

NEWS IN BRIEF

MIGRATION IN THE CONTEXT OF RITUALS AND PRACTICES

On June 26–29, 2012, the Eighth Annual Conference of the SIEF (International Society for Ethnology and Folklore) Working Group “The Ritual Year” (established in 2004) took place in Plovdiv, Bulgaria.

The conference under the general title “Migrations” was organised by the Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Studies with the Ethnography Museum at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, and the Paisii Hilendarskii University of Plovdiv, with Lina Gergova at the head of the organising committee. The subject of migration came up due to the topicality of the phenomenon and relating problems, which attract the attention of ethnologists, folklorists, linguists, historians, sociologists and specialists from other fields of humanities from many countries.

The call for papers evoked responses from researchers of twenty countries, and forty presentations were given within the four conference days. Each day started with an introductory lecture. On the first day, after the official opening, **Jurij Fikfak** (Slovenia) in his presentation “Crisis and Ritual Year” discussed participation in rituals and practices as a possibility for negotiating difficult situations, crises and traumas, including change in place of residence (migration). In his paper, the researcher made a distinction between rituals as regular practice (rather rare nowadays) and as intellectual heritage – the basis for the national idea. In his opinion, regarding national-cultural tradition as the mental basis is necessary for determining identity, and this approach could contribute to the restoration and continuity of holiday rituals. According to discussants, these processes are under way in several countries.

The second day of the conference was opened by **Emily Lyle** (Scotland), Chair of the Ritual Year Working Group, with her presentation “The ‘Life Cycle’ of Crops in Relation to the Ritual Year”. The researcher compared the vegetation period of main European grains with people’s seasonal life and ritual practices. E. Lyle’s idea that in vegetation periods the most significant are the beginning and the end, not their cyclicity, aroused heated discussion. The main issue argued was to what extent could mythological year be structured and whether we could disengage ourselves from concrete climatic conditions that have impact on grain growing in different regions of Europe.

On the third day, the keynote speech was given by **Irina Sedakova** (Moscow), who talked about time and space in the Balkan and Slavic rituals of separation. In her analysis of real (departure, leaving of migrants, recruiting, etc.) and symbolic (transition moments in life cycle – birth, wedding, funeral) leave-taking, the researcher offered a classification of ‘separations’, based on temporal dichotomy – the separation is either temporary (until the next meeting) or permanent (forever). The associations between separations in calendar and family rituals were also discussed. This topic evoked many memories of personal life as well as from fieldwork. For instance, grandmother saw her grandchildren off by blessing them with loaves of bread (Latvia); parents, when bidding farewell, said: “God in front of you, and we will follow” (Bulgaria), etc.



Moment from the meeting of the SIEF Ritual Year Working Group. From the left: Leander Petzold, Irina Sedakova and Emily Lyle. Photo by Andres Kuperjanov 2012.

On the last day, **István Povedák** (Hungary) talked about strategies for identity preservation, giving a detailed introduction into the ethno-cultural, public awareness and political activities of the students' association of Szekler University (SZEFE). The organisation advocated and created rituals (including an anthem popular even nowadays) to support the identity of Transylvanian Hungarians who returned to Hungary in 1920. Rituals and politics are closely connected, and on national basis rituals can either separate or unite people – this idea was conveyed by many speakers at the conference.

The panel “Ritual Year of Migrant Communities” was opened by **Laurent Sébastien Fournier**, who talked about the ritual games of the Scottish Diaspora in the United States. The researcher analysed calendar ball games that have been spread all over the world by Scottish emigrants and have acquired specific local features. He proposed to view these games as a ritual genre that has preserved its ritual foundation regardless of the great variability and specific local features. The Scottish exodus started in the 18th century, and the descriptions of games in American literature date back to 1846. By the late 19th century these games had nearly died out, only to make a powerful re-appearance after World War II. Today the games are losing their connection with the calendar, and their sacral character has faded; however, identity issues, Scottishness and its material signs have become more significant. The following discussions elaborated on the notion of the ‘ritual genre’ as well as the ethnic stereotypes of the Scots. According to David Stanley (USA), Americans do not regard them as greedy and stingy but rather as courageous, brave and tenacious in the spirit of Romanticism inspired by the works of Water Scott. The topic of ethnic stereotypes in the context of migration was also investigated in other papers.

David Stanley in his paper “Rituals and Customs in an Immigrant Community” noted that American experience in the sphere of migration and relating issues is ex-

tremely important today, as many countries feature multiculturalism. He dwelt upon the situation in the State of Utah which, due to the development of coal industry in the 19th century, attracted workers from nearly thirty nationalities. The use of the signs of national belonging (clothing, hairstyle, attributes) as well as confession, ritual and everyday food, music and dances helped the newcomers preserve their identity; yet, sometimes the migrants found themselves in a situation in which they had to hide their origin and adopt local rituals and customs.

Jaka Repič (Slovenia) in his paper “The Role of Rituals, Celebrations and Festivities in Slovene Diasporic Community in Argentina” discussed the history of the preservation and maintenance of customs among emigrants who fled their homeland in the 1820s. By operating with the notions ‘personal trauma’ and ‘collective memory of roots’, the researcher described the mechanisms for mythologizing the past, native places and holidays. The presentation raised questions about the return of emigrants to their homeland, the ethno-cultural problems related with visiting cult sites (for the Slovenes, Mount Triglav) and the ways of overcoming stereotypes.

