

# On the Importance of One Character

Some Afterthoughts on *The Forest of Anykščiai*

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## ABSTRACT

*The latest edition of Anykščių šilelis (The Forest of Anykščiai) by famous Lithuanian poet Antanas Baranauskas renewed the old debate how understood the last word in the second line of the poem. The textual analysis of first three publications with the poet's autographs and early copies does not provide any possibility to accept the conjecture suggested by one of editors in the early 1960s. This case is analyzed in the broader Lithuanian related and international context of links of alternative readings with strands of a literary interpretation.*

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IT HAS BEEN FOR MORE THAN A CENTURY THAT ANY INTRODUCTION to textual scholarship has been trying to hammer into the heads of philology, theology, and history students that in this field of activity, attention to each character, and even each diacritical or punctuation mark is important (THORPE 1972, 131–40; KELEMEN 2009, 14–16). Two usually rather scanty groups sincerely believe in this. Representatives of the first group are the readers of this journal. And those belonging to the second group create internet sites, in which they try to prove that the world will end on a given day of a given month, as implied by certain previously misunderstood line in the Bible or Koran, which only they have managed to read correctly. The majority of other contemporary scholars of the humanities, at least tacitly, regard the attention to the details of transcription dismissively and ironically at best, and at worst—as a repressive rigorism that restricts liberating ideas. I will dare to make an assumption that it is only the leniency of society to the oddities of scholars and the autonomy of universities rather than our arguments that make a difference when decisions are made if textual scholarship should remain funded by public money.

Therefore, each case allowing us to read famous works and influential texts according to alternative interpretational paradigms has great value. I have in mind the variants that not only a narrow group of editors, but also

wider academic circles regard as decisive. The selection of variants may alter the argument of the entire work, its key motifs, and character types. Scepticism towards attention to details fades away when trying to answer the well-known question if in his final soliloquy Othello compares himself with a *base Indian* who *threw a pearle away*, as is testified in the *First Quarto*, or with a *base Iudean*, as one can read in the *First Folio* (LEVIN 1982, 60). According to Tom Davis (1998), in the second case Othello's obvious "very heavy self-condemnation" eliminates the understanding of an "unrepentant Othello" (97), which Frank Raymond Leavis was once trying to prove. German textual criticism is still noted for outbreaks of discussion about the readings that have minimum difference in the graphical respect, but are semantically alternative and change the interpretation of the author's personality: "Schmutz" vs "Schmerz" [filth vs pain], — in Heinrich von Kleist's letter to Maria von Kleist of 1807 (ROCKENBERGER 2012).

Here I am going to present in greater detail another example, when "two famous and seminal interpretations, that affected the reading practice of generations, almost entirely dependent (it is not too strong to say) on a variation of one letter in one word" (DAVIS 1998, 97). It can widen the understanding about the relation between two objects of textual scholarship—the artefacts of written culture and fugitive, transitory, and fleeting meanings of a work of fiction. Or, to put it more cautiously, about how this relation is understood and, more frequently, misunderstood on the north-eastern fringe of Europe, in Lithuania.

Judging by the poetic value and influence on the national cultural tradition and complications of textual scholarship, the nineteenth-century poet Antanas Baranauskas (1835–1902) is to Lithuanian literature, which developed in a later period, what Shakespeare is to English literature. Baranauskas' poem *Anykščiu šilelis* [*The Forest of Anykščiai*] (1858–59) is considered one of two most important classical works of the Lithuanian past. It consists of 342 alexandrine lines about the beauty of nature, the history of the country, as well as sensual and spiritual experiences. In the first part of the poem, after a brief introduction presenting an image of a cut-down pine forest, the memory of the lyrical subject paints a picture of primordial nature, which is conveyed by metaphor-rich descriptions of the views, scents, and sounds of the forest. Each episode is compositionally regular and dynamically ascending—the eyes rise from moss to pine tops; the audial episode culminating in a choir of birds starts with midnight silence, in which the poet develops metaphysical hearing enabling him to "hear" the movement of stars in heavens. In the second part of the poem, the images of people exploiting the riches of the forest and the ethics of a village community are

