

**Autumn school “Dialogues with Magic”**  
11-12 November, 2021, Saka (www.saka.ee)

## Program

### **11 November**

9.15 Joint start in bus from Estonian Literary Museum (Vanemuise 42, Tartu) towards Saka

11.15-11.45 Arrival in Saka manor, coffee in seminar area

Session I – moderated by Reet Hiimäe

11.45-12.00 **Reet Hiimäe**. *Introduction: Dialogues with magic*

12.00-13.00. **Meelis Friedenthal**. *Magic in the Early Modern scholarly discussions in Europe*

13.00-13.30 **Andrey Shishkov**. *Dark Theology: A new theory of supernatural objects*

13.30-14.15 Lunch

Session II – moderated by Marju Sammul

14.15-15.15 **Emily Pierini**. *Substances, healing and multi-sensory imagery in Brazilian mediumistic trance*

15.15-16.15 **Mare Kõiva**. *Estonian magic healers and verbal magic*

16.15-16.30 Coffee break

Session III – moderated by Alec Richard Kozicki

16.30-18.00 **Michael Winkelman**. *Shamanism from the perspective of cross-cultural research and neuroscience*

18.00-18.30 **Margaret Lyngdoh**. *Spirit masters and assistant spirits: Dialogues in context of the Khasi usage of magic*

18.30-19.30 Dinner

19.30- Socializing, networking and leisure

## **12 November**

7.15-9.15 Breakfast

Session I – moderated by Jonathan Roper

9.15-10.00 **Eva Toulouze, Nikolay Anisimov.** *Magic in modern Udmurt society*

10.00-10.30 **Savannah-Rivka Powell.** *Spirits between the strings: The Ainu tonkori as a magically imbued instrument*

10.30-11.00 **Kashif Farooqi.** *Matriarchal charming tradition: Gender and socio-cultural analysis of Zulekhavi tradition in Multan*

11.00-11.30 **Digne Üdre.** *Folk ornament and magic*

11.30-11.45 Coffee break

Session II – moderated by Saara Mildeberg

11.45-12.15 **Viidalepp, Auli.** *Technology-as-magic: Historical automata as magical objects*

12.15-12.45 **Tõnno Jonuks.** *Magic in news – magic, witchcraft and superstition in Estonian newspapers 1850-1980*

12.45-13.15 **Nikolai Shurakov.** *What can philosophy of language say about spells?*

13.15-13.45 **Introduction of poster presentations: Kareng Ronghangpi.** *Assault sorcery in Karbi belief worlds; Michele Tita.* *Wild witches in the Italian Alps*

13.45-14.30 Lunch

Session III – moderated by Reet Hiimäe

14.30-15.00 **Tanel Toom.** *Point of view of magic and supernatural in fictional audiovisual narrative forms*

15.00-15.30 **Helen Roostma.** *Detectives of the occult in fin-de-siècle weird fiction*

15.30-16.00 **Anastasiya Fiadotava.** *“All that is great is built upon memes”:* *Meme magic and the cult of Kek*

16.00-16.30 **Alina Oprelianska.** *Ukrainian witches and their burial customs*

16.30-17.00 Conclusions, good-bye-coffee

17.00 Bus back to Tartu (arrival in Tartu appr. 19.00).

The event will be organized with the support of European Union, European Regional Development Fund (ASTRA project of Estonian Literary Museum, EKMDHUM) and Estonian Literary Museum, it is also related to Centre of Excellence in Estonian Studies (CEES).

# Abstracts

## **Magic in the Early Modern scholarly discussions in Europe**

*Meelis Friedenthal,*

*Associate Professor of Intellectual History, Institute of Philosophy and Semiotics, University of Tartu*

*Associate Professor of the Intellectual History of the Baltic Sea Region, Tartu University Library*

The presentation will focus on the treatment of magic in Early Modern academic texts. First, the rediscovery of magic in European universities in the 16th century will be discussed, followed by the distinction between natural magic and demonic magic in Early Modern Swedish (including Finnish and Estonian) universities. How does natural magic work and how does it differ from demonic magic? Can demons change one creature into another (e.g. humans into wolves or other animals)?