Petko Hristov (Bulgaria), who has been investigating work migration on the Balkans, discussed in his paper “Seasonal Labour Migrations and Ritual Cycles” how seasonal work migration of the past and today’s migrations fit into and influence the ritual calendar. Earlier on, winter was the time for weddings and autumn for baptismal ceremonies, whereas today wedding celebrations take place in the summertime, when all migrants gather in their native villages; baptismal ceremonies usually also fall on spring or summer. Today these celebrations feature certain ‘European’ characteristics conditioned by migration, and sacrificial rituals (*kurban*) have been transformed to a considerable extent. The researcher pointed out frequent changes in state borders in some regions (for example, in Macedonian villages these changes have occurred up to five times during the past century), which has had a significant impact on both the migration processes and rituals.

Tatiana Minniyakhmetova (Russia – Austria) in her paper “The Ritual Calendar of Migrants” dwelt upon changes in the annual cycle of rituals and in the calendar (including division into weeks) on the example of the Udmurts moving to other regions of Russia. Environment has a great impact on the Udmurts’ historic rituals, and therefore change in place of residence also influences the semantics of rituals. **Aigars Leilbārdis’s** presentation “Calendar Customs in Latvian Village Timofeyevka in Siberia” also reviewed the influence of neighbouring cultures; yet, doing it on the basis of rather different material. The Russian setting has had a considerable impact on the Latvians’ holiday calendar (borrowing of some concepts of Midsummer Night) and terminology, but a number of rituals inherent in Latvia, such as celebration of Palm Sunday and specific omens relating to this, have persisted.

A special section was dedicated to the fieldwork carried out within the project for studying culture in Bulgarian-Turkish borderlands. **Valentina Ganeva-Raycheva** and **Nikolai Vukov** in their joint paper discussed commemorating cases of Bulgarians and Turks’ forced resettlements, **Meglana Zlatkova** spoke about inhabiting divided territories and rituals on the two sides of Bulgarian-Turkish border, and **Lina Gergova’s** paper was dedicated to the national commemorative meetings on Petrova Niva, Bulgaria, focusing on local/national and traditional/modern. The rituals of the Bulgar-

ians in Turkey and of the Turkish resettlers in Bulgaria include regular visits to native places in their former homeland, ritual meetings and common meals in sacred places.

A significant subtheme of the conference was New Paganism, which has recently been in the centre of attention of several members of the Ritual Year Working Group. This year, unusual formats were used. **Kamila Velkoborská** (Czech Republic) and **Leon van Gulik's** (Netherlands) joint presentation dwelt upon the history of New Pagan movement Wicca, its spread and rituals, which have acquired specific features in each country. The paper was illustrated by a live interview with Morgana Sythove, who calls herself a witch. She told the audience that in the 1970s she was travelling in Europe and discovered the Wicca movement in the Netherlands, and made it her life-work. Morgana, who participates in all the rituals of the annual cycle and also performs other magic rituals, declares that all the Wicca components function well and this is the reason why this movement is popular all over the world. Morgana's current trip to Bulgaria also testified to the quick migration and attractiveness of this movement: after the conference she participated in the celebrations of the summer solstice as well as initiation rites organised by the Bulgarian New Pagan Association.

In the section of migration of rituals and ideas, **Katarina Ek-Nilsson** (Sweden) talked about female representations in the Swedish midwinter tradition and their roots. The paper was mainly based on archival materials (the researcher works at the Archives of Onomastics and Folklore in Uppsala, Sweden). St. Lucia's Day (December 13) is regarded as a purely Swedish holiday in Sweden, relating to abundant rituals and social-political activeness. However, the speaker maintained that the roots of St. Lucia can be traced back to ancient goddesses of light and femininity and the female biblical characters. **Ana Stefanova** (Bulgaria) in her paper "Nestinarski Ritual Complex in Stomanovo Village – A New Place for an Old Tradition" expanded upon a topic of interest for many anthropologists: migration of rituals in space and time, as well as increase of their spectacularity and esotericism. By analysing the custom spread in Bulgaria and partly also in Greece of dancing on burning coals on St. Constantine's Day (May 21), holding icons of saints, in a village where such rituals have never been observed formerly, she proved that it could be just one person in a village who takes over and develops a ritual complex. In the village of Stomanovo it was a middle-aged person who assumed the role of the performer and leader of the rituals, claiming to be a clairvoyant and a prophet, descending simultaneously from Mother Theresa and Vanga by his mother's line. In addition to the common fire-dancing (with his grandmother's picture instead of an icon in his hands), he also performs rituals relating to shamanism, modern esotericism, eastern religions, etc.

