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for Contemporary Legend Research

34th International Conference

Perspectives  
on Contemporary  
Legend

Tallinn, Estonia  
June 28 – July 2, 2016

The Institute of Theology  
of the Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church  
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Abstracts

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Dear colleagues,

It is our pleasure to welcome you to the 34<sup>th</sup> annual International Society for Contemporary Legend Research (ISCLR) conference “Perspectives on Contemporary Legend”. We have chosen Tallinn, the capital of Estonia, as the site of this year’s conference to offer our colleagues the opportunity to experience the sights of this simultaneously medieval and modern city and to see the nature and history of the Lahemaa National Park in North Estonia.

The ISCLR, which was founded in 1982, has evolved into a large network that brings together the researchers from numerous countries interested in modern storytelling and media. A fair amount of topical material on contemporary legends and rumours is presented and discussed on the society’s active Facebook community. Fascinating detailed interpretations of contemporary legends and rumours are regularly published in the society’s newsletter *FOAFtale News* and in the journal *Contemporary Legend*. And still there is reason to come together to listen to the informative and topical papers by our colleagues. This year’s conference brings together researchers from 14 countries. We are happy to report that interest in the Tallinn conference has been considerable. The present book includes all the abstracts accepted by the organisers in order to also give a voice to those who could not be here in person.

The presentations have several focal points this year. One theme that has interested researchers is political folklore: talks will be given on the elections in Belarus, on both serious and humorous narratives linked to Stalin, and on folklore on Michelle Obama. The

rumours that are spread against the backdrop of major events are discussed in papers focused on the First World War and the interwar period. As usual, the themes include the classics of contemporary legends: observations of haunted places (including exhibiting ghosts on the screen), alien abduction narratives, the grateful terrorist in its Portuguese version, and tales of stolen organs. Already, there is an analytical response to folklore that has emerged on the basis of relatively recent news that is often linked to human tragedy such as the case of a missing plane. Although these stories are thematically a classic in the field, these case studies are always new, expressed in new contexts and approached from new perspectives.

A paradigm of today's research of contemporary legends is the continued focus on scary stories and the detailed exploration of the complexes of fear and humour: talks will be given on the Slender Man phenomenon and both a black car and a white van are treated as sources of anxiety. In many instances, the evolution of a historical being or phenomenon in the modern world, including online, is addressed. Still around are saints and Scandinavian gods; the palace of Knossos continues to be a fascination. The hybridity of contemporary folklore and its close links to other fields is especially clear in the analysis of urban legends turned into a card game. Papers on the more general characteristics of contemporary legends and their development also promise to serve as a good basis for discussion.

Although this meeting takes place in Tallinn, we invite all of you to visit Tartu, the folklore capital, when you are next in Estonia. Tartu is a true centre for folklore studies with a dedicated Department of Folkloristics at the University of Tartu and the Folklore Archives and the Department of Folkloristics at the Estonian Literary Museum.

Mare Kalda and Eda Kalmre

## Tuesday, June 28

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9.00–10.00 Registration

10.00–11.30

SESSION 1

**Christine Shojaei Kawan** Walter Anderson as an Innovator

**Eda Kalmre** Some Remarks on Urban Legends and Their Collecting Process in Estonia in the 1990s

**Carme Oriol and Emili Samper** Collecting, Archiving and Studying Rumours and Contemporary Legends Today

11.30–12.00 Coffee break

12.00–13.30

SESSION 2

**Radvilē Racēnaitē** Folk Narrative and the Internet: Christian Saints and God in a Digital World

**Rae Muhlstock** Knossos in the Catskills: The Mythopoesis of Michael Ayrton's Arkville Maze

**Gail de Vos** The Norse God Bragi in Popular Culture

13.30 – 15.00 Lunch break

15.00 – 16.30

SESSION 3

**Véronique Champion-Vincent** Native Americans as a Source of Wisdom. History and Analysis of a Contemporary Mythology

**Eleanor Hasken** “Some of My Experiences, I Just Want to Share”: Tellability in Alien Abduction Narratives

**Theo Meder** Black Stories. Kwispels, Contemporary Legends etc. as Card Games

17.30 Tour of Old Town

19.00 Reception at the Estonian Academy of Sciences, Kohtu 6 (at Toompea Hill)

## Wednesday, June 29

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9.00–10.30

SESSION 4

**Anna Kirzyuk** *Death to Soviet Children* in a Black Car: The History and Meaning of the Child's Horror Story

**Jeanmarie Rouhier-Willoughby** Stalin or the Bolsheviks?

**Alexandra Arkhipova** How a Legend Turned into a Woman: The Story of Roza Kaganovitch, Stalin's Secret Wife

10.30 – 11.00 Coffee break

11.00. – 12.30

SESSION 5

**Anastasiya Astapova** Fraud or Sham? Rumor and Humor on Elections in Belarus

**Patricia A. Turner** For Better or for Worse: Folklore and Michelle Obama

**Rita Repšienė and Odeta Žukauskienė** Utopias, Fictions and Dead Cities: Reality and Perspectives

12.30 – 14.00 Lunch break

14.00 – 15.30

SESSION 6

**Reet Hiimäe** Fate, Miracle Doctors and Magical Interventions: Contemporary Beliefs about Childlessness in Interaction with the Mass Media

**Mare Kõiva, Rahel Laura Vesik** Loyal Dogs That Have Touched Many Hearts

**Peter Burger** White Van Stories: Stranger Danger, Rhetoric, and Media

15.30–16.00 Coffee break

16.00–17.30

SESSION 7

**David Clarke** “Can’t Believe a Word You Read, Sir, Can You?”: The Role of Soldiers, Spies and Journalists in the Dissemination of WWI Rumour-Legends

**Filip Graliński** Forteana, Urban Legends or Journalistic Copy Paste? Weird Stories in the Interwar Polish Press

**Carolyn E. Ware** A Dog Named Tank and Other Tales of Animal Rescue

18.00

Tour of Old Town

## Thursday, June 30

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Excursion to Lahemaa

## Friday, July 1

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9.00 – 10.30

SESSION 8

**Zuzana Panczová** The “West” in Conspiracy Theories in Slovakia

**Alexander Panchenko** Organ Theft Legends in Russia: Conspiracy Theories, the Authoritarian State and Consumer Society

**Daria Radchenko** Secret Bodies, Stolen Organs: Legend Motives of the Ukrainian Crisis

10.30–11.00 Coffee break

11.00–12.30

SESSION 9

**Aurore Van de Winkel** The Disappearance of Flight MH370: Rumours, Legends and Theories in the French Sphere

**J. J. Dias Marques** “The Grateful Terrorist” in the Portuguese Oral Tradition

**Rosemary V. Hathaway** Legendary Personal Experience Narratives from a Vietnam-War Era Protest

12.30–14.00 Lunch break

14.00–15.30

SESSION 10

**Mikel Koven** The Haunted Antiquarian: BBC’s Ghost Stories for Christmas, Antiquarian Investigations and Folk Horror

**Andrea Kitta** Supernatural Contagion: Suicide, Violence, and Slender Sickness in the Slender Man Phenomenon

**Jan Pohunek** Shadows, Sounds and Energies: On the Phenomenology of Haunted Places

15.30–15.45 Coffee break

15.45–17.00 General meeting

19.00 Conference Dinner

## Saturday, July 2

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10.00–12.00

SESSION 11

**Mare Kalda** Sacrifices at the Unearthing of Treasure: Legends and Beyond

**John M. Bodner** Pot Labourers’ Communication Ecologies: Rumour, Legend and Occupational Narratives among Marijuana Growers

**Elena Iugai** The Magic Requit in Russian Everyday Narratives

**Sandy Hobbs** and **David Main** The Vanishing Hitchhiker: Then and Now

CONFERENCE CLOSING



# How a Legend Turned into a Woman: The Story of Roza Kaganovitch, Stalin's Secret Wife

**Alexandra Arkhipova**

Russian State University for the Humanities, Moscow

The paper is dedicated to the story of Roza Lasarevna (also Mos-eevna, or Mikhailovna) Kaganovich. She was mentioned in countless memoirs and court cases as the sister (or daughter or niece) of Stalin's powerful right hand Lasar Kaganovich and she had never existed. Her biography emerged from folklore, false memoirs and the speculations of certain historians.

