

# FOAFTale News

Newsletter of the International Society for Contemporary Legend Research

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## IN THIS ISSUE:

- From the Editor's Desk
- Eda Kalmre and Mare Kalda, "A Special Welcome from our Tallinn Hosts"
- An Interview with 2014 Brian McConnell Book Award Winner Eda Kalmre
- Perspectives on Contemporary Legend 2016 Program
- Véronique Champion-Vincent and Jean-Bruno Renard, *Conspiracy Theories Today* (2016) Table of Contents in French and English
- Back Matter

## FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

Is Ted Cruz the Zodiac Killer? Do the Clintons have a decades-long, double-digit hit list? Are savage liberal goons beating Donald Trump supporters until blood comes out of their eyes? With the American election cycle in full swing, political urban legends seem to be dominating the rumor mill and our International Society for Contemporary Legend Facebook page.

Of course, as an international organization, we have also remained attuned to legends beyond the American primaries. A mountainous Omani village that receives so little sunlight that residents need only fast three and a half hours per day during Ramadan. A python springing from a toilet to bite a Thai man's penis. Killer Korean electric fans. The world of contemporary legend carries on, and so do we.

In this issue, you will find a variety of columns, all with a European tilt, and several focused on the upcoming 2016 Perspectives on Contemporary Legend meeting in Tallinn, Estonia. To begin, Eda Kalmre and Mare Kalda, the 2016 conference hosts, offer a special welcome to guests planning a week of fun and legend scholarship in Tallinn. Next, *FOAFTale News* sat down with Eda Kalmre to learn more about her career as a legend scholar and her prizewinning book *The Human Sausage Factory: A Study of Post-War Rumour in Tartu*.

Following this, readers can take a sneak peek at the 2016 Perspectives on Contemporary Legend meeting program. This issue ends with Véronique Champion-Vincent and Jean-Bruno Renard offering an English translation of the table of contents to their new book *Conspiracy Theories Today*.

As always, *FOAFTale News* is open to accepting articles, review, interviews, or any other material of interest pertaining to contemporary legend and the study thereof. In addition to this newsletter, be sure to join and contribute to the International Society for Contemporary Legend Research's Facebook group, a consortium of legend scholars and legend enthusiasts who post daily content on legend happenings in the modern world.

David J. Puglia

## EDA KALMRE AND MARE KALDA, "A SPECIAL WELCOME FROM OUR TALLINN HOSTS"

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 International Society for Contemporary Legend Research, 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.

*Eda Kalmre and Mare Kalda*

**AN INTERVIEW WITH 2014 BRIAN MCCONNELL BOOK  
AWARD WINNER EDA KALMRE**

In an ongoing feature, *FOAFTale News* sat down with Eda Kalmre, winner of the 2014 Brian McConnell Book Award. The prize came in recognition of her book *The Human Sausage Factory: A Study of Post-War Rumour in Tartu* (2013). Kalmre will also be hosting the 2016 Perspectives on Contemporary Legend meeting in Tallinn, Estonia. In celebration of her win and in anticipation of her hosting the upcoming conference, Kalmre agreed to an interview discussing her life in legend, her award-winning book project, and her take on the state of the legend field today.

*FOAFTale News: How did you first become interested in contemporary legends?*

**Eda Kalmre:** It was at the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s. I worked in the Estonian Folklore Archives, and Estonia had just gained independence and opened up to new contacts and ideas. I was inspired by the books on urban legends by Jan Harold Brunvand and Finnish professor Leea Virtanen.

*FN: In your opinion, why should people take contemporary legends seriously?*

**EK:** A large part of contemporary legend should be taken seriously. Legends used to belong to the peripheral part of communication in society, but now thanks to different medias (social media, digital media, participation journalism) intertwined, it has become a more significant channel to get information than ever before. More over, false information and propaganda has also become a bigger problem than before. The Internet is an abysmal source for rumours. Once the rumour has gone viral, it is hard to

prove its falseness. Even if it is proven false, it is difficult to fight against the collective beliefs. It is known that over the last few years, the European Union has spent great sums of money to build a lie detector for social media.

*FN: Do you have a favorite contemporary legend?*

**EK:** Yes, I have many favourites. Some of them I have written about, some of them I have not. One is the story about the lilac lady, who since the 1930s has haunted the Estonian Literature Museum where I work. I have also been moved by the somewhat different urban legend of the young man who is saved by the snake. The story was told in the context of Soviet troops invading Afghanistan in 1970s and 1980s, when young Estonian boys were there as well.

