



# Folklore

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# **Folklore**

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# CONTENTS

To what Extent are Jokes Reactional? (Based on a Joke Cycle about Yury Luzhkov's Dismissal) Anastasiya Astapova	7
Funny or Aggressive? Failed Humour in Internet Comments Liisi Laineste	29
On the Role of Visualisation in Understanding Phraseologisms on the Example of Commercials Anneli Baran	47
<i>Click 'Like' and Post It on Your Wall!</i> Chain Posts on Facebook – Identity Construction and Values Piret Voolaid	73
Death and Bereavement on the Internet in Sweden and Norway Anders Gustavsson	99
The Peasant Poor and Images of Poverty: Finnish Proverbs as Discursive Representations of Cultural Knowledge Eija Stark	117
On Reality, Truth and Ideologies in the Case of Munchausen Tales Eda Kalmre	141
DISCUSSION	
Enigma as a Literary Device in Native American Folklore: Jarold Ramsey's Analysis of Two Clackamas Chinook Tales. <i>Daniel J. Frim</i>	159
INTERVIEW	
Interview with Hungarian folklorist and ethnologist Mihály Hoppál on the occasion of his 70th jubilee. <i>Nikolay Kuznetsov</i>	163

<b>IN MEMORIAM</b>	
Artem Kozmin	171
<b>NEWS IN BRIEF</b>	
Migration in the Context of Rituals and Practices. <i>Irina Sedakova</i>	173
Europäischer Märchenpreis 2012 to Wolfgang Mieder. <i>Christian Grandl</i>	180
Thesis Defence: Toms Kencis. Disciplinary History of Latvian Mythology. <i>Rūta Muktupāvela</i>	185
<b>BOOK REVIEWS</b>	
A Sociological View on Target Choice in Jokes. <i>Liisi Laineste</i>	189
On the Epic of Gilgamesh in Estonian. <i>Vladimir Sazonov</i>	193

## TO WHAT EXTENT ARE JOKES REACTIONAL? (BASED ON A JOKE CYCLE ABOUT YURY LUZHKOV'S DISMISSAL)

*Anastasiya Astapova*

**Abstract:** The article concentrates on jokes that appeared immediately after the dismissal of Yury Luzhkov, Mayor of Moscow, in 2010. As soon as he was fired after eighteen years in the same position of mayor, the Internet was flooded with jokes about his dismissal as well as numerous discussions on internet forums and blogs. I collected the jokes as well as opinions from the discussions, categorised them by their themes, and tried to understand how these two phenomena (jokes and discussions on the Internet) correlate with each other, in order to understand whether the axiom that folklore is a mirror of society is true.

**Keywords:** Yury Luzhkov, (internet) humour, topical jokes, political jokes, reflection of social life in folklore

It seems to be true that whenever something important happens in the world around us, it is immediately manifested in folklore. One of the most 'responsive' genres of folklore is obviously jokes. No wonder that in the 1980s several folklorists turned to the study of such reflections in jokes. For example, some articles concentrated on the jokes that appeared immediately after the disaster of the space shuttle Challenger (Simons 1986; Smyth 1986; Oring 1987).

Contemporary scholarship acknowledges such 'reactional' jokes; for instance, Liisi Laineste focuses on what she calls topical jokes from the point of view of their cognitive function. She takes into consideration mainly the jokes about the terrorist attack in the USA in September 2001, and mass alcohol poisoning in Estonia (Laineste 2008). Similar topics are discussed by Alexandra Arkhipova in her articles dedicated to the jokes about Vladimir Putin, including those which appeared as a reaction to the so-called 'Snow Revolution' in winter 2011–2012 (Arkhipova 2009, 2012). Unlike the aforesaid authors, she uses statistical methods for the analysis of the topical jokes and makes a conclusion about the popularity of the new form of the joke that parodies speech genres.

Nevertheless, many topical joke cycles have been neglected by scholars and forgotten by joke tellers. It would thus be of great interest to learn about how

and why these joke cycles appear and to what exactly they in fact react. The aim of the present paper is to evaluate this phenomenon through a sample of Russian political jokes, which showed up as soon as Mayor of Moscow Yury Luzhkov was dismissed.

It is important to mention that the jokes under consideration here can also be regarded as political. Research into political jokes in European and American scholarship is quite abundant, as is reflected both in individual articles and whole monographs, or compilations of articles (many sources are enumerated by Aleksandra Arhipova in *Anekdot v zarubezhnykh issledovaniakh XX veka* [Arkhipova 2001]). In Russian scholarship this type of joke has been largely ignored not because of any scholar's fault, but because during the Soviet period jokes, especially those of political character, were forbidden not only to study, but even to tell. Nevertheless, the beginning of the study seems to be very promising as there are already examples of high-quality works on political jokes (Shmeleva & Shmelev 2001; Arkhipova & Mel'nichenko 2008; Arkhipova 2009; Alekseevskii 2010).

## **JOKES ABOUT YURY LUZHKOVA: BACKGROUND**

Before moving to the jokes, it would be worthwhile to describe the person about whom these jokes were actually made.

Yury Mikhaylovich Luzhkov (born on September 21, 1936) is a Russian politician who served as Mayor of Moscow from 1992 to 2010. He became famous because of the large construction projects in the city (including the building of a new financial district). His second wife, Elena Baturina, is a Russian businesswoman, and Russia's only female billionaire (she became a billionaire during her husband's mayorship, which became the reason why people criticized the mayor).

Luzhkov frequently appeared in public at different festivals and celebrations, and was an enthusiastic promoter of the city. He was critical of homosexuality and issued several bans on the Moscow Pride Parade.

Moscow under Luzhkov kept the Soviet practice of requiring a notice of the permanent living place (*'propiska'*), as the government wanted to limit uncontrolled migration and homelessness, although the process of registration is very bureaucratic.

Other points of criticism concerned with Luzhkov were ecology spoilt by the great number of automobiles, high corruption rate, bad artistic flair of the mayor mentioned by many artists, which obviously influenced new architecture, and preferences for the dubious works of art by sculptor Zurab Tsereteli and

painter Alexander Shilov; finally, the authorship of the programme according to which precipitation had to be redistributed to diminish the expenses of cleaning Moscow streets from snow.

Luzhkov is fond of football, horse-riding, tennis, and bee-keeping. His image is strongly connected with the cap he usually wears.

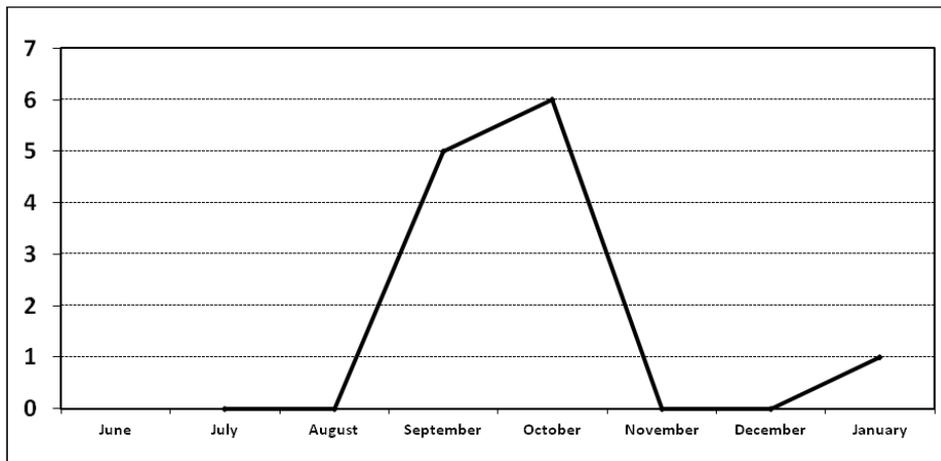
At the end of August 2010, after 18 years of Luzhkov's rule, rumours concerning his dismissal started to spread. None of these rumours were confirmed by the government. Later on, in September, the central governmentally-controlled TV channels showed several documentaries criticizing the politics of Luzhkov, especially the way he handled the 2010 fires around Moscow; also, the mayor and his wife were accused of corruption. He was dismissed by President Dmitry Medvedev at the end of September (after returning from a holiday in Austria) with the official explanation "loss of confidence".

## **REACTION TO THE DISMISSAL**

People reacted to the event immediately. This reaction on the Internet was mainly expressed in the two following forms:

### **1. Jokes.**

It is interesting to follow the jokes about Luzhkov that appeared on the particular website [www.babedra.ru](http://www.babedra.ru), which actually provides about twenty 'fresh political jokes' every month.



*Figure 1. The number of jokes about Luzhkov in 2010 on [www.babedra.ru](http://www.babedra.ru).*

Obviously, Luzhkov became a really popular butt of the jokes in September and October 2010, exactly when he was dismissed. However, it was not only joke websites that enjoyed the outbreak of jokes about Luzhkov at the same time. For example, the thread discussing funny items about Luzhkov (*Rzhaki pro Luzhka*) appeared on the website [www.forum.littleone.ru](http://www.forum.littleone.ru) on September 30, 2010. It included not only jokes, but also demotivators, humorous poems and other genres.

## 2. Forum discussions.

Another form of reaction was reflected in comments on the situation, which could be found in forums, blogs, and social networking services.

Based on the observations about the simultaneous increase of both jokes and internet discussions about Luzhkov, I argue that these two forms of reaction – jokes and discussions – are definitely closely connected and deserve further consideration and comparison.

## METHODS OF RESEARCH AND SOURCES

Since it has been generally admitted that folklore is the reflection of social life, the two sources described – jokes and discussions – provide a valuable opportunity to challenge this axiom by comparing them. For this purpose, two corpora of data had to be compiled: discussions and jokes. It is important to note that the data were collected in February 2011, five months after Luzhkov's dismissal, when the opinions as well as the jokes were very 'fresh'.

### Corpus 1. Discussions

To consider the discussions, I chose the following sources:

1. The thread 'Why all TV channels suddenly started to flay Luzhkov?' on [www.forum.littleone.ru](http://www.forum.littleone.ru) (appeared after the first TV programmes began criticizing Luzhkov, just a few days before the official dismissal; contained 95 messages).

2. 'Is Luzhkov interesting for anybody here?' on [www.forum.littleone.ru](http://www.forum.littleone.ru) (appeared right after Luzhkov's official dismissal; contained 212 messages).

3. [Livejournal.com](http://Livejournal.com)

The first one hundred results in search of 'Luzhkov' on [www.livejournal.com](http://www.livejournal.com).

4. [Twitter.com](http://Twitter.com)

The first one hundred results in search of 'Luzhkov' on [www.twitter.com](http://www.twitter.com).

The choice of the sources is not random. The forum where the first two threads appeared is not specifically political: it was created first as a forum for Saint Petersburg parents to discuss problems connected with pregnancy, upbringing, education, schools, and other questions associated with children, but it has gradually broadened, and now it also contains threads about weddings, shopping, automobiles, jobs, art, cooking and so on, as well as politics. Probably, the composition of the forum users remains mainly female, but as the forum has expanded, many more male users have joined in as well, especially as compared to the beginning of the website.

Even though the forum is meant to be for Saint Petersburg, not Moscow parents, the Moscow mayor was discussed there. This made me think that the users on this forum would touch upon more serious topics, the ones that might also be reflected in the jokes, while Moscow forums probably also have discussions on minor and less important local events.

Concerning Twitter and LiveJournal, these sources are among the most popular social networking services. Thus I managed to get data from both the wide-spread and well-known sources as well as less popular (not political) sources, which have different aims and main themes for discussions.

With the help of the data I tried to follow how the users estimated Luzhkov's activities, and which attributes of his personality as well as which prominent events of his rule were mentioned. Thus I categorized the theme of each message posted on the topic (for example, "Luzhkov is a thief").

Sometimes the posts were repeated, for example, on LiveJournal: in this case both/all items are taken into consideration and included among the data because it means that this particular topic is interesting for the users as it is exploited by more than one user.

On the other hand, sometimes one and the same post indicates several themes. For instance, one and the same message could claim that Luzhkov deserves criminal liability, and that his wife is a rich woman. In this case all the themes are taken into account. Thus, even though only the first 100 results of search for 'Luzhkov' were included in the research, the considered posts sometimes discussed more than one theme each – that is why all in all I got 126 categorisations.

At the same time a lot of messages on the forum contained only emoticons, e.g. smileys (as some discussions were humorous); that is why, for example, from the first thread which contained 95 messages only 66 themes were extracted.

As a whole, I had 429 opinion themes extracted from the messages in the discussions I read: 66 and 117 from the two [www.forum.littleone.ru](http://www.forum.littleone.ru) threads, 120 from LiveJournal and 126 from Twitter.

	'Why did all TV channels suddenly start to flay Luzhkov? Is Luzhkov interesting for anybody here?'	LiveJournal	Twitter	<b>Total</b>	
Refusal to take part in the Day of Anger			8	47	<b>55</b>
L was not favoured by the government any more (there was a conflict)	17	8	6	4	<b>35</b>
L compared with Matvienko	4	22			<b>26</b>
L is a thief who stole a lot		12	10	2	<b>24</b>
Ideas about who will become the new mayor		22			<b>22</b>
Application for the British residence permit			4	17	<b>21</b>
Moscow architecture (spoilt, new, destroyed)		4	7	10	<b>21</b>
Application for the Latvian residence permit			10	10	<b>20</b>
Bee-keeping	7	5	1	5	<b>18</b>
L as a very rich man (L is rich enough to live well in the future)	12	3			<b>15</b>
Sobyanin			9	6	<b>15</b>
Criminal liability of L		2	8	4	<b>14</b>
Elena Baturina	3	5	5		<b>13</b>
Mass media broadcasts were ordered by the government	13				<b>13</b>
Random remarks			11	1	<b>12</b>
Positive opinions about L	5	6			<b>11</b>
Talks about 'otreshenie' (impeachment), loss of confidence		5	3		<b>8</b>
The problem of traffic jams		3	5		<b>8</b>
The dismissal is just a show-off before the upcoming election		7			<b>7</b>
Building of new roads		2	1	3	<b>6</b>
High-tech toilets designed by L and called off by Sobyanin			4	1	<b>5</b>

L's attitude towards homosexuals		3		2	5
New ways of cleaning snow in Moscow by Sobyenin			5		5
Common people will never know the reasons of the conflict	1		3		4
L's old age, time for him to retire	2			2	4
L and Ukraine			3	1	4
L compared to Berezovsky and Hodorkovsky				4	4
Neutral reference	2	2			4
L in search of a new job			3		3
L's inventions				3	3
L's personal webpage			2	1	3
Switzerland, the Alps as his residence		3			3
The problem of 'gastarbeiters' in Moscow		3			3
'Cherkizon'			2		2
Anniversary of Moscow			2		2
Cap			2		2
L's absence when Moscow region was on fire			1	2	3
L's conflict with Dorenko			1	1	2
Moscow ecology			2		2
Terrorism			1		1
Tsereteli			1		1
<b>Total</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>117</b>	<b>120</b>	<b>126</b>	<b>429</b>

**Figure 2.** The themes of discussions (absolute frequency of the themes reflected – not percentage).

As Twitter turned out to be the website that reacted to the news most operatively, the most often posted tweets were about Luzhkov's *refusal to take part in the Day of Anger*, organized by the opposition, and his *application for the Latvian residence permit* (he applied for it, but Latvian government refused) *as well as the British residence permit* – these were the latest topics for the posts about the former mayor on Twitter those days (data collected on February 11, 2011). The other most popular opinions manifest, firstly, that criticizing TV programmes (in case the thread that appeared just before the TV programmes about Luzhkov's dismissal is considered) appeared or (later) dismissal happened

because *Luzhkov was not favoured by the government any more*, or because it was *just a show-off before the upcoming election*. Some messages deal with the wording that accompanies Luzhkov's dismissal, especially with *loss of confidence* and the word '*otreshenie*' ('renunciation'), the archaic official term for impeachment.

It was also said that *common people will never know the reasons of the conflict*. Luzhkov was often *compared to V. Matvienko* – Mayor of Saint Petersburg at that time (since it is the second largest and quite important city of Russia, and also because it was discussed on Saint Petersburg forum). Speculating about *who would become the new mayor* as well as about the character of *Sergei Sobyenin* – who actually became the mayor later – was also quite popular. The five correlating themes considered Luzhkov to be *a thief who stole a lot, a rich man*, accused him of *corruption* and preferential deals with his wife, *Elena Baturina*, or stressed that he deserved *criminal conviction*. Luzhkov was *compared to B. Berezovsky and M. Hodorkovsky*, some other former influential people in Russia, who are not in favour any more (M. Hodorkovsky is in prison, while B. Berezovsky died in British political asylum in the UK in March 2013). *Moscow architecture (spoilt, new, destroyed)*, the fancy celebration of the *850th anniversary of Moscow, the problem of traffic jams and building of new roads* during his rule, *high-tech toilets designed by Luzhkov and called off by Sobyenin* (about 100 high-tech toilets, consisting of a toilet cabin itself and the outdoor advertising, were planned to be constructed and used in Moscow streets by Luzhkov, but this project was rejected by Sobyenin), *new ways of cleaning snow in Moscow by Sobyenin*, and *Luzhkov's inventions* were discussed as well. Among the points for criticism here were also *Luzhkov's attitude towards homosexuals*, Luzhkov's conflict with *Ukraine* and journalist *Sergei Dorenko, the problem of 'gasterbeiters'<sup>1</sup> in Moscow*, the destroyed market '*Cherkizon*' (Cherkizovsky), *Moscow ecology, terrorism*, preferences towards the controversial works of architecture by *Tsereteli*, and Luzhkov's *absence when the Moscow region was on fire. The old age of Luzhkov* (time for him to retire) was mentioned, as well as his *search for a new job* (what he was going to do after dismissal). Among other attributes, *Luzhkov's personal webpage, bee-keeping, cap, and Switzerland (the Alps) where he has a residence* were discussed. Some messages contained *positive opinions about Luzhkov*, while some were *neutral* ('I don't care') or just *random* (concerning some other politician, where Luzhkov was mentioned just occasionally).

Obviously, the results differ from one website to another; that is why afterwards I calculated the percentage of opinions for each discussion (LiveJournal, etc.) and then summed it up to present the whole percentage ratio for all discussions. Thus the results of Twitter, for instance, do not exceed the results of

the post-dismissal data from [www.forum.littleone.ru](http://www.forum.littleone.ru) only because the latter contained fewer opinions than the former. I calculated the percentage in each case separately, not the quantity of opinions summed up together. For example, LiveJournal mainly consists of the posted news, and as far as the search was undertaken on February 11, 2011, these messages mainly contain the news of that day.

## **JOKES**

Jokes were collected on the Internet from special joke websites, social network media and forums, since the compared material (discussions) is also from the Internet. I searched for the first 100 results for “Anekdoty Luzhkov” (Luzhkov jokes): this approach helped me to find the majority of existing jokes. It is interesting to know that quite many of them were found on the same Saint Petersburg forum [www.forum.littleone.ru](http://www.forum.littleone.ru), which is mainly designed for women (while politics is often considered to be a male dominated business).

In all, I managed to find 65 jokes scoffing at Luzhkov’s dismissal (it was usually quite clear which jokes appeared after the dismissal, because they scoffed at the dismissal itself); it means that this event was significant for the inhabitants of Russia; otherwise it would not have been manifested that much in folklore. The overall number of jokes relating to his rule and dismissal was nearly 150, and if we take into account that Luzhkov had been mayor for eighteen years, this fact is of fundamental importance: people created as many jokes within half a year after his dismissal as during the 18 years of his rule. Thus, again, there is no question that this event became significant in society and, consequently, also in folklore.

I have to admit that in some cases the texts collected could hardly be called jokes in the traditional meaning; they were rather humorous poems. As the users or the editors of the website had put them into the category of jokes, this emic perspective made me take them into consideration as well.

All in all, there were 29 categories of jokes I considered: cap, application for the British residence permit, etc.

Finally, I compared the percentage of different themes in the jokes to the same percentage in discussions.

## IS FOLKLORE THE MIRROR OF SOCIETY?

My aim now is to prove or refute the hypothesis declared at the beginning: if folklore reflects what is going on in society, this would indicate that the main themes that are interesting for people in the discussions will be comparable to the main themes of the jokes.

The table below presents the results of comparing the percentage ratio of the main joke themes to the main discussion themes.

	% of opinions	% of jokes after dismissal
The refusal to take part in the Day of Anger	12.8	0.0
L was not favoured by the government any more (there was a conflict)	8.2	10.7
L compared with Matvienko	6.1	0.0
L is a thief who stole a lot	5.6	7.4
Ideas about who will become the new mayor	5.1	0.0
Application for the British residence permit	4.9	2.5
Moscow architecture (spoilt, new, destroyed)	4.9	2.5
Application for the Latvian residence permit	4.7	3.3
Bee-keeping	4.2	7.4
Comparison with Sobyenin	3.5	1.7
L as a very rich man (L is rich enough to live well further on)	3.5	3.3
Criminal liability of L	3.3	9.1
Elena Baturina	3.0	10.7
TV broadcasts were ordered by the government	3.0	4.1
Random remarks	2.8	0.0
Positive opinions about L	2.6	0.0
Talks about 'otreshenie' (impeachment), 'loss of confidence'	1.9	8.3
The problem of traffic jams	1.9	0.8
The dismissal is just a show-off before the upcoming election	1.6	0.0
Building of new roads	1.4	0.8
High-tech toilets designed by L and called off by Sobyenin	1.2	0.0
L's attitude towards homosexuals	1.2	2.5

New ways of cleaning snow in Moscow by Sobyanin	1.2	0.0
Common people will never know the reasons of the conflict	0.9	1.7
L's old age, time for him to retire	0.9	1.7
L and Ukraine	0.9	0.8
L compared to Berezovsky and Hodorkovsky	0.9	2.5
Neutral reference	0.9	0.0
L's absence when Moscow region was on fire	0.7	3.3
L in search of a new job	0.7	1.7
L's inventions	0.7	2.5
L's personal webpage	0.7	0.8
Switzerland, the Alps as his residence	0.7	0.8
The problem of 'gastarbiters' in Moscow (also registration, accommodation)	0.7	1.7
'Cherkizon'	0.5	0.0
Anniversary of Moscow	0.5	0.8
Cap	0.5	5.0
L's conflict with Dorenko	0.5	0.0
Moscow ecology	0.5	0.8
Terrorism	0.2	0.0
Tsereteli	0.2	0.8

**Figure 3.** Comparison of the themes of jokes and discussions (percentage).

Undoubtedly, most of the subjects and facets about Luzhkov's personality and rule listed above (extracted from the internet discussions) are very much reflected in the jokes.

At the same time it is obvious that the reflection should not be taken too literally. For example, the fact that *Luzhkov refused to take part in the Day of Anger* has an incontestable preponderance over the other points, while jokes remain totally unaffected by this fact. But let me remind that this fact was mainly prevalent in LiveJournal and Twitter, where it was repeatedly posted as one of the daily news on February 10–11. Moreover, it is quite difficult to make the news work in the joke: as there are no really bad habits, criminal news, or other humorous potentialities revealed in it. It could also be that perhaps I just failed to find any jokes on this topic, although they actually exist.

The second popular point is among the most widespread ones in both discussions and jokes. People are of the opinion that the mayor's dismissal was caused

by the conflict with Vladimir Putin or Dmitri Medvedev, or even both, and, as a result, Luzhkov was not favoured anymore. Since the concrete reason of the conflict was not announced officially, and there were numerous suppositions in the press, sometimes also unbelievable ones, the extreme manifestations of these suppositions and their absurd nature are revealed in the jokes. The jokes show that Luzhkov might have been accused of any trifle just to make him guilty.

*В доме престарелых трое дедков обсуждают, кто какие анекдоты больше всего любит рассказывать.*

*Один:*

*– Я люблю анекдоты про Штирлица!*

*Второй:*

*– А я люблю анекдоты про Ржевского!*

*Третий:*

*– А я больше всего люблю рассказывать анекдоты про Вовочку и Винни-Пуха.*

*Первые двое хором:*

*– Вот вы, Юрий Михайлович, и допизделись в итоге!*

(<http://inq-brc.ru/index.php/mesto-na-saite/1595-anekdote-20120504>, last accessed on October 2, 2012)

Three old men in the home for aged people discuss who enjoys telling which jokes.

The first: “I like to tell jokes about Stirlitz!”

The second: “I like to tell jokes about Rzhevsky!”

The third: “I like to tell jokes about Vovochka and Winnie the Pooh most of all.”

The first two with one voice: “That’s how you, Yury Mikhailovich, ended up here!”

(Comments: Yury Mikhailovich – the name and patronymic of Luzhkov. Max Otto von Stirlitz is the leading character in a popular Russian book series by novelist Julian Semyonov and its television adaptation *Seventeen Moments of Spring*. Stirlitz has become a stereotypical spy in Soviet and post-Soviet culture, similar to James Bond in western culture, as well as the hero of numerous anecdotes. *Poruchik* (lieutenant) Rzhevsky is a cavalry (hussar) officer, another hero in jokes. Vovochka is also a character in jokes, the Russian equivalent of Little Johnny. Winnie the Pooh here is the allusion to Dmitry Medvedev, the president of Russia: his surname derives from the word ‘medved’, meaning ‘bear’.)

The third most popular theme of discussions is the *comparison of Luzhkov and Mayor of Saint Petersburg Valentina Matvienko*, which is not reflected in the jokes at all. Generally, Matvienko rarely became the butt of humour: there were only few jokes about her, mainly scoffing at her failure to struggle with the consequences of snowfalls and numerous icicles, which caused plenty of injuries and property damage in 2010 and 2011. Additionally, if we consider the themes related to Luzhkov, they can hardly be associated with the image of Valentina Matvienko<sup>2</sup>.

On the contrary, the idea that *Luzhkov is a thief who stole a lot* is revealed more or less equally both in the jokes and in the opinions, as well as the topic of *his recommendable criminal conviction*, which refers to his supposed bribes and thefts.

*Заключённые в новой камере знакомятся.*

– Ты за что сидишь?

– В 1990-е мешал Лужкову воровать. А ты?

– В 2000-е помогал Лужкову воровать. А ты?

– А я и есть Лужков.

(<http://www.anekdot.ru/id/471278/>, last accessed on 2 October 2012)

The prisoners in the cell get acquainted:

– Why do you do time?

– In 1990 I prevented Luzhkov from stealing. And you?

– In 2000 I helped Luzhkov to steal. And you?

– I am Luzhkov.

Another closely related although less popular topic is the *comparison of Luzhkov with Berezovsky or Hodorkovsky*. In these jokes Hodorkovsky's character is mainly reproduced as both Luzhkov and Hodorkovsky used to be persons of consequence, very rich and successful, but later they lost their status after a conflict with Putin or Medvedev. Logically, the next stage of Luzhkov's case must be criminal conviction, in the same way as it happened to Hodorkovsky.

*Самый короткий анекдот про Лужкова: Лужков – Ходорковскому:  
“Миш, подвинься!”*

(<http://www.anekdot.ru/id/471507/>, last accessed on October 2, 2012)

The shortest joke about Luzhkov:

Luzhkov to Hodorkovsky: “Misha, move aside, please!”

Ideas about *who will become the new mayor* were not reflected in folklore.

Still another interesting topic is *Moscow architecture spoilt, destroyed or rebuilt*. It is important to mention that it used to be the most wide-ranging topic in the jokes about Luzhkov before his dismissal, although this is not the subject of this research. But the topic survived even in post-dismissal jokes, although these examples are not so numerous and it is not of paramount importance, as it does not create the punch line really but just serves as one of the minor attributes.

*После ударно-доходных годков  
Что с собой должен захватить Лужков?  
Лену Батурину – женицину в теле,  
Кепку, Портфель и всего Церетели.*  
(<http://www.bibo.kz/stishki/376369-posle-udarno-dokhodnykh-godkovch-to-s-sobojj.html>, last accessed on October 2, 2012)

After highly profitable years  
What should Luzhkov grab when he leaves?  
Lena Baturina – a plump woman,  
The cap, the briefcase and the whole of Tsereteli.  
(This text originally rhymes in Russian.)

The rumour that Luzhkov applied for the *Latvian residence permit* (which was rejected) and the *British residence permit* soon after his dismissal can be found in the jokes as well.

*Не пустили Лужкова в Ригу,  
показали Лужкову фигу,  
на него посмотрели косо,  
и не стал наш Лужков Лужковсом.*  
(<http://www.anekdot.ru/an/z/c330119;1.html>, last accessed on October 2, 2012)

Luzhkov wasn't let to Riga,  
They gave him the finger,  
They looked at him askew,  
And Luzhkov didn't become Luzhkovs.  
(This text originally rhymes in Russian.)

The jokes also consider his *immigration to Great Britain*.

– *Лужкову наконец-то дали вид на жительство в Англии.*  
– *Значит, пора объявлять всесоюзный розыск.*  
(<http://www.anekdot.ru/id/492697/>, last accessed on October 2, 2012)

- Luzhkov was finally issued the English residence permit.
- So, it's high time to declare that he is wanted by the state.

The theme of Luzhkov's relationship to *Switzerland and Austria* is very rare both in jokes and discussions.

Sometimes several of Luzhkov's supposed drawbacks or character traits are revealed in one and the same joke. *Bee-keeping* as the mayor's hobby is one of the examples illustrating such a situation: the point itself is not the main topic of the joke, but it complements the punch line. The mention of the cap has a similar function. This case may be compared to the ones where the narrator tells a joke, using the speech peculiarities of the hero of the joke (like the ones about Georgians or about Boris Yeltsin); for instance, their accent, or expressions characteristic of them (Shmeleva & Shmelev 2002). The cap as an attribute characteristic of Luzhkov serves the same purpose. The cap is peculiar for him, thus, he may be easily recognized in the joke even in case his name is not mentioned.

*В тридевятом царстве – тридесятом царстве жил-был мэр Лужков. И любил он что-нибудь разгонять – то облака разгонит, то гей-парад. А однажды разогнал машину до запрещенной скорости, а его работники ГИБДД остановили и права отобрали. И как он с ними не заискивал, как ни уговаривал решить вопрос на месте – они протокол составили и штраф неслабый ему выписали. А потом тихонько на ушко ему и говорят: "А нехрен было, гомофоб ты в кепке, наш парад разгонять."*

(<http://sadalskij.livejournal.com/246753.html>, last accessed on October 2, 2012)

Once upon a time, in the kingdom of Far Far Away, there lived Mayor Luzhkov. He liked to disperse things: sometimes clouds and sometimes a gay pride parade. But once he exceeded the speed limit and the police officers stopped him and revoked his driving license. No matter how hard he tried to fawn upon them, no matter how hard he tried to persuade them to solve this problem on the spot, they drew up a report, imposed a fine and then whispered gently into his ear: "You shouldn't have dispersed our pride parade, you, homophobe in a cap."

Since before Luzhkov's dismissal numerous *TV programmes appeared accusing* him of bribes, theft, enormous wealth, and corruption, these were also reflected in discussions and jokes.

*В Москве идут похороны Лужкова. Несут цветы, венки и т. д. Рядом идет небольшая колонна и несёт плакат - © ПО ЗАКАЗУ ОРТ.* (<http://www.anecdots.su/anecdot/25759/>, last accessed on October 2, 2012)

Luzhkov's funeral is conducted in Moscow. People come, carrying wreaths and flowers. A small procession goes by, carrying a poster: "Commissioned by OTR".

(ONT (ORT) is a governmentally controlled TV channel in Russia.)

The theme relating to *Elena Baturina* is very popular in discussions as well as in the pre-dismissal jokes, while post-dismissal jokes do not often reflect it.

– *А кто сейчас Лужкова заменил?*

– *Ресин!*

– *А у него жена чем занимается?*

(<http://www.anekdot.ru/id/471288/>, last accessed on October 2, 2012)

– Who took the place of Luzhkov?

– Resin.

– And what does his wife do?

Obviously, *positive opinions* are hardly reflected in the jokes.

Some other extremely important subjects are *traffic jams* and *immigrants* ('gasterbeiter') in Moscow, which Luzhkov was always largely blamed for.

*Лето. Москва. Пробка. Машины еле ползут. Вдруг к одной из машин подбегает молодой человек в дорогом костюме и стучит в окно. Мужик опускает стекло и спрашивает: чего, мол?!*

*Молодой человек захлеб начинает рассказывать:*

– *Юрия Михайловича захватили террористы, требуют огромный выкуп! Немедленно! Времени вообще нет, иначе обещают облить мэра бензином и сжечь! Вот, решили пройтись по машинам – кто сколько даст?*

*Мужик (задумавшись):*

– *Ну, я литров пять могу дать!*

(<http://www.tnu.in.ua/forum/archive/index.php/t-410-p-2.html>, last accessed on October 2, 2012)

Summer, Moscow, a traffic jam. The cars hardly crawl along. Suddenly a young guy wearing an expensive suit runs up to one of the cars and knocks at the window. The man in the car opens the window and asks what the guy needs. The latter starts telling effusively that Yury Mikhailovich was captured by terrorists, who hold him for ransom. No time at all,

otherwise they promised to pour gasoline over him and burn him down. That's why the mayor's friends decided to ask people in the nearest cars if they could give something.

After thinking for a while, the man says: "Well, I could give five litres."

Nevertheless, the topics relating to traffic jams and immigrants become practically the least important jokes relating to Luzhkov's dismissal, although previously they used to be the most significant in the joke cycle about Luzhkov.

One of the migration-related problems was the institution of '*propiska*', which Luzhkov was often vituperated for. This is reflected in the following joke, where the boot turns out to be on the other foot: Luzhkov himself takes the place of those who suffered from this practice.

*Сразу после отставки Лужкова планируется отселить его с Батуриной за 101-й километр, потому как вряд ли они пройдут московскую регистрацию. Понаехали тут, понимаешь, лимита хренова!*  
(<http://www.anekdot.ru/id/470360/>, last accessed on October 2, 2012)

After Luzhkov's dismissal it is planned to lodge him together with Baturina behind the 101st kilometre of Moscow, as they will hardly get Moscow registration. Come back where you belong, lousy limita!

(*Limita* – people within the *propiska* quota, also known as *limitchiks* (limitchiki), from the Russian word '*limit*' for 'quota'. *Propiska* quota was the system of residential permits and registration in major cities of the Soviet Union. Later the word '*limita*' lost its initial meaning and is now used for those who come to the biggest cities of Russia from other cities or countries to work and live.)

A similar thing happens in the '*homophobia*' topic: in the joke Yury Luzhkov turns out to be in the opposite position if compared to the previous one: here he divorces Baturina (who used to be one of the main characters in Luzhkov cycle) and becomes a homosexual although he used to be a homophobe.

*Как стало известно Юрий Лужков развелся с Батуриной и переехал жить к Дмитрию Харатьяну. Юрий Михайлович признался что в свое время женился на Батуриной из-за внешнего сходства с его возлюбленным. Прежний статус не давал возможности открыто быть с любимым. Теперь же когда ничто больше его не удерживает он рад что может открыто заявить миру о своих чувствах. И впервые извинился за гей-парад: "Я думаю дорогие вы меня поймете и простите. Теперь если разрешат я выйду с вами, пацанчики!"*  
(<http://www.anekdot.ru/id/474761/>, last accessed on October 2, 2012)

As reported, Yury Luzhkov divorced Baturina and moved to Dmitry Haratyan's place. Yury Mikhailovich confessed the fact that he had married Elena Baturina because she had resembled his lover. The previous position of mayor did not let him hook up with his sweetheart. Now nothing keeps him from his love and he is happy that he can declare his intimate feelings to the world. For the first time he asked to excuse him for the pride parade: "I think, my dear, you understand and forgive me. If they allow the next pride parade I will go out with you, you naughty boys!"

Two other closely related themes are the formulations for the mayor's *dismissal* ('otreshenie') and *loss of confidence* ('utrata doveriia') and the opinion that the dismissal per se was just a *show-off before the upcoming election*, to pretend that the government dismisses those who deceive people or do not keep their promises. The former theme became very popular in folklore, probably because the formulation itself was not quite usual for the recent history of the country and at the same time it did not really reveal the reason behind it. Meanwhile, the topic is closely connected with the idea that an unknown *conflict happened between the government and the mayor*, which was also mentioned above.

*Разговаривают два гаишника.*

– Слышал новость? Президент Лужкова в отставку отправил из-за какой-то ерунды!

– А в чем он провинился?

– Да доверенность какую-то потерял.

(<http://anekdotov.net/anekdot/all/akojtoerundyavchemonprovinilsjadadoverennostkakujutopoterjal.htm>, last accessed on October 2, 2012)

Two GAI (State Automobile Inspectorate) officers talk:

– Have you heard the news? The president dismissed Luzhkov because of a trifle!

– What is his fault?

– He lost some kind of warrant...

(In Russian the words 'doverennost' ('warrant') and 'doverie' ('confidence') are paronymous, and the pun is used in the joke.)

It is also quite natural that the new mayor *Sobyanin* is now compared to the previous one, although he does not appear in the jokes so often.

Among the latest (as of February 2011) news in discussions was, firstly, that Sobyanin rejected the project of *high-tech street toilets* once provided by Luzhkov, and secondly, that the new mayor changed the methods of cleaning the streets in Moscow during winter. As a result, many people reported that they

fell and hurt themselves in icy streets. I failed to find jokes connected with this particular news. The popularity of the latter on the web may be explained by the specific sources – Twitter and LiveJournal, which tend to post mainly news, and this popularity is temporary, greatly restricted in terms of time. The same applies for *Luzhkov's personal webpage*: he said that he was ready to develop his personal webpage although his life was transparent for everybody even without *the webpage*. The news circulated on the internet for several days only and probably it was not important enough to become the basis for new jokes.

*Homophobia* is another issue Luzhkov was always blamed for not only in the media, but in folklore as well.

The topics of *Cherkizon* (the well-known Moscow market that was closed down when Luzhkov was in power) and *terrorism* are rarely mentioned on the chosen websites and were not found in the jokes either.

Furthermore, there are a few jokes about *Luzhkov trying to find a new job* – another attempt to show that now he is an ordinary person with no privileges.

*Ознакомившись с формулировкой последнего приказа в трудовой книжке Лужкова, Елена Батурина отказала ему в приеме на работу.*

(<http://www.bibo.kz/anekdoti/375665-oznakomivshis-s-formulirovkojj-poslednego-prikaza.html>, last accessed on October 2, 2012)

After looking through the formulation of the last entry in Luzhkov's service record, Elena Baturina refused to employ him.

Finally I should mention the problem that Luzhkov was often blamed for: when *Moscow region was on fire in August 2010*, he was having a holiday in Austria. Only one joke was found about it, and the main topic is tangibly transformed.

*Сенсация! Разгадана причина смога над центральной Россией. Это во время "отпуска" мэра его команда, почувствовав недоброе, жгла компромат за 18 лет.*

(<http://www.bibo.kz/anekdoti/80769-pro-kompromat.html>, last accessed on October 2, 2012)

Sensation! The reason for the smog over central Russia has been found! It is that during Luzhkov's holiday, the mayor's team, for fear of trouble, set on fire the discrediting evidence found about him from the past eighteen years.

## CONCLUSIONS

The widespread opinion that folklore is the reflection of society was tested here through the comparison of the opinions expressed by people and their quantitative representativeness in the jokes about the same event. It is clear that the jokes sometimes possessed several themes, in which case I tried to take all of them into account without underlying the only one which was the most important for the punch line, since all of them contributed to it to a smaller or greater extent. In the same way, none of the opinions found on the web may be considered as the most or the least important, since they create the image as a whole.

My initial expectation was to achieve more straightforward results which could confirm the declared theory. Even though there is much correspondence between the opinions and the jokes, the results showed that folklore is quite selective, and often reveals the issues that are in some way sympathetic to the genre. In addition, some facts are not easy to be ridiculed, for example, it is hardly possible to make jokes about the positive characteristics of a hero.

Luzhkov has always been an important figure in the jokes, since he was the mayor of the Russian capital. But most of the topics before and after his dismissal are quite different. As a whole, the jokes switch from being the bearers of separated ideas (here I mean the jokes told about Luzhkov before the dismissal) to being the units containing several themes within them (after the dismissal). They tend to summarize the opinions about Luzhkov's activities. That is why we have numerous examples where Luzhkov is not just depicted as the 'builder' as he used to be, but where his more or less complex image is provided, including several themes. Thus the character becomes more complicated. The jokes now tend to draw a kind of conclusion about most of Luzhkov's features as well as his rule.

Jokes about Luzhkov still appear, even though he is not that important political figure any more. People hold him in remembrance because the result of his rule, namely, the appearance of modern Moscow, still exist. There is no doubt that it changed considerably within these eighteen years and since people are greatly afraid of changes in general, it is only natural that they are reflected in jokes. Jokes are often used to accumulate and then voice the indignation concerning novelties. That is why all troubles that Luzhkov went through lately are savoured in the jokes; this is the form of revenge and consolidation as well. People are happy to know that the boot is on the other foot now; he who used to be rich, respectable and lucky is in an unenviable position today: the jokes even usher him to move away from Moscow since he does not have his registration,

or depict him as a homosexual. The image of the former mayor now occupies an oppositional place if compared to his principles or decrees he issued in the past.

Often the jokes are told in the form of news as far as it is the main form of the media that talked about him in the first place, and thus the jokes acquire a formal similarity of appearance with the news, possessing the parenthetical words and clauses like “it has been reported”. Researchers have claimed that the purpose of these jokes is to aim at the aggression in the mass media and the power it has (Simons 1986; Smyth 1986).

Finally, the jokes researched are told not only about Luzhkov. For instance, the joke about three people in a prison cell discussing what they were punished for is also widely told about the Belarusian president Alexander Lukashenko, and this is not the only example.

Obviously, this topic deserves further research of different material as far as reactional humour turns out to be something more complicated than just a mere reflection of life.

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## **NOTES**

<sup>1</sup> A guest worker. The word was loaned from German and is widely used in Russian to define the immigrants (especially from the former Soviet part of Asia) coming to work in the big Russian cities.

<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, the jokes mentioning both figures started to appear later, when Matvienko became the hero of news: she left the position in Saint Petersburg and became the Chairman of the Federation Council of the Russian Federation: *After reading about Luzhkov's fortune of 10 milliards and Matvienko's fortune of 3 milliards in press, the university entrants of Moscow State University demanded from the governing body of the university to open new faculties: of bee-keeping and laser icicle-cutting.*

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# FUNNY OR AGGRESSIVE? FAILED HUMOUR IN INTERNET COMMENTS

*Liisi Laineste*

**Abstract:** Jokes, ethnic slurs and parodies often occur in Internet comments, as the general feeling of anonymity allows for and even favours balancing on the verge of the acceptable and the unacceptable. Thus, a humorously intended comment can be perceived as aggressive by other Internet users. This possibility is further enhanced by the fact that the electronic media in general and computer mediated communication (CMC) in particular lacks non-verbal conversational cues that would signal the intentions of the communicator with greater, though not absolute, accuracy. The interrelations between online humour and aggression have so far escaped the attention of researchers, although scholarly discussions concerning these two phenomena in face-to-face interaction have been frequent.

This paper analyses comment sequences in the Delfi news portal ([www.delfi.ee](http://www.delfi.ee)) from 2000 to 2007. Delfi is an Estonian online news website known for its liberal attitude towards commenting. The aim of the article is to describe the boundaries between humour and verbal aggressiveness and address the notion of failed humour through its occurrence in online communication. In addition to presenting the patterns of humorous and aggressive modalities in comment sequences, some cases in which humour changes into aggressiveness are analysed.

**Keywords:** Internet, computer mediated communication, humour, verbal aggression, failed humour

## INTRODUCTION

Folkloristic account of humour has in recent decades become rather interdisciplinary as different aspects of humour are tied to such notions as xenophobia, group identity, creativity, subculturalisation, globalisation, etc. In order to embrace these phenomena, folklorists must include insights from other academic fields like sociology, ethnography, and psychology, to name just a few. As a considerable proportion of everyday interaction is moving to the Internet, all of the above-mentioned fields of study have made attempts to define the scope and methodologies of research on the Internet.

A reliable analysis of contemporary humour should also include the Internet (both as a source and as a specific environment that shapes interaction), because it has become a primary present-day channel for humour. It is only logical that researchers should thus pay attention to humour as one of its main constituents. The entertaining function of the Internet is surpassing the practical, educational and other possible uses that the medium was initially designed to carry (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1996: 22; Blank 2009: 2). As a matter of fact, researchers of the Internet have stressed that more than simply being a medium, the Internet presents a specific cultural context. This means that internet culture should be studied in its own right (e.g. Hine 2005).

Particularly typical of computer mediated communication (CMC) is the enhanced ambiguity of statements. The social cues that would normally inform the recipient(s) about the intentions of the sender are missing and thus the meanings of a statement multiply, escaping the control of the author, and the message is received depending on the interpretation of the (global) audience. For this reason, a statement originally intended as humorous may be misinterpreted as an aggressive one, which is an example of failed humour (for two recent studies on failed humour in face-to-face communication, see Priego-Valverde 2009 and Bell 2009). In the following sections, an overview on aggression, humour and the interrelations of these two phenomena are given.