strung on the narrative axis of Lithuanian history since its Christianization in the late Medieval Ages. The fate of the forest is presented in parallel to the fate of Lithuania; a comparison crossed out by tsarist censors from the first edition of the poem (BARANAUSKAS 1860, 60) reads that in the past, “The trees all merging in one vista grand / As Lithuanian hearts in one homeland” (BARANAUSKAS 1985, 162). The sacral links between man and nature conveyed in transformed tropes borrowed from the poetics of folk songs are described as a source of creative work and a rich spiritual life.

During a hundred and fifty-five years, thirty-seven editions of the poem in Lithuanian, its translations into eighteen languages (MIKŠYTĖ 1960; BARANAUSKAS 2013), and many hundreds of pages of literary criticism have appeared.<sup>1</sup> Despite intensive analysis, a latent question would constantly arise: how should one read and understand the beginning of the poem, which is being learnt by heart already by the fifth or sixth generation in a row? I am referring “to read” and “to understand” rather than “to write”, since its transcription, as will be explained soon, is absolutely reliable. Although no new previously unknown documents have appeared, the discussion of *how to understand it* has recently become more urgent, because alternative opinions have made their way into publications aimed for schools (BARANAUSKAS 2012, 141; BARANAUSKAS 2012a, 42). And the key to an answer is the last letter of the second line that determines which of two different lexemes will be recognized in the word consisting of mere four letters.

In order to explain it, a short lesson in Lithuanian—just a couple of words and several grammatical forms—is necessary. These two words are “tikėti”—“to believe”, and “(atsi)tikti”—“to happen”. The analytical nature of the Lithuanian and its great many inflexional forms endows it richly with partial homophones. In the case under discussion, in the dialects of East Lithuania, from which Baranauskas descends, the third person (singular and plural) of the present tense of “to believe” and the plural (participial form) of the past tense of the oblique mood of “to happen” are similar: [tiki]—“believe” and [tiki]—“has happened”. In the first case, the vowel of the ending is pronounced short in the town of Anykščiai, where the poet was born, and in the second case—half-long, but without a substantial difference. Besides, the spelling of the nineteenth century, which had not yet been standardized, does not always allow us to judge

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1. Publications are counted not including stereotypical reprints, editions in braille and audiobooks; for their systematic account, see: SUBAČIUS 2009; for editions issued following this article, see BARANAUSKAS 2009; 2009a; 2012; and 2013.

this difference. For example, in the last word of the first line—participle [nuplīkī]—“gone bald”, which is rhymed with the word under discussion—“believe” or “has happened”,—the second [ī] is surely half-long, but in the earliest known printed version of the poem (BARANAUSKAS 1859, 61) it was transcribed without differentiating between a short and half-long vowel—both of them were marked as grapheme <i>:

....nupliki

....tiki

One can also compare the transcription of the vowel [i] in other places of this source, where its length and shortness is not marked as well: “iszkłotos”, “Kepina” (short both in the dialect and standard language), “paukstites”, “gribu” (long both in the dialect and standard language). Therefore, because of the homographic forms, the first two rhymed lines of the poem in the first publication may be understood in two ways:

Kaľnaj keľmuoti, pakallnes nupliki,

Kas jusu gražej senobinej tiki?

Stump-littered hillocks, desolate and bare,

Who can believe in your former beauty?

*or*

What has happened to your former beauty?

What meanings are encoded in the first and the second reading? In the first case, formally the address “who can believe” is tentatively directed to those who have not witnessed the former beauty of the presently cut-down forest, which is further depicted in the poem. However, the lyrical subject gives a rather deep sigh in the form of a rhetorical question that nobody except himself remembers and is able to restore in their imagination the pine forest, which used to stimulate all senses. Alongside it is a promise of reviving the a-historical world of the golden age by the power of poetry, which the poet believes in. This implies a vision and spiritual powers. If we read it as “what has happened”, the addressee of the question is the poet’s birthplace, which looks different today. The poet putatively speaking with personified stumps (ŽENTELYTĖ 2001, 226), reveals a negative historical shift, and tries to understand what has caused it. This implies affirmative description and causative relations. As the introduction presupposes both the direction of thought and emotional intonation, for a large part deter-

mining the reading and understanding, there is no need to prove broadly the importance of the difference between “believe” and “has happened”.