The first rumors of Stalin's secret third wife spread among the Soviet diplomatic ranks in the late 1930s. They were based on an anti-Semitic idea: Lasar Kaganovich was the true secret Jewish ruler of the Soviet Union who controlled Stalin via his sister. The secret service of the Nazi Reich had trusted this rumor and had even suggested a reward for information on the whereabouts of Roza Kaganovich. After WWII, this legend became even more popular and, in its last episode, Roza was killed during her attempt to assassinate Stalin for his last anti-Jewish campaign. In 1953–1954, many were imprisoned for spreading the latter rumor.

Roza's story began its second life when emigrants brought this folklore to the West and, given an understandable lack of verifiable and uncensored information from Russia, a number of historians mistook these rumors for true information.

Why is this story worthy of a researcher's interest? It is a clear example of mythology (mis)informing history. Primary elements (rumors about Roza) unite in complex legends, which evolve according to the rules of folklore and give rise to anti-Semitic stereotypes that, in turn, produce a political ideology. Evidently, a myth attracts people more than real history.

## Fraud or Sham? Rumor and Humor on Elections in Belarus

**Anastasiya Astapova**

University of Tartu, Tartu

This paper is dedicated to the folklore of presidential elections in non-democratic societies, with a particular focus on Belarus. Various scholars label the elections in authoritarian countries “the elections without choice”. Indeed, in Belarus, the lack of choice and electoral fraud have become a matter of common knowledge whether for the Belarusians themselves or outside observers. Multiple rumors circulate about the frauds at particular polling stations or the results of elections fitted to the numbers ordered by the regime. Yet, even though the independent opinion polls are not exactly as positive for the Belarusian president as the official results of the staged election, they show that Alexander Lukashenko wins within the self-sufficient system he created. This hegemony, for instance, is nurtured by various manifestations of the election sham reproduced by Belarusians.

At the same time, the election rumors and jokes circulating in the oral communication and the Internet question the existing hegemony. Based on extensive fieldwork in Belarus and on the Belarusian mass media, I will show how the genres of rumors and jokes are

interconnected, sometimes to the point of being indiscernible. This applies both to their forms and themes. Rather than looking at the limits of two genres, I will concentrate on their interplay, intertextual bridges between them, ideologies they share, and new directions for understanding non-verifiable folklore they provide.

## Pot Labourers' Communication Ecologies: Rumour, Legend and Occupational Narratives among Marijuana Growers

**John M. Bodner**

Grenfell Campus, Memorial University of Newfoundland,  
Corner Brook

This talk explores the communication ecology of a group of small-scale illegal marijuana growers in and around a village in British Columbia, Canada. Based on five years of interviews and ethnographic fieldwork, this largely descriptive presentation argues that rumour and contemporary legend take on an elevated role in an occupational ecology that is severed from normative communication hierarchies. Building on the work of Ross Coomber (2006) and Susan C. Boyde and Connie I. Carter (2014) the talk focusses on investigating key performances, as well as contextualizing marijuana workers' narratives within larger-than-local judicial discourses – some of which are, themselves, founded in drug contemporary legends.

Boyde, Susan C. and Connie I. Carter 2014. *Killer Weed: Marijuana Grow Ops, Media and Justice*. Toronto: U of Toronto P.

Coomber, Ross 2006. *Pusher Myths: Re-Situating the Drug Dealer*. London: Free Association Books.

# White Van Stories: Stranger Danger, Rhetoric, and Media

**Peter Burger**

Leiden University, Leiden

Legends about strangers abducting children in (mostly) white vans are an international phenomenon. The apparent proliferation of these stories can be attributed to both diffusion and independent invention. The present paper analyses a sample of white van stories from the Netherlands (1999–2015), comprising news items, vernacular discussion (web forums, Facebook, Twitter), and official statements by police spokespersons and school boards. During this period, the identity of the alleged perpetrators changed from pedophiles to Eastern European immigrants, reflecting shifts in political and media discourse.

The analysis takes as its starting point the notion of legend as a rhetorically constructed category. Applying Aristotle's basic means of persuasion (ethos, logos, and pathos), it focuses on the relationship between institutional and vernacular discourse. The paper attempts to assess the contribution traditional news media and social media make to the legend process. Confirming studies by Donovan (2004) and Burger (2014), one of its conclusions is that the dialectic of conditional belief ('this could be true – please spread the message') versus debunking ('this is an urban legend that has no value whatsoever') drives vernacular discussions. The same belief style however is often expressed in official statements, adding to the legend's spread and longevity.

Burger, Peter 2014. *Monsterlijke verhalen. Misdaadsagen in het nieuws en op webforums als retorische constructies*. Den Haag: Boom Lemma.

Donovan, Pamela 2004. *No Way of Knowing. Crime, Urban Legends and the Internet*. New York & London: Routledge.

- Howard, Robert Glenn 2005. A theory of vernacular rhetoric. The case of the 'Sinner's Prayer' online. *Folklore* 116, pp. 172–188.
- Oring, Elliott 2008. Legendry and the rhetoric of truth. *Journal of American Folklore* 121, pp. 127–166.

## Native Americans as a Source of Wisdom. History and Analysis of a Contemporary Mythology

**Véronique Campion-Vincent**

Paris

The aim is to present, situate and analyse this important element of alternative spiritual beliefs (New Age).

From the 19<sup>th</sup> century, literary fictions and large scale shows (especially Buffalo Bill's Wild West) have awakened the interest of Europeans. It is also very early that one finds Europeans settling in America playing Indians (Grey Owl, Seton). The celebration of the Far West epic plays a major role, and cowboys, militaries from the War of Secession or sheriffs are as important as the Native Americans themselves.

Linked to the development of youth movements (Scouts and Woodcraft Indians) collective behaviors of festive identification lead to the development of Indian Hobbyist movements whose evolution will be outlined both in America and Europe. (Green 1988)

On the other hand, learned and literary conceptions about Native Americans evolve already in the 1930s and change radically from the 1950s. This will be documented by the presentation of a legend: "Chief Seattle's (alleged) Speech", a movement strongly linked to the

origin legend “Rainbow Family” and by an outline of the successive presentations of the Sioux Black Elk’s philosophical and religious message.

In 2015, since more than thirty years, in parallel with the Europeans playing Indian in the Indianist clubs, Native Americans – sometimes “self-proclaimed” and fought by the tribal leaders – come to disseminate in Europe a knowledge transformed by the New Age conceptions of the Past Golden Age, incarnated in the Celts, and of the Noble Savage (Bowman 1995).

This “cultural primitivism” – the good savage is better than the decadent civilised person – is a transformed revival in which the quest for spirituality (rather than religion) consists of an individual manipulation of symbolic systems (Hanegraaff 1997).

The persistence of Indianists clubs which is mostly festive needs to be situated within the growth of the living history of historical re-enactments (Middle-Ages, Napoleonic troops, etc.). Can this regression to the past, sometimes to a dream past, as with the steampunk movement, be considered a part-time haven? The question can be asked.

Bowman, Marion 1995. The Noble Savage and the Global Village: Cultural Evolution in New Age and Neo-Pagan Thought. *Journal of Contemporary Religion* Vol. 10, No. 2, pp. 139–149.

Green, Rayna 1988. The Tribe Called Wannabee: Playing Indian in America and Europe. *Folklore* Vol. 99, No. 1, pp. 30–55.

Hanegraaff, Wouter J. 1997. New Age Religion and Secularization. *Numen* 47, pp. 288–312.

# “Can’t Believe a Word You Read, Sir, Can You?”: The Role of Soldiers, Spies and Journalists in the Dissemination of WWI Rumour-Legends

**David Clarke**

Sheffield Hallam University, Sheffield

Following the publication of a story in the London *Sunday Telegraph* during 2014 concerning my archival research into WWI rumours, I received an email from a Canadian historian who claimed that two well-known legends of the war were ‘dreamed up’ by a journalist who worked for the wartime propaganda bureau operated by British military intelligence. This paper draws upon primary sources for the Russian troop rumour of August 1914 and the German ‘Corpse Factory’ rumour, that was widely disseminated by Lord Northcliffe’s media empire during 1917, to investigate two competing explanatory hypotheses. The first attempts to trace the genesis of the rumours to stories ‘planted’ in the print media by elite sources, via a ‘top down’ route. I compare the evidence with that proposed for second hypothesis, that traces these stories – and others from WWI – to oral sources, primarily gossip and rumour, that was circulated by soldiers in Flanders to civilians on the Home Front. Via this ‘bottom up’ route, the stories reached elite sources who, via the medium of compliant newspapers, transformed them into legends of the war that were helpful for strategic and propaganda purposes. The extent to which these ‘trench myths’ became accepted as fact by many combatants is revealed by the words of an Australian sergeant, relayed to an officer, on their discovery of an alleged Axis ‘corpse factory’ in the closing months of the war: “Can’t believe a word you read, sir, can you?”