Irina Stahl's (Romania) presentation spoke about healing rituals in post-communist Romania and introduced the cult of St. Nectarios of Aegina in 'emigration', which started to evolve after part of his remains had been removed. The Saint of Aegina (he died on this island in 1920) has been attributed several miracles, healing cases, conceptions, etc., which have not been observed in Greece. Chapels and springs are put up in his honour, and Nectarios has become one of the most popular names given to children. A similar case was treated also by **Vihra Baeva**, who spoke about Greeks who lived in Melnik, Bulgaria, and after the Balkan War in 1912 had to emigrate to Sidirokastro in Greece, taking with them the icon of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary (Bulgarian:

Света Зона), the upper part of which depicted the handing over of the Holy Girdle of Virgin Mary to apostle St. Thomas. The Bulgarians who remained in Melnik preserved the local custom of the veneration of the Holy Girdle; they ordered a copy of the icon and built a chapel. On the day of the veneration of the Holy Girdle of the Virgin Mary associated with this icon and the cult, the day of the city of Melnik is also celebrated – this is a clear indication of the cult being part of local identity. Here we should point out that the popular name of the holiday, as well as the icon, the chapel and the spring is Holy Girdle. The researcher mentioned that both in Bulgaria and in Greece the Holy Girdle is personified as the Virgin Mary – a fact that informants were not able to explain. The elements of the cult and the details of miracles differ in the two countries.

Evy Johanne Håland's (Norway – Greece) paper was dedicated to the veneration of midwives characteristic of Bulgaria and some northern regions of Greece, which in northern Greece is celebrated on St. Dominica's Day (January 8). According to the researcher, this custom is not observed in other regions of Greece; yet, it is widely followed in Bulgaria. It is obvious that the holiday was transferred to Greece by the Balkan migration.

An interesting example of the migration of the veneration of saints from one confession to another and its celebration by both the Christians and the Muslims (including a joint pilgrimage) was presented by **Manoël Pénicaud** (France) in his paper about the myth of the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus.

The section of the comparative approach to rituals opened by two papers under the same title: **Marlene Hugoson** (Sweden) and **Nancy Cassell McEntire** (USA) compared tree cults in Europe and America. M. Hugoson described, on the basis of ethnographic archival materials, a healing ritual that has survived until today and consists in pulling a child through an opening in a tree. N. McEntire analysed a modern belief relating to the curing power of an oak tree in the state of Illinois, and conjuring practiced in the vicinity of this tree. **Nikolemma Polyxeni Dimitrou** (Great Britain) introduced, on the basis of her master's thesis, Scottish and Greek calendar rituals and the periods of the activation of evil spirits. **Chiara Quagliariello** and **Sabine Lamour's** (France) paper compared family traditions of European and non-European origin as well as their preservation and observation in migrant communities in today's France. The processes of adaptation and acculturation, which involve renunciation from former beliefs and rituals exotic for the host society, are rather painful for migrants.

The section "Rituals and Representations" started with a joint paper by **Mare Kõiva** and **Andres Kuperyanov** (Estonia), entitled "The View from the Migrant's Window", which was based on archival materials and newspaper articles and gave an overview of the customs of Estonians who had fled to Stockholm as refugees during the Second World War. St. Lucia's Day with the obligatory visit to the home of a girl wearing white all over and carrying candles either in hand or on her head, seemed to Estonians as a strange, solely Swedish holiday; also, Estonians' and Swedes' traditions of New Year celebrations with families and friends were different, etc. Humour played an important role in Estonians' adaptation to Swedish traditions, which was pointed out and demonstrated by examples by the researchers.

Ekaterina Anastasova (Bulgaria) focused in her presentation "Mixed Families and Ritual 'Diet' in Emigration" on the migration conditioned by the conclusion of interna-

tional marriages. She pointed out the importance of ritual food in the preservation of domestic calendar rituals. **Maria Kissikova-Petrova** (Bulgaria) continued the topic of mixed marriages, describing in her paper “Migration and Ritual: Religious Identity in a New Cultural Environment” the case of a Bulgarian woman who had married an American and joined the activities of a local religious sect. In the course of the discussion, David Stanley dwelt upon the activity of USA religious sects, their extensive network and the erection of enormous churches, including even drive-ins, which means that you can participate in the service without leaving your car.

Janika Oras in her paper entitled “Song Fights in Contemporary Estonian Weddings: Experiences and Meanings” described the traditional wedding as a subtype of migration (leaving home). She pointed out one part of the ritual, in which the bride’s and bridegroom’s families sing humorous and game songs. J. Oras, who is a specialist in Estonian folk music, often conducts such song fights at weddings. **Olga Pashina** (Russia) spoke about the ritual disharmony in the ‘inaccurate’ singing of seasonal ritual calendar songs, which is caused on purpose on specific dates by migration of the songs inside the calendric year.

Inese Runce (Latvia) described how Halloween celebration tradition reached from America to Latvia. The festival that was totally unknown to Latvians twenty years ago was adopted quickly and today it is celebrated both in the capital and in the diaspora in Great Britain, Germany and other countries. **Bożena Gierrek** (Poland) talked about how Polish students studying the Irish language and culture celebrate St. Brigid’s Day.

Rachel Sharaby (Israel) analysed in her paper “Crossing Boundaries. Between Absorbers and Absorbed in Ethnic Holiday” how the ethnic Mimouna holiday that the immigrants from North Africa brought to Israel in the 1970s, changed from a local ritual into a national public holiday. This is a good example of how the marginal and peripheral in the ritual cycle can become central during a particular period of time.

