folk Tradition], Warszawa: Ludowa Spółdzielnia Wydawnicza.
- Leach Edmund, 1966, Ritualization in Man in Relation to Conceptual and Social Development, *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society of London*, series B, vol. 251, no. 722: 403–408.
- Laskowski Roman, 1984, Kategorie morfologiczne języka polskiego – charakterystyka funkcjonalna [Morphological Categories in the Polish Language: A Functional Approach], in: *Gramatyka współczesnego języka polskiego. Mor-*

- folgia* [The Grammar of Contemporary Polish. Morphology], ed. Renata Grzegorzczkova, Roman Laskowski, Henryk Wróbel, Warszawa: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe.
- Le Guin, Ursula K., 2001, *The Other Wind*, Boston, New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.
- Levack Brian P., 2006, *The Witch-Hunt in Early Modern Europe*, Harlow–London: Pearson Longman.
- Lévi-Strauss Claude, 1963, *Structural Anthropology*, trans. Claire Jacobson, Brooke G. Schoepf, New York: Basic Books.
- Lévi-Strauss Claude, 1966, *The Savage Mind*, University of Chicago Press.
- Lévy-Bruhl Lucien, 1910, *Les fonctions mentales dans les sociétés inférieures*, Paris: Félix Alcan.
- Libera Zbigniew, 1995, *Medycyna ludowa. Chłopski rozsądek czy gminna fantazja? [Folk Medicine. Common Sense or Peasant Fantasy?]*, Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego.
- Libera Zbigniew, 2003, *Znachor w tradycjach ludowych i popularnych XIX–XX wieku [The Healer in Folk and Popular Tradition in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries]*, Wrocław: Towarzystwo Przyjaciół Ossolineum.
- Ligęza Józef, Stoiński Stefan Marian (eds.), 1938, *Pieśni ludowe z polskiego Śląska. Z rękopisów zebranych przez Emila Szramka oraz zbiorów dawniejszych A. Cinciały i J. Rogera* [Folk Songs of the Polish Silesia. From the Manuscripts Collected by Emil Szramek and from Older Collections of A. Cinciała and J. Roger]. Vol. 2: *Pieśni balladowe o zalotach i miłości* [Ballad Songs of Love and Courtship], ed. Józef Ligęza, Stefan Marian Stoiński, Kraków: Polska Akademia Umiejętności.
- Little Lester K., 1979, Les maledictions monastiques au Moyen Age, *Annales. Economies, Sociétés, Civilizations*, no. 1, pp. 43–60.
- Little Lester K., 1987, Cursing, in: *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, vol. 2, ed. Mircea Eliade, New York–London: Macmillan Publishing Company, pp. 182–185.
- Little Lester K., 1993, *Benedictine Maledictions. Liturgical Cursing in Romanesque France*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Lyons John, 1979, *Semantics*, vol. 2, Cambridge–New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Lobachevskaia Olga A., 2008, *Zhenskie antropomorfnye kresty na Belarusi. Sovremennye nabliudeniia i hipotezy*, in: *Paliavaia falklarystyka i etnalohija: dasledawanne lakalnykh kultur Belarusi*, ed. I. Iu. Smirnovaia, V. A. Labachevskaia, Minsk: Belaruskii Dziarzhavnyi Universytet Kultury i Mastatstva, pp. 94–109.
- Maczinsky Ioannes (Jan Mączyński), 1564, *Lexicon Latino Polonicum ex optimis Latinae linguae Scriptoribus concinnatum* [A Latin Polish Lexicon Compiled from Finest Writers], Regiomonti Borussiae (Konigsberg): Typographus Ioannes Daubmannus.
- Maguire Henry (ed.), 1993, *Byzantine Magic*, Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection.
- Maledicta...*, 1977–1985, *Maledicta. The International Journal of Verbal Agression*, ed. Reinhold Aman, vol. 1–8, Waukesha.

- Malinowski Bronisław, 1922, *The Power of Words in Magic. Some Linguistic Data*, in: Bronisław Malinowski, *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*, London–New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul, E. F. Dutton, pp. 428–464.
- Malinowski Bronisław, 1923, *The Problem of Meaning in Primitive Languages*, in: Charles K. Ogden and Ivor A. Richards *The Meaning of Meaning*, London: International Library of Psychology, Philosophy and Scientific Method, pp. 451–510.