Clarke, David 2004. *The Angel of Mons*, London: Wiley.

- Gregory, Aidan 2008. *The Last Great War*, Cambridge University Press.
- Hayward, James 2002. *Myths and Legends of the First World War*, Stroud: Sutton.

## From the Museum Exhibit to the Powerful Deity: Contemporary Legends about the “Altai Princess”

### **Dmitrii Doronin**

Russian Presidential Academy of National Economy and Public Administration/ Russian State University for the Humanities, Moscow

“Interfax-Russia”, Russian non-governmental news agency, reported that the trial on the case of the burial of the remains of the so-called “Altai Princess” started in January 27, 2016. One of the Altai people’s religious leaders sued the Republican National Museum in Gorno-Altaiisk, where the mummy of the “Princess” is exhibited as an object of cultural heritage. Before that, archaeologists claimed that they found sensational genetic data which proved that the “Princess” was originally a young man. These and other events make up a long history of confrontation between the Altaian nationalists and archaeologists from the Russian Academy of Science. The Scytho-Siberian mummy was found in 1993 in a kurgan of the Pazyryk culture on the Ukok Plateau. The first legendary texts about “Princess Ukok” already existed at that time. Today, the corpus of these legends is really diverse and complex.



The aim of this paper is to make a typology of these legends and to analyze their content. These texts were created and broadcasted by different groups of people in Siberia (scientists, local nationalists, journalists, government officials, politicians, bloggers, representatives of mystical currents, the Altai shamans). These modern folklore texts reflect different conflicts in the Altai Republic and represent their political and religious activities. Current events enrich these legends with new motifs. Disaster (such as earthquakes, floods or downfall of helicopters) plays the most important role in this process.

These legends have different functions. For instance, they make the history of Altai more ancient and majestic by appropriating (a cultural expropriation) historic landscape and objects of ancient cultures. These legends also have a great interpretive ability. For example, they explain the war between Russia and Ukraine. Many shamans have a constant visionary experience with the spirit of the “Princess”. They communicate with her and it is an important source of new motifs for legends about the “Princess” as well.

The research was supported by the Russian Foundation for Basic Research in the framework of the Monitoring contemporary folklore: database and corpus-based analysis (Project No 16-06-00286)

# What We Can Learn From Pre-Modern Bosom Serpent Legends?

**Davide Ermacora**

University of Padova, Padova

This paper is based on an on-going work for a critical anthology of pre-modern fantastic folklore narratives about animals entering and living in the human body (see Ermacora et al. 2016). These narratives are generally referred to, among English-speaking scholars, as ‘bosom serpent’ legends (BS). Gilliann Bennett (2005: 46) has considered the BS “a fine case study in the nature of contemporary legends”. The criteria she used to distinguish modern contemporary BS legends, told since the mid-1800s onwards, are the following: 1) the focus of the tale is on symptoms, diagnoses and cures rather than on BS; 2) the story is usually secular (i.e., there is no supernatural or religious element) (ibid.: 22). Are these criteria sufficient to make up the emergent contemporary BS legend? What really is ‘contemporary’ in a 19<sup>th</sup>, 20<sup>th</sup> and even 21<sup>st</sup> century BS tradition? Medieval and pre-medieval literary BS, in fact, frequently satisfy these criteria. Secularisation (Bennett’s second point) obviously depends on the historical period, the geographical area under observation, and the particular oral or literary genre in which the BS appears. Moreover, as orally-based texts, pre-modern BS often have the character of a folk narrative with certain recurrent stylistic elements considered typical for the definition of contemporary legend genre, including localization, the naming of witnesses, the FOAF (‘Friend of a Friend’) phenomenon, and so on. In this paper, I will try to answer

the following question: what can scholars, in particular contemporary legend scholars, learn from pre-modern BS legends?

Bennett, Gillian 2005. *Sex, Violence, Disease, and Death in Contemporary Legend*. Jackson, MI: University Press of Mississippi.

Ermacora, Davide, Roberto Labanti and Andrea Marcon 2016. Towards a Critical Anthology of Pre-Modern Bosom Serpent Folklore. *Folklore*, forthcoming.

## Legendary Symbols, Cultural Metaphors and Narrative Subtexts: The Case of Missing Women, White Trucks and Money

**Diane E. Goldstein**

Indiana University, Bloomington

In an article entitled “The Missing White Girl Syndrome: Disappeared Women and Media Activism”, Sarah Stillman asked: “When it comes to body counts, which bodies ‘count’?” (2007: 491). Stillman goes on to discuss the media coverage of missing females, “who qualify as ‘damsels in distress’ by race, class, and other relevant social variables in contrast to those who appear more disposable due to poverty, race or perceived immorality” (p. 491). While Stillman is not a legend scholar, her work is instructive, not just due to the focus on media narratives but also because it calls attention to the interconnectedness of missing women narratives with surrounding social problems.

On June 3, 2011, a 20-year-old apparel merchandizing student at Indiana University disappeared after a night of partying at a local bar. Rumors concerning her disappearance have proliferated in

the nearly five years since she was last seen. While many of these rumors conformed to the “missing white woman” and “missing party girl” tropes (Tucker 2009), as Stillman and Tucker suggest, they also create a narrative magnet for discourse concerning various local social problems.

My early work on rumors and legends surrounding this case focused on narrative motifs and social problems, but continued analysis of those narratives suggested an intriguing pattern of the use of culturally loaded symbols creating subtexts, perhaps relevant to broader legend scholarship. Like many rumors surrounding disasters, the stories in the disappearance narrative corpus contained kernel narratives, more a reference to a story line or a belief statement than any longer self-sustained narrative. In most cases in the rumors, symbols figured big, framing and shaping the narrative subtly for those who shared the frame of reference. The repeated use of figurative, representative and metaphoric symbols formed a subtext to the legends, creating a parallel narrative world. This paper explores the symbolic construction of rumor and legend, focusing on the issue of cultural subtexts and narrative simultaneity.

Stillman, Sarah 2007. ‘The Missing White Girl Syndrome’: Disappeared Women and Media Activism. *Gender & Development* 15, No. 3, pp. 491–502.

Tucker, Elizabeth 2009. Guardians of the Living: Characterization of Missing Women on the Internet. *Folklore and the Internet: Vernacular Expression in a Digital World* 1, p. 67.

# Forteana, Urban Legends or Journalistic Copy Paste? Weird Stories in the Interwar Polish Press

**Filip Graliński**

Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznań

In May 1925, the Polish press reported extensively on a bizarre incident involving English coal miners, a half-man, half-animal 35-centimetre-tall monster and a shovel (unfortunately for the monster). What to make of this story? Is it based on some real events? Or is it rooted in British (Polish?) folklore? Or is it just a hoax made up by Polish (French? British?) journalists?

This is just one example of many weird stories circulating in the Polish press during the interwar period. With large-scale digitisation projects, the progress of optical character recognition technology and the advances of artificial intelligence, it is now becoming possible to automatically extract and re-discover nearly all (or even *all*) weird stories reported, copied and pasted and made up in the old newspapers (and then forgotten in the mists of time).

Weird news and stories could be considered on three interrelated levels: as (subjectively, allegedly, claimed-to-be, etc.) real events, as folklore motifs (for instance, embodied in contemporary legends) or as the output of journalists working in specific social, cultural and economic settings. In other words, the corpus of weird stories could be of interest to anomalistics in the style of William R. Corliss (or even hard sciences such as astronomy, meteorology or medicine), folkloristics and the history of journalism alike. Disentangling the three threads is an arduous task fraught with pitfalls but also many research opportunities.

# “Some of My Experiences, I Just Want to Share”: Tellability in Alien Abduction Narratives

**Eleanor Hasken**

Western Kentucky University, Bowling Green

My paper will focus on individual narratives found online and posted on alien abduction forums. The narratives that I have chosen for this paper come from two different forums, Alien Abduction Help Forum and Unexplained Mysteries. While the second forum covers a much broader range of topics, including cryptozoology and urban legends, both sites have dedicated forums for people who have either had an experience with an alien or those who are unsure if they have but would like to discuss their potential experiences. My analysis will focus on these personal experience narratives in terms of their tellability. I will draw on research by Amy Shuman, Glenn Howard, and Diane Goldstein to argue that online forums provide spaces for these otherwise untellable narratives to be shared with an interested community. The discussion of tellability will then turn towards evaluative statements within these narratives and how these statements dictate what is and what is not considered appropriate to share in future posts.