Skaidre Urboniene’s (Lithuania) presentation “Commemoration of Well-Known Lithuanian Emigrants: Signs and Rituals” focused on the form of the ritual (mounting a plaque), the place (home, schoolhouse, college, etc.) and date (birthday, date of publishing a well-known book, etc.).

Miha Kozorog’s (Slovenia) paper dealt with the annual festival of the newest art organised in Topolò, a Slovene village in Italy. The festival was treated as a ritual complex which is meant to enhance the status of the minority group and revive their national identity. **Lina Midholm** (Sweden) dwelt upon Midsummer, the most ‘Swedish’ holiday in the calendar, pointing out its most important components in the society that was the first in Europe to become multicultural. It is namely the diversification of ethnic cultures that the researcher holds as essential in the processes of globalisation and localisation of the customs of the ritual year.

The same conclusion was drawn also by **Māra Kiope** (Latvia) in her paper “One Year in Latvia: Ritual as the Model of Migration-Open Society”. **Karine Michel** (France) talked about the Jews’ migration from the post-Soviet Russia. She said that the Jews who emigrated from the former Soviet Union do not know Jewish traditions, holidays or rituals and, besides, their self-identification is really low. They have special centres of Jewish culture where they are introduced to Jewish holidays and ritual year traditions.

Several presentations were dedicated to the historic and ideological aspects of festivals as well as the problems of the diaspora and minority groups. **Arbnora Dushi** and **Arben Hoxha** analysed in their joint paper the adoption of Albanian national holidays by the Albanian population in Kosova; **Nadezhda Pazukhina** spoke about the identity problems of the Old Believers in Latvia; **Marija Klobčar** (Slovenia) discussed the impact of ideology on Ash Wednesday traditions in the village of Kamnik; **Grigor Grigorov** (Bulgaria) dwelt upon sports award ceremonies since the times of Ancient Greek, drawing attention to the mythological roots of the rituals; **Marie-Laure Boursin** (France) presented a comparative analysis of the ritual closing the religious learning at the Islamic schools in France and Bulgaria.

To conclude, the conference theme “Migration and Ritual Year” was depicted from various perspectives and inside different societies. The Ritual Year conference materials will be published in a collection. The next, ninth international conference of the SIEF Working Group on the Ritual Year will be held in Szegedi, Hungary, in March 2013, the topic being “Politics, Holidays, Festivals”.

The cultural programme for the participants of the conference organised by the hosts was noteworthy, including a city tour, an opera night at the ancient theatre, a trip to Bachkovo Monastery, visits to the Thracian Crypt and the Rose Museum in Kazanlak, as well as to ethnographic museums.

Irina Sedakova

EUROPÄISCHER MÄRCHENPREIS 2012 TO WOLFGANG MIEDER

On September 13, 2012, Wolfgang Mieder, professor of German and Folklore at the Department of German and Russian at the University of Vermont (Burlington/VT), received the Europäischer Märchenpreis (European Fairytale Prize) for his life's work.

This prize worth 5,000 €, together with the Lutz-Röhrich-Preis (Lutz-Röhrich-Prize) for folkloristic historical-comparative narratology to support junior scientists and the Anerkennungspreis (Appreciation Prize)¹, has been awarded annually since 1986 by the Märchen-Stiftung Walter Kahn (Fairytale Foundation Walter Kahn) to individual people or organisations, who have advanced their mission to explore and preserve traditional European fairytales and legends. Previous prize winners of the Europäischer Märchenpreis were, among others, Max Lüthi (Zurich, 1988), Isidor Levin (St. Petersburg, 1989), Helmut Fischer (Hennef, 2002), Hans-Jörg Uther (Göttingen, 2005), Dietz-Rüdiger Moser (Munich, 2009), and Rolf Wilhelm Brednich (Freiburg, 2010).²

Since 2006, the Märchen-Stiftung Walter Kahn organizes the Märchentage (Fairytale Days) around the presentation of the prizes, which devote themselves to the propagation of fairytales and research to teachers, educators, scientists, as well as friends of fairytales. In 2012, the conference "Wo hinaus so früh, Rotkäppchen?": 200 Jahre *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* der Brüder Grimm (Where to out so early, Little Red Riding-hood?: 200 years of *Children's and Household Tales* of the Brothers Grimm) was held on September 12–14 in Münsterschwarzach to commemorate the publication of the first volume of this fairytale collection.

The presentation of the prizes took place at an evening banquet in the historical Schelfenhaus (Schelfen House) in Volkach, since 2002 the location of the office of the Märchen-Stiftung Walter Kahn, and was musically enhanced by parts of the fairytale opera *Hansel and Gretel* (1893) by Engelbert Humperdinck (1854–1921).