- Malinowski Bronisław, 1935, *Coral Gardens and Their Magic. A Study of Tilling the Soil and of Agricultural Rites in the Trobriand Islands*, vol. 2: *The Language of Magic and Gardening*, London: George Allen & Unwin.
- Malinowski Bronisław, 1948, *Magic, Science and Religion and Other Essays*, selected and with an introduction by Robert Redfield, Glencoe, Illinois: The Free Press.
- Marcinek Jan, 1947, *Funkcja odpraszacza [The Function of Intercessor]*, *Prace i Materiały Etnograficzne*, vol. 6, Lublin, pp. 187–199.
- Markiewicz Henryk, Romanowski Andrzej, 1990, *Skrzydlate słowa [Winged Words]*, Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy.
- Masłowska Ewa, 1987, *Przeobrażenia semantyczne polskich gwarowych nazw diabła [Semantic Transformations of the Names of the Devil in Polish Dialects]*, *Studia z Filologii Polskiej i Słowiańskiej*, vol. 24, pp. 77–90.
- Mathiesen Robert, 1993, *Magic in Slavia Orthodoxa. The Written Tradition*, in: *Byzantine Magic*, ed. Henry Maguire, Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, pp. 155–177.
- Matisoff James A., 1979, *Blessings, Curses, Hopes, and Fears. Psycho-Ostensive Expressions in Yiddish*, Philadelphia: Institute for the Study of Human Issues.
- Matusiak Szymon, 1908, *Święty i przeklęty (bocian) [Sacred and Cursed. The Stork]*, *Lud*, vol. 14, pp. 170–178.
- Mauss Marcel, 2001, *A General Theory of Magic*, transl. Robert Brain, London–New York: Routledge.
- Mazurkiewicz Małgorzata, 1986, *Kamień – dzieło Boga czy diabelska sprawka? [A Stone: Created by God or by the Devil?]*, *Akcent*, no. 4, pp. 52–55.
- Mazurkiewicz Małgorzata, 1987, *Kamień człekokształtny, czyli życie ukarane [A Human-Shaped Stone, or, Life under Punishment]*, *Polska Sztuka Ludowa*, no. 1–4, pp. 74–77.
- McIntosh Christopher, 1994, *Magic*, in: *The Encyclopaedia of Language and Linguistics*, ed. Ron E. Asher, Oxford–New York: Pergamon Press, pp. 2343–2344.
- Meyer Marvin, Smith Richard, 1994, *Ancient Christian Magic. Coptic Texts of Ritual Power*, San Francisco: Harper.
- Michajłowa Katia, 2010, *Dziad wędrowny w kulturze ludowej Słowian [The Wandering Beggar in Slavic Folk Culture]*, trans. Hanna Karpińska, Warszawa: Oficyna Naukowa.
- Middelkoop Pieter, 1960, *Curse, Retribution, Enmity As Data in Natural Religion, Especially in Timor, Confronted with the Scripture*, Amsterdam: Drukkerij en Uitgeverij Jacob van Campen.
- Middleton John, 1987, *Magic. Theories of magic*, in: *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, ed. Mircea Eliade, vol. 9, New York–London: Macmillan Publishing Company, pp. 82–89.
- Middleton John, 1989, *Magic*, in: *The New Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 15th edition, vol. 7, Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica.

- Minear Paul S., 1991, Far as the Curse Is Found. The Point of Revelation 12:15–16, *Novum Testamentum*, vol. 33, no. 1, pp. 71–77.
- Modzelewski Karol, 2004, *Barbarzyńska Europa* [Barbarian Europe], Warszawa: Iskry.
- Modzelewski Karol, 2015, *Barbarian Europe*, trans. Elena Rozbicka, New York: Peter Lang.
- Moulton James Hope, 1915, Magi, in: *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, ed. James Hastings, vol. 8, Edinburgh–New York: T. & T. Clark, Charles Scribner's Sons, pp. 242–244.
- Moszyński Kazimierz, 1928, *Polesie Wschodnie. Materiały etnograficzne z wschodniej części b. powiatu mozyrskiego oraz z powiatu rzeczyckiego* [Eastern Polesie. Ethnographic Materials Collected in the Eastern Part of the Former Poviats of Mozyr and Rechytsa], Warszawa: Kasa im. Mianowskiego.