I will also argue that alien abduction forums are constructed via stories to create a cohesive community. Questions of tellability and group are intrinsically tied, primarily because group belonging on these forums revolves around sharing and actively participating in talking about alien abductions. Group, in this instance, is constituted by the repeated act of declaring that the narrators have not found any other location that they can safely share their story in, thus, these online message boards are the only communities that have been deemed appropriate for sharing experiences. I believe that

this paper will contribute to the study of contemporary legends by examining the tellability of personal narratives that are frequently categorized as paranormal.

## Legendary Personal Experience Narratives from a Vietnam-War Era Protest

**Rosemary V. Hathaway**

West Virginia University, Morgantown

Last summer, while doing oral-history research with West Virginia University alumni who attended the university during the Vietnam War era, I encountered two very different accounts of the same incident. The narratives described a student demonstration staged to show solidarity after the Kent State shootings in May 1970.

Version 1: "I can remember when we had... student riots in Morgantown and... the State Police marched up...and they had all their riot gear on... .They [students] were throwing water balloons at each other – I mean, basically it was the Greeks versus the...quote-unquote 'hippies.' And it was a water balloon fight."

Version 2: "It was right after Kent State... and there was a group of students who took over Grumbein's Island for three days.... On the morning of the third day, you hear the bullhorns saying, 'You need to leave the area, immediately. We are about to give you tear gas.' And you look up: one road coming down was the West Virginia State Police in riot gear. Coming from down where the library and where the law school used to be is the City Police, and coming from the old Mountaineer Field is the National Guard and they're in riot gear. And the tear gas canisters come in and I was out of there in a heartbeat."

These two narratives constitute both personal-experience narratives and legends of the Vietnam War era. Regardless of which is more “true,” both are significant. They demonstrate that the memories of people who were college students at that time hinge on specific narratives that encapsulate and express not “fact”, but the teller’s beliefs not about what happened, why it happened, and what it means in the present.

While much has been written about the intersections between personal-experience narrative and legend (see, for example, Main 2007 and Lindahl 2012) this paper explores how those dynamics operate on emergent histories about an era that we imagine would be remembered the same way by all who participated.

## Fate, Miracle Doctors and Magical Interventions: Contemporary Beliefs about Childlessness in Interaction with the Mass Media

**Reet Hiimäe**

Estonian Literary Museum/ University of Tartu, Tartu

My paper concentrates on the dynamics of contemporary beliefs about involuntary childlessness in Estonia, whereby special focus is laid on the influences from the mass media. I will describe the dichotomy between the experiences of childless individuals and the perceptions of people who have no personal relationship with the problem of childlessness. I will also point out how interviews with magical healers published in the mass media resonate in subjective explanation models and the interventions of childless people.



Modern alternative healers, witch doctors and shamans are often depicted as heroes in the media and many of them mention their ability to help involuntarily childless people as a proof of their extraordinary healing power. However, the people who are confused about or disappointed in their help are usually given no voice in the media. I will describe how childless people find their way to individual belief models (e.g., perceived direct contacts with the souls of their unborn children) that do not depend on uncontrollable outside circumstances in order to overcome the personal crisis. Thus, such personal belief narratives can be regarded as “structures of power” (Bruner 1986: 144).

Bruner, E., M. and Turner, V. W. 1986. *The Anthropology of Experience*. University of Illinois Press: Illinois.

## The Vanishing Hitchhiker: Then and Now

**Sandy Hobbs and David Main**

University of the West of Scotland, Paisley

Although it is the most widely written about of the classic contemporary legends, there is still much to be learnt from studying the Vanishing Hitchhiker. This paper reports the authors' recent investigations of the legend. It presents evidence that it is an example of the Substitute Personal Experience Narrative proposed by Main and Hobbs (2007). It also reports a temporal comparison between students' reaction to the Vanishing Hitchhiker legend, as examined by the Hobbs-Cornwell Questionnaire (initially published in *Foaf tale News* 19, 1990). Some further analysis of the data will also be presented.

# The Magic Requital in Russian Everyday Narratives

**Elena Iugai**

Russian State University for the Humanities, Moscow

The balance of good and evil is often exteriorized in stories, in how a person has found and usually lost something valuable. We will focus on two subjects: money and artistic talent.

As is shown in interviews, there is a price for pieces of art: “You will for certain pay for your poems. After writing something valuable I always feel ill”. The success in creativity could also cause the stories about contacts with evil spirits, because the purchase of the gift is a variant of the deal with the devil. For example, there are such narratives about one famous artist in Vologda. On the other hand, the heavenly muse demands renunciation of the terrestrial good. In modern stories, the nature of creative activity is not often discussed, but the locus common is that talent is not for free.

Unexpected money could also be given by god or by the devil, and the important thing is to determine whether it is fortunate for a person. As the book by A. Arkhipova and J. Fruchtman (2013) has showed, in Russia, there are a lot of beliefs, legends and practices concerning money. The paper will show the stories where finding money in the street causes being robbed or retired or, on the contrary, the loss of money is followed by an award. In the majority of cases, the balance is restored by money itself, but it could also be other material or spiritual wealth.

These two lines could be combined in one in the plot about a person who pays for big money with silence in creativity.

The majority of the stories are not realized as mystical, but the templates and repetition show that they are close to legends.

Arkhipova, Alexandra and Fruchtmann, Jakob 2013. *Fetish and Tabou. The Anthropology of Money in Russia*. Moscow.

## Sacrifices at the Unearthing of Treasure: Legends and Beyond

**Mare Kalda**

Estonian Literary Museum, Tartu

Several treasure tales focus on the sacrifice that is needed to get the treasure (an animal, lives of seven brothers, a sheep with lambs, the first person one sees when he/she reaches home) and give directions about the special manipulations necessary for obtaining the treasure. Therefore, when someone has to be given away or killed to receive a hidden treasure, when human or animal blood must flow, or something has to be brought to be offered to the guardian of the treasure or its representative, we are virtually dealing with the act of sacrifice. Actually, in comparing the situation told in a legend to the concept of religious sacrifice and to the examples coming from archaeological research, obvious differences can be seen. According to the archaeological discourse, one reason for a hoard deposit was the cult in the course of which the hoard itself served as an offering that was never meant to be retrieved. However, we can find the elements of ancient rituals in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century recordings of folklore functioning as legend motifs. In his interpretation of the Swedish legends of buried treasures, John Lindow (1982: 260) rightly explains these tales as existing at least in part as a vehi-

cle for popular fantasy. The other part of such cases seems to be more closely related to folk belief. Legends in which the sacrifice is required have different endings that indicate a certain ambivalence toward what is permitted and what is not when making contact with unknown partners and forces.

Lindow, John 1982. Swedish Legends of Buried Treasure. *Journal of American Folklore* Vol. 95, No. 377, pp. 257–279.

## The Girl in a Wine-Stained Dress and an Estonian Soldier Saved by the Snake in Afghanistan: Some Remarks on Urban Legends and Their Collecting Process in Estonia in the 1990s

**Eda Kalmre**

Estonian Literary Museum, Tartu

The story about the girl in a wine-stained dress and another about an Estonian soldier in Afghanistan saved from death by a snake are, in some sense, emblematic urban legends in Estonian folklore from the 1990s. Both are modern stories typical to the Estonian tradition of that period when the motifs of supernatural and magical meet in a Soviet-like context.

This paper discusses the author's personal observations, experiences and dilemmas from the 1990s, when she was organizing fieldwork in the Estonian Folklore Archives and founded the collection of urban legends in this institution.

In Estonia, the 1990s was a time of great change in every sense. The changes took place in political as well as social sphere. Estonia regained its independence in 1991. Since the end of the 1980s, the canon of folklore studies was also changing. New possibilities for spreading folklore emerged, and the role of media became more important in this process; for the researchers, context became more important, and the domains widened; the interest of the folklorists was becoming more directed towards the people and topics of their own time.

Together with social and political changes some entirely new story types – urban legends and rumors – entered into folklore studies in Estonia as objects of collecting and studying. Much of the material that was not considered actual for collecting in the 1980s, and especially for studying in context, either due to the oppressive totalitarian power or due to the self-censuring by the researchers, suddenly became a possible object of folklore studies in the 1990s.

The urban legends collected in the 1990s show that this tradition was present here, comparable to the stories of similar topic and content from the West but still somewhat different. The material collected in the 1990s was, in some sense, a memorization of the urban legends and rumors representing irony, humor, stereotypes, fears and beliefs told as true stories during the previous 50 years, thus forming the basis for understanding our history but also for understanding the stories of the next, digital era.