### **CMC and aggression**

Aggression is an ever-present part of human society, although its expression differs across societies and cultures. In face-to-face interaction, its appearance is socially inhibited, and means of mass communication are censored for their aggressive content, but communication that occurs within the Internet is not often regulated for its aggressive content. Whereas the prominent features of Internet communication, namely that it allows for more interactivity and provides more detailed information compared to print media, radio and TV (Tsfati & Weimann 2002), are positive in essence, the information the medium provides may at the same time be more shallow, dispersed and biased. Furthermore, what is most important in the context of this article: while earlier communication technologies may have contributed to shaping the message, they did not offer the same capacity for invoking as many fundamental social psychological processes that can be related to aggressiveness as the Internet does (Malamuth et al. 2009: 166). Research has shown that aggression is not dominant, but still an ever-present part of the Internet and CMC (Terezskiewicz 2012: 195–196;

Laineste 2012: 180), ranging between 3 and 20 percent of its content (based on their analysis of internet comments and online social networks).

Online verbal aggression is generally known as flaming. Flaming initially referred to incessant talking or pointless chatter (for the history of the term, see Joinson 2007: 79). Since then, its scope has grown to include everything from impoliteness and swearing to excessive use of exclamations and superlatives (Kiesler et al. 1985); it can take the form of online communication in chat rooms and forums, but it can also be expressed through racist websites, stealing virtual identities, stalking, creating and spreading computer viruses, and much more. It has become a common term to designate any negative and antisocial verbal behaviour on computer networks – e.g. as a “form of personal verbal violence arising largely from the peculiar conditions of online writing” (Millard 1997: 145). Points that most researchers agree upon are that flaming is uninhibited, heated and emotional venting that occurs in computer networks. Anonymity and volatile identities are factors that contribute to engaging in online flaming.

In real life, people have an almost limitless array of behaviours besides words – they can use verbal or physical assault, or just give an angry look so that their body language supports their message. The online environment offers a much more limited set of options for expressing oneself. This has been described by a number of studies about computer-mediated communication (e.g. Hine 2005: 7) where the Internet has been referred to as an impoverished medium. A growing body of researches in the field of Internet studies assess the factors that enable the growing presence of aggressive statements online. So far, the main factor blamed for causing online aggression is the anonymity of the medium, but this is far from being the only one, as more recent studies show. Malamuth et al. (2009: 168) gives an overview of the reasons for online aggression, showing that there are a number of interactive factors that influence it. Instead of approaching the material from a single theory, the authors break the existing evidence down to three separate categories, and list the following three main incentives for flaming: (1) those creating the motivation to commit aggression, (2) those reducing internal and external inhibitions that might prevent acting out the desire to aggress, and (3) those providing the opportunity for the act to occur (ibid.). Thus, there is a plethora of mutually supportive reasons for online aggression.

Joinson (1998: 89–90) stresses that it is essential not to reduce the reasons for heightened aggression only to a single factor, i.e., the anonymity of the medium. The degree of personal engagement on different websites varies, as does the level of disinhibition that triggers flaming. In the present study, the website under examination is an anonymous discussion board where a clash

of opinions is more inherent than, for example, in more personal online social networks, e.g. Facebook.

### **CMC and humour**

Studies of Internet humour have until now disregarded the effect of the medium on the expression of humour; instead, the Internet is used as merely a convenient source of research material. At times, authors refer to particular characteristics of Internet humour as compared to face-to-face humorous communication (e.g. its rich context, cf. Oring 2003: 130, or faster dissemination, cf. Ellis 2001). As an exception to this rule, in one of the first articles on the subject, Nancy Baym (1995) described online humour in discussion groups, stressing its positive effect on group solidarity and its important role in identity formation.

Humour that occurs in comment sequences presents a different side of the phenomenon, as this kind of communication is more likely to create misunderstanding and failed humour than the more immediate and personalised interaction on discussion groups described by Baym. Humour in the Internet comment sequences rarely takes the form of a traditional punch-lined joke. A typical feature of CMC is citing previous texts, including other users' comments, both in ironic or factual manner. Intertextuality is thus continuously present in this medium: people use citations of known humorous texts (also parts / punch-lines of jokes, see also Shmelev & Shmeleva 2009: 225) and winged words (Brzozowska 2009: 163). Full texts of jokes are left out because even though their form has considerably shortened (when compared to old folk jokes), they are still too long for the purposes of online communication. In addition to a variety of different forms of humour present in the online environment, the content may also vary from mild and playful jokes to teasing, satire or verbal attacks. In the latter, humour is often used as a disclaimer to hide the aggressive intentions of the joke-teller (for a thorough overview, see Oring 2003: 55–57). Although it has been hypothesised that due to reduced cues and subsequently more risks of misunderstanding, Internet users would be careful with using either humour or irony, research shows the opposite (e.g. Hancock 2004).

### **Interrelations of humour and aggression**

In several studies, humour and aggression are often mentioned together or even defined through one another (Gruner 1997). Seemingly aggressive acts can appear as funny (for example, slapstick comedy is built on this implication),

and, without context, much of what can be called humour may, under some circumstances, offend people.

Public discussions about the limits of humour and insults have often resulted in relatively incompatible points of view. What is an act of aggression to one party may be mere mirth for another, and tastes in humour can easily become a subject that one does not argue about. The reactions to a statement that was intended humorously or was expressed through humorous means may be unexpected to the initiator and can even result in actual physical violence (e.g. the Danish cartoon controversy in 2006, which exploded after a set of editorial cartoons about Muslims were published in the Danish newspaper *Jyllands-Posten*; in subsequent reactions, protestors burned flags, organised consumer boycotts, attacked Danish embassies, etc). In this way, an argument of tastes can turn into a physical battle of defending one's right and ability to laugh (for discussion, see, e.g., Lewis 2008).

### **Failed humour in CMC**

The notion of failed humour has entered the discipline of humour research only recently, and this is partly vested in the previously dominant assumption that by definition, humour should bring about a positive reaction (i.e., laughter). The numerous examples where a failed joke goes unnoticed, makes one shrug, become angry or insulted, were disregarded in the name of coherent analysis (for an overview, see also Hay 2001; Norrick 1993). By now it is evident that humour theory should also encompass failed humour in order to be able to define its object in the first place (Norrick & Chiaro 2009: xiv).

Failed humour is very often met with anger or a biting remark. The alternating of humour and aggression is addressed in the analysis section of this article, because this can give insights into the ways how these two concepts are interrelated, answering the following research questions: (1) How do humorous and aggressive statements alternate? (2) Is failed humour in Internet comment sequences more likely to bring about aggressive and insulting statements?

Humour is essentially a non-bona-fide mode of communication (Raskin 1985), or in different terms, a communication characterised as paratelic activity (Apter 1982; Martin 2010). This means that in order for a joke to become potentially funny for the audience, they have to play along and accept the situation both on the level of the specific joke and on the level of its social context. In the case of some jokes, the audience must suspend the aversion towards its violent content (e.g. in the joke about brake marks in front of an animal who has been hit by a car, but no marks where an ethnic character has met a similar fate). The listen-

ers have to accept that this is make-believe, a game that entails no real danger (in this example, damage neither to the animal nor to the ethnic character). If this condition is not fulfilled and a joke puzzles, irritates, is repulsive or evokes aggression, humour has failed. In face-to-face communication, audience expectations about humour (it should make one laugh, be entertaining) may have an effect on responses to failed humour (Bell 2009: 158). The initiator of humour has failed twice: has disrupted the conversation by telling a joke, and also has failed to entertain. Jennifer Hay's (2001: 67) model of humour apprehension points out that recognition, understanding and appreciation of humour must all be present in order for a joke to be successful. Each stage is a prerequisite for the next one. On the last level – that of humour appreciation – the existence of a shared cultural background and values becomes important, but a misunderstanding of the textual and contextual levels also leads to failure in humour appreciation. Trying to be humorous in CMC has different, yet quite understudied effects on conversation than attempted humour in face-to-face interaction and probably also follows different mechanisms for both initiating and reacting to humour. The expanding Internet environment draws together different people, whose reaction is affected by their group identity and aspects thereof (the existence and status of group leaders, identity construction and its stability; for a discussion about the same factors in face-to-face interaction, see Zillmann & Cantor 1976: 100–101) as well as ethical convictions. We can propose that the appreciation of humour found on the Internet is simultaneously more and less probable, or, to put it differently, the diapason of possible reactions is wider. Positive humour appreciation is supported by the globalisation tendencies of the web, better knowledge of different cultures, and multiplicity of identities, whereas negative reactions to humour stem from the fragmentation of the media and its provocative quality backed up by anonymity and disinhibition.

## **MATERIAL**

In order to answer the questions concerning the interaction of humour and aggression and the alternation of these two phenomena in anonymous comments, comment sequences on the least censored Estonian news website, Delfi ([www.delfi.ee](http://www.delfi.ee)), were analysed. There are several reasons behind this choice: first of all, it attracts the widest variety of people (unlike, for example, a forum dedicated to one subject only); secondly, it allows for different opinions as well as their clash; and thirdly, it is one of the remaining safe havens of anonymity in the increasingly controlled medium.

To characterise the targeted environment in a few words, Delfi is an ever-popular news portal, designed to attract the highest number of readers, and the commentators are aware of the permissiveness this implies. It is characteristic that Delfi has been dubbed “the toilet wall” of Estonian Internet. After some polemics (and one person convicted for hate speech in 2005) there have been rearrangements in terms of reporting abuse – the editor can remove a comment if it is reported as abusive – but none of the comment threads in our dataset bore signs of this procedure. There were no ‘white spots’ that usually mark the place of a removed comment (today, comment editors do it more frequently). This permissiveness even extends to the journalists working for the portal. In an analysis of various online news portals in Estonia (Justiitsministeerium 2007), Delfi was reportedly the most provocative in wording news headlines. They are often formulated in a way that provokes aggressive reactions, or even better, a clash of opinions (Laineste 2012).

Based on the material of a previous study (see Justiitsministeerium 2007) that compared only aggressive statements in online comments, forums, blogs and social networking sites, the dataset compiled for this analysis consisted of 91 comment threads (from the section of domestic news) from the years 2000–2007, altogether 18,382 single comments. The particular time span was of interest because it included the year 2005 when discussion about free speech on the Internet was launched, as well as the politically quite controversial year 2007 (with regard to ethnic issues in Estonia), and also touched upon the years prior to this. To remove seasonal biases, we chose one week from each year: week 47 from 2000, week 5 from 2001, week 12 from 2002, week 19 from 2003, week 27 from 2004, week 33 from 2005, week 40 from 2006, and weeks 2 and 17 from 2007. Two threads from each day with the highest number of comments were included in the material.

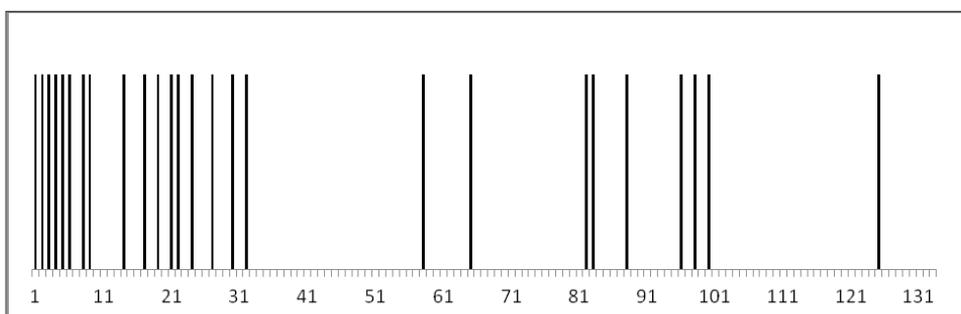
The presence of humour was marked by explicit responses recognising funny performances, use of cues associated with humour, and the coder’s assumptions of humour use. The presence of aggression was categorised (see also Tereszkievic 2012: 187, using the model presented by Kayany 1998) through its verbal (personal attacks, venting, etc.) and non-verbal (capitalisation, emoticons, punctuation, etc.) expression. The categories of neither humour nor aggression were specified in more detail, although future research into the topic could benefit from differentiating, for example, between verbal and non-verbal aggressiveness. The category of aggressive statements was divided between general and targeted aggression, a decision which was further justified by the results. An additional category of neutral comments was used to cover the material as widely as possible.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Alteration of humour and aggression in comment sequences on the Delfi news website

Firstly, we will discuss the results concerning patterns of humour and aggression in comment sequences. The results of the analysis in the four identified categories (humour, general aggression, targeted aggression, and neutral) are presented on the graphs below. To visualise the alteration of these four different modes of comments, two threads – *Reps: Külalistele vaeseid ei näidata* (Reps: They don't show the poor to the visitors; Delfi, August 17, 2005) and *Homoühendused taunivad Angeli kampaaniat* (Gay societies are against the Angel campaign; Delfi, October 4, 2006) – were chosen, because they exemplify the overall trends in the material well. The graphs attempt to show the patterns – the density, coincidence, and alternation – of the four categories, which, in turn, give an insight into our first question, i.e., how humorous and aggressive statements alternate.

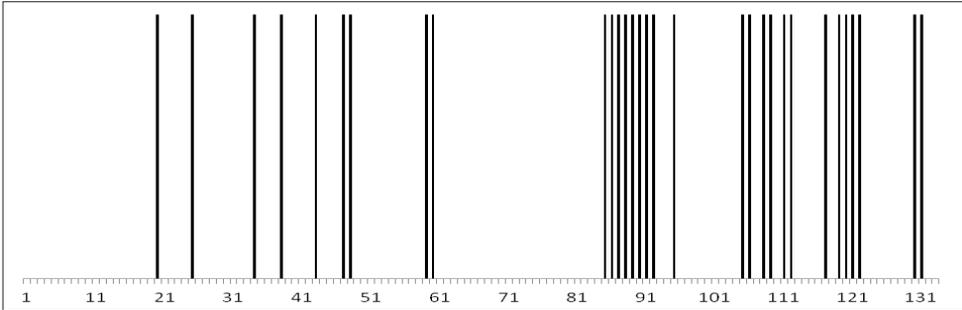
Figure 1 shows the incidence of humorous statements in a comment thread. Humour seems to present an 'opening act' for tackling the issue in the news text. Commentators try to reformulate the news from an unfamiliar angle, and find amusing elements or incongruence on the textual as well as semantic level. For example, one of them states: "She [Mailis Reps, the former Minister of Education] fell down from a tree and became minister straight away."



**Figure 1.** Humour in the news text "Reps: They don't show the poor to the visitors" (Delfi, August 17, 2005).

Aggression targeted at fellow commentators is more frequent towards the end of the thread (see Figure 2). People involved in the discussion, having used up

all humorous as well as neutral statements, resort to insulting others whose comments annoy them, writing, for example: “to eip: I feel sorry for you, you victim of an abortion”, or “to Keeleemees: you were probably the brightest student of a special education facility[...]”.



**Figure 2.** Targeted aggression in the news text “Reps: They don’t show the poor to the visitors” (Delfi, August 17, 2005).

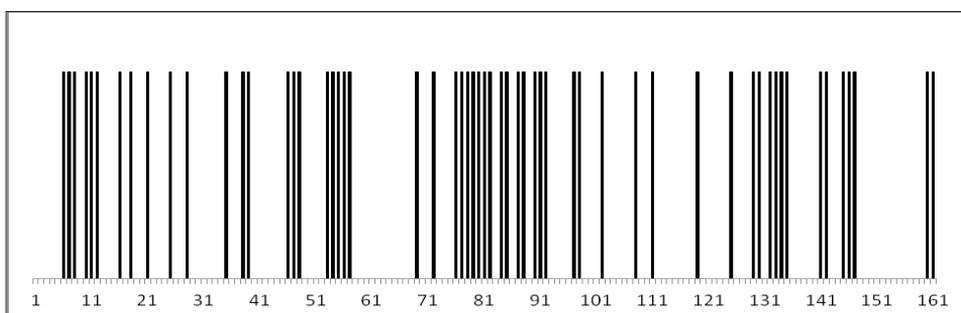
General aggression, on the other hand, is quite evenly present throughout the thread, with no particular high or low frequency segments (Figure 3). It is, as already mentioned, an ever-present background of online interaction; not dominant, but still visible. Statements that exemplify the graph are taken from the thread that deals with a campaign that the infamous gay nightclub Angel organised, giving out glow in the dark reflectors to raise awareness of homosexuality. As can be expected, the generally aggressive comments condemn the subculture of gays (e.g. “Fags should be put back in the closet. And force the door shut”).



**Figure 3.** General aggression in “Gay societies are against the Angel campaign” (Delfi, October 4, 2006).

Neutral comments follow largely the same patterns as the previous category of general aggressiveness (Figure 4). Although a motivation to develop a coherent discussion is not prevailing, people keep coming back to the point they would like to make concerning the topic under discussion, with statements like the following:

I cannot see anything deplorable in Angel's campaign. The criticism of gay societies aims to disguise the critics' dogmas as absolute truth. The right to have an opinion does not mean that everyone should think the same way. I suggest that all homophobic parents go and educate themselves a bit instead of crowing here in Delfi, and then they could raise their children as tolerant citizens.



**Figure 4.** Neutral comments in “Gay societies are against the Angel campaign” (Delfi, October 4, 2006).

In all sequences that we have shown here, the tagged categories alternate according to a quite unified pattern. To generalise across the material, the sequences start out with humorous or neutral comments: the commentators may refer to the title of the news, distort it in a funny way, present stereotypes about the people or group whom the news concerns, etc. This is usually followed by a neutral discussion where different parties present their points of view; simultaneously, general aggression may be seen (e.g. angry statements about the government in general or a too tolerant society as a whole), but targeted aggression is not present. In the final section of the sequences, the discussion takes a more aggressive turn, and commentators start to verbally attack each other. Sometimes (but not in the cases above), if the motivation of the participants or their fascination with the subject is low, the comments in the ending section may also just ‘fade away’, in which case targeted aggression is not so visibly present there.

In a very clear-cut manner, we see another interesting tendency in the material; namely, general aggression and a neutral mode of commenting spreads evenly across the threads. The density of both is rather even in the beginning, middle and end section. There can be a slight overlap in the modes, but more generally, when neutral discussion prevails (e.g. Figure 4, comments 51–55 and 75–90), there is less aggressiveness, and vice versa. At the same time, the second mutually complimentary pair – humour and targeted aggression – excludes each other, as we can see from Figures 1 and 2. This implies that targeted aggression towards fellow commentators is almost always humourless. To take this point further, the finding seems to echo several studies, although more theoretical in nature, which stress the mirthfulness of humour. We can say that some forms of humour can serve aggressive intent, but only to a certain degree. There is a point starting from which humour is not suitable or powerful enough to express anger or distress (see also Davies 2002). However, humour can turn into aggressiveness, which in turn can canalise into humour, as we see from the material for the present study: they do not happen simultaneously but alternate between one and the other. This result challenges approaches (most particularly, Gruner 1997) that tie all humour with aggression, which, as they claim, is the basic underlying mechanism of humour. In the analysed material we can see a different tendency: when discussion gets heated and commentators start attacking each other because of their identity or beliefs, humour (including sarcasm and irony) disappears from their comments. This leads us to think that neither humour nor its ‘sharper’ subgenres are useful in real conflict, nor is it more practical to refrain from comparisons, metaphors, exaggerations and other more playful forms of speech, etc., when the aim is to express anger. Christie Davies (2002) has mentioned that ethnic humour may coincide with ethnic conflicts in a given society, but the jokes that are told cannot be interpreted as a way of expressing the underlying hostility. There are much more effective means for doing this than through humour.

### **Effects of failed humour in comment sequences**

In order to identify the factors that induce the change from a jocular mode of conversation into an aggressive one (turning to the second research question: Is failed humour more likely to bring about aggressive and insulting statements in Internet comment sequences?), let us look more closely at two of the comment sequences analysed above to see what reactions follow instances of attempted but unrecognised humour.

The material shows that the failure of humour may, but does not necessarily cause a particular rise in the level of aggressiveness. Failed humour can equally result either in increased aggression or indifference (especially when a more intriguing and heated discussion is under way). Below, examples of both of these reactions are presented, taken from the same threads mentioned at the beginning of this chapter (p. 36). In the first sequence of comments that targets the former Minister of Education, who was accused of fawning over the Russian government when talking about Mari minorities in Russia, humour (or, rather, irony) is met with extended discussion about one of the commentators:

Mmanson: Sneer, Zebra, you have shitloads of black humour, but nobody understands it:)))

Patser: Actually, Zebra is the jewel of this place.

Zebra: abu is an abu is an abu...

Mmanson: zebras are zebras are zebras... Hallelujah, Zebrafuckers:)))

Zebra to Mmanson: I don't even doubt that your IQ is high.

Mmanson: I know where you live!

Zebra: Then come visit me someday.

Mmanson: Ok, I'll come, even if I don't want to...

Zebra: Why not? Are you afraid? Don't be, abu. I don't eat children.

(Reps: Külalistele vaeseid ei näidata 2005)

This is continued with a prolonged sub-thread in the comment sequence, dealing with personal remarks on the account of the user Zebra. Although the 'line of insult' does not start from one particular misinterpreted statement (instead, it is initiated by the active – even though initially neutral – participation of a pro-Russian commentator, Zebra), it gets a good incentive after Zebra uses the humorous nickname for allegedly dim-witted locals, 'abu'. Obviously meant as humorous nonsense, it is received with growing anger, and is further fuelled by other unfathomable statements (in miscoded Cyrillic) by the user Zebra. This case is thus an example of failed humour that grows into an online quarrel, although a mild and teasing type of quarrel rather than a straightforwardly insulting one.

The second thread presents an example of a rather heated exchange of opinions, especially because of the presence of a pro-gay commentator who joins in the discussion with comments that are highly aggressive, as in the comment by Undu to nurk: "Next time I'll take a gun and kill all the homophobes, because who doesn't let others live, shouldn't be living himself." The thread also contains two jokes with a punch-line, but both of them go unnoticed, even if they do offer a poignant comment on the discussion, as in the post by Lihtsalt joke:

In a little village in Pskov oblast, grandpa and grandchild are sitting on a bench and grandpa tells about his memories of the war:

– Then the Germans came into our village, lined all the men up and asked if we wanted to be shot dead or sodomised.

– And then, grandpa, what happened next?

– I was killed, my boy, I was killed.

(Homouhendused taunivad Angeli kampaaniat 2006)

This does not, unlike the sudden presence of pro- and anti-gay commentators, increase the aggressive tonality. Nevertheless, it is against the backdrop of the aggressive statements (especially statements of targeted aggression) that jokes and other forms of humour are bound to fail more often. This is to say, while failed humour in itself does not cause more aggression in online comment boards, the presence of (and rise in) aggression definitely causes humour to fail. There are usually no clues in the threads which would inform the participants of CMC about the (humorous) intention and nature of a statement. In the examples cited above, the derogatory, but at the same time playfully absurd nickname ('abu') is perceived as intruding into, if not insulting to, the community of rather xenophobic commentators. It seems that instead of being concerned about the correct reception of one's statements, commentators are actively engaged in a battle of wits where casualties are not important; it is the few 'hits' that count.

The results lend support to those studies that claim that humour is not a form of aggression: when humour is present, direct and targeted aggression does not occur, and vice versa. It does not, however, clarify all the relevant details of the interrelations of an overall aggressive background and humour within an anonymous message board.

The findings concerning the patterns of aggression alternating with humour can be discussed in the light of the theoretical framework of online aggression in general. Research states that aggression is an outcome of several coinciding aspects: motivation, inhibition and opportunities provided by specific online contexts; it is not only a by-product of the anonymous environment as a whole. This holds largely true for the material in question, where permissive anonymity is backed up by a motivation to aggress provided by the journalists and other commentators. Delfi presents a clear preference to motivate through publishing provoking news texts. We can see a tendency of more aggressive comments in the case of provokingly verbalised news or posts which are ten times more likely to induce harmful comments (see Laineste 2012). Delfi is also not keen on restraining the users from using aggressive statements. Users are not required to log in, even for commenting – this causes high levels of anonymity and allows people to go there and 'act out' quite purposefully. This is an outcome of a number of factors, of which the economical factor must be foregrounded. Advertisements

are sold by the number of clicks, and people are attracted to visit the site, read the news, and, more importantly, the comments, from which they can expect a good shot of adrenalin. Not all visitors comment, but they implicitly favour the action, the 'blood and tears' that the commentators provide.

The present study also describes the conditions of CMC where a joke falls flat. This is frequent in online communication, where social and non-verbal cues are limited. Very little, if any, of the humour in comment sequences is framed through conventionalised openings. People involved in the interaction do not signal that they are about to use humour; instead, they keep coming up with more comments, with quite an obvious attempt to outwit each other. In Hay's (2001) terms, no additional clues for the recognition of humour are given; humour is vested in each individual statement (see also Baym 1995). The 'game' of making the wittiest remark in itself seems to reward Internet commentators, and they are always ready to become engaged in this battle. This may sometimes, depending on the subject and the (identity-based) opinions of the participating Internet-users, evoke aggressive responses. It seldom happens that commentators are helped along with regard to recognition, understanding or appreciation of humour; CMC and the Internet as an environment in general seems to be reluctant to spell out humour. Instead, commentators are engaged in the battle of wits in a rather individualistic and socially non-coherent manner. They do not, at least in the anonymous environment that we examined, signal others about their intentions to joke, nor are they willing to recognise a joke that has been made. All in all, this motivates the commentators to outplay each other in their wittiness, cleverness, and aggressiveness – all at the same time – in order to make themselves visible to and be appreciated by the audience. It can be said that Internet humour is an expression or display of individuality and personal wit, and less, at least in the material used for this study, an indication of closeness and solidarity (for a different viewpoint, see Baym 1995).

The lack of a paratelic state (Apter 1982) mentioned earlier is another possible reason for humour to fail in the first place. The anonymous online message board is void of an immediate, positive and supportive atmosphere, which under other circumstances would form the premises for successful humour. The anonymous commentators in Delfi rarely laugh together in an earnest way. Instead, background of the conversations is a constant general aggressiveness (see Figure 3). A little detail or misunderstanding may occasionally lead to directed aggressiveness. Although the disposition to save face and be polite (initially described by Brown & Levinson 1987) would suggest that failed humour should be met with supportive actions by other participants in the interaction, this does not happen in CMC. Politeness and face-saving is necessary for fostering

cooperation and showing good intentions, but Internet users are not motivated to display social sensitivity because of rather loose and digressive ties between them. On the contrary: the Internet may offer a way out of these social norms that we as a community must exercise on a daily basis.

The results of this study, even if they do take us a step forward in understanding why humour fails, are not very helpful in pinpointing the possible effects of failed humour in CMC or relating these to certain types of utterances and/or humour, as this would require more in-depth study (e.g. interviews with the commentators). According to the examples discussed above, unrecognised or misinterpreted attempts at humour may result in either silence or an increased level of aggression. Specific reactions depend on the underlying emotions (the thread is full of generally aggressive statements), emotional and intellectual involvement of the participants (the topic of the discussion is so interesting that all attempts at misleading the discussion into absurdity are ignored), the humorous potential of the news text and the playfulness of the commentators, etc., to name just a few. Further research is in order, and should include more examples of the context of failed humour that result in either of the reported reactions. On the basis of the current material, we are able to state that engaging in a game of wits is frequent among Internet commentators, and (due to the specific features of the media) this kind of humour often fails, but unlike in face-to-face communication, the consequent failure is treated superficially both by the initiators and the recipients of humour. This is not a serious matter for the initiator – even if someone is insulted, or a heated discussion starts, the person who wrote the (humorous) statement might, on the contrary, take pride in the uproar that he or she caused. The recipients, on the other hand, can just ignore lame jokes and carry on with the discussion or choose a new thread that is of more interest.

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## ON THE ROLE OF VISUALISATION IN UNDERSTANDING PHRASEOLOGISMS ON THE EXAMPLE OF COMMERCIALS<sup>1</sup>

*Anneli Baran*

**Abstract:** Phraseologisms are linguistic units characterised by figurativeness or usage of metaphors. But what exactly is figurativeness? In the case of a linguistic unit, it is a quality instigating visual imagery. So, the direct meaning of a great part of phraseologisms is so figurative that we can easily visualise it. It is obvious that these individual visualisations help us understand an unfamiliar expression. The fact that while interpreting phraseologisms, language users may consciously proceed from mental images, is also confirmed by psycholinguistic experiments. This article dwells upon visualisation of metaphorical expressions as a means of conveying messages in advertisements and their reception or interpretation.

**Keywords:** phraseologisms, iconicity, mental lexicon, iconic motivation, figurativeness

### MOTIVATION IN PHRASEOLOGISMS<sup>2</sup>

When discussing the nature of the phraseological unit, we usually emphasise such features as stability, figurativeness, motivation, and idiomaticity; yet, practically always we have to accentuate the relativity of these parameters as well as their affectedness by subjective factors. Therefore we cannot say that these characteristics are similarly valid for all phraseological units.

For more than half a century, the core notion in phraseological studies has definitely been motivation. Discussions about the notion of motivation (validity) in phraseological research have lasted nearly as long. The criterion of motivation, which was introduced into the classification of phraseological units by Russian linguist and academician Viktor Vinogradov, is largely regarded as subjective in modern phraseology, and is sometimes even discarded as barely suitable for analysis. However, this is an essential notion adding to the nature of the phraseologism, and therefore I would like to discuss it somewhat further.

Starting from Vinogradov, phraseologisms have roughly been divided into two groups on the basis of the motivation criterion: phraseological fusions or

opaque phraseologisms and phraseological unities or transparent phraseologisms. These two main types include units that can be differentiated only on the basis of the motivation criterion. The units in the first group are demotivated whereas the ones in the second group “implicitly refer to motivation and semantic divisibility” (Vinogradov 1947: 352–353). This is where subjectivity sets in, as, except for a few obvious cases, the level of motivation is not measurable by linguistic means.

The current definition of motivation in phraseological research originates from phraseologist Harald Burger: “Motivation means that the meaning of a phraseologism can be understood by way of the free meaning of the unit or the meanings of its component parts” (2003: 66). Similarly to Vinogradov, Burger also emphasises that motivation is inseparable from semantic idiomaticity: the stronger the motivation of the phraseologism, the weaker its idiomaticity (and vice versa). So, motivation is in inverse relationship with idiomaticity, and therefore an unavoidable concept – they are interpreted through each other. Burger regards the motivation level as the relationship between the whole and its components in the chain of signs (1973: 26 ff.). This chain of signs can be either motivated or demotivated. In the first case, the meaning of the whole can be ‘derived’ from the meanings of its component parts, as formal and semantic structures are isomorphic, whereas in the second case it is not possible. As regards idiomaticity, idioms in the narrower sense of the word are demotivated word sequences, whereas idioms in a broader sense are weakly motivated, and completely motivated sequences are not idiomatic. Hence – the weaker the motivation of the word sequence, the more idiomatic it is. However, Burger also emphasises that language users have a different understanding of not only the motivation but also the relationship between motivation and idioms.

In addition to Vinogradov and Burger, two more researchers of phraseology – Dmitrij Dobrovol’skij and Elisabeth Piirainen – have made an attempt to delve into the problems of motivation in phraseologisms. In cooperation, they have authored three monographs: *Symbole in Sprache und Kultur. Studien zur Phraseologie aus kultursemiotischer Perspektive* (1996), *Figurative Language: Cross-Cultural and Cross-Linguistic Perspectives* (2005) and *Zur Theorie der Phraseologie. Kognitive und kulturelle Aspekte* (2009).

Dobrovol’skij and Piirainen’s treatment of different types of motivation in phraseologisms is based on semiotic concepts – arbitrariness, iconicity and symbolicness.<sup>3</sup> As they have argued: although the creation of symbolic units can be regarded as spontaneous and unpredictable, it is not entirely arbitrary, as it is partly defined by certain regularities (Dobrovol’skij & Piirainen 2005: 183 ff.). Here I would like to emphasise their contention that conventional symbolic units are concurrently arbitrary and non-arbitrary (ibid.: 184 ff.).

By relating arbitrariness to the cognitive theory of conceptual understanding, they maintained that phraseologisms are arbitrary in the sense that even if the formation of a symbolic unit is defined by a conceptual structure, the so-called semantic result is not entirely predictable – the level of predictability depends on the level of motivational transparency.<sup>4</sup> Yet, they are non-arbitrary in a sense that there exist logical connections between the conceptual input and output, this way motivating links between the knowledge plane, which is partly fixated in lexical structure, and the actual or figurative meaning. This in turn means that if we have knowledge about both the source and the meaning, we can imagine which cognitive processes lead to a certain semantic result; this is why the figurative unit seems to be prone to motivation.<sup>5</sup>

As was mentioned above, it is obvious that not all phraseological units can be motivated to the same degree. Yet, in addition to the distinction between motivation and demotivation, we can distinguish articulation inside motivation. Dobrovol'skij and Piirainen suggest that there exists motivation based on form and motivation based on meaning, or iconic and symbolic motivation.<sup>6</sup> These are motivation types, not classes of phraseologisms, i.e., there are phraseologisms that are motivated both semantically and formally (Dobrovol'skij & Piirainen 1996: 107). The best examples here are comparisons and pair formulas in the intensifying function.<sup>7</sup> Also, the aforementioned authors claim it to be obvious that idiomatic expressions reverberate in the mental lexicon as a whole, as they are not produced without prior knowledge that such idioms can be exploited. So it is not meaning transmission in the traditional meaning but rather “an operation of knowledge structure” (*Operationen mit den Wissensstrukturen*) (Dobrovol'skij & Piirainen 1996: 111). Hereby they base their viewpoints on Lakoffian theory: metaphorically motivated phraseologisms are elaborated on the basis of everyday knowledge, frame/script/schema knowledge or concept structure, or some other conceptual structure knowledge. According to Dobrovol'skij and Piirainen, the actual meaning of idioms emanates from the frame or script, i.e., cognitive structure, or associative context due to certain conceptual operations (2005: 164 ff.). So, relevant knowledge structures from primary frames are projected on the target frame, this way enabling the motivated interpretation of the combination of form and content. According to these researchers, the advantage of the tools of such meta-language interpretation as compared to the concept of traditional meaning transmission is the possibility to discuss not only explicit but also implicit elements ‘generated’ by idioms (hence the aforementioned notion ‘inner form’). Besides the semantic autonomy of its components, the imagery phenomenon also comprises a reference to the semantic divisibility of phraseological meaning and therefore it is not possible to analyse imagery without including the meanings of individual components

in the phraseological meaning. Dobrovol'skij and Piirainen are of the opinion that for an adequate semantic description of an idiom we have to include the significant elements of the inner form<sup>8</sup> in order to explain the meaning. This fact also testifies to the complexity of the motivation of a phraseological unit.

Yet, these elements of deep structure are not necessarily significant for concluding and therefore, for motivation. As the selection of features is more or less arbitrary, the elaboration of the deduction process must, according to Dobrovol'skij and Piirainen, proceed from the conceptual structure as a whole. However, the processes corresponding to motivation can be associated with the frame (static conceptual structure) or script (dynamic procedural knowledge structure) to a different extent. Dobrovol'skij in his book co-authored with Anatoli Baranov emphasises that not all phraseologisms are similarly understandable, i.e., their interpretation does not take place only on one level but mental images in phraseologisms must be viewed on three different levels (Baranov & Dobrovol'skij 2008: 115):

- Individual-based quasi-visual mental images;
- Knowledge level (i.e., frames, scripts, schema);
- Conceptual-metaphoric level.

The aforementioned two researchers hold that until today the second level has been practically ignored by phraseologists. In their opinion, one of the reasons is the fact that modelling striving for universality eliminates cultural linguistic specificity. On the other hand, pictorial images are empirically better understandable than generalised cognitive or conceptual metaphors.

## FIGURATIVENESS OR ICONICITY?

The concept of motivation is closely associated with idiomaticity, and the latter in turn with figurativeness. But what exactly is figurativeness?<sup>9</sup>

German scholarship, which has been leading the way in phraseology for quite a while (see, e.g., Burger 2003; Häcki Buhofer 1999), distinguishes between two notions: *Bildlichkeit* (imagery) used in a more general sense and *Bildhaftigkeit* as imaginarity and visuality.<sup>10</sup> The latter can be understood as a quality of the linguistic sign to instigate concrete imagery or visualisation. Figurative words and expressions are the ones that can easily be linked to a concrete situation. So, in the case of some idioms, both the component parts and the direct meaning of the expression are so figurative (Ger. *bildhaft*) that the whole event can be imagined as visual-concrete. Dobrovol'skij and Baranov call these images quasi-visual. According to the experiments made by the same researchers, we

can proceed from them under certain circumstances, and they may (although do not need to) be associated with the actual meanings of the respective idioms (Baranov & Dobrovol'skij 2008: 112). Yet, this activity based on associations can differ by person and usage relations.

Undoubtedly, metaphors based on pictoriality are linguistic images closely associated with iconicity. This idea was introduced by Yuri Lotman, who argued that an icon is a metaphor (1981: 16), hereby bearing in mind an icon as a painted image in the literal meaning of the word, with complex non-identity relationships between its form and content.

The approach proceeding from iconicity has become a matter of increasing interest in phraseology studies only in recent years; as a rule, phraseological units have been discussed as figurative. In addition to Dobrovol'skij and Piirainen, the notion of iconicity<sup>11</sup> in phraseology has recently been studied in more detail also by Ken Farø, although from a somewhat different viewpoint. Farø also treats iconicity as a specific case of motivation, yet differentiating between iconicity and iconography, preferring the latter as a more precisely defined and less subjective to figurativeness, which is widely exploited in phraseology (2006a: 62 ff.). He defines iconography as a potential of the idiom to conjure up a mental vision on the basis of direct interpretation. However, according to Farø, iconography is not the same as figurativeness, which is traditionally understood as a quality generating a visual image – therefore, not a psychological but rather a semiotic-psychological quality of a linguistic sign (*semiotisch-psychologische Eigenschaft*) (Farø 2006a). While in iconography, a mental image is created by way of literal or direct understanding of the idiom, then in the case of iconicity, the idiom 'reflects' its content through its form. Although Farø maintains that phraseologisms are iconic as they 'reflect' their content and are therefore semantically transparent for the language user who is familiar with their meanings, he finds that it is *groß granulierten Abbildung* (an extremely coarse image) (Farø 2006a: 63). Just like Dobrovol'skij and Piirainen, Farø also argues that the content that is made transparent forms only a small part of the actual meaning of the idiom, i.e., in the case of iconicity, we cannot claim that content and form are in mutual conformity. Therefore, iconicity does not refer to a relationship between all the elements of form and content because it constitutes only a small part of the 'actual' content, i.e., of all the qualities of the idiom.

Dobrovol'skij, who has actively been engaged in defining the concept of motivation, considers the identification of figurativeness with semantic ambiguity or motivation as incorrect (1997: 47). Correlation between idioms and motivation on the basis of semantic ambiguity is not always completely clear. An idiom can be made up of semantically ill-formed strings, have only figurative meaning

and still be motivated. So, the precondition for figurativeness is not semantic ambiguity, as there exist also idioms with no literal meaning, whose so-called figurative content is absurd. Or, as Dobrovol'skij emphasises, the content plane of idioms often provides an absurd description of events and actions impossible in a real world, therewith breaking the laws of common logic: the word components that are formally joined on the basis of syntactic models, do not form a meaning relating to the world picture but result in funny associations. As Baranov and Dobrovol'skij emphasise, in these cases visualisation is useless and we have to draw on cognitive knowledge (2008: 112–113).<sup>12</sup> These researchers claim that, despite the aforementioned quasi-pictorial/visual images, each motivated idiom has a certain meaning attached to it, which emanates from the suitable conceptual structure, frame or schema and cannot be consciously regulated. As mentioned above, the same was also postulated by Dobrovol'skij and Piirainen in their research.

In conclusion we can say that there are different conceptions about the importance of the so-called inner picture (or figurative meaning component) in the cognitive process; yet, we should proceed from the fact that visual images provide at least as good (if not even better) access to conceptions as notions. It is clear that phraseologisms can offer, in addition to phraseological meaning, also starting points for visual images that improve understanding, on the one hand making it more concrete, but on the other hand introducing additional elements of meaning, which have nothing to do with phraseological meaning. So people's visions enable varied perception of phraseological meanings and are not 'prescribed' but allow for different individual interpretations.

## **VISUALISATION AS MOTIVATION FACILITATOR FROM PSYCHOLINGUISTIC ASPECT**

The previous chapter presented the ideas of linguists-phraseologists about motivation and its role in interpreting phraseological expressions. On the other hand, psycholinguists have also been actively engaged in interpreting figurativeness and the role of visualisation therein. Yet, rather, they are narrowly focused on idioms, weighing the correlation between opaqueness and transparency only in the case of such linguistic units with complex motivation.

For a long time, one of the most renowned researchers in this field has been Raymond W. Gibbs Jr., whose research based on psycholinguistic experiments has proved that motivational images have a psychological-cognitive reality of motivation (2002: 452). If the initial relationships fade, it has a negative impact on motivation; yet, some new relationships can emerge and the expression can

still acquire motivation. However, it becomes obvious that search for motivation brings along changes in interpretation. The most essential observation that has been pointed out by the same researcher in idiom-studies is that the interpretation process does not pass an intermediate stage – direct meaning – but immediately decides in favour of the figurative meaning; Gibbs calls this kind of model the *direct access model / view / hypothesis* (1994). This model is based on the idea that expressions along with their meanings have been stored in the mental lexicon and they always appear as the first choice. Gibbs, who thinks that there is no reason to consider the direct meaning as psychologically primary, i.e., something that always precedes the following stages in the course of processing (1989: 249), has emphasised that this is simply about various results of the linguistic interpretation process – this is so-called psychological reality. The metaphor is used to forward different vague, indirect meanings, whose reconstruction is strongly restricted by the context shared by the speaker and the listener. People's intuitions about the mental images behind idioms are, according to Gibbs, a co-product of specific conceptual metaphors motivating the figurative meaning of idioms. Although in reality, idioms have two types of meanings – direct and figurative, it is namely the conceptual metaphor that motivates the image in the idiom and activates it automatically. According to this approach, automatism enables to overlook the concrete direct meaning.

Some researchers have also made attempts to oppose Gibbs in certain aspects. Cristina Cacciari and Samuel Glucksberg have noted that interpretation is more complicated especially in the case of the idioms that denote concrete activities also in the direct meaning of the word, which may, but need not be semantically associated with the figurative meaning of the idiom (1995: 46). These researchers regard it as highly probable that in such cases a visual image can emerge, which reflects direct rather than idiomatic meaning (or associates rather with so-called direct-meaning scene, which largely depends on how automatic the interpretation of the respective idiom is). However, Cacciari and Glucksberg do not treat the interpretation and usage of idioms as merely activating of the meanings of words, but also take into account the aspect of creativity, i.e., they are exploited in a suitable context. In case several interpretations are possible for idioms, a suitable one is selected on the basis of contextual and situative information, so that in this concrete meaning unambiguous interpretation is possible.

However, Gibbs does not agree to the contention attributed to him, according to which ordinary speaker's mental images about idioms are based on merely figurative meaning of the idiom or even on conceptual metaphors that underlie these idioms. Similarly to the experiments carried out by Cacciari and Glucksberg, Gibbs's own experiments also prove that initially, people form a

very concrete image about an idiom, which can be understood literally. Mental images for different idioms are in accordance with each other, and this integrity, according to Gibbs, is not based on figurative meaning but on the fact that the motivation of each idiom is supported by a similar conceptual metaphor. In his article co-authored with Nandini Nayak (Nayak & Gibbs 1990: 322), Gibbs has summarised the results of his experiments, claiming that people are able not only to ascertain the metaphoric similarity between idioms, but they also use this knowledge when they have to make decisions about the suitability of idioms in certain contexts – the conceptual coherence between the idiom and its surrounding context has a direct influence on the processing speed of idioms. Tests indicate that although conceptual metaphors influence people's decisions about the suitability of an idiom in different contexts, they are not accessible in *on-line* interpretation of idioms. Even if test persons were asked for a figurative paraphrase of the metaphor, the answers still provided the ones in contradiction to the relating conceptual metaphor. However, Gibbs emphasises (1998: 105) that neither he nor his colleagues have claimed that conceptual metaphors are not readily accessible in the interpretation process of idioms, i.e., when the participants have not completed the interpretation of figurative phrases, but this process should be interpreted as a clue indicating that conceptual metaphors are activated either simultaneously or right after the idiom has been understood.

Certainly, when interpreting idioms, conceptual metaphors are much more easily accessed due to highly conventionalised close connection between the idiom and the conceptual metaphor than is the case with a random linguistic metaphor. Moreover, the majority of conceptual metaphors have yielded different idiomatic/conventional expressions, i.e., conceptual metaphors underlie cognitive processes within which figurative speech is interpreted (Gibbs 1998: 106–107): more frequent use of certain idioms and attributing motivation to them by way of conceptual metaphors can make the latter more salient and more accessible in a situation in which idioms are heard or read.<sup>13</sup> Gibbs emphasises that regarding something as primary or secondary does not necessarily imply different cognitive processes; it is rather an issue of salience. Gibbs holds that the fact that people automatically analyse the literal meanings of the words in an expression would need further investigation, within which we should discard the interpretation of literalness in the linguistic meaning.