*FN: Do you incorporate contemporary legends into your teaching?*

**EK:** I have had some special lecture series about urban legends at the University of Tartu. Not any more, though, so I really miss them. Folklore is not so popular at the university as it was in 1990s. I don't work in a university but in an institution for folklore research. On the other hand, I have supervised many students on their archive workshops in the museum and they have always had to collect contemporary lore, preferably urban legends.

*FN: You won the Brian McConnell Book Award for your book, The Human Sausage Factory: A Study of Post-War Rumour in Tartu. How did you start working on that topic?*

**EK:** That legend is fixed in Estonians' collective memory for many reasons. The impulse for the research came from an article that was published in Tartu's newspaper. Many were touched by it, so afterwards they contacted me themselves with the wish to give interviews. Over the years, I worked in different archives and made over 30 interviews.

*FN: For those who haven't read Human Sausage Factory yet, could you give us a brief summary?*

**EK:** This narrative study centers on the multifaceted treatment of a rumour that was popular in the city of Tartu and its vicinity after the Second World War. These are rumours based on real life and real behaviour, and therefore many people believe they are true. According to the rumour, there used to be a mechanized human sausage mill in the ruins near the Tartu market and people were lured there from the street. Russians, Jews, expatriate Estonians from Russia, and Soviet authorities were the “offenders” most commonly associated with this monstrous business. Hundreds of people visited the site of the alleged sausage mill and recollections of the event and the city in the post-war period still linger in the memories of the older generations. The story of the sausage mill is one of the characteristic narratives encompassing the beliefs, prejudices, values and stereotypes of the post-war era with a distinctively influential and diverse semantic potential.

*FN: What's your next project?*

**EK:** These days I am compiling and editing a special issue about rumours, urban legends, and conspiracy theories. The focus for that is the context of Russia and Eastern Europe: the elections in Belarus, the rumour about Putin’s disappearance, and the way rumours and urban legends are exploited by politics and propaganda. It also includes an article about the Snowden affair. The other project I am working on is an Estonian book called *Nothing is True, But Everything is Possible: A Little Guide to Rumours, Urban Legends and False-news*.

#### PERSPECTIVES ON CONTEMPORARY LEGEND 2016 PROGRAM

**Tuesday, June 28**

**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**

*Radvilè Racènaitè - 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**

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

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

*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**

**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 – 11.30 Coffee break**

**11.30. – 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 Repsiene and Odeta Zukauskienė* - **Utopias, Fictions and Dead Cities: Reality and Perspectives**

**12.30 – 14.00 Lunch break**

**14.00 – 15.30 Session 6**

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

*Dmitrii Doronin* - **From the Museum Exhibit to the Powerful Deity: Contemporary Legends about the “Altai Princess”**

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

**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* - **Fortean, 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 or visiting the KGB Museum at the Viru Hotell**

**Thursday, June 30**

**Excursion to Lahemaa**

**Friday, July 1**

**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**

**10.00- 12.00 Session 11**

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

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

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

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

**Conference closing**

**VÉRONIQUE CAMPION-VINCENT AND JEAN-BRUNO RENARD,  
CONSPIRACY THEORIES TODAY (2016) TABLE OF CONTENTS  
IN FRENCH AND ENGLISH**

Numéro spécial de *Diogène*  
sous la direction de Véronique Campion-Vincent et  
Jean-Bruno Renard

**Les théories du complot aujourd'hui /  
Conspiracy Theories Today**

Avant-propos/ Introduction de Véronique  
Campion-Vincent et Jean-Bruno Renard

*Partie 1. Approches théoriques / Theoretical  
Approaches*

1. Gérald BRONNER, *Pourquoi les théories du complot se portent-elles si bien ? L'exemple de Charlie Hebdo / Why are Conspiracy Theories so widespread ? The Charlie Hebdo Case*

2. Michael BUTTER and Peter KNIGHT, *Bridging the Great Divide: Conspiracy Theory Research for the 21st Century / Comblant le grand fossé : recherches sur les théories du complot pour le XXI<sup>e</sup> siècle*

3. Julien GIRY, *Le conspirationnisme : archéologie et morphologie d'un mythe politique moderne / Conspiracism: Archeology and Morphology of a Modern Political Myth*

