

NEWS IN BRIEF

MEMORY, REMEMBERING, AND LEGEND: ESTONIAN FOLKLORISTS' 10TH WINTER CONFERENCE

In December 2005, the Department of Folkloristics of the Estonian Literary Museum initiated a series of conferences, which turned into a regular specialist winter forum – an invigorating event in the ritual year of the participants and everyone else involved in it. The 2015 Winter Conference was organised by the Department of Estonian and Comparative Folklore at the University of Tartu, with support from the Centre of Excellence in Cultural Theory and the Cultural Endowment of Estonia. The conference took place at Taevaskoja Tourism and Holiday Centre on February 26 and 27, 2015.

The organising committee (Ergo-Hart Västriik, Kristel Kivari, and Tiina Sepp) offered as keywords for the conference memory, remembering, and legend – concepts that are related to different stages of the heritage process. These concepts in the folklorists' analytical toolbox made it possible to bring to the fore living folklore phenomena and the borderline areas around them. The relevant motto of the conference – life creates stories, stories create life – turned out to be rather inspiring. Both the speakers and the audience re-experienced something that only the format of a winter conference can offer: folkloristic work outside the office in between the certain calm of the beginning of the year and the hectic spring calendar packed with various events. The aspect of remembering was also topical because in November 2014 folklorist Aino Laagus, who had introduced new approaches to legend studies in the late 1980s, would have celebrated her 70th birthday. During the panel discussion in the evening of the opening day, the researchers' former friends and colleagues recalled her as a nice and intelligent person and initiator of various undertakings.

The conference listened to 16 papers and a presentation of a recently published book in the series *Reetor*, titled *Uurimusi tänapäevasesst kujundkeelest* (Research into Modern Figurative Language), compiled and edited by Anneli Baran. Two of the papers, Mare Kõiva's "Zoofolkloristics and Its Dimensions" and Andres Kuperjanov's "Ethnoastronomy and Folk Astronomy", were meant to be presented at the panel dedicated to the borderline areas of folklore.

Tiiu Jaago's presentation dedicated to the notions 'memory' and 'border' in the folkloristics of the interdisciplinary era was a contribution to the advancement of the theory of folkloristics. In her paper Jaago highlighted what exactly the branches of science engaged with memory studies interpret as memory. History as science operates with the knowledge of past facts; folklore is channelled in the heritage history, which associates narratives of the past with the present, whereas biographical studies are concerned with the issues of ways and intentionalities of the presentations of the past.

Mall Hiimäe in her presentation welcomed the tendency of rediscovering memorative narratives. Her own approach to the subject, titled "A Comparative Study of Ghosts in Virumaa Folk Belief", clearly exemplified this viewpoint. As an excellent expert in the domain, she emphasised the regional peculiarities of this area, and symbioses of the creatures familiar in local lore.

In recent years, Reet Hiimäe has carried out advanced research into belief stories. At this conference she discussed, based on older belief narratives, how and under what circumstances non-verbal communication – for instance, with supernatural creatures, dead relatives, or messengers through dreams – is converted into a narrative. These are experience stories, which present the description of the experienced act and the narrator's interpretation of the observed (heard, perceived) situation.

The first panel was followed by presentations concerned with children's studies and folk education. Pihla Siim introduced to the audience a questionnaire carried out within a project dedicated to family migration in Europe, concerned with the stories of mobility told by Estonian children who have moved to Finland. She showed what the children in the families who have migrated to Finland for work think about life and work in a foreign country. Children highlight somewhat surprising details and facts, often of secondary importance at first sight; they invent their own explanations to why they had to move, yet also indicate the reasons their parents have given for moving.

Piret Voolaid, who has been engaged with some borderline phenomena of classical genres, this time cast a glance at the interesting and spontaneous 'out of the mouths of children' sphere, under the title "A Folkloristic Glance at Children's Humour: From Memorable Sayings to Written Stories". As it is part of children's language, we should regard the material as linguistic jokes. At the same time, they can be interpreted as humorous, spontaneous, everyday stories, instigated by children's experience and converted into a story by an adult. As was demonstrated, some of them are reverberations of the adults' world, thereby acting as socio-cultural clues.