Gibbs also reappraised his approach ten years later, claiming that the hypotheses associated with conceptual understanding that he formulated in 1998 were carried by the idea of treating the interaction of different aspects of metaphoric models and language use and -understanding as hierarchical. Based on this knowledge, in his research co-authored with Markus Tendahl, he finds it

more sensible to proceed in the interpretation of language understanding instead of conceptual metaphor theory from blend theory or the notion of conceptual blending (Tendahl & Gibbs 2008: 1843).

In recent years, ongoing attempts have been made to ascertain the importance of mental images in the understanding and processing of figurative language. Numerous tests have been carried out, above all, among those who learn English as a foreign language at an advanced level. Although methodology for drawing adequate conclusions is only being developed, these tests prove unambiguously that interpretation of images is highly individual. Yet, as indicated by the results of experiments, visualisation, unlike verbal stimuli (e.g. word-for-word descriptions), facilitates the interpretation of completely unfamiliar idioms (see Boers et al. 2009), which may but need not contribute to interpretation. Cognitive efforts are also influenced by etymological explanations. In the case of opaque idioms it might be of avail; yet, does not need to be (Boers et al. 2009; Szczepaniak & Lew 2011). In addition, monosemic words in the idiom can be interpreted differently or the source-domain belonging of an idiomatic expression cannot be defined unambiguously. Yet, my own experience with the phraseology questionnaire proved the opposite trend: when interpreting an image in an unfamiliar expression, people rather rely on associative links and the explanation given is related to the so-called actual meaning of the expression to a smaller or greater extent (Baran 2008). However, these were native speakers for whom interpretation was certainly easier than for those with no command of the language. It is obvious that, in order to understand figurative speech, just good or even excellent knowledge of another language is not enough. The words that have so-called associative meaning in a set expression can be polysemic in out of context use – this is a facet that makes the interpretation of a phraseological image complicated for a non-native speaker. Some researchers even refer to this as a special kind of phraseological metaphor (see Naciscione 2010); however, in my opinion this distinction is not necessary.

Understanding of a language also implies the perception of the cultural context. Deficiency in this sphere could be compensated by visualising the image as a clue. This is especially frequent in modern advertising, which, whether we want it or not, as a component of public space occupies a central place in our lives. In addition to ordinary places of occurrence (so-called outdoor or open city space, printed media, television, radio), advertising industry increasingly uses the Internet environment, demonstrating flexibility by taking advantage of different multimodal means. Visualisation as the central element of advertising operates as a reference to cohesion, which allows for interpretation while the text is not understandable or an object of aberrant decoding. Or, as Charles Forceville, exploring figurativeness and pictoriality, has emphasised in case

of advertisements, visual contextualisation facilitates the understanding of verbal metaphors (1994: 6).

The following examples represent the combination of text and picture.<sup>14</sup> The picture operates as a kind of mnemonic device facilitating understanding – the expression is contextualised. Also, the picture can certainly be ‘manipulated’: some aspects can be accentuated whereas some others that are nearly equivalent can just be deliberately ignored or regarded as not important. A similar tendency to visualise can also be observed in internet humour, and it is especially expressive in the case of demotivators: see, for instance, comparative studies by Anneli Baran (2012) and Tomasz Piekot (2012) on the example of Estonian and Polish material. Although interpretation is directed consciously (or at least attempts are made to do so), reception is largely cognitive, i.e., the construction of meanings is individual. As experiments have proved, complete consensus about meanings is extremely rare (Szczepaniak & Lew 2011). Also, it is obvious that, for the purpose of cognitive economy, the first thing emerging in memory is offered as a solution. For a long time, researchers have proceeded from the proposition that non-typical (phraseology-specific) cognitive efforts are made to interpret phraseologisms. However, this conception contradicts reproductiveness inherent in phraseologisms, which undoubtedly makes cognitive expenditure more economic (Häcki Buhofer 1999). As a solution, psycholinguists have recommended to view the acquisition of idioms as part of a wider phenomenon – as cognitive mechanisms that serve as the basis for semantic competence and linguistic understanding (Levorato & Cacciari 1999: 54).

## VISUALISATION OF PHRASEOLOGISMS IN ADVERTISEMENTS

Advertising as a phenomenon of the mass media has become part and parcel of modern culture. Its impact seems to be the strongest in the youth culture, which was also clearly demonstrated by the school lore competition in 2007.<sup>15</sup>

Commercials have become part of the public space; different media channels (including the Internet) are used to forward them and they can also be encountered in the street. More and more often, commercials aim at influencing rather than informing. Modern commercials can be seen everywhere, i.e., to forward the same message, different means are used, which guarantees more extensive impact. Due to wide spread, advertising has become a significant communication phenomenon.

One of the advertising strategies is effect-based texts<sup>16</sup>, which apply for humour, pun or other elements of unexpectedness. Besides the text, the visual part is one of the main elements of an advertisement. Its function is to make

the narrative in the message more expressive, whereas it has to be associated with the main idea of the commercial message. Or, as has been formulated in advertising psychology, if one of the elements in the reception of visual advertising – looking at the image, reading the slogan, reading the body of the text – should fail, the failure is complete (Bachmann 2005: 55). Therefore, for achieving the primary purpose of advertising – its psychological impact – all the components are similarly significant.

Although the following examples representing mainly printed advertising have been chosen in view of demonstrating the possibility of purposeful visualisation of phraseologisms despite the ambiguity of the image (or, due to it, for that matter), these also eloquently testify to the increasing importance of visibility. According to opinion polls, the youth is primarily interested in animated multimodal commercials rather than merely static published or outdoor advertising posters.<sup>17</sup> Although there are always exceptions, the visual side around the text is still the most important element of commercials. As advertising research has proved, people prefer commercials with 70–80% covered by the visual (Bachmann 2005: 67). Therefore, only up to 30% of the total space of the advertisement remains for the verbal part.

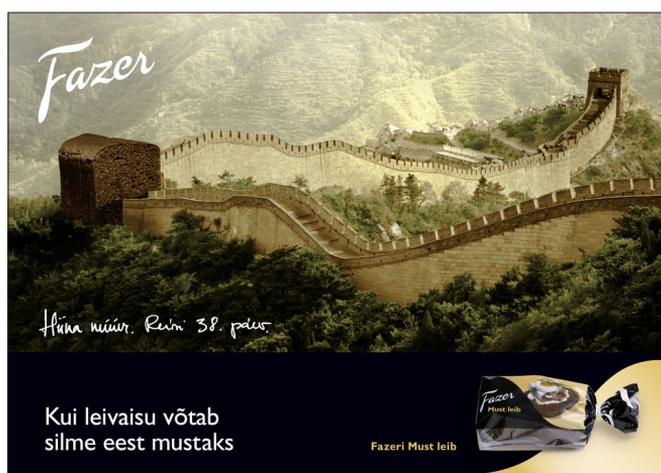
It is understandable that in modern society, in which written word has become dominant, copywriters are trying to make text messages more expressive by adding effectual visualisation. As several renowned phraseologists have demonstrated in their researches into advertising language, phraseological expressions are allegedly the best for this purpose, as they act as eye-catchers due to their colourfulness and certain familiarity (see, e.g., Röhrich 1978: 87; Fiedler 2010: 6). So, visual set expressions are attributed some features that are rather relative in view of more recent studies. The more remarkable is the fact that practitioners – in this case copywriters – dare to forward their messages by the expressions that by today have lost their topicality and motivation.

Advertising research reveals that copywriters focus on a particular target group. However, they cannot afford ignoring people outside this group who as consumers also belong to the same public space. Therefore, we all as 'recipients' can interpret the messages that have previously been creatively interpreted by their creators. This is a kind of double interpretation, as something that was given a different content by someone can be re-interpreted and not necessarily in the same frame. This can bring along increasing expressiveness and comic impact. In quite a few respects it is similar to the incongruity solution suggested by humour theoreticians (see Krikmann 2004: 130 ff.): interpretation different from so-called prototype usage (or non-prototype usage) in turn enables new marked interpretations and impacts therefrom. In advertising these purposeful modifications acquire additional meanings on different levels (semantic,

functional, etc.). Yet, the understanding of such deviations presupposes certain competence, especially due to their usage in insufficient linguistic context.<sup>18</sup> Traditionally, the communicativeness of pictures is regarded as more universal than verbal language; yet, at closer inspection we learn that the universal comprehensibility inherent in pictures is valid only within a concrete cultural context (Laaniste 2005: 618; Hallsteinsdóttir 2011). It is obvious that in order to understand the pictorial images connecting both figurative language use and visual language, it does not suffice to master another language. This is a fact that those who create meanings for achieving some goals do not always seem to be aware of.<sup>19</sup> Here we can but agree to Peeter Torop's statement about the complex relationship between the verbal and the visual, arguing that "the relationship between the text and the image is a central media-analytical problem, which is also a significant issue of cultural self-description and self-understanding" (Torop 2008: 731).

Below I analyse some examples of visualising phraseologisms and the relationship between the text and the picture in local advertising.<sup>20</sup>

Phraseologisms exploited in advertising are often changed both in form and in content. The notion of *remotivation* has been used in connection with emerging modifications (Varga 2010). This is a term that, for example Burger, suggests should be avoided as inaccurate: it does not embrace reversing the 'genetic process' but rather the activation of a possible word-for-word modification of a phraseologism or some aspects of one or several of its components (Burger 2003: 68). He argues that instead of remotivation, we should still discuss changes depending on either a different motivation or the actualisation of a word-for-word variation. This article is also based on the latter opinion.



**Figure 1.** Advertisement for Fazer black bread, saying:  
When craving after black bread makes you black out.

In the first example (Fig. 1), on the one hand, a well-known set expression and, on the other, symbols and stereotypes have been used to deliver the message. In the text part the traditional figurative expression *silme ees läks mustaks* ('everything went black before the eyes'; 'blacked out') has been used. The expression has been somewhat altered: instead of the verb *minema* ('go') the verb *võtma* ('make, render') in the meaning 'cause to be or become' has been used.<sup>21</sup> An earlier record in the database of Estonian sayings and phraseologisms (EKFA) dates back to 1937: *Keik ilm lää silmade ees mustaks* ('the entire world turned black before the eyes'). Actually, the original dates back to a farther past, as already in 1840 Friedrich Reinhold Kreutzwald, the 'father' of Estonian national literature, used it in his story *Wina-katk* (Vodka plague):

*Juhtus ükskord emmaga, kes nisammoti jowastano olli, rängaste rido; emma söimas ja torrises ni kaua wasto, kunni issa irmsal kombel needma ja wanduma akkas, et minno ihhokarwad püsti töusid ja kõik mul silmade ees mustaks läks.*<sup>22</sup>

Once there was a great row with Mother, who was also drunk; she kept scolding and grumbling until Father started to curse and swear, so that I had gooseflesh all over and blacked out.

According to source materials, this expression is most probably a German loan: *jem. wird es schwarz vor den Augen* (Röhrich 1973), which was adopted into Estonian and has been in use already for centuries. Actually, at first sight, the connection between the text and the image in this advertisement is practically hidden. The advertising sequence compares the traditional Estonian bread product with world-famous structures, such as the Great Wall of China and Stonehenge in Great Britain). The copywriters have probably been influenced by the lexeme *must* ('black'): *must leib > silme eest läks mustaks* ('black bread > everything went black before the eyes'). Here we have to admit that the authors are skilfully playing both on verbal and visual level as well as with cultural symbols: black bread essential for Estonians has been juxtaposed with the symbols of world renown. Also, it makes fun of stereotype thinking: if an Estonian is tired of travelling abroad, they can see only one thing in their mind's eye. This idea was also expressed in the TV-commercial, in which a girl returning to homeland goes right from the airport to a store to buy black bread, as this is something that she has missed very much while away from home:

After returning from a long trip, craving after black bread is most desperate. Black bread, sour cream and salted herring could even be sold as a package. This is the food that makes you feel you have arrived home. As by now the majority of Estonians have been abroad, this feeling is familiar to many. Congratulations to the creators on a good advert! I believe

that this commercial will find its way into the hearts of the black bread people. (Henri Jääger 2008)

The Finnish-origin producer of the bread has a product presentation on its homepage featuring the same rhetoric:

Much has been spoken about yearning for Estonian black bread while away from home. It is not just the bread that you are used to eating. It is a symbol of homely food that people miss the most while being abroad. (Fazer 2012)

Although certain platitude constitutes a natural part of both the advertisement and the traditional expression, a much more effective result can be achieved by a creative approach to both. As was manifest above, product promotion can be visually compatible with cultural traditions and symbols. In the case of bread products, the same symbols have also been exploited by other manufacturers in this sphere. Yet, it is obvious that, with no clear perception of cultural context, the message in the advert remains quite vague.<sup>23</sup>



**Figure 2.** Advertisement for Sampo home loan.

The second example (Fig. 2) is a banking commercial with a very simple message: we are better than anybody else (Sampo makes the best loan offer). The commercial is based on the visualisation of the word-for-word or lexical content of the well-known expression *tee puust ette ja värvi punaseks* ('make out of wood and paint it red') (in the earliest records in the EKFA from the 1960s: *tee või puust ette* ('you can make it even out of wood')); the texts with the addition of

*värvi punaseks* ('paint it red') date back to a more recent period); brush and paint are the attributes that are directly associated with painting. In addition, the image of a hand swinging the brush along an imaginary surface presents a process, i.e., something is born just there and then. Visualisation is probably used also for an additional effect: red as an intensive eye-catching colour. Although red as a symbol is generally universal, this colour is also ambivalent to a certain extent: it has both positive and negative connotations in different cultures.<sup>24</sup> In Estonian as well as Finnish tradition, red has historically had a positive role (Sarapik 1998: 23–25); yet, in Estonia as a post-socialist society this colour has also been marred by negative shades. Therefore, if we fail to consider all the meanings, the impact of a visual message can be unexpectedly different. Similarly to the previous example, this is also a foreign company – a facet characteristic of nearly all the advertisements presented here – who in its product promotion has made use of traditional Estonian set expressions and tried to make them visually more expressive.



**Figure 3.** Advertisement for Elion economy campaign, saying:  
*Do you want a good computer for the price of a sandwich?*

The third example of advertising has made use of an expression well known in Estonian. The meaning of the devaluative adverbial phrase *võileivahinna eest* ('for the price of a sandwich') is 'extremely cheap, for a song'. It is a really old expression, which is also suggested by the texts in the EKFA; the earliest of them date from the end of the 19th century (1889). However, the phrasing in them is somewhat different – *võileiva eest* ('for a sandwich') (e.g. *Andis võileiva iest ära*. 'Gave it away for a sandwich.'). Only from the 1940s the expression

started to be used together with the lexical component *hind* ('price'). In my opinion this expression could also have originally been a loan from German: *etw. für ein Butterbrot hingegeben* (Röhrich 1973).

The visualisation in the advert uses scarce means and refers to the lexical content of the expression only indirectly (tableware set out on the table), avoiding explicit description. Although the objects exploited in the advert have only rather a vague connection to the literal meaning of the phraseologism, the message, due to the familiarity of the saying, is still easy to understand. But it is another matter altogether to what extent the promises made in the advert are valid in real life – an aspect that tends to be underestimated while using figurative expressions in the messages targeted at the general public.

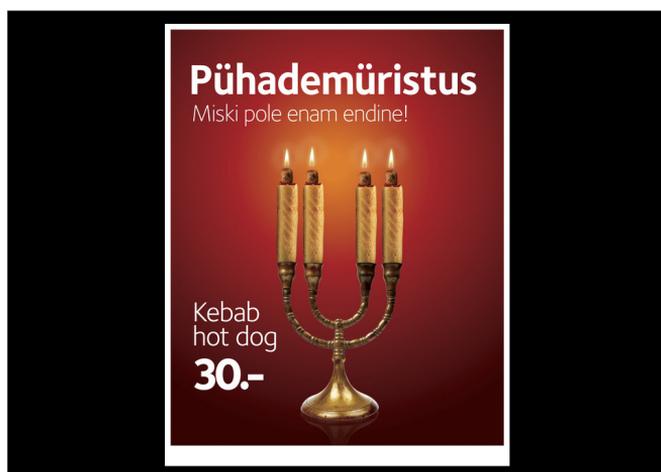


Figure 4. Statoil advertisement.

The following example (Fig. 4) gives an idea of how to forward an extremely multilayered message in advertising. Unlike in the former examples, the phraseologism *Pühade müristus!* ('Holy thunder/rumble!'; Good Gracious!) in this advert is not directly a source of visualisation. Although the database of Estonian phraseologisms includes only one record of this expression (dating from 1966), which sounds rather archaic, the rhetoric exclamation *Oh sa püha(de) müristus!* ('Oh, holy thunder/rumble!') is frequently encountered in modern language use. If we check earlier lexicographic sources, we can see that this expression is included neither in F. J. Wiedemann's (1973) nor in Andrus Saareste's (1958–1963) dictionaries. It might be a German-origin interjection (cf. *Donner und Blitz!*). Its modern occurrence is confirmed by the inclusion of

the expression *Sa püha müristus!* (You holy thunder/rumble!) (with a remark ‘expression of surprise’) in the Explanatory Dictionary of Standard Estonian. The noun *müristus* (‘thunder, rumble’) is a derivation of the verb *müristama* (‘to thunder, to rumble’), one of the meanings of which is the sound that follows a flash of lightning. As an expression of surprise, it is most probably based on this particular associative meaning. In visual depiction, the authors might possibly have proceeded from the word *püha* (‘holy’),<sup>25</sup> the more so that this is a Christmas advert. At first sight, the advert combines completely incompatible facets. The exclamation should mark the reaction to a favourable offer as something singular or unheard of – a specifying remark denoting the change compared to the old (‘good’) times points to this. On the other hand, this ‘not like formerly’ is manifested in the strangely influential illustration. Namely, a religiously eloquent object is used for visualisation – the menorah from Jewish culture. Yet, in order to forward the message, this is executed in caricatural exaggerated manner (originally, it is a seven-branched candelabrum). One cultural symbol has been converted into a means of advertising for well-known items which belong to other cultural spaces – Turkish kebab and American hot dog. Remarkably, they have selected a meat meal that occupies a special place in Jewish culture. As this is a Christmas campaign (2008), it is even stranger as Jews do not celebrate Christmas. So, this is an advert based on diverse, most controversial links between the text and the picture, the different layers of which can even be unfathomable at first sight. Although the promoted company is again of foreign origin, the local market has used a version created by an Estonian advertising agency, which would have been hardly acceptable in the society emphasising political correctness.



*Figure 5. Advertisement for Kalev confectionery.*

The fifth advert is a good example of how you can fail completely if you flirt with the meaning of an expression. The euphemistic name *mesikäpp* ('Bruin') denoting the bear is also the name of popular local chocolate candy. The aim of the advert was to inform the consumer about releasing the old product in a new form – as an ice-cream. However, the slogan *Tegime mesikäpa külmaks!* ('We made the Bruin cold!') is ambiguous here. Namely, the figurative meaning of the verbal set expression [kedagi] *külmaks tegema* ('make someone cold') is 'kill someone' (FS). According to the EKFA, this expression originates from wartime language use (example text: *Vaenlased tehti külmaks* ('the enemy was made cold')). While the aim was to make the slogan short and striking, the possibility of the figurative level of meaning was not considered. So it happened that a strongly expressive phrase that is also used in prison jargon, made its way into an advertisement targeted at children. This fact evoked a strong negative response both in online and social media. Here are a few examples of headlines and quotes:

- Bruin in choco stick shoes made cold. (Eesti Päevaleht 2011)
- Do we have to interpret the slogan 'We made the Bruin cold!' so that the *Kalev* Confectionery confesses to murdering a bear? (Meiel 2011)
- The *Mesikäpp* ice-cream introduced to the market by *Kalev* is advertised in the streets, and even small children can spell it that the Bruin has been 'made cold' now.

In prison jargon making someone cold means killing them. Let's hope that Bruin is still okay! (Vaene Mesikäpp tehti külmaks! ('The poor Bruin was made cold!') – Vahvel.net 2011)

Maybe unexpected criticism was one of the reasons why the life of this advertisement in the streets was short-termed. In any case, this is a good example of how incompetent use of expressions can result in negative promotion of a company (not necessarily the product). Contrary to the expected results, the failed product promotion drew negative attention to the recognised local enterprise with long-term traditions.

In the case of the last example (Fig. 6) we again have an advertisement in which text is combined with a figurative expression that at first sight is not easily understandable. Actually, the textual part *Saiast on siiber. Loodus kutsub* ('White bread is a real damper. Nature is calling') is composed of two expressions: [millestki] *siiber olema* ('to be a damper'; to be fed up with something, have enough of something) (EKSS) and *loodus kutsub* ('nature is calling') (EESS). While the first expression originates mainly from the youth slang from decades ago (according to EKFA, from the 1990s, but probably even earlier), the specific origin of which is rather vague,<sup>26</sup> then with the second one things are

somewhat more complicated. In Estonian this expression existed already before the offensive of the English language and therefore it cannot be regarded as a word-for-word translation of the English idiom *Mother Nature is calling*.<sup>27</sup> However, the so-called new coming of the expression could have occurred due to the latter's influence. I cannot say whether the copywriters were aware of the other, more ironic meaning of the saying, but in any case they succeeded in combining the figurative expression and the message by way of visualisation (the aim being to encourage inter-Estonian tourism). Similarly to several former examples, the knowledge of cultural context is beneficial in interpreting the visuals supporting the advert message. Different multimedia means were applied in this advert – in addition to street advertising also TV-promotion and banners on the Internet. While clicking on the latter, a 'game' opened, which consisted in moving the cursor on the screen (command: *Paku pardile saia!* ['Feed the duck with white bread']), which in turn opened the main message *Puhka Eestis!* (Have a break in Estonia!); the aim of the advert was to activate local tourism.<sup>28</sup>



**Figure 6.** Advertisement of Tourism Development Centre in Tartu. Photo by Anneli Baran 2009.

## IN CONCLUSION

When discussing phraseologisms, we usually speak about stability, fixation, and reproducibility – so, it is a linguistic unit excluding any kind of change. The presented examples of co-existence of advertising and phraseologisms are semantic modifications based on ambiguity, with only negligible formal changes. These kinds of playful linguistic deviations constitute a natural part of phraseologism reproduction. On the other hand, phraseological expressions can easily be interpreted by their so-called recipients, which is proved by people's explanations in questionnaires about phraseology. So we can say that an unfamiliar expression is not necessarily incomprehensible. It is the figurativeness of the phraseolo-

gism that allows for different possible interpretations – namely, visualisation in its processing. While exploring this aspect, we can apply a psycholinguistic approach. A figurative expression generates cognitive activities – finding and constructing meanings. Although the use of phraseology implies the creativity aspect, understanding can be successful only if both parties perceive the wider context, either on conceptual or cultural level. On the other hand, although visualisation can be helpful in understanding, this opportunity also involves artificial exaggeration and manipulation. The nature of this kind of targeted creativity is especially obvious in advertising. From the communicative-pragmatic viewpoint, their main objective is to attract attention, make the recipient indagate and ‘decode’ the visual image. As was manifest in the presented examples, it is done, as a rule, by way of associative connections. Unfortunately, the user often ignores the fact that the recipient can have a different understanding of the phraseologism. Thus, we can treat the phraseologism as a linguistic sign which, as a complex phenomenon, allows for different interpretations. The visualisation of phraseologisms frequently encountered in advertising is an excellent example of the intertwining of figurativeness and textuality, which is not in the process of becoming but has already become dominant. In further research, we have to establish whether the understanding of visualised texts depends on the existing phraseological competence or it is the general interactive competence that is essential here.

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Research for this article was supported by the targeted financing project SF0030181s08 (Narrative Aspects of Folklore. Power, Personality and Globalisation) and the state programme project EKKM09-150 (Database of Estonian Sayings and Phraseologisms and Source Publication of Phraseologisms in the Series *Monumenta Estoniae Antiquae*).
- <sup>2</sup> The theoretical part of the article is based on the author’s doctoral thesis defended in March 2011 (see Baran 2011).
- <sup>3</sup> Phraseologisms as symbols were discussed in paremiological research already earlier; for example, by paremiologist Grigory Permiakov in the 1960s (see Permiakov 1968).
- <sup>4</sup> If we regard phraseologisms as iconic signs, this kind of motivation would sign-theoretically correspond to Ferdinand de Saussure’s secondary motivation, this way contradicting arbitrariness as the concept of non-motivatedness of the sign (de Saussure 1966: 133).
- <sup>5</sup> This concept largely coincides with the contention voiced by Georg Lakoff, the prolocutor of cognitivists, who maintains that although according to so-called classical linguistic approach idioms have arbitrary meanings, then cognitive linguistics claim that they might be not arbitrary but rather prone to motivation; i.e., they are formed

automatically, by productive rules, yet are adapted to the models offered by the conceptual system (2007: 275).

- <sup>6</sup> Although in 1996 these researchers set an aim to elaborate criteria to differentiate between the two types of motivation, nine years later they introduced the term *blending* (Dobrovolskij & Piirainen 2005: 103) in the meaning of interaction between different motivation types.
- <sup>7</sup> In Estonian, alliteration is a frequent formal motivator, especially in phraseological comparisons and word pairs, such as: *täis nagu tarakan* ('drunk as a cockroach'; drunk as a skunk), *saba ja sarvedega* ('with tail and horns'; all included), *lood ja laulud* ('stories and songs').
- <sup>8</sup> Parallel to the term *inner form of the idiom*, the authors also use the notion *image component* (*bildliche Bedeutungskomponente / Bildkomponente / bildliche Komponente*), the latter meaning a so-called mental image in a cognitive process.
- <sup>9</sup> An excellent example of the figurativeness of proverbs and sayings is the painting *Netherlandish Proverbs* (1559) by Pieter Bruegel the Elder, which has given rise to several researches, for example, by Alan Dundes and Claudia A. Stibbe (1981). In more detail, proverb iconography has been discussed by Wolfgang Mieder (2008).
- <sup>10</sup> In Estonian, these notions are barely distinguishable: according to EKSS (Dictionary of Estonian Literary Language), the term *piltlikkus* means 'something represented as a (visual) picture, imagery; metaphorical, figurative', whereas the meaning of *visuaalsus* is 'figurative, using or including images'.
- <sup>11</sup> In Estonian linguistics, iconicity has been defined by Helle Metslang (1993: 204): "Iconicity is an expression of transparency, a phenomenon in which the form reflects the content in a certain sense. With the evolution of languages and their increasing abstractness, iconicity has had to give way to arbitrariness; yet, it is still influential enough, facilitating the reception of information, its processing and transmission."
- <sup>12</sup> The same complex of notions has also been discussed by cognitivists, with one of the keywords being the more general *embodiment*, not only the narrow *visualisation*. Thus, Mark Johnson in his book *The Body in the Mind* (1987) uses the notion *gestalt* for experiencing the physical world, which claims that experience is structured already on the pre-linguistic physical plane.
- <sup>13</sup> Here we could draw a comparison with Rachel Giora's graded salience hypothesis. According to this, word salience in mental lexicon is influenced by conventionality, frequency, familiarity and prototypicality/stereotypicality (Giora 2003: 15). Thus, this kind of lexicon is also open to change. Contextual influencing factors are regarded as relatively low by Giora.
- <sup>14</sup> Another question is to what extent we can make a distinction between text and picture today. David Crystal, who has studied Internet language, has compared the writing style in Internet environment to animated language (2001).
- <sup>15</sup> The collection competition was organised by the Department of Folkloristics at the Estonian Literary Museum along with the Estonian Folklore Archives. The previous bigger action of the kind took place fifteen years earlier.

- <sup>16</sup> The term was coined by Talis Bachmann and signifies texts that are largely more entertaining than other strategies (Bachmann 2005: 60).
- <sup>17</sup> Multimodal aspect in advertisements that makes use of phraseologisms has been discussed in more detail by phraseologist Erla Hallsteinsdóttir (2011).
- <sup>18</sup> Although, according to research, the purposeful usage of humour in advertising produces a positive effect, mistakes are easy to occur, and therefore it is recommended to apply it only under restrictions (Bachmann 2005: 98–99).
- <sup>19</sup> On advertising perception, incl. the peculiarities of visual perception in advertising, see Bachmann (2005).
- <sup>20</sup> Nearly all the mentioned commercials have been awarded the Golden Egg prize by the Estonian Association of Advertising Agencies.
- <sup>21</sup> Linguistic means in the language of advertising, incl. the occurrence of verbal forms, as well as sentence structure and textual characteristics, have been discussed in more detail by Reet Kasik (2000).
- <sup>22</sup> This example originates from the corpus of old literary Estonian *Vakkur*. It is interesting to mention that the most important work of earlier lexicography, Ferdinand Johann Wiedemann's Estonian-German Dictionary (first published in 1869) includes merely the expression *mustaks lööma* (turn black) without an explanatory sample sentence.
- <sup>23</sup> Adverts of big international companies are quite different in this respect, as they try to sell their products with one and the same message all over the world or, at the utmost, adapt it to concrete circumstances only to a certain extent (see Leitchik 2006).
- <sup>24</sup> The notion of red in the phraseologies of different languages has been discussed by Piirainen & Dobrovolskij (1996: 265–267).
- <sup>25</sup> Visualisation of one component instead of the whole phraseologism points to the aforementioned peculiarity of phraseological interpretation: this process can be based on the associative links related to a certain lexeme, which can emanate from the ambiguity of the word.
- <sup>26</sup> According to Saareste's dictionary (1958–1963), one of the meanings of the German-origin word *siiber* (<*der Schieber*) is 'damper'; so an explanation for interpreting the expression could be 'get stuck, be damped'.
- <sup>27</sup> See: <http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=mother%20nature%20is%20calling&defid=5566747>, last accessed on February 21, 2013.
- <sup>28</sup> This advertisement was part of a longer campaign in which the characters alternated. The commercial released in 2009 was awarded the Golden Egg as one of the best in local advertising market. The version discussed here can be found at [http://www.tank.ee/kuldmuna/puhka\\_eestis\\_250x250\\_part.swf](http://www.tank.ee/kuldmuna/puhka_eestis_250x250_part.swf), last accessed on October 3, 2012.

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## ***CLICK 'LIKE' AND POST IT ON YOUR WALL!*** **CHAIN POSTS ON FACEBOOK – IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION AND VALUES**

*Piret Voolaid*

**Abstract:** The article<sup>1</sup> focuses on chain posts that were collected in the years 2010–2012 and spread predominantly among girls of ten to twelve on Facebook (facebook.com) – a social network that has a membership of over 450,000 in Estonia. The source material comprising approximately 220 texts is similar by form and content to chain letters known from earlier tradition; yet, the web environment with its specific technical structure allows the texts to turn into a peculiar Facebook-like phenomenon.

The author takes a closer interest in the changes in form adapted to chain letters as a genre in Facebook environment as well as thematic categories of these letters. The analysis of the epistolary cultural phenomenon focuses on the socio-folkloric nature of texts with its communicative and socio-cultural aspects. The main focus is on how socio-cultural environment influences changes in the genre, what kind of global and local impacts occur in Estonian-language chain posts and how this everyday genre reflects the realities of the era and the values intrinsic to this age group. The levels of personal and collective identity construction of chain posters as a special age group have been analysed against the identity motivation theory known from social psychology.

**Keywords:** chain posts, chain letters, Facebook, identity, Internet folklore, school lore, youth lore, social networking, values, luck chain letters

### **INTRODUCTION**

The social networking service Facebook founded in 2004 has recently gained high popularity among both younger and older Estonians, and we could well claim that this portal has become a synonym of social media. While adults appreciate, above all, the possibility of access to important information provided by this web environment, the younger generation (mainly schoolchildren) regard it primarily as an entertaining communication site and only then something related to, for example, school activities.<sup>2</sup> Communication usually establishes certain traditions and folklore is born and spread. This article is based on a fragment of modern Internet folklore, focussing on chain messages posted in

2010 and 2011 by a girls' community on their Facebook walls<sup>3</sup>. It is easy to disseminate a message: if you post it on the wall/timeline of your profile, it immediately shows in your friends' news feed, so that each member of the community can see the new posts on the opening page of their Facebook account, this way having a good overview of their friends' walls. So, by their nature, posts are an epistolary folklore phenomenon, a subform of the Internet memes which spreads by one click from wall to wall, forming a human chain from the posters. Similarly to a typical chain letter, a chain post constitutes a message that persuades the addressee to copy the letter and pass it on to a certain number of or as many people as possible. To a certain extent, we could regard as chain posts also passing on and sharing on the Facebook all kinds of other Internet memes (e.g. caricatures and manipulated photos, so-called demotivators). These are not included in the current research as predominantly they do not include an explicit instruction to share and forward.

This article aims to give an overview of chain letters posted on Facebook as a phenomenon spreading most actively among teenagers, to analyse the nature of folkloric posts and their material-thematic expressions and interpret the texts through identity construction and value shaping mechanisms expressed in them.

## **THEORETICAL STARTING POINTS**

Facebook is a sub-form of new media based on information technology. Such social networks are not merely channels for forwarding information but rather structures that resemble geometrical places (in which a different life can occur) and are even adaptable to topological or abstract spaces, e.g., "I am writing on my FB homepage", "I have ... friends on the FB", etc. (Briggie 2010: 163). Information lives on this technological media ground, the user can hardly be distinguished from information and active communication as well as creation of novel knowledge is ongoing.

Any written text is born as a result of social activity (see, e.g., Kress 2004: 84–105), whereas the user chooses a suitable form for mediating knowledge. One of those distinguishable genres is Facebook chain posts. From the folkloristic point of view chain posts have a common part with chain or luck letters or luck chains known from former times.<sup>4</sup> In Estonia, notifications about Christian-origin printed protective letters or the so-called 'letters from heaven' equipped with abundant instructions date back to as early as the end of the 18th century (Vahtramäe 1998: 181). The earliest of luck chains stored in folklore archives originates from the year 1883 (Kõiva 1993: 12), so we can speak about more than one hundred years' chain letter tradition in Estonia. In analytical treat-

ments of local material, folklorists have pointed out historic and categorising aspects (Anderson 1937; Põldmäe 1938; Kõiva 1993), thereby also describing developments of the genre due to new technological environments (computer and Internet), approaching changes in category through, for example, the notion of dialogue (e.g. Seljamaa 2003, 2004, 2005). In an interactive environment, in which the creation and mediation of meaning is multimodal (compared to archival texts, genres are not so much linguistic categories; all kinds of audio, visual, technological and other means are considered – see Kress 2004; Torop 2008, and others), it is easier for a researcher to observe informative, social, entertainment and other roles of folkloric phenomena. By their form and content, chain posts can merge with modern urban legends, anecdotes and folkloric short forms, thereby convincingly confirming vague genre borders and adaptation of classical folkloric phenomena on the Internet (see, e.g., Kõiva & Vesik 2009: 109). As an essential feature of modern folklore, including chain letters, researchers emphasise their ability to sensitively react to the events occurring in society and reflect them in their own way (Hoppál 1986: 62). Folklore that depends on the knowledge created by the media about current events and comments on them has also been called *newslore* (e.g. Frank 2011). *Newslore* can be expressed in many folklore forms, such as jokes (incl. catastrophe humour), urban legends, digitally altered photographs, mock news stories, press releases or interoffice memoranda, parodies of songs and poems, political and commercial advertisements, and still or animated cartoons. Facebook chain posts also acquire *newslore* value if they draw on real-life (tragic) events and react to both the events covered by the media and media coverages themselves. The whole net lore has to be viewed against global level, and so Estonian chain posts also demonstrate signs of close cultural exchange (incl. translations from one language to another, language merger), which accompanies increasing relative importance of distance communication nowadays.

Facebook chain posts could be called an epistolary genre, which sociologist Liz Stanley characterises as dialogical and directed to another person (Stanley 2004: 202–203).<sup>5</sup> In Facebook environment, the chain message is not private; it can be posted on the profile or wall (in the new version also timeline) of a concrete individual; yet, it is visible also to many others. In most cases, it is oriented to an impersonal ‘other’; yet, in view of a wider community. Depending on the reaction of the addressees – whether the message is copied one-to-one and passed on, or the user makes changes in it, whether the posted message is commented or the reaction is limited to reading it and clicking the ‘like’ button – active or passive communication is formed. As another feature, Stanley points out that letters are perspectival, their structure and content changes according to the particular recipient and the passing of time (ibid.:

202–203). Chain posts in Facebook environment usually end in an imperative formula, e.g., “Click ‘like’ and post it on your wall!” or “Add to your status!”, so they demand that you copy and spread the message. Thirdly, the letters have strongly developing conventions and preoccupations, and their own epistolary ethics. All these aspects can change according to particular correspondences and their temporal parameters. However, these features are not specific only of a letter as a genre, but describe social interaction on a more general level. It is complicated to subordinate the whole phenomenon to particular canons; they could rather be interpreted as an open, inter-textual, creative, dynamic context-centred phenomenon, which coincides with several genre-theoretical views of folklore (Briggs & Bauman 1992; Bauman 1992; Ben-Amos 1997, etc.).

Researches into the youth’s Internet usage indicate that their online and offline worlds are psychologically connected and new forms of technology are used for essential evolutionary needs, i.e., sexuality, intimacy, increasing independence and identity quest (see Reich et al. 2012: 357). So, one of the aims of folklore spreading among the youth is to give support to satisfying such age-related needs. In a closer analysis of the material, identity studies have been supportive, as the main starting point here is to find out how individual or collective self-concept is constructed, argued or protected through tradition (see, e.g., Kuutma 2006). During the past decade, Estonian folklorists have focused on identity issues from different angles, the most relevant keywords being, for example, *ethnic identity* (e.g. Korb 2012; Valk & Ojamaa 2011), *local identity* (e.g. Kalda 2004), *gender identity* (e.g. Ehin 2003; Kalmre 2010), etc. Eda Kalmre (2010) has analysed girls’ self-presentation on the example of communication portal rate.ee. Sentimental love stories are essential in girls’ self-expression and identity construction, and in many ways sentimental chain letters perform the same functions. The Facebook chain posts under investigation here are chiefly the lore of a concrete age group – the active community being girls at the age of ten to twelve<sup>6</sup> – which supports the construction of their social identity.

Social psychologist Vivian L. Vignoles (Vignoles et al. 2006: 311–312) has explained identity construction and preservation in different age groups on the basis of motivational theory. Identity construction is influenced by six main motives: self-esteem or evaluation of one’s own worth, continuity or maintaining your image in different situations, distinctiveness, belonging, efficacy, and meaning, which are also related to the needs that people satisfy while constructing and perceiving their identities. This article aims at explaining whether and how the tradition of posting and commenting of chain messages is targeted at satisfying the needs related to identity construction, which motive categories (e.g. need for belonging, increasing self-esteem) are in the foreground in this tradition and how these categories are expressed through texts.

The application of socio-psychological methods is justified in the analysis of those chain posts that refer to inter-group relations and roles and can be interpreted through the notion of social identity. According to the theory of social identity (e.g. Tajfel 1978, 1981; Valk 2003), it is the part of an individual's self-concept which is based on the knowledge about belonging to social group(s). The foundation of collective communication is the person's need for confirming and differentiating identity, on which the person's emotional self-esteem and perception of one's own worth is based. Schoolchildren's social status is assessed against the sociometric nomination method and peer nomination method (Tropp & Saat 2010: 70). Chain posts with comments targeted at friendships can be viewed as an informal sociometric means, which is used to initiate the members of the community to make various choices (either positive, neutral or negative) and also to assess the others.

## MATERIAL AND ANALYSIS

The analysis presented in this article is based on 220 text types collected by the observation of asynchronous Internet communication.<sup>7</sup> As a Facebook user (in this research, above all, as a parent), I collected chain messages posted predominantly by pre-teens and teens or the ones posted on their walls. For social situations, I mainly acted as a passive observer; yet, sometimes also asked additional questions.

The members of the community form a semi-private forum, the access to which is afforded only to the ones registered in the environment. On average, each member has a couple of hundred friends, some of whom they have never met in real life.<sup>8</sup> It is obvious that, in view of this, the notion of 'friend' has been expanded and modified. Teenager's self-esteem might depend on the number of friends on Facebook and this has given rise to the so-called Facebook new proverb: *May you have 777 friends rather than 777 euros*. The most active posters of chain letters seem to be girls at the age of ten to twelve, who obviously do not mind demonstrating their feelings and for whom the topics of chain letters (friendship, romantic feelings, family, home) and their sentimental style are essential. A similar tendency is revealed in the results of the all-Estonian school lore collection competition: among the ten-year-old schoolgirls' answers chain letters were the most numerous (see also Kõiva 1993: 13). The same themes are popular in schoolgirls' poetry notebooks and diaries, but also communication portals with large young membership in Estonia, such as rate.ee and orkut.com. The posting of chain messages features a noticeable gender aspect: although Facebook boys' community can see all the chain messages, they rarely pass them

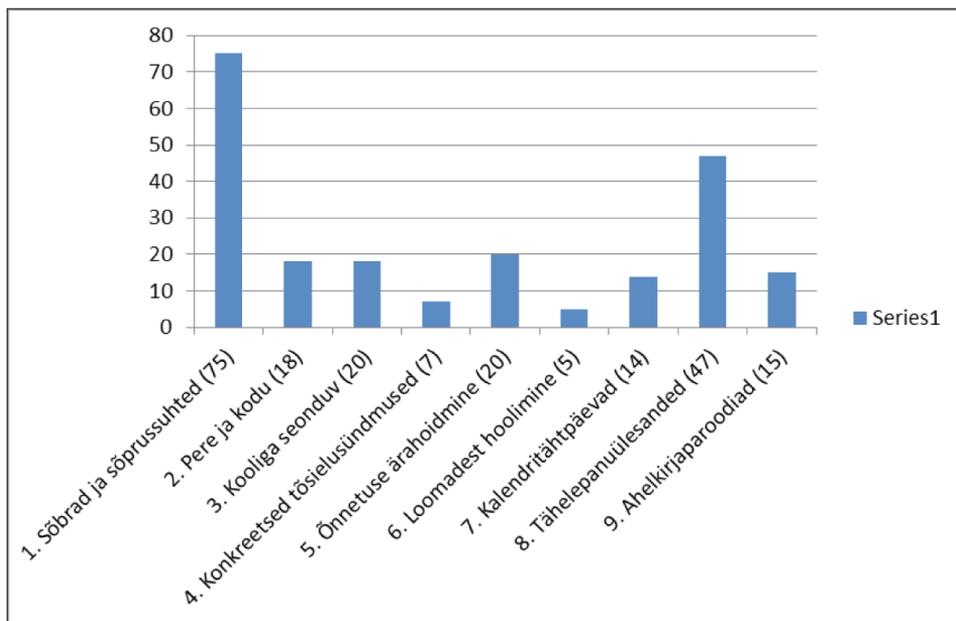
on. Even if they do it, they rather share ironic and parody letters, which aim at ridiculing serious and sentimental chain messages, turn them upside down and call them trash in their comments on girls' posts. Here it is important to mention that although Facebook structure favours posting both on one's own and on others' walls, this kind of chain posts are similar by their function to spam, which is forwarded without asking permission from the wall owner and which could turn out to be a deception, affecting its bona fide recipient with, for example, a computer virus or monetary damage. From a sociological point of view, spam is considered to be interesting due to the reaction that it evokes in long-term users of the Internet and computer-mediated communication. Spam is often associated with the newcomers in the virtual space, who deserve old users' resentment because they are not aware of or do not respect tacit rules (Bell et al. 2004: 165). Certain parallels can be found in posting chain letters: ten-to-twelve-year-olds are definitely more daring to forward these letters, both due to their youth (letters seem to be fresh and interesting, the topics have greater impact on them, they believe in the content more than their older peers) and ignorance about rules and customs.

## **THEMATIC CATEGORISATION OF FACEBOOK CHAIN LETTERS**

Facebook chain posts requiring forwarding are extremely multifarious, both by the length of the texts (ranging from one sentence to longer narrations) and their topics and functions. The earlier chain letter tradition has been categorised in very different ways (e.g. VanArsdale 2007; Seljamaa 2003; Krikshchiunas 2012). In order to get a more comprehensive picture of Facebook chain letters, texts have been divided into the following categories: 1. Friends and friendships. 2. Family and home (close relatives). 3. School and studies. 4. Chain posts following everyday events. 5. Prevention of accidents (valuation of life and health, incl. warnings against alcohol and drugs). 6. Caring about animals. 7. Chain posts related to calendar holidays. 8. Attention tasks and tests. 9. Parodies of chain letters. As is usual for folkloristic categorisations, category borders can be vague for chain posts; for example, a text about friendship can also be related to school life.