- Ngankam Fogue Dieudonné, 1985, *La malédiction chez les Bamiléké du Cameroun. Une analyse philosophique*, Bafoussam: D. Ngankam Fogue.
- Niebrzegowska-Bartmińska Stanisława, 2001, Idea działającego słowa w tekstach polskich zamówień [The Concept of Word Agentiality in Polish Spell Cures], *Etnolingwistyka*, vol. 13, pp. 101–115.
- Niebrzegowska Stanisława, Panasiuk Jolanta, 1991, O badaniach folkloru na terenie województwa siedleckiego [On Studying the Folklore of Siedlce Voyvodeship], *Twórczość Ludowa*, no 3–4, pp. 89–91.
- Nyrkowski Stanisław, 1973, *Karnawał dziadowski* [The Beggar Carnival], Warszawa: Ludowa Spółdzielnia Wydawnicza.
- Obrębski Józef, 2005, *Skandal we wsi* [Scandal in the Village], in: Józef Obrębski, *Dzisiejsi ludzie Polesia i inne eseje* [Today's Inhabitants of Polesie and Other Essays], ed. Anna Engelking, Warszawa: Wydawnictwo IFiS PAN, pp. 53–70.
- Obrębski Józef, 2007, *Polesie archaiczne* [The Archaic Polesie], in: Józef Obrębski, *Studia etnosocjologiczne*, vol. 1: *Polesie*, ed. Anna Engelking, Warszawa: Oficyna Naukowa, pp. 33–185.
- O'Keefe Daniel Lawrence, 1982, *Stolen Lightning. The Social Theory of Magic*, Oxford: Martin Robertson.
- Ong Walter Jackson, 2002, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word*, London and New York: Routledge.
- Peirce Charles Sanders, 1933, On Existential Graphs, Euler's Diagrams, and Logical Algebra, in: Charles Sanders Peirce, *The Collected Papers*, vol. 4: *The Simplest Mathematics*, ed. Charles Hartshorne, Paul Weiss, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, pp. 418–504.
- Pełka Leonard, 1987, *Polska demonologia ludowa* [Polish Folk Demonology], Warsaw: Iskry.
- Pisarkowa Krystyna, 1972, Z historii polskich zdań rozkazująco-proszących (Przykład leksykalizacji i gramatykalizacji) [From the History of Polish Imperative-Deontic Utterances. An Example of Lexicalization and Grammaticalization], in: *Z polskich studiów slawistycznych* [From Polish Slavonic Studies], series 4: *Językoznawstwo. Prace na VII Międzynarodowy Kongres Slawistów w Warszawie 1973* [Linguistics. Materials for the Seventh Interna-

- tional Congress of Slavonic Studies in Warsaw 1973], Warszawa: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, pp. 35–41.
- Pisarkowa Krystyna, 1978, Partykuła [The Particle], in: *Encyklopedia wiedzy o języku polskim* [An Encyclopaedia of the Study of the Polish Language], ed. Stanisław Urbańczyk, Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, pp. 239–240.
- Pisarkowa Krystyna, 1994, *Pragmatyczne spojrzenie na akt mowy* [A Pragmatic Approach to Speech Acts], in: Krystyna Pisarkowa, *Z pragmatycznej stylistyki, semantyki i historii języka. Wybór zagadnień* [From Pragmatic Stylistics, Semantics and Language History], Kraków: Polska Akademia Nauk. Instytut Języka Polskiego, pp. 11–23.
- Pisarkowa Krystyna, 1998, *Zaklęcie magiczne a korespondencja tekstu z faktem* [The Magical Spell and the Correspondence Between the Text and the Fact], in: *Tekst. Analizy i interpretacje* [Text. Analyses and Interpretations], ed. Jerzy Bartmiński, Barbara Boniecka, Lublin: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Marii Curie-Skłodowskiej, pp. 151–167.
- Pisarkowa Krystyna, 2000, *Językoznawstwo Bronisława Malinowskiego* [The Linguistics of Bronisław Malinowski], vol. 1: *Więzy wspólnego języka* [The Bounds of Common Language], Kraków: Universitas.
- Platon, 1990, *Kratylos* [Cratylus], trans. Witold Stefański, Wrocław–Warszawa: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich.
- Pleszczyński Adolf, 1892, *Bojarzy międzyrzeccy. Studium etnograficzne* [The Boyars of the Międzyrzec Region. An Ethnographical Study], Warszawa: Michał Arct.
