

# BOOK REVIEWS

## CONTEMPORARY LEGENDS IN SLOVENIA

**Ambrož Kvartič. *Pa se je to res zgodilo? Sodobne povedke v Sloveniji*. Ljubljana: Filozofska fakulteta, 2017. 272 pp.**

The monograph titled *Pa se je to res zgodilo? Sodobne povedke v Sloveniji* (So Has This Really Happened? Contemporary Legends in Slovenia) is the first book dedicated to the topic of Slovenian contemporary legends, and can therefore be considered as a turning point in this genre in Slovenian folkloristics. The book was written on the basis of Kvartič's doctoral dissertation on contemporary legends in Slovenia.

The book is divided into two parts: in the first, largely theoretical part the author discusses key concepts for research, recognition, analysis, and general understanding of contemporary legends worldwide (mostly in the Anglo-Saxon world) and in Slovenia. The theoretical part is divided into eight chapters and comprises the majority of the book. It starts with an introduction in which Kvartič introduces his methodology and research question, explaining what contemporary legends can be found in Slovenia, how and which processes influence these materials, and who tells contemporary legends, to whom, and why these legends are told. He tries to answer these questions from theoretical and empirical, textual and contextual, comparative and interpretative, emic and etic viewpoints, and illustrates his findings with material collected during fieldwork. The main methodology for collecting contemporary material was fieldwork conducted between 2010 and 2014, which included interviews, observation, and organization of storytelling events (3–10 people), which were audio-recorded. The author focused on cities with more than 10,000 inhabitants.

The introductory part of the book is followed by theoretical issues with a comprehensive overview of previous theoretical research on contemporary legend in Slovenia and abroad. He first introduces definitions of contemporary and urban legends, emphasizing that such legends spread mainly in urban environments and to a somewhat lesser degree in rural ones. He understands contemporary legends as “incredible, bizarre, unusual, disgusting, frightening, terrifying, but also humorous stories that continually emerge and vanish in daily conversations and are repeatedly installed in the real experimental world of their narrators”. Kvartič brings into initial focus the terminology issues that have so far remained unresolved. He uses the term ‘contemporary legend’; however, he does not ignore the term ‘urban legend’, which he introduces as a genre, a referential framework, and metonymy, and as a signifier of identity.

In terms of genres, types, and intertextuality Kvartič finds contemporary legends as specific and recognizable phenomena. He brings forth also examples of the use of contemporary legends in screenplays, comic texts, and fine arts. When discussing typology, Kvartič emphasizes that although motifs might be similar, there is a huge problem with linguistic and cultural differences, and therefore the typology presents a specific challenge.



The author turns special attention to the synchronic and diachronic migration of motifs in contemporary legends as well as to the reality and beliefs. His findings are predictable: most of the motifs are to be found in different cultural and language areas. Contemporary legends travel through time and place, through languages and different places of identifications, and therefore both synchronic and diachronic migrations are extremely vivid.

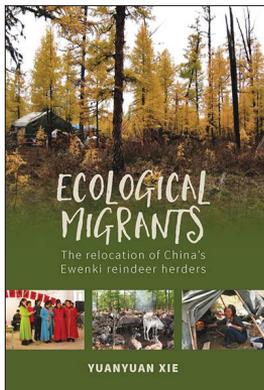
In the second part of the book, titled “Contemporary Legends in Slovenia: Examples with Interpretation”, Kvartič puts material into focus. Considerable attention is devoted to *interpretation* as a process of finding the meaning, which also gives us a deeper insight into the culture and underlines the characteristics of the contemporary legend: they change and adapt to concurrent history and chaotic social environment much faster than other folklore genres. He presents the material of contemporary legends, that was collected during fieldwork, and categorizes it by themes: *The Vanishing Hitchhiker*, *Trickster in Contemporary Legend*, *The Failed Stag Party*, *The Couple Caught in Flagrante Delicto*, *Tourist Experience*, *Foreigners/Other in Contemporary Legends*, etc. In all the themes Kvartič aims to find variations, a general motif, rationalization of legends, localization of the migration motif, and socio-historical context.

As a finalizing conclusion, Kvartič states that contemporary legends constitute a source for never-ending research – not only because of their huge variety but also because they change and adapt the stories to the context.

Contemporary legends were neglected in Slovenian folkloristics for a long time; therefore, this book, with its strong theoretical and highly professional approach, fills in a big gap in Slovenian folkloristics. But not only that – the book is also highly inspiring and interesting for a wider readership as the language the author has used is very fluent and vivid, with many examples and outlines of stories. Due to its good theoretical insight into the scholarship of the subject, it also provides valuable support to all researchers of contemporary legends and contemporary folklore in general.

Saša Babič

## STILL ECOLOGICAL MIGRATION? AN EWENKI CASE



**Xie, Yuanyuan. *Ecological Migrants: The Relocation of China's Ewenki Reindeer Herders*. New York & Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2015. 220 pp.**

The book under review is one in the already impressive list of the latest publications based on socio-anthropological research among the Ewenki – a relatively large but dispersed Tungusic-speaking ethnic group, which still retains the practice of reindeer herding in a number of places in Siberia (Russia), Mongolia, and China. Every year, for the last 6–7 years, one or two monographs on the Ewenki are published, which almost immediately evoke a lively response in the academic environment (Funk 2014; Napol'skikh et al. 2014; Ventsel 2014; Mamontova 2016).