### **Friends and friendships, search for personal and social identity**

Different chain posts can be divided into thematic rubrics. A very important facet of pre-teens and teens' lives is their peers and relations with them; diminishing of parental control over young people's activities and their social positioning



**Figure 1.** Thematic categories of Facebook chain letters (221 types or sets of same-content variants).

become more important. So it is not strange that the majority of their chain posts are dedicated to **friendships and relations**, appealing to their peers to value real friends, testing the strength of friendship and their own position in a community. On the one hand, such texts reflect quests for social identity, featuring social relationships and belonging to social groups; they are related to mutual power relations in a lore group. This way, testing chain posts with their answers can satisfy young people's need for belonging and relating, which some researchers (e.g. Vignoles et al. 2006; Deci & Ryan 2008: 183) regard as the primary need in self-defining theory. The need for belonging must constantly be proved by various relation contacts. On the other hand, however, they support the shaping of the youngster's personal identity (self-image or self-concept). For example, the following post enables a developing youngster to confirm his/her traits through the peers and perceive their attitudes.

Post it on your wall and get to know what other people think about you:  
 1. Crazy. 2. I'd like to kiss you. 3. Hyperactive. 4. Jerk. 5. I miss you. 6. Best friend. 7. Nice. 8. Smart. 9. Stupid. 10. I'd like to go on a date with you. 11. Easy. 12. Hot. 13. Funny. 14. Hugger. 15. Ravishing. 16. Pensive.

17. Cute. 18. Beautiful. 19. Loud voice. 20. Cool. 21. I love you. You can also pick several. ;)

Self-concept comes as a reflection from the people who are significant for youngsters. It is easy for the youngsters themselves to arrange this reflection in social networking in test format, with the help of chain posts. In some of them, which operate as so-called sociometric tests, answers expected from friends are specified in percentages.

10% – poor friend, 20% – lost contact long ago, 30% – it’s a pity we quarrelled ☹, 40% – stupid, 50% – normal, 60% – cool guy, 70% – it’ll be fun ☺, 80% – crazy! 90% – goddamn good friend :D, 95% – best friend ever! 97% – I like you ☺, 98% – let’s go on a date?, 100% – love you!  
Copy on your wall to see what your friend picks out about you! ☺

This type of chain posts are commented the most frequently, as they instigate community members to make assessments (either positive or negative) about their friends in the style: *If I am the best, write B, if I am just a friend, write F, if you hate me, write H, if you want us to be friends forever, write FF*. However, the texts indicate that sometimes they are constructed only in view of shaping a positive opinion; the listed qualities are either exclusively positive or the latter predominates and comments are generally approving. Sometimes, these posts are used to learn about mutual relationships; they can reveal who are leaders or who are ostracised from a social group. It is this kind of posts that support the identity construction of developing youngsters, the main motivator of which (see above: Vignoles et al. 2006) is satisfying the needs related to self-esteem, belonging and efficacy.

Facebook ‘like’, ‘comment’ and ‘share’ buttons enable friends to react to posts and also get feedback from the community members about concrete posts. Sentimental chain letters become a kind of medium for expressing friendly feelings towards one’s peers and demonstrating caring, yet also for ousting some members from the group. Quite a few posts dwell upon boys’ and girls’ sentimental feelings and love, which is ineluctable in teenagers’ generic self-determination and maturation processes. Topics could be unravelled in long and tragic love stories, like, for instance, the following post:

What is the true meaning of love?

A girl and a boy are motorcycling at 160 km/h. Girl: Please brake, I am scared. Boy: No, this is fun! Girl: No, it’s not. Please, we are going too fast! Boy: OK. Tell me you love me and I will slow down. Girl: Okay. I love you. Could you brake now, please ... Boy: Now give me a hug. \*The girl hugs the boy.\* Boy: Could you take my helmet off and put it on yourself?

It's driving me nuts. Next day in newspapers: A motorcyclist ran into a building due to a brake problem; the driver was killed, the passenger survived. What really happened was that the boy understood half-way that the brakes were out of order, and instead of telling the girl about it, he asked her to tell him she loved him and felt her hug for the last time ... The boy gave his helmet to the girl in spite of the fact that it meant his own death ... ♥♥♥ If you love someone, post it on your wall.

This kind of urban legends with nameless characters spread widely in chain posts. The unexpected punch line is emotionally easy to remember and has an educational connotation.

Novel chain posts comprise a number of texts in the form of a questionnaire, which are not anonymous any more but involve concrete members of the community. Many of them are intriguing and simulate the forbidden/hidden world of alcohol, sex and other topics, in which the posters at this age have no practical experience yet, although they certainly pursue interest in the so-called adult issues.

Birthday! Go to your profile and take the first eight friends on the left:  
Birthday child: ...  
Drops 'dead' under the table: ...  
Jumps into the cake: ...  
Tanks up with vodka: ...  
Performs a striptease on the table: ...  
Dances by him/herself: ...  
Kisses the birthday child: ...  
Comes to the party uninvited and gets drunk: ...  
Congratulations! :D

This kind of birthday questionnaire enables youngsters in their pre-teens to develop their fantasy world and feel out boundaries. The described party culture could be a reality for adults, yet provides youngsters a creative opportunity to peep into the adults' mysterious activities. Irrefutably, these topics are largely influenced by modern media and television.

The lore of postmodern era is closely connected with popular culture. The impact of popular culture, advertising and media on youngsters' world, including interest in films, music and sports, is confirmed by the presence of local and foreign youth idols anchored in posts (e.g. Justin Bieber, Rihanna, famous Estonian pop singers Koit Toome, Getter Jaani, etc.), characters from Harry Potter stories and things related to them, etc.

Go to your profile and look to the left; these ten friends are:

Lady Gaga: ... :D

Michael Jackson: ... :D

Madonna: ... :P

Selena Gomez: ...

Rebecca Black: ... :P

Miley Cyrus: ... xD

Justin Bieber: ... x)x)

Usher: ... :D

Rihanna: ... :P

Bruno Mars: ... :D

Posts are mainly commented on by the members of the community whose names happened to be in the list. The things happening, for example, at a birthday party can be intriguing, comments are usually humorous and allow for fantasies on the basis of activities or characters in the post, refute a concrete action or exaggerate it and continue fantasising.

### **Close relatives (family and home)**

A separate sub-topic is related to **family members and home**, which proves that family, i.e. parents, grandparents and other close relatives (e.g. sister, brother) are important in young people's lives. These posts indicate that youngsters care about their mothers and fathers and these chain letters are typically posted in waves on Mother's and Father's Day but also at other times. Chain posts relating to family members confirm the results of several researches (e.g. Harter 1999), which claim that in the teens, peers' opinions become more and more weighty, whereas parents and next of kin are still regarded as significant and remain so.<sup>9</sup>

Sometimes the posts speak (either directly or indirectly) about parents' failure to do something and admonish them to make choices in the interests of their children and appreciate moral values. This idea is well expressed in the following allegoric narrative, in which the son is trying to give a hint to his father that time dedicated to the child should be more important than work.

Father came home from work late at night. He was tired and grumpy as always. His five-year-old son was waiting for him at the doorstep.

"Dad, could I ask you something?"

"Of course, what's up?"

"Dad, how much do you make an hour?"

“What do you need to know that for?” the father got upset.

“I need to. Please tell me how much you make an hour.”

“Well, around five hundred. Why?”

“Dad, could you lend me three hundred kroons?”

“You want money for a silly toy, don’t you?” Father raised his voice. “Go to your room and go to bed! You can’t be such an egoist! I work the whole day long, come home dog-tired, and you are putting forward demands!”

The son went quietly into his room and closed the door. The father was still grumpy. “First he asks about my salary and then he wants money!” After a while he calmed down and started feeling sorry for the boy. “Maybe he really needs something so badly? Oh, what the heck! He has never asked me for money before!”

When the father went to his son’s room, the latter was already in bed. “Are you asleep already?” the father asked.

“No, I am just lying,” the boy answered.

“I was too tough with you. I had a hard day today. I am sorry! Here’s the money.”

The boy thanked his father cheerfully and took several worn-out bank-notes from under his pillow. When the father saw that his son already had money, he felt spiteful again. The boy carefully counted all the money. “Why did you ask me for money if you already had some?” the father grumbled.

“I needed some more but now I’ve got enough,” the son answered. “See, here’s exactly five hundred kroons. I would like to buy an hour of your time. Please come home an hour earlier tomorrow and let’s have dinner together.”

If you value most the time that we spend with our loved ones, click ‘like’ and post the parable on your wall!

Seemingly minor details refer to cultural and social changes, so the monetary unit ‘kroon’ enables us to date the parable back to the period of Estonia’s own money, which ended on December 31, 2010.

Posts under this category feature caring, kindness and honesty; in addition to mother and father other close relatives are also in the foreground; the following post, for example, expresses love for brothers and sisters:

My friend asked me if I love my brother/sister. I answered in the negative. Then he asked if I would help them if they had a problem; I said no. Finally he asked if I cared about my brother/sister at all. I answered: “I don’t love my brother/sister, I adore them; if they had a problem, I wouldn’t just help them but would run for them into a burning house,

and if they weren't there any more, I would die." Click 'like' and put it on your wall if you have the best brother/sister in the world! :)

I have differentiated between the first and the second categories, although they both feature a moral expressing the importance of friendship and altruism, which allows viewing them also as a joint category (about abstract altruism and temporality of human life as different categories see, e.g., Seljamaa 2003).

### **School and school-related events**

To some extent, the third topic relates to the first one, yet, has more to do with **school and things happening there**. These messages feature positive facets related to school, which find their expression in school anticipation and attitude towards school and peers as something pleasant, for example:

I like my class very much. If you like yours, too, and you would like to see it, click 'like' and post it on your wall (L).

On the other hand, these messages reflect, through a humorous prism, some haunting obligations accompanying school and learning:

Why do you have to go to school? Math – we have calculators, right? Mother tongue – I can speak, can't I? Physics/chemistry – yeah, sure, the sun is hot! Biology – well I definitely know that hares have ears. Health education – I know how to walk and run if necessary. Geography – north, east, south, west. History – I know exactly what happened yesterday. Post it on your wall if you think the same! (:

The group under study comprises youngsters in their pre-teens, yet chain letters are also posted by adults. It was namely them who, on the first days of September, 2012, initiated a chain appeal relating to the beginning of the school year, which testifies to the educational opportunities provided by this folklore genre. Adults and parents are in contact with children through Facebook community and in this concrete case chain posts are used for educational purposes, to remind the youngsters about rules of behaviour.

To all the youngsters who return to school!

If you see that somebody has a hard time making friends or you witness someone being harassed because they do not have friends or they are too shy or not wearing the finest clothes, please be there for them. Say hello or at least smile when you meet them in the corridor or schoolyard. You

do not know what their life outside school is like. Your being friendly can change someone's life a lot!

Copy this on your wall to abolish bullying at school.

On a more general plane, this posting about school harassment refers to shaping common values, and a comment by an adult following it (e.g.: This is important and is also valid for teachers and in adults' working places) provides a wider social meaning, also indicating that bullying and power abuse are issues not only at school and for schoolchildren but also spread in society on a wider scale. The authorship of these texts is a separate topic: when reading the posts, it seems that the educational and more complex parables are created by adults who are originators of directional values and whose texts are consumed by youngsters.

### **Chain posts spreading as news(folk)lore**

In order to understand the background of some chain posts, we have to ask what exactly was taking place in society when a concrete letter spread or which events were in the centre of media or public attention at the time. In quite a few cases, posts have been initiated by **real situations, topical events and convulsions and their media coverage**. Chain letters may reflect emotions and fears relating to the surrounding reality and instigated by concrete events. So, for example, chain posts reveal human horror and concern about the bloodshed on Utøya Island in Norway in July 2011 and the impunity of the criminal responsible for it.

The person who killed at least 92 people in Oslo can be sentenced for 21 years at the most. Put it on your wall if you think that he deserves life sentence or capital punishment.

Information about events is usually obtained through the media, whereas chain posts are a reaction to both the events and their media coverage. Through media world and distant events as well as local specific ones reach the youngsters. Involvement in social bottlenecks can be demonstrated by the post spread as newslore in the autumn of 2011, which appeared after an accident in a nursery school in Tallinn, and which appealed to the city authorities to think about children's safety and fix the playgrounds.

Yesterday at 12 an innocent three-year-old boy got killed in a nursery school in Lasnamäe (district in Tallinn)!!! The thing that caused it was a ladder with a missing rung. The boy got stuck in between the rungs and suffocated. The paramedics tried to resuscitate him but failed. Why

couldn't the city authorities fix the playgrounds at nursery schools? Why are politicians interested only in their pay rise? Why couldn't they spend this money on children's playgrounds? If you agree that the city should fix the playgrounds at nursery schools, click 'like' and post this message on your wall. ://

Such chain narratives often comprise stereotypes (e.g., politicians are only interested in their own pay rise) through which more general collective identities are assumed and processed.

### **Prevention of accidents (incl. computer viruses, alcohol, drug-related)**

Sometimes chain posts feature a threatening tone, which in itself can frighten people. This is actually a classical characteristic of the chain letter: the forwarder of the letter is promised good luck whereas the one breaking the chain is threatened with bad luck and consequences in the style: if you do not copy the posting and pass it on within a certain time, something very bad will happen to you. The spread of the religion-shaded 'letters from heaven' started to subside already after the First World War (see, e.g., Anderson 1937: 23); yet, the exploitation of superstition and magic inherent in these letters (belief that if you act in a certain way and pass on the letter, you can control your life and guarantee success) is there even nowadays. Short quizzes testify to the fact that it is namely younger posters that believe in the content of these letters.<sup>10</sup> Yet, nowadays, the role of letters in communication is more important than in the past, especially as technical solutions enable us to comment on the letters and express our own opinions about them.

This material also includes serious warnings. Chain letters are used, for example, to inform the peers about computer viruses, although we cannot be sure whether or to what extent the users have actually come across these viruses themselves.

There is a trojan virus called Koobface worm that targets Facebook users. It gathers your information, penetrates the system and closes it down. Don't open the link Barack Obama Clinton Skandal. And if Smartgirl 15 sends you a friend invitation, don't accept it, as it is a VIRUS. If any of your friends should accept it, you will also get this virus. PUT THIS ON YOUR WALL AND SPREAD AMONG YOUR FRIENDS!!!!

Bad habits are also recalled; for example, young people are warned against sitting behind the wheel after consuming alcohol and suggested they should

also impede their peers from doing it. The plots of warning chain letters might be loans from urban legends of earlier times. Such longer and often moralising parables are rather like practical warnings and precautions, reminding young people of the things that they might forget in their bravado. The following post is a regretful address to the mother by a girl who was killed in a car accident due to alcohol. The aim of this extremely emotional writing with moral shading is to make youngsters ponder on this and warn about the consequences.

Mom, I went to a party with my friends and I remember you telling me, “Don’t drink!” You asked me not to, as I was supposed to drive after the party. So I only had soda. I was proud of myself as I followed your advice. Contrary to my friends, I made the right choice.

When the party was over, everybody got in the car, although they shouldn’t have driven. I knew that I was sober. Mom, I couldn’t image what the future had in store for me ... Now I am lying on the asphalt and can hear policemen talking ... There is blood all over the asphalt and I am trying not to cry ... I can hear the doctors say I am not going to make it ... I am sure that the friend who was driving didn’t think he was going that fast. After all, he had decided to drink and now I must die. Why do they do it, Mom?!?! Although they know they destroy lives.

I am in such pain – as if I have been stabbed with several knives.

Please tell my sister not to be scared, and my dad to be strong. Someone should have told my friend not to drink if he was going to drive. If his parents had warned him like you did with me, I would still be alive. My breathing gets weaker and weaker and I am so scared, Mom. These are my last moments and I am so desperate! I’d like to hug you and tell you how much I love you ... I love you, Mom ... Goodbye ...

This was written by a journalist who happened to be on the place of accident.

The girl whispered these words before she died, and the shocked journalist wrote them down. The same journalist started a campaign against drunk driving. If you read this post but do not share it or even delete it, you will lose your chance; even if you don’t drink yourself and it doesn’t concern you directly, you’ll make others realise that their life is in danger ...

Please copy it and post it on your wall!

Digital folklore researcher Trevor J. Blank has emphasised that “while orally transmitted legends convey societal fears and prejudices in coded language, electronically transmitted narratives express these sentiments more abrasively, due to the sender’s anonymity” (2009: 9). Nowadays, people face traffic-related



Sometimes the letters consist of narratives and statements that are similar to urban legends and horror stories and imply believing, yet are apparently not very truthful. The following is a sample text that describes as a truthful tradition the way that cats are treated in China – a faraway area both geographically and culturally, intensifying an ethnocentric stereotype.

A: It is allowed to kill animals in China! Women come and film how they kill kitties! First they beat the kitty and then take their high-heeled shoes and cast them against the kitty's head and belly. The kitty cries but the women laugh! And then it doesn't suffer anymore and dies! I can't understand what's wrong with these people!!! :( If you share my opinion, click 'like' and post it on your wall!!!

B: Horrible.

A: :(

C: Creepy and absolutely unacceptable! :( I wonder if the Chinese cannot help it?! :( The animal is absolutely helpless against humans and I think it is just hideous and heartless to take advantage of it this way! :( What do they get out of it?! :( I am not going to copy it on my wall because (I don't mean any harm with it) it makes me sick and I feel like weeping, but I wish with all my heart this would end and this is not only the Chinese who do such things! :(

A: YES... I agree.

D: And this should be disallowed to EVERYBODY!

D: But it is nice that Estonians still primarily wear their high-heeled shoes instead of using them for 'a bit' different purpose...

A: :D

E: But why can't we punish the people who mistreat animals? We punish the ones who abuse other people, don't we?

D: Indeed.

The four girls' discussion following the post is especially interesting. All the commenters agree that the way animals are treated must be disapproved (*hideous, unacceptable, makes me sick*), and they offer solutions (*punishment*) or even find something positive (*it is nice that Estonians still primarily wear their high-heeled shoes*). The commented chain posting is a step forward from the traditional pedagogical system based on orders and prohibitions and allows for shaping common values in discussion.



## **Parodies of chain letters**

A separate category comprises jokes about Facebook, from sayings to anecdotes. These include aphorisms and maxims from earlier times posted on Facebook walls. Defining interpretations about school and life in general seem to be appropriate for spreading as a new wave of chain letters in social media.

A great number of chain posts are **parodies of chain letters**, which emphasise that this phenomenon should not be taken very seriously and could rather be treated as useless spam. Even in mainly comic parody texts the final formula is an order to spread the text and the interrupter of the chain is threatened to be punished; yet, the hyperbolic images and exaggerated ideas make you doubt their plausibility.

Copy it on your wall if chain letters get on your nerves; for example: if you don't share it, a faceless man will come and strangle you ... FB IS NOT REAL LIFE!

In contrast, some parodies demolish the style of the chain letter. The following list of punishments inflicted on the posters of chain letters is a specimen of absurd humour:

Each time you copy some kind of sentimental crap on your wall:

- \* an angel dies of cancer;
- \* one little penguin gets its feet cut off;
- \* one dolphin also dies each time, a very cute one;
- \* at least ten kittens are castrated;
- \* five dolphin pups get killed with an oar;
- \* two pandas are cut into shashlik meat;
- \* at least one person in your friends list thinks you are an idiot.

Attitude towards earnest chain posters is expressed, for example, in the following post: "If you have always been an idiot who shares all kinds of crap on your wall, add it in your status".

Some parodies with their metaphors appear like philosophic contemplations, which, analogously with aphorisms and defining sayings should instigate further and more serious reflection.

Facebook is a mental institution and we are all patients here. We are sitting alone, staring at the screen, imagining that we are being social. Some of us have fantasy farms, -towns, -animals and other things. We nudge one another and think it is okay, and we even write on the walls. If you are also being treated here, scribble it on your wall! I stole this message from another patient! :D

On the basis of a sample story, a parody can also state in plain words that nothing will happen to the chain breaker.

A girl was on Facebook in her computer. She saw a letter, saying: “If you don’t share it, you will die tomorrow!” The girl did not copy it on her wall and guess what? NOTHING HAPPENED! Share it if you hate these chain letters!!

It is mainly chain letters that are ridiculed; yet, sometimes chain postings are also used to mock at other genres. For example, understanding of the following chain message entitled *Pen is a Writing Implement* needs concrete background knowledge:

Hi kid!

Are you one of those who don’t carry a pen? Well ... borrow from others? What?? This is your decision, I wouldn’t borrow my pen to any of the ‘new pupils’; why should you? The pen is really and actually the only implement that a child uses for writing. Do you know how big is the percentage of Estonian children that carry a pen? I don’t, but what is wrong with you? If somebody speaks about pens, remember and hammer it into your head and write it on your wall that A PEN IS A WRITING IMPLEMENT!!

This is obviously a ridiculing imitation of the HIV prevention campaign organised by the National Institute for Health Development in the autumn of 2011 under the heading *Condom is Sex*, which evoked wide response in the media and among the general public, giving rise to a number of textual and video parodies. The Facebook chain letter version is a good example of these parodies.

The majority of chain posts are international and are translations of mainly English-language wall posts. Only in a few cases I have found chain posts in English among the ones posted by Estonian youngsters; most of them spread in Estonian and are sometimes supplemented locally. As in their search for ethnic identity youngsters are open to cultural and linguistic influences (Tamemägi & Ehala 2012: 243), the spread of translated texts in the mother tongue as written everyday tradition is useful for the sustainability of the language (although a teenager can understand the texts also in English and could just as well keep and share the original version). However, we have to agree that the translations of the chain posts are often clumsy and crude. English-language computer terminology has brought into Estonian such direct loans from English as, e.g., *kopi* (copy) and *peist* (paste), whereas Facebook technical system requires the usage of such words as *laik* (like) and *šeer* (share).

## IN CONCLUSION

There is nothing new under the sun! The tradition of chain letters has been transferred, with alterations, from the past to the present. Many formal elements and content motives can be found in earlier folkloric records, and their origin can be traced back to the religion-shaded 'letters from heaven' (allegedly written down by God or Jesus Christ), poetry notebook tradition or well-known children's horror stories, but also different jokes and folkloric short forms. However, chain posts, even if they apply topics, structural canons, etc. known from earlier tradition, leave the impression of a fresh tradition in the pre-set Facebook environment and should be treated in close connection with wider cultural context. In web environment they could be viewed as spam; yet, undoubtedly, they constitute a peculiar form of everyday communication, which, due to their evergreen topics as well as reminders of current events can provide significant information about the era, environment, culture and worldview on a wider scale. Chain messages are part of the young poster's daily spontaneous person brand or public image and reveal certain things about the whole lore group who share these letters, sometimes change them at their own discretion, post them on their walls, comment on them and thereby constantly communicate. By their nature chain posts support pre-teens' identity construction mechanisms, and the topics (friendship, romantic feelings, home, family, close relatives, pets, shocking public events concerning young people, etc.) support individual self-quests and evolution of social skills. These letters also represent spheres of collective identity. In identity construction, different factors relating to satisfying youngsters' self-esteem, continuity, distinctiveness, belonging, efficacy and meaning operate as motivators.

A more detailed analysis of chain epistolarium indicates that these texts often present values essential and meaningful from the point of view of the existence of Man as a social being. These could refer to caring, honesty, justice, preservation of life and health both by youngsters' family members and peers at school as well as virtual and real-world communities, and also attitudes towards worldwide problems. Recently, children's and youngsters' value education and systematic shaping of values have been widely discussed in Estonia. From the point of view of the researcher, chain posts operate as indicators for young people's values; also, through these postings informal – everyday and organic, unnoticeable and natural, created and regulated by young people themselves – value education takes place, which shapes moral concepts in accordance with the ideas widely spread in society, yet often questioning them.

Modern folklore is open to rapid changes, short-termed as to its content and loses its topicality quickly. We dare not predict how viable the phenomenon of chain posting will be and what kinds of developments it will be undergoing. Yet, it is evident that Facebook with all its opportunities seems to be a suitable place for this rapidly modifying folkloric phenomenon.

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Research for this article was supported by research project SF 0030181s08 and grants ETF 8149 and ETF 8137.
- <sup>2</sup> Young people often spend their out-of-school time at the computer. According to 2007 school lore collection competition, schoolchildren use the computer two to four hours per day on average, mainly visiting communication portals, the most popular of which in 2007 were rate.ee, feim.ee and orkut.com (Voolaid et al. 2007: 358). The peak of Facebook among Estonian users was the year 2010.
- <sup>3</sup> In 2012, Facebook took into use, instead of the wall, the timeline application, with an aim to turn the user profile into a virtual notebook.
- <sup>4</sup> Synonymous terms *chain letter*, *luck letter* and *luck chain*, which most probably are German loans in Estonian, have been discussed by folklorist Mare Kõiva (1993: 12), and in more detail by Elo-Hanna Seljamaa in her bachelor's thesis (2004: 11), which mentions as the core of chain letters or classical chain letters the ones exploiting good or bad luck. In this article the terms *chain letter* (with a wider meaning) and *chain post* (more accurate in Facebook environment) are synonyms of equal meaning, their sub-form being *luck letter* or *luck chain*.
- <sup>5</sup> Here it is essential to point out that the idea of a *dialogue* (according to Mikhail Bakhtin) on an extensive meaning field has been used by Elo-Hanna Seljamaa (2004) in her in-depth research into chain letters as a dynamic folklore genre, which highlights, above all, the researcher's dialogue with empiricism but also relationships with other researches.
- <sup>6</sup> The Children's Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA) mandates that websites that collect information about users (like Facebook) are not allowed to sign on anyone under the age of thirteen. Accordingly, Facebook's Statement of Rights and Responsibilities requires users of the social network to be at least thirteen years old. In Estonia as in many other countries many pre-teens use the service anyway: some get permission to create an account from their parents while others lie about their age to get past sign-up restrictions.
- <sup>7</sup> The original chain posts are in the possession of the author; the majority of the text corpus has been published in a popular-scientific collection "Pane *like* ja postita oma seinale: Valimik Facebooki ahelpostitusi" (Click 'like' and post it on your wall: Collection of Facebook Chain Posts) (Voolaid 2012).

- <sup>8</sup> School lore fieldwork in Hiiumaa in October 2012 showed that friends most active in virtual communication on Facebook are largely the same ones with whom everyday eye-to-eye communication occurs (e.g. class- and school peers).
- <sup>9</sup> This assumption was also confirmed by the results of the all-Estonian school lore collection competition in 2007. The first topic in the questionnaire entitled *Leisure and Friends* asked the pupils to name someone they wanted to follow. In addition to favourite musicians, actors, singers and sportsmen, youngsters often mentioned their parents, which shows how important they consider their family (see also Voolaid et al. 2007: 356).
- <sup>10</sup> In October 2012, I participated in school lore fieldwork in Hiiumaa. In oral interviews, I also asked questions about chain postings. In several cases teenagers from basic school answered in retrospective that several years ago they had passed on these letters as they believed in the threats befalling on those ignoring the orders. They also emphasised that now, being older and more experienced, they did not believe in it any more.

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# DEATH AND BEREAVEMENT ON THE INTERNET IN SWEDEN AND NORWAY

*Anders Gustavsson*

**Abstract:** Memorial websites on the Internet constitute a new form for expressing grief and for remembering deceased relatives and friends. In my sample of memorial websites, I have studied those that are open to the public. Such memorial sites have had an explosive development during the 2000s. The messages become a virtual, social meeting place by giving mourners an opportunity to express themselves and avoid remaining alone with their grief. In this study the all-inclusive issue has been how mourners express their emotions and concepts of belief regarding the deceased person. *The question focused upon is the belief in something posthumously supernatural.* Memorial sites on the Internet are also set up for dead pets. The boundary between humans and animals as spiritual beings is discussed in the study. In Norway the vision is primarily directed backwards, relating to traditions, and in Sweden forwards, in the direction of changes. In Sweden there is a greater tendency to adopt innovations and to leave the long-standing. This study can, in addition, play a part in the contemporary discussion about greater outspokenness concerning death, compared to the prevalent silence and taboos of the 1900s.

**Keywords:** grief, innovation, memorial websites, national comparison, tradition

## INTRODUCTION

As a cultural historian and folklorist, I have carried out research on varying themes and perspectives concerning death and dying in Sweden and Norway. My first studies were done in the 1960s and the 1970s about social distinctions in old cemeteries and about older burial customs and their survival, as well as their respective disappearance. One study concerned the disappearance of a very ancient funerary ritual in which guests drank a glass of wine or, in Norway, beer, in memory of the deceased and as a gesture of farewell just before the coffin was taken to the burial (Gustavsson 1973). This study was part of a bigger project at the University of Lund, which concentrated on life cycle from birth until death in Sweden (Bringéus 1987).

After the 1970s, I left the research field concerning death and dying for a long time. This theme was not any longer topical within cultural research discussions in Scandinavia – on the contrary, it was practically a taboo to study such a theme. I noted, however, that an observable change occurred in the 2000s. This is in line with what the Danish sociologist Michael Hviid Jacobsen has found within social science after the 1980s. Then themes around death and dying could be brought to the fore instead of the earlier tabooing (Hviid Jacobsen 2009). In this new research situation I returned to study death and dying in earlier times but with an emphasis on the 1990s and the 2000s (Döden 2009). The research perspectives have been concentrated on individual symbols, collective rituals and messages and beliefs expressed on the Internet. The first study dealt with symbols of gravestones in cemeteries in Norway and Sweden in the 1990s and onwards and was performed within the research project *Symbols of Death*, started in 2000. I was especially interested in the new expressions of individualism in cemeteries. Questions about the growing individualism instead of earlier collectivism became obvious in ethnological discussions (Gustavsson 2003).

The second study discussed collective rituals around sudden death in recent times and was worked out within a collaboration project by cultural historians at the University of Oslo, and was concerned with different perspectives on rituals (Ritualer 2006). The third and latest study deals with bereavement expressed on the memorial sites for dead humans and pets on the Internet. Emphasis is placed on the analysis of the contents of the messages which stress a perspective of faith. This study has been worked out within the interdisciplinary research network named Nordic Network of Thanatology (NNT), founded in 2010, and Belief Narrative Network within the global International Society for Folk Narrative Research (ISFNR) ([www.isfnr.org](http://www.isfnr.org)). I summarised many of my studies on death, burials and bereavement from earlier times until recently in a publication in English, entitled *Cultural Studies on Death and Dying in Scandinavia* (Gustavsson 2011).

It became important to compare the situations and developments in Norway and Sweden, as beginning from 1997 I worked as a professor at the University of Oslo, Norway, instead of my earlier academic positions in Sweden, in the old universities in Lund and Uppsala. In the 1980s and 1990s I met renewed discussions about national characters both in Norway (Hodne 1994) and in Sweden (Arnstberg 1989; Daun 1989), but no national comparisons were made within ethnology and cultural history. However, I became interested in such comparisons, through which it may be easier to observe the characteristic traits between cultures and in this case national characters. From the end of the 1990s I worked within a Swedish-Norwegian border project under the title

*Cultural Encounters of the Borders* (Danielsson & Gustavsson 1999) and was able, through fieldworks with interviews and photographs from both sides of the border, to observe many differences between these two neighbouring countries, which I had not imagined earlier.

During the 2000s, research on the material obtained from the Internet began to attract attention in the cultural sciences. This is seen, inter alia, in the articles in the annual *Ethnologia Scandinavica* 2009, which is devoted to critical questions about the Internet as a research source. Also of interest is the anthology *Digital Storytelling* edited by Norwegian sociologist Knut Lundby in 2008. The term 'netnography' has been taken into use. Robert V. Kozinets has provided the following definition: "Netnography is participant-observational research based on online fieldwork. It uses computer-mediated communications as a source of data to arrive at the ethnographic understanding and representation of a cultural or communal phenomenon" (Kozinets 2010: 60). The International Society for Ethnology and Folklore (SIEF) published an anthology *Shaping Virtual Lives* in 2012 (Shaping 2012).

In this new research situation I decided to study memorial sites that I had observed on the Internet. This new medium affords undreamt of and hitherto quite unexploited opportunities for conducting cultural research by allowing access to the emotions, beliefs and experiences of present-day people. The memorial websites constitute a new form for expressing grief and for remembering deceased relatives and friends. The messages are expressed by individuals on their own PCs in the privacy of their homes.

Because the messages and the imaginary conversations are published on the Internet, they are also accessible to outsiders, both acquaintances and strangers, including scholars. In my sample of memorial websites, I have studied those that are open to the public. Because of ethical reasons, I have avoided the ones that are available only to a limited circle or for which the guest must log on. The new Internet media, including memorial websites, have led to wholly new perspectives on ethical questions about private and public spheres when compared to previously held opinions (Hannemyr 2009). The scholar would act unethically as a spy if he or she logged on and became a member of such closed sites merely to observe and record, not to contribute a personal message.

Respect for anonymity is vital, as I study persons who write messages without their being aware of being followed. Anonymity in this study is achieved by omitting the surnames of message writers in my text. Messages on memorial websites usually include a photograph of the deceased, often a whole series of photos taken during the life of the deceased. These I have chosen not to publish because this would make identification easier. What is essential is that the scholar consciously tries to avoid inflicting mental harm upon those who are being studied.

As a cultural scholar, one cannot escape being affected psychologically when reading all the extremely sorrowful and emotional messages on memorial websites. The scholar's insight power and feelings of empathy are vital in familiarising them with and interpreting the experiences of those persons who share their often despairing emotions.

Conducting the study on a regional basis in Norway and Sweden has not been possible, because the residences of the deceased and the writers are seldom noted; nor has it been possible to gain any knowledge of the writers' social statuses.

Memorial sites have undergone an explosive development during the 2000s. In 2008 there were about 600 memorial websites in Sweden (*Dagens Nyheter*, October 6, 2008). My research deals with memorial websites that became available in Norway and Sweden during 2009 and 2010, with the most extensive material being found in Sweden. My aim is to compare the situation in these two countries. What differences and/or similarities can be noted on memorial sites? What can be the causes for these differences? Innovation acceptance is contrasted with the preservation of traditions.

The memorial websites were set up by people who had recently suffered extreme grief in their immediate relationships.<sup>1</sup> Messages about one and the same deceased person can continue over several years in connection with, for example, birthdays, name days and anniversaries of the dead ones. Although I have read messages posted on a great number of memorial sites, this study is by no means quantitative. As the memorial websites are so new, it is not yet possible to study changes over time, but it may be possible through renewed studies later on in the future.

Those who post messages on memorial websites are for the most part women, often mothers or widows and sometimes sisters. What can be the cause of this gender difference? It may be that at times of crisis men have more difficulty in expressing their deep emotions in words, and instead they move away and take shelter behind their wives' or partners' backs.

These websites become a virtual, social meeting place, giving mourners an opportunity to express themselves and avoid remaining alone in their grief. A new social fellowship arises, which is neither restricted in terms of space nor related to previous contacts in one's life. This was not possible before the Internet time. Memorial websites help to keep the memory of the deceased alive and not to be easily forgotten. Close relatives in the state of mourning are thus clearly gratified when other people post messages and when they light symbolic candles without words in memory of the deceased. A number of newspaper stories mainly in Sweden but also in Norway are based on interviews about the value of memorial websites and blogs for the closest grieving relatives in

their prolonged process of mourning. This is an obvious example of the media's increasing frankness about reporting on the very real and intimate aspects of death that strike individuals.

In my present study the all-inclusive issue is how mourners on the memorial websites express their emotions and concepts of belief regarding the deceased person. *The question focused upon is the belief in something posthumously supernatural*, and not primarily the rational expression of grief such as remembrance, loss and love. Do concepts of life after death exist and how are they expressed? What is the status of the deceased considered to be on the other side and is he or she accessible in any way for the mourners? Can the dead be aware of and perceive the messages that the living send to them? Is any form of dialogue possible with them? Can the living at a certain point in the future, after their own deaths, be reunited with their dead loved ones and friends?

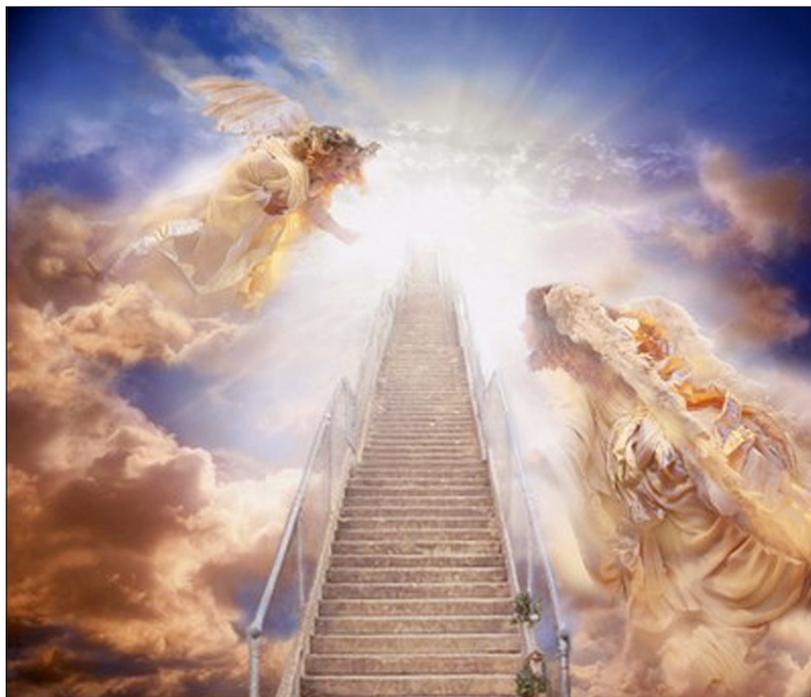
Memorial sites on the Internet are also set up for dead pets (in my research cats), for their former owners to express beliefs about what happens to pets after they die. The fixing of the boundary between humans and animals as spiritual beings is discussed.

This study can, in addition, play a part in the contemporary discussion about greater outspokenness concerning death, compared to the prevalent silence and taboos of the 1900s. The general trend, remarked upon by Michael Hviid Jacobsen (2009), can have aided people in the extreme, without the need to confront other people in person.

## **BEREAVEMENT EXPRESSED ON MEMORIAL WEBSITES FOR DECEASED PERSONS**

The concept that the deceased are somewhere in heaven is very common in the messages. There they can meet with others who have died and live together with them. In their messages in guest books, other mourners can express hopes that their various relatives will be able to meet one another even if they were not acquainted during their earthly lives. A new fellowship that is comprehended to be real and similar to earthly life is assumed to occur after death. The deceased are believed to be able to continue practising their activities in heaven. Doubt or absolute denial of any form of existence after death is extremely rare in the messages.

It is often thought that the deceased can be contacted by the living and that the latter can even communicate their messages to the deceased on a computer. The technical possibilities of this life are, in other words, transferable to the existence on the far side of death. When the deceased are in heaven, they both



**Figure 1.** Angels guard the stairs that the dead use to climb up to heaven ([www.tillminneav.se/showPage.php?id=.344](http://www.tillminneav.se/showPage.php?id=.344), no longer available).

watch over and protect their friends and relatives. The conception of a reunion with the deceased sometime in the future often appears in the messages. A new existence and fellowship can begin that will never end. Finiteness is replaced by the everlasting, and joy is restored supremely. This is something to look forward to as a consolation in one's state of grief.

Belief in angels occurs in the messages very often. In order to enter their world, the deceased must climb an endless stairway that is depicted in some of the messages. The meeting with angels is described in a clearly positive context for the deceased. They can also speak in poetic form about how happy they are among angels. When Marcus suddenly died in 2002 at 20 years of age, his mother Mari-Anne wrote poems in which her son spoke to her from heaven. Because it is so good to be “where angels dwell”, Marcus's mother believes that her son “will have a wonderful birthday party up there with the angels. I can see how you smile and laugh on your special day”. This was written on Marcus's twenty-fifth birthday in 2007 ([www.tillminneavmarcus.dinstudio.se](http://www.tillminneavmarcus.dinstudio.se)).

It is in keeping with neo-religious New Age conceptions (Alver 1999) that angels are the beings mainly discussed as having a supernatural or divine

character. Neither darkness nor punishment occurs after death, which is fully in line with present-day neo-religious movements.

A conception that is also used is that the deceased is a gift or a loan from God. God and Jesus are mentioned more often in Norwegian than in Swedish messages. This is especially noticeable in messages written by teenagers. When a Norwegian boy Trond was killed in a traffic accident at the age of 15, three girls from his class wrote: "God loves to pick flowers, and now he has picked the finest one, that's you, Trond". Several other school friends mentioned God in their memorial messages about Trond.

A common concept is that children and young people become angels after death. This is in striking contrast to earlier beliefs in which the deceased were supposed to be souls, not angels. British sociologist Tony Walter has also found a similar change concerning beliefs in England (Walter 2011). The mothers of the dead ones call themselves 'Mothers of angels'. In addition, we can see the glorification of the deceased that is expressed by calling them the very best, finest or prettiest angels in heaven. The deceased can continue to spread joy and humour in heaven just as they had done on earth. For example, when Anders died suddenly at 45 years of age, his wife wrote:

All the angels are going to experience your good humour; the winds will spread the sound of angels laughing at your jokes.

([www.tillminneav.se/showPage.php?id=683](http://www.tillminneav.se/showPage.php?id=683))



**Figure 2.** The mother of a deceased daughter has written: "Hugs from your beloved mother". The angel has both the halo and wings and may probably represent the daughter ([www.tillminneav.se/showPage.php?id=34](http://www.tillminneav.se/showPage.php?id=34), no longer available).

Memorial websites dedicated to the deceased generally contain far more traditional Christian conceptions in Norway than in Sweden. This concerns references to God and Jesus. In Sweden, we can observe more of a diffuse, general religiosity that reminds us of New Age modes of thought in which individuals and the brightness of a coming existence have a prominent position.

It can be difficult to give an explicit answer as to why former traditions associated with the deceased in general have a stronger position in Norway. A more obvious degree of secularisation clearly plays a certain role in Sweden. Another factor is individualism that is more evident in Sweden than in Norway. This is also visible in the choice of symbols on gravestones in Sweden and Norway in recent times (Gustavsson 2003). In Sweden there is often a tendency to regard what is new as being positive, to focus on the cheerful events emphasised by the media. The result can be that one covers over anything that is sorrowful.

*When a child dies in the womb*, it is quite usual for a mother in Sweden, but not in Norway, to write one or more messages on memorial websites. This usually results in several guest book messages from other mothers who have lost children in the same way. We often meet the declaration about the *stillborn infant* being an angel. This angel was in a hurry to return to heaven where the other angels dwelled. Angels are most often mentioned without God being named. A picture of a child with angel's wings is sometimes attached. These mothers call themselves 'Angel-mommies'. The infant's existence on the far side of death is seen as being a very real life. This is especially noticeable in messages that are written on delivery anniversaries. Parents can then imagine a birthday party in heaven and even send up a balloon. The mother of a girl called Adelfosie, who died in 2006, wrote:

Play with your angel friends and meet Mummy on the day when I come up to you! I'm looking forward to embracing you! [...] I do so hope that I will come to you in angel-land where time does not exist.

([www.adelfosie.webs.com/mammastankertiliver.htm](http://www.adelfosie.webs.com/mammastankertiliver.htm), no longer available)

In some cases parents state that they believe or in other cases know that after their own deaths they will see their children again in some vague future.

It can be said that a final characteristic of the memorial websites for stillborn infants is that they really do not differ in any way from the ones relating to living children who have died. In their reactions of grief, parents do not differentiate between a living and a stillborn child. Children are seen as coming to a different and supernatural existence. They have been borrowed, whether they were born alive or died in the womb. The sorrow does not begin only after the death of a child born alive but concerns also a stillborn child.

I have conducted a special study of memorial websites relating to *suicidal acts*. Such sites contain numerous distinctive elements compared to websites



**Figure 3.** This picture was published on a memorial website for Ehline, who committed suicide in 2007, at the age of 31. The text reads: 'May angels watch over you' ([www.minneavehline.blogg.se](http://www.minneavehline.blogg.se)).

dedicated to other dead persons; also, clear differences between Norway and Sweden can be observed. These distinctive elements include criticism of the deceased, self-reproach among close relatives and friends, criticism of psychiatric treatment and repudiation of existing suicide guides. There are also some similarities between websites relating to suicides and those set up for other dead persons.

Despite their sorrow, sense of loss and shock, some *Swedish statements* and guest book messages show that close relatives find comfort in believing that the person who died through suicide could have come to a different existence after death. It is believed to be better than the life the deceased once had and consciously chose to leave. This new existence is, however, conceived of as being diffuse. These are not traditional religious conceptions. No thoughts of punishment after death are expressed. This corresponds fully with the neo-religious conceptions of 'the regained paradise' (Kraft 2011). In Sweden, the surviving relatives are also believed to be able to make contact with the deceased in the latter's new existence. Numerous messages mention the probability of a reunion between the surviving relatives and the deceased in some vague future. So, the sister of a young man called Pierre, who took his life in 2005 when 20 years of age, wrote:

I hope you will meet all of us, one after the other, with wide-open arms when it's our turn to come to the other side, because I know you are there somewhere and are waiting for us. ([www.tillminneav.se](http://www.tillminneav.se))

The deceased can also meet angels in the afterlife who care for them. They can as well be conceived of as being angels. This is more frequently spoken of than are conceptions of angels helping the deceased. A glorification of the deceased often occurs, in which the latter is seen as being the best angel that can be found.