4. Emmanuel KREIS, *De la mobilisation contre les « théories du complot » après les attentats de Paris des 7 et 9 janvier 2015 / Mobilization against "Conspiracy Theories" after the Murderous Attacks of January 7 and 9, 2015 in Paris*

5. Rudy REICHSTADT, *Le conspirationnisme ou l'extension du domaine de la négation. L'intrication de la complosphère avec la mouvance négationniste / Conspiracism or Extension of the Realm of Denial. Intricacy of the Conspiracist Web with the Negationist Current*

## Partie 2. Approches psychologiques et sociologiques / Psychological and Sociological Approaches

6. Loïc NICOLAS, *Pouvoirs du discours et terreur des mots. Jésuites, juifs, francs-maçons : la rhétorique au service de la conspiration / Powers of Discourses and Terror from Words. Jesuits, Jews, Freemasons: Rhetoric at the Help of Conspiracy*

7. Sylvain DELOUVÉE, *Répéter n'est pas forcément croire. La question de la transmission des idées conspirationnistes / To Repeat Does not Mean to Believe. The Question of Conspiracy Ideas Transmission*

8. Véronique CAMPION-VINCENT, *Note sur les entrepreneurs en complots / Note on Conspiracy Entrepreneurs*

9. Jean-Bruno RENARD, *Les causes de l'adhésion aux théories du complot / The Causes of Acceptance of Conspiracy Theories*

## Partie 3. Les théories du complot dans les anciens pays communistes/ Conspiracy Theories in Formerly Communist Countries

10. Stéphane FRANÇOIS et Olivier SCHMITT, « Être russe signifie être anti-américain. » *Le conspirationnisme dans la Russie contemporaine / "To be Russian means to be Anti-American". Conspiracy Theories in Contemporary Russia*

11. Radan HALUZÍK, "But Who on Earth is Organising the Whole Thing ?" *How Lack of Understanding of the Mechanisms of the Velvet and Colour Revolutions opens up space for Conspiracy Theories: The Case of Post-Soviet Eastern Europe / « Mais qui sur Terre organise tout cela ? » Comment le manque de compréhension des mécanismes des Révolutions de velours et de couleurs ouvre un espace pour les théories du complot : le cas de l'Europe de l'Est post-soviétique*

12. Zuzana PANCZOVÁ and Petr JANEČEK, *Conspiracy Theories in the Heart of Europe. Popular Conspiracy Theory Topics in Slovakia and the Czech Republic / Théories du complot au cœur de l'Europe. Les thèmes des théories du complot en Slovaquie et en République tchèque*

## Partie 4. Les théories du complot aux États-Unis/ Conspiracy Theories in the United States

13. Michael BARKUN, *Conspiracy Theories as Stigmatized Knowledge / Les théories du complot en tant que savoir stigmatisé*

14. Mark FENSTER, *A Failure of Imagination: Competing Narratives of 9/11 Truth / Un manque d'imagination : les récits en concurrence sur la vérité du 11-Septembre*

15. Gary Alan FINE, *The Promiscuity of Facts: Barack Obama and Uncertain Knowledge / L'hétérogénéité des faits: Barack Obama et le savoir incertain*

## Partie 5. Complotisme et culture populaire / Conspiracism and Popular Culture

16. Aurore VAN DE WINKEL, *La disparition du Vol MH370 : stimulus pour la construction d'un imaginaire mêlant complot, dissimulation, bluff et fiction / The disappearance of Flight MH370: stimulus for the construction of an imaginary who combines conspiracy, cover-up, bluff and fiction*

17. Raphaël JOSSET, *Auri Sacra Fames. L'argent et la finance dans le conspirationnisme / Auri Sacra Fames. Money and Finance in Conspiracism*

18. Eva SOTÉRAS, *Le conspirationnisme sur fond rythmique : le cas du rappeur Rockin' Squat / Conspiracism with Background Beat: the Rap Artist Rockin' Squat Case*

19. Damien KARBOVNIK, *Théories du complot et ovnis / Conspiracy Theories and UFOs*

### BACK MATTER

FOAFTale News accepts short articles, reports, queries, reviews, and collectanea pertaining to contemporary legend. To submit, contact the Editor, David J. Puglia ([david.puglia@bcc.cuny.edu](mailto:david.puglia@bcc.cuny.edu)).

All back issues of FTN can be found at <http://www.folklore.ee/FOAFTale>. Thanks as ever to Eda Kalmre and the *Haldjas* server at the Estonian Literary Museum for hosting.