

Contemporary Estonian Pupil Dog Lore

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Estonia

- The Republic of Estonia is a member of the European Union
- North-East Europe – west of Russia, east of Sweden, south of Finland
- Area 42,000 sq km
- Population 1.5 million (ca 1 mil Estonians)
- Language: Estonian
- Money: Euros from 1.1.2011

Estonia

In 1990: 90% agrarian workforce

In 2010: 4% agrarian workforce

Population ~1.5 million.

400,000 live in the capital, Tallinn.

100,000 live in Tartu, 2nd largest city

In 2000: usually one-two pets per family

By 2010: often more than one pet

Adult Petowners

- ❖ Pet-owners are younger than 65
- ❖ Married more than single or widows
- ❖ Pet is a component of the self-image
- ❖ Pet as a family member

Animals belong more often to a family

- ❖ with children
- ❖ which has more than 4 family members

Topic today

The presentation analyses the figure of dog (pet) in the life of contemporary school children and how it reflects in their personal experience stories. My main source is the big school lore competition which took place in 2007 (app. 17,000 participants). We received a broad variety of pet names, humorous and dramatic stories.

The stories reflect a shift in people`s attitudes and values, compared to stories from early 20th century.

Schoolchildren lore collection

- First major collection initiative in 1993
- - concerned all forms of folklore (stories, jokes, proverbs, etc.)

- Second major initiative in 2007 – 17,000 respondents from schools all over Estonia, all ages.
- - one question was about pet animals and stories of them.

2002 on-line conference “Private and public”

Subtopic “People and animals” – Questionnaire & stories

How do you feel about cats, dogs, etc. as pets in city conditions?

How do you feel about those who feed homeless cats?

What experiences does it offer for a child to communicate with an animal/bird?

Could a pet replace a fellow human?

How old should a kid be before you allowed him to take a dog?

How many pets would you yourself have?

How do you feel about your neighbor’s dog?

Is a pet a symbol of status?

Our relations to animals depend on the attitudes of our parents towards animals.

Rural people, esp. elderly, have definitely different opinions: utilitarianism versus humanitarianism.

This also concerns the attitude towards the pet industry (processed food, toys, accessories) and the emerging image of pets as family members with a budget.

Schoolchildren and pets

- Roughly one third of respondents had pets.
- In rural areas, everyone has pets
- Most common pets – cat and dog
- Less common – caged animals - birds, rodents, turtles
- Children include pets that live with their grandparents

Schoolchildren and pets

- In rural setting pets include household animals not strictly pets – e.g. guard dog
- Pets in urban setting are both family pets and personal pets
- Personal pets are often actually cared for by the mother
- Most common reason for not having pets (if given) is utilitarian or “mother is against”
- Pets are most important until 14 years old

Stories about pets

- “We have had so many funny stories, but I can not tell any right now”
- Pet escapes (and is found)
- Pet makes some kind of mischief
- Pet acts as almost human
- Most stories that children call funny are slapstick funny or even tragic

Stories about pets

- Stories that their parents tell

Once our dog peed on the carpet and my stepfather wanted to punish him. I felt sorry for the dog (it was mine and my sister's) so I hid it in the bathroom. Stepfather searched and searched and could not find him. Finally, when stepfather gave up, I called him and he came out of the bathroom. Everyone wondered how he got there **and they still keep wondering.**

Dog versus other pets

- Dogs and cats were the most often mentioned pets. However, there were more actual stories about cats.

Probable practical reasons:

- Cats are more likely to be let inside in rural households, while dogs are outdoor only
- Dogs are likely to be chained up while cats are free range
- Therefore, cats have more access to people and get into more stories

Compared to early 20th C

- In urban setting, dogs as strictly pets were uncommon and rather for upper class
- If animals were let inside, then restricted to some parts of the house
- Strange customs of the rich Germans – dog funerals, revenant dogs

Stories told in early 20th C

- Stories concerned more animals children had constant contact with – animals they herded, esp. larger and longer living ones like cows and horses
- Rural children had favourites among domestic animals they had everyday contact with

Connection to daily roles

- In early 20th century, children were part of the agrarian family, working with domestic animals and their stories concerned encounters with these.
- Dogs were herding aides or house guards, not pets.

Connection to daily roles

- In 21st century, most rural households have no cattle or herd animals, but every house must have a dog and cat. They are seen as utilitarian household members. Children have no duties related to them.
- In urban setting, animals are pets. Parents have rational reasons for choosing pets easier to keep in urban settings. Adults take dogs for their own purposes, not for children. Children have less to do with dogs than cats.

Summary

- Dog and cat are central to image of home
- Children have fewer duties related to and exposure to dogs than to cats. Thus, more “reportable events” about cats, leading to more cat than dog stories.
- Stories children tell of dogs reflect stories their parents tell of dogs.



Thank you!

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