https://doi.org/10.7592/YBBS8.2.02

The Laughter in and around Treasure Tales

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Abstract:. Traditional treasure tales can be interpreted as stories of success and failure. Based on the texts in the Estonian Folklore Archives, the current article focuses on the role of laughter within treasure tales and in their audiences. When someone in a legend makes a mistake, misses an opportunity, or gets embarrassed when searching for treasure, the audience may respond with laughter. The laughter heard during storytelling is an ambiguous sign, as both the characters' failure and success can evoke the same reaction. On the other hand, when treasure tales are told as belief legends it is the supernatural being that sometimes laughs, making its presence known by a peculiar laugh that serves as a warning to the human character.

Some treasure tales can be categorised as funny stories by genre. This means that the narratives tend to be taken as humorous based on genre conventions. Indeed, treasure legends can be told for entertainment, but at the same time laughter can conceal a listener's mixed feelings about the content of the narrative.

Human characters in treasure tales laugh in the same situations in which they would in real life. In addition, the fear of being laughed at makes sense in treasure tales because people rather avoid doing certain things and hide their deeds and thoughts associated with treasure hunting.

Keywords: Laughter, treasure tales, tale world, belief legend

When telling legends a storyteller sometimes starts laughing, if not outright, then chuckling a bit. In recordings of folklore interviews one can hear bursts of laughter accompanying the conversation. Tales about hidden treasure have also been told to the accompaniment of laughter. What makes participants in these performance situations laugh? Is this a sign that a joke is being told? Is there something inherent in the topic of treasure that calls forth certain emotions in audiences and results in bursts of laughter? A rush of laughter can easily arise not only during storytelling, but also in a lecture situation after the title of the presentation is mentioned. The lecture topic can create ambivalent expectations in listeners, who question whether they are being asked to attune themselves to the real or the fictional, whether the matter is believable or unlikely. In contrast, a talk about the folk calendar, the metrics of runo songs or the history of a folklore collection does not illicit such an anticipatory reaction.

Apart from the fact that in certain contexts the telling of tales about hidden treasure is accompanied by laughter, episodes of laughter also belong to the content of the narrative: characters in the story laugh. As a content element in the story, laughter has a specific function in the evolution of the narrative events.

The present article will focus on the one hand on laughter in treasure tales (based on approximately 6,000 legend variants transcribed in the Estonian Folklore Archives). It will also discuss the bursts of laughter accompanying the telling of treasure tales based on recordings made during fieldwork in the last decades of the 20th century (250 tape recordings in the same archive). The recorded materials allow the researcher to investigate the question of what laughter reveals when telling treasure tales. Based on examples I will attempt to give an overview of the role of laughter in stories, and in the performance situations of these stories, and find out whether there are common elements among reactions arising on both levels.

Among treasure tales collected in the Estonian Folklore Archive over the last few hundred years one can find examples of people laughing, and people being overcome with joy, happiness, or contentment. These situations are supplemented by episodes in which the characters in a story are afraid of being laughed at, or where treasure hunting is undertaken entirely for the sake of a joke. Observations made about the meaning of laughter both in the story realm and in the telling realm lead to the question: in what kinds of legend episode does laughter break out, what is it connected to, and what does it express? However, by posing these questions, this article does not aim to develop hu-

mour studies, because the author believes that laughter does not always signify movement into the field of humour.

Laughter during storytelling has rather different stimuli from laughter on a content level (from the perspective of the fairy tale genre, cf. Röhrich 2008: 199–201). Therefore, I draw methodologically upon the ethnography of narrating, according to which different realms need to be kept in mind simultaneously: interaction between narrators and listeners, during which there is talk of treasure, and the events in the story realm, narrated in a certain situation (Young 1987: 24–37; Palmenfelt 2007). Thus, the story realm is actualised in the narrating, even if the story relays events that might have happened or did happen in the real lives of tellers and listeners. Katharine Young emphasises that folk narratives represent unusual happenings located within the geography of the ordinary world (1987: 56). Ulf Palmenfelt and Lena Marander-Eklund, whose research object is personal experience stories, do not raise the question of the specificity of the story realm in non-fiction narratives (Palmenfelt 2007; Marander-Eklund 2006). Merili Metsvahi (2002) on the other hand examines different levels of narration based on the example of the legend genre, in which case the boundaries between the realms of narrative content and narration are more obvious.

Situations in which the storyteller laughs have caused folklorists and representatives of neighbouring research fields to puzzle over why the informant reacts this way. Storytellers may laugh in certain situations when speaking of events in the fictional world as well as transmitting content into the context of the ordinary world. But they sometimes react in exactly the same way if they get confused or experience ambiguous feelings toward the story they tell. This happens when the distance between the story and the real world of the storyteller and audience is unclear or is not specified.

Crisis of enculturation, communication tools, rituals, turning things into a joke…

The contexts of laughter have inspired a search for explanations and reasons for laughter as a behaviour. Humour researchers define the category of the joke as their research object, focusing first and foremost on the textual characteristics of laughter, less on the audience. However, laughter has also

been extensively studied in humour research (cf. e.g. Morreall 1983: 1–59; Martin 2007: 153–190). When searching for basic explanations of laughter behaviour, both humour and laughter theorists refer to Thomas Hobbes, who, while not offering a definition of humour, characterises laughter as the expression of a sudden feeling of happiness caused either by contentment with one`s own action or noticing a lack in another, in comparison to whom one feels better[1] (Hobbes 1985 [1651]: 125; cf. also Heyd 1982: 286, 292). Thus, according to Hobbes, starting to laugh presumes a feeling of triumph or contentment.