In Sweden, the differences between suicides and other deaths have largely been wiped out. A certain standardisation has taken place, comparable to what has occurred in many other areas of social life. Equality, not differentiation, concerns all, according to the dominant political and media norms that have become increasingly strong. In order to achieve equality, former boundaries separating people must be broken down. As ideas of equal worth for all people have become the great ideal, this is also expressed on the memorial websites for the deceased. The belief in some diffuse existence after death, conceptions of angels and a conviction about the surviving relatives' reunion in some distant future with the person they have lost through suicide is consistent with what is expressed on the memorial websites set up for deceased persons in general. This same consistency is valid with regard to questions of glorification and honouring of the deceased.



**Figure 4.** *“Light a candle for my angel child,” wrote Ehline’s mother on October 31, 2009 ([www.minneavehline.blogg.se](http://www.minneavehline.blogg.se)).*

Norway is more restrained when it comes to expressing oneself about suicide, and the boundary between suicide and other deaths is marked in an entirely different manner. One does not encounter conceptions of an existence after death for those who have committed suicide. Glorification or expressions of honour are unthinkable, since this could lead to others being tempted to commit suicides. A so-called emotional contagion (sometimes known as “spillover effect”) is to be hindered in every possible way. In Sweden, however, there is a clearly expressed conception about how messages on memorial websites can prevent suicide in that they show the unfortunate effects this has on the closest relatives. There are a number of visitors on Swedish guest books relating to suicide, who write that what they have read about suicides on the memorial websites encourages them not to take their own lives. They have gained a clear understanding of how much suffering a suicide causes to the closest relatives and friends.

The Norwegian material consisting of memorial websites about suicide is quantitatively scanty as compared to what exists in Sweden. This indicates that the former tabooing of suicide containing elements of shame is obviously greater in Norway. There also appears to be more keeping to former negative beliefs about those who commit suicide with reference to a coming afterlife. The stability of tradition is clearly more evident in Norway. Reticence concerned with speaking and writing about suicide is also noticeable in media presentations. In Sweden, too, the media was long restrained about mentioning personal names and writing articles about suicide. The death of the wrestler Mikael Ljungberg in 2004 resulted in a clearly observable change. It is after this period of time that more and more memorial websites have been established for persons who have committed suicide.

Even if equality and standardisation have become the ideal in Sweden, there are also certain differences between the websites set up for those who have committed suicide and those who have died in other ways. This is shown by the criticism, and not only glorification, that can be expressed about those who have taken their lives. The deceased cause extreme sorrow among their closest relatives and friends. For example, a young man named Janne took his own life when he and his girlfriend were 19 years of age. They had met in the evening, and had hugged and kissed each other. That same night he gassed himself to death, despite having said to his girlfriend, ‘see you tomorrow’. She expressed her anger in the following way:

Oh, how mad I was at him. How could he do this to me? We had planned to sit together in a nursing home, drinking beer and smoking Marlboros. ([www.metrobloggen.se/jsp/public/permalink.jsp?article=19.6367435](http://www.metrobloggen.se/jsp/public/permalink.jsp?article=19.6367435))

Criticism of this kind is even stronger in Norway than in Sweden. The words 'egoism' and 'cowardice' related to the deceased are conceptions that I have encountered on Internet websites only in Norway.

## **BEREAVEMENT ON MEMORIAL WEBSITES FOR PETS**

Around 2000, scholarly interest arose among especially Norwegian ethnologists in studying the cultural connections between Man and animals, and a big research project was conceived on this topic in Oslo (Thorsen 2001). In that connection I chose to study memorial sites for dead pets, particularly cats. Using specific examples from animal graveyards, I found expressions of emotional intimacy between humans and their pets. Swedish memorial websites on the Internet for deceased pets began to appear at about the turn of the millennium, in 2000, with discussion forums and guest books.<sup>2</sup> The number of such websites has increased noticeably since 2005. During the 2000s they also began to appear in Norway but not to the same extent as in Sweden.<sup>3</sup> The people who contribute to these guest books are for the most part those who have had similar experiences of losing their cats. The guest books thus become a form of a meeting place where emotions and faith can be expressed and shared without the participants having had any previous familiarity with one another.

The issues considered in my study focus on the way in which pet owners express their emotions and their faith when confronted with the reality of the death of their animals. Have the memories and emotions regarding pets assumed forms that resemble the way in which close relatives mourn a person who has died? Can conceptions about the existence after death also be perceived in the case of animals and how are they expressed?

There are many cases in Sweden, and some also in Norway, of long descriptions of what the cat has meant to its owner in many different situations over the years. A photo or a drawing of the deceased cat is usually found in online messages. In Sweden there are some examples of such photos that have been replaced by a black cross exactly like those found in some obituary notices for humans. This never occurs in Norway. The glorification of the cat is evident in most cases. The cat has provided psychological support for the owners. The Swedish contributions describe such a degree of intimacy between the human and the cat that the latter assumes completely human characteristics.

Detailed descriptions of how the cat died are commonly included in the texts in both the Swedish and the Norwegian material. These descriptions obvi-

ously constitute a way of adjusting to grief by allowing the owners to express their experiences of what has taken place. Intense and severe emotions are usually expressed especially in connection with the gruelling decision to have the veterinarian put the animal down. The psychological pain caused by the cat's sufferings has been very difficult to endure. In their grief, the owners in Sweden in some cases direct their accusations towards God. Such statements about God in relation to pets cannot be found in the Norwegian material. Here religion is kept separate from the death of an animal.

Generally speaking, it appears that pets are clearly integrated members in the families of those persons who choose to publish messages on the Internet. This applies to those who have the greatest need for expressing their grief and for sharing it with others. Grief and its accompanying emotions concerning the deceased pet have been provided with an opportunity to be expressed in the public sphere by making use of the Internet. In a developing modern society no need is felt for concealing grief from the others. It may even be less painful to write down one's experiences than to express them among one's nearest and dearest. The discussion forums on the Internet can in this way be of genuine assistance for surviving the lengthy process of mourning and for sharing it with others. In the midst of a difficult situation of grief, it may be of great help to realise that other people can publish contributions that will offer consolation and in which they can share their own previous experiences of endured grief. Traumatic emotions can be relieved when they surface through weeping or by written messages instead of being concealed. Answers may be received that can aid in the release of feelings in a grief-stricken situation.

A frequently recurring motif in Swedish statements is the concept of a future transcendent existence for the cat. The cat is thus believed to have acquired a new life in this feline heaven, which has a strong resemblance to its former living conditions on earth. Earthly life is in this way projected onto an assumed existence after death. Not only humans but also pets can be regarded as angels. The angel status can sometimes begin already during lifetime but manifests itself especially after death. The belief is very similar concerning dead humans and pets in Sweden. One expression that is used is that the deceased cat has passed on over the so-called 'rainbow bridge' to another world, called the Rainbow Country, where there are only positive emotions. In some cases a rainbow is depicted in the Internet contributions, as well as the 'rainbow bridge' that winds up towards the clouds.



**Figure 5.** A place called Rainbow Bridge ([www.acreswaycats.com/rainbowbridge.htm](http://www.acreswaycats.com/rainbowbridge.htm)).

Belief in a future reunion between the cat and its owner on the far side of death can often be expressed. A belief of this kind can be linked to a Christian faith in some cases and not merely to a diffuse and general religiousness. There are also some instances in Sweden, as well as a few in Norway, of a cat having been ascribed an angelic character. The cat Mitzi is characterised as being an angel in the feline heaven. This demonstrates an obvious similarity to what has become common on memorial sites dedicated to human beings. In this regard, a clearly religious element has appeared in recent years, something that reminds one of the manifestations of angels related to neo-religious conceptions that have been linked to the recent deaths of young people in Sweden and, to some extent, also in Norway. A belief of this kind about deceased cats living on after death, experiencing continued contacts with their surviving owners and meeting them again after they themselves die, seems to be a new phenomenon that has manifested itself on the Internet. Norwegian Internet sites contain some examples concerning a fairly diffuse existence of the deceased cats after their death, but far from as many as in Sweden. The two Norwegian examples of cats as angels do not mention a possible future existence in heaven. In Norway, such expressions of faith are reserved solely for deceased people. The fixing of the boundary between humans and animals as spiritual beings is more pronounced in Norway than in Sweden. Norwegian contributions sometimes indicate a direct criticism towards 'humanlike characterisation'. Again, Norway has saved considerably more of the earlier tradition than Sweden. The concept of the 'rainbow bridge' does, however, occasionally surface in Norway.

Swedish texts on the Internet consist of longer and more emotional messages than those I discovered in Norway. Conceptions of a feline heaven and angelic forms after death were in the focus in Sweden. This constitutes a manifest difference as compared to Norway. There the spiritual dimension in the form of pictorial symbols and texts is more pronounced on human graves than in Sweden (Gustavsson 2003). The situation between these two countries is entirely reversed regarding animal graves or animal memorial websites. In Sweden, the spiritual dimension after death is actually more pronounced with reference to animals than to humans. Changes in Sweden correspond with the preservation of traditions in Norway. Openness as regards death and the concept that one can converse with the deceased animal clearly appears to be on the increase in Sweden. Evidence has been found in Sweden, but not in Norway, that grief-stricken owners have conducted conversations with their dead cats on the Internet in the hope that the cats will be able to hear them communicate. The cat Isa that died in 2001, at the age of fifteen, received the following message from her owner:

I want you to know that I keep a picture of you on my bedside table and that I chat with you every evening and say good night; have you heard me? ([www.katt.nu/kyrko-minnes5.htm](http://www.katt.nu/kyrko-minnes5.htm))

One might actually speak of an *anthropomorphic process*. As a main result, I have found that the previously strict boundaries between humans and pets are increasingly in a state of flux in Sweden. Norwegian contributions, on the contrary, can sometimes indicate a direct criticism towards 'humanlike characterisation'.

## **SOME CONCLUDING REMARKS**

In the present time, memorials on the Internet have given the scholars quite new possibilities to investigate the processes of bereavement concerning both deceased humans and pets. The changes can be very different in varying cultural but also national contexts. This is clearly visible in the comparison between Norway and Sweden. Tradition is the opposite of changes and this must be analysed in the light of different historical presumptions. In Norway the vision is primarily directed backwards, relating to traditions, and in Sweden forwards, in the direction of changes. Sweden features a marked tendency to adopt innovations and to leave the long-standing. One factor behind this is the stress on individuals in Sweden. The messages posted on the websites are both shorter and less emotional in Norway than in the case of their counterparts in Sweden, who observe more a diffuse, general religiosity that reminds us of

New Age modes of thought, in which individuals and the brightness of a coming existence have a prominent position. In Sweden people tend to regard what is new as being positive, to focus on cheerful events. Life's darkest moments can be given a brighter shape. In this respect, Norway can be seen as being more realistic in its preservation of older traditions and in not merely rejecting life's darker sides without further discussion.

The Internet contributions studied here provide opportunities for establishing a number of fundamental ideas about contemporary humans. It is obvious that intense emotions need to find their expression in words and must not be suppressed within the thoughts of separate individuals. The process of grief must be allowed to be shared with others even if this is not done verbally within one's immediate circle of friends and relatives. It is not unproblematic to converse with just anyone about one's innermost feelings and traumatic experiences. Here the Internet can serve as a public sphere providing welcome relief when struggling to endure the difficulties of the grief process. Mourners can sit at their PCs in the privacy of their homes and express their innermost feelings and beliefs, and communicate them to a large number of mostly unknown people. The writers do not need to meet them physically, but can still receive responses and sympathy from those who have experienced similar difficult situations.

The mourner of a deceased pet maintains anonymity. This constitutes a difference compared to the memorial sites devoted to humans, in which the name of the deceased as well as the years of birth and death are stated. Despite the fact that anonymity is thus set aside, the mourners express themselves very openly. It may be easier to show grief openly for a close relative or friend than for a pet. In the social context, showing grief for the latter's death may be considered as less acceptable.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> The following are the homepages for mourners which I have studied in Sweden: [www.bloggtoppen.se/tema/sorg/](http://www.bloggtoppen.se/tema/sorg/) (theme/sorrow); [www.efterlevande.se/aktuell.html](http://www.efterlevande.se/aktuell.html) (the national league of widows and widowers), [www.evigaminnen.se/minnessida/](http://www.evigaminnen.se/minnessida/) (eternal memory); [www.hem.passagen.se/anglaforum](http://www.hem.passagen.se/anglaforum) (angel forum); [www.hem.passagen.se/anglaringen/](http://www.hem.passagen.se/anglaringen/) (angel ring); [www.kanalen.org/barn-i-minne/sidor.html](http://www.kanalen.org/barn-i-minne/sidor.html) (children in memoriam); [www.livetefterdoden](http://www.livetefterdoden), [www.blogggratis.se](http://www.blogggratis.se) (life after death); [www.metrobloggen.se](http://www.metrobloggen.se) (metro blog); [www.minnesljus.se](http://www.minnesljus.se) (memorial light); [www.minneslund.se](http://www.minneslund.se) (memorial grove); [www.minnessidan.se](http://www.minnessidan.se) (memorial site); [www.mista.se](http://www.mista.se) (loss – begun in 2007); [www.samsorg.se](http://www.samsorg.se) (SAMS cooperation for people in sorrow); [www.smaanglar.org/](http://www.smaanglar.org/) (little angels – organised by the parent association Little Angels); [www.sorginfo.se](http://www.sorginfo.se) (grief information – begun in 2005); [www.tillminneav.se/showpage.php?id](http://www.tillminneav.se/showpage.php?id) (in memoriam, begun in 2006 and visited by more than one million people by 2010); [www.vimil.se](http://www.vimil.se)

(those who have lost a loved one in the midst of life – begun in 2005); [www.vsfb.se/main/page](http://www.vsfb.se/main/page) (a non-profit parents' association for those who have lost a child).

The Norwegian memorial sites that I have studied are: [www.engesiden.com](http://www.engesiden.com) (angels' site); [www.etbarnforlite.no/Menysider/nyheter.htm](http://www.etbarnforlite.no/Menysider/nyheter.htm) (a child too few, set up by the association We Who Have a Child Too Few); [www.forum.smartmamma.com/showthread.php](http://www.forum.smartmamma.com/showthread.php) (smart mama); [www.hvilifred.no/index.php?id](http://www.hvilifred.no/index.php?id) (rest in peace); [www.minnelunden.no](http://www.minnelunden.no) (the memorial grove).

<sup>2</sup> [Http://hem.fyrlistorg.com/djurens\\_himmel](http://hem.fyrlistorg.com/djurens_himmel) (access restricted); [www.katt.nu/kyrko-minnes.htm](http://www.katt.nu/kyrko-minnes.htm).

<sup>3</sup> Examples of Norwegian websites are [www.hakrilas.no/tilminne](http://www.hakrilas.no/tilminne), [www.dyresonen.no](http://www.dyresonen.no) (access restricted) and [www.turtlecats-birma.net](http://www.turtlecats-birma.net).

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# THE PEASANT POOR AND IMAGES OF POVERTY: FINNISH PROVERBS AS DISCURSIVE REPRESENTATIONS OF CULTURAL KNOWLEDGE

*Eija Stark*

**Abstract:** This article examines the core idea of poverty proverbs as hints of cultural knowledge in old Finnish rural countryside. Until World War II, most of the Finns lived in a high-risk society with only few institutions to guarantee their safety and well-being. The continuous threat of absolute poverty was evident for the majority of the Finns. The basis of this research is 204 proverbs that contain the words *poor*, *poverty*, *pity* or *unfortunate*. The proverbs analyzed and classified here were collected in the Folklore Archives of the Finnish Literature Society between the years 1885 and 1950. The ideational level of the proverbs in the context of social history is crucial in revealing the schematic structure that people use to communicate about rural poverty.

**Keywords:** cultural knowledge, Finland, folk ideas, peasant poverty, proverbs

Throughout the nineteenth and well into the twentieth century, the majority of the population in Finland remained agrarian and poor. By World War II, more than half of the Finns still lived in rural areas and most of them earned their living primarily from agriculture and forestry. Urbanization proceeded rapidly from the 1960s onwards. This paper focuses on the idea of the cultural knowledge and shared understanding that ordinary people, ‘folk’, had of the concepts and ideas concerning the rural-based poverty in Finland at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries. The basis of this article is a corpus of 204 Finnish proverbs that contain the words *poor*, *poverty*, *pity* or *unfortunate*; of these, 54 have been selected as examples of a certain theme of cultural knowledge.<sup>1</sup> Some of the proverbs were explained by the informants. Therefore, I also carefully scrutinized every explanation provided by the informants for any given proverb text, if such was available. The article does not explore what is distinctive about Finnish proverbs but rather, how semiliterate poor peasants, the majority of the Finns in the relatively recent past, described their universe of experience from the point of view of living standards. The

perspective is on what folklorist Alan Dundes would have called “folk ideas” about the “traditional notions that people in common culture have about the nature of man, of the world and of man’s life in the world” (Dundes 1972: 95). Just as Dundes argues, proverbs are useful in trying to understand folk thought and cultural knowledge.

By defining the concept of folk ideas, Alan Dundes did not discuss the role of social or historical context of a proverb, but instead, stated that folk ideas are expressed in a great variety of different genres and they might also appear in non-folklore materials (Dundes 1972: 95). The premise of this analysis is that people of equal socio-economic status share their understandings of the world that they have learned and internalized in the course of their similar experiences. Individuals rely on these shared understandings to comprehend actions and to evaluate other people’s actions. Even though the sample proverbs selected for the present article are analyzed in relation to northern European and Finnish social history, many of the proverbs are internationally known, for example, in Africa (Kimilike 2006). Indeed, many of them can be dated back far into history but can also be familiar to contemporaries. I assume that many cultural ideas of the poverty proverbs are rooted more in the experience of absolute poverty than in a geographically separate culture, such as northern European or Finnish. Regardless of this, proverbs cannot be understood without reference to a vast knowledge of the early rural 20th century Finnish context. One of the most significant aspects is that in the past proverbs in Finland were a form of speech used by individuals that constituted the minority from the point of view of social power (Granbom-Herranen 2010: 94). The proverbs analyzed in this article have been collected from the Finnish-Karelian rural communities.

Life in this rural culture was uncertain and risky. At the turn of the century, less than 40 percent of all households in the countryside were landowning families. Moreover, more than half of the Finnish landowners were smallholders, cultivating less than ten hectares of arable land (Peltonen 1995: 33). The other two peasant household groups were tenant farmers, constituting 20 percent of the rural population, and farm labourers, making up 40 percent of all the households (Alanen 1995: 44–45). Since agriculture in a harsh climate and on a small piece of land did not provide self-sufficiency, sources of livelihood were many and therefore, various types of small leaseholders and agricultural workers formed the majority of the rural population. For example, logging was a vital source of income for both the landless population and for those owning a small farm in the rural area.

## THE PROVERB SAMPLE

The proverbs discussed here originate from the Folklore Archives of the Finnish Literature Society and were collected between 1885 and 1950. The people behind the proverbs represented mainly the rural working-class and peasants. These groups formed the majority of the population in that period and were considered as the active folklore users. The most common method of collecting for an interviewer was to ask a member of the 'folk' to recall all types of proverbs or proverbial sayings. These interviewers were often young, Finnish and Swedish-speaking undergraduates with nationalistic enthusiasm,<sup>2</sup> but also other members of the peasantry. In Finland, many representatives of the 'folk' contributed large collections of all types of folklore texts, jotting down notes concerning oral tradition over the years or collecting material from their home parish, and subsequently sending them to the Folklore Archives.<sup>3</sup> This method of collecting was encouraged by the Folklore Archives, which donated paper and instruction manuals to assist these folk collectors (Stark-Arola 1998: 54).

Later on, folklore questionnaires were organized by the Folklore Archives of the Finnish Literature Society and were announced to the public in the media, mainly in newspapers and magazines. Among the most comprehensive ones was *a questionnaire of the Kalevala jubilee* in 1935–36, in which ordinary people were encouraged to send in all types of folklore to the Folklore Archives in order "to store the fading intellectual heritage of our forefathers" (Haavio 1935).<sup>4</sup> This questionnaire, like the previous collections, was a continuum of the romantic assumption where purported 'folk' materials constituted an authentic language and literature. At the European level, collecting folklore from the 19th century onwards was part of nationalizing individual countries that needed to legitimize their own history and culture (Bendix 1997: 67).

From the end of the 19th century until the 1960s, academic folklore scholarship adopted the historic-geographic method, in which the main objective was to study the origin and history of folktales. Therefore, each folklore text had to be based on a large number of variants in order to reveal its origin and history. According to the instructions for collecting folklore, informants had to be asked their name, age, place of residence and the source of the folklore item. The collectors were not asked to note down the occupation or social class of the informant (Apo 1995b: 48). Therefore, the people who used those texts – songs, poems, proverbs and tales – in their everyday life were not of interest, since they were seen as only passive tradition bearers. Instead, what was important for the academic scholars and the folklore collectors at that time was the *tradition* itself, not the individuals using and creating meanings and living with them. The traits of the historic-geographic method are still evident in the Folklore

Archives of the Finnish Literature Society. The collection of folklore genres is vast but many of the items have been stored without knowing the actual event or anything related to the social background.

The proverb database in the Folklore Archives of the Finnish Literature Society consists in its entirety of over 500,000 proverb texts. Each proverb text is on a single card and the file is for manual use. These cards are arranged in alphabetical order according to the first noun of a proverb or a proverbial saying (Laaksonen & Saarinen 2004: 64). By a rough estimation, the total number of proverb cards that contain the words *poor*, *poverty*, *pity* or *unfortunate* is 6,000. Since many of them are variants of others, the actual number of proverbs concerning poverty and the poor is notably less. For a proverb to be valid for the analysis in this paper, it must have at least two variants. Many of the proverbs often have 5 to 100 variants in addition to an explanation of an informant for a specific proverb. However, almost as frequently, many proverbs are unique. From this very extensive material, I have omitted the proverbs that have been recorded only once.

The entire collection and, consequently, also this paper covers a variety of proverbial phrases: moral wisdoms, comments on life and phrases including comparison. Since the aim of the analysis is to study cultural knowledge, a detailed genre analysis of the proverbs – the question of whether a certain proverb is a proverb or merely a short comment – is irrelevant. When studying cultural knowledge – or ‘folk ideas’ – a researcher has to relinquish the nominal view of genre categories (Dundes 1972: 96).

In the proverbs tackled in this article, the perspective for poverty is most often that of the poor. At the time when poor relief was nearly completely absent, poverty was a matter of the poor, not of the nobility or clergy. Therefore, the proverbs may not have been universally true, but they were – just as Wolfgang Mieder has pointed out – correct in certain historical contexts and situations (Mieder 1993: xii). The imagery and the content of the proverbs have probably been part of the informants’ everyday surroundings. However, a source that is almost as important is the imagery of earlier proverbs. Matti Kuusi has noted that traditional ideas, images and schemata have a decisive influence on the formation of proverbial sayings and a great majority of proverbs and sayings originate as analogical forms from earlier proverbs. According to Kuusi, folk aphorists saw their everyday milieu through the window of traditional symbolology. Indeed, the traditional role division is rooted strongly in proverbs and, even more clearly, the dominance of the tradition directs their structural formation (Kuusi 1994: 142). The echoes of Matti Kuusi’s view originated undoubtedly from the historic-geographic method but after exploring proverbs including

other keywords than poverty (Stark 2011: 53), it is difficult to disagree with Kuusi at this point.

## **FOLKLORE AS A WAY TO EXPRESS CULTURAL KNOWLEDGE**

According to Lauri Honko, there is no natural existence for folklore beyond performance. To him, folklore archives are nothing but collections of dead artefacts, arbitrarily limited texts that were generated under rather special, mostly non-authentic circumstances (Honko 1989b: 33). In this article, the focus is somewhat the opposite. I suggest that many folklore items, including proverbs, can be studied and analyzed without knowing the actual performance situation of the proverbs if the chosen sample is coherent by theme. Arvo Krikmann has pointed out that the bulk of proverbs represent kind of empiric laws or norms and communicative contexts serve merely as ‘topical inductors’ for proverbs (Krikmann 1996 [1994]). Therefore, proverbs used by individuals perform a significant part in containing, carrying, transmitting and communicating the varied products of the experience and knowledge of the people in their community.

Cultural knowledge is expressed in a great variety of different genres; yet, in this article, cultural knowledge is interpreted through the proverbs which include the words *poor*, *poverty*, *pity* and *unfortunate*. The basis for this article is the notion that a folklore genre dictates the limits of communication (Honko 1989a: 15). This means that cultural knowledge about poverty in the proverbs is represented in a specific, proverbial way. Precisely speaking, what is cultural knowledge and how should we understand it? First, cultural knowledge is about categorization, in other words, cultural knowledge enables people, ‘informants’, to categorize information, and second, it works as a theoretical notion for researchers.

People categorize their social environment; they do not merely think that they interact with individuals, but they tend to see them as members of more general classes, such as a family, social class, ethnic group, caste or gender (Boyer 2009: 296). Individuals rely on these shared understandings to comprehend and organize experience, including their own thoughts, feelings, motivations and actions, and the actions of other people (Quinn 2005: 2–3). The perceived world is thus presented as structured information rather than arbitrary and unpredictable attributes. Therefore, cultural knowledge is divided into categories in order to provide the maximum information with the least cognitive effort (Rosch 1978: 28). This is why people often use stereotypes and idealizations in their narratives and folklore. Accordingly, cognitive anthropology in particular has been

interested in the forms and variability of cultural knowledge, ‘folk knowledge’, as well as their construction in specific contexts (D’Andrade 1995; Shore 1996).

The concept of cultural knowledge does not differ from the Dundesian concept of folk ideas, with the exception of the former being developed by cognitive anthropologists. In both concepts, the assumption is that people who belong to a given group or who have the same socioeconomic status, also share understandings of the world that have been learned and internalized in the course of their shared experiences. Furthermore, cultural knowledge is (or folk ideas are) embedded in words and stories and it is learned from other people and shared with them (Quinn 2005: 4).

The terms ‘cultural models’ or ‘folk models’ have been used to refer to the commonly shared cultural knowledge in *a given social group*. Folk models may be classified as models because they do not consist of merely separate fragments of knowledge but rather of world-ordering models that are either latent or manifested in them (Siikala 2002: 56). In this paper, poverty proverbs have been analyzed to determine answers to the following two questions: What connotations can be seen in the proverbs that include the words *poor*, *poverty*, *pity* and *unfortunate*? What sort of representations of social relations arise in poverty proverbs? These questions have been crucial in revealing the schematic structure that people use to communicate about rural poverty in Finland.

The poverty proverbs contain several ideas that are distinguished by their key words, imagery conveyed in metaphors, typical contexts of expression, and emotional twine (Strauss 1997: 371). I have generalized these ideas into models, basic beliefs on a higher abstraction level. These ideas have been crystallized into linguistic propositions but their denotation is only part of the constellation of semantic associations and mental images which are linked to the propositions in the mind of folklore users. Cultural models – or semantic bundles – linked to poverty proverbs are: 1) the signs of the poor; 2) the poor against the rich and their distinction; 3) answers to the question of how it feels to be a poor individual, and 4) the humane poor. I examine each of these four cultural models separately.

## **THE SIGNS OF THE POOR**

From the corpus of 204 proverbs, many concern rather explicitly the appearance of the poor. In those proverbs, the social distinction between the people who are poor and those who are more affluent appears mainly by marking bodily differences. The characteristics that were visible to others were a skinny physique, dirtiness and ragged clothing. The two cultures of the rural environment, those

of the landowners and the landless, were expressed not only by the size of their arable land and the extent of their property – livestock, agricultural equipment – but also by their different social manners. For example, the landless people acted differently. The landless poor ate quickly, whereas the masters had an easy and calm lunch break; the masters wore hats, whereas the landless people wore caps. Furthermore, clothing in general emphasized the difference between these two groups of people (Frykman & Löfgren 1987: 260).

For the poor themselves, proverbs were a suitable way to express the agony of their everyday life. Poverty manifested itself in bodily signs. Slimness was a reason for laughing from within: *The poor man has so little skin that when his eyes close, his asshole opens up.*<sup>5</sup> As to their physical traits, the poor were described by emphasizing their basic needs being merely physical. Swedish ethnologists Jonas Frykman and Orvar Löfgren have noted that in the eyes of the elite, poor people often appeared to be dirty, foul-smelling, unaware of “the correct code of behaviour”, and vulgar (Frykman & Löfgren 1987: 270). Living in poverty was a stigma and the authorities’ attitude concerning poverty was primarily a matter of morals (Rahikainen 1993: 89). Did the poor know of the negative image that wealthier people had of them? According to the proverbs that include poverty-related keywords, the rural commoners knew well how the upper class criticized them. However, this did not mean that the poor would have agreed with the stigma attached to them.

Although Finland was a part of Russia since 1809, the institutional structure, including judicial, religious and local government authorities, had largely been established during the preceding Swedish period (Eloranta et al. 2006: 18). Therefore, for instance, the Finnish Poor Law in 1879 adopted its model from Sweden and in it the attitude toward poverty was hard (Rahikainen 1993: 90). The poorest people – usually the orphans, the sick and the elderly – were farmed out to landowning households at public auctions. Although the poor did not like being farmed out to households, there was even more antipathy to the strictly controlled poorhouses, which proliferated from the 1890s onwards (Rahikainen 2002: 169). People were generally expected to get along by themselves and in the poor society every man was accountable for himself and his family. The life of the poor was miserable and full of hardships and this is also demonstrated by metaphors in the proverbs. In order to cope with such uncertain livelihood conditions, the poor had to struggle to diversify their sources of income and food: *Everything is growing in the poor man’s sack.*<sup>6</sup> Often the poor’s only belongings are what they carry: *The poor man is like an open sack.*<sup>7</sup>

The poverty proverbs utilize the *hyperbole*, an exaggeration, where both small and big blend as, for example, in the proverb: *The poor man’s granary has a hungry mouth.*<sup>8</sup> The exaggeration above consists of blending the images

of the poor owning a food storage and of how starvation does not disappear despite the existence of the granary (because there is neither a granary nor food in it). It is therefore evident that the relief for the poor was too ineffective to prevent malnutrition. The miserable living standard of the poor was summarized by stating: *The poor man's life is like wetness burning*, or simply: *The poor live in suffering*.<sup>9</sup>

Some of the proverbs are humorous reflections on the desolateness of life. One of the most popular proverbs by number (more than 50 variants) deals with the advantages of being poor: *The poor do not fall from high up, but from the broom to the floor*.<sup>10</sup> One of the informants of the proverb has explained this by stating that "if a poor person gets even poorer, it is not unknown to him because he has been at the bottom before". A similar idea can be found in the following proverb: *The poor man doesn't fear becoming poor, the wet (man) doesn't fear the water*.<sup>11</sup> The life of the poor had either too much or too little; they had many children and illnesses and they had to move house often, but they also had little food, few clothes and a low life expectancy. This dichotomy is presented in a humorous way in the following proverb that is the answer to the question where one is from: *The poor man can't afford to be from afar*.<sup>12</sup>

Among the proverbial expressions concerning poverty, true poverty was seen as a mental state, not as being material or physical. The proverb *Poor is the one who has no soul*<sup>13</sup> emphasizes how a person's true essence depends on wisdom, intelligence and righteous mind, not the amount of their material wealth. Often these types of proverbs have distinctly Christian overtones as, for example, in the proverbs: *Even the masters have Lord, the wretched have souls*, and: *Even the poor man has his honour; even the wretched have God* (Kuusi 1994: 146).<sup>14</sup> In the poverty proverbs, the poor can have both literal and metaphorical meanings: it could refer either to a person who is in the state of material poverty, in other words, in absolute poverty, or to a person who has bad luck, is otherwise in a bad mental state, or is somehow pitiful.

In the Finnish poverty proverbs, 'a poor person' seems to be a synonym for an individual. This may reflect the shortages that existed in Finland until World War II. People who were agricultural labourers often lived in the landlord's household, although they did not belong to the family. Moreover, the majority of day-labourers in agriculture lived as cottagers on rented land or in rented rooms on the landlord's property (Peltonen 1995: 33). In the big picture, the majority of the landowning class was also relatively poor and only a small part of the whole population had an adequate standard of living. The concept of the poor is therefore *polysemic*, which means that related meanings of words form categories and the meanings bear familiar resemblances to one another (Lakoff 1987: 12). The word *pity* has an even stronger tendency for polysemy,

since among the poor and sickly, it can refer to a bad person and its synonyms are ‘unhappy’, ‘a lame duck’, or ‘a stupid one’.

Among the proverb users in the Finnish rural society, true poverty has concerned especially the insane, as the next proverb demonstrates: *A poor one is not poor unless he is somewhat mad as well.*<sup>15</sup> Anthropologist Marianne Gullestad has pointed out that dichotomization and complementarization are processes that occur in ethnic and national movements but also in the issues of social identity (Gullestad 1996: 75). The Finnish autobiographies produced by common people born in the period of 1880–1930 had an oft-mentioned idea that was similar. Among the poor, people wanted to make a clear boundary between the poor and the insane (Stark 2011: 228). The poor did not want to become identified with other marginalized groups in the rural society even though both groups were regular users of the poor relief.

Many of the proverbs constitute norms, advice, or denials. Proverbs are often a suitable form of communication in domination relationships or in the relationship of a potential conflict (Finnegan 1981: 31). As Heda Jason points out, proverbs and oral literature in general serve as a connective element between the value system and the social systems by suggesting certain attitudes towards the society’s values and its problematic points (Jason 1971: 619). The appearance and temper of the poor are described with pity, as a guideline for not repressing the ones who are already in a low social position in society as the next proverb suggests: *Do not deride the poor man’s child, he is already poor.*<sup>16</sup> In one of the proverb cards, the informant explained the idea of the proverb in the following manner: “If somebody wanted to tease someone and the other person realized this, he or she might have said this proverb to his/her teaser.” As was mentioned above, the word *poor* might have referred to a naive or a gullible person as well.

According to social historian Marjatta Rahikainen, the purpose of the 1879 Poor Law was to make recourse to public assistance as difficult and as abhorrent as possible (Rahikainen 1993: 90). The mischief made by a poor one could have been criticized by a straightforward speech strategy as, for example, in the proverb: *Beat if you like, the poor man’s skin stands the pain.*<sup>17</sup> This proverb represents a figurative form of speech and the core idea of the proverb has obviously been conveyed by evoking the guilt of the malevolent. Severe conditions and misery were part of everyday life of the poor, and therefore, it was a recurrent, universal theme in the poverty proverbs, as the comparative collections of European proverbs indicate (Paczolay 2005: 132).

## THE POOR AND THE RICH

At the end of the 19th century, Finland was a poor but also a stratified and hierarchical society. Finland was *a society of estates*, which was a certain legally constituted class division of society. The two higher estates were the nobility and the clergy and the two lower estates were the burghers and the land-owning peasants. The gentry were few in number – they accounted for only 1.5% of the Finnish population in 1870 (Talve 1997: 30). Most of the population did not belong to an estate and had no political representation. Those who did not belong to an estate were cottagers and tenants of farms owned by others, farm-servants, rural craftsmen, travelling salesmen, vagrants and the unemployed. Furthermore, the industrial workers living in towns and industrial parishes were not represented by the four-estate system. The population outside the estates was mainly behind the collected folklore because in its early decades the folklore collectors were interested only in the cultures of the lower classes, the people who were considered as ‘folk’.

In the poor rural societies, landowning was seen as a primary source of livelihood. In estate societies, the ruling classes were those possessing land, and the ownership of land also meant the holding of political power (Wordie 1989: 6). Usually, the landowner who employed a number of rural labourers on his farm was at the top of the rural hierarchy. In Finland, the distinction between the landless and the landowning people became more marked at the end of the 19th century when the size of the landless population rose dramatically due to the high birth rate and the decline of infant mortality (Eloranta et al. 2006: 16–17). At this point, by showing off their increased social power and prestige, the landowning groups began to eat and sleep in a different space from their agrarian workers (Haatanen 1968: 73).

The poverty mentioned in the proverbs is conveyed in terms of two polarities: the poor against the rich and the boundaries between those two. The poor exist only in contrast with the rich – a dichotomy whereby both actors are dependent on each other. Furthermore, the social relations, the conflicts in the social relations and the inversion of those relations as expressed in the poverty proverbs, are derived from the imbalance between the social classes. The boundaries between the rich and the poor were expressed not only in proverbs but also in other types of oral tradition, such as jests and fairytales. This has been explained by William Bascom as folklore representing a mirror of culture and incorporating descriptions of the details of social institutions as well as the expressions of attitudes (Bascom 1965: 284).

The proverb informants have predominately been the poorest in the absolute and relative terms of poverty in their own society. By definition, absolute

poverty is a lack of basic human needs, such as clean water, nutrition, clothing, shelter, health care and education. In contrast, relative poverty is the condition of having fewer resources or less income than others within a society (Townsend 1979: 31–33). By belonging to the category of the poor, people were aware of the concept of prosperity. In proverbs, the juxtaposition between the poor and the rich is reflected not by comparing the breadth of welfare, but by marking one's own actions and personality. In this context, without question, the poor and the rich are not on an equal footing. The next proverb introduces the idea of the distortion of social strata: *The rich man hides his richness, but the poor man can't hide his poverty.*<sup>18</sup>

In spite of their lower social status, the poor were believed to get on better than the rich. Low status results in more joys and happiness than those at a higher level of status enjoy: *The poor man is rich when his belly is full, but the rich man has much to worry about, for he fears becoming poor.*<sup>19</sup> This perspective where the poor were portrayed as courageous, kind and ingenious in contrast to the lazy and self-indulgent antagonists who were high-born and wealthy, is also familiar from fairytales (Apo 1995b: 208, 215, 218).

The poverty proverbs are composed of *formulas*, the forms of which can be constructed like many aphorisms that stress the shared fates of opposites (Kuusi 1994: 143). The confrontation between the poor and the rich resulted in a dead heat and the resistance against one's own low social position was futile since the social class offered obvious advantages, as the next proverb claims: *The rich people drink, the strong ones fight and the poor people transfer home-brew by the horse-drawn carriage.*<sup>20</sup> In other words, the poor made use of the rich people's vices that were provided by their prosperity. Advantages produced disadvantages that, in turn, produced advantages.

## **DISTINCTIONS BETWEEN THE POOR AND THE RICH**

Cultural knowledge of poverty was also verbalized by basing the proverbial idea on the higher status of the rich people. Anthropologist James Scott uses the term *mystification*, which is something that subordinate classes do to themselves by justifying the force of circumstances, i.e., “the naturalization of the inescapable” (Scott 1985). The means and ways of surviving are justified simply by using common sense. In this type of proverb, power is viewed from below upwards.

In Finland, land ownership was of vital importance for cultural boundaries. One of the most common ways in which the rural poor resisted their landlords and the upper classes in general was by moralizing about how their lifestyles and practises deviated from those of the poor (Frykman & Löfgren 1987: 148).

For the lower classes – the representatives of the common folk – the existing imbalance of social boundaries was expressed by changing the perspective. Proverbs therefore addressed critique indirectly. One's own low status was elicited from the position of the rich: *He doesn't acknowledge the poor, nor does he speak to the ugly.*<sup>21</sup> Issues related to poverty, such as begging and the associated stigma, were argued by coercion: *I don't need to, but a poor man's child must.*<sup>22</sup> The landowners in the impoverished society were usually well aware of their higher status and did not hesitate to show it if needed. James Scott uses the term 'weapons of the weak', referring to the hidden verbal and practical acts of resistance in contexts where the 'weak' cannot afford to openly confront power holders (Scott 1985: xvi).

Poverty proverbs can be interpreted as manifestations of weapons of the weak, just as they are representations of the culture of contestation. This means that the subordinate people resist the generally applied cultural forms of the dominant classes by seeing things differently. This notion was first introduced by anthropologist Luigi Lombardi-Satriani, who traced out the idea that everyday reality provides an ample sounding board for the critical social attitudes manifest in different ethnographic descriptions and folklore genres (Lombardi-Satriani 1974: 103–105). The term *contestation* refers to the context 'of adducing opposing testimony' towards the hegemonic culture, that is, the culture that is defined by the people in power in a given historical society. This resistance is manifested in the adoption of different ways of thinking and behaviour by those in power that produce the dominant ideologies in the society.

The different views on poverty that are expressed in the proverbs can be manifested by using personification. Personification is a description of an object as being a living person or animal (Lakoff & Johnson 1980: 33). In these proverbs, poverty can act independently and it can cause bad consequences, such as is the case in the following proverb: *When poverty comes in at the window, love goes out of the door.*<sup>23</sup> One could argue that this proverb is more crucially about love but, in addition, it concerns the ideal love which is rooted in the questions of one's living standards and the avoiding of poverty. Poverty in the proverbs refers to a lack of material and physical needs but is also expressed in the setting of family relations and paring. Personified poverty represents the image that was presumably also familiar to the better-off people in the rural society because such proverbs express notions of deprivation that are somehow universal. Moreover, poverty causes disagreements inside families and marriage relationships.

One of the universalities of poverty is that it has a visual aspect. The poor received better social financial support if they behaved humbly and gave the appearance of a ragamuffin (Stark 2011: 323). By being categorized as the poor,

people were expected to be, act and verbalize in a certain way. Sometimes this performance probably went too far, which resulted in other poor and even the better-off people's statement: *There, poverty and pomp pull the cat's tail.*<sup>24</sup> The personified poverty in these proverbs was a way of criticism in the contexts where straightforward sarcasm would have been too cruel. One example of this is the visual stress on poverty: the poor with their humble behaviour and filthy appearance evoked more empathy from the better-off people and therefore more welfare money.

Personification in language makes it easier to understand abstractions and also to elucidate causality in a historical context. The next story was originally a proverb but it has been attached to an additional story:

When poverty starts to rule a house, it first travels along the fences to the mansion, then it goes into the main room, and once in there, it goes to the beams where the kindling chips are stored. From there it goes to the bread crate and lands on the table.

As the preceding story illustrates, poverty imagery can act independently. Another variant expresses this idea more succinctly: *When poverty arrives, it arrives in nine ways.*<sup>25</sup>

## **HOW DOES IT FEEL TO BE IN NEED?**

Poverty defines one's actions – social relations and the expressions of oneself. One theme of the poverty proverbs concerns the cruel aspects of the estate society and the status of the poor within this society. This semantic group includes advice as well as the dos and don'ts for the poor. Many of the proverbs describe the gloominess of life when living in poverty as, for example, in the proverb: *The poor one is created to ramble, the crippled one to wander.*<sup>26</sup> Just as the definition of absolute poverty, proverbs also identify the idea of the worst state of poverty, which stands aside simply by the nutrition being on offer: *The poor man is rich when his belly is full.*<sup>27</sup> Living in poverty is troublesome, as challenging as gaining and maintaining prosperity: *Poverty is not for the poor to rule.*<sup>28</sup> More realistic are the proverbs that describe the everyday life challenges for the poor as, for example, in the proverb: *How can the poor man fart, if he doesn't even have anything to eat?* and: *How can the poor man buy, when one pocket is empty and the other pocket has nothing in it?*<sup>29</sup> The latter proverb has a version that both exalts the unfortunate and mirrors the egalitarian views in the verbal use of ordinary folk: *How can the poor man buy if he only has a soul?*<sup>30</sup>

Although poverty in proverbs can be interpreted as a representation of a culture of contestation – that is, the poor recognized the positive aspects of living in poverty – the lower social status of the poor was also acknowledged. The latter was a negative aspect of poverty – the poor person was a nobody: *The poor man is looked down upon, his shoes are fed to the dogs.*<sup>31</sup> In addition to physical appearance, the poor were recognized by their lack of social networks: *No one is a friend of the poor man.*<sup>32</sup> Also, the unfortunate were not the most welcomed guests at social gatherings. The low status of the poor manifested unofficial rules and codes that made the social distinction between the rich and the poor clearer. As E. P. Thompson has observed, the ruling class control in the estate societies was located primarily in cultural hegemony, and only secondarily in an expression of economic power (Thompson 1991: 43). The status of the poor in the Finnish rural society produced a logic of action that required explanations. By explaining their views, people became aware of the hierarchies and existing social categories. Begging was one behavioural act that was rationalized: *The poor man eats when he gets.*<sup>33</sup> It is simply rational to eat what one is being offered, which is also the following underlying idea in the proverb: *The poor man is devoid of everything.*<sup>34</sup>

The actions of the poor were restricted by the limitations that were interpreted either negatively as coercion, or positively, with humour. Coercions of the ruthless circumstances are being described, for instance, in the proverb: *There is no law for the poor.*<sup>35</sup> Life was harsh and it was better to live one moment at a time. The differences between the poor and the rich were also visible in the ways that some things were possible and even in the interests of the rich, but not of the poor. For example, the idea of the proverb: *The poor man has time to pass away, but not to suffer*<sup>36</sup> is the costs of illnesses that were a reason for the poor not to go to a doctor (Urponen 1994: 237). The limited opportunities for the poor were not always interpreted negatively – sometimes one's distress was being laughed at. Although poverty was a serious, non-ridiculed state of affairs, speaking of it with humour enabled the speakers to comment on the existing social hierarchies. For instance, the minimal aspect of one's own actions is described by the following proverb: *The poor man's feast doesn't run late, starts in the evening, ends in the evening.*<sup>37</sup>

How does it feel to be in poverty? Quite often poverty proverbs offer reflection on the essence of poverty. In the estate society, poverty was regarded as a personal weakness. The estate society was justified by believing it was God's will and the social position of a person in society reflected their capability and nature (Frykman & Löfgren 1987: 164). The producers of the poverty proverbs were mainly people from the social underclass and therefore the most common advice for tackling poverty was not to be ashamed of it. The proverbs *Poverty is*

*no disgrace, but it is a great inconvenience and Poverty is not a crime*<sup>38</sup> bring out the idea of not blaming oneself for poverty. In addition, the accusations that the poor people are lazy and good-for-nothing are contested in proverbial speech, as in the following proverb known in many cultures: *After all, poverty is not a pleasure to anybody*.<sup>39</sup> According to the informant of the proverb above, “the saying is told if one has encountered poverty, meaning that want of something itself is a source for sorrow and misery and not for joy to anybody”.

