

Opponents are always tempted to speak about things missing in the dissertation, not those dealt with. Maybe the materials in the Estonian Folklore Archives would have deserved more detailed discussion? And although the significant works in the European tradition, for instance, in the context of the 17th century, are presented in detail, the older tradition of dowsing with its own peculiarities has been left rather invisible. Some of the treatments of Estonian material from the past would have deserved a synopsis of at least a few sentences but Kivari has only mentioned them passingly. Although special literature has been thoroughly and probably sufficiently elaborated, diligent browsing of bibliographies (not only those of folklore) would have yielded salient addition namely in terms of local tradition.

The dissertation published as the 24th issue of *Dissertationes Folkloristicae* is a salient research enriching folkloristic analysis. Due to the approach considering different aspects, the use of suitable analytical tools, and the unique interaction of the researcher and the research object, the dissertation *Dowsing as a link between natural and supernatural: Folkloristic reflections on water veins, Earth radiation and dowsing practice* has added essential and necessary new knowledge to cultural studies.

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References

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CONFERENCE OF THE INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY FOR CONTEMPORARY LEGEND RESEARCH, Tallinn, June 28 – July 2, 2016

Amsterdam in 2010, Harrisburg in 2011, Gottingen in 2012, Lexington in 2013, Prague in 2014, San Antonio in 2015, and Tallinn in 2016 – these are the cities that have recently hosted researchers of contemporary legends, who persistently continue the tradition of annual meetings. This year researchers in this field from the Estonian Literary Museum were given the honour of organising the 34th conference of the International Society for Contemporary Legend Research (ISCLR). Eda Kalmre and Mare Kalda along with an efficient conference team had chosen as the venue to discuss contemporary legends a place in Pühavaimu Street, in the Old Town of Tallinn.

Year in, year out, the first call for papers has been similar in form: Proposals for papers on all aspects of legend research are sought, as are those on any legend-like tradition that circulates actively at present or has circulated in an earlier historical period. Extensive understanding of the sphere and its resulting interpretation have

taken shape during the years the society has operated. Some thirty years have passed since the innovative Sheffield meetings in the 1980s; during these years group identity and disciplinary history have been established. One of the founder members of the society, Sandy Hobbs, was also supposed to come to the conference, yet had to give up his plans. His and David Main's co-authored presentation, "The Vanishing Hitchhiker: Then and Now", was read by Véronique Campion-Vincent. The versatile and buoyant French colleague herself discussed how Native Americans serve as a source of wisdom in the context of alternative spiritual beliefs (New Age). Bill Ellis joined the conference via Skype, to be informed about his nomination as a recipient of the Linda Dégh Lifetime Achievement Award for Legend Scholarship.¹ The nominee greeted the conference participants in his characteristic witty style. The award has been handed out since 2015, and the first one was given to Gillian Bennett and Paul Smith, who were also involved in the establishment of the society and the Sheffield seminars. So far all the laureates, as well as Linda Dégh (1920–2014) herself, were and are researchers who have made an inestimable contribution to the study of contemporary legends, and whose works serve as the basis in discussions about these legends.

As a rule, conference presentations can roughly be divided into two: some of them deal with folklore related to famous personalities or major events concerned with many people, as well as variegated fusions of folklore and media news; some others focus on the activity of marginal groups or proceed from symbolic places. Narratives channel the main human fears and emotions, which surface in urban legends and are related to human existence, ethical choices, prohibitions and punishments, pleasures and disgusts, as well as dangers emanating from their own species.

Patricia Turner and Anastasiya Astapova, researchers in the field of political folklore, talked about popular interpretations of great things and personalities. Turner introduced the image of Michelle Obama and compared it with those associated with other symbolically charged females in politics. Astapova, based on her fieldwork in Belarus and on the Belarusian mass media, showed the interplay between the genres of rumours and jokes about presidential elections in non-democratic societies. Aurore Van de Winkel from Brussels explained the construction of French popular imagination created around the disappearance of the Malaysian Airlines flight MH 370. Rosemary Hathaway's presentation was induced by personal experience narratives about protest against the Vietnam War. Power relations, images of the enemy, conspiracy theories – these were the keywords of Zuzana Panczová's presentation about utilising the "West" and "East" dichotomy in the conspiratorial discourse in Slovakia, Alexander Panchenko's presentation about organ theft legends in Soviet and post-Soviet Russia, and Daria Radchenko's presentation about war folklore with a sensitive topicality in the context of the political crisis in Ukraine. Jeanmarie Rouhier-Willoughby's observations were concerned with the relationships between power and sacredness: based on interviews, she discussed GULAG trauma narratives, in which the massacre venue became sanctified.