Lists of varying, even contradictory, laughter situations begin with Anthony Ludovici`s book about the mystery of laughter (1932).[2] Decades later, John Morreall offers a division between humoristic and non-humoristic cases of laughter (Morreall 1983: 1–2; also mentioned by Knuuttila 1992: 96–98). Morreall locates the example of the reaction to finding out about winning the lottery in the area of non-humoristic laughter. It seems that there is a similar experiential basis for the emotion that treasure tales describe in connection with finding treasure. In contrast, humoristic laughter accompanies listening to a joke or recognising trickery; other stimuli for laughter could be other people's mishaps or simply a jolly mood, which can give rise to laughter for no particular reason.

Today laughter is defined as an instinctive, contagious behaviour that is subject to unconscious control and rarely occurs in solitude. Laughter articulates speech and is mainly not connected with humour. Speakers laugh more frequently than their listeners, and men try to make their women companions laugh by means of their behaviour, while women, indeed, laugh more frequently than men (Provine 2000, 2004; Panksepp & Burgdorf 2003; cf. Röhrich 2008: 201–202). In this connection, psychologist Robert Provine stresses that he studies laughter without distinguishing it from the mechanisms of humour.

As a folklore genre, the legend does not differ remarkably from ordinary speech. This piece of narrative folklore is woven into conversation when a narrator thinks it is a good illustration of a situation, a way of influencing other participants, advancing the conversation at hand, or if a narrator just wants to share the legend she or he knows. Of course, a legend can be told during a specific storytelling session in which clear distinction is made between the (partially) professional teller and the listeners (Bauman 1992: 46; Andersen 2011; Sobol 2020). Sometimes the participants in a storytelling session laugh because

they consider the narrative to be funny. But on the other hand both the narrator and the listeners laugh because the laughter makes a connection and facilitates more uninhibited communication. It is very likely that some informant's laughter during folklore interviews can be interpreted as communicative laughter.[3] For example, when folklorists asked a woman from Sürgavere, south Estonia about a treasure tale regarding the money pit in her former home village, the interviewee reacted by laughing. She apologised for forgetting the story, but by laughing she bought a bit of time, and as the conversation continued, she was able to recall the legend.[4]

Weighing the various stimuli for laughter, Lena Marander-Eklund (2008) has identified characteristics of laughter that occurs in a conversational context. Through an in-depth analysis of birth stories, she shows how conversational laughter becomes an element of narrative style. Laughter simultaneously provokes and hides emotion: joy and the release of tension, pain and the feeling of loss of control of one`s body, fear and helplessness, anger and vulnerability, feelings of embarrassment. A small number of birth stories told during her research project were presented as situational comedy and thus some comical laughter was involved. The laughter accompanying the narration turned out to be a way of transmitting emotions. However, Marander-Eklund also makes a significant observation: the narrator's expression of non-comical laughter does not automatically provoke shared laughter in other conversation partners (Marander-Eklund 2008: 106).

Thus, the narrator of a personal experience story might laugh when transmitting even a non-comical incident (compare the results of R. Provine`s observation: the speaker laughs more than the listener). Although she or he is laughing, the listener maintains seriousness because she or he senses the serious tone of what is being conveyed. With respect to the presentation of other genres as jokes and anecdotes, it is considered in good taste not to laugh at one`s own jokes (Viidalepp 2004 [1965]: 103). Nevertheless, almost everyone can recall exceptions in which the performer who tells a joke laughs, or situations in which a tale that was not meant to be laughed at evokes an (inappropriate?) jolliness in the listener. At the same time if tales are told mainly for entertainment purposes the humorous rhetoric is used to narrate both personal experience stories and legends, and the audience responds with laughter as expected. In addition to communicative laughter and humorous laughter, the infectious quality of laughter itself can prevail. Eik Hermann (2006: 129) writes that starting from a

certain intensity, laughter generates more laughter, which does not derive from the original joke; those engaged in such laughter would not usually be able to reply precisely about what it is that amuses them.

In addition to comical laughter and contagious conversational laughter we can observe laughter in response to ambiguity in legend content.[5] With respect to the laughter accompanying the telling of treasure legends, it is important to note that all participants, the teller and the listeners, and even the researcher, sense ambivalent feelings toward the topic under discussion. Do people laugh because something is funny or because there is confusion? Perhaps the "dark side" of laughter is revealing itself at these moments and people are laughing at someone or something (cf. Panksepp & Burgdorf 2003: 543).

During fieldwork in Setumaa in 1996, ethnologist Aivar Jürgenson noticed that informants laughed when speaking about religious topics. In his subsequent article, entitled "Seeking Religious Confession during an Enculturation Crisis" (Jürgenson 1997), he explained how such bursts of laughter, albeit funny in themselves, seemed inappropriate to him in his fieldwork (Jürgenson 1997).[6] According to Jürgenson, people were becoming more distant from the wisdom of their forbears, and under the influence of processes of secularisation they tended to laugh at mythological representations (beings) (ibid.: 82–83). In Oring`s interpretation the laughter accompanying the narration of a supernatural experience decreases the extent of truthfulness attributed to the event (Oring 2008: 139). Bill Ellis (1987: 54–57) has discovered that interpreters of the urban legend "The Hook" arrived at completely different results depending on whether their sources were journalistic versions of the story or recordings of interviews. When reading printed versions of the stories, reactions of participants in the conversation were not included; in contrast, the audio recordings were accompanied by multivocal chuckling. B. Ellis' research experience leads us to regard the Estonian treasure tale "Only the same hand that buries the treasure can take up it again" (Aarne 1918 type 64, Jauhiainen 1999 type P 421) as an anecdote and not a "serious" belief legend. Based only on archive manuscripts this tale might be classified as an ordinary legend (cf. example 1).