## **Dark Theology: A new theory of supernatural objects**

*Andrey Shishkov,*

*PhD student, School of Theology and Religious Studies, University of Tartu*

What is magic but a breakthrough of supernatural objects into social reality? The French philosopher and sociologist Bruno Latour once wrote that religion is indeed opium, only not for the people, but for sociologists, "that put social scientists readily to sleep at the very moment when those they are in charge of studying are being made to act by others." In his view, when a religious actor testifies that he was motivated to act by God or some spiritual entity, it is easier for sociologists to come up with any theory explaining the actor's behavior by anything and to ignore this testimony. This approach may be called "naïve materialism." However, the opposite position of many theologians, who believe that any spiritual entity can be regarded as a direct participant in various life processes (including social ones) in the same sense as people ('naïve spiritualism'), is also just as wrong as 'naïve materialism'. The fact is that we do not have direct access to spiritual entities. They are always in the shadows.

The theory that allows us to get away from the extremes of naïve materialism on the one hand and naïve spiritualism on the other is what I call 'dark theology'. It draws on the philosophical toolkit of object-oriented ontology (OOO by G. Harman, T. Morton, L. Bryant) and uses some methodological techniques of Bruno Latour's actor-network theory. This approach offers, above all, an epistemology of the supernatural as dark (in the sense of cognition, not ethics). OOO first assumes the finiteness of human thought, which means there are things that we cannot think of. Second, he argues that things are inherently withdrawn for cognition: consciousness remains to deal with the representations it has created. Third, these representations are contingent, unstable, and fragile, for we do not have solid knowledge; we study in shadow.

God, a spiritual being or energy here, is as much an object of human knowledge as any other object. We have no direct access to him; his nature is hidden from us. But from the point

of view of OOO, the essence of any object, in general, is hidden from us. We encounter other objects only by "surface contact," or as Graham Harman writes, "surface qualities of each other". In my presentation, I will try to describe the basics of my project and offer a vision of how it is possible to talk about supernatural objects concerning human social reality.

### **Substances, healing and multi-sensory imagery in Brazilian mediumistic trance**

*Emily Pierini,*

*Marie Curie Fellow in Anthropology, Sapienza University of Rome, Italy*

This paper examines the relational dimension of trance-based spiritual healing understood as an ecology of fluids and substances between human and spirits. After introducing different approaches to the study of spirit mediumship, possession, and spiritual trance in relation to healing, it focuses more specifically on some Brazilian mediumistic practices drawing comparisons with nineteenth century European Spiritualism. Then, it delves into the multi-sensory aspects of mediumistic trance and the ethnographer's bodily experience in order to explore a complementary epistemology of healing and reflect upon ethnographic embodiment.

### **Estonian magic healers and verbal magic**

*Mare Kõiva,*

*Leading researcher and director, Department of Folkloristics, Estonian Literary Museum  
Head of the Centre of Excellence in Estonian Studies*

The presentation will look at various healers using old and new magic techniques and their practices, take a closer look at the development of some magical realities, to see the way symbolic rituals were used in magic. Verbal magic regulated communication between people and the spirit world, between people and diseases, between people and living nature and many other spheres.

The presenter will examine some examples of the rules of verbal magic and the relationship between magic and rituals. Verbal magic includes a material side, in the form of textual letters and amulets, additionally being associated with books on ritual magic, published in sixteenth and seventeenth century, and reprints and excerpts from nineteenth century. We will be collectively trying to answer questions about whether today's magic is object-, space- or time-sensitive, is it a process or a petrified activity? Can we map magical activity and create mental maps based on contemporary magical techniques?

### **Shamanism from the perspective of cross-cultural research and neuroscience**

*Michael James Winkelman,*

*Retired from School of Human Evolution and Social Change, Arizona State University*

Cross-cultural research reveals remarkably similar spiritual healing phenomena found worldwide in foraging societies of the pre-modern world. These include: overnight community rituals involving dancing, drumming and singing; experiences of spirit world encounters in an out-of-body experience; beliefs about powers derived from human-animal identities; alterations of consciousness used for healing and divination; healing involving soul recovery and object extraction; and involvement with hunting, among others. These cross-cultural patterns reveal the underlying structures of humans' evolved psychology, an

ecopsychology that developed in the context of the ritual expansion of the organization of social life and consciousness.