To sum up the directions of analysis of *The Forest of Anykščiai* and the entire oeuvre by Baranauskas, which have taken root in Lithuanian academic criticism, I could state that the different readings of the second line significantly support one of two basic interpretational alternatives. According to most critics, Baranauskas’ is a Romanticist poem (LAZDYNAS 2012, 320–321), and a contrast between the bleak present and the bright past is testified by the solitary lyrical subject whose spiritual power brings back to life the aesthetic splendour of the bygone times. The links between non-believing and forgetting, as well as memory and poetic imagination, encoded in the sigh of the first lines “who can believe . . .”, are the basic ideological dominants. The cut-down and regrown forest that comes back to life in the song of the poet who believes in its former beauty is perceived as a metaphor of the unconquered nation, and the national character of the poem is emphasized (MIKŠYTĖ 2001, 715).

However, according to others, the mathematically strict structure of the episodes of the poem corresponds to its descriptive classicist (or sentimentalist) nature. The followers of this approach that de-emphasizes Romanticism seek rationality and prioritize the acquisition of knowledge over the exercise of imagination—the subject-observer presumably registers how it was in the past and how it is today. In its turn, this way of thinking is justified by a logically formulated question at the beginning of the poem: what has *happened* to the forest—an almost routine inquiry why the landscape has changed. Similar poetic phrases can be found in the poem *The Deserted Village* (1770) by the eighteenth-century Irish-English writer Oliver Goldsmith, whose translation into Polish or especially Russian might have had some influence on Baranauskas (LAZDYNAS 2012a, 138–142).

If we look at this problematic situation with the eyes of a textual scholar rather than a literary critic, it becomes much clearer. I have already mentioned that it is a conundrum of reading and understanding rather than inscription. Here is a short description of the primary objects in this case used by textual scholarship. Neither the early autograph from the time when *The Forest of Anykščiai* was composed, nor later holographs, about which we know from the author’s correspondence, have survived. The first publication of the poem was prepared after a copy made by Klemensas Kairys, a friend of Baranauskas, which in the given place coincides with the homographic orthography of the publication and thus does not help us. As we can guess from other places in Kairys’s copy and manuscript notes by Baranauskas from the same period, the length of the vowel [i] was not

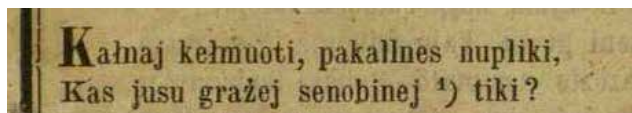
graphically marked at all in the poem’s autograph. In the surviving copy of the poet’s brother Anupras Baranauskas, made at the time when the poem was written, the place of accent is occasionally marked above the letter with a circumflex or a macron, in the case of the vowel [i] coinciding with the long or half-long vowel of the dialect: “grîna”, “grîbu”, “puszînu”, “puszîni”, “kukutîs” (long), and “patî”, “blinndîs”, “gajjlî”, “lizdî” (half-long). However, the transcription of the last words of the first lines in these copies is homographic — it coincides with the first publication and Kairys’s copy: “. . . nupliki / . . . tiki” (BARANAUSKAS 1995, 498–503).