Pille Kippar also discussed stories that spread within a restricted lore group (family circle). Her presentation titled "Grandfather's Jäneda-Stories: Shaping Experience into Social Competence" pointed to the possibilities how the older (and wiser) can share knowledge in each situation; for instance, introducing the history and meaning of a place when passing through, and pointing out the correct way of acting in different situations.

The evening panel was dedicated to the categories of belief and religion. Ülo Valk in his presentation "Supernatural as Ontological Liminality: Recollections and Legends of Were-Animals" first pointed out the methods of truth rhetoric used to achieve credibility in legend-telling. He then continued with the introduction of extremely interesting magical practices of animal transformations in Assam legends. Aado Lintrop in his paper "Shamanistic Course as a Model of Heritage Process" showed how practising neo-shamanism can become a community-creating factor. Ergo-Hart Västriik discussed the spread of the ideas of Estonian *maausk* (native faith) and how these ideas have found coverage in the media. The speaker was, above all, interested in the topics and keywords, in connection with which this religious group emerged in the news flow, as well as changes therein. Västriik maintains that *maausk* enjoys a positive image in the media.

Merili Metsvahi spoke about the descriptions of Estonian peasants' sexual life in August Wilhelm Hupel's book "Topographical Notes from Estonia and Livonia", published in the last quarter of the 18th century. Metsvahi regards Hupel's descriptions as a good reflection of ethnographic reality, offering necessary data for studying Estonian family lore. Liisi Laineste's presentation discussed remembering the events of the Second World War and depicting life stories and selected historic events as a series of caricatures. The analytical frame was constituted by the idea of the impact of a conflictual context on

the life narrative and the role of humour therein. Liina Paaes talked about Estonian sign language, loan signs, and the formation and use of new folkloric concepts, discussing both general folkloric terminology and the concepts meant to designate phenomena relates to deaf folklore in Estonian. Ell Vahtramäe in her presentation about Estonian food and national food tried to establish which foods have been defined as national and/or Estonian in the media. The speaker was also interested in how all this related to memory, identity, and consumerist culture, and to what extent a social text is formed.

Anastasiya Astapova's, Margaret Lyngdoh's and Alevtina Solovyova's presentations added cross-cultural dimension to the conference. Astapova's paper, "No Rules – No Trust: Democracy and Rumours about Surveillance", weighed rumours about surveillance activities in contemporary Belorussia. These stories are intensified by the authorities' non-transparent activities and people's doubts about modern means of communication making surveillance relatively easy. Margaret Lyngdoh delivered a paper under the heading "On Why the West is a Taboo Direction among the Khasis". She discussed folklore formation around places of accidents, manifesting Christian and native faith as well as secular beliefs. Alevtina Solovyova's presentation under the heading "Gold Coins, Singing Monks and Restless Places: A Historical Memory of Mongolian Demonological Topics" was based on fieldwork carried out in Mongolia (organised by the Centre of Folklore and Semiotics at the Russian State University for the Humanities) and focused on demonological beliefs in local historic lore. She dwelt upon a story cycle about golden coins in possession of the spirits of Chinese merchants, and a story about mysterious lights and occasional prayer songs in the cemetery of Buddhist monks.

The first conference day was finished by Mooste folk musicians, whose music made the listeners sing along with the performers.

In hindsight it can be said that it was a successful event opening new perspectives and enriching the participants' experience in every respect.

Mare Kalda

FOLKLORE COLLECTION AT THE ESTONIAN FOLKLORE ARCHIVES IN 2014 AND PRESIDENT'S FOLKLORE COLLECTION AWARD

On April 24, 2015, the Estonian Folklore Archives (EFA) summarised the past year of folklore collecting. Jürgen Ligi, Minister of Education and Research, handed out folklore collection awards to the best folklore collectors of 2014. Four people were recognised for their work in this field.