> Example 1. Grandmother kept telling [the story] … So the old man put the gold there, in the old days there were large grain threshing rooms, with hearths, too, ash hearths. A big oven, the kind where the ash was scraped in [chuckles]. The old man, damn it, put his gold there before

> he died. It was said that "the hand that puts, takes". The old man died [keeps telling the story with laughter in her voice] and the old women dragged him to that place, using his hand to scrape for gold. I don`t know whether he got the gold or not [change in tone of voice]. That`s how Grandmother told it. (RKM, Mgn II 3073 (12) < Simuna khk – O. Kõiva, A. Tael, M. Jallai < E. K., 74 a (1978).)

This might be an example of laughter that discredits content, i.e. it signals not only that the storyteller is not taking the story seriously but considers the described situation to be ridiculous. In all the approximately ten recordings of the same tale found in the folklore archives between 1960 and 1982 one can hear the storyteller`s laughter, not at the beginning, when the teller is biding his or her time so as better to remember by laughing lightly, but during the content of the story, in the description of the attempt to find treasure through 'the hand that put it there'. The tale made the listeners laugh, something that also happened in interview situations. In contrast, manuscript variants do not reveal informants` attitudes. One variant of the same story from the end of the 19th century[7] describes a search that, it is claimed, really took place. Rhetorical devices in the text, such as reference to a court case (the story is said to have been written down in parish court records), and its connection to a specific person (one "Tõrsaare papa") at a specific time (1861) indicate that the story should be taken seriously.

In his essay on laughter in the Middle Ages, Jacques Le Goff (2006 [1989]: 169) emphasises the importance of the historical treatment of laughter: "Depending on the era and the society, attitudes toward laughter, practices of laughter, objects and forms of laughter have been changeable." Unfortunately, there is no evidence that would confirm decisively that, at the end of the 19th century "Only the same hand…" and other – at a first sight – belief legends did not evoke laughter, while they did after World War Two. In the case of old texts, we can find only rare descriptions of how the teller and the audience reacted during the storytelling and what emotions they expressed. August Annist, researcher of Estonian literature and epics, characterised a countryman`s reaction to the recounting of the feats of the epic hero Kalevipoeg as "broad, Olympian peasant`s laughter", which resembled Kalevipoeg`s own mirth after he threw the water spirit into the bog (Annist 2005: 656). Perhaps some treasure tales have evoked a similar audience reaction.

There are parallels confirming that, for some reason, as long as three hundred years ago, a legendary topic was met with laughter. In the context of the historical study of belief legends Merili Metsvahi quotes Hermann von Bruiningk`s work on werewolves in Livonia: "When Thies, called to be a witness [in court concerning another matter], has to swear that he is telling the truth, another peasant starts laughing. When he is asked why, he answers that everyone knows that Thies is in communication with the devil and that he is a werewolf" (cf. Metsvahi 2001: 101). Further, Metsvahi writes that accusations made by Thies himself took a more serious turn in 1691, when even the judges "laughed at him and sent him on his way unpunished". However, it is still unknown why the abovementioned bystander laughed. Information that we have about laughter in the contexts of supernatural matters lead us to consider not only the marker of enculturation crisis (cf. Jürgenson 1997), and various reasons to laugh over a joke, but various other stimuli, including emotions provoked by the level of narration and the story realm. Indeed, it is true that as a behavioural phenomenon, laughter is strongly bound up with context (Martin 2007: 155; Solomon 2006: 79–89). This makes cases in which laughter is embedded or made relevant in treasure tales all the more interesting. Taking into consideration the laughter of the character in the legend we can in certain cases determine the tale type to which the story belongs.

Elliott Oring regards laughter and humour, interconnected with each other, as rhetorical devices in folktales (Oring 2008: 130, 139–140). As already indicated, it is to be expected that laughter is quick to burst out when a tale is being told for entertainment; in such cases serious content is turned into a joke during the performance.[8] Humour then enters into the service of the tale`s rhetoric, and the events described in the tale amuse people. Leea Virtanen has discussed tales of haunting and horror that have a surprise ending and has shown how such narratives function as a parody of the folktale (2000: 108–109). During the performance of quite scary legends, both the tellers and listeners sometimes laugh, and we can perceive the using of tales for entertainment. When the narrator of a treasure tale laughs, the interpreter immediately has to begin guessing. Either the partner in the conversation has contradictory feelings, or perhaps taking her of his time to answer. She or he might be concealing a lack of knowledge, either not believing what is being said, or just the opposite, believing it with conviction, but hiding behind laughter in the fear of being compromised. The essential ambivalence of the folktale cautions us about in-

terpreting the laughter that accompanies the telling. Laughter cannot always or univocally be regarded as a signal that the content of the story is not being taken seriously. A. Jürgenson (1997: 80) states that a joke is not the only provocation of laughter. Based on her extensive experience, G. Bennett (1989: 296) claims, "The teller and/or the listener sometimes laugh even when they have a serious attitude toward the topic of conversation and in no way plan to discredit what is being told. Oring (2008: 139) concludes that there are many kinds of laughter, not all of which constitute a response to humour".

