

## IN MEMORIAM

**ÜLO TEDRE**

**FEBRUARY 12, 1928 – MARCH 9, 2015**



March 9, 2015, was the last day of Ülo Tedre's life and scholarly career. His legacy is comprised of more than 400 written, compiled and edited works, which cover practically all folklore genres as well as Estonian literary and cultural history, such as *Eesti mees ja tema sugu* (Estonian Man and His Kin) (1952–1954/2003), the four-volume Estonian folk song anthology (1969–1972), a short monograph *Eesti pulmad* (Estonian Weddings) (1973), a beautiful album to celebrate Jakob Hurt's 150th birth anniversary (1989), the song collections of Jõhvi and Iisaku parishes in the series *Vana Kannel* (Old Zither) (1999), a voluminous overview of Estonian mumming and masking traditions published in Sweden (2007), to name but a few. In addition, he published a number of shorter writings about the Estonian runo song, beliefs and practices, and about Estonian folklore classics Jakob Hurt, Matthias Johann Eisen, Oskar Loorits, and Walter Anderson, as well as overviews of Estonian folklore in different collections and school textbooks, and more than 70 reviews on folkloristics, literature, and culture. We should also mention his fruitful collaboration with Veljo Tormis in reinstating the original runo song in Estonian choir music, his work as head of the folklore section at the Institute of Estonian Language and Literature (1962–1991), membership of different professional associations and boards, and the III Class Order of the White Star conferred on him in 2000.

The majority of Ülo Tedre's scholarly works have been enumerated in the bibliography compiled by Karin Maria Rooleid in 2008, and his scholarly contribution has been abundantly cited by folklorists from Estonia, Finland and other countries. Yet, I have found only one writing in which Tedre's works have been analytically analysed.

Considering the extent of Ülo Tedre's research and scholarly activities, it is understandable that the number of people who knew him and with whom he communed was enormous. It is hard to guess, in retrospect, which clusters and strata were involved. Most of his contemporaries have already passed away, and their memories about Ülo Tedre as a person both inside and outside the world of research, with all his rational and emotional characteristics, interests and hobbies, are lost for us; so, in-depth information about Ülo Tedre's life events is rather scarce.

There is a portrait film by Vallo Kepp, titled "Life as a Runic Verse: Ülo Tedre" (1994), in which Tedre himself and several of his colleagues speak about him. Also, the scholar published his reminiscences of life and people at the folklore section of the Institute of Estonian Language and Literature in the years 1947–1990 in a collection *Eesti filoloogia poolsajand Teaduste Akadeemias* (Half a Century of Estonian Philology at the Academy of Sciences) (1997), and an interview with him was published in the journal *Mäetagused* in 2008, on the occasion of his 80th jubilee. However, there are still people who knew him personally and could be interviewed.

I first met Ülo Tedre in 1964, so I knew him for half a century, although due to differences in the age and social status, I was never part of the circle of his closest friends.

However, in the autumn of 1963 Matti Kuusi launched a major Finnish-Estonian joint paremiological project, and Ülo Tedre as a representative of the Institute of Estonian Language and Literature at the Academy of Sciences of the ESSR was a member of the commission responsible for the work on the Estonian side. The primary task of the Tartu working group, under the lead of Erna Normann, was to compile a publication on Estonian proverbs. The imposed time limits were unrealistically optimistic, and we immediately faced difficulties, which required numerous discussion meetings with the participation of the leading committee and members of the working group throughout 1964–1966. This was when I first met Ülo Tedre, a middle-aged curly-haired stoutish man with spectacles, whose presence in the building was betrayed by the aromatic tobacco smell emanating from his pipe. He acquainted himself with our problems, and when in the autumn of 1965 we faced yet another crisis, it was him who resolutely suggested that we should replace the acting leader.

In 1969 our working group was practically dissolved, and I managed to start my post-graduate studies at the Institute of Estonian Language and Literature. The topic of my dissertation was a mixture of the image semantics, worldviews and classification of proverbs, and Ülo Tedre became my supervisor. At that time we were *p r o b a b l y* on a first-name basis with him, although it did not come so easily back then, even in the company of men, especially those with a different social status. I had some colleagues who worked side by side for decades and still addressed one another formally.

Tedre was not especially eager to speak about his personal life; yet, he repeatedly recalled suffering from lack of food at the university hostel (due to the post-war poor economic situation), and a banner with a motto "Aqua et panis – vita canis", which the

students hung on the wall. When a hostel warden came and saw it, he commented on it: “Why are you hanging those English slogans here, better use Estonian ones instead!” Once we happened to walk through the old town, and I asked him something about a building that we were passing. He then told me the entire history of this house and continued with each following one on our way.

Ülo Tedre was a figure that our children found fascinating, with a beret aslant over his forehead, a pipe hanging from the corner of his mouth, always carrying a briefcase; he made contact with children easily and was called Uncle with a Pipe in our family. Ülo was constantly reading something. He lit his pipe to the morning coffee, grabbed a random book from the shelf, and sometimes read it for hours.

In September of the year of the Chernobyl catastrophe, 1986, there was a folklore conference at the Institute for World Literature in Moscow, and the pair of us represented Estonia. They accommodated us in the hotel Akademicheskaya, which was a nice one, but we were warned that the walls were ‘micro-concrete’ (full of microphones), so we were trying to keep our evening conversations under control. I remember that we could not keep to the conference schedule at all, and instead of planned presentations we had fierce arguments about structuralism and semiotics and whether they were useful or senseless in folkloristics. During intervals everybody gathered around the Ukrainian participants to enquire what had happened and what the situation was like. In the afternoons we walked around in Moscow, admiring the abundance of bookshops, snooping around at second-hand booksellers, but mainly bought coffee beans by kilograms, later to be distributed to our Tallinn and Tartu colleagues, as in the second year of perestroika this delightful substance had disappeared from Estonia altogether.

In 2014, Tellervo Krogerus published an 856-page book titled “Sanottu, tehty: Matti Kuusen elämä 1914–1998”, to mark the 100th birth anniversary of Matti Kuusi, a Finnish folklorist, paremiographer and paremiologist. The author who could publish – if not earlier then in 2028 at the latest – a book of a similar volume titled “The Life of Ülo Tedre (1928–2015)”, may already be visible in the arena of folkloristics, but maybe not yet.

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