Baranauskas’ letters prove (ALMINAUSKIS 1930, 77–78, 100) that the second edition of the poem in Prague (BARANAUSKAS 1875), and the third—in Weimar (BARANAUSKAS 1882), prepared, accordingly, by the Czech linguist Leopold Geitler and the German philologist Hugo Weber for linguistic purposes—were based on the holographs sent to them by author. Although in these editions the endings of the first two lines are marked with not exactly the same graphemes, in both cases the difference in the length of the vowel [i] is clearly differentiated:

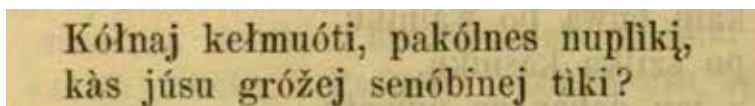
1875	1882 I	1882 II
...nupliki	...nupliky	...nuplikê
.....tiki	.....tiki	.....tikĩ
<i>=[i] half-long accented	<î>=[i] half-long accented	<î>=[i] short accented
<ı>=[i] long/half-long	<y>=[i] long/half-long	<ê>=[ê] long/half-long
<i>=[i] short	<ı>=[i] short	<ĩ>=[i] short

Thus, all the three transcriptions support the reading of “tiki” (dialect) / “tiki” (standard language) from “tikèti” — “to believe”, and reject the version of “tiki” from “tikti” — “to happen”.

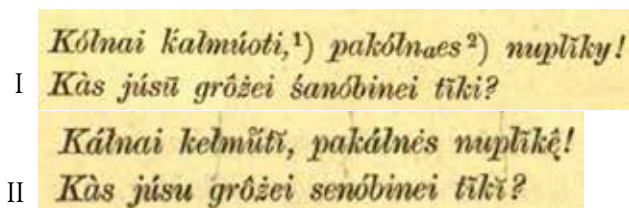
Readers may already be puzzled why in quoting the edition of 1882 we presented two variants of transcription and two facsimiles. It is indeed a surprising case for, as in the Weimar edition, following the author’s decision and referring to different holographs specially prepared by the author, *The Forest of Anykščiai* was published in two different transcriptions on facing pages. The first transcription, that is, on the left page, corresponds to the pronunciation in his dialect, while on the right page, a unique orthographic system invented by Baranauskas himself and based on the principle of polyphonetics was used. The Latin alphabet was supplemented with diacritical marks in such a way that a representative of each Lithuanian dialect could read the transcription in his or her own manner (SUBAČIUS 2006,



**Figure 1.** 1st publication of *The Forest of Anykščiai*: 1–2 lines (BARANAUSKAS 1859, 61)



**Figure 2.** 2nd publication of *The Forest of Anykščiai*: 1–2 lines (BARANAUSKAS 1875, 41)



**Figure 3 and 4.** 3rd publication of *The Forest of Anykščiai*: 1–2 lines (BARANAUSKAS 1882, 2–3)

184). Regarding the issue under discussion, it is enough to point out that the participial forms, such as the one at the end of the first line and the one that would be at the end of the second line if the reading [tīkī]—“has happened”—was correct, in Baranauskas’s polyphonic notation have the long vowel [ē] in the ending according to the pronunciation of other dialects. In other words, the transcription “. . . nuplikē / . . . tīkī” implies that at the end of the second line stands the verb “believe” in the present tense, and not the participial form “has happened”, which should have been spelled as “tīkē”.

The fact that the left and the right pages of the 1882 edition present two different transcriptions of the same place most strongly confirms the reading “believe”. This statement sounds somewhat paradoxical, as it is customary to think that it is coincidence rather than difference of transcriptions that increases the reliability of the reading of a text. Early textual scholarship would regard the discrepancy of written characters above all as a con-

flict of variants, and one of them would exclude the other in the main text of a critical edition. The new theoretical insight would posit the same as a possibility offered to a reader by a parallel edition or multi-textual digital presentation to choose any variant and make an egalitarian comparison. More sophisticated textual criticism would sometimes use the opposition of spellings for a historical reconstruction, when both documented variants are rejected, but it is by their discrepancy that a more authentic, no longer extant, form is accounted for. Even if it were established that the difference is merely orthographic, it would imply either the diachrony of the copies or their belonging to different cultural and social traditions. According to the logic of genetic criticism, different holograph transcriptions of the same work would line up as succeeding points in the trajectory of creative process and changes in the writer's thought, or at least his writing practice.