# *Death to Soviet Children* in a Black Car: The History and Meaning of the Child's Horror Story

**Anna Kirzyuk**

Russian Presidential Academy of National Economy and Public  
Administration, Moscow

My paper is based on the data of the project “Rumour as a Speech-Genre: Data Base and Index of Soviet Rumours”. The project focuses on collecting and systematizing the plots of rumors which circulated in the USSR from 1965 to 1985.

I would like to examine the Soviet variation of the persistent urban legend about the dangerous black car. It says that *there is a black car with the inscription DSC (Death to Soviet Children), which takes away children*. The “DSC car” rumour was a kind of cautionary tale which was told among Soviet children in the beginning of the 1980s. I am going to analyze the “DSC car” legend in the manner of the psychoanalytic semiotic of Alan Dundes (with the application of some elements of Lacan’s psychoanalysis and semantic analysis). If our unconsciousness speaks through folklore narratives, we should interpret them in the same way as Lacan and Freud interpreted dreams. We have to ascertain the meaning of a legend’s elements in the system of the meanings of the concrete culture. On the one hand, such an element as the black car links the “DSC car” story with international organ theft legends. In these stories, the “black car” belongs to rich foreigners (socially and ethnically *others*), who pose a threat to the group. On the other hand, the black car has specific semantics in the USSR: in the Soviet context, it refers to the “*chernyi voron*” – the black car of NKVD, which took away (often forever) people arrested in the Stalin era.

In the paper, it will be demonstrated how these two senses join in the “DSC car” legend and produce a new sense that is topical in the Late Soviet context.

## Supernatural Contagion: Suicide, Violence, and Slender Sickness in the Slender Man Phenomenon

**Andrea Kitta**

East Carolina University, Greenville

Slender Man, the supernatural creature created and popularized online, has been linked to multiple violent acts, including the “Slender Man Stabbings” in 2014 in Wisconsin. “Slender Sickness,” a specific condition created online by Slender Man enthusiasts includes symptoms such as paranoia, insomnia, memory loss, lethargy, depression, nose bleeds, coughing fits, insanity, and sometimes even death. Both the media and participants in the Slender Man phenomenon have linked Slender Man to bullying, violence, and death, especially suicide. This presentation will explore Slender Sickness and its possible linkage to depression and cyberbullying as well as look at the concept of suicide contagion, in particular, how it relates to the media coverage of the Pine Ridge Reservation and their interactions with Slender Man. I will also explore the ways that Slender Man both helps and harms those who participate in fan fiction and believe in Slender Man.

# The Haunted Antiquarian: BBC's *Ghost Stories for Christmas*, Antiquarian Investigations and Folk Horror

**Mikel J. Koven**

University of Worcester, Worcester

The concept of “folk horror,” which has emerged in recent years to describe films like *The Wicker Man* (Robin Hardy, 1973) and *Blood on Satan's Claw* (Piers Haggard, 1971) to the BBC's *Ghost Stories for Christmas* (various, 1971–1978, 2005–2013) series of occasional adaptations of M. R. James' short stories, is a thorny one for modern academic folklorists. Andy Paciorek defines folk horror as popular culture texts (films, TV series, books, music, illustration/art) which “have a rural, earthy association to ancient European pagan and witchcraft traditions or folklore” (p. 9); a definition which suggests a rather restricted perception of folklore. Central to this somewhat woolly definition is the figure of the antiquarian scholar, both amateur and professional, who investigates the persistence of (stereotypes of) folk traditions either in the modern world or as reconstructions of an imagined past. Using several of the BBC produced short adaptations of M. R. James's stories, this paper will explore the representation of the antiquarian as a Gothic hero: the antiquarian becomes a liminal site where the past haunts the present due to his investigations into that past.

Paciorek, Andy 2015. Folk Horror: From the Forests, Fields and Furrows: An Introduction. In K. Beem and A. Paciorek (eds.) *Folk Horror Revival: Field Studies*, pp. 8–15. Wyrld Harvest Press.



# Loyal Dogs That Have Touched Many Hearts

**Mare Kõiva, Rahel Laura Vesik**

Estonian Literary Museum, Tartu

Dogs loyal to their master are popular in folklore, literature, and media stories.

We are going to talk about a story of a faithful dog and its media coverage. It is a true story that took place in Japan in the 1920s and 1930s. Professor Hidesaburō Ueno took in a dog and gave him the name Hachi (Hachi – ‘eight’), but the dog is also known as Hachikō (Kō - ‘affection’). Every day Hachikō went to the Shibuya train station and waited for the professor who worked at Tokyo University to arrive at the station after work. In 1925 the professor died and for nearly 10 years after the professor’s death, Hachikō went to the station every day waiting for his master to return.

After the death of Professor Ueno, Hachikō still went daily to the Shibuya train station. In 1935 Hachikō died in front of the Shibuya train station. In 1934, a statue to Hachikō was erected in front of the Shibuya train station - Hachikō himself was present when the statue was revealed. The monument remains a popular meeting place in Tokyo. In 2015 a new monument was opened at the University of Tokyo where Professor Ueno worked.

Hachikō’s story has been made into a number of films, theatre plays and nearly 500 printed stories. In Shibuya there are Hachikō buses which play a song about Hachikō’s story. Hachikō has been turned into an example how children should behave and he was written into children’s schoolbooks (in 1967). Hachikō also has a place in popular culture and an important place among Japan’s national symbols. The story of Hachikō and his master are among the main narratives of Japan.

In the presentation we will discuss different narratives concerning Hachikō and how the story has spread in transmedia. The example of the American version raises some questions, for example, how justified is it to transfer a national story to another culture context.

## “The Grateful Terrorist” in the Portuguese Oral Tradition

**J. J. Dias Marques**

Universidade do Algarve/ Universidade NOVA de Lisboa, Faro

My paper deals with the legend known as “The Grateful Terrorist”, which pullulated for some months in the Portuguese oral tradition in 2004, before and during the European football championship then held in that country. After a period of several silent years, this legend reappeared in two different occasions in 2015 in Portugal.

In my paper, I will try to establish the different subtypes of this legend, show some versions of it (from Portugal and elsewhere), and try to clarify the different social and political aspects that seem to be behind its versions. I will also try to show the connection between this legend and much earlier narratives.

# Black Stories. Kwispels, Contemporary Legends etc. as Card Games

**Theo Meder**

Meertens Instituut, Amsterdam

In 2006, at the ISCLR conference in Copenhagen, Peter Burger and I introduced the term 'kwispel' for a specific kind of narrative riddle genre. The paper was published in *Toplore* 2006, where we defined this typical subgenre as follows: "a kwispel is a narrative riddle game, in which the narrator / riddler in a few words unveils the mysterious conclusion of a story and asks what happened, whereupon it is up to the audience to unravel the entire plot of the story by asking questions that can only be answered by 'yes' or 'no'" (p. 37). One example of the sort of clue a riddler can start with is: "a rope breaks. A bell chimes. A man dies."

In 2004, the German clinical epidemiologist Holger Bösch, who has a PhD in Psychology, turned the oral genre of the kwispel into a semi-oral card game and called it Black Stories (US: Dark Stories). Each deck contains 50 cards. The Riddlemaster reads out the sentences with the puzzling outcome of the plot on the upper side of the card, and the other gamers have to find out what happened. The solution of the kwispel is spelled out on the back of the card. Each side of the card has an intriguing illustration by the professional artist Bernhard Skopnik. The first deck of Black Stories was a great success, and by now ten decks have been published in the German-speaking countries. The English title Black Stories was also used for the Dutch translations: in the Netherlands and Flanders, seven decks have been published so far. Other languages they come in are English, French, Czech, Portuguese, Hungarian, Italian, Greek, Japanese and Latin (!). The game is available in 23 countries, and over 4 million copies have been sold (mostly in the German-speaking countries).

So ten decks with 50 riddles makes 500 kwispels: that is much more than tradition can provide. Where does Holger Bösch get all these kwispels from? What are they about? Who plays them? When and where? And how popular is this kwispel card game anyway? Will the card game give a boost to the traditional oral genre of the kwispel again?

Meder, Theo and Burger, Peter 2006: "A rope breaks. A bell chimes. A man dies." The kwispel: a neglected international narrative riddle genre, in P. Catteuw, M. Jacobs and S. Rieuwerts [e.a.] (eds.): *Toplore. Stories and Songs*. Trier, WVT-Verlag, pp. 28–38.