The story of a woman from Põlva parish in southern Estonia who said in 1973 that she had seen gold coins laid in a circle on the ground, creates a double effect.[9] Looking for an explanation of her experience, she pointed to the possibility that the devil`s hand was involved, and then laughed. However, she neither turned the story into a joke, nor did she argue for belief in the devil's existence (traditionally, the devil is often the guardian of hidden treasure). During the conversation the interviewee revealed that it was her grandfather who had connected his childhood experience with "the old devils" (her grandfather had told her the tale). For the narrator herself, the content of the story remained ambiguous, as can be seen in the conclusion: "Who knows what kind of a thing it is." However, neither the utterance of the story nor the laughter that accompanied it brought clarity to the matter.

Who laughs within the story world?

Folktales do not focus on feelings of legend characters in detail, because this would slow down the transmission of events. However, treasure tales do provide some information about emotions: joy, hope, fear, doubt, insecurity, disappointment, envy, greed; emotions that provoke laughter in the characters in the story or seem to amuse those who know the tales.

In the treasure tales, laughter has a significant influence on events in all but one tale type, "The woman from an auger hole" (in fairy tale index, Ee 423*, cf. Järv, Kaasik & Toomeos-Orglaan 2009: 563). A hidden treasure episode occurs in the approximately twenty variants of this tale type noted in Estonia. The main content of the tale is as follows. A man marries a being (probably an elf) who came out of an auger hole.[10] One day the woman starts laughing in a puzzling manner on the way to church and agrees to admit the reason

for this only on condition that her husband shows her where she has come from. It turns out that what made her laugh was a treasure she saw by the side of the road, which was visible to her because of her unearthly background. Variants of the story differ as to what or who actually points to the location of the treasure: does the horse stumble on the pot or do talking ravens betray its location? Later, when the woman has already gone on her way, the flesh-and-blood man simply has to go and take the treasure out. The one who laughs is the unearthly being who has information that the human character did not have. We could speak of this as laughter at knowing a secret, or even *the laughter of superiority* (Morreall 1983: 6–10; italics in original). Up until then not laughing was the mark of the elf`s otherness; knowing a secret that is meaningful for humans makes her act like a human being, i.e. by laughing her reaction provokes her husband to ask about the reason for her laughter, as is common in human relations. The woman reveals the information, which has become clear to her, but in return the man must reveal his secret, specifically where he got his wife.

The laughter of supernatural beings also occurs in other types of treasure tale, but elsewhere it is not as decisive for the course of the tale's events. Once again, laughter becomes a sign of contact with a different kind of reality. A human perceives the difference between this and ordinary laughter, and the unexplained laughter provokes fear. We can construct a dense framework of a religious interpretation around the laughing supernatural being, but what is noteworthy here is that the laughter sounds wrong somehow. This is particularly notable when laughter and crying are heard alternately, as in a tale submitted to a legend collection competition in 1939. L. Vister, a high school student in Tõrva at the time, recorded the tale of a pot of gold in Kullalohu forest.[11] According to conditions set to get the gold, one had to walk back and forth through the forest in the middle of the night. One man tried to fulfil the condition, but he began to hear "ridiculing laughter" and on his last walk heard "mournful crying and moaning". In 1911 folklore collector Hans Karro wrote down a long tale to send to the Estonian Literature Society, in which the male character had heard, while counting money he had previously found, the sound of eleven strange voices laughing at once.[12] This episode acts as a warning and belongs to the list of other signs of evil among the character`s negative experiences. Rather than creating a feeling of fun, this laughter forces the human to be cautious, as if to

alert his senses to an encounter with a feared, dangerous world. Supposedly comical responses elsewhere force mortals to remain serious.

However, the laughter of a supernatural being in treasure tales does not occur only to hinder the activity of the treasure seeker. As was said, in certain situations laughter can definitely be interpreted as the expression of a feeling of superiority, for example of the treasure guardian when laughing as an expression of superiority at human misfortune that happens while seeking treasure. As a result, we perceive a certain variability here in that the guarding creature either gives or does not give a treasure to a person. For example, in a tale sent in 1895 from Kronstadt to the organiser of a folklore collection in Estonia,[13] black men by the treasure fire laugh out loud when they see a human walking on the fire in order to receive wealth. The man had to throw an object into the fire to receive this fortune (by doing this he would be marking part of the wealth as his own). Because he has nothing within easy reach, he walks into the fire himself. After that the guardians disappear, but the man realises that he has actually stepped into a waterhole. Climbing out of the water the man hears a voice laughing and mocking. "Look at the fool! He wanted to get money from us, and jumped into a pond!" The failure of this human`s action is confirmed by the laughter of his ghostly opponents, with the story being textualised with a humorous tone. The treasure hunters' failure is common in treasure tales, while in a few legend types they are literally laughed at (see Jauhiainen 1999 type P 101).

