

NEWS IN BRIEF

JOINT ESTONIAN–HUNGARIAN SEMINAR “GLOBAL AND LOCAL ELEMENTS IN CONTEMPORARY FOLKLORE IN HUNGARY AND ESTONIA”

A new academic cooperation started in 2022, bringing together researchers of contemporary folklore from two institutions: the Estonian Literary Museum in Tartu, Estonia, and the Institute of Ethnology of the Research Centre for the Humanities in Budapest, Hungary. The aim of the project is to collect and analyze jokes, memes, contemporary legends and other contemporary folklore forms (e.g., school lore), their usage and dynamics in order to detect playfulness and creativity in the (new) formats they take and address the way they reflect the social reality that gives rise to them. The project aims to take into account cross-cultural as well as diachronic and synchronic perspectives, offering a unique and innovative perspective in folklore studies of Estonia, Hungary, and Belarus.

The first joint seminar within the framework of the cooperation was held at the Institute of Ethnology in Budapest on November 29, 2022.¹ The nine presentations were connected in many ways, at the same time covering a wide range of topics.

The first session started with a presentation by Mare Kõiva on Estonian waterhorse traditions. The rich Estonian material about this mythological creature was presented together with Celtic and European indigenous parallels, drawing attention to the local characteristics as well as the more widespread elements. The following papers turned their attention to the folklore and beliefs of schoolchildren and the youth. First, Piret Voolaid presented an overview of school lore collecting campaigns in Estonia. These have provided – and continue to provide – insight into the changing traditions in contemporary society. The questionnaires touch upon a wide variety of genres and topics, and the accumulated expertise can help in adapting this research practice in Hungary as well. The next presentation by Reet Hiimäe focused on the reflections of environmental fears and crises in Estonian contemporary narrative folklore, drawing on material from the school lore collections and other sources to demonstrate how traditional beliefs connected to the environment have been heavily influenced by global trends and fears conveyed by the media. The last paper in this session dealt with the role of the printed media as a transmission channel and also a source of belief legends. Éva Mikos presented examples of contemporary legends related to snakes, spiders, and alligators, which were published as news articles in Hungarian newspapers at the beginning of the 20th century.

The afternoon session started with a practical introduction into collaborative digital humanity tools for folklore studies by Liisi Laineste, on the example of Airtable. The different formats of contemporary folklore (including internet memes), as well as the

quick emergence and large quantity of examples call for a suitable and flexible methodology. The advantages of collaborative research are also increasingly recognized in the humanities. Online tools can facilitate collaborative work on a shared dataset, including joint practices of categorization, tagging, and analysis. The participants of the seminar experimented shortly with *Airtable*, taking the first steps to build a shared dataset.

Staying within the broad topic of humorous expression but turning to a diachronic perspective, Katalin Vargha presented the background of a Hungarian term used today in humorous discourse as a way of calling someone a joke killer. The roots of the term '*papjancsi*' go back to singer and actor János Papp (1879–1944), who became a protagonist of anecdotes in his lifetime, and later evolved into a humorous character with the distinctive feature of being a joke killer. The next presenter, Anastasiya Fiadotava, returned to the present and the physical world. She shared a Belarusian case study on the use of humor during political protest, aiming at the qualitative analysis of both the content and the temporal and spatial context of protest posters. The last two presentations of the seminar were connected by the source material of audiovisual media. First, Mariann Domokos presented a paper on the impact of television on Hungarian popular culture, focusing on the possibilities of the folkloristic investigation of film and television from the point of view of fairy tale research. In the last presentation of the seminar, Mare Kalda introduced the conceptual framework of transmedial worlds. On the example of the movie "Spring", she showed a wide range of creative adoption by the Estonian social media audiences, including memetic videos, phrases and images engaging with or reflecting the original movie and novel.



*Anastasiya Fiadotava making her presentation on the use of humor.
Photograph Piret Voolaid 2022.*

The presentations were followed by a lively discussion on the similarities and differences of the characteristics of contemporary folklore in Estonia and Hungary, as well as the possibilities for collaboration within the framework of the joint project. Internet memes and other forms of online humor in times of permacrisis continually provide material for comparative research. This is also a good opportunity for further exploration of collaborative research practices facilitated by digital humanity tools. The Estonian methodology of school lore collection through online questionnaires is also to be tested in Hungary. Joint work and discussion shall be continued in 2023, with opportunities to meet and exchange ideas at several scientific events.

Katalin Vargha

Note

- ¹ The seminar was supported by the joint research project of the Department of Folkloristics of the Institute of Ethnology of the Research Centre for the Humanities, and the Department of Folkloristics of the Estonian Literary Museum, “Global and local elements in contemporary folklore in Hungary and Estonia” (NKM-18/2022), under the agreement on scientific cooperation between the Estonian Academy of Sciences and the Hungarian Academy of Sciences.