In spite of the poor’s miserable life, living in poverty is described – again – in humorous terms. One of the most popular poverty proverbs by the number is the extended variant of the proverb: *Poverty is no joy to anybody but I have laughed at it*.<sup>40</sup> In the Finnish Folklore Archives collection, the more variants a proverb has, the more likely there are informants’ explanations for the proverb. The proverb above has been explained by one informant as follows: “Even though poverty is a miserable state of affairs, the poor have a right for joy and sometimes that joy can be poverty itself”. The proverbial poverty humour arises from the fact that people have nothing and it produces embarrassing and uncomfortable situations. For example, measliness is a reason for laughing: *The poor man gets his joy from farting or: To be poor and thin is good for a man*.<sup>41</sup> Furthermore, one recurrent theme in the poverty proverbs is farting. Jonas Frykman and Orvar Löfgren argue that rules of cleanliness related to the bourgeoisie lifestyle at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries were concerned with the triumph of culture over nature. In other words, people who behaved in a sophisticated way held a better position in society than those who appeared more ‘natural’. By taming the animal within – emotions, organic functions, and sexuality – a person became cultured (Frykman & Löfgren 1987: 172–173). The elite was more worried about the common people’s morals and behaviour than about hunger (Haapala 1986: 399). The poor were familiar with the upper- and middle-class values of cleanliness and order, but at the same time, they found this life-style difficult to realize in their own cultural context. Moreover, the poor actively contested the views of the elite by showing off the manners that attracted condemnation, such as farting and belching (Apo 1995a: 167).

People representing a certain status are usually expected to behave and express their aims verbally in specific ways (e.g. Shuman & Bohmer 2004: 407). In the Finnish estate society, the socially lowest groups were expected to be quiet and humble: *Poverty tells one to be quiet*.<sup>42</sup> Often, instead of advising one how to behave, proverbs warn against misbehaving (Jason 1971: 619). For example, folklore warned against being poor and too proud: *There is nothing more annoying than a poor man who is proud*.<sup>43</sup> The subjection relations in rural Finland were not simply defined by the elite from above downwards, where the lower classes would have been the subordinate or victims of the people in

power. On the contrary, the lower class preferred to behave in a certain way in relation to the ruling class in order to get a job and to keep the wolf at bay. The landowning peasants hired their landless counterparts to work on their land and therefore it was in the poor people's interests to get along with their masters. Being simple and timid evoked the least irritation among the landowning peasants (Stark 2011: 121). This historical context is probably the background to the proverbs emphasizing the humble nature of the poor.

## THE HUMANE POOR

Although in proverbial representations the poor considered themselves too small in relation to the elite, they were not voiceless in their society. By internalizing their place in their own society, the poor did not fully accept the hegemony of the upper class people. Just as in African proverbs, the emphasis in the Finnish poverty proverbs is on the egalitarian perception based on creation (Kimilike 2006: 234). As physical beings, the poor interpreted themselves as being equal to the landowning peasants, burghers and officials. This affected the senses and the desire to be similar to the hegemonic classes: *The poor man's mouth tastes sweet*. The same idea is expressed in the proverb: *Although he's poor, his mouth isn't made of birch bark*.<sup>44</sup> Moreover, economic imbalance led to different cultural codes that were presented in social situations. The way a dead person was consigned to the grave revealed the social position of the deceased: *When a poor man dies, he is buried in a shallow grave*.<sup>45</sup> Despite the funeral customs, the dead body of the poor person had to be treated with respect: *No one is so poor that he can't be carried in a coffin*.<sup>46</sup>

The humane aspect of the poor in the poverty proverbs encourages people to treat the unfortunate well. One of the most popular proverb guides is: *Don't sneer at the poor man's sled for yours is made of alder*.<sup>47</sup> Here, an informant explained the proverb so that "it was said as a critique to somebody who had spoken of the work and deeds of other people with despise". Another informant's explanation to the proverb was "not to mock other people's lives because your own life is not that good, either". Laura Stark-Arola has noted that envy, anger and desire in the 19th century Finnish countryside were not seen as emotions but rather as forces that only magic or aggressive anti-actions could have clamped down. Some of the magic actions were the belief of the evil eye, the laws of sympathy and contagion and the various mechanisms of magical harm such as curses and 'spoiling'. They all represent cultural knowledge that reverberates through all aspects of social life. According to the folklore of the Finnish magic rituals, envy and harmful thoughts were not under the mastery

of the people themselves, but were uncontrolled forces that were self-acting (Stark-Arola 2002:68).

In rural Finland, the poor were considered worthy of aid in order to avoid magical curses that they could have handed down or that could have happened anyway without a seemingly known benevolent actor. Some proverbs convey the idea of granting aid that is straight from the Bible (Kuusi 1994), for example: *Do not enclose your hand from the poor*, and: *He who has pity on the poor lends to the Lord*. During the period in Finland when the welfare benefit system was undeveloped, the poor expected the better-off people to make a greater contribution to the distribution of material wealth. Aiding pertained also to one's closest relatives: *Do not disdain poor relatives and small wounds*.<sup>48</sup>

Even though some of the poverty proverbs are obviously connected to magic beliefs, there is a clear link to the political ideas about class relations in proverbial speech. According to these views, misery and agony that stem from poverty emerge as the consequences of the uneven distribution of wealth. The proverb *He did not die of poverty but of cold and hunger*<sup>49</sup> sets the idea of poverty on the level of causality, asking implicitly about the circumstances where people are required to live. The political aspect of the poverty proverbs concerns the idea of prosperity by leaving economic worries behind as, for example, in the proverb: *Let the poor man benefit, the ailing one heal*.<sup>50</sup> In a poor society, in terms of material goods, everyday actions were restricted and this was well acknowledged by the poor. The wish for something better in one's life was expressed either by emphasizing material needs, as in the proverb: *Where the poor one loses except wishing to become a rich one*, or mental values as, for example, in the proverb: *Even the poor man cannot be denied high ideals*.<sup>51</sup>

## CONCLUSIONS

Finland underwent the process of modernization and economic growth relatively late. Nowhere else in Western Europe social and technological changes occurred as rapidly as in Finland – during the span of a mere lifetime. Until World War II, most of the Finns lived in a high-risk society in which there were few institutions to guarantee their safety and well-being. Social and economic conditions, and the changes in them, have undoubtedly had a great impact on folklore and popular thought.

Rural society and the poverty in it have been thoroughly studied by historians and social politicians. In spite of our view of poverty in the past, the phenomenon has still been inadequately described. In previous poverty studies, the poor themselves hardly ever had a direct opportunity to explain what

it was like to be poor. Therefore, proverbs are an excellent way to look inside societies to get a glimpse of the past and the people in them. Proverbs reflect attitudes, norms and intentions that people are interested in within the social boundaries of their own society. In order to study proverbs at their ideational level, a researcher needs sufficient knowledge of the specific features that concern proverbs as a genre.

As hints of cultural knowledge, proverbs originally produced orally are not products of individual minds isolated from society but strategic responses to a continuous chain of narrative flow arising in everyday social life. Folklore created by people who were members of neither the nobility nor the priesthood does not recount past events, but instead offers clues to the crucial cultural themes and the values of common people in the past.

## ABBREVIATIONS

HAKS = *Hämeenlinnan alakansakouluseminaari* [Hämeenlinna Teacher Training College]<sup>52</sup>

KRA = *Kansanrunousarkisto* [Folklore Archives of the Finnish Literature Society]

KRK = *Kalevalan riemuvuoden kilpakeräys* [Collection contest in honour of the 100th anniversary of *Kalevala*]. Helsinki: Finnish Literature Society

KT = *Kansantieto ja pienet keräelmät* [Answers to the questionnaire from the journal 'Folk Knowledge' and small collections]. 1936–to present. Helsinki: Finnish Literature Society

VK = *Vähäisiä keräelmiä* [Minor collections]. 1900–1930s. Helsinki: Finnish Literature Society

## ARCHIVAL SOURCES

Folklore Archives of the Finnish Literature Society in Helsinki (proverb-cards: *köyhä*, *köyhyys*, *vaivainen*)

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> The keywords in Finnish are: *köyhä* (poor), *köyhyys* (poverty), *vaivainen* (pity, crippled, unfortunate, wretched). The archive is located in Helsinki.

<sup>2</sup> Collecting folklore was a grassroots activity in the making of the Finnish nation where one of the many aspects was the political integration of Swedish speakers and Finnish speakers. About the Fennoman nationalists and their symbolic turn to the 'people', see, e.g., Anttonen 2005: 162.

- <sup>3</sup> Matti Kuusi has listed by name the most active collectors who have sent over 1,000 proverbs to the Folklore Archives of the Finnish Literature Society; see Kuusi 1997: IX–X. The proverbs I have used are mainly from the same collectors.
- <sup>4</sup> Tarkoituksena on kansan itsensä avuin saada tuleville ajoille säilytetyksi esi-isiemme henkisen perinnön viimeiset sirpaleet, jotka vielä ovat säilyssä kansamme muistissa.
- <sup>5</sup> Köyhääs on niin vähä nahkua, ku silmät mänee kii, ni pers jää auki. KRA. Hartola. A. Heino 310.1935.
- <sup>6</sup> Kaikki köyhän säkissä itää. KRA. Pohjois-Savo. J. Härkönen VK 23:367.1904.
- <sup>7</sup> Köyhä on yhtenä säkinä. KRA. Paltamo. O.A.F. Lönnbohm 4401.1920.
- <sup>8</sup> Köyhän aitta on suuta täynnä. KRA. Forssa. K. Erkko KT 44:203.1936.
- <sup>9</sup> Köyhän elämä on kuin märkä palais. KRA. Kaustinen. Heikki Savo KT 176:317.1938; Köyhä kituin elää. KRA. Viipurin pit. P. Vauhkonen VK 107:491.1922.
- <sup>10</sup> Ei köyhä korkialta kaadu, luudan päältä lattialle. KRA. Ilmajoki. J. Pirilä 227.1885.
- <sup>11</sup> Köyhä ei pelkää köyhtymistä, märkä ei kastumista. KRA. Sulkava. HAKS 6486.1938.
- <sup>12</sup> Ei köyhän kannata kaukaa olla. KRA. Tervo. Anni Heimonen KT 88:248.1936.
- <sup>13</sup> Sehän köyhä on, jolla ei ole sielua. KRA. Parikkala. Ida Mikkonen 14.1908.
- <sup>14</sup> Herra on herrallakin, vaivasellakin Jumala. Karstula. Rutuna H. E. 108.1891; On köyhälläkin kunniansa, vaivaisellakin Jumala. Suistamo. HAKS 16662.1943.
- <sup>15</sup> Ei kööh ol ilman kööh, ete ol vähä hull kans. KRA. Uusikirkko. Jalo Numminen 237.1916.
- <sup>16</sup> Ei saa narrata köyhän lasta, se on köyhä ilmankin. KRA. Valkjärvi. A.G. Andersson 364.1902.
- <sup>17</sup> Lyö jos lystää, kyllä köyhän nahka kestää. KRA. Kemijärvi. Paloheimo A. 768.1909.
- <sup>18</sup> Rikas salaa rikkautensa, vaan köyhä ei voi salata köyhyytään. KRA. Kärsämäki. Jalmari Pyrrö VK 77:104.1915.
- <sup>19</sup> Silloin on köyhä rikas, kun on maha täys, mutta rikkaalla on suuri huoli, kun pelkää köyhtyvänsä. KRA. Laukaa. J.G. Oksanen 207.1892.
- <sup>20</sup> Rikkaat juo, väkevät tappelee ja köyhät ajaa sahtia. KRA. Kuhmalahti. HAKS 18664.1943.
- <sup>21</sup> Ei tunne köyhää eikä puhu rumien kanssa. KRA. Piikkiö. HAKS 17852.1943.
- <sup>22</sup> Mun ei tarvihe, mutta köyhän lasten täytyy. KRA. Nurmes. Aino Hirvonen 3064.1956.
- <sup>23</sup> Köyhyys tulee ikkunasta sisään, rakkaus menee ovesta ulos. KRA. Nurmes. Impi Ollilainen KT 153:10.1937.
- <sup>24</sup> Siinä köyhyys ja komeus vetävät kissanhäntää. KRA. Johannes. HAKS 25820.1944.

- <sup>25</sup> Kun köyhyys rupeaa alistamaan taloa, tuloo se ensin aitoja pitkin kartanoihin, sitten se menee tupaan ja siellä ensiksi päreorsille. Sieltä se menee leipähäkkiin ja sieltä se purottaa pöyrälle itsensä. KRA. Veteli. Väinö Tuomaala 3086.1949; Kun köyhyys tuloo, niin se tuloo yhdeksää tietä. KRA. Härmä. J.O. Ikola 3422.1922.
- <sup>26</sup> Luotu köyhä kulkemaan, vaivainen vaeltamaan. KRA. Ylihärmä. Antti Kangas VK 35:538.1890.
- <sup>27</sup> Silloin on köyhäki rikas ko on kupu täysi. KRA. Rovaniemi. M. E. Perunka VK 74:89.1927
- <sup>28</sup> Köyhyys se ei ole vähävarainen hallittava. KRA. Kiihtelysvaara. Iida Vallaskangas 444.1911.
- <sup>29</sup> Mistäpä köyhä pierasee kun ei oo mitä nielasee. KRA. Lehtimäki. Aaro Vallinmäki 1186.1914; Millä köyhä ostaa, toinen tasku on tyhjä, toises ei mitään. KRA. Noor-markku. Fr. Lindgren 659.1892.
- <sup>30</sup> Millä se köyhä ostaa, kun sillä ei ole kuin sielu. KRA. Vieremä. HAKS 20357.1943.
- <sup>31</sup> Ylen köyhä katsotaan, kengät koiralle syötetään. KRA. Nurmes. Aino Hirvonen 3431.1956.
- <sup>32</sup> Ei köyhän kanssa ole kukaan tuttava. KRA. Ylihärmä. Isak Korpi 332.1900.
- <sup>33</sup> Silloin köyhä syö, kun hän saa. KRA. Pori. J. Friman 17.1889.
- <sup>34</sup> Kaikkia vaivainen vailla. KRA. Rautalampi. Kuopion lyseon toverikunta XXXVIII:76.1889.
- <sup>35</sup> Ei köyhällä lakia ole. KRA. Orivesi. Hugo Hörtsänä 2270a.1953.
- <sup>36</sup> Kyllä köyhä kuolla joutaa, mutta ei sairastaa. KRA. Ylihärmä. Isak Korpi 17.1900.
- <sup>37</sup> Ei köyhän pitoja pitkälle pidetä, illalla alkaa, illalla loppuu. KRA. Eräjärvi. J. Tyyskä 1428.1908.
- <sup>38</sup> Ei köyhyys oo mikään häpiä, se on vaan joku muu onnettomuus. KRA. Ylihärmä. Vaasan suomalaisen lyseon konventti IV:840.1888; Ei köyhyyskä ole mikään rikos. Alastaro. E. Vihervaara 2156.1911.
- <sup>39</sup> Eihän tää köyhyys ole ilo kellekään. KRA. Mäntyharju. J. Hotinen 1053.1931.
- <sup>40</sup> Köyhyys ei oo ilo kellenkään, mutta minua se vaan naurattaa. KRA. Kivijärvi/Kars-tula. Jalmari Leppänen 390.1937.
- <sup>41</sup> Köyhän ilo, kun pierree ja nauraa. KRA. Naantali. P. Nummelin 1203.1892; Köyhänä ja laihana on ihmisen hyvä olla. KRA. Teisko. T. Aatola VK 1:9.1912.
- <sup>42</sup> Köyhyys käskee olemah hiljan. KRA. Iitti. T. Puttila 178.1887.
- <sup>43</sup> Ei mikään niin harmita, kun köyhä, joka on ylpiä. KRA. Uskela. Väinö Kallio 2951.1912.
- <sup>44</sup> Köyhänkin suu makean maistaa. KRA. Jurva. U. J. Tarkkanen VK 97:381.1890; Eihän se köyhänkä suu tuohest o. KRA. Orimattila. F. A. Hästesko 521.1907.

- <sup>45</sup> Kun köyhä kuoloo, niin matalaan maahan pannaan. KRA. Korpiselkä. I. Rikkonen 570.1909.
- <sup>46</sup> Ei niin köyhää kuollutta, ettee arkussa kantta. KRA. Iisalmi. Elma Saarinen KT 284:456.1957.
- <sup>47</sup> Elä pilkkoo köyhän kelkkoo, leppäne se on ommais. KRA. Liperi. Tommi Korkala 1087.1939.
- <sup>48</sup> Köyhää sukua ja pientä haavaa ei pidä ylenkatsoman. KRA. Nummi. Matilda Österberg 17.1887.
- <sup>49</sup> Ei se köyhyytee kuollu, mutt villuu ja näläkää. KRA. Savonlinna. Aleks Seppänen 450.1936.
- <sup>50</sup> Soishan köyhä hyötyvänsä, poteva paranevansa. KRA. Jääski. E. Paaajanen VK 70:29.1903.
- <sup>51</sup> Ei köyhääkkää oo kielletty korkeist aatoksist. KRA. Kivennapa. Oma Martti Paavolainen 373.1950.
- <sup>52</sup> The college of education whose students collected folklore and handed it over to the Folklore Archives of the Finnish Literature Society.

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## ON REALITY, TRUTH AND IDEOLOGIES IN THE CASE OF MUNCHAUSEN TALES<sup>1</sup>

*Eda Kalmre*

**Abstract:** This article studies the way the meaning of a tradition has changed over time. It is based on four text samples, all representing similar motives. The story reflects a former popular belief that if you hold on to a wild animal's tail, the animal will jump clean out of its skin. *The Man Nails the Tail of a Wolf to a Tree* (ATU 1896) is a popular folk tale with an international distribution. Texts of this type have also been called Munchausen tales. The changed message of similar traditions reflects the change in our attitude towards nature, but also the growing distance of man from nature.

**Keywords:** animal abuse, comic legend, joke, Munchausen tale, social narrative, tall tale, urban legend

In the modern world, folktale texts reach us through various channels: they are spread in oral communication, and can be read in fiction books, on the Internet and in the written press. We can listen to these texts, read and sometimes even watch their adaptations in television programmes, feature films and theatre plays in the visual media. For a folklore researcher, issues of texts and their relation to the tradition are as important as the issues of the context and meaning in these texts.

The folkloric text, once learnt and stored in the memory, be it a small product remembered verbatim or a longer narrative that can be reproduced according to a plot scheme and key lines, is in its latent inactive state in the mind, open or devoid of meaning. Yet the situation, in which the product enters the consciousness, is recalled, actualised, produced and performed, is full of meaning. (Honko 1986a: 99)

Why do some old and well-known stories/texts keep reappearing every now and then, what is their meaning for us, and what is the message they convey? Does the meaning of a text change in time, and if so, to what extent?

In defining the meaning of a narrative, the time-related ideologies of narrators, of their audiences and also of researchers play a crucial role. The genres are also dominant factors in the organisation of communicating tradition.

Genres could be conceived of as units of communication which focus, direct and limit meaning, favour some and avoid other topics, regulate expression and encourage typical ways of speech and action. (Honko 1986b: 52)

Several researchers have pointed out that while the *Märchen* incorporates narrative motives into an artistic story, the legend employs them as credible facts (e.g. Dégh 1971: 62).

The contextual approach suggests that in folklore texts are more stable than their meanings (Honko 1986b: 40). Researchers of narratives are generally aware of the fact that the meaning of a text is relative, that their interpretations are subjective and may change in time.

Consequently we may well question the validity of such fixed constructs of interpretation and of the “evidence” they produce. The history of ideologies can be read from that of interpretations. The meaning of text is not a fixed constant but is a variable, determined by the development of culture and ideas, fashions and trends, and dependent on rules and ruling ideologies, not to forget the education and cultural awareness, the sex, age, religion and ethnic group of the consumer. Cultures are systems of meaning. (Röhrich 1986: 128)

The same narrative can be interpreted in different ways in different times and cultures, yet some functions remain constant over time. Narratives can have an individual, a narrator-centred and a general level of meaning. In belief legends it is the expression of fears and anxiety, and in fairy tales the repression of fears and the fulfilment of wishes and dreams.

New meanings are continually being given to traditional folk material. The question is whether these new forms can have the same meaning for urban societies as the traditional oral genres did for another time? (Röhrich 1986: 129)

Carl Lindahl has observed the mechanism of such modifications while comparing contemporary legends and older archival materials and has claimed that according to certain legend plots, the solution of the story is unambiguous; it has a single possible interpretation. The characters are either good or bad, and operate according to clearly understood moral norms. However, in the case of the modern counterparts of the same archival texts, the interpretive rules are much more complicated. One situation can have more than one possible solutions and one symbol can have several contradicting meanings (Lindahl 1996).

But what could we learn by observing texts with similar motifs emerging at different times? The following discussion is an attempt to interpret a message from a well-known folktale, which has changed in time, by observing both the text and the context around it. This means that although my viewpoint on this material is comparative and to some extent proceeds from the semantics of folktale genres, the following approach can rather be essayistic due to the small number of comparable texts. Genres are treated here mainly as different discourses, each one of them having their own rhetorical features, vocabulary, position in reality, use of descriptive language, character types and dominant symbolic meanings. In case a narrative motif or topic has become part of such a complex, it is subject to the rules prevailing within the form of the discourse (Ben-Amos 2009: 132–133).

In this article, one of the essential starting points for interpreting the material is the narrators' attitudes towards the subject matter – i.e., what is the position of the narrative in reality, to what extent it should be believed. In reality, these borders are not really strictly established, especially if we talk about legends (or their modern counterparts – urban legends) and jokes. While a legend as the carrier and verifier of religious information is related to folk belief, then “a ‘joke’ is defined as brief, humorous folktale, usually containing only a single episode and ending with a punch line. The line between joke and legend blurs even further with urban legends that acquire a punch line ending. In practice, some humorous urban legends are frequently told as jokes, with the teller indicating by performance style (tone of voice, facial expression, gestures, etc.) that he or she regards the story as mere fiction” (Brunvand 2002: 223).

In the case of the following material it is noteworthy that contemporary or urban legends can be regarded as a media genre due to their similarity to the news. As a matter of fact, many stories considered to be folklore can today be found in newspapers as sensational news or urban canards, in which reality is full of dangers and risks and the most fantastic or extraordinary cases are made credible by the testimonies of the alleged eye-witnesses (Virtanen 1996: 250–252).

As regards the creation of credibility, although ostensible, legends feature the same genre characteristics as tall tales (ATU 1875–1999). These are narratives that start in a realistic key; yet, they have an unpredictable and humorous climax verging to absurdity. Tall tales are often told so as to make the narrator seem to have been a part of the story. These are, for example, the popular Munchausen tales<sup>2</sup> widely known from literary works, as well as various other tall tales. Actually, narrating of these kinds of tall tales is an old tradition and was initially related to the art of story-telling inherent in people remarkable for

something in the communities of travellers, hunters, merchants, etc. Richard M. Dorson (1939) called these stories comic legends (see also Ben-Amos 1976: 25).

The following argumentation attempts to make sense of the development of the message of a well-known folk narrative, while taking into consideration the text (the genre) as well as the context that surrounds it. The text that could be regarded as an urban legend attracted my attention a few years ago while reading a brief news piece from the Baltic News Service (BNS). While examining the several source texts of this legend, I focus on the following questions: 1) what message they convey, and how these texts are related to reality, and also 2) how these texts reflect people's attitudes towards nature and animals.

## MATERIAL

The narrative presented here first (1) could be classified as a journalistic version of an urban legend, which was depicted by the author as a real-life event with eyewitnesses. Namely, in 2005, the Estonian police launched an investigation on the basis of a newspaper article. According to the author of this article, in the town of Pärnu in the southwest of Estonia, some boys skinned cats by making a T-shaped cut into a cat's face and while holding onto a short piece of rope tied to the cat's tail, threw it from the roof, so that the cat's skin peeled off over its ears. Allegedly, the boys had killed at least six cats this way.

The results of the police investigation were published on March 9, 2005, as a BNS news piece entitled "Article on Cat-Slaughter Based on an Urban Legend" (*Artikkel kasside tapmisest põhines linnalegendil*, BNS 2005). The police spokesman asserted that the article had been inspired by a conversation between two girls, during which one girl had told her friend similar stories about cats and blowing up of frogs. The mother of one of the girls had overheard the conversation and was so shocked by the cruelty of the children that she wrote an article to the local newspaper. This was the very article that triggered the police investigation. The police concluded upon consulting with experts that animals could not be skinned in this manner.

This shortly summarises the brief news piece that I happened to read some time after it was published. Further investigation revealed the original source that had inspired the confusion. It was published in Russian in the newspaper *Molodezh' Estonii* (Youth in Estonia) in the section SOS under the headline '*Kotovasiia*<sup>3</sup> *iunyk potroshitelei* (Trouble with Cats and Young Rippers) (Kollom 2005). The article took up almost an entire page and consisted of three individual parts. In the first part Inessa Kollom, the author of the article, described the schoolboys' gory deed which was allegedly witnessed by a schoolgirl who had

happened to walk her dog nearby this evening. The incident was described very realistically and readers were taken aback by the disgusting images of the sadistic torture of animals, the suffering victims and the ruthless boys.

The picture that I saw was beyond one's imagination. A cat was lying in a pool of blood and growled, trying to crawl out of its skin. The cat's tail was tied to a tall rope that was suspended from the roof. One could hear barbaric laughter from the rooftop. (ibid.)

In the second part of the article, more details are added to the description. The author notes that the torturers were high-school boys at the age of 14–15, but gives no further information about the persons of the boys or the school they were from, claiming that the boys' faces had not been seen.

The third part of the article is edifying and explores the issue of adolescent aggression and whether it is an innate or an acquired phenomenon.

And this is our future. Now they are tormenting cats, later they will become total maniacs who kill women and children... Indeed, our youth has been badly infected by the "A-virus" – aggression. (ibid.)

The author concludes that it is not a matter of instincts, but the problem is caused by deficiencies in the upbringing of the modern youth. The dramatic content of the article is further emphasised by a picture collage by Vladimir Pryadilshchikov, which depicts a small black kitten, with a big bloody wrench hanging over it. The latter represents as if live evil, having an eye drawn to it. The tragic tonality of the picture is still emphasised by crimson trickles in the middle of the picture and along margins.

The above-cited story largely resembles an old folk tale which says that if you hold on to an animal's tail, it can jump out of its skin in fear. "The Man Nails the Tail of the Wolf to the Tree", ATU 1896, is a tall tale of international spread that has been called a Munchausen tale. The second text example (2) in this article, entitled "Seven Horseshoe Nails", originates from here. Estonian folklorist Mall Proodel-Hiiemäe has included "Seven Horseshoe Nails" in her anthology of hunter's tales, noting that this tale type seldom occurs in Estonia. Usually, international tall tales inspire abundant local compilations, but in this case we can talk of a simple reproduction of a classical tall tale (Proodel 1969: 23).

#### Seven Horseshoe Nails

I went to the woods once, and found seven horseshoe nails lying on the ground. Since I knew that the nails were supposed to bring luck, without thinking further I put them in my pocket. Suddenly I see a big tree stump, and seven wolves resting nearby after their meal. I ponder: if I

go to look for help, they will wake up and leave, but with a little trick, I will be a wealthy man at once. Suddenly an idea came to me. I took all the seven horseshoe nails, pinned each wolf's tail to the stump, then banged with a cudgel against the tree and barked. Lo and behold – as if they had been stung, all the wolves jumped up and took off towards the woods, but forgot their tails pinned to the stumps and so they jumped out of their skins. Pity about the meat, but it couldn't be helped; I had to be satisfied with the skins. (RKM II 155, 159/60)

It was quite common that a story-teller's repertoire would include several stories fitting with the distinct image of either a traveller or a hunter. This kind of tall tales formed entire series. So, there is also another story told by M. Sikk (born in 1877), the narrator of "Seven Horseshoe Nails".

Bitter cold

On an early Sunday morning, I went to the woods. I had heard that it was hare-shooting season, and I thought I would try my luck. Suddenly I saw a hare. I banged once, twice, third and fourth time, but the hare paid no heed. I understood that it was frozen. I gathered a pile of twigs, made fire, waited until the hare warmed up. And when I took another shot, the hare kicked the bucket at once. (RKM II 155, 161)

The third (3) similar motif of a tall tale or a hunter's tale ("Hunter Turns Animal Inside Out", ATU 1889B<sup>4</sup>) can be found in a collection of anecdotes published during the Soviet period. The story was recorded from a live performance in 1975.

How to Catch a Bear?

???

You dip your hand in honey, the bear comes and starts licking your hand. You stick your hand really deep, so deep that you grab the bear's tail through the backside and turn the bear inside out. (Viikberg 1997: 358)

In the 1990s, it became evident to me that the cat story was highly popular in Estonian school lore repertoire. Several schoolboys wrote it down for the school lore collection in 1998. Below is an example (4) from the Estonian Folklore Archives, narrated by a 13-year-old boy.

An annoying cat kept returning to the stairway. People had repeatedly thrown turpentine on its back. The cat had then scurried away and sat down on its behind, and pulled itself forward with front paws. As the cat would not leave, the boys living there had enough of it and tied a rope around the cat's neck and threw the cat out the window. Holding on to one end of the rope, the cat reportedly jumped out of its skin. A chunk of meat fell on the ground.



**Figure 1.** Illustration to the tale “Turns Wolf Inside Out” by Gustave Doré in the Russian translation of Rudolph Erich Raspe’s book “The Adventures of Baron Munchausen”, Moscow & Leningrad 1936.

In the context of the above text, a further comment is in order: I had a discussion with my then teen-aged daughter on this topic. The story was familiar to her: she had heard a similar tale from her classmates, the boys who had insistently teased the girls on a class excursion by telling the story. Neither the narrators nor the listeners doubted the feasibility of the incident. We can suppose that the girls whose story had inspired Inessa Kollom to write her article had heard a similar story from some boys they knew.

### **THE MAGIC AND THE REALITY OF THE TALL TALE**

While observing how all these stories that describe cases of animal abuse fit into their time and context, we should first specify that the four texts described above can be associated with somewhat different contexts and time periods. The tall tale presents the milieu and ideas of an agrarian culture. In this story-world, both small and big miracles are possible: in this case the magical number of the lucky horseshoe nails and the same number of sleeping wolves who did not wake up even after their tails were pinned to the stump. The first-person narrator thought that it was a pity that the meat was lost, but the seven wolf skins cost a fortune in this world.

The Munchausen tales were amusing lie stories which were based on the tradition and the storyteller's imagination. In the twentieth-century lore of hunters, foresters and lumber jacks, tall tales were mostly told as first-person narratives, or as personal experience stories. In the case of the tall tale, the storyteller takes on the role of a con artist who intentionally fools the audience. First-person narration made the story appear reliable, and the audience appreciated the fantastic end that arrived by unusual means and a sheer chance. This was for the sake of a good joke and at the same time of having a laugh at those among the audience who took the joke seriously.

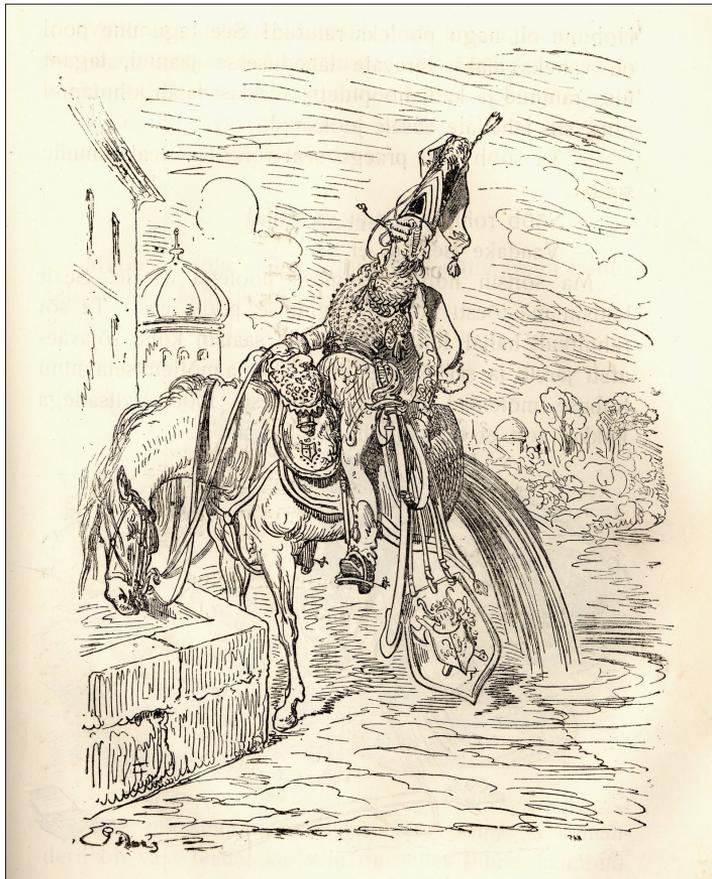
Telling such a joke is a culturally determined form of communication, which usually differs from everyday mediation of information. The joking frame appears to be a negotiated domain. Its license must be sanctioned by both the performer and the audience. Thus, jokes and joking performances, like any other form of cultural production, are enmeshed within socio-cultural power relations that they simultaneously map and disrupt (Preston 1997: 471).

Mall Proodel-Hiiemäe, who has examined such stories in their natural performance context, emphasises that in tall tales the effect of the story indeed aimed to take advantage of the ignorance of the audience. The story, however, was successful only as long as it was told as fiction and accepted as such by the audience (Proodel 1969: 23). Solutions that cannot be used in real life operate perfectly well in tall tales. Dan Ben-Amos, who has studied these tall tales in Jewish culture, argues that this genre has been perceived as a special story form and these stories had culturally restrictive borders, which established the topics suitable for narrations. In the narrating of such stories, the social role of the narrator is extremely important. The special reputation gained by the experience of a traveller or hunter entitled them to exaggerations and therefore, their tales and lies could have been subjected to the social convention of common agreement, which lends the stories a hint of reality. In case any of the figments failed to correspond to the culturally recognised genre prescriptions, it emerged from the rest of the material as a breach of cultural norms. At the same time, the same genre characteristics that the narrators formulated and perceived in the active period of the story tradition, symbolically passed on the special mutual influence between the seeming reality and real make-believe of the stories (Ben-Amos 2009: 286).

The audience of the comic legend, who were familiar with the life and physiology of animals, forgot for a moment what they knew and enjoyed the style, fantasy and covert humour of the story set in the familiar context. The audience appreciated the lie for the sake of a good story; therefore the old tall tale was not perceived as cruel or violent. The story leaves the impression that the wolves who are able to flee into the forest can obviously cope in life even with-

out their skins – as it is the case in many fairy tales that tell about animals, or more exactly, about humans disguised as animals who leave their skins on a big stone and come to breast-feed their human children or visit their human relatives at home.

In most hunter and war stories that were allegedly told by Munchausen, the incidents with animals tested the limits of the audience's perception, morality and good taste. So did the strange beasts resembling the hare with eight legs, or the bear that swallowed the carriage beam in its greed for honey, or Munchausen's horse that had lost half of its body in battle, and was no longer watertight.



**Figure 2.** Illustration to the tale “Half a Horse” by Gustave Doré in the Russian translation of Rudolph Erich Raspe’s book “The Adventures of Baron Munchausen”, Moscow & Leningrad 1936.

The moral balance in these seemingly cruel plots is maintained through the interaction of humour and fantasy. The fore part of Munchausen's horse finds its hind part in a meadow, and the farrier sews them together with young shoots of laurel, so that a mighty laurel wreath grows around the horse's head.

Small and big miracles that are born in the interrelation of the narrator and the tradition occur in the tale along with pragmatism. Whatever tricks are used to catch the prey, a prey is still a prey, because these tales reflected a world in which only the clever and inventive ones merited survival and real success. If you wanted to survive, you had to be cleverer and sturdier than the animal. Thus, the tales teach us how to turn a bear inside out by sticking the hand into its maw, or how to suffocate a bear or a wolf by sticking the hand deep into the animal's throat, so that it is unable to shut its mouth.

## **THE AMBIGUITY OF THE CONTEMPORARY MUNCHAUSEN STORY**

The contemporary versions of the old tall tale that emerge as part of children's and media culture are an evidence of the possible manifestations and applications of folklore in the modern culture. For a contemporary man, the motive of an animal turned inside out like a fur coat seems absurd rather than as a situation intrinsic to a comic legend "referring to the special mutual influence between the seeming reality and real make-believe". The modern shorter equivalents of (or the narratives functionally closest to) the tall tale seem to be riddle-like anecdotes with an absurd punch line (see Text 3). These texts do not provide the audience an answer; the emphasis in the text lies in the humour that results from the absurdity and unexpectedness of the situation. Text 4, which has been recorded from children, suggests that the customs, practices, tale and belief traditions, etc., which have become secondary in adult lore, have been passed on to and adopted by the children's culture. Continuing its existence in the children's culture, the Munchausen tale has acquired an (additional) function of determining social relationships within the group. The aggressiveness in the children's folklore and the narrator's intent to evoke in the audience a sense of disgust and disapproval is mostly introduced for the purpose of seeking attention and superiority. This is obviously also one of the reasons why the story usually belongs to the repertoire of boys. Here the story has maintained part of its older narrating function; one of the motivations of the narrator of the hunter's tale was clearly the same.

Observing the changes in the meaning and the function of the example texts, we have to agree that the modifications are most remarkable in the proportions of how the reality has been presented. Like the contemporary media text and the children's horror story, the older tall tale has taken the form of a belief legend that tells about cat torture in towns and blocks of flats. The older folk tale not only describes the reality, but also creates something more. The Munchausen tale was first and foremost an enjoyable lie that did not pretend to be true and as such represents one of the most significant differences between the tall tale and its modern developments.

The modern texts narrate about animal abuse as a social phenomenon and a form of human aggression. The shocking and detailed witness descriptions in the first media text sound like testimonies of a Munchausen syndrome<sup>5</sup> sufferer; through the description of violence and disgusting details the narrator tries to draw attention to himself and convey a clearly moralising message, whatever the cost.

In our increasingly urbanising culture, these texts reflect the general lines of development in the modern practices relating to animals (keeping of domestic animals, animal protection movement, establishment of zoos, etc.). If we follow the history of relationships between people and animals, we can see that in the peasant world the demarcation line between human and animal was less strict than in the modern world. For example, domestic animals were indicators of the peasants' social and economic status; they lived side by side with people and in the cold season often even shared the same room (see also Costlow & Nelson 2010). Nowadays, the former pragmatic perception of pets as property is being replaced with the view of pets as friends and companions. Attitudes towards animals depend in the first place on the general cultural context, and the time-related message that this tradition conveys reflects the change in people's relationship with nature, in this case pets. In this context, the children's horror story (Text 4), but even more so the graphic and moralising media text (Text 1) inspired by it, can be defined as a social narrative<sup>6</sup> that reveals the unresolved social problems of the welfare society.

Nowadays, animals are treated not only as equals to people but also as weak and helpless. In 2001, for example, the term 'pet' and the rules regulating people's responsibilities towards pets were officially adopted (see Javoiš 2006). People have come to hold similar ritual celebrations in honour of their pets that are organised for humans (birthday parties, funerals) (see Torp-Kõivupuu 2004). At the same time, large cities are still faced with the problem of stray pets, especially cats that reproduce too freely and spread diseases. The same newspaper issue that published the report of the police spokesman, for example, also includes an article reporting that it had been decided that all stray cats in Pärnu were to be sterilised.

From a narrative researcher's viewpoint, it is interesting to note that Texts 1 and 4 fit among the many contemporary urban legends that reflect similarly ambiguous attitudes towards cats. These are mostly rather cruel stories in which the relationships between humans and animals are not very positive and may have a tragic outcome for some characters of the story.<sup>7</sup> Many urban legends that are popular in the Estonian tradition tell about dead cats that are taken to the countryside to be buried, but are mistaken for something else. There is a story about how a cat run over by a neighbour's car was mistakenly considered a victim of food poisoning, etc. Cats are nice and cute, but do they really belong into our flats or even beds, and are we not overly personifying them? Is it necessary to call a fire brigade every time we see a cat on a roof? Finnish folklorist Leea Virtanen, who has studied legends among the adults' repertoire and children's horror stories, is convinced that the message of such accident stories is that we should not treat animals like humans. The place of dogs and cats is outside, and we should be masters of our own house (Virtanen 1996: 184).

Many belief legends that were popular in the agrarian culture basically reflect the same idea: on the one hand, they express a pragmatic perception towards pets, while on the other they stress that a pet, like all the nature around us, must be treated with respect. Even today people are familiar with belief legends according to which the person who damages a bird's nest or tortures an animal will be punished (Salve 2007: 61–63). Leea Virtanen (1996: 66) points to a story popular among Finnish schoolchildren in the 1990s, which speaks about a cat's revenge on two boys who killed her kittens – she scratches one of them blind and drops a stone to the other's head.

However, in the first and fourth examples, the case could be that for the today's schoolboy speaking about his 'hunting trip' is a tall tale similar to the ones told by the hunters in the distant past.

In a way, these lie stories seem to belong to our time, yet in another way they do not because we tend to judge them according to the cultural norms and moral criteria of the modern society. It seems that for the people of our century, the Munchausen tales are simply tales of animal cruelty and lies. There is an interesting documented case in Estonia: a member of a commission that was created within the framework of the Library Act in 1923–1924<sup>8</sup> found in 1935 that the tales of Munchausen are not suitable for Estonian libraries because “[t] here are many lies in this book. And there is much animal torture” (Veskimägi 2000: 44).

The BNS news initiated various and contradictory opinions from the readers in the Internet comments. They pointed on the untrustworthiness of the media and the police, problems with stray animals and the homeless, and wondered

about the truthfulness of the story. However, many of the comments proved that this kind of tradition was generally known.

- Are the police stupid or are they just pretending? Unbelievable.
- But this description is also crazy – to skin cats like that! Whatever for did the newspaper publish it? Some psychos might hit on the idea and then be disappointed that the skin won't peel off.
- I heard about this trick that boys performed already some five years ago. Frankly speaking, it was a grownup man who boasted about it and said that it was a spectacular sight.
- Congratulations to investigative journalism! By the way, women in sauna gossiped that in Rapla (town in Estonia) hunters had skinned a bear the same way! (*Postimees*, March 8, 2005)
  
- Estonian press bases its articles on the information from a reliable agency NSR ('naised saunas rääkisid' (women gossiped in sauna)).
- All kinds of idiots are published in the newspaper???? Damn the scraggy cats wandering about. Torturing animals is not a nice thing to do, but damn it, I also have problems with neighbourhood cats, they come and pee around my house ... damn it, everyone knows how disgustingly cat piss stinks; air gun doesn't help, probably have to set a bear trap under the snow.
- This T-shaped cut was an issue already in the 1980s, in my childhood. This is rather an urban legend. (Delfi, March 8, 2005)

All above examples clearly illustrate the fact that the form and the message of a contemporary narrative can be very ambiguous. It is evident that a narrative text cannot be considered a single established statement, but it represents a dialogue with several different, contradicting voices. Linda Dégh and Andrew Vázsonyi suggest that the legend itself has not changed, but as we examine the legend *in vivo*, the 'new' changes in structure and meaning become apparent to us. This allows us to perceive different voices and understandings, every one of them expressing different viewpoints in the legend as far back into the past as the records enable us to trace its context (Dégh & Vázsonyi 1971).

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

Today we can no longer tell if and to what degree the stories about turning animals inside out and making them jump out of their skins were told as tall tales or comic legends. There were probably enough people who wanted to believe these stories despite their knowledge of nature and animal physiology. Today the story is not quite the same, and, evidently, the form of the belief legend has become even more predominant.