Tale type ATU 763 "The Treasure Finders Who Murder One Another" is (according to the international folk tale index) an example that includes an episode of laughter where ordinary people communicate and mock each other. Three brothers are going treasure hunting, but the oldest refuses to participate hoping to get money without doing anything. He is, of course, ridiculed by his younger brothers, who laugh at him. "Behold the man who hopes to be given money without digging or exerting himself. We`ll see whether it comes true."[14] But it turns out later that only the oldest brother survives because after finding treasure the younger brothers murder one another so as not to share the money (one of them is stabbed to death and the other is poisoned). After certain twists and turns in the plot, the older brother`s hopes come true.

The situation in which the human character in a treasure tale laughs at a supernatural being is rather rare. When a person has outsmarted a *koll* or devil and dared to rejoice, punishment is not far away, as can be expected in belief legends. In a legend connected with Kirumpää fortress in south Estonia,

the condition for finding the treasure is to bring a foal, a rooster and a child to the spirit of lake Tamula. One man replaced the child with a cat, received the money chest and laughed at the success of his cheating. After this the lake got up and chased him and the man was forced to drop the money chest.[15] However, Leea Virtanen (2000: 112) has discussed the possibility of laughing at a supernatural being in legends from another point of view. According to her, the narration of belief legends includes the narrative ridiculing of a dreaded creature, making it permissible to laugh at a supernatural being.

One of the more surprising research results was that there was no overt ban on laughter in treasure tales. A ban on speaking, for example blurting out a secret, is relevant if the treasure is designated for a specific individual. In particular tale variants laughter is treated as the equivalent of speaking, and laughing is enough to make the treasure disappear. An outburst of laughter is accompanied by talking. In the example above, the human character is unable to remain silent. Rather, strange figures, with whom it is forbidden to speak, are released into the treasure-seeker`s path. In one tale, seeing three oxen walking on two feet and one fish carrying another caused the male character to laugh, but he managed to remain silent and serious. However, a chicken dragging a load of hay and a lion protecting baby chicks was too much, and the search turned out to be in vain.[16] Intuitive recognition is built into such concatenations, which John Morreall cited as examples of laughter caused by an absurd situation and a funny series of events (Morreall 1983: 13). According to Morreall, such laughter at an absurd situation does not contain a sense of superiority, nor does it operate in any way to benefit the one who laughs.

When something is done just for the fun of it in treasure tales

As is sometimes the case in everyday life, chance plays an important role in treasure tales. Therefore, it is not uncommon for a treasure hunter to express joyful emotions or laugh in satisfaction when accidentally finding a hidden treasure. The phrase doing something 'just for the fun of it' is used in other legends where the treasure is not found by chance, but the finder has some information about the possible location of the treasure in advance. Then the phrase is used to mean effort without serious commitment that nevertheless

leads to success. In one tale from Helme, a poor villager goes to look for a mattock shown to him in a dream, for the fun of it; the story goes that in fact he finds money there, which he uses for his son`s education.[17] Among the texts of a legend collecting campaign from 1939 is a report on treasure found by the folklore collector's forefather. When ploughing a field the ancestor had noticed a juniper tree and a rock, and just for the fun of it dug in that place, finding an iron box "full of gold and jewellery". Later he went to the bank and exchanged the gold for currency.[18] In contrast, in tales oriented toward serious and systematic searching, in some cases reflecting the activities of almost professional treasure hunters, the fortune fails to appear. Ironically, planned activities do not lead to the desired result, although trying just for fun does.

Some treasure tales are essentially warning stories, which, for example, forbid dealing with the devil, or even mentioning his name. Surprisingly, in one story a person dares to cast a spell using the devil's name. According to a legend variant from Harju County in northern Estonia[19] a ploughman sees his neighbour burying a kettle of money and overhears him conjuring the devil. The eyewitness shouts out for the fun of it, "the money for me, the kettle for the devil!" Indeed, a man in a black coach does bring the treasure, the pile of money is left to the man, and nothing worse happens. The one who longed for money has dared to compete with the potentially dangerous devil. Other examples emphasise that there can be no fun when ghosts and spirits (including the devil) are involved. Just as laughter might arise from contradictory impulses, considering something a joke is ambivalent in treasure tales. In some cases, one is allowed to accept suspicious challenges, try them out for the fun of it, and nothing harmful results. In other cases, there is sufficient warning that contact with another reality is out of the question, that there can be no digging for fun, and attempts to search are abandoned. Some treasure tales have been noted in which a person goes to check something out just for the fun of it, almost gains possession of a treasure chest, but is finally deprived of it because she or he has, by accident but unavoidably, violated additional conditions. These three scenarios illustrate the fact that when encountering hidden treasure just for the sake of it, or just for fun, the result cannot be predicted.