The introduction in Wolfgang Mieder's honour was given by his friend of many years, the renowned narratologist and paremiologist Siegfried Armin Neumann, former head of the Wossidlo-Forschungsstelle (Wossidlo Research Institute) in Rostock, and laureate of the Europäischer Märchenpreis 1999.³

Siegfried Neumann first talked about the very successful academic career of Wolfgang Mieder, who was born in Nossen (Saxony, Germany) in 1944, raised in Lübeck, and who went to the United States of America when he was only 16 years old. After attending high school, he began his studies in French and German, which he finished in 1966 with a BA, and then in 1967 with the MA. His dissertation *Das Sprichwort im Werke Jeremias Gotthelfs: Eine volkskundlich-literarische Untersuchung* (1970) at Michigan State University (East Lansing/MI) seemed to already indicate his future research field.⁴ After a short time as an Assistant Professor of German at Murray State University (Murray/KY), Wolfgang Mieder went to the University of Vermont in 1971, became Associate Professor of German in 1975, and in 1978, at the age of 34, he became a full Professor of German and Folklore. Already one year before that, he had been appointed Chairperson of the Department of German and Russian.

Siegfried Neumann then outlined the different fields and results of Wolfgang Mieder's scientific research as evidenced by his unprecedented activity in publishing. In the centre



Wolfgang Mieder.

of his work is proverbial language, which he tries to grasp in all its facets.⁵ In addition to the traditional formulaic language, he also pays attention to its variations, and he has coined the term 'anti-proverb'. Even the thus far neglected literary forms of the proverb poem and the proverb story received more attention because of his studies. It was always of great significance for Wolfgang Mieder to reprint old proverb collections and proverb studies in order to make them available again for proverb scholarship.

Siegfried Neumann especially emphasised the awe-inspiring bibliographical work for paremiology done by Wolfgang Mieder. After his massive four-volume work *International Proverb Scholarship: An Annotated Bibliography* (1982–2001), a range of extensive special bibliographies, followed another up-to-date large two-volume *International Bibliography of Paremiology and Phraseology* (2009) and, for the first time, an *International Bibliography of Paremiography: Collections of Proverbs, Proverbial Expressions and Comparisons, Quotations, Graffiti, Slang, and Wellerisms* (2011).⁶

Even essential requirements for a modern Anglo-American proverb scholarship, said Siegfried Neumann, were provided by Wolfgang Mieder by editing several large, as well as regional proverb collections.⁷ Siegfried Neumann also pointed to Wolfgang Mieder's

great interest in the proverbial diction of leading American and English politicians (Lincoln, Truman, Obama, Churchill, etc.), which has led to several large monographs.

Wolfgang Mieder's greatest concern is seen by Siegfried Neumann in his idea of an internationally oriented, interdisciplinary proverb scholarship, for which in 1984 he established a prerequisite to present new approaches and results of research by publishing the proverb journal *Proverbium: Yearbook of International Proverb Scholarship*.

Because of his leading role in paremiology, Siegfried Neumann stated, Wolfgang Mieder's importance for narratology is often overlooked. Here it is especially the questions of a modern reception of fairytales and the relationship between the fairytale and the proverb, which have scarcely received attention by scholarship so far. Wolfgang Mieder has shown, based on a large number of examples, that especially the *Children's and Household Tales* of the Brothers Grimm (1812 and 1815) are nowadays handed down very often no longer in their original version, but changed in form and content. His particular interest was also in the proverbs of the Grimms' fairytales, as well as their proverbial and aphoristic 'Schwundstufen' (reduced forms). Into the same direction aimed Wolfgang Mieder's studies about other genres of folk poetry, such as the fable, the legend, and the funny tale or the folk song, where he always presented an informative picture of the reception of their motifs in today's world.

The variety and significance of his research, summarized Siegfried Neumann, made Wolfgang Mieder a worldwide highly esteemed scholar, his work made him an immensely popular university teacher, and his help and advice a guiding spirit of international proverb scholarship. Folklorist Lutz Röhrich (1922–2006), one of his best friends, and laureate of the Europäischer Märchenpreis 1991, had once said about him: "Er ist einfach ein 'Gutmensch', dem es ein Herzensbedürfnis ist, ständig für andere da zu sein" (He is simply a good human being whose heart's desire is to always be there for others).

At the beginning of his words of thanks,⁸ Wolfgang Mieder emphasised in his own humorous way the importance of his wife Barbara, standing lovingly by his side for now already 43 years, in his being awarded with the Europäischer Märchenpreis.

He was absolutely surprised, Wolfgang Mieder said, when the enormous and incredible news had reached him, that he was honoured for his life's work in narratology and proverb scholarship, because he always did only his best for science and his students, just like so many others do too. This appreciation would give him the courage and strength to continue with his work for quite a few more years in order to fully deserve the Europäischer Märchenpreis, he said.

A passage from Wolfgang Mieder's letter to his friends made clear how much it meant to him that his native country granted him such an honour, although wistfulness resonated that his friend Lutz Röhrich was not able to witness this anymore. – Certainly he would have been proud of "his little friend Wolfgang". (Author's comment)

Wolfgang Mieder then explained that he was not the first paremiologist and scientist of fairytales who went from Germany to the United States of America. He mentioned the expatriate Karl Friedrich Wilhelm Wander (1803–1879), the emigrant Karl Knortz (1841–1918), and the married couple Carl Zuckmayer (1896–1977) and Alice Herdan-Zuckmayer (1901–1991), who spent their exile from 1939 until 1948 in his own adopted home Vermont. He also named Günter Grass (1927) and his friend Lutz Röhrich, who, as well as the two before mentioned, had used their impressions of rural Vermont in their writings.