This presentation uses biological and neurological perspectives to analyze the bases of shamanic universals such as ritual, chanting and dancing, soul flight, animal identities and spirit beliefs. These and other shamanic universals are examined as manifestations of innate modular thought processes. The alterations of consciousness considered to shamanism exhibit properties of psychological integration that illustrate their roles in cognitive evolution and healing. The roles of shamanic ritual and thought are shown to have direct correspondences to major features of human social and cognitive evolution and features of human ecopsychology. The persistent attraction of shamanism is in part due to its intimate relationship to our evolved psychology.

### **Spirit Masters and Assistant Spirits: Dialogues in Context of the Khasi Usage of Magic**

*Margaret Lyngdoh,*

*Research Fellow in Folkloristics, Department of Estonian and Comparative Folkloristics,  
University of Tartu*

The Khasi indigenous tribes inhabit the Khasi Hills in Northeast India. They are predominantly Christianised with over 83% of the population primarily belonging to either the Catholic or Presbyterian factions. In such a context, it may be supposed that the place for magic is almost non-existent. But Church authority is sourced from the wholesale demonisation of older Khasi practices that, while remaining outside of religious canon, are demonised. This strategy is effective in controlling the Church populace through the harnessing of the emotion of fear.

*Jhare* “magic” practitioners in Northern Khasi Hills use “spirit masters” to control and change the circumstances of a petitioner, while in the border areas of West Khasi Hills, *Ojha* (ritual practitioners) use spirit assistants to work with, in their sorcery practices. This presentation will look at the concept of “dialogues” in magic as “links”. Such linkages are then tied to the core traditions (that I call “tradition tropes”) to which such magical practices are immanent. In such an approach to empirical data, what interpretations can be derived from the patterns in “magical” practices that would emerge? Do magical traditions have a hierarchy in their “dialogues” with other forms of magic? All material that will be presented in this talk is derived from primary fieldwork carried out between 2011 and 2020.

### **Magic in modern Udmurt society**

*Eva Toulouze,*

*Researcher of Ethnology, University of Tartu*

*Nikolay Anisimov,*

*Researcher, Department of Folkloristics, Estonian Literary Museum*

In contemporary Udmurt society, which is included in the whole Russian field, belief in magic and in people who master magic forces has not disappeared, both in general and explicitly. In general, magic thinking is activated in liminal, critical situations and it has consequences on the people’s behaviour. Moreover, in Udmurt rural society, magical deeds

structure the communicative field, and, as a consequence, this extends to urban milieu. On the basis of their fieldwork, observations and interviews, the authors will reflect on this issue.

**Spirits Between the Strings:  
The Ainu *Tonkori* as a Magically Imbued Instrument**

*Savannah-Rivka Powell,*

*PhD student, Department of Estonian and Comparative Folkloristics, University of Tartu*

In 1965 and 1966 Emiko Ohnuki-Tierney documented tales and riddles as dictated by an Ainu woman named Husko born in 1900 who had spent the greater part of her life in Sakhalin. This folklore included the recitation of the musical epic ‘Tonkori oyasi’ or ‘musical-instrument demons’. This tale addresses the Ainu belief that objects of material culture may become possessed by demons if they are not dealt with in the proper manner. In this tale, the demons can only be expelled through the correct phrases gifted to the hero by a guardian spirit in a dream. The *tonkori*, which is a stringed instrument, is played by both men and women, however, the demons in this tale are specified as male, whereas other similar narratives follow certain patterns of gender affiliation based on the item’s use in vernacular culture. The content of this epic will be compared to another Sakhalin Ainu tale I collected during my 2019 fieldwork in Hokkaido in which the *tonkori* was described as a women’s instrument containing the spirit of her lost baby. In this belief the *tonkori* is framed as having a comforting spirit and is held in the way one might cradle a baby while playing the instrument. Both narratives signify the belief of spirits within material items and the importance of maintaining appropriate relations with these beings.