## Knossos in the Catskills: The Mythopoesis of Michael Ayrton's Arkville Maze

**Rae Muhlstock**

SUNY, University at Albany, Albany

Knossos is stirring. The ancient civilization, arbiter of the famed labyrinth and its narrative of betrayal, deception, lust, and loss, was once thought buried beneath its own palace. But since Sir Arthur Evans's excavations, the ancient civilization and its architectural anomaly have arisen to occupy our contemporary imaginations. They have inspired authors, artists, film and video game creators, and scholars like myself to wander the chambers of the labyrinth for the mythological qualities endemic to its architecture and its form and to question what it means to wander the labyrinths of the self, the other, and society in the contemporary world. Since the myth is evoked so often in contemporary culture, it is worth exploring in both its classical and contemporary incarnations.

Michael Ayrton spent much of his career wandering Daedalus's mythological labyrinth. By the mid 1960s, Ayrton had written, painted, sculpted, and sketched the labyrinth numerous times, culminating in the commission from Armand G. Erpf to build The Arkville Maze on his grounds in the Catskill Mountains.

As part of my larger research on the contemporary implications of the mythological labyrinth, I visited the Arkville Maze in 2013 and conducted a number of interviews with the townspeople and the workers who live with it day in and day out. The ethnographic data collected during my visit suggest an intriguing relationship between the Maze, the myth, and their contemporary surroundings. Using the methods and theories described by folklorists like Greg Urban, Thomas Sebeok, and Francis Utley, this paper will explore how myth begets myth. The townspeople of Arkville, NY, have only a middling interest in the classical myth. In their contemporary reception, they are not curious about the myth, just the Maze, not interested in its meaning, just its being there. It has taken on its own mythic quality divorced from antiquity and, as the visiting researcher, my own position in this rendition became, for them, a point of fascination.

## Collecting, Archiving and Studying Rumours and Contemporary Legends Today

**Carme Oriol and Emili Samper**

Universitat Rovira i Virgili, Tarragona

Although rumours and contemporary legends are widely present in our daily conversations, they can often be difficult to collect through interviews because informants can find it difficult to understand clearly what it is we want them to tell us.

When collecting such materials, it is therefore important to use strategies that assist us in the task of identifying rumours and legends. Once the materials have been collected, it is likewise important to ensure that they are kept under the best possible conditions so that they can be easily consulted during the subsequent analysis phase.

Given these challenges, the present paper describes strategies that are used to collect rumours and contemporary legends in the research conducted at the Universitat Rovira i Virgili in Tarragona (Catalonia, Spain). It explains how the information obtained during research is organised and introduced into the special “RumorFolk” database that has recently been created at the Folklore Archive of the Universitat Rovira i Virgili, and concludes by demonstrating how the entire process functions through the analysis of the various versions of one of the legends contained in the database.

## Organ Theft Legends in Russia: Conspiracy Theories, the Authoritarian State, and Consumer Society

**Alexander Panchenko**

Institute of Russian Literature, Russian Academy of Sciences,  
St. Petersburg

The presentation deals with the history and social meaning(s) of organ theft legends in the late Soviet and post-Soviet Russia. While there are a number of substantial research works on the issue in Western folklore studies, it has been barely researched in Russia. What may be considered certain “symbolic reference points” sus-

taining the dissemination of organ theft legends are the notions of power and the socio-economic dominance of some social groups, nations, or states over others, as well as collective fears of the “risk society” which metonymically turn the loss of individual identity into the loss of control over one’s body. However, social, political, and economic contexts that provide organ theft legends with their particular symbolic meanings and cultural adaptability still require thorough investigation.

Post-Soviet societies that usually deal with both the Third and First World versions of the theme can give us an interesting example of how organ theft legends are contextualized within “transitional” economic, social, and political circumstances. In this perspective, the organ theft theme (as well as some other globally known themes of contemporary legends) in present day Russia is related to a broader domain of conspiratorial narratives produced, transmitted, and supported by “emotional communities” of fear and distrust. The aim of this presentation is to investigate how the symbolic meaning and memetic adaptability of organ theft legends correspond with particular social, political, and emotional contexts.

## The “West” in Conspiracy Theories in Slovakia

**Zuzana Panczová**

Institute of Ethnology, Slovak Academy of Sciences, Bratislava

Conspiracy theories as a specific kind of rumour-based statements are interesting objects of research in social science because of their impact on group beliefs and acting. They often create specific narratives or narrative schemes with established topics and cycles; their contents are mostly spread spontaneously through the “conduits” of

supporters and produce a complex system of “conspiracy culture”. Therefore, they are perceived as an interesting object of research also for contemporary folklore or narrative studies.

In this paper, the author presents one of the typical features of conspiracy theories – a dualistic worldview which explains important events as the consequences of a hidden struggle between “us” and the dark forces. An example of this characteristic is also present in the dichotomous terms “West” and “East” which have their set of geo-political and cultural (as well as axiological) connotations. As a political and moral concept, the “West” is especially highly utilized in the conspiratorial discourse in Slovakia. (This is neither a new nor a specifically Slovak phenomenon, so its interpretations must take into consideration the relevant ideological and historical background.) It emerges also in connection with actual “hot” topics of public discussion (from the “gender ideology” or migration crisis in the EU to local strikes of teachers and nurses). The paper tries to discuss functions of this concept in rumours and conspiracy theories with regard to the local historical context, and to reveal its ties to other images of the “enemy” frequently used in the rumours circulating on popular Slovak web sites. Besides conspiracy theories as such, the focus of the analysis is set also on the narratives (among others also urban legends) supporting their suspicions, as well as on various kinds of argumentation strategies leading to cooperation (or even fusion) of seemingly contradictory ideological worldviews (left and right-wing supporters, Christians and white supremacists, etc.).



# Shadows, Sounds and Energies: On the Phenomenology of Haunted Places

**Jan Pohunek**

National Museum, Prague

Many contemporary legends and first-hand descriptions of alleged supernatural phenomena are connected to a specific place or a specific environment. In such stories, the reflected environment can sometimes be understood as a stage where the story takes place, but may also become an active force by itself – for example, by influencing the behavior or health of visitors and inhabitants.

The paper presents examples of some environments frequently used in supernatural narratives (especially abandoned houses, castle ruins, forests and underground spaces) and discusses patterns and motifs that seem to be more prevalent in stories related to locations like these. It focuses on the role of sensory experiences and both personal and social interpretations of space which help to make a place suitable for being endowed with a legend.

Among the main environmental factors that seem to shape the role of a place in a story are qualities like inhabitability, nature-like appearance, the available range of sight and both social and actual cleanliness. Human interactions with “haunted” places are also influenced by a preference of “practical” or “romantic” approaches which differ aesthetically and underline basic modes of behavior typical for the management of locations that are considered to have supernatural qualities.

The paper is based on research conducted by the author in the Czech Republic and examples of such locations in the area that were researched in detail are given to illustrate various topics. These locations include former military areas, castle and house ruins, remains of industrial objects, caves and old mines, prehistoric hillforts, haunted forests and others.

# Folk Narrative and the Internet: Christian Saints and God in a Digital World

**Radvilė Racėnaitė**

The Institute of Lithuanian Literature and Folklore, Vilnius

The paper deals with various folklore-related narratives, Internet memes and image macros that talk about Christian Saints and God. It presents an attempt to investigate their connections to the individual creation and traditional folklore as well as the blending of oral dissemination with the electronic means of transmission on the Internet or by e-mail. The aim is to find out whether this material is actually new, what social strata it is popular in, and whether it is justly labelled “Internet folklore”.

Both in Lithuania and abroad, the spread of the modern folklore was particularly stimulated by the appearance of such forms of communication as Internet chat sites, blogs, e-mail and interactive electronic media. These were the sources from which the most popular samples of recently created contemporary narratives (both in written and visual forms) were picked up. It should be noted, however, that such electronic means of existence, completely uncharacteristic to traditional folklore, determine the global character of the themes and contents of contemporary folklore (i.e., when narratives based on globally well-known topics spread in Lithuania as well).

Some of these narratives go back directly to the traditional Biblical legends of origin about the creation of the Earth, Adam and Eve, and the burdens of human existence, Noah’s Arch, etc., while others refer to eschatological folklore and the folk beliefs about the post mortal experiences of meeting Saint Peter at the Gates of Paradise.