Does the use and adaptation of old folktales help us to express our feelings and perceptions of the world around us? Or do the folktales reveal to us the hidden aspects of ourselves – our transformed sense of morality, ethics and hygiene, but also our ignorance? The answer is affirmative to both. But these narratives certainly show us that the contemporary culture is no longer the culture of the narrator that is born in the interaction of the storyteller and the audience and in which the cruelty of the old hunter's tale is hidden behind the storyteller's creative imagination and skill and behind the audience's understanding that "this cannot happen in real life". It is no longer the personified world where a clever human triumphs over a clever animal. Maarja Lõhmus argues that, when delving into the gist of the media myth, we should take a glance at the relationships between modern society and the media. "Media functions as a means of turning phenomena and processes into social and institutional ones and presents these as such." (Lõhmus 2009: 185) The modern culture is a media culture where the folktale is recounted with profuse realistic, graphic and shocking details, and this leaves us the impression of its eternal presence and endless possibilities.

This is the world we believe in. Linda Dégh has succinctly described the transformed relationship between the man and the legend:

There were times in which people could distinguish fantasy from reality, artistic imagination from everyday life. These were 'adult times', fabulous times that could cope with magic. Our time is increasingly becoming a legend-time in which reality intermingles with unreality, without the capability of discriminating one from the other. We live in a society that regards beliefs, daydreams, and hallucinations as feasible suggestions that can turn into reality. This is what we learn from legends and headline news. (Dégh 2001: 8)

It seems that while trying to make animals more human-like and the nature dependent on us, we have lost the moral balance between the human race and the animals. The debate about the equal rights for humans and animals and

the abuse of the latter by the former; a public skinning of an animal by animal rights activists in Tallinn Town Hall Square, and a particularly atrocious killing of a cat during a teenagers' bottle-spinning game in a flat in Tallinn represent the reality of the 21st century.<sup>9</sup>

## ARCHIVAL SOURCES

RKM – Folklore collection of the Department of Folkloristics at the Estonian Literary Museum

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> The article is supported by the state programme SF 0030181s08 “Narrative Aspects of Folklore. Power, Personality and Globalization”.
- <sup>2</sup> Karl Friedrich Hieronymus von Munchausen (1720–1797) was a German nobleman and military officer, who was famous for his fantastic lie stories and became a symbol of an outrageous bluffer and liar. The folktales that were allegedly told by Munchausen were published in English by R. E. Raspe and in German by G. A. Bürger already in the 1780s. Later on, Raspe's and Bürger's texts, and free compilations and adaptations of Munchausen-episodes that only partly corresponded to the original texts spread over the whole world. At the end of the 19th century the term *munchauseniade* was introduced among the literary circles (included in Brockhaus lexicon since 1872). With the publishing of anonymous chapbooks, the baron became something of a folkloristic character that anyone could use at their discretion. Nowadays the storyteller and the lying baron Munchausen is featured as the hero in many books, art and music pieces, theatre performances and films (see Jaaksoo 1992: 3–16). Further on the Munchausen tale cycle see *Enzyklopädie des Märchens*.
- <sup>3</sup> *Kotovasiia* is an example of word play in Russian: *kot* – cat, *katavasiia* – a mess, a trouble.
- <sup>4</sup> By the way, the ATU does not mention this tale type occurrence in Estonia; yet, it exists in Finland (Uther 2004: 474).
- <sup>5</sup> Munchausen syndrome is a medical term for a mental disorder. A sufferer from this disorder repeatedly feigns physical or mental illness in order to draw attention and evoke sympathy. The patient's behaviour may include pathological lying, feigning illness, sometimes inflicting physical harm to themselves, falsifying medical tests, etc. See also <http://www.clevelandclinic.org/health/health-info/docs/2800/2821.asp?index=9833>, last accessed on April, 3, 2013.
- <sup>6</sup> Many scholars have argued that contemporary legends should be understood and interpreted in the context of social problems and anxieties. Donna Wyckoff turns the question round and argues that contemporary legend theory has utility in understanding the social problem(s). The theoretical background of the contemporary legend

enables us to understand and evaluate the social contents and the rhetoric of the problems of today's society. Donna Wyckoff examined stories about sexual harassment from the viewpoint of the contemporary legend and called them "social narratives" (Wyckoff 1996: 364).

- <sup>7</sup> See also S. Hartwell's *The Cat in Urban Mythology* [online], available at: <http://messy-beast.com/urbancat.htm>, last accessed on March 12, 2013.
- <sup>8</sup> The head of the commission was Estonian linguist and language reformer Johannes Aavik, and the aim of the commission was to ensure the availability of quality literature in the open libraries of Estonia.
- <sup>9</sup> See *Postimees* (Nov. 13, 2006) "*Laupäevasel loomakaitsjate meeleavaldusel Tallinna vanalinnas läks rüseluseks*" ('Public Unrest in the Animal Rights Activists' Protest in Tallinn Old Town on Saturday'), also *Eesti Ekspress* (Nov. 16, 2006). See *SL Õhtuleht* (March 30, 2007) "*Kass kräunus, karvu tal enam peal ei olnud!*" ('The Cat Was Screaming, Its Hair All Gone').

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## ENIGMA AS A LITERARY DEVICE IN NATIVE AMERICAN FOLKLORE: JAROLD RAMSEY'S ANALYSIS OF TWO CLACKAMAS CHINOOK TALES

*Daniel J. Frim*

**Abstract:** This paper discusses Jarold Ramsey's classic article, *The Wife Who Goes Out Like a Man, Comes Back as a Hero: The Art of Two Oregon Indian Narratives*. It analyzes Ramsey's arguments against the backdrop of Alan Dundes's work in Native American folklore as well as more recent controversies in this field. Some scholars, such as Dundes, have attempted to vindicate Native American folklore against Eurocentric criticism by fitting it into Western literary molds. Ramsey, on the other hand, brings to light the distinctive aesthetic qualities of two tales from the Pacific Northwest by recognizing the ways in which these narratives often stray from the literary expectations of Western readers. In this respect, Ramsey's approach is preferable to that of Dundes, and it provides a model for the careful, aesthetically oriented analysis of the idiosyncratic features of individual folklore traditions.

**Keywords:** Native American folklore, Pacific Northwest, Clackamas Chinook, Alan Dundes, Jarold Ramsey, aesthetics of folklore

Alan Dundes has described what he calls "the casualist theory of American Indian folktale composition [...] According to this view, American Indian folktales are composed of random, unstable conglomerates of motifs" (Dundes 1965: 206). Dundes rejects this approach, arguing instead that Native American folktales, like the folktales of Europe, can be mapped by logical, Proppian morphological schemes. With this argument, Dundes is attempting to rescue Native American folklore from Eurocentric criticism,<sup>1</sup> but in doing so, he overlooks some of the distinctive qualities of this folklore tradition. In an article entitled *The Wife Who Goes Out Like a Man, Comes Back as a Hero: The Art of Two Oregon Indian Narratives*, Jarold Ramsey likewise responds to impressions of Native American folklore as illogical. His response, however, is more nuanced than that of Dundes. Ramsey combines basic elements of Dundes's argument with another approach, which allows the Clackamas Chinook folktales that Ramsey

analyzes to be puzzling or even, in some respects, illogical<sup>2</sup>, and which seeks to explain these qualities as meaningful literary devices.

Admittedly, at many points, Ramsey suggests that the most puzzling, apparently nonsensical or surreal features of Native American folklore can be cleared up through consultation of cultural, contextual knowledge, and in this respect, his argument parallels that of Dundes. For example, at the beginning of his paper, Ramsey describes traditional assessments of Native American folklore in the following terms:

Indian literature is likely to seem all the more terse, even cryptic, to us for being the verbal art of highly ethnocentric, tribal people, whose infinitely diverse cultures we still don't know much about. (1989: 210)

The implication here is that Indian lore makes little sense “to us” but that it makes perfect sense to its intended audience or, ideally, to an ethnographically informed folklorist. Similarly, Ramsey addresses one of the most mysterious motifs in the article’s focal Clackamas folktale: the practice of “dancing for the head” (ibid.: 217) of a decapitated murder victim. He explains, “Presumably, the dance is intended to help the killer obtain its spirit power, as in the practice of most Western Indian groups” (ibid.: 218). This ethnographically informed explanation transforms what at first appears to be a surreal, inscrutable element of the story into a clear allusion to a Native American ritual.

Elsewhere, however, Ramsey skillfully combines knowledge of ethnographic context with a more interpretive approach that allows Native American folklore to retain some of its surreal, puzzling, or apparently illogical qualities. He addresses, for example, a plot event which lacks logical clarity because it is apparently unmotivated and is not caused by previous events in the plot: in the story *Seal and Her Younger Brother*, a man is murdered in his bed by his mysterious wife, but no explanation of the murder or of its motives is provided. Ramsey has the opportunity to explain away this apparent gap in the logical clarity of the tale, because he points out that the plot of *Seal and Her Younger Brother* also occurs as an embedded episode within another, longer story, *The Revenge against the Sky People*. In *The Revenge against the Sky People*, the embedded episode that shares its plot with *Seal and Her Younger Brother* receives full elucidation in the larger context of the story. Ramsey therefore acknowledges the possible contention that the mysterious *Seal and Her Younger Brother* is “no more than an interesting fragment” and that it is puzzling merely because it has been separated from the larger context of “the ‘true version’ [i.e., *The Revenge Against the Sky People*]” (ibid.: 216). According to this hypothetical approach, fuller knowledge of the cultural and inter-textual context of *Seal and Her Younger Brother* demonstrates that, in fact, this tale leaves nothing unexplained; it initially puzzles us only because it has come to

us in an incomplete version, but its inscrutability can be remedied by a fuller knowledge of the tale's context.

However, Ramsey emphatically rejects this approach, writing: "both the impression and the conclusion would be wrong. Indian mythology, like all oral literature, relies on narrative motifs and situations that may be current in differing combinations" (ibid.). Here, Ramsey seems to acknowledge the existence of apparently "random, unstable conglomerates of motifs" perceived by the "casualist" approach that Dundes rejects (Dundes 1965: 206). But Ramsey, unlike Dundes, sees these as meaningful literary features of Native American folklore that should be analysed rather than denied. Ramsey cites Hymes, who argues that the enigmatic, murderous wife in *Seal and Her Younger Brother* is a typical Native American Trickster character, whose mischievous or evil acts are "an indispensable plot agent", and that "according to the conventions of the Northwest Trickster, no special purpose or provocation for killing is necessary" (ibid.: 213). In citing Hymes's analysis, Ramsey still refers to ethnographic knowledge of the tale's context, but instead of using it to deny that the motives underlying the murder episode are mysterious, he suggests that this mysteriousness is a literary, aesthetic feature of the narrative:

It is hard not to admire the narrative artistry by which means the ostensible primary action (the deception and killing of the husband by his 'wife') is muted and left obscure so as to bring the apparent secondary action [...] into the foreground. (ibid.)

Here, Ramsey admits that the tale *does* omit any explanation of the husband's murder, but he suggests that this omission and its impact on the logical clarity of the tale act as literary devices, whose purpose is to direct attention away from the murder and onto the tale's true focus.

Ramsey's article, which was first published in 1977<sup>3</sup>, bears upon a controversy that has grown in intensity over the past three decades. Attempts to "rescue" Native American folklore have gone far beyond the scope of Dundes's and Ramsey's arguments regarding narrative logic or other literary features and have attempted to address the daunting question of historicity. Native American folklore is now widely treated as a factual, historical document (Echo-Hawk 2011: 268). While few, presumably, would deny that folklore has the potential to preserve historical data, new approaches to Native American lore sometimes apply this principle of historicity to a degree that may surprise students of other folklore traditions. Roger Echo-Hawk, for example, argues that folklore can preserve memories stretching back as far as 40,000 years (ibid.: 274) and that the origin myths of the Arikara and other tribes record events in Pleistocene-era migrations, such as journeys through the Arctic represented by tales of "a dark origin point" (ibid.: 276). This scholarly trend represents an

earnest and much-needed attempt to move beyond the influence of dismissive attitudes towards non-Western cultures and literatures. But in the midst of this controversy, Ramsey's article presents a nuanced argument suggesting that, without attempting to fit Native American folklore into pre-formed molds such as Proppian morphological schemes (or, perhaps, literal documentary historicity), it is possible to begin understanding this folklore tradition in its own terms through careful analysis aimed at elucidating the tradition's distinctive literary qualities.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> This interpretation was suggested by my colleagues Becca Harbeson and William Goulston, and confirmed by Professor Joseph Harris, in Folklore and Mythology 98a, a course at Harvard University. The use of the term "rescue" in this context is borrowed from Professor Joseph Harris.

<sup>2</sup> By 'illogical', I do not mean self-contradictory or otherwise *counter* to logic. Instead, I use 'illogical' to refer to a *lack* of explicitly logical plot structure. In other words, for the purposes of this paper, an 'illogical' tale is one in which things happen for no explicit reason. The plotline may consist of unmotivated actions or events that do not logically lead from one to the next. Or, if the central plotline is logically structured, then auxiliary events entering or affecting the central plotline are random, spontaneous, or inexplicable. To put this feature in Levi-Strauss's terms, "it would seem that in the course of a myth anything is likely to happen. There is no logic, no continuity. Any characteristic can be attributed to any subject; every conceivable relation can be met. With myth, everything becomes possible." (Levi-Strauss 1972: 291).

<sup>3</sup> *PMLA*, Vol. 92, pp. 9–18.

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## INTERVIEW WITH HUNGARIAN FOLKLORIST AND ETHNOLOGIST MIHÁLY HOPPÁL ON THE OCCASION OF HIS 70TH JUBILEE

*Interviewer Nikolay Kuznetsov*

**Could you please say a few words about your origin?**

I was born in a small town called Kassa (Košice), which today belongs to eastern Slovakia. I usually say that I come from a middle-class family – that of a railway clerk. It was fortunate for me as people with middle-class background considered learning essential.

In 1955 we moved to Sárospatak, a town with a high-level gymnasium. I was lucky to attend it. The school had been established 400 years ago and it was well-known all over Hungary. It was one of the best gymnasiums in the country. At the time I attended it, it could boast many teachers from the old staff. In addition to good teachers, the school in Sárospatak had an excellent library. I took to it from the very beginning. I liked the smell of the books there.

I remember well that, as a schoolboy, I wrote a small research entitled *Sárospataki diákok a '48-as forradalomban* (Sárospatak students in the 1848 revolution). Many students from Sárospatak joined the fight for freedom. I just loved it: what an elated idea – freedom!



*Mihály Hoppál.*

In addition, Sárospatak is the home town of Hungarian freedom-fighter Ferenc Rákóczi. In Sárospatak we lived across the Rákóczi Castle and, as children, played in the castle gardens. My father was a doctor, a gynaecologist.

Later on, during my university years, I visited the neighbourhood to collect my first ethnographic materials on folk medicine in Zemplén County.

**Did you enter university right after finishing gymnasium studies?**

No, I skipped a year. At that time universities did not willingly accept those with no working class background. So after high school I worked on the railway for a year and gained extra points for entrance the next year. Times were like that.

**Did you undertake ethnology studies from the very beginning?**

Yes, I majored in the Hungarian language, literature and ethnology from the very start.

My father was friends with the director of the museum that was housed in Rákóczi Castle. And this was a reason why I took to ethnology. I was not particularly eager to become a historian; yet, I was considering majoring in history. This museum director was an ethnographer, my father's good friend, and then I decided that I was into it.

**What is it that interests you most in ethnography?**

I started with research into folk medicine. My first book entitled *Népi gyógyítás Magyarországon* (Folk Medicine in Hungary) is dedicated to this topic, and the book has also been published in English. My diploma thesis *Zempléni népi gyógyítás* (Zemplén Folk Medicine) – about 200 pages of research on the material I collected myself – dealt with the same subject matter.

This was the time when an ethnography research group was established at the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. It was led by Gyula Ortutay, and he hired me right away. The year was 1967, so I have been working there for 45 years already.

The ethnography research group was in need of younger researchers, as most of the members already had doctoral degrees. They had a voluminous collection that had to be put into order. And so Éva Pócs and I systematised it by illnesses, medicinal herbs, healing methods, places, etc. In the course of this work I came to understand many things: for example, how folk beliefs work. Folk medicine is a mixture of knowledge and beliefs. And so I engaged myself in the system of beliefs.

### **How did you come to study shamanism?**

In 1972, Vilmos Diószegi, Head of the Department of Folklore, left the academy, leaving behind an English-language manuscript that I was supposed to edit. This work resulted in a book entitled *Shamanism in Siberia*. This was how I delved into exploring shamanism.

### **You are also known as an ethno-semiotician...**

In 1967, I happened to be in Moscow for the first time, participating in a course at the Institute of Slavonic and Balkan Studies. I stayed there for three months. Each week somebody presented a paper, and finally my turn came. My presentation topic was *Notes about Ethno-Semiotics*. In Moscow I also had a chance to meet Vyacheslav Ivanov, Valery Toporov, Yuri Lotman and other prominent figures from the Moscow school of semiotics.

From Moscow I took with me volumes of *Sign Systems Studies*. I also read a paper on this subject at the University of Budapest. Then, together with Vilmos Voigt, we devised ethno-semiotics, which is description of ethnographic phenomena with the methods of semiotics.

And then I met Valery Basilov. He was Research Secretary at the institute in Moscow, while I had the same position at the Institute of Ethnography in Budapest. And we became friends. He also studied shamanism. Then I went to Moscow for the second time, now already for half a year period.

### **Could we regard these Moscow researchers as your greatest mentors?**

Yes, you could. I learned the most from my Moscow colleagues. They sent me offprints to read. We once also went to the basement where the film collection was stored. They showed it to me but I was asked to keep it a secret. The collection included primary material, video footages from Simchenko and Oskin, which were made into films only decades later. I concluded that, as shamans had been filmed, they still existed. And that it would be interesting to go and see them. Local colleagues told me that I could try.

I considered going to the Kyrgys in Central Asia, and also to the Caucasus, as I wanted to explore the Turkic peoples. There I befriended Georgian scientists and an Armenian, Sarkis Arutjunjan, who has written about Armenian mythology. In short, I was trying to find my place in life. And I was greatly influenced by the fact that I was able to participate in fieldwork.

After that I tried to visit Moscow annually, bringing back the most recent scientific publications. By the way, I was the one to first publish Lotman's works in Hungarian. Moreover, this was Lotman's first publication abroad, i.e.,

outside the Soviet Union. When Lotman visited Hungary, he expressed deep gratitude to me for that. I took great pride in the fact that semiotics research was also published in Hungary.

I also started my trips to Italy, as Italians also developed an interest in semiotics. It was Umberto Eco who took it up. Before that, he used to be a linguist, not a real semiotician. Then he started writing *The Name of the Rose*. I remember that once, at the dinner table, he mentioned something about using a strange device that enabled moving the text back and forth (the computer).

At the time, they organised one- or two-month semiotics courses in Italy. I also got a scholarship for attendance, and delivered a lecture on research into mythology in the Soviet Union, introducing the ideas of Ivanov, Toporov, Lotman and some others. I regarded it as my special role – to be like a shaman, a mediator between the two worlds, East and West.

And then we had an idea that colleagues from the Soviet Union could come to Hungary and researchers from Europe were also allowed to come there already. So we decided to organise the first shamanism conference in Hungary, which was dedicated to the memory of Vilmos Diószegi. It took place in the beautiful town of Sárospatak. The conference was a real success, and resulted in the publication of *Shamanism in Eurasia*.

We also asked some Finns to participate: Juha Penttikäinen, Anna-Leena Siikala, etc. I also frequented Finland at the time. And once in Helsinki, when sitting in Juha's sauna (all important things are settled in sauna) we decided to start a series on Uralic mythologies in the form of a comparative encyclopaedia.

**You have travelled all over the world. Could you name a place that you would like to visit time and again?**

China is definitely one of these places. You can find many small nations there which have not been thoroughly investigated from the scientific point of view. However, the Chinese themselves have recently started to explore the cultures and ethnographies of their small nations; for instance, the ministry has ordered monographs on this topic. Also, there are young people among ethnic minorities who study to become ethnographers, folklorists, etc.

**Each small nation in Asia has their own language. Does it make things complicated for a researcher from Europe?**

Yes, it does. And I really regret that I was not able to learn all these languages. Yet, in order to do this, you have to get there at an early age. One of my colleagues, Dávid Somfai Kara, was just at the right age and was able to travel all over the Soviet Union. He went to Central Asia and learned a few local languages. I did not have a chance to do it and this is a severe shortcoming.

However, I realised that everything that I saw could be recorded visually. And I was also lucky as this was when the rebirth of shamanism began. In China it happened a bit later, but I made it there in time as well. Foreigners had not been there much and I was allowed to do different things. My predecessor Diószegi, for example, had not been allowed to conduct research properly. So, I was also lucky, which you have to be in order to do your work fairly well. You have to be determined and enthusiastic, but it is also very important that you are at the right place at the right time.

After a conference in Budapest a Buryat researcher, who also participated in the conference, invited me to his country. He did not want to take me to fieldwork, either, but at least showed me materials at the museum. Even that was a big deal, as nobody else had been allowed to go there before me. Actually, in the beginning I was declined access as well; they said that the museum was under repairs. I said that this was the special purpose of my visit. Then my colleague promised to arrange it for me. So I was also able to take pictures there.

When I went to China, which I was not permitted to do in the beginning, either, I expressed a wish to explore smaller nations in the countryside regions as well. They told me it was not possible. I explained that I was not a tourist, that I had come for work purposes. It took great pains to get a permit to go to the Manchus' former capital Changchun. In conversations with my colleagues they mentioned that they had some shamanic items. I was so happy and thought that I could go to the museum and see the display and take pictures of the objects. But they brought the items to me in two suitcases. I did not say a word.

Some years later I learned that as I had behaved myself and had not expressed any anger, they had decided to take me to a shaman. This was my first live meeting with a real shaman. But before China I had visited Korea, where I bought a small camera that enabled taking quick snapshots. It was this camera that I used for taking pictures of this old shaman. So I was lucky again.

After my third journey to China they told me that they had taken me to the shaman because I had not been impatient and aggressive.

**Maybe, in addition to luck, a researcher should also possess certain personality features?**

Definitely perception. With a person from the east you have to sit and talk lengthily, and maybe also drink some wine; you should not hurry. For them time runs its own course.

**Have you ever wanted to learn to become a shaman yourself?**

I have repeatedly been asked the same question during fieldwork. A Tuva shaman once said to me: *you are my son*. My answer was that I could not stay

there and learn everything as I already had a family and my whole life back at home. A young single person can stay there for months, learn the language and other things.

I was in an advantaged position as I had edited publications on shamanism and read special literature, so I was able to ask relevant questions. It takes quite long for a young researcher to gain knowledge about all that as they lack all the basics. Especially English-speaking researchers are like that. Thanks to Diószeg I knew a lot of things beforehand: for example, when shooting a film, I knew exactly what to shoot, what to turn attention to, etc.

In Korea a female shaman also made a proposition to me to come and study under her supervision. She also had three really beautiful disciples, one better-looking than the other. I would have loved to stay; yet, I had my flight ticket in my pocket with the exact return date on it.

As already said, this work has to be started when you are still young. And now, being seventy years old, I have to say that there are so many things that I would like to accomplish. Actually I do not need to travel any more, as I have a dozen of bulky volumes of fieldwork materials that I have collected, and also some additional materials that have not been even processed yet. On this basis several books could be written. This material should be elaborated and, in the course of this, all the questions that you also asked should be answered.

So my answer to your question if I have ever wanted to become a shaman is negative. These are two different occupations: you can be an ethnographer, anthropologist or ethnologist, or you can be a shaman. You should not blend these two together, especially if the local language is not your mother tongue. Mythology can be understood only in your mother tongue. This is why we made a decision long ago that Uralic mythologies should be written by local researchers. As for me, I should write Hungarian mythology. Fortunately, good things have been written also previously. Arnold Ipolyi's work is definitely among the best ones, and I have also re-published it. However, many things have to be written again, as old books have a very different structure, and so on.

### **Why do we have to study shamanism?**

I could give two different answers to this question. On the one hand, we have to explore not only shamanism, but also other ingredients of culture, because all of them are essential: food, songs, dances, etc. On the other hand, shamanism has to be investigated and it is worth investigating even more, as in the 1990s and 2000s small nations were able to present part of their culture as a symbol of national identity. And these small nations could not boast many things to pick out for presenting, so shamanism was just 'the thing'. Also, this coincided with UNESCO's decision to protect and preserve folklore, so the time was

favourable. They succeeded even in China. In the regions where shamanism survived (communist) persecution, this presented a good opportunity. And by today it is already business. Hero epics also emerged, for example, *Manas* by the Kyrgys people and *Olonkho* by the Yakuts.

**What would the world be like without shamanism and shamans?**

It is a good question, but we will never know. The healing technique that for the less cultured peoples starts with sound-making (clapping hands, tapping two sticks together) has proved to be very efficient. What is very important in shamanic healing is that many people come together and concentrate on the sick person. It is an ancient technique in which each person concentrates and directs their energy on the same spot. Modern medicine has nothing of the kind. This is human approach and could be learned from shamans.

People assemble, sing together, watch the shaman beat the drum; they are emotionally involved in the healing process, listen to the recommendations that the shaman gives to the family members kneeling in front of him, and participate in the joint party where the meat of the sacrificed animal is eaten. And it is important here that the shaman is the one who organises the community and its life. This has continued for thousands of years, and this is how religion has evolved.

We are increasingly arguing that already Neanderthals had shamans. It was shamans who gathered a few dozens of people around them to form communities. On this basis people developed a sense of belonging. Shamans also had their say in the preparations for hunting trips, performing rituals; they sang about the past, and repeatedly told stories to the community of who they were and where they came from. This way, shamans recreated identity and preserved the community's wisdom. In conclusion we could say that we would be worse off without them.

**You have written many books. How have shamans reacted to them?**

I have also taken my books to them, although it has often happened that by that time some older shamans have already passed away into the afterlife. Honestly speaking, I really do not know what their opinion is. I believe that they are not interested in my books; they live in a world of their own. Of course, today's shamans are happy to participate in TV-shows and so on. Yet, this is not important for proper shamans.

**Are there any shamans in Hungary?**

There are some neo-shamans.

**And what do you think about neo-shamanism?**

I think that this is the result of natural evolution. Especially at the time when so-called empty spaces emerge everywhere, as there is no faith. This is a queer thing which, in a sense, could be called psychotherapy. Many people say that it is a good thing, so let it be – especially if it brings in money.

**What do you think of Finno-Ugric relationships, the so-called Ugric-Turkish war, etc.?**

I have never concealed the fact that I like Ago Künnap's theory. I am of the same opinion with him that we cannot deny the existing theory but we still have to re-analyse certain parts of it. Because, as he has also proved, things look different from a different angle. You do not need to or even must not be dogmatic. A real scientist is open to everything new and accepts the fact that someone else can prove that they are right. Angela Marcantonio argues that the ones referring to János Sajnovics have misunderstood the Latin text and this is where errors have started.

Recently a big etymological dictionary of old Turkish languages was completed. We cannot deny that certain words occur there. We are not able to explain *Árpád*, *Álmos*, *táltos*, or *boszorkány* from the Finno-Ugric point of view. And this is the place for contemplation. For instance, if *god* and similar concepts belong in Uralic mythology, then the word *isten* cannot be placed in the Finno-Ugric system. So, it is worth considering. Even Diószegi showed that parallels of Hungarian *táltoses* (shamans) fighting like oxen can be found by Altai Turks but not by Finno-Ugrians.

When we will have completed the series of Uralic mythologies, we might have found out who resembles who. There are a number of similar elements; yet, Hungary is not part of the Finno-Ugric system. Not that I want to deny something, but there are plenty of things that have to be surveyed and analysed.

**Finally, could you please tell us what kind of relationships you have with Estonian folkloristics and ethnography?**

Estonian folkloristics is very close to my heart. Several of my works have been published in Estonian and I have received good feedback. I think that I and my Estonian colleagues have come to understand each other.

**Thank you for sharing your thoughts about your life and work with us!**

## IN MEMORIAM

**ARTEM KOZMIN (MARCH 15, 1976 – FEBRUARY 1, 2013)**



On February 1, 2013, at the age of 36, Artem Kozmin, young Russian folklorist and anthropologist, researcher of the Centre of Folklore Typology and Semiotics at the Russian State University for the Humanities, died in Ulan-Bator.

Artem Kozmin was a disciple and colleague of the famous Russian folklorist Sergey Neklyudov, a researcher of a wide range of interests and competences. During his short life time, he managed to write about the structure and semantics of narrative folkloric texts, genre systematics and geographic spread of folklore, metrics of poetic texts, and Polynesian languages and tradition, as well as carry out fieldwork in Mongolia and North Caucasus. Artem Kozmin's contribution to the creation of digital databases and registers, including software, for folklore and myth texts, as well as the development of digital analysis methodology and its practical use in folklore is especially weighty. His candidate's dissertation entitled *Strukturno-semanticheskii ukazatel' fol'klornykh siuzhetov*:

*In memoriam*

*kompiuternaia model' ustanovleniia sviazei mezhdu tekstom i edinitsami ego opisaniia* (Structural-Semantic Index of Folklore Plots: A Computer Model for Establishing Text-Index Unit References) was also dedicated to the same topic.

Quite a few Estonian folklorists knew Artem Kozmin personally – either from summer schools of folkloristics at the Russian State University for the Humanities or other science forums. We will remember him with gratitude for his writings, the registers and databases created by him, his numerous invaluable digital gifts to us, as well as his humane empathy and cheerfulness.

## NEWS IN BRIEF

### MIGRATION IN THE CONTEXT OF RITUALS AND PRACTICES

On June 26–29, 2012, the Eighth Annual Conference of the SIEF (International Society for Ethnology and Folklore) Working Group “The Ritual Year” (established in 2004) took place in Plovdiv, Bulgaria.

The conference under the general title “Migrations” was organised by the Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Studies with the Ethnography Museum at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, and the Paisii Hilendarskii University of Plovdiv, with Lina Gergova at the head of the organising committee. The subject of migration came up due to the topicality of the phenomenon and relating problems, which attract the attention of ethnologists, folklorists, linguists, historians, sociologists and specialists from other fields of humanities from many countries.

The call for papers evoked responses from researchers of twenty countries, and forty presentations were given within the four conference days. Each day started with an introductory lecture. On the first day, after the official opening, **Jurij Fikfak** (Slovenia) in his presentation “Crisis and Ritual Year” discussed participation in rituals and practices as a possibility for negotiating difficult situations, crises and traumas, including change in place of residence (migration). In his paper, the researcher made a distinction between rituals as regular practice (rather rare nowadays) and as intellectual heritage – the basis for the national idea. In his opinion, regarding national-cultural tradition as the mental basis is necessary for determining identity, and this approach could contribute to the restoration and continuity of holiday rituals. According to discussants, these processes are under way in several countries.

The second day of the conference was opened by **Emily Lyle** (Scotland), Chair of the Ritual Year Working Group, with her presentation “The ‘Life Cycle’ of Crops in Relation to the Ritual Year”. The researcher compared the vegetation period of main European grains with people’s seasonal life and ritual practices. E. Lyle’s idea that in vegetation periods the most significant are the beginning and the end, not their cyclicity, aroused heated discussion. The main issue argued was to what extent could mythological year be structured and whether we could disengage ourselves from concrete climatic conditions that have impact on grain growing in different regions of Europe.

On the third day, the keynote speech was given by **Irina Sedakova** (Moscow), who talked about time and space in the Balkan and Slavic rituals of separation. In her analysis of real (departure, leaving of migrants, recruiting, etc.) and symbolic (transition moments in life cycle – birth, wedding, funeral) leave-taking, the researcher offered a classification of ‘separations’, based on temporal dichotomy – the separation is either temporary (until the next meeting) or permanent (forever). The associations between separations in calendar and family rituals were also discussed. This topic evoked many memories of personal life as well as from fieldwork. For instance, grandmother saw her grandchildren off by blessing them with loaves of bread (Latvia); parents, when bidding farewell, said: “God in front of you, and we will follow” (Bulgaria), etc.



*Moment from the meeting of the SIEF Ritual Year Working Group. From the left: Leander Petzold, Irina Sedakova and Emily Lyle. Photo by Andres Kuperjanov 2012.*

On the last day, **István Povedák** (Hungary) talked about strategies for identity preservation, giving a detailed introduction into the ethno-cultural, public awareness and political activities of the students' association of Szekler University (SZEFE). The organisation advocated and created rituals (including an anthem popular even nowadays) to support the identity of Transylvanian Hungarians who returned to Hungary in 1920. Rituals and politics are closely connected, and on national basis rituals can either separate or unite people – this idea was conveyed by many speakers at the conference.

The panel “Ritual Year of Migrant Communities” was opened by **Laurent Sébastien Fournier**, who talked about the ritual games of the Scottish Diaspora in the United States. The researcher analysed calendar ball games that have been spread all over the world by Scottish emigrants and have acquired specific local features. He proposed to view these games as a ritual genre that has preserved its ritual foundation regardless of the great variability and specific local features. The Scottish exodus started in the 18th century, and the descriptions of games in American literature date back to 1846. By the late 19th century these games had nearly died out, only to make a powerful re-appearance after World War II. Today the games are losing their connection with the calendar, and their sacral character has faded; however, identity issues, Scottishness and its material signs have become more significant. The following discussions elaborated on the notion of the ‘ritual genre’ as well as the ethnic stereotypes of the Scots. According to David Stanley (USA), Americans do not regard them as greedy and stingy but rather as courageous, brave and tenacious in the spirit of Romanticism inspired by the works of Water Scott. The topic of ethnic stereotypes in the context of migration was also investigated in other papers.

**David Stanley** in his paper “Rituals and Customs in an Immigrant Community” noted that American experience in the sphere of migration and relating issues is ex-

tremely important today, as many countries feature multiculturalism. He dwelt upon the situation in the State of Utah which, due to the development of coal industry in the 19th century, attracted workers from nearly thirty nationalities. The use of the signs of national belonging (clothing, hairstyle, attributes) as well as confession, ritual and everyday food, music and dances helped the newcomers preserve their identity; yet, sometimes the migrants found themselves in a situation in which they had to hide their origin and adopt local rituals and customs.

**Jaka Repič** (Slovenia) in his paper “The Role of Rituals, Celebrations and Festivities in Slovene Diasporic Community in Argentina” discussed the history of the preservation and maintenance of customs among emigrants who fled their homeland in the 1820s. By operating with the notions ‘personal trauma’ and ‘collective memory of roots’, the researcher described the mechanisms for mythologizing the past, native places and holidays. The presentation raised questions about the return of emigrants to their homeland, the ethno-cultural problems related with visiting cult sites (for the Slovenes, Mount Triglav) and the ways of overcoming stereotypes.

**Petko Hristov** (Bulgaria), who has been investigating work migration on the Balkans, discussed in his paper “Seasonal Labour Migrations and Ritual Cycles” how seasonal work migration of the past and today’s migrations fit into and influence the ritual calendar. Earlier on, winter was the time for weddings and autumn for baptismal ceremonies, whereas today wedding celebrations take place in the summertime, when all migrants gather in their native villages; baptismal ceremonies usually also fall on spring or summer. Today these celebrations feature certain ‘European’ characteristics conditioned by migration, and sacrificial rituals (*kurban*) have been transformed to a considerable extent. The researcher pointed out frequent changes in state borders in some regions (for example, in Macedonian villages these changes have occurred up to five times during the past century), which has had a significant impact on both the migration processes and rituals.

**Tatiana Minniyakhmetova** (Russia – Austria) in her paper “The Ritual Calendar of Migrants” dwelt upon changes in the annual cycle of rituals and in the calendar (including division into weeks) on the example of the Udmurts moving to other regions of Russia. Environment has a great impact on the Udmurts’ historic rituals, and therefore change in place of residence also influences the semantics of rituals. **Aigars Leilbārdis’s** presentation “Calendar Customs in Latvian Village Timofeyevka in Siberia” also reviewed the influence of neighbouring cultures; yet, doing it on the basis of rather different material. The Russian setting has had a considerable impact on the Latvians’ holiday calendar (borrowing of some concepts of Midsummer Night) and terminology, but a number of rituals inherent in Latvia, such as celebration of Palm Sunday and specific omens relating to this, have persisted.

A special section was dedicated to the fieldwork carried out within the project for studying culture in Bulgarian-Turkish borderlands. **Valentina Ganeva-Raycheva** and **Nikolai Vukov** in their joint paper discussed commemorating cases of Bulgarians and Turks’ forced resettlements, **Meglana Zlatkova** spoke about inhabiting divided territories and rituals on the two sides of Bulgarian-Turkish border, and **Lina Gergova’s** paper was dedicated to the national commemorative meetings on Petrova Niva, Bulgaria, focusing on local/national and traditional/modern. The rituals of the Bulgar-

ians in Turkey and of the Turkish resettlers in Bulgaria include regular visits to native places in their former homeland, ritual meetings and common meals in sacred places.

A significant subtheme of the conference was New Paganism, which has recently been in the centre of attention of several members of the Ritual Year Working Group. This year, unusual formats were used. **Kamila Velkoborská** (Czech Republic) and **Leon van Gulik's** (Netherlands) joint presentation dwelt upon the history of New Pagan movement Wicca, its spread and rituals, which have acquired specific features in each country. The paper was illustrated by a live interview with Morgana Sythove, who calls herself a witch. She told the audience that in the 1970s she was travelling in Europe and discovered the Wicca movement in the Netherlands, and made it her life-work. Morgana, who participates in all the rituals of the annual cycle and also performs other magic rituals, declares that all the Wicca components function well and this is the reason why this movement is popular all over the world. Morgana's current trip to Bulgaria also testified to the quick migration and attractiveness of this movement: after the conference she participated in the celebrations of the summer solstice as well as initiation rites organised by the Bulgarian New Pagan Association.

In the section of migration of rituals and ideas, **Katarina Ek-Nilsson** (Sweden) talked about female representations in the Swedish midwinter tradition and their roots. The paper was mainly based on archival materials (the researcher works at the Archives of Onomastics and Folklore in Uppsala, Sweden). St. Lucia's Day (December 13) is regarded as a purely Swedish holiday in Sweden, relating to abundant rituals and social-political activeness. However, the speaker maintained that the roots of St. Lucia can be traced back to ancient goddesses of light and femininity and the female biblical characters. **Ana Stefanova** (Bulgaria) in her paper "Nestinarski Ritual Complex in Stomanovo Village – A New Place for an Old Tradition" expanded upon a topic of interest for many anthropologists: migration of rituals in space and time, as well as increase of their spectacularity and esotericism. By analysing the custom spread in Bulgaria and partly also in Greece of dancing on burning coals on St. Constantine's Day (May 21), holding icons of saints, in a village where such rituals have never been observed formerly, she proved that it could be just one person in a village who takes over and develops a ritual complex. In the village of Stomanovo it was a middle-aged person who assumed the role of the performer and leader of the rituals, claiming to be a clairvoyant and a prophet, descending simultaneously from Mother Theresa and Vanga by his mother's line. In addition to the common fire-dancing (with his grandmother's picture instead of an icon in his hands), he also performs rituals relating to shamanism, modern esotericism, eastern religions, etc.

**Irina Stahl's** (Romania) presentation spoke about healing rituals in post-communist Romania and introduced the cult of St. Nectarios of Aegina in 'emigration', which started to evolve after part of his remains had been removed. The Saint of Aegina (he died on this island in 1920) has been attributed several miracles, healing cases, conceptions, etc., which have not been observed in Greece. Chapels and springs are put up in his honour, and Nectarios has become one of the most popular names given to children. A similar case was treated also by **Vihra Baeva**, who spoke about Greeks who lived in Melnik, Bulgaria, and after the Balkan War in 1912 had to emigrate to Sidirokastro in Greece, taking with them the icon of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary (Bulgarian:

*Света Зона*), the upper part of which depicted the handing over of the Holy Girdle of Virgin Mary to apostle St. Thomas. The Bulgarians who remained in Melnik preserved the local custom of the veneration of the Holy Girdle; they ordered a copy of the icon and built a chapel. On the day of the veneration of the Holy Girdle of the Virgin Mary associated with this icon and the cult, the day of the city of Melnik is also celebrated – this is a clear indication of the cult being part of local identity. Here we should point out that the popular name of the holiday, as well as the icon, the chapel and the spring is Holy Girdle. The researcher mentioned that both in Bulgaria and in Greece the Holy Girdle is personified as the Virgin Mary – a fact that informants were not able to explain. The elements of the cult and the details of miracles differ in the two countries.

**Evy Johanne Håland's** (Norway – Greece) paper was dedicated to the veneration of midwives characteristic of Bulgaria and some northern regions of Greece, which in northern Greece is celebrated on St. Dominica's Day (January 8). According to the researcher, this custom is not observed in other regions of Greece; yet, it is widely followed in Bulgaria. It is obvious that the holiday was transferred to Greece by the Balkan migration.

An interesting example of the migration of the veneration of saints from one confession to another and its celebration by both the Christians and the Muslims (including a joint pilgrimage) was presented by **Manoël Pénicaud** (France) in his paper about the myth of the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus.

The section of the comparative approach to rituals opened by two papers under the same title: **Marlene Hugoson** (Sweden) and **Nancy Cassell McEntire** (USA) compared tree cults in Europe and America. M. Hugoson described, on the basis of ethnographic archival materials, a healing ritual that has survived until today and consists in pulling a child through an opening in a tree. N. McEntire analysed a modern belief relating to the curing power of an oak tree in the state of Illinois, and conjuring practiced in the vicinity of this tree. **Nikolemma Polyxeni Dimitrou** (Great Britain) introduced, on the basis of her master's thesis, Scottish and Greek calendar rituals and the periods of the activation of evil spirits. **Chiara Quagliariello** and **Sabine Lamour's** (France) paper compared family traditions of European and non-European origin as well as their preservation and observation in migrant communities in today's France. The processes of adaptation and acculturation, which involve renunciation from former beliefs and rituals exotic for the host society, are rather painful for migrants.

The section "Rituals and Representations" started with a joint paper by **Mare Kõiva** and **Andres Kuperyanov** (Estonia), entitled "The View from the Migrant's Window", which was based on archival materials and newspaper articles and gave an overview of the customs of Estonians who had fled to Stockholm as refugees during the Second World War. St. Lucia's Day with the obligatory visit to the home of a girl wearing white all over and carrying candles either in hand or on her head, seemed to Estonians as a strange, solely Swedish holiday; also, Estonians' and Swedes' traditions of New Year celebrations with families and friends were different, etc. Humour played an important role in Estonians' adaptation to Swedish traditions, which was pointed out and demonstrated by examples by the researchers.

**Ekaterina Anastasova** (Bulgaria) focused in her presentation "Mixed Families and Ritual 'Diet' in Emigration" on the migration conditioned by the conclusion of interna-

tional marriages. She pointed out the importance of ritual food in the preservation of domestic calendar rituals. **Maria Kissikova-Petrova** (Bulgaria) continued the topic of mixed marriages, describing in her paper “Migration and Ritual: Religious Identity in a New Cultural Environment” the case of a Bulgarian woman who had married an American and joined the activities of a local religious sect. In the course of the discussion, David Stanley dwelt upon the activity of USA religious sects, their extensive network and the erection of enormous churches, including even drive-ins, which means that you can participate in the service without leaving your car.

**Janika Oras** in her paper entitled “Song Fights in Contemporary Estonian Weddings: Experiences and Meanings” described the traditional wedding as a subtype of migration (leaving home). She pointed out one part of the ritual, in which the bride’s and bridegroom’s families sing humorous and game songs. J. Oras, who is a specialist in Estonian folk music, often conducts such song fights at weddings. **Olga Pashina** (Russia) spoke about the ritual disharmony in the ‘inaccurate’ singing of seasonal ritual calendar songs, which is caused on purpose on specific dates by migration of the songs inside the calendric year.

**Inese Runce** (Latvia) described how Halloween celebration tradition reached from America to Latvia. The festival that was totally unknown to Latvians twenty years ago was adopted quickly and today it is celebrated both in the capital and in the diaspora in Great Britain, Germany and other countries. **Bożena Gierrek** (Poland) talked about how Polish students studying the Irish language and culture celebrate St. Brigid’s Day.

**Rachel Sharaby** (Israel) analysed in her paper “Crossing Boundaries. Between Absorbers and Absorbed in Ethnic Holiday” how the ethnic Mimouna holiday that the immigrants from North Africa brought to Israel in the 1970s, changed from a local ritual into a national public holiday. This is a good example of how the marginal and peripheral in the ritual cycle can become central during a particular period of time.

**Skaidre Urboniene’s** (Lithuania) presentation “Commemoration of Well-Known Lithuanian Emigrants: Signs and Rituals” focused on the form of the ritual (mounting a plaque), the place (home, schoolhouse, college, etc.) and date (birthday, date of publishing a well-known book, etc.).

**Miha Kozorog’s** (Slovenia) paper dealt with the annual festival of the newest art organised in Topolò, a Slovene village in Italy. The festival was treated as a ritual complex which is meant to enhance the status of the minority group and revive their national identity. **Lina Midholm** (Sweden) dwelt upon Midsummer, the most ‘Swedish’ holiday in the calendar, pointing out its most important components in the society that was the first in Europe to become multicultural. It is namely the diversification of ethnic cultures that the researcher holds as essential in the processes of globalisation and localisation of the customs of the ritual year.