Two persons, said Wolfgang Mieder, had been incomparable mentors and best friends for him to this very day: Lutz Röhrich in Germany, and the no less renowned folklorist Alan Dundes (1934–2005) in the United States of America.⁹ They were and still are his fairytale falling stars, who together with their families had given him, as in his favourite fairytale *The Falling Stars*, the most beautiful gifts of life. Supported and acknowledged by them, he had learned the enthusiasm for joyful scientific work, emulating them in high spirits, grateful every day to stand on the broad shoulders of his heroes, to whom he owes the majority of his success. Not unmentioned were many more dear colleagues and friends on both sides of the Atlantic, the two scientific souls of his German-American conviction, said Wolfgang Mieder, who were joined by numerous internationally renowned folklorists and paremiologists. Together they form the falling stars of a ‘gay science’, an expression already used by Johann Gottfried von Herder (1744–1803) and later by Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900), to which Wolfgang Mieder has devoted himself wholeheartedly: interested in everything and tireless in his endeavour, just as the two great philologists Jacob (1785–1863) and Wilhelm Grimm (1786–1859). To put it with Wolfgang Mieder in an (anti-)proverbial nutshell, the ‘gay science’ is an eternal “Seek and you will find” (Matthew 7, 7) and a new “Find and you will seek!”

At the end of his remarks Wolfgang Mieder stressed once again how much the Europäischen Märchenpreis as an appreciation of his life’s work, awarded by his native country, means to him. He offered his warmest congratulations to both younger prize winners, Jasmin Beer and Teresa Maria Müller, and mentioned how it was a good feeling to know that the investigation of fairytales, paremiology, and narratology was in good hands of brilliant up-and-coming young scientists, to whom he also counted the author. Young people like these, said Wolfgang Mieder, give him the energy and joy, to serve the gay science a little bit longer.

In the end, Wolfgang Mieder announced that he will share half of his prize money with four of his folklore students in Vermont and with the author of this contribution, who wants to thank him again sincerely. In this way, said Wolfgang Mieder, his ‘Falling Stars’ Prize, fallen out of the fairytale sky, would not only serve him, but also young people in his native country as well as in his by now quite old adopted home America.

Christian Grandl

Notes

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¹ This foundation with headquarters in Munich and a coordination place in Frankfurt was founded in 1985 by a travel agent and enthusiast in fairytales Walter Kahn from Brunswick (see www.maerchen-stiftung.de, last accessed on March 23, 2013). The foundation has its own journal *Märchenspiegel: Zeitschrift für internationale Märchenforschung und Märchenpflege*, which has been published quarterly since 1990, and understands itself as mediator between science and the joy in fairytales, with its contributions of well-known experts in fairytale science (see www.maerchen-stiftung.de/index.php4?e1=2&e2=1, last accessed on March 23, 2013).

The Lutz-Röhrich-Preis worth 2,500 €, which has been awarded since 1994, was given in 2012 to Jasmin Beer for her Master's thesis *Menschenfresser: Zur Anthropophagie im Märchen* (Friedrich-Schiller-Universität Jena, 2010), and the Anerkennungspreis worth 1,000 €, which has been awarded since 2000, was given in 2012 to Teresa Maria Müller for her First State Examination for the Post of Grammar School Teacher *Lernen mit und von Märchen: Die pädagogische Bedeutung von Märchen am Beispiel des gymnasialen Schulunterrichts* (Ruprecht-Karls-Universität Heidelberg, 2011).

- ² This year, the *Europäischer Märchenpreis* will be awarded to Germanist, folklorist, Grimms and fairytale researcher Heinz Rölleke (Neuss). For all prize-winners of the Märchen-Stiftung Walter Kahn, see www.maerchen-stiftung.de/index.php4?e1=7&e2=3, last accessed on March 23, 2013.
- ³ *Europäischer Märchenpreis 2012 für ein großes Lebenswerk: Laudatio anlässlich der Preisverleihung an Prof. Dr. Wolfgang Mieder. Märchenspiegel: Zeitschrift für internationale Märchenforschung und Märchenpflege* 23/4, 2012, pp. 28–34.
- ⁴ Published in *Europäische Hochschulschriften, Reihe 1, Deutsche Literatur und Germanistik*, 70 (Bern: Herbert Lang et al., 1972).
- ⁵ For his more than 400 articles and more than 200 books, see his *International Bibliography of Paremiology and Phraseology*, Vol. 1 (Berlin et al.: Walter de Gruyter, 2009), pp. 487–542 (nos. 5575–6028) and his *International Bibliography of Paremiography: Collections of Proverbs, Proverbial Expressions and Comparisons, Quotations, Graffiti, Slang, and Wellerisms*, Supplement series of *Proverbium: Yearbook of International Proverb Scholarship*, 34 (Burlington, Vermont: The University of Vermont, 2011), s. v. 'Mieder, Wolfgang'.
- ⁶ See note 5.
- ⁷ See note 5.
- ⁸ *Sterntaler der fröhlichen Wissenschaft: In Erinnerung an meine Eltern. Märchenspiegel: Zeitschrift für internationale Märchenforschung und Märchenpflege* 23/4, 2012, pp. 35–40.
- ⁹ For the correspondences between Wolfgang Mieder and Alan Dundes, see Wolfgang Mieder (ed.) *“Best of All Possible Friends”: Three Decades of Correspondence Between the Folklorists Alan Dundes and Wolfgang Mieder*, Supplement series of *Proverbium: Yearbook of International Proverb Scholarship*, 19 (Burlington, Vermont: The University of Vermont, 2006), and between Wolfgang Mieder and Lutz Röhrich, see Wolfgang Mieder (ed.) *“Freundschaft ist des Lebens Salz”: Dreieinhalb Jahrzehnte Korrespondenz zwischen den Folkloristen Lutz Röhrich und Wolfgang Mieder*, Supplement series of *Proverbium: Yearbook of International Proverb Scholarship*, 24 (Burlington, Vermont: The University of Vermont, 2007).