The majority of the examples analysed belong to the comic folklore and have a didactic impact. They can be of two kinds: folkloric pieces of literary origin (not necessarily Lithuanian) and re-actualized traditional folklore. Travesties or contaminations of the latter, in order

to achieve a comical effect, are especially popular and regarded as vivid manifestations of contemporary Internet creativity.

## Secret Bodies, Stolen Organs: Legend Motives of the Ukrainian Crisis

### **Daria Radchenko**

The Russian Presidential Academy of National Economy and Public Administration, Moscow

The political crisis in Ukraine in 2013, followed by active military actions in the country's Eastern region in 2014-2015 were followed by official media and the users of social networks, who generated and transmitted a huge number of texts forming a negative image of the opponents and added offensive comments to the news. Beyond vernacular communication on the subject, information warfare was used by the agents of the conflict both offline and online. Many of these were based both on traditional ethnic humor and stereotypes and on the corpus of contemporary legends, using the imagery and motifs of the genre. Legends and legend-like narratives were supported by verbal and visual folklore texts of other genres (jokes, photoshops, etc.), predictably with a very sensitive (and thus offensive) topicality: death and the attitude towards the dead, violence against children, sexual offence and homosexuality, etc.

One of the consistent elements of contemporary war folklore is a group of narratives discussing the attitude to the bodies of those killed in action – whether they are honoured or neglected. The Ukrainian crisis is no exception. At least two big correlated motifs occur in press and vernacular comments: (1) the bodies are neglected and secretly buried as “medical waste”; (2) the dead bodies on the

battle fields become the loot of black transplantologists. These narratives connect an archaic motif of the unburied dead with the medical anxieties of the contemporary society.

## Utopias, Fictions and Dead Cities: Reality and Perspectives

**Rita Repšienė and Odeta Žukauskienė**

Lithuanian Culture Research Institute, Vilnius

The paper discusses the utopian narratives and new visions which course the agonies of cities, transforming place identity and modifying relationships to historical heritage. These utopias conjure up the *vision* of an advanced *society*, producing “legends” that alter the cartography of existing cities and leading to the abandonment of historical buildings. The paradigm of “dead cities” takes on a new meaning today. Although it is said that “a city does not die when its last resident moves away”, it should be admitted that the death also happens when new fictional discourses are imposed, municipalities lose the industries, symbolic places are emptied and alternative (“placeless”) spaces are not vivid. Dead cities occur and are referred to in different contexts, for example the film “Only Lovers Left Alive” (2013), directed by Jim Jarmuch, frames the city of Detroit as a Gothic graveyard, an apocalyptic space, as the city of the dead, exploring the real-life *urban* decay of *Detroit*. But what urban legends lead to the symbolic death of our cities? The paper will deal with the cultural realities in Lithuania.

# Stalin or the Bolsheviks?

**Jeanmarie Rouhier-Willoughby**

University of Kentucky, Lexington

Legends surrounding the death of forty religious figures at the hands of guards at the GULAG located in Iskitim, Russia from the 1930s to 1950s are well known in this part of western Siberia. The victims have been viewed as martyrs for the faith at the hands of an atheist state, and their deaths have led to the belief that the spring on this spot is sacred and miraculous. Over the last two years, I have collected a variant of the legend from among the laity that ascribes the holiness of this site to an entirely different source. In this version, it was not merciless guards at Stalinist internment camps that attacked the faithful, but rather the Bolsheviks, who persecuted and killed those in religious orders in the decade after the October Revolution. The story goes that two priests fled into the Siberian wilderness to escape certain death at the hands of the revolutionaries. They lived near the spring and helped believers in secret, living holy lives in this forbidding environment.

The shift in attention from Stalin to the Bolsheviks is telling in the context of contemporary Russia. With Stalin's rehabilitation in the eyes of many, his legacy is fraught with complexity as the victor in World War II and as an economic modernizer who brought Russia into the industrial age. He was also purported to be a believer in Orthodoxy and ignorant of the GULAG atrocities, a victim himself of a deception by conniving advisors. If attention shifts to the Bolsheviks, who instituted the policy of atheism, Stalin's role as a vicious mass murderer is deemphasized.

This paper will examine the socio-political contexts for the shift to the "true" culprit in this variant of the legend.

# Walter Anderson as an Innovator

**Christine Shojaei Kawan**

Göttingen

Walter Anderson, who was a professor of comparative folklore in Tartu from 1920 to 1939, is mostly known as one of the foremost representatives of comparative folk narrative research, the “great crusader of diffusionism”, and the scholarly adversary of Albert Wesselski. This contribution will, however, draw attention to a facet of his work which seems, at least outside Estonia, to have been forgotten: Walter Anderson not only pursued the study of folk narrative according to the rules of the geographic-historic school, he also opened up new paths, for example, through his experiments of tale transmission and through the collection and study of newspaper stories and rumours such as the so-called Mars panic.

# For Better or for Worse: Folklore and Michelle Obama

**Patricia Turner**

University of California, Los Angeles

Following his stirring speech nominating John Kerry for the presidency in 2004, both Barack and Michelle Obama were in the spotlight. And while their eventual status as the first family of the United States suggests that they earned respect from their constituents, it is also the case that their status engendered widespread contempt from those opposed to their ascension.

In recent years, ISCLR presentations have documented the range of rumors, legends and conspiracy theories that have surfaced about President Obama. This paper documents the lore that has emerged about FLOTUS (First Lady of the United States) and grapples with the similarities and dissimilarities between the narratives that are circulated about POTUS (President of the United States) as well as looking at the way in which “her” texts resemble those associated with other symbolically charged females in the world of politics such as Sarah Palin and Hillary Clinton.

## The Disappearance of Flight MH370: Rumours, Legends and Theories in the French Sphere

**Aurore Van de Winkel**

Catholic University of Louvain, Brussels

The year 2014 and the beginning of 2015 were particularly black for the airline industry. Several mortal air crashes made the highlights of the media and provoked numerous reactions on e-press, forums, blogs and social networks.

Bad weather conditions, missiles, human errors, suicide: the official causes are numerous, but not always convincing, especially when proof is missing. That was the case with Malaysian Airlines flight MH370 that disappeared from the radar in the middle of the Indian Ocean on 8 March, 2014. The Malaysian authorities quickly concluded it was an accident and all the passengers had died. However, at the time, the aircraft had not yet been found! One and a

half years later, an aileron washed ashore on Reunion Island. So it is difficult to know with certainty what happened.

Some Internet users, among whom are experts, propose explanatory scenarii for the causes and events of the accident, based on information from the authorities. However, these explanations have not convinced the public at large. So other Internet users have been searching for alternative explanations that may have been hidden by the authorities for different reasons. Inspired by previous facts, old rumours, legends and popular fiction, they have invoked terrorist diversion, military defense strategies, experience with new technology, appearance of a black hole, a new Bermuda triangle, or even aliens, amongst others.

The paper will explain the construction of the French alternative popular imagination created around this event, found randomly in the French e-press articles and in the readers' comments, in the posts of French blogs, forums and Facebook. We will show that this popular imagination is composed of various narratives and theories which are mixed or opposed in very rich intertextual connections. All of this allows us to reflect on a new typology of alternative explicative narratives, often caricaturally named conspiracy theories.



# Legends and Nostalgia: Stalin as a Cultural Demiurge of the Soviet Everyday Life

**Maria Volkova and Alexandra Arkhipova**

Russian State University for the Humanities, Moscow

Everybody knows Churchill's quote that says "Stalin had found Russia working with wooden ploughs and leaving it equipped with atomic piles". Almost an identical popular opinion is spreading now among those who have a lot of nostalgia for the Soviet past: "Stalin put Soviet Union on the path of progress". Such a perception created the new specific image of Stalin in contemporary urban legends. He became a *demiurge* of the Soviet everyday life. According to these legends, the Soviet leader invented or forced other people to create a set of famous everyday things: the champagne "Soviet", faceted glass, the sausage "Doctor" and even matches "Balabanovo".

The nostalgia for a past epoch gives to these things a new quality. It is often said that the "Soviet matches were the safest and never went out" or "the sausage 'Doctor' was the tastiest and healthiest". According to folklore texts, all these marvelous things could exist only due to Stalin's activities. For instance, he ordered winemakers to create *the drink of victory* under threat of death in 1945, because he wanted something to celebrate the victory in the war. They fulfilled his commands extremely fast and created the "Soviet champagne". A similar story exists about the "Balabanovo" matches.

The paper investigates how the contemporary post-Soviet nostalgia became a trigger for the creation of legends about the origin of the "Soviet good life".