I have enumerated the approaches to spelling variants and their treatment, when the central decisive figure is an editor, a researcher. Conversely, in the third edition of Baranauskas's poem a dialogue of the variants of spelling is sanctioned by the author himself or, at least, the author's phantom emerging from the testimonies found in his letters that the edition has been prepared after his holographs. This dialogue gives us a highly reliable, almost stereoscopic, confirmation of the authenticity of the lexical and grammatical forms of the text. Two parallel printing sets almost eliminate the chance of typographic error made in the same place in both transcriptions. Two systematic orthographies do not leave any possibility for homography and, in their turn, when analysed together, dispel all doubts about the identity of words and the fact that these are mere variants of transcription and not a linguistic text. Reliable recognition of a linguistic text is confirmed not retrospectively, as a reconstruction of an archetype, but synchronically and, quite possibly, prospectively, as a signpost for future adequate transcriptions in some more modern orthography. Was this prospective possibility used in preparing later posthumous editions of the poem? Probably not. The publication of parallel orthographies was taken as a basis both in the editions where the source was indicated, and where the source could be traced only philologically. However, the dialogic arrangement of texts found in the 1882 edition was not used in any of them; instead, either of the two variants was transcribed, with greater or lesser accuracy, in a more modern spelling (ŽIRGULYS 1954, 48–49; MIKŠYTĖ 1994, 312). And finally, as was mentioned, there still are enthusiasts of two ways of reading the second line.

Certainly, the Lithuanian linguist Juozas Balčikonis was familiar with the above-discussed material of the first publications of the poem; however,



he was probably the most determined advocate of the anti-romantic “has happened” variant (1960). As this variant is not supported by the very obvious transcriptions of the discussed publications, Balčikonis relied on the motif of error. Theoretically, three cases are possible: 1) the error appeared already in the manuscript; 2) typesetters failed to read the handwriting correctly; or 3) they did not have enough of the necessary type, as the letters contained diacritical marks. Baranauskas is famous for his precise linguistic descriptions of dialects and phonological research. It is very difficult to believe that while making three different copies of his work at a different time in his own hand, he would make a significant mistake already in the second line and blindly repeat it even while transliterating the manuscript of the poem into another orthographic system. Although psychological probability is a certain criterion of textual scholarship, there is another more serious argument that considerably reduces the possibility of misunderstanding or accidental confusion of letters. The third edition includes two more pairs of lines, whose endings contain rhymed participial and present tense verb forms identical to “. . . nuplīkē / . . . tīkī” (i.e. in the reading of “believe”), written in both notations in precisely the same way as the endings that we are interested in:

Line number	1882 I	1882 II
1	...nuplīky	..nuplīkē
2	.....tīki	... ..tīkī
39	...sutûpy	... sutûpē
40	....rīarûpi	....nerûpī
245	...kurēny	...kurēnē
246	.....pēni	.....pēnī

In the second and third cases homophony or homography is absent, thus the words and their grammatical forms can be identified in one single way. Even though a typesetter might have been influenced by the levelling effect of mechanical repetition of combinations of symmetrical forms, it could only have been directed towards a sequence of the text, i.e. not the first two lines may have been typeset erroneously by the analogy of further lines, but on the contrary, further lines would have been distorted while automatically repeating the endings of the first lines. In addition to the above-indicated analogues of exact rhymes to the first and second lines, the 1882 edition contains three more pairs of rhymed lines (15–16, 33–34, 111–112), in the endings of which short and long vowels of the [i] type are orthographically differentiated.