- Polaczek Stanisław, 1891, Z podań i wierzeń ludowych zapisanych we wsi Rudawie pod Krakowem [From the Folk Tales and Beliefs Recorded in the Village of Rudawa near Krakow], *Wiśła*, vol. 5, pp. 625–631.
- Połęcki Bolesław, 1976, “Zabobony” z Będziemyśla [“Superstitions” from Będziemyśl], *Literatura Ludowa*, vol. 20, no. 1, pp. 39–41.
- Popowska-Taborska Hanna, 1987, Kaszubskie “kutin” ‘czarownik.’ Przyczynek do paralelizmów procesów nazwotwórczych [The Kashubian “Kutin” ‘Czarownik’ [Sorcerer]: Some Remarks on the Parallelism in Word Formation Processes], *Studia Polonistyczne*, no. 14–15, pp. 211–214.
- Popowska-Taborska Hanna, 1989, O potrzebie słownika semantycznych paralelizmów [On the Need for a Dictionary of Semantic Parallelisms], in: *Paralele w rozwoju słownictwa języków słowiańskich* [Parallels in the Development of Vocabulary in Slavic Languages], ed. Hanna Popowska-Taborska, Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, pp. 19–26.
- Power Patrick C., 1974, *The Book of Irish Curses*, Dublin: The Mercier Press.
- Propp Vladimir, 1968, *Morphology of the Folktale*, trans. Laurence Scott, Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Przybylska Renata, 1986, Co się komu “ciśnie na usta”, czyli o pewnym typie wyrażen ekspresywnych [What Springs to Whose Lips, or, On a Particular Type of Expressive Utterances], *Język Polski*, vol. 5, pp. 347–351.
- Przyznina Jadwiga, 1971, Jeden tryb czy dwa tryby? (Problem form trybu przypuszczającego w języku polskim) [One or Two Moods? On the Problem of the Subjunctive Mood Forms in Polish], *Biuletyn PTJ*, vol. 29, pp. 131–139.

- Rabi Nachman z Bracławia, 1996, *Puste krzesło. Odnaleźć radość i nadzieję. Ponadczasowa mądrość chasydzkiego mistrza rabiego Puste krzesło. Odnaleźć radość Nachmana z Bracławia* [An Empty Chair. Finding Hope and Joy. Timeless Wisdom from a Hasidic Master, Rebbe Nachman of Breslow], ed. Moshe Mykoff, trans. Jerzy Moderski, Poznań: Rebis.
- Rak Joanna, Grębecka-Ćwiek Zuzanna, 1998, Kara opatrności jako cud [The Punishment by Providence as a Miracle], *Polska Sztuka Ludowa. Konteksty*, vol. 52, no. 1, pp. 51–53.
- Ravenhill Philip L., 1976, Religious utterances and the theory of speech acts, in: *Language in religious practice*, ed. William J. Samarin, Rowley MA: Newbury House Publishers, pp. 26–39.
- Ray Benjamin, 1973, "Performance utterances" in African rituals, *History of Religions*, vol. 13, no. 1, pp. 16–35.
- Rozwadowski Jan, 1921, *O zjawiskach i rozwoju języka* [On Linguistic Phenomena and Language Development], Kraków: Towarzystwo Miłośników Języka Polskiego.
- Rypson Piotr, 1989, *Obraz słowa. Historia poezji wizualnej* [The Image of the Word. A History of Visual Poetry], Warszawa: Akademia Ruchu.
- Ryzhkova Svetlana, 2001, Obychnye i strannye chasti tieła u latyshey (k kontseptsii cheloveka v traditsionnoy kulture), *Etnolingwistyka*, vol. 13, pp. 197–214.
- Sambor Jadwiga, 1998, Magiczne i religijne (chrześcijańskie) akty mowy [Magical and Religious (Christian) Speech Acts], in: *Człowiek – dzieło – sacrum* [Man – Creation – the Sacred], ed. Stanisław Gajda, Helmut Sobeczko, Opole: Uniwersytet Opolski, Instytut Filologii Polskiej, pp. 103–112.
- Searle John R., 1980, What is a Speech Act?, in: *Philosophy in America*, ed. Max Black, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, pp. 221–239.
- Semkowicz Władysław, 1916, *Przysięga na słońce. Studium porównawcze prawn-etnologiczne* [Swearing by the Sun. A Comparative Legal-Ethnographic Study], Kraków: G. Gebethner i Sp.