Treasure tales as jokes

A number of tale types are classified as jokes according to folkloristic classification. This might lead one to believe that such tales create fun, and that the laughter aroused when listening to them is humoristic laughter. Of interest in this respect are tale types that focus on a fortunate coincidence: "The Treasure at Home" (ATU 1645), "A Dream of Treasure Bought (Guntram)" (ATU 1645A) and "The Robbers under the Tree" (ATU 1653, the fifth subversion). The "Dream of Marking the Treasure" tale type (ATU 1645B) reflects a fortunate coincidence only at the beginning of the tale. In addition to those already named, "The Talkative Wife and the Discovered Treasure" (ATU 1381) is included here. Arvo Krikmann, researcher of proverbs and sayings, and of folk humour, has characterised the types under discussion here as tales of undeserved luck, alongside deceptive jokes concerning deserved success or failure, and jokes concerning stupidity or deserved failure (Krikmann 2003: 170). According to Krikmann, coincidence does not really belong among the motivating factors in jokes, although it is the activator of events in realistic tales or novellas. However, treasure tales are very much oriented towards coincidence. Even if the story tells of the planned search, coincidence intervenes on a plot level, changing the course of the action. Tales of fortunate discoveries and unfortunate failures seldom acquire a joke-like quality. Thus, one should not be surprised that tale types classified in the area of jokes according to the international classification are sometimes not actually jokes or are not jokes in particular local cultures. That instances of coincidental discovery and unfortunate failure could both illicit laughter is another matter. In the first case this happens because of empathic sharing of the finder`s joy, in the second because of a feeling of superiority[20] because no one gets the treasure.

In the 20th century more archaic treasure tales, that in earlier times were told as jokes, gradually faded from the living tradition, though they were still published in folk tale anthologies. However, the folklore archive always offers surprises, and we can find such a joke recorded as late as 1970. The female teller could not hold back her laughter at the end of every phrase spoken to the folklorist when she told of how an old man had dreamed of treasure and marked its location with excrement. At the end, the narrator confirmed, laughing, that it was a true story, everything the man in the story had dreamed of

actually happened. In this tale we can see the idea of a connection between money and excrement, which has often been of analytical interest. Researchers have been challenged to investigate the equivalence of money and excrement (for example Arnoux 2005; as well as Dundes 1962: 1040–1041; Goldberg & Lewis 2000: 50–51).

In the case of the joke about marking treasure, the imagined situation might have seemed funny to the audience but not to any of the story`s characters. Even if a person laughs out of embarrassment or when getting into a pickle (the case of non-humoristic laughter), this is not seen in this case. Laughter about getting into a pickle can appear as a dilemma on the level of the narration: the story might indeed be funny, but when and where is it appropriate to retell it?

The "Dream of Treasure Bought", tale type (ATU 1645A), has traditionally been placed in the same section as anecdotes and jokes in folktale classifications. Does the story make anyone laugh? If so, could there be anything funny to the listener? The main narrative line of the tale is as follows: a nobleman (a common man in variants) is on a journey and falls asleep under a tree. His servant (or companion) observes an insect or little worm creep out of his mouth, go to a stream, and try to cross it. The servant lays his sword (or stick) across the stream and the little animal crosses over. Later the animal returns the way it came and goes back into the mouth of the sleeping man, who then wakes up and says how he saw a place where some treasure is buried. Another man tells of what he observed; they discuss the matter and find the treasure. Studying the Estonian versions of the tale we can conclude that in our cultural area such a story does not function as a joke and has been circulated only as a belief legend. Legend scholars have again and again experienced how laughter as an emotional reaction rings out at the performance of a belief legend. Yet we are not certain about a laughing reaction after listening to this particular story; apart from which the laughter accompanying belief legends does not necessarily derive from humour. The Estonian legend variants of ATU 1645A (consisting of 26 texts in the archive) do not point to anything ridiculous either in, or relating to, legends. Michael Chestnutt (1991) has searched for an analytical explanation of the qualities of jokes in tale type ATU 1645A. Based on Scandinavian variants, he has stressed that a particular kind of logic is expressed through the story.

An episode of laughter also belongs to the content of "The Treasure at Home" (ATU 1645). Laughter in the story realm does not make the events in this story funny in the narration realm. Even if the story appears to be a

joke in certain situations, the narratives collected in the folklore archives still favour the other classification, specifically as a legend. As in the legend-like fairy tale "The Woman from an Auger Hole", laughter becomes a repeated content element in the variants of ATU 1645. The character in the tale dreams (or it is said) that he finds a treasure on a bridge (or square) in a city (Riga, Tallinn, Tartu, Narva). He goes to find it but nothing happens. He walks around until a townsman takes an interest. During a short conversation, the townsman laughs in a superior way over the apparent stupidity and gullibility of this recently arrived man.[21] During the conversation it also becomes clear that the hidden treasure is actually to be found in the countryman`s farm, which the townsman had earlier dreamed of. The countryman realises how things are, returns home and finds a kettle of money. In a more elaborate version of the story, this is followed by another episode of laughter. Indeed, a few years later some soldiers happen to visit the same farm. They keep laughing and laughing at the message inscribed in a foreign language on the edge of the kettle they see in the farmhouse that says "the deeper you dig, the better you find". The hints and explanations offered in a laughing tone turn out to be relevant information. If the character in the story laughs, then how do the storyteller and the audience respond? Liisa Kümmel, being a good storyteller, was not struck by laughter when she was interviewed during fieldwork in 1963. She said:

> But one time it happened that some Russians came in and wanted something to drink. So, the man gave them something to drink from the pitcher. The men looked on and laughed. He asked, 'why are you laughing?' They replied, 'it says here "take from the bottom, where it`s thicker!"' So, the man started thinking, what does that mean, take from the bottom, it`s thicker. He started to look around again. He found a great kettle full of coins. That was enough to find himself a wife. That was how it was with money holes.[22]

Practical jokes inspired by treasure lore

In addition to traditional legends, folklore collections contain stories about how people who take hidden treasure too seriously have been ridiculed. Pranksters tend to amuse themselves at the expense of the target of the joke, taking advan-

tage of the situation in order to laugh at their companions. Laughter is provoked by setting the companion up as the target of the joke; failure seems funny right from the beginning. If the prank misfires for some reason, the hoped-for effect of the joke does not prevail, and no tale is born that can later be told with amusement. The opposite is also true: the butt of the joke does not talk about ridicule unless it is the teasers who fail. Based on John Morreall`s example (1997: 37–40) we can assert that the creation of personal (mental) distance acts as a stimulus for jokes and laughter: what happens to other people is funny, but if the same had happened to oneself, it would not have been funny at all.