The same conclusion was drawn also by **Māra Kiope** (Latvia) in her paper “One Year in Latvia: Ritual as the Model of Migration-Open Society”. **Karine Michel** (France) talked about the Jews’ migration from the post-Soviet Russia. She said that the Jews who emigrated from the former Soviet Union do not know Jewish traditions, holidays or rituals and, besides, their self-identification is really low. They have special centres of Jewish culture where they are introduced to Jewish holidays and ritual year traditions.

Several presentations were dedicated to the historic and ideological aspects of festivals as well as the problems of the diaspora and minority groups. **Arbnora Dushi** and **Arben Hoxha** analysed in their joint paper the adoption of Albanian national holidays by the Albanian population in Kosova; **Nadezhda Pazukhina** spoke about the identity problems of the Old Believers in Latvia; **Marija Klobčar** (Slovenia) discussed the impact of ideology on Ash Wednesday traditions in the village of Kamnik; **Grigor Grigorov** (Bulgaria) dwelt upon sports award ceremonies since the times of Ancient Greek, drawing attention to the mythological roots of the rituals; **Marie-Laure Boursin** (France) presented a comparative analysis of the ritual closing the religious learning at the Islamic schools in France and Bulgaria.

To conclude, the conference theme “Migration and Ritual Year” was depicted from various perspectives and inside different societies. The Ritual Year conference materials will be published in a collection. The next, ninth international conference of the SIEF Working Group on the Ritual Year will be held in Szegedi, Hungary, in March 2013, the topic being “Politics, Holidays, Festivals”.

The cultural programme for the participants of the conference organised by the hosts was noteworthy, including a city tour, an opera night at the ancient theatre, a trip to Bachkovo Monastery, visits to the Thracian Crypt and the Rose Museum in Kazanlak, as well as to ethnographic museums.

Irina Sedakova

## EUROPÄISCHER MÄRCHENPREIS 2012 TO WOLFGANG MIEDER

On September 13, 2012, Wolfgang Mieder, professor of German and Folklore at the Department of German and Russian at the University of Vermont (Burlington/VT), received the Europäischer Märchenpreis (European Fairytale Prize) for his life's work.

This prize worth 5,000 €, together with the Lutz-Röhrich-Preis (Lutz-Röhrich-Prize) for folkloristic historical-comparative narratology to support junior scientists and the Anerkennungspreis (Appreciation Prize)<sup>1</sup>, has been awarded annually since 1986 by the Märchen-Stiftung Walter Kahn (Fairytale Foundation Walter Kahn) to individual people or organisations, who have advanced their mission to explore and preserve traditional European fairytales and legends. Previous prize winners of the Europäischer Märchenpreis were, among others, Max Lüthi (Zurich, 1988), Isidor Levin (St. Petersburg, 1989), Helmut Fischer (Hennef, 2002), Hans-Jörg Uther (Göttingen, 2005), Dietz-Rüdiger Moser (Munich, 2009), and Rolf Wilhelm Brednich (Freiburg, 2010).<sup>2</sup>

Since 2006, the Märchen-Stiftung Walter Kahn organizes the Märchentage (Fairytale Days) around the presentation of the prizes, which devote themselves to the propagation of fairytales and research to teachers, educators, scientists, as well as friends of fairytales. In 2012, the conference "Wo hinaus so früh, Rotkäppchen?": 200 Jahre *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* der Brüder Grimm (Where to out so early, Little Red Riding-hood?: 200 years of *Children's and Household Tales* of the Brothers Grimm) was held on September 12–14 in Münsterschwarzach to commemorate the publication of the first volume of this fairytale collection.

The presentation of the prizes took place at an evening banquet in the historical Schelfenhaus (Schelfen House) in Volkach, since 2002 the location of the office of the Märchen-Stiftung Walter Kahn, and was musically enhanced by parts of the fairytale opera *Hansel and Gretel* (1893) by Engelbert Humperdinck (1854–1921).

The introduction in Wolfgang Mieder's honour was given by his friend of many years, the renowned narratologist and paremiologist Siegfried Armin Neumann, former head of the Wossidlo-Forschungsstelle (Wossidlo Research Institute) in Rostock, and laureate of the Europäischer Märchenpreis 1999.<sup>3</sup>

Siegfried Neumann first talked about the very successful academic career of Wolfgang Mieder, who was born in Nossen (Saxony, Germany) in 1944, raised in Lübeck, and who went to the United States of America when he was only 16 years old. After attending high school, he began his studies in French and German, which he finished in 1966 with a BA, and then in 1967 with the MA. His dissertation *Das Sprichwort im Werke Jeremias Gotthelfs: Eine volkskundlich-literarische Untersuchung* (1970) at Michigan State University (East Lansing/MI) seemed to already indicate his future research field.<sup>4</sup> After a short time as an Assistant Professor of German at Murray State University (Murray/KY), Wolfgang Mieder went to the University of Vermont in 1971, became Associate Professor of German in 1975, and in 1978, at the age of 34, he became a full Professor of German and Folklore. Already one year before that, he had been appointed Chairperson of the Department of German and Russian.

Siegfried Neumann then outlined the different fields and results of Wolfgang Mieder's scientific research as evidenced by his unprecedented activity in publishing. In the centre



Wolfgang Mieder.

of his work is proverbial language, which he tries to grasp in all its facets.<sup>5</sup> In addition to the traditional formulaic language, he also pays attention to its variations, and he has coined the term 'anti-proverb'. Even the thus far neglected literary forms of the proverb poem and the proverb story received more attention because of his studies. It was always of great significance for Wolfgang Mieder to reprint old proverb collections and proverb studies in order to make them available again for proverb scholarship.

Siegfried Neumann especially emphasised the awe-inspiring bibliographical work for paremiology done by Wolfgang Mieder. After his massive four-volume work *International Proverb Scholarship: An Annotated Bibliography* (1982–2001), a range of extensive special bibliographies, followed another up-to-date large two-volume *International Bibliography of Paremiology and Phraseology* (2009) and, for the first time, an *International Bibliography of Paremiography: Collections of Proverbs, Proverbial Expressions and Comparisons, Quotations, Graffiti, Slang, and Wellerisms* (2011).<sup>6</sup>

Even essential requirements for a modern Anglo-American proverb scholarship, said Siegfried Neumann, were provided by Wolfgang Mieder by editing several large, as well as regional proverb collections.<sup>7</sup> Siegfried Neumann also pointed to Wolfgang Mieder's

great interest in the proverbial diction of leading American and English politicians (Lincoln, Truman, Obama, Churchill, etc.), which has led to several large monographs.

Wolfgang Mieder's greatest concern is seen by Siegfried Neumann in his idea of an internationally oriented, interdisciplinary proverb scholarship, for which in 1984 he established a prerequisite to present new approaches and results of research by publishing the proverb journal *Proverbium: Yearbook of International Proverb Scholarship*.

Because of his leading role in paremiology, Siegfried Neumann stated, Wolfgang Mieder's importance for narratology is often overlooked. Here it is especially the questions of a modern reception of fairytales and the relationship between the fairytale and the proverb, which have scarcely received attention by scholarship so far. Wolfgang Mieder has shown, based on a large number of examples, that especially the *Children's and Household Tales* of the Brothers Grimm (1812 and 1815) are nowadays handed down very often no longer in their original version, but changed in form and content. His particular interest was also in the proverbs of the Grimms' fairytales, as well as their proverbial and aphoristic 'Schwundstufen' (reduced forms). Into the same direction aimed Wolfgang Mieder's studies about other genres of folk poetry, such as the fable, the legend, and the funny tale or the folk song, where he always presented an informative picture of the reception of their motifs in today's world.

The variety and significance of his research, summarized Siegfried Neumann, made Wolfgang Mieder a worldwide highly esteemed scholar, his work made him an immensely popular university teacher, and his help and advice a guiding spirit of international proverb scholarship. Folklorist Lutz Röhrich (1922–2006), one of his best friends, and laureate of the Europäischer Märchenpreis 1991, had once said about him: "Er ist einfach ein 'Gutmensch', dem es ein Herzensbedürfnis ist, ständig für andere da zu sein" (He is simply a good human being whose heart's desire is to always be there for others).

At the beginning of his words of thanks,<sup>8</sup> Wolfgang Mieder emphasised in his own humorous way the importance of his wife Barbara, standing lovingly by his side for now already 43 years, in his being awarded with the Europäischer Märchenpreis.

He was absolutely surprised, Wolfgang Mieder said, when the enormous and incredible news had reached him, that he was honoured for his life's work in narratology and proverb scholarship, because he always did only his best for science and his students, just like so many others do too. This appreciation would give him the courage and strength to continue with his work for quite a few more years in order to fully deserve the Europäischer Märchenpreis, he said.

A passage from Wolfgang Mieder's letter to his friends made clear how much it meant to him that his native country granted him such an honour, although wistfulness resonated that his friend Lutz Röhrich was not able to witness this anymore. – Certainly he would have been proud of "his little friend Wolfgang". (Author's comment)

Wolfgang Mieder then explained that he was not the first paremiologist and scientist of fairytales who went from Germany to the United States of America. He mentioned the expatriate Karl Friedrich Wilhelm Wander (1803–1879), the emigrant Karl Knortz (1841–1918), and the married couple Carl Zuckmayer (1896–1977) and Alice Herdan-Zuckmayer (1901–1991), who spent their exile from 1939 until 1948 in his own adopted home Vermont. He also named Günter Grass (1927) and his friend Lutz Röhrich, who, as well as the two before mentioned, had used their impressions of rural Vermont in their writings.

Two persons, said Wolfgang Mieder, had been incomparable mentors and best friends for him to this very day: Lutz Röhrich in Germany, and the no less renowned folklorist Alan Dundes (1934–2005) in the United States of America.<sup>9</sup> They were and still are his fairytale falling stars, who together with their families had given him, as in his favourite fairytale *The Falling Stars*, the most beautiful gifts of life. Supported and acknowledged by them, he had learned the enthusiasm for joyful scientific work, emulating them in high spirits, grateful every day to stand on the broad shoulders of his heroes, to whom he owes the majority of his success. Not unmentioned were many more dear colleagues and friends on both sides of the Atlantic, the two scientific souls of his German-American conviction, said Wolfgang Mieder, who were joined by numerous internationally renowned folklorists and paremiologists. Together they form the falling stars of a ‘gay science’, an expression already used by Johann Gottfried von Herder (1744–1803) and later by Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900), to which Wolfgang Mieder has devoted himself wholeheartedly: interested in everything and tireless in his endeavour, just as the two great philologists Jacob (1785–1863) and Wilhelm Grimm (1786–1859). To put it with Wolfgang Mieder in an (anti-)proverbial nutshell, the ‘gay science’ is an eternal “Seek and you will find” (Matthew 7, 7) and a new “Find and you will seek!”

At the end of his remarks Wolfgang Mieder stressed once again how much the *Europäischer Märchenpreis* as an appreciation of his life’s work, awarded by his native country, means to him. He offered his warmest congratulations to both younger prize winners, Jasmin Beer and Teresa Maria Müller, and mentioned how it was a good feeling to know that the investigation of fairytales, paremiology, and narratology was in good hands of brilliant up-and-coming young scientists, to whom he also counted the author. Young people like these, said Wolfgang Mieder, give him the energy and joy, to serve the gay science a little bit longer.

In the end, Wolfgang Mieder announced that he will share half of his prize money with four of his folklore students in Vermont and with the author of this contribution, who wants to thank him again sincerely. In this way, said Wolfgang Mieder, his ‘Falling Stars’ Prize, fallen out of the fairytale sky, would not only serve him, but also young people in his native country as well as in his by now quite old adopted home America.

Christian Grandl

## Notes

The author would like to thank Andreas Nolte, who has proof-read this contribution.

<sup>1</sup> This foundation with headquarters in Munich and a coordination place in Frankfurt was founded in 1985 by a travel agent and enthusiast in fairytales Walter Kahn from Brunswick (see [www.maerchen-stiftung.de](http://www.maerchen-stiftung.de), last accessed on March 23, 2013). The foundation has its own journal *Märchenspiegel: Zeitschrift für internationale Märchenforschung und Märchenpflege*, which has been published quarterly since 1990, and understands itself as mediator between science and the joy in fairytales, with its contributions of well-known experts in fairytale science (see [www.maerchen-stiftung.de/index.php4?e1=2&e2=1](http://www.maerchen-stiftung.de/index.php4?e1=2&e2=1), last accessed on March 23, 2013).

The Lutz-Röhrich-Preis worth 2,500 €, which has been awarded since 1994, was given in 2012 to Jasmin Beer for her Master's thesis *Menschenfresser: Zur Anthropophagie im Märchen* (Friedrich-Schiller-Universität Jena, 2010), and the Anerkennungspreis worth 1,000 €, which has been awarded since 2000, was given in 2012 to Teresa Maria Müller for her First State Examination for the Post of Grammar School Teacher *Lernen mit und von Märchen: Die pädagogische Bedeutung von Märchen am Beispiel des gymnasialen Schulunterrichts* (Ruprecht-Karls-Universität Heidelberg, 2011).

- <sup>2</sup> This year, the *Europäischer Märchenpreis* will be awarded to Germanist, folklorist, Grimms and fairytale researcher Heinz Rölleke (Neuss). For all prize-winners of the Märchen-Stiftung Walter Kahn, see [www.maerchen-stiftung.de/index.php4?e1=7&e2=3](http://www.maerchen-stiftung.de/index.php4?e1=7&e2=3), last accessed on March 23, 2013.
- <sup>3</sup> *Europäischer Märchenpreis 2012 für ein großes Lebenswerk: Laudatio anlässlich der Preisverleihung an Prof. Dr. Wolfgang Mieder. Märchenspiegel: Zeitschrift für internationale Märchenforschung und Märchenpflege* 23/4, 2012, pp. 28–34.
- <sup>4</sup> Published in *Europäische Hochschulschriften, Reihe 1, Deutsche Literatur und Germanistik*, 70 (Bern: Herbert Lang et al., 1972).
- <sup>5</sup> For his more than 400 articles and more than 200 books, see his *International Bibliography of Paremiology and Phraseology*, Vol. 1 (Berlin et al.: Walter de Gruyter, 2009), pp. 487–542 (nos. 5575–6028) and his *International Bibliography of Paremiography: Collections of Proverbs, Proverbial Expressions and Comparisons, Quotations, Graffiti, Slang, and Wellerisms*, Supplement series of *Proverbium: Yearbook of International Proverb Scholarship*, 34 (Burlington, Vermont: The University of Vermont, 2011), s. v. 'Mieder, Wolfgang'.
- <sup>6</sup> See note 5.
- <sup>7</sup> See note 5.
- <sup>8</sup> *Sterntaler der fröhlichen Wissenschaft: In Erinnerung an meine Eltern. Märchenspiegel: Zeitschrift für internationale Märchenforschung und Märchenpflege* 23/4, 2012, pp. 35–40.
- <sup>9</sup> For the correspondences between Wolfgang Mieder and Alan Dundes, see Wolfgang Mieder (ed.) *“Best of All Possible Friends”: Three Decades of Correspondence Between the Folklorists Alan Dundes and Wolfgang Mieder*, Supplement series of *Proverbium: Yearbook of International Proverb Scholarship*, 19 (Burlington, Vermont: The University of Vermont, 2006), and between Wolfgang Mieder and Lutz Röhrich, see Wolfgang Mieder (ed.) *“Freundschaft ist des Lebens Salz”: Dreieinhalb Jahrzehnte Korrespondenz zwischen den Folkloristen Lutz Röhrich und Wolfgang Mieder*, Supplement series of *Proverbium: Yearbook of International Proverb Scholarship*, 24 (Burlington, Vermont: The University of Vermont, 2007).

## THESIS DEFENCE: TOMS ҘENCIS

### DISCIPLINARY HISTORY OF LATVIAN MYTHOLOGY

**Toms Ҙencis: *A Disciplinary History of Latvian Mythology*. Dissertationes Folkloristicae Universitatis Tartuensis 19. Tartu University Press, Tartu 2012, 218 pp.**

I had the honour of evaluating Toms Ҙencis's doctoral thesis "A Disciplinary History of Latvian Mythology" (supervisors: professor Kristin Kuutma, professor Ülo Valk; Department of Estonian and Comparative Folklore, Faculty of Philosophy) already in spring 2012, and it was my real pleasure to participate in this significant event for the humanities of both Baltic countries – the defence of the thesis in Tartu on October 5, 2012.

I have to admit that it is not a simple task to evaluate a thesis in the pre-defence period and to be the reviewer of the same work at the defence. Anyway, I am pleased to say that the necessary dialogue between me and the aspirant has taken place, and therefore I can once more ascertain that Toms Ҙencis's doctoral thesis is an original and innovative academic research. From the viewpoint of Latvian humanities, as I see it, the originality and novelty refers, above all, to the chosen approach. What I mean is that instead of traditional methodological approach – to treat the process of the formation of a phenomenon from a diachronic perspective, which might be expected in view of the thesis title – the author has chosen to dissect the material with the methods offered by postmodernist theory, to deconstruct well-known truths and to display them in a new perspective. The selected form of analysis – reflexivity – has been presented here as a progression from the sociocultural context towards particular researchers, their works and concepts, as well as a demonstration of the significance of these aspects in the process of disciplinary formation. The author presents it as "investigation into the knowledge production process rather than the content of knowledge, analysis of representational form rather than the object of representation" (p. 8). And this investigation process should reach the goal "to demonstrate how a particular object of study is constructed, how it gains or loses its scientific legitimacy, how its variations are related to the theoretical, social, institutional, and political positions of its creators during different periods of time and within various traditions of research" (p. 13).

Due to such a form of analysis, a kind of postmodern study has been produced, where the object and the context of study, as well as the author's personal intention have become textual elements of equal value. It can be concluded that, based on the chosen approach, interesting details of opinions and mutual relations of persons involved in the research of Latvian folklore and mythology, as well as significant nuances in their



*Toms Ҙencis. Photo by Alar Madisson 2010.*

attitudes towards the dominant power of their time can be outlined. This adds to the topicality of the work, as the analysis of the disciplinary formation process can draw certain parallels to the modern situation in the field of humanities.

The author has successfully balanced the so-called inner and outer perspective in his research. As he represents the main Latvian folklore and mythology research institution, he knows well the values and the research style of this institution as well as the contents of its archives, and he also has access to the most recent research in the field. At the same time, his studies at the revered University of Tartu provide for dispassionate and objective (as much as it is possible in the humanities) perspective of the research object, and, what is of no lesser importance, spread new knowledge on the topic not only within the academic circles of one country but in a much wider audience. By the way, with the accessibility and distribution of the newly produced knowledge in view, I would like to express my gratitude to the Department of Estonian and Comparative Folklore at the Faculty of Philosophy, University of Tartu, for the publication of this thesis in monographic format. This is a nice practice, promoting the distribution of the latest research and fresh findings and boosting the self-confidence and daring of new scientists, as well as their responsibility for the quality of the study.

Reverting to the contents of Toms Kēncis's research, I have to admit that I was surprised at the author's boldness and ability to create a certain intrigue just in the first passage of his opus. Thus, in the very first line of the introduction he announces that his research focuses on a non-existent subject, claiming that "this is a thesis on the history of a discipline that does not exist" (p. 7), and the relations of the object of the study with the academic and professional nomenclature have been chosen as a criterion of existence. In my opinion, a certain tribute to positivism can be seen in this phrase as well: it is difficult to rationalise the world view, and it does not fit into the field of science because of the non-empiric character of the study object. If one can ignore the phenomenological method of analysis for religious experience as the starting point in the study of the mythic world perception, then it is possible to perceive Latvian mythology as a system of views, rituals and cults, not subject to reconstruction due to a considerable lack of historical material. Anyway, separate segments – conception of life after death, cult relics, mythic images and figures and their functions – have been subject to reconstruction. Certainly, since its very beginning at the end of the 19th century the process of reconstruction has attracted the attention of not only scholars, but also of the general public or laymen, because it is exciting and, as it seems, accessible to almost everyone who, paraphrasing Algirdas Greimas, "likes detectives and mind games". It is possible that Latvian mythology does not exist as a discipline in the process of specialisation of modern sciences. Fragments of world view are attested in archaeological, written and historical sources, in language, folklore, daily routines, literature and art, religion, psychology and other spheres, studied by certain branches of natural and social sciences and the humanities. Thus, in the age of extreme specialisation and fear *not to know, not to be a specialist, not to be competent*, who will be the one to dare to propose a clearly definable object of mythological study? On the other hand, if mythology is treated as a certain *type of speech, narrative* or text (in terms of Roland Barthes and Paul Ricoeur) – no matter if constructed, reconstructed or deconstructed, verbalised or expressed indirectly – it has been, is and will be an indispensable part of every live culture. As an ideological structure, it exerts influence upon and takes

over several different forms of collective life and thought: political mythology, ethnic mythology, eschatological mythology, mythology of conspiracy, etc. Thus, mythology as a form of figurative thinking possesses certain regularities which can be perceived, systematised, typologised and, consequently, studied in cross-, multi-, trans-, inter- or even non-disciplinary ways. Coming back to the aspect of imperceptibility of Latvian mythology as a discipline, I would like to point out the author's successful solution to the situation, a kind of emic position – in order to define mythology and the object of his study, he uses the definition of mythology provided by the authors who have produced mythological discourse. So far, the object of the study exists.

To characterise the epistemic context of the history of Latvian mythology, the author has chosen to view it through the Foucauldian power/knowledge dyad prism. From this point of view it seems to me that the author overestimates the symbiotic connection between power and knowledge, presenting it as an irreversible abstraction or inevitability, absorbing almost all spheres of social relations, including scholarly and academic. I admit that mythology and folklore studies are closely related to the strong, politically and socially organising ideology such as nationalism (p. 185); anyway, it should be mentioned that not a single society, even a totalitarian one, can be represented as an amorphous mass, just for the reason that it is comprised of individualities who are conscious subjects capable of preserving their basic structures in spite of the change of economic, political, psychological and legal conditions or status. I tend to agree with the late Foucault and his thesis about the individual as a rational subject, who can actively resist normalisation and reach ethical freedom through self-confidence, self-discipline and self-constitution. Regardless of a separate chapter in Toms Kencis's work devoted to personalities in Latvian mythology research, the role of individual and personal factors or the significance of personal willpower in the process of knowledge construction has been undeservedly neglected in the publication.

Thus, the model of research history of Latvian folklore and mythology, proposed by the author, is balancing on the edge of determinism, and it provokes us to think of a certain inadequacy in the title of the thesis, which might be changed to a more adequate one, for instance, "Disciplinary History of Latvian Mythology from the Perspective of the Theory of Power".

The author's idea of the absolutisation of the Foucauldian theory of power takes us to one more question, which is connected with the chronological frame of the research. In view of the author's statement: "Writing of any history is an action of selection and interpretation, possible only from a certain distance: therefore there is no history of today, while yesterday already becomes an object of history writing. This is also the reason why this thesis defines its subject matter as temporally bounded to the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, covering the most recent developments only in the form of overview" (p. 179). Here a question should be asked about why he concludes the history of mythology research with the re-establishment of independence in the 1990s. The author's 'today', as a matter of fact, has been continuing for almost a quarter of a century. The end of the 20th century and the first decade of the 21st century were so rich in new research in the field of Baltic and Latvian mythology, because at last both exile and Latvian scholars could exchange their views without ideological limitations, global literature and the most recent research became accessible for Latvian scholars, Latvian folklore and mythology research underwent certain institutionalisation, young

scholars were awarded research grants, etc. This is why the author's argument for the chronological framing of his work is not convincing. Thus, it can be concluded that the contents of the thesis only partly corresponds to its title, and it would be more appropriate to call it a disciplinary history of Latvian mythology from the 1890s until the 1990s.

Anyway, it is the perspective intended by the author, it is consequent in respect to theory, it is based on selected factography and pointed quotations from authoritative works. My opinion is that the thesis displays high scholarly standards, and it is a significant contribution to the humanities of both countries.

When reading Toms Ķencis's work, it makes the impression that not only Latvia and Estonia but all the three Baltic countries are comparably similar in their search for academic reconstruction of pre-Christian mythologies, regardless of the cultural historical differences outlined by the author in Appendix III. I dare say that it would be worthwhile to continue in the same direction, and from the author's proposed perspective of reflexivity to analyse the formation and evolution of the school of Lithuanian mythology research. This approach may yield different results, because Lithuanian scientists strongly rely on historical written sources, whereas folklore is attributed a much lesser role.

In any case, I am grateful for the possibility to get acquainted with the work which suggests that its author is a young developing scholar, a self-sufficient and creative person, whose preferences are not towards well-known paths, but towards his own. And, finally, I wish this research to receive a proper evaluation and recognition not only in Estonian, but also in Latvian and Lithuanian humanitarian spheres. We have much more in common than different. May the author's hopes of his research and of the applied methods becoming a model for scholars from other countries and other academic disciplines (pp. 10–12) come true.

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## BOOK REVIEWS

### A SOCIOLOGICAL VIEW ON TARGET CHOICE IN JOKES

**Christie J. H. Davies 2011. *Jokes and Targets*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press. 314 pp.**

Professor Christie Davies, the renowned humour scholar, has written yet another account on the rules that govern target choice in folkloric jokes. His latest book “Jokes and Targets” aims at explaining and predicting how popular joke cycles develop, and why some targets are more prone to feature in those jokes. This time, he focuses on other targets than ethnic to extend the validity of his statements to more groups than before. The six chapters, framed by the generalising introduction and conclusion, all concentrate on a separate target: blondes, the French, Jewish women and men, men having sex with men, lawyers, and the totalitarian Soviet Union. The conclusion is followed by 23 pages of references and an index.



To get a proper grip of what Davies’s stances are, we have to go back to his previous works. Since taking up humour studies in the late 1970s, he has published five books and a number of articles on humour. Many of these have become landmarks in the study of ethnic humour, but, as he mentions in a recent interview, “[Jokes and Targets] is much broader in scope and deals with jokes about professions and social classes, sex jokes, and political jokes which were not in the earlier books. This one is comprehensive.” (interview with C. Davies, 2011) This is true in many ways: not only does this book refer back to previously valid models in order to enhance them, but it also touches on other issues that Davies has polemicised on earlier occasions like, for example, the functions of jokes (developed in greater detail in “Mirth of Nations”). For a concise overview of Davies’s theories and arguments, the present book is a very valuable source.

Contentwise, “Jokes and Targets” is an extension of the research that was first outlined in the book “Ethnic Humour around the World” (Davies 1990). In this book, which has become a frequently cited classic, he maintained that ethnic jokes about stupidity are dependent on 1) geographical (centre versus periphery), 2) linguistic and cultural (the target usually speaking a non-mainstream version of the same language than the joke-teller), and 3) economic (joke-teller is better off than the target) factors. This gave a list of perfectly testable hypotheses of different ethnic groups that can become objects of ridicule. Throughout his work, he stresses the importance of appropriate methodology and points out possible pitfalls for novices in the field. In “Jokes and Targets” (p. 2), he warns against underestimating the task and reducing the existence of jokes to arbitrary common sense explanations, without sufficient proof or even possibilities of falsification. So, to set down another positive example, the author presents a study based on his thorough sociological research that at times ventures into literary, folkloristic, or historical studies. He succeeds once again to provide even better explanations for jokes and cycles,

approaching his task by analysing jokes from two main aspects: what is specific to the place and time that the jokes are told in, and why the same kind of jokes did not spread in other similar contexts. Davies makes an explicit use of the methodological toolkit of comparative sociology developed by Max Weber and, more recently, Stanislaw Andreski. In an academically elegant prose, he guides the reader through the material, furnishing the path with plenty of colourful examples from various genres, but, above all, jokes. To those familiar with his style, it is no surprise that subtle pieces of humour like “But it is time to leave beauty altogether and turn to the French” (p. 76) wait for the reader, casually scattered into the text.

Joke targets chosen to shed light on the relationship of jokes as social facts and their surrounding social reality form a seemingly accidental set. But the inherent underlying aspect that unites them is that the proliferation of these joke butts has not got a snugly fitting explanation before. The first chapter “Mind over matter” overarches the book by outlining the theory, whereas the following chapters add valuable details and insights. Starting with a concise introduction that covers the methodological tools in use as well as defines the main object of research and its sources, Davies continues by stopping on each of the aforementioned targets, intricately cross-referencing between the chapters to further clarify his point about a few rules explaining the majority of cases. Elaborating on his previous statements on the direction of joking about stupidity, he formulates the rule of laughing at the more material and earthy over the more ethereal and mental. This applies to most ethnic, vocational and other groups. Jokes are not always about power and lack of it; the direction of laughter can be bottom-up as well as top-down. Instead, the mind and body form a pair of opposites, and excesses in the use of either can end up in communal laughter. Jokes are also prone to happen when power is based on the force of physicality (p. 31) as shown in the plenty of examples of jokes about stupid militias, dictators, aristocrats, marines, orthopaedic surgeons, or athletes. So, he concludes, stupidity jokes rely, above all, on the contrast between body and mind.

The occupations and groups associated with material things are most likely to be cast as stupid. On the other end of the scale, also intelligence can be laughable, especially when it is put to work for attaining rewards in a morally questionable way. A majority of the chosen targets seek to illuminate the same line of thought. The second chapter, focusing on “Blondes, sex and the French”, combines two very different accounts, sex being the uniting factor in the analysis. Blond jokes cycle derives from an entrenched disposition to think of blondes as sexually attractive, which leads to a stereotype of them as being sexually available, i.e., ready to surrender to bodily urges rather than calculative thought. A different example is presented by jokes about the French, the roots of which lie much deeper in the history, vested in the asymmetries of trade and travel: the pre-World War Western erotic literature and art came prominently from France, and sex tourism was also asymmetrically in favour of this country. Even if there is no actual support for the stereotype after the Second World War, the tradition is still alive, feeding on its strong and distinctive roots.

Opposite to this, jokes that the Jews tell about their nation and, more specifically, their women, stress qualities that express self-control and -preservation. In the chapter “Jewish Women and Jewish Men”, Davies refers to jokes about Jews as the perfect counter-statement to jokes about blondes and athletes, as an example of a case where the excess use of mind can be as funny as being ascribed to having no intelligence at

all. A bold statement thrown at the reader concerns the exclusive nature of these jokes. The author maintains that the jokes about Jewish women are unrelated to the general humour of misogyny, and cannot be reiterated as jokes about non-Jewish marital relationships. At the same time, jokes about the hypo-sexual wife are common all over the world, and can bear no reference to the Jewish wife, for example:

*A man tells his friend: "Last night, we finally started to tie in with my wife, sexually: I, too, got a headache!" (Meie Naljaraamat [Our Jokebook], 27.08.1997)*

So, it is hard to approve of Davies's proposition when he writes: "Gentiles would not have been able to invent them, for they would have no interest in the matters raised by the jokes." (p. 113) This does not call for re-structuring of the theory with regard to the Jewish marriage jokes, but does raise a need to a more general background in the explanation.

The chapter about masculinity (titled "Sex between Men") provides a difficult case full of intrinsic details, displaying a different pattern within the model of the mind versus the body. It would have been illuminating to read more about how the particular tendency – to choose a male target for sex-related jokes, depicting them as being penetrated by another man – in the framework of the overarching mind-body dichotomy, because in some ways it even contradicts the base of the theory by letting the body (masculine strength and determination) take victory over the mind (by depicting the educated, well-off social classes as effeminate, or as targets of male penetration).

Sometimes the reason to laugh at some targets is not brought about by their deliberate over-thinking. Lawyers, for example, are most probably laughed upon because they tend to use their intelligence in a way that benefits only themselves, without any evidence left for their clients to prove this, as described in the chapter "The Great American Lawyer Joke Cycle". Jokes about lawyers, real estate agents and bankers become especially popular during times of economical crises. The reason for this is that the representatives of these professions are selling services that are not tangible (hence, representing the mind rather than the body), and their real economic contribution is opaque, all of which makes them a perfect target for jokes about craftiness. Again, the starting point is contrasting the material with the ethereal. The important question is why the cycle is so inherent in American culture, and even if the jokes have travelled, they have remained the same, i.e., they have been translated, but not adapted any further. The answer, as Davies prompts, lies in the distinctly American virtues of free speech, legal rights, individualism, and the American dream.

The last target to make it into a book is a generalised one: the Soviet society in "The Rise of the Soviet Joke". In this case, Davies notes that the jokes became to represent the whole system and it was no longer meaningful to single out any target. I cannot but agree with him when he states that all manner of targets were aggregated into a single huge genre of political jokes. The entrance point to this subject is also comparative in essence, as the author sets apart the jokes of autocracy (as those seen in jokes about General Franco) and totalitarianism. He continues by sketching a thorough historical backdrop to the jokes in order to approach his focus of interest concerning Soviet jokes: did the jokes have a marked effect on the system and its collapse, and could the collapse have been predicted through the existence of these jokes. In this, he strays quite far

from the overarching model (which, intuitively, would mean blaming the physicality and brute force of the totalitarian power – versus intellectual power – for drawing in all the humour), and instead elaborates on his thesis of jokes being a thermometer, not a thermostat. Providing a number of examples from the history of political hegemonies and their collapses, he maintains that although metaphors like “wit is a weapon” persist, humour possesses no straightforward power to bring down a political system. But humour does, however, help to understand and judge the system from the inside, which is why paying attention to jokes and knowing where they came from and what patterns they have displayed may lead to unusual but truthful insights into societies that produce the jokes.

The conclusive chapter presents an invaluable lesson of theory construction and refutation. Davies outlines the developments of his theories of jokes and targets (namely, centre-over-periphery, monopoly-over-competition, and mind-over-matter models), explaining where the need to expand and elaborate on them has stemmed from, and how new comparisons and material have forced him to re-formulate his stance. The mind-over-matter model, a follow-up to the previous ones (described in Davies 1990 and 2009), indeed accounts for the insufficiencies that his former theory has displayed. For example, the first model did not explain fully why aristocrats would be depicted as stupid in British jokes, whereas monopoly-competition model failed to include, for instance, athletes or orthopaedic surgeons as targets of stupidity jokes. As a replacement, Davies offers an elegant and simple model (yet not too simple, as in good-over-bad dichotomy), providing the reader with ample illustrations on the way. However, he does not wholly neglect the initial theories, which, as he states, “taken together, [...] explain more than any one of them does on its own” (p. 264).

“Jokes and Targets”, being an excellent piece of scholarship, helps to further clarify why certain targets have become conventional and what are the rules that govern target choice.

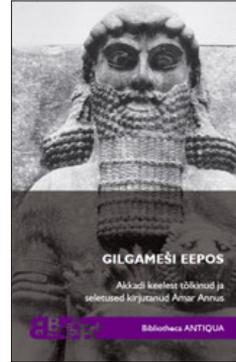
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ON THE EPIC OF GILGAMESH IN ESTONIAN<sup>1</sup>

*Gilgameši eepos. Akkadi keelest tõlkinud ja seletused kirjutatud Amar Annus 2010. [The Epic of Gilgamesh: Translated from the Akkadian language and commented by Amar Annus.] Bibliotheca Antiqua, Tallinna Ülikooli Kirjastus, 242 pp.*



The Babylonian *Epic of Gilgamesh*<sup>2</sup> is one of the oldest and most famous epics in the history of mankind, which was extremely popular in ancient Near East during the 2nd and 1st millennia BCE and probably even later. Along with the *Epic of Gilgamesh*<sup>3</sup>, another Babylonian epic *Enūma eliš*<sup>4</sup> has supposedly influenced the most well-known heroic epic or epic poems of Ancient Near Eastern cultures and countries, such as Babylonia, Assyria, Hittite kingdom, kingdom of Mitanni (Khanigalbat), Amorite kingdom of Yamhad, kingdom of Nuzi, kingdom of Kizzuwatna, kingdom of Urartu, and also city-states, such as Mari, Ugarit, Emar, Carchemish and Halab (modern Aleppo), as well as other Syrian, Palestinian, Anatolian or Mesopotamian city-states and kingdoms. The poem was well known in the scribal tradition in Mesopotamia, ancient Egypt, Palestine, Urartu, and Iran (Achaemenid Persia) during the reign of Alexander the Great and later in Hellenistic Seleucid Empire.

Some elements of *The Epic of Gilgamesh* could also be found in Greek-Roman mythological legacy and in literature: theogonies, myths, poems, and the like, as well as later on in Late Antiquity and supposedly partly also in the medieval Near Eastern literature: in Arabic and Persian poems, tales literature, for example *Odyssey*, *Cycle of Heracles*, *Alexander romance*, Persian national epic *Shahnameh*, etc. (see, for example, Dalley 1991: 1–17).

*The Epic of Gilgamesh* has been published many times in English, French, German, Russian, and other languages (see, for example, Diakonov 1961; George 1999, 2003, 2007). This very famous epic poem was also published in Estonian by Boris Kabur in 1994 (Kabur 1994). Although Boris Kabur (1917–2002) was an author and translator, he was not an Assyriologist or philologist in the field of ancient Near Eastern studies and he did not know the Akkadian language; hence, his translation was mainly made on the basis of Russian (I. M. Diakonov's translation: Diakonov 1961) and English versions.

In 2010, the second Estonian translation of the *Epic of Gilgamesh* was published. The original text was translated and commented by Assyriologist Dr. Amar Annus. He has published several articles, translations and a book in the field of Assyriology.

The new Estonian translation of *The Epic of Gilgamesh* by Amar Annus includes *Acknowledgments*, *Introduction*, *Estonian translation of the Epic* (altogether 12 tablets), *Commentaries*, *Hittite "Gilgamesh"* (written by Jaan Puhvel), *Bibliography*, *Glossary*, and *List of Illustrations* – altogether 242 pages. It is the only scientific translation of *The Epic of Gilgamesh* in the Estonian language.

Amar Annus's translation is quite accurate, made directly from the Akkadian language. Amar Annus is a very talented translator and he is also an expert in deciphering Akkadian and Sumerian cuneiform texts (see, for example, Annus 2001; MKA: 23–47, 55–95, 137–202, 239–254; 260–271; Annus & Lenzi 2010).

This is not only a good translation from Akkadian, but also a profound analysis of the epic and it is one of the reasons why this translation can be designated as scientific. However, the translator has neglected the Akkadian transliteration in this work. In my opinion it would have been very good if this edition of *The Epic of Gilgamesh* had also incorporated Akkadian transliteration of all the 12 tablets. It is certainly understandable that this edition is meant not only for the orientalist and specialists in the field of Near Eastern Studies, but also for other readers who are interested in reading this literary masterpiece. However, with Akkadian transliteration it would be more useful for specialists and scholars who work with this epic, and it could also be very helpful for students in learning the Babylonian dialect of the Akkadian language. The second critical remark concerns the fact that the book does not include an index part, which could also be very useful for working with *The Epic of Gilgamesh*.

Having discussed the abovementioned shortcomings, I have to point out that the translation of *The Epic of Gilgamesh* by Amar Annus has a very profound introduction (Gilgameši epos 2010: 11–58) and commentaries (Gilgameši epos 2010: 193–226), which also include some remarks about Hittite Gilgamesh provided by an eminent Hittitologist and linguist, professor emeritus of the University of California, Jaan Puhvel (Gilgameši epos 201: 223–227).

The first known version of *The Epic of Gilgamesh* – the survived fragments of cuneiform texts – was written in the Old Babylonian dialect of the Akkadian language. It can be traced back to the Old Babylonian period based on *ductus* (Ger. *Schreibstiel*) and the style of cuneiform signs – the so-called Pennsylvania Tablet (dates from approximately 18th or 17th centuries BCE). It seems that the Standard Version of *The Epic of Gilgamesh* originated from a later period – from the end of the Middle Babylonian period (ca. 13th–11th centuries BCE) (Gilgameši epos 2010: 33).

The opening words of the Standard Version of the *Epic of Gilgamesh* are *ša naqbu īmuru* – “He, who saw the Deep” (Gilgameši epos 2010: 33). The author of this Standard Version is a Babylonian scholar and scribe *Sîn-lēqi-uninni*, who edited *the Epic of Gilgamesh* and unified it in one poem that consists of 12 tablets. *Sîn-lēqi-uninni* was probably a historical figure who lived in the Middle Babylonian period approximately during the epoch 1300–1100 BCE; however, we cannot exclude the possibility that he could have lived even some centuries earlier, most probably only after a few ruling generations after the reign of Hammurabi (1792–1750), who was the most famous king of the First Dynasty of Babylon and the founder of the Old Babylonian Empire.

Many motives, storylines and roots of *The Epic of Gilgamesh* are older than the Old Babylonian or Middle Babylonian periods and they originate from the Sumerian period – 3rd millennium BCE. From the Ur III period (2112–2004 BCE) we have 5 independent short stories or, to be more precise, epic heroic songs on Bilgamesh (Sumerian form of the name Gilgamesh). Those five epic songs (probably more stories about the divine hero and King Bilgamesh and his deeds existed in Sumer, but those have not been found yet) were written in the Sumerian language (Neo-Sumerian dialect) in the Ur III period or later during the Isin-Larsa period, when Sumerians already assimilated with the Akkadians and Amorite people. Hereby it is necessary to mention that these Sumerian short epic songs or poems about the adventures and heroic deeds of the king of Uruk Bilgamesh, such as *Bilgamesh and Akka* (see, for example, the Estonian translation of *Bilgamesh and Akka* by Vladimir Sazonov and Raul Veede in MKA: 49–53; see also

Sumerian original, the ETCSL transliteration: c.1.8.1.1; see also the edition Römer 1980), *Gilgamesh and the Bull of Heaven* (ETCSL transliteration: c.1.8.1.2), *Gilgamesh, Enkidu and the Netherworld* (ETCSL transliteration: c.1.8.1.4; Shaffer 1963), *Gilgamesh and Huwawa* (ETCSL transliteration: c.1.8.1.5 and c. 1.8.1.5.1) and *The Death of Gilgamesh* (ETCSL transliteration: c.1.8.1.3; see also Espak 2009: 25; Cavineaux & Al-Rawi 2000: 241–242) were extremely popular in earlier times – in Old Sumerian (or Presargonic, ca 2900–2335 BCE) and Old Akkadian (2334–2154 BCE) oral tradition, and they belong to the folklore legacy of Sumerians and Akkadians. In my view they obviously existed in Sumerian oral tradition in very early times – in the Presargonic period (2900/2800–2330 BCE). It seems quite possible that the first stories – epic songs about Bilgamesh – were already composed in one-two or at least three generations after the death of the hero, the most famous king of the First Dynasty of Uruk – Gilgamesh, who hypothetically lived and reigned in Southern Sumerian city-state Uruk approximately in 2700–2600 BCE.<sup>5</sup>

Nevertheless, Gilgamesh was deified after his physical death, people prayed to him as God in the hope of getting help and support in the fight against demons and illnesses. In Ancient Mesopotamia he was not only a protector of the mankind and civilization, who fought with zoomorphic demons (bulls or lions with human heads: several motives can be found in Mesopotamian art, especially in cylinder seals; see about the cylinder seal, for example, Moortgat 1940), but also in Neo-Sumerian period he was a patron or friend and brother of the ruling king – as in the reign of Ur-Namma (2012–2094) or Šulgi<sup>6</sup> (2093–2046).<sup>7</sup> Additionally, Gilgamesh was also represented as a very important deity in the Netherworld<sup>8</sup>. But whether Gilgamesh really was a historical figure or not is a complicated question that we cannot discuss here in this short review.<sup>9</sup>

To conclude, we can say that it is very important and necessary to publish a new commented edition of *The Epic of Gilgamesh* in Estonian with a profound historical-philological introduction and analysis. Let us hope that in the future several translations of other important and significant oriental poems, epics, myths, and epic songs such as *Atra-hasis*<sup>10</sup>, *Enki and Ninmah*<sup>11</sup>, and others, will be published in Estonian.

Vladimir Sazonov

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> I am very grateful for editing this review and for his critical remarks to Mr. Parviz Partovi. This review was published with the support of ETF grants 8993 and 8669.

<sup>2</sup> See about The Epic of Gilgameš in George 2003.

<sup>3</sup> George 2003; Schaffer 1963.

<sup>4</sup> See the new edition of *Enūma eliš* by Thomas R. Kämmerer and Kai A. Metzler (Kämmerer & Metzler 2012); see also Espak 2010: 191–192.

<sup>5</sup> IDV I: 168–170; Sallaberger 2008: 46–49; Selz 2005: 43–44.

<sup>6</sup> About Šulgi see, for example, Sazonov 2008: 84–107.

<sup>7</sup> Klein 1976: 271.

<sup>8</sup> About the Netherworld see Katz 2003; Sazonov 2012: 87–98; Espak 2009: 19–29.

<sup>9</sup> See more about Gilgamesh in, for example, Annus 2012: 44–45; Sallaberger 2008.

<sup>10</sup> See, for example, Espak 2010: 189–190.

<sup>11</sup> See, for example, Espak 2010: 186–188.

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