# The Norse God Bragi in Popular Culture

**Gail de Vos**

University of Alberta, Edmonton, Alberta

In Snorri Sturluson's *Skáldskaparmál* (The Art of Poetic Diction), he relates the incident when Ægir came to Asgard to visit the Æsir and falls into a conversation with a god at the banquet, Bragi, who is listed fourth in Snorri Sturluson catalogue of the Æsir in *Gylfaginning* as the God of Poetry. "He is excellent with respect to wisdom and foremost in linguistic genius and speech. He knows most about poetry, and because of him *bragr* is called poetry, and from his name that one is called a *bragr* of men or a *bragr* of women who possesses verbal talent beyond others, a man or a woman" (see also Lindow 2002: 86).

In response to Ægir's question about the origins of poetry, Bragi tells one of the most famous of the Norse myths – when Odin went to war against the vanir. The two sides negotiated a truce settlement in which each side spat into a kettle. This mingled spittle was utilised to create the man, Kvasir, and from him came the mead of poetry.

Not much more is said about Bragi. Several early academic debates pondered the question of Bragi the poet being a human figure melded into Snorri's sagas, perhaps the poet Bragi Boddason rather than Bragi being a god in his own right. Bragi's wife, Idunn, has her own important role to play in the pantheon but, other than the popular iconic depiction of Bragi as an old man with a harp and the question about his providence, his stories are largely untold in the classic myths. This has, in part, been adjusted through the avenue of popular culture such as comic books, television shows, and fantasy novels. In this paper, Gail will be examining the contemporary

reworkings of the stories and legends of this ancient and often overlooked deity.

Lindow, John 2002. *Norse Mythology: A Guide to the Gods, Heroes, Rituals, and Beliefs*. Oxford University Press.

## A Dog Named Tank and Other Tales of Animal Rescue

**Carolyn E. Ware**

Louisiana State University, Louisiana

For the past seven or eight years, the sentimental “true” story of a black Labrador dog named Tank has circulated widely on the Internet. Told in first person by the man who allegedly adopted the dog from a no-kill shelter, the tale describes the new owner’s struggles to bond with the dog whose name, he has been told, is Reggie. After two weeks, the frustrated owner is ready to return the dog to the shelter when he remembers and reads a sealed letter handed to him by shelter employees. This letter, written by the dog’s former owner, reveals Reggie’s real name and background. The letter writer was a soldier who left Tank at the shelter upon his deployment to Iraq, hoping that he would soon return and reclaim his pet. The dog was to be offered for adoption only if the soldier did not survive his tour of duty. The dog’s new owner immediately recognizes the soldier’s name as a local hero recently killed in combat, calls the dog by its real name, and their bonding begins.

This tale, identified as false by Snopes.com in 2009, continues to circulate online, although usually in a considerably shorter version than the Snopes variant. Often, various photos of a black Labrador

accompany the story, sometimes with photos of a soldier in uniform. Not surprisingly, the tale seems to appeal particularly to animal lovers and military veterans, whose comments often speak to its inspirational value. Even when postings reveal that the story has been identified as fiction, some readers insist that “it doesn’t matter if it’s true or not” because its messages of heroism and human-animal bonds are essentially true, and at least one commenter attacks Snopes.com’s reliability. Others feel cheated, like the veterinarian who wrote that people who create hoaxes like this “deserve a special ring in Dante’s Inferno.”

This paper draws on recent rumor and legend scholarship to examine similarities and differences among the online versions of the Tank story and to suggest that the tale is a “proposition for belief,” in Fine and Ellis’s words. Primarily, however, I focus on readers’ online comments and their negotiation of belief, disbelief, and anger (or defense) when the story is revealed as false. I also use excerpts from my interviews with animal welfare workers to explore narratives of real-life animal adoptions, and animal rescuers’ reactions to the Tank the Dog debate.

# List of Conference Participants

**Alexandra Arkhipova**

alexandra.arkhipova@gmail.com  
Russian State University for Humanities  
Moscow, Russia

**Anastasiya Astapova**

anastasiya.ast@gmail.com  
University of Tartu  
Tartu, Estonia

**John M. Bodner**

jbodner@grenfell.mun.ca  
Grenfell Campus  
Memorial University of Newfoundland, Canada

**Peter Burger**

P.Burger@hum.leidenuniv.nl  
Leiden University  
Leiden, The Netherlands

**David Clarke**

David.Clark@shu.as.uk  
Sheffield Hallam University  
Sheffield,  
England, United Kingdom

**Dmitriy Doronin**

demetra2@mail.ru  
Russian Presidential Academy  
of National Economy and Public Administration/  
Russian State University for the Humanities  
Moscow, Russia

**Filip Graliński,**  
filipg@amu.edu.pl  
Adam Mickiewicz University  
Poznań, Poland

**Eleanor Hasken**  
eahasken@gmail.com  
Western Kentucky University,  
Bowling Green, U. S. A.

**Rosemary V. Hathaway**  
Rosemary.Hathaway@mail.wvu.edu  
West Virginia University,  
Morgantown, U. S. A.

**Reet Hiimäe**  
reet@folklore.ee  
Estonian Literary Museum/  
University of Tartu, Tartu, Estonia

**Alexander (Sandy) Hobbs**  
sandyhobbs10@hotmail.com  
University of the West of Scotland  
Paisley, Scotland, United Kingdom

**Elena Iugai**  
leta-u@yandex.ru  
Russian State University for the Humanites,  
Moscow, Russia

**Mare Kalda**  
kalda@folklore.ee  
Estonian Literary Museum  
Tartu, Estonia

**Eda Kalmre**  
eda@folklore.ee  
Estonian Literary Museum  
Tartu, Estonia

**Anna Kirzyuk**

kirzuk@mail.ru

Russian Presidential Academy  
of National Economy and Public Administration  
Moscow, Russia

**Andrea Kitta**

KITTAA@ecu.edu

East Carolina University, Greenville, U.S.A.

**Mikel J. Koven**

m.koven@worc.ac.uk

University of Worcester,  
Worcester, United Kingdom

**David Main**

david.main@uws.ac.uk

University of the West of Scotland  
Paisley, Scotland, United Kingdom

**J. J. Dias Marques**

jjmarq@ualg.pt

Universidade do Algarve/  
Universidade NOVA de Lisboa,  
Faro, Portugal

**Theo Meder**

theo.meder@meertens.knaw.nl

Meertens Instituut,  
Amsterdam, The Netherlands

**Yvonne J Milspaw**

yvonnemilspaw@yahoo.com

Harrisburg Area Community College  
Harrisburg, U.S.A.

**Rae Muhlstock**

rmuhlstock@albany.edu  
SUNY, University at Albany,  
Albany, U. S. A.

**Carme Oriol**

carme.oriol@urv.cat  
Universitat Rovira i Virgili,  
Tarragona, Catalunya, Spain

**Alexander Panchenko**

Apanchenko2008@gmail.com  
Institute of Russian Literature,  
Russian Academy of Sciences, St. Petersburg, Russia

**Zuzana Panczová**

Zuzana.Panczova@savba.sk  
Institute of Ethnology, Slovak Academy of Sciences  
Bratislava, Slovakia

**Jan Pohunek**

prebral@seznam.cz  
National Museum,  
Prague, Czech Republic

**Radvilė Racėnaitė**

raganagar@gmail.com  
The Institute of Lithuanian Literature and Folklore,  
Vilnius, Lithuania

**Daria Radchenko**

darya\_radchenko@mail.ru  
Russian Academy of National Economy and Public  
Administration  
Moscow, Russia



**Rita Repšienė**

r.repsiene@gmail.com  
Lithuanian Culture Research Institute  
Vilnius, Lithuania

**Jeanmarie Rouhier-Willoughby**

j.rouhier@uky.edu  
University of Kentucky, Lexington, U. S. A.

**Emili Samper**

emili.samper@urv.cat  
Universitat Rovira i Virgili,  
Tarragona, Catalunya, Spain

**Odeta Žukauskienė**

odeta.zukauskiene@gmail.com  
Lithuanian Culture Research Institute,  
Vilnius, Lithuania

**Patricia A. Turner**

pturner@college.ucla.edu  
University of California  
Los Angeles, U.S.A.

**Aurore Van de Winkel**

avandewinkel@yahoo.com  
Catholic University of Louvain  
Brussels, Belgium

**Gail de Vos**

Gail.devos@gmail.com  
University of Alberta, Edmonton  
Alberta, Canada

**Carolyn E. Ware**

cware1@lsu.edu  
Louisiana State University  
Louisiana, U. S. A.