- Słupecki Leszek Paweł, 1987, *Wilkołactwo* [The Werewolf Syndrome], Warszawa: "Iskry".
- Stępień Jan, Wycisk Franciszek, Paprocki Henryk, 1973, Anatema [Anathema], in: *Encyklopedia katolicka* [The Encyclopaedia of Catholicism], ed. Feliks Gryglewicz et al., vol. 1, Lublin: Katolicki Uniwersytet Lubelski, Towarzystwo Naukowe Katolickiego Uniwersytetu Lubelskiego, pp. 519–521.
- Stomma Ludwik, 1978, Magia dzisiaj. Rozważania o metodzie [Magic Today. Thoughts on the Method], *Polska Sztuka Ludowa*, no. 3–4, pp. 131–142.
- Stomma Ludwik, 1979, Magia dzisiaj – zasady analizy [Magic Today. Methods of Analysis], *Polska Sztuka Ludowa*, no. 4, pp. 195–204.
- Stomma Ludwik, 1986, *Antropologia kultury wsi polskiej XIX w.* [Anthropology of Polish Peasant Culture of the Nineteenth Century], Warszawa: Instytut Wydawniczy PAX.
- Swienko Henryk, 1983, *Magia w życiu człowieka* [Magic in Human Life], Warszawa: Młodzieżowa Agencja Wydawnicza.
- Szymański Józef, 1983, *Nauki pomocnicze historii* [Supplementary Historical Disciplines], Warszawa: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe.

- Świętek Jan, 1893, *Lud nadrabski (od Gdowa po Bochnię). Obraz etnograficzny* [The People of the Raba (from Gdów to Bochnia). An Ethnographic Description], Kraków: Akademia Umiejętności.
- Tambiah Stanley Jeyaraja, 1968, The Magical Power of Words, *Man, N. S.*, vol. 3, pp. 175–208.
- Tambiah Stanley Jeyaraja, 1973, Form and Meaning of Magical Acts. A Point of View, in: *Modes of Thought. Essays on Thinking in Western and Non-Western Societies*, ed. Robin Horton, Ruth Finnegan, London: Faber, pp. 199–229.
- Tambiah Stanley Jeyaraja, 1979, A Performative Approach to Ritual, *The Proceedings of the British Academy*, vol. 65, pp. 113–169.
- Thomas William I., Znaniecki Florian, 1927, *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America*, vol. 1: *Primary Group Organization*, New York: Alfred A. Knopf.
- Tokarska-Bakir Joanna, 2000, *Obraz osobliwy. Hermeneutyczna lektura źródeł etnograficznych. Wielkie opowieści* [The Peculiar Image. Hermeneutic Reading of Ethnographic Sources. The Great Narratives], Kraków: Universitas.
- Tokarski Jan, 1971, Na początku było Słowo [In the Beginning Was the Word], in: Jan Tokarski, *Słownictwo (teoria wyrazu)* [Vocabulary. The Theory of the Word], Warszawa: Państwowe Zakłady Wydawnictw Szkolnych, pp. 8–12.
- Tolstaya Svetlana M., 1994, K poniatiiu funktsii v iazyke kultury, *Slavianovedenie*, no. 5, pp. 91–97.
- Tolstaya Svetlana M., 2001, Magiczne funkcje negacji w tekstach sakralnych [Magical Function of Negation in Sacred Texts], *Etnolingwistyka*, vol. 13, pp. 117–125.
- Tołstoj Nikita I., 1992, *Język a kultura. Niektóre zagadnienia słowiańskiej etnolingwistyki* [Language and Culture. Some Problems of Slavic Ethnolinguistics], *Etnolingwistyka*, vol. 5, pp. 15–25.
- Tolstoy Nikita I., 1995, Iz "grammatiki" slavianskikh obriadov, in: Nikita I. Tolstoy, *Iazyk i narodnaia kultura. Ocherki po slavianskoy mifologii i etnolingvistike*, Moskva: Indrik, pp. 63–77.
- Tomicka Joanna, Tomicki Ryszard, 1975, *Drzewo życia. Ludowa wizja świata i człowieka* [The Tree of Life. The Folk Vision of the World and Man], Warszawa: Ludowa Spółdzielnia Wydawnicza.