**Matriarchal charming tradition:  
Gender and socio-cultural analysis of Zulekhavi tradition in Multan**

*Kashif Farooqi,*

*MA student, Folkloristics and Applied Heritage Studies, University of Tartu*

Divination and charming have an intertwined historical relationship. Charming practices can enter another domain and serve the purpose of healing physically and mentally. In my paper, I shall present my proposed MA-level research, which attempts to delve deep into the arena of charms, charming and matriarchy to find answers to these questions and analyze one of the matriarchal charming traditions in the ancient city of Multan (Pakistan) through a socio-cultural and gender lens. Digital tools will be used during the research to gather qualitative data to pilot-test alternative data collection tools in the course of the pandemic.

The research will engage with the charm performers, beneficiaries and others who have directly or indirectly benefitted from or observed the practices. The research will try to find answers to questions like how the carriers of the tradition were able to keep this matriarchal tradition alive, how do they foresee the future of this tradition, how the technological advancement in the society has impacted this tradition.

In patriarchal societies, the area of charming is dominated by men, which raises the question of how comfortable women and girls are in seeking help from the charmers about women-specific issues. Does the need for women-friendly solutions give birth to matriarchal charming traditions or have they existed in the societies on their own? The research will also dig into the question of whether the tradition has developed resilience in the women or

created more dependency? Has it changed the family relationship of beneficiary women at their homes?

### **Folk ornament and magic**

*Digne Üdre,*

*PhD student, Department of Estonian and Comparative Folklore, University of Tartu*

The presentation will explore the relationship between contemporary uses of Latvian folk ornament and magic beliefs.

In contemporary Latvian society, the folk ornament is an often-used visual tool to display one's national identity and belonging with the uses of folk ornament being as creative as varied. Practising folk ornament can be just a visual element but it can also have deeper meanings for its users and guide one's way to self-development and even alternative spirituality. For many, this is a lifestyle choice that is merged with an interest in folklore and traditional culture.

An important part of this tradition is the ornament's interpretation of mythology. Mythological interpretation of ornament is a system where elements of the ornament are matched with concepts from Latvian mythology. Therefore each of the ornaments has a name according to its mythological accordance, and deities can be depicted as graphic symbols. Accordingly, this tradition is not just a visual exercise or passion for ethno-design, it also involves a vernacular understanding of mythology.

Part of the appeal of folk ornament lies in the belief of the benevolent and sometimes even magical qualities of the ornament. The presentation will explore these beliefs based on the fieldwork interviews that I have conducted with the contemporary practitioners of folk ornament.

### **Technology-as-magic: Historical automata as magical objects**

*Auli Viidalepp,*

*PhD student, Department of Semiotics, University of Tartu*

The idea of artificial, mechanical 'life forms' is not a new one. Ancient Greek legends feature many characters that are either makers-engineers (Prometheus, Daedalus, Pygmalion) or made (Talos, Galatea, multiple mechanical wonders) artificially. In ancient and medieval times, historical rulers commissioned and displayed various automata to demonstrate their power. Such devices were often perceived as imbued with demonic or magical powers by those who did not understand their functioning.

The mythical engineered creations of Daedalus, Descartes's mechanical 'daughter', or the intricate clockwork designs of Pierre Jaquet-Droz are usually not considered as first associations or direct forerunners of the modern robots. Even so, an increasing number of scholars describe and analyse 'medieval robots' or ancient thoughts about artificial intelligence. However, in medieval and ancient thought, the distinction between humans, gods, heroes and automata is not so clear-cut. Just as in contemporary narratives from science

fiction and popular science, different categories of creatures blend and merge into a joint semiotic reality. They do so in all kinds of discourses, fictional and non-fictional alike.

### **Magic in news – magic, witchcraft and superstition in Estonian newspapers 1850-1980**

*Tõnno Jonuks,*

*Leading researcher, Department of Folkloristics, Estonian Literary Museum*

This presentation discusses newspaper records concerning magic, witchcraft and superstition from 1850-1980. During this, more than a century long period we can see how approaches to magic change and how the originally ridiculing attitude has gradually changed into a more positive one and how condemnable superstition became positive cultural heritage. Moreover, newspaper records – currently understudied – provide a rich and peculiar corpus of data in studying 19th-20th century magic.