Practical jokes have been performed on the basis of treasure lore in two ways. One of these is fake treasure. Here coins are scattered in the path of the treasure hunter, or a false money pot is hidden, or a fire is made that might imitate the gleaming light of treasure. In other cases, those who are being teased do not have the intention of getting their hands on the treasure. In such cases, an image connected with treasure lore is activated, for example in order to frighten his companions the joker disguises himself as a horrifying treasure guardian.

Tales that describe the failure of someone`s serious treasure hunt can also offer the possibility of jokes and ridicule. For example, in a longer narrative transcribed in 1933 about two passionate treasure hunters, we encounter a well-developed failure story formed of several episodes.[23] Initially the tale develops in the frame of a belief legend: the treasure hunters are hindered by an unexpected heavy storm and beasts are sent by the devil. The tale employs two aspects of the rhetoric of truth used for telling a legend (Oring 2008): the story is connected to a real place and person, and there is reference to a real person who had often spoken of his treasure-seeking adventures. However, the narrative is resolved differently. "Some pranksters made a little fire, rattled broken beer bottles and broke an old pot. Others called old T. [the character's name] out from the tavern to see and listen to how the devil had run off with the money, with a rattling sound, depriving T. of the treasure. This tavern joke was told by an old man named H. H. …" A long time later, during fieldwork in 1997, the folklorist was told this same practical joke, which was probably a vital part of local tradition concerning treasure buried in a certain place. The characters of this story dug only to make it look as though they had removed a pot of money. They made the landowner angry, indicating that the prank was successful.[24]

In some ways practical joking inspired by treasure lore cancels out tradition because it decisively overturns those episodes in a folktale that have previously

been presented as fact. However, on the other hand, even though they have given the tale a new direction, such changes keep the original tale alive. The evolution of a tale in the community from information relevant to the object of the joke also creates the opportunity for a laugh of superiority: who would believe that treasure fires burn, and ghosts guard treasure? Such people deserve to be ridiculed.

Conclusion

In tradition related to hidden treasure laughter is expressed both on the level of narration (the teller and the listeners laugh) as well as in the story realm (the characters in the narrative laugh). On the basis of the thematic text corpus of the Estonian Folklore Archive, we can say that in most cases laughter at the narration level does not synchronise with the laughter of the characters in the story realm. Listeners laugh or are amused when the character in the tale is in a pickle, is deprived of the hoped-for benefit or does something wrong. When there is an empathic reception, joy at the character`s good fortune is appropriate. John Morreall (1997: 43–44) and Eik Hermann (2006: 149) have called attention to this contradiction in laughter, which breaks out when there is failure but also when there is success. Indeed, treasure tales are stories about finding or being left empty-handed, and the obstacles encountered along the way. The contrary nature of laughter appears in treasure lore, in the situations that occasion laughter. Laughter when telling the tale depends on the context of presentation and the emotional reactions of the participants.

Treasure tales make one laugh if they are told in a funny manner, for example if the main reason to tell them is entertainment. In the case of treasure jokes, the genre issues a licence to laugh in advance. As a genre, the legend flexibly adjusts to different contexts, and so it becomes possible to tell about hidden treasure seriously, or, alternatively, by turning it into a joke, as we have seen in various examples above. If one needs to find an explanation for laughter in a treasure tale and in the narration context, there are more factors to keep in mind than genre conventions. Laughter in a treasure legend might be simultaneously humoristic laughter and a sign of ambivalent feelings. However, laughter endangers the extent to which the narrative can be taken seriously. Laughter might also hide the fact that the topic touches a person deeply.

Alongside the more complicated reasons for laughter, it seems that communicative laughter is a natural accompaniment to storytelling. Sometimes the narrator of a personal experience story laughs when asserting that she or he personally landed in the middle of the events being relayed. In this manner she or he emphasises ownership of what was experienced and is being told. Using rhetoric and other performance conventions, including telling the tale as a joke, the teller can achieve the same reaction in listeners, and all participants in the narrating situation laugh together.

In belief legends laughter is a signal of the beyond. The being who laughs possesses information that is inaccessible to mortals because of the limitations of the latter`s senses. Several common beliefs and warnings are also relevant in treasure tales including those that apply to laughter more generally. Hearing suspicious laughter, a human who wants to find treasure has to be careful: there may be a supernatural being nearby, and the human has to decide whether to avoid the encounter or use the chance that is being offered.

Sometimes characters in treasure tales laugh in situations where people would also laugh in their ordinary lives, either at someone else`s misfortune, the success of a practical joke, upon seeing a comical array of things (in the case of surprising success), or as a result of discerning the absurdity of a situation. Even if in treasure tales and during the narration of tales the laughters do not coincide, one can nevertheless claim that just as characters are energised by laughter in the story realm, laughter offers a challenge to listeners` senses. There is yet another factor that brings them closer: just like a person in the real world, a legend character leaves something undone or does something secret to avoid becoming the object of others' laughter.