- Tomicki Ryszard, 1976, Słowiański mit kosmogoniczny [The Slavic Cosmogonic Myth], *Etnografia Polska*, vol. 20, no. 1, pp. 47–97.
- Tomicki Ryszard, 1980, Ludowe mity o stworzeniu człowieka [Folk Myths on the Creation of Man], *Etnografia Polska*, vol. 24, no. 2, pp. 49–119.
- Tomicki Ryszard, 1981, Religijność ludowa [Folk Religiosity], in: *Etnografia Polski. Przemiany kultury ludowej* [Ethnography of Poland. Transitions in the Folk Culture], ed. Maria Biernacka, Maria Frankowska, Wanda Paprocka, vol. 2, Wrocław etc.: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, Wydawnictwo Polskiej Akademii Nauk, pp. 29–70.
- Tomicki Ryszard, 1983, *Magia i mitologia w kulturze ludowej* [Magic and Mythology in the Folk Culture], "Rocznik Muzeum Etnograficznego w Krakowie", vol. 8, pp. 7–24.
- Tomicki Ryszard, 1987, Mit [Myth], in: *Słownik etnologiczny. Terminy ogólne* [The Dictionary of Ethnography. General Terms], ed. Zofia Staszczak, Warsaw–Poznań: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, pp. 244–248.

- Topolińska Zuzanna, 1986, O kategoriach gramatycznych polskiego imperatiwu [On the Grammatical Categories of the Polish Imperative], *Język Polski*, vol. 46, no. 3, pp. 167–173.
- Toporow Vladimir N., 1988, *O rituale. Vvedenie w problematiku*, in: *Arkhaicheskij ritual w folklornykh i ranneliteraturnykh pamiatnikakh*, ed. Eleazar M. Meletinskiy, Moskva: Nauka, pp. 7–60.
- Toporow Władimir N., 1977, Wokół rekonstrukcji mitu o jaju kosmicznym (na podstawie baśni rosyjskich) [On the Reconstruction of the Myth of the Cosmic Egg (Based on Russian Folk Tales)], trans. Ryszard Maślanko, in: *Semiotyka kultury* [The Semiotics of Culture], ed. Elżbieta Janus, Maria Renata Mayenowa, Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, pp. 132–146.
- Uspenskiy Boris A., 1983, Mifologicheskij aspekt rusckoy ekspressivnoy frazeologii, pt. 1, *Studia Slavica Hungarorum*, vol. 29, pp. 33–69.
- Uspenskiy Boris A., 1987, Mifologicheskij aspekt rusckoy ekspressivnoy frazeologii, pt. 2, *Studia Slavica Hungarorum*, vol. 33, no. 1, pp. 37–76.
- Uspieński Borys A., 1985, *Kult św. Mikołaja na Rusi* [The Cult of St Nicolas in Old Russia], trans. Elżbieta Janus, Maria Renata Mayenowa, Zofia Kozłowska, Lublin: Redakcja Wydawnictw Katolickiego Uniwersytetu Lubelskiego.
- van der Leeuw Gerardus, 1938, *Religion in Essence and Manifestation. A Study of Phenomenology*, translated by John Evan Turner, London: G. Allen & Unwin.
- Vodola Elisabeth, 1986, *Excommunication in the Middle Ages*, Berkeley–Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- Walczak Bogdan, 1988, Magia językowa dawniej i dziś [Language Magic Then and Now], in: *Język zwierciadłem kultury, czyli nasza codzienna polszczyzna* [Language as the Mirror of Culture, Or, Our Everyday Polish], ed. Halina Zgółkowska, Poznań: Wydawnictwo Poznańskie, pp. 54–68.
- Wasilewski Jerzy Sławomir, 1989, *Tabu a paradygmaty etnologii. Rozprawa habilitacyjna* [Taboo and Ethnological Paradigms. A Habilitation Dissertation], Warszawa: Uniwersytet Warszawski. Wydział Historyczny.
- Wasilewski Jerzy Sławomir, 1998, Magia [Magic], in: *Nowa encyklopedia powszechna PWN* [The New Comprehensive Encyclopaedia], vol. 4, Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, p. 24.
- Wax Murray, Wax Rosalie, 1963, The Notion of Magic, *Current Anthropology*, no. 5, pp. 495–518.
- Wierciński Andrzej, 1997, *Magia i religia. Szkice z antropologii religii* [Magic and Religion. Essays in Anthropology of Religion], Kraków: Nomos.