### **What can philosophy of language say about spells?**

*Nikolai Shurakov,*

*PhD student in Theoretical Philosophy, Institute of Philosophy and Semiotics, University of Tartu*

For centuries, the focus of philosophical research of language was directed to declarative sentences which only can be true or false. This paradigm was constantly overlooking the role language can play in our life. J. L. Austin introduced a notion of ‘speech acts’ in order to capture a number of things language can do. In my talk, I introduce the motivation for the speech act theory. Then, I will present key concepts and distinctions employed by philosophers of language. There are different inner classifications of speech acts and different theories of what constitutes a speech act. These steps establish a ground for the thesis I want to propose – spells are speech acts. There is a couple of thought-provoking conclusions of this proposal. Firstly, we should find a suitable category of speech acts to accommodate spells. And secondly, we can try to use the methodology adopted by philosophers of language to investigate spells.

### **Assault Sorcery in Karbi Belief Worlds**

*Kareng Ronghangpi,*

*PhD student, Department of Estonian and Comparative Folkloristics, University of Tartu*

The Karbi belong to the Tibeto-Burmese group and inhabit the twin districts of Karbi Anglong in Assam, India. Their language is called Karbi. Historically, the Karbis have been known as ‘Mikir’ (or Meekir/Mikeer/Mekir), that is derogatory form of addressing Karbi people. Later the term Karbi or ‘Ārlèng’, was used to designate this indigenous group. The Karbi society is patriarchal with some elements of matrilineality woven in. Ritual makes up a large part of what the Karbi religion is comprised of.

The Karbi community has a broad concept of the human and the non-human world preserved and transmitted through the oral traditions passed down through generations. The

relationship between the non-human entities includes a sense of mutuality, participation, and reciprocity. But Karbi non-humans are considered dangerous.

The present paper focuses on the usage of malignant ritual ‘magic’ known as *bap*, to gain status in the society and the feeling of empowerment by interactions with the non-human entity by inflicting harm on others due to greed or envy. There are three types of *bap*: the first type is known as *Ramaha* – a wild plant found only in the forest. The second kind of *bap* is the one that can be domesticated at home in the form of a plant and does not have a specific name but falls under the category of *bap*. The third is known as *Thengkur* – a spirit that can be used to attain power and harm others in exchange for wealth.

Some parts of Chowkihola, Jongthung, Den Arong, and Tokadi villages that fall under the Karbi Anglong district are famous for practicing assault sorcery by using *bap*. This presentation aims to explain the phenomenon associated with the use of *bap* as a means of leveling hierarchy in the community or to gain status, position, and power.

### **Wild witches in the Italian Alps**

*Michele Tita,*

*PhD student, Department of Estonian and Comparative Folkloristics, University of Tartu*

The Alps are among the highest peaks in Europe. Situated between the Italian peninsula and the European mainland, the Alpine chain stands with its unique beauty and its wild, impervious and inaccessible woods and glaciers. In such a wild environment, human settlement has always been hard and scarce. Nonetheless, villages exist in the Alps and people have learnt to live there. Many of these villages exist in the valleys, relatively far and safe from the wild areas on a higher altitude.

However, Alpine villagers could not and still cannot avoid contact with wilderness and non-anthropogenic environments. They also tend to make wilderness the protagonist of their own folklore, through imaginary figures that represent wilderness and the concept of the “wild”. I focused on one of these figures in my research, namely the “wild man”, while coming across the local hearsay about witches too in the Italian side of the Alps. As well as the wild man, witches are told to live in isolation and far from the Alpine villagers, in the realm of wilderness, where they can also practice witchcraft in total secrecy. Moreover, witches are considered scary, especially for children, who might avoid woods to prevent any encounter with them.

With this presentation, I aim to explore the folklore regarding witches in the Italian Alps and connect these scary, fascinating and magical figures with the local idea and image of wilderness.

### **Point of view of magic and supernatural in fictional audiovisual narrative forms**

*Tanel Toom,*

*PhD student, Baltic Film, Media and Arts School, Tallinn University*

Making and directing films is all about the dialogue with the audience – there is no film if there is no communication. Great films are the ones that manage to put us right into the center of a character’s emotional headspace. The way films achieve high levels of emotional empathy has to do with the way the filmmakers use their craft to not just let us observe a story at a safe distance but to feel like we ourselves are travelling with the characters on their journey. This narrative stance is called **cinematic point of view** (POV). Films and television shows present their stories from a certain point of view, and if that changes, it can completely alter the story – or at least how the audience feels about a character or situation.