Acknowledgements

This research was supported by EKKD-III5 "Patterns of emotional development in Estonian culture"; EKM 8-2/20/3 "Narrative and belief aspects of folklore studies" and by the European Union through the European Regional Development Fund (Centre of Excellence in Estonian Studies, TK-145).

Notes

[1] In some examinations of laughter, a quotation is formed on the basis of this passage from Hobbes: "Laughter is nothing else but a sudden glory arising from some sudden conception of some eminency in ourselves" (see Panksepp 2005: 63). The chapter of Hobbes' *Leviathan* that makes distinctions between emotions states: "Sudden Glory, is the passion which maketh those Grimaces called Laughter; and is caused either by some sudden act of their own, that pleaseth them; or by the apprehension of some deformed thing in another, by comparison whereof they suddenly applaud themselves. And it is incident most to them, that are conscious of the fewest abilities in themselves; who are forced to keep themselves in their own favour, by observing the imperfections of other men. And therefore much Laughter at the defects of others is a signe of Pusillanimity. For of great minds, one of the proper workes is, to help and free others from scorn; and compare themselves onely with the most able" (Hobbes 1985 [1651]: 125; cf. also the e-book version at Project Gutenberg: http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/3207).

[2] I consider contemporary humour theorist Victor Raskin's evaluation of A. Ludovici somewhat strange, the latter having written about the dark side of laughter along with its light side as if he hated humour (cf. Krikmann 2004: 22–23. Emphasis mine). Jacques Le Goff (2006 [1989]: 169) praises John Morreall's (1983) consideration of the serious side of laughter.

[3] On psychological and sociolinguistic aspects of communicative laughter see for example Glenn 2008, and O'Connell & Kowal 2008, in particular 163–174.

[4] See RKM, Mgn II 2063 (c) < Suure-Jaani khk < Sürgavere – I. Rüütel, A. Väljaots < female informant, born 1898 (1971). This woman, 83 years old at the time, told the story with a significant personal connection because she had participated in the attempt to find the treasure. Here and hereafter in the current article, the informants of archive texts are anonymised in cases where the publication of the narrator`s name does not seem ethical.

[5] On the essential ambiguity of legends see Lindahl 1986.

[6] In moments of leisure during shared fieldwork, folklorists have discussed the backgrounds of their conversation partners' laughter. Generally, such discussions are undocumented, although some information has been recorded in the fieldwork diaries in the Estonian Folklore Archives.

[7] EKS 4°5, 256 (3) < Rõuge khk – W. Luik (1888/1889).

[8] Eda Kalmre (2010) has studied the issue, drawing examples from contemporary legends.

[9] RKM, Mgn II 2378 (d) < Põlva khk – I. Rüütel, O. Kiis < female informant, born 1901 (1973).

[10] According to the international classification of folk tales, the core of ATU 826 is the devil writing a list of sins on a cowhide, which is witnessed by a holy man. Fairy tale researcher Risto Järv (2000: 113) indicates that "researchers have classified this content as belonging to a legend, though it also reminds one of fairy tales". In the current enquiry we are interested in tales where ATU 826 and the revelation of the location of the treasure are combined (cf. also Aarne 1918, tale type 59).

[11] ERA II 237, 56/7 (9) < Helme khk – L. Vister < Jaak Vister, 58 years (1939).

[12] EKS 48 XXIII, 21/5 (95) < Palamuse khk – H. Karro (1911).

[13] E 15377/84 (3) < Kroonlinn – D. F. Roosipuu (1895).

[14] E 13966/9 (4) < Koeru khk – O. Hintzenberg < Aadu Tomberg (1894).

[15] E 15516 < Põlva khk – J. Melzov (1895).

[16] ERA II 243, 595/7 (15) < Hargla khk– S. Suur < Hipp Suur, 74 years (1939).

[17] E 12229/30 (24) < Helme khk – J. Karu (1894).

[18] ERA II 222, 315/6 (6) < Kuusalu khk – E. Sammelselg < Aleksander Sammelselg, 60 years (1939).

[19] E 53125 (43) < Keila khk – P. Berg < Julius Rääp (1922).

[20] On humour deriving from a feeling of superiority see Heyd 1982: 291–292; Morreall 1983: 6–8; Knuuttila 1992: 106–107; Krikmann 2004: 28–29.

[21] The scene containing this story was staged in a similar manner at the Emajõe Summer Theatre open-air performance of *Money* (seen 7 August 2010 in Tartu). The man from the city relates the advice he got in his sleep and laughs it off as irrelevant.

[22] See RKM, Mgn II 889 (d) < Tori khk (1963).

[23] ERA II 58, 257/67 (7) < Paistu khk – M. Sarv < Marie Noorkukk, 50 years (1933).

[24] EFA I 21 (4) < Kanepi khk, Kõlleste v – K. Tamm < male informant, 86 years (1997).

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E – the manuscripts of M. J. Eisen, 1880–1934
EFA – ELM folklore manuscripts from 1996 onwards
EKS – Estonian Literary Society folklore manuscripts, 1872–1924
ERA – Estonian Folklore Archives, 1927–1944
RKM – Estonian State Literary Museum folklore manuscripts, 1945–1999
RKM, Mgn II – ELM audio recordings of the, 1953–1993

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