A number of processes viewed in the context of contemporary legend studies manifest a symbiosis between the media (especially digital media) and the physical world. Websites present material shared and consumed therein, but which has intertextual connections with pre-digital era texts. Radvilė Racėnaitė had collected Internet memes that talked about Christian saints and God. Gail de Vos examined the image of the Norse god Bragi in contemporary popular culture. Carolyn Ware introduced the sentimental 'true' story

of a dog named Tank, which had circulated on the Internet, and brought out similarities and differences between the online versions of the story. Another 'pet presentation' by Mare Kõiva and Rahel Laura Vesik discussed the well-known Japanese story about a faithful dog and its later spread in the media. David Clarke ("The Role of Soldiers, Spies and Journalists in the Dissemination of WWI Rumour-Legends") and Filip Graliński ("Fortean, Urban Legends or Journalistic Copy Paste? Weird Stories in the Interwar Polish Press") analysed fabricated or rumour-news specially transformed into legends.

Special landmarks in the development of folkloristics as a field of science were dwelt upon by Christine Shojaei Kawan (methodological innovation in the folklore research by Walter Anderson), Eda Kalmre (urban legends and their collecting process in Estonia in the 1990s), and Carme Oriol and Emili Samper in their co-authored presentation about the strategies of collecting, archiving, and studying contemporary legends in Catalonia. Mare Kalda gave an overview of the more universal ideas of giving and receiving, based on traditional Estonian treasure tales. Elena Iugai discussed Russian beliefs, legends, and practices concerning money, and showed how the balance of good and evil was established in belief stories. The presentation by Rita Repšienė and Odeta Žukauskienė dealt with visual and narrative power of cinematic legends influencing life in so-called 'dead cities'. Mikel J. Koven explored how the figure of the antiquarian scholar in the film adaptations of M. R. James's ghost stories faces the situation where the past haunts the present. Theo Meder shared his experience of having followed the narrative riddle game of kwispel during the last ten years (see also Burger & Meder 2006), which has turned into a card game called Black Stories, in which the players are given hints by which they have to guess different urban legends.

For some time already, rumours featuring fear, anxiety, and suspicion, accompanied by manifestations of ostension and peculiar behaviour, have constituted popular spheres of contemporary legends. Peter Burger analysed legends about strangers abducting children in white vans, and compared news items, discussion on the web, and statements by officials. The paper by Anna Kirzyuk, however, focused on the Soviet variation of the persistent urban legend about dangerous black cars, circulating in the Soviet Union in the 1960s–1980s, and was based on the data collected in the course of the corresponding research project. J. J. Dias Marques talked about the reappearance of a legend known as "The Grateful Terrorist" in two different occasions in Portugal in 2015, after its last circulation some ten years ago. Andrea Kitta observed the development of Slender Sickness,² spreading from its initial virtual location to the physical reality of people (teenagers). Eleanor Hasken demonstrated the narratives posted on Alien Abduction Help Forum and Unexplained Mysteries Forum – places for people who have had some experience with aliens. The board of the society recognised her presentation as the best student presentation at the Tallinn conference. Reet Hiiemäe also explored a sensitive topic: she focused on contemporary beliefs about childlessness in Estonia and showed how childless people try to overcome their personal crisis. John Bodner's paper "Pot Labourers' Communication Ecologies: Rumour, Legend and Occupational Narratives among Marijuana Growers" was based on five years' fieldwork and showed narratives in a broader judicial context. Rae Muhlstock had studied the contemporary implications of the mythological labyrinth, especially the maze built in the Catskill Mountains, and showed how local people, rather than to be interested in the myth, were interested in merely the existence of the maze. Jan Pohunek in his paper on the phenomenology



Figure 1. Urban legend researchers with historian Ott Sandrak at Tammisspea erratic boulder.
Photograph by Jan Pohunek 2016.



Figure 2. Theo Meder in the dual role of a presenter and game leader.
Photograph by Meelis Roll 2016.

of haunted places presented examples of areas frequently mentioned in supernatural stories (abandoned houses, castle ruins, haunted forests, etc.) His attention was paid to the role of sensory experiences and different kinds of interpretations of space, which help to create stories worth telling.

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In the late autumn of 2016, the next conference in 2017 was announced, which will take place at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette, on June 6–10.

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Notes

¹ See <https://contemporarylegend.org/prizes-and-awards/linda-degh-lifetime-achievement-award/reipient-1/>, last accessed on November 10, 2016.

² A special issue of the society's journal, titled *The Slender Man. Contemporary Legend: The Journal of the International Society for Contemporary Legend Research*, 2015, was published recently, and it includes five longer articles by Trevor Blank & Lynne McNeill, Andrew Peck, Jeffrey Tolbert, and Andrea Kitta, five shorter discussion points, and a book review.

References

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