THESIS DEFENCE: TOMS ҔENCIS

DISCIPLINARY HISTORY OF LATVIAN MYTHOLOGY

Toms Ҕencis: *A Disciplinary History of Latvian Mythology*. Dissertationes Folkloristicae Universitatis Tartuensis 19. Tartu University Press, Tartu 2012, 218 pp.

I had the honour of evaluating Toms Ҕencis's doctoral thesis "A Disciplinary History of Latvian Mythology" (supervisors: professor Kristin Kuutma, professor Ülo Valk; Department of Estonian and Comparative Folklore, Faculty of Philosophy) already in spring 2012, and it was my real pleasure to participate in this significant event for the humanities of both Baltic countries – the defence of the thesis in Tartu on October 5, 2012.

I have to admit that it is not a simple task to evaluate a thesis in the pre-defence period and to be the reviewer of the same work at the defence. Anyway, I am pleased to say that the necessary dialogue between me and the aspirant has taken place, and therefore I can once more ascertain that Toms Ҕencis's doctoral thesis is an original and innovative academic research. From the viewpoint of Latvian humanities, as I see it, the originality and novelty refers, above all, to the chosen approach. What I mean is that instead of traditional methodological approach – to treat the process of the formation of a phenomenon from a diachronic perspective, which might be expected in view of the thesis title – the author has chosen to dissect the material with the methods offered by postmodernist theory, to deconstruct well-known truths and to display them in a new perspective. The selected form of analysis – reflexivity – has been presented here as a progression from the sociocultural context towards particular researchers, their works and concepts, as well as a demonstration of the significance of these aspects in the process of disciplinary formation. The author presents it as "investigation into the knowledge production process rather than the content of knowledge, analysis of representational form rather than the object of representation" (p. 8). And this investigation process should reach the goal "to demonstrate how a particular object of study is constructed, how it gains or loses its scientific legitimacy, how its variations are related to the theoretical, social, institutional, and political positions of its creators during different periods of time and within various traditions of research" (p. 13).

Due to such a form of analysis, a kind of postmodern study has been produced, where the object and the context of study, as well as the author's personal intention have become textual elements of equal value. It can be concluded that, based on the chosen approach, interesting details of opinions and mutual relations of persons involved in the research of Latvian folklore and mythology, as well as significant nuances in their



Toms Ҕencis. Photo by Alar Madisson 2010.

attitudes towards the dominant power of their time can be outlined. This adds to the topicality of the work, as the analysis of the disciplinary formation process can draw certain parallels to the modern situation in the field of humanities.

The author has successfully balanced the so-called inner and outer perspective in his research. As he represents the main Latvian folklore and mythology research institution, he knows well the values and the research style of this institution as well as the contents of its archives, and he also has access to the most recent research in the field. At the same time, his studies at the revered University of Tartu provide for dispassionate and objective (as much as it is possible in the humanities) perspective of the research object, and, what is of no lesser importance, spread new knowledge on the topic not only within the academic circles of one country but in a much wider audience. By the way, with the accessibility and distribution of the newly produced knowledge in view, I would like to express my gratitude to the Department of Estonian and Comparative Folklore at the Faculty of Philosophy, University of Tartu, for the publication of this thesis in monographic format. This is a nice practice, promoting the distribution of the latest research and fresh findings and boosting the self-confidence and daring of new scientists, as well as their responsibility for the quality of the study.

Reverting to the contents of Toms Kēncis's research, I have to admit that I was surprised at the author's boldness and ability to create a certain intrigue just in the first passage of his opus. Thus, in the very first line of the introduction he announces that his research focuses on a non-existent subject, claiming that "this is a thesis on the history of a discipline that does not exist" (p. 7), and the relations of the object of the study with the academic and professional nomenclature have been chosen as a criterion of existence. In my opinion, a certain tribute to positivism can be seen in this phrase as well: it is difficult to rationalise the world view, and it does not fit into the field of science because of the non-empiric character of the study object. If one can ignore the phenomenological method of analysis for religious experience as the starting point in the study of the mythic world perception, then it is possible to perceive Latvian mythology as a system of views, rituals and cults, not subject to reconstruction due to a considerable lack of historical material. Anyway, separate segments – conception of life after death, cult relics, mythic images and figures and their functions – have been subject to reconstruction. Certainly, since its very beginning at the end of the 19th century the process of reconstruction has attracted the attention of not only scholars, but also of the general public or laymen, because it is exciting and, as it seems, accessible to almost everyone who, paraphrasing Algirdas Greimas, "likes detectives and mind games". It is possible that Latvian mythology does not exist as a discipline in the process of specialisation of modern sciences. Fragments of world view are attested in archaeological, written and historical sources, in language, folklore, daily routines, literature and art, religion, psychology and other spheres, studied by certain branches of natural and social sciences and the humanities. Thus, in the age of extreme specialisation and fear *not to know, not to be a specialist, not to be competent*, who will be the one to dare to propose a clearly definable object of mythological study? On the other hand, if mythology is treated as a certain *type of speech, narrative* or text (in terms of Roland Barthes and Paul Ricoeur) – no matter if constructed, reconstructed or deconstructed, verbalised or expressed indirectly – it has been, is and will be an indispensable part of every live culture. As an ideological structure, it exerts influence upon and takes