The important features of the primary objects mentioned here were noticed by Baranauskas's editor Regina Mikšytė back in the 1960s. She also provided some arguments based on those features in a short article printed in a small font and placed under the heading "Information" among the appendices of a philological journal (1962, 488–489), as at that time, as it is now, the opinion that issues of textual scholarship are not worthy of greater attention prevails in Lithuania. At the end of the 20th century the reading "believe" seemed to have definitively taken root (BARANAUSKAS 1994, 27). However, at the beginning of the 21st century the linguist Rita Šepetytė not only returned to the question of alternative readings, but also presented the form of contemporary orthography "tike" (ŠEPETYTĖ 2001, 5), which is not homographic and can only be understood as "has happened" and not as "believe", in an edition of *The Forest of Anykščiai* meant for schools (BARANAUSKAS 2001, 31). In my assessment, it is not a better or worse motivated choice of one of the two variants testified by the sources. It is an invented conjectural emendation implied by the homograph of the first edition; however, other essential documents directly related with holographs strictly contradict this supposition. Nevertheless, other publishers followed Šepetytė (BARANAUSKAS 2012a, 42; BARANAUSKAS 2013, 47).

As all can remember, while speaking about errors and conjectures, Alfred Edward Housman compared a textual scholar with a dog hunting for fleas (1921, 69). At first sight, hunting for fleas that are not there is a pointless task. So where does the enthusiasm of linguists and literary critics for this kind of hunting come from? Šepetytė states in her commentary: "Probably many readers of *The Forest of Anykščiai* by Antanas Baranauskas have found the second line of this work [containing "tiki" — "believe"] strange" (2001, 5). Strange, as presumably it was: 1) less common in our daily speech, 2) characterized by syntactical rection, which is of bookish—Latin—origin (cf. "tibi fidamus", "mi fido"), and 3) not in line with the poetics whole of the work. The last argument draws us into a vicious circle—a classicist interpretation of the whole is constructed on the basis of the reading of "has happened", chosen *a priori*, which obviously excludes the reading of "believe". The doubt if the constructions of the poem by a literate author distributed in the printed form may be bookish sounds lame. And the most shocking is the fact that the discussion of *lectio difficilior* and *lectio faciliior* is being reintroduced into literature of the modern times and contemporary philology. It is only in this way that I can interpret the description of reading as strange, unusual and less common, particularly with a view to the fact that it is testified by three different printing sets made from different holographs. In this case making a simplifying and

trivializing conjectural emendation of a poetic text with regard to a semantically more complex reading requires courage that may come only from a total neglect of textual criticism.

Literary critics solving the question of typology of *The Forest of Anykščiai* are “bothered” by the alternation of lyrical and epic episodes and other heterogeneous features of the work. Thus they have tried to label it as “narrative poetry”, “a lyrical epic poem” (PAKALNIŠKIS 1981, 101; 191), “a lyrical poem” (BIRŽIŠKA 1924, 52), “a romantic poem” (MIKŠYTĖ 1993, 86), “a romantic lyrical poem” (ABRAITYTĖ 2003, 82), and even “a romantic heroic poem” (MIKŠYTĖ 2001, 50), though the character of the poem is a tenacious radically personified forest and the relentless forces of history rather than knights or heroes. Therefore, the solution of textual criticism, which is favorable to the reading of the second line as “Who can believe in your former beauty”, which is the only possible reading according to the material of the sources, is significant to the terminological games of criticism. By tipping the scales to the advantage of the interpretation proving the dominant of Romanticism, this reading helps to justify the description of “a romantic poem”. Thus, a correctly recognized character becomes a point of reference in attributing the work to a cultural period, literary trend, and even looking for the most precise sub-genre definition.

It is obvious that textual scholars, like all researchers, are inquisitive and seek the truth. And in doing this, they meticulously scrutinize, edit and publish a great many objects in a large variety of ways (which only a small circle often finds interesting). However, to build a positive public opinion, a flagship object is needed. Thus let us have close at hand some good examples of how our dawdling over one letter can give well-motivated answers to these didactic questions about literature that win “unsatisfactory” or “excellent” marks for students. The most gifted of these students, as Donald H. Reiman elegantly revealed by an example of his own education, who are familiar with alternative readings, holograph revisions, and “textual anomalies” (2008, 22), may feel the basic attraction for literature and textual scholarship.

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