Liis Reha and Katre Koppel received an award for collecting the lore of the Viljandi Culture Academy. The gathered material was compiled into a book under the heading *Ühine teistsugusus: artikleid ja esseid TÜ Viljandi Kultuuriakadeemia 60. aastapäevaks* (Common Difference: Articles and Essays Dedicated to the 60th Anniversary of the Vil-

jandi Culture Academy). Liis Reha and Katre Koppel were initiators of this project. The material collected was voluminous: 63 audio-interviews, iterations of interviews (1155 digital pages), 270 digital photographs, and 2 video files. Besides the fact that the collection covers the history of one educational institution, known, throughout its history, under different names (Viljandi Culture School, Culture College, Culture Academy), it reveals the idiosyncrasy of this institution – with its hostels, creative-minded teaching staff and even more creative students – in our educational space.

Anne Rebane has handed over to the archives reminiscences of her grandmother, the latter's knowledge of medicinal herbs and of healing with them, as well as about celebrating calendrical holidays at home. She has provided a gripping and warm depiction of the family's life at Lasnamäe (district of Tallinn) at the time when it featured only a few blocks of flats. She has also donated to the museum her grandmother's life story and a notebook with riddles written by her. Anne Rebane has participated in the archives' collection competition and has donated to the archives 101 photographs of her own and her grandmother's sister's families. The photographs depict the life of a family in Haapsalu in the 1930s.

Eha Võso has taken part in three last collection competitions organised by the archives. Her writings are fascinating, humorous, and precise in their details. As she has worked as a kindergarten teacher, some of the topics, for example, children's games, are close to her heart; so are humorous stories discussing funny events in the life of kindergarten teachers, which is well known to the writer.

The figures characterising the past year's collection work of the Folklore Archives are rather remarkable. In 2014 the archives received more than 6500 pages of written material, 2000 photographs, and 351 audiovisual items.

This year we have continued with making archival data available by means of the online file repository and information system Kivike. Currently the descriptions of 53,884 items from folklore archives collections are preserved in Kivike, whereas more than half of them were added in 2014.

In 2014 the archives organised a collection competition for home lore, under the heading "Stories about Our Homes", coordinated by Mari Sarv, senior researcher of the EFA.

The collection campaign aimed at mapping Estonians' home experience today: where our homes have been and are situated; whether they are hereditary, bought, rented, or self-established; what we know about our home and its environs and what we want to pass on; how the sense of home emerges; how many homes people have had during their lifetime, and what people feel in the process of moving house.

The campaign resulted in 72 contributions: 774 pages on paper, nearly 1000 digital pages, and plenty of photographs. These items clearly indicate how many times people have moved house (as compared to earlier mode of life), and also refer to the reasons why it has been done. As compared to earlier folklore collections, townspeople's home-related stories are brought to the fore, as well as people's relationships with the urban landscape. Different generations' perception of home is also clearly perceivable: for pupils their home is primarily the place where their parents and family live; university students appreciate, most of all, privacy, the possibility to be and act according to their own will, whereas home as a 'place' seems to be less important. However, the home stories of the older generation are more faceted, interlarded with different life facts,



*Folklore collectors with the Minister of Education and Research, Jürgen Ligi.
Photograph by Alar Madisson 2015.*



*From the left: Anne Rebane, Liis Reha, Eha Võso, Katre Koppel, Jürgen Ligi.
Photograph by Alar Madisson 2015.*

memories, and emotions associated with them. The older generation's home stories are presented against the background of war- and post-war years, and experiences related to the war, violence, and repressions, as well as to migrants from the Soviet Union. Later destinies have been strongly influenced by the Soviet-time job placement practice. Many of the contributions by the older generation include stories about losing home for different reasons.

We are grateful to all the contributors and invite everybody to participate in the 2015 collection competition, under the heading "My Landscapes".

Astrid Tuisk