over several different forms of collective life and thought: political mythology, ethnic mythology, eschatological mythology, mythology of conspiracy, etc. Thus, mythology as a form of figurative thinking possesses certain regularities which can be perceived, systematised, typologised and, consequently, studied in cross-, multi-, trans-, inter- or even non-disciplinary ways. Coming back to the aspect of imperceptibility of Latvian mythology as a discipline, I would like to point out the author's successful solution to the situation, a kind of emic position – in order to define mythology and the object of his study, he uses the definition of mythology provided by the authors who have produced mythological discourse. So far, the object of the study exists.

To characterise the epistemic context of the history of Latvian mythology, the author has chosen to view it through the Foucauldian power/knowledge dyad prism. From this point of view it seems to me that the author overestimates the symbiotic connection between power and knowledge, presenting it as an irreversible abstraction or inevitability, absorbing almost all spheres of social relations, including scholarly and academic. I admit that mythology and folklore studies are closely related to the strong, politically and socially organising ideology such as nationalism (p. 185); anyway, it should be mentioned that not a single society, even a totalitarian one, can be represented as an amorphous mass, just for the reason that it is comprised of individualities who are conscious subjects capable of preserving their basic structures in spite of the change of economic, political, psychological and legal conditions or status. I tend to agree with the late Foucault and his thesis about the individual as a rational subject, who can actively resist normalisation and reach ethical freedom through self-confidence, self-discipline and self-constitution. Regardless of a separate chapter in Toms Kencis's work devoted to personalities in Latvian mythology research, the role of individual and personal factors or the significance of personal willpower in the process of knowledge construction has been undeservedly neglected in the publication.

Thus, the model of research history of Latvian folklore and mythology, proposed by the author, is balancing on the edge of determinism, and it provokes us to think of a certain inadequacy in the title of the thesis, which might be changed to a more adequate one, for instance, "Disciplinary History of Latvian Mythology from the Perspective of the Theory of Power".

The author's idea of the absolutisation of the Foucauldian theory of power takes us to one more question, which is connected with the chronological frame of the research. In view of the author's statement: "Writing of any history is an action of selection and interpretation, possible only from a certain distance: therefore there is no history of today, while yesterday already becomes an object of history writing. This is also the reason why this thesis defines its subject matter as temporally bounded to the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, covering the most recent developments only in the form of overview" (p. 179). Here a question should be asked about why he concludes the history of mythology research with the re-establishment of independence in the 1990s. The author's 'today', as a matter of fact, has been continuing for almost a quarter of a century. The end of the 20th century and the first decade of the 21st century were so rich in new research in the field of Baltic and Latvian mythology, because at last both exile and Latvian scholars could exchange their views without ideological limitations, global literature and the most recent research became accessible for Latvian scholars, Latvian folklore and mythology research underwent certain institutionalisation, young

scholars were awarded research grants, etc. This is why the author's argument for the chronological framing of his work is not convincing. Thus, it can be concluded that the contents of the thesis only partly corresponds to its title, and it would be more appropriate to call it a disciplinary history of Latvian mythology from the 1890s until the 1990s.

Anyway, it is the perspective intended by the author, it is consequent in respect to theory, it is based on selected factography and pointed quotations from authoritative works. My opinion is that the thesis displays high scholarly standards, and it is a significant contribution to the humanities of both countries.

When reading Toms Ķencis's work, it makes the impression that not only Latvia and Estonia but all the three Baltic countries are comparably similar in their search for academic reconstruction of pre-Christian mythologies, regardless of the cultural historical differences outlined by the author in Appendix III. I dare say that it would be worthwhile to continue in the same direction, and from the author's proposed perspective of reflexivity to analyse the formation and evolution of the school of Lithuanian mythology research. This approach may yield different results, because Lithuanian scientists strongly rely on historical written sources, whereas folklore is attributed a much lesser role.

In any case, I am grateful for the possibility to get acquainted with the work which suggests that its author is a young developing scholar, a self-sufficient and creative person, whose preferences are not towards well-known paths, but towards his own. And, finally, I wish this research to receive a proper evaluation and recognition not only in Estonian, but also in Latvian and Lithuanian humanitarian spheres. We have much more in common than different. May the author's hopes of his research and of the applied methods becoming a model for scholars from other countries and other academic disciplines (pp. 10–12) come true.

D.A., Assoc. prof. Rūta Muktupāvela
Latvian Academy of Culture