- Wierzbička Anna, 1971, Kategoria semantyczna “ramy modalnej” [The Semantic Category of “Modal Framework”], in: *Sesja naukowa Międzynarodowej Komisji Budowy Gramatycznej Języków Słowiańskich w Krakowie w dniach 3–5 grudnia 1969 r.* [Proceedings of the International Colloquium on the Grammatical Structure of Slavic Languages in Kraków, 3–5 December 1969], ed. Stanisław Urbańczyk, Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, pp. 179–182.
- Wierzbička Anna, 1973, *Akty mowy* [Speech Acts], in: *Semiotyka i struktura tekstu. Studia poświęcone VII Międzynarodowemu Kongresowi Sławistów* [Semiotics and Text Structure. Papers from the Seventh International Congress of Slavistics], ed. Maria Renata Mayenowa, Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, pp. 201–219.

- Wierzbicka Anna, 1983, Genry mowy, in: *Tekst i zdanie*, ed. Teresa Dobrzyńska, Elżbieta Janus, Wrocław: Ossolineum, pp. 125–137.
- Wierzbicka Anna, 1986, *Analiza lingwistyczna aktów mowy jako potencjalny klucz do kultury* [The Linguistic Analysis of Speech Acts as a Potential Key to Understanding Culture], in: *Problemy wiedzy o kulturze. Prace dedykowane S. Żółkiewskiemu* [Problems of Cultural Studies. Essays In honor of S. Żółkiewski], ed. Alina Brodzka, Maryla Hopfinger, Janusz Lalewicz, Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, pp. 103–114.
- Wierzbicka Anna, 1987, *English Speech Act Verbs. A Semantic Dictionary*, Sydney–Orlando–San Diego: Academic Press.
- Wierzbicka Anna, 1992, Wschodnioeuropejska kultura żydowska w świetle żydowskiej “etnografii mowy” [Eastern European Jewish Culture in the Light of the Jewish “Ethnography of Speech”], *Teksty drugie*, no. 5, pp. 5–25.
- Wierzbicka Anna, 1996, Między modlitwą a przekleństwem: “O Jezu!” i podobne wyrażenia na tle porównawczym [Between a Prayer and a Curse: A Comparative Analysis of “O Jezu!” [Oh Jesus!] and Similar Expressions], *Etnolingwistyka*, vol. 8, pp. 25–39.
- Wierzbicka Anna, 1999, *Język – umysł – kultura* [Language – Mind – Culture], ed. Jerzy Bartmiński, Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN.
- Winkelman Michael, 1982, Magic: A theoretical reassessment, *Current Anthropology*, vol. 23, no. 1, pp. 37–66.
- Wrocławski Krzysztof, 1985, *O Bogu, jego sługach i diabelskich sztuczkach. Setnik legend Południowej Słowiańszczyzny* [On God, His Servants and Devil’s Tricks. One Hundred South Slavic Legends], ed. & trans. Krzysztof Wrocławski, Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy.
- Wyka Anna, 1993, *Badacz społeczny wobec doświadczenia* [A Social Researcher and Experience], Warszawa: Wydawnictwo IFiS PAN.
- Zaremska Hanna, 1993, *Banici w średniowiecznej Europie* [Outlaws in Medieval Europe], Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Semper.
- Zienkiewicz Romuald, 1852, O uroczyskach i zwyczajach ludu pińskiego oraz o charakterze jego pieśni [On Sacred Groves and the Customs of the People of Pińsk and on the Character of Their Songs], *Biblioteka Warszawska*, vol. 4, pp. 505–527.
- Zowczak Magdalena, 1994, Mitologia zamawiania i mistyka zamówów na podstawie współczesnych materiałów z Wileńszczyzny [The Mythology of Cure Spells and the Mystique of Magical Healing On the Basis of Contemporary Records from the Vilnius Area], *Literatura Ludowa*, no 4–6, pp. 3–33.
- Zowczak Magdalena, 2013, *Biblia ludowa. Interpretacje wątków biblijnych w kulturze ludowej* [The Folk Bible. Interpretations of Biblical Motifs in Folk Culture], Toruń: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu Mikołaja Kopernika.
- Życzyńska-Ciołek Danuta, 1996, Pomieszany świat [World in Confusion], *Polska Sztuka Ludowa. Konteksty*, no 3–4, pp. 203–207.