The shot or scene can be **objective** – there is no bias towards a particular character, we’re watching everyone react, and the camera itself isn’t too close to the action – or it can be **subjective** – favoring one of the characters, focusing more on his/her POV.

The same goes with the sense of place and supernatural, often non-physical spiritual characters, an ominous feeling or a threat that is about to rise from something. How to show the non-physical? How to wake up and give life to an inanimate object?

We will be looking at what is a cinematic POV, different levels of it and how to control and direct it, putting a special emphasis on supernatural and magical.

### **Detectives of the occult in *fin-de-siècle* weird fiction**

*Helen Roostma,*

*PhD student, Department of English Studies, University of Tartu*

The topics touched upon in weird fiction range from ghosts to aliens, from zombies and vampires to metaphysics, leading to a sprawling corpus of material that is difficult to define by anything other than a certain quality of weirdness. It follows, then, that weird fiction has traditionally been divided into many subgenres with occult detective fiction being one such subgenre. Contrasted with Lovecraftian horror, though, the occult detective story has been examined sparsely thus far. Because of this, this presentation aims firstly to examine the origins of occult detective fiction and to determine how occult detectives function as characters: are they detectives like any other or is there something special about them? What kind of ontological questions does the presence of the supernatural – or its lack – present in occult detective stories, and are these questions specific to the *fin-de-siècle*? Secondly, this presentation aims to follow the threads which link weird fiction of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century to contemporary fiction to determine whether the occult detective story is something that belongs into the past or if it is something that keeps, much like a revenant, coming back.

### **“All that is great is built upon memes”: meme magic and the cult of Kek**

*Anastasiya Fiadotava,*

*Researcher, Department of Folkloristics, Estonian Literary Museum*

A series of dramatic political and social events of the mid-2010s in the Western countries – with the 2016 US elections being the culmination – has provoked not only an unprecedented resonance in social media, but also highly visible magical activities. The intersection of these two currents gave birth to a new phenomenon, namely, the meme magic. The concept of meme magic originated on the imageboards (primarily on 8chan and 4chan) and refers to the

possibility of influencing real-life events with the help of internet memes. Not only the memes, but also certain numerical combinations are believed to have magical power.

Meme magic is tightly interconnected with another trend of imageboards – the cult of Kek who is considered to be a god of chaos. Kek, being a combination of internet slang (“kek” is an alternative for “LOL”) and a reference to the mythology of Ancient Egypt (where Kek was the god of darkness and obscurity), also bears resemblance to Pepe the Frog who is a popular character of Alt-right memes. The peculiar blend of contemporary forms of online communication and an obscure deity of ancient religion draws the attention not only of the Alt-right supporters, but also of a larger audience who are consequently engaged in the otherwise marginalized discourse.

Meme magic and the cult of Kek are discussed within the framework of quasi-ostension (Ellis 1992) as well as the earlier forms of internet “spells” (see, for example, Voolaid 2013). The presentation will also touch upon the ironic undertones of these phenomena and show how humour can be instrumental in evoking emotions and promoting the content shared by the Alt-right imageboard posters. Finally, the inner controversies among the posters will be revealed through the analysis of recent 4chan threads dedicated to the cult of Kek and meme magic.

### **Ukrainian witches and their burial customs**

*Alina Oprelianska,*

*PhD student, Department of Estonian and Comparative Folklore, University of Tartu*

According to Ukrainian beliefs, witches cannot pass away like any other person and suffer on their deathbed, until they pass down their power. The paper describes three cases of witches' death in order to delineate belief narratives about the deathbed of witches in Ukrainian folklore, the reason they suffer and how to avoid it according to Ukrainian beliefs. The paper considers witch's power/energy as a clue point that keeps the vitality of the witch.

The research also locates witches and their death-specifics in a Christian, or to be precise, in the Eastern Orthodox context, as well as in the context of vernacular religion, where the witch is a Christian and cannot be deprived of a proper burial ritual until she proclaimed herself as a witch. The Christian concept of sinfulness and gaining salvation by forgiveness was adopted in vernacular religion of Ukrainians, although the duty of the remittal of the sins lies on the human shoulders. The paper is based on fieldwork material, collected through online conversations in summer-autumn of 2020.