In a Big Black Town, There Was a Big Black House

It was in the 50s. I was visiting my relatives in South Estonia. The village people used to gather at their place and tell stories to each other. They were worried and said that in Moscow there was a mechanical man made of iron walking around the Kremlin. Inside it, there was a nuclear bomb and if it blew up, nothing would be left of the Earth. They were all elderly people and did not think about how a child would react to it. I was very very scared (A veterinary doctor, age 48).

I want to introduce you to the horror stories of Estonian children and bring some examples of the legends popular in the 40s, 50s and 60s that have influenced children's repertoire. Horror stories are as good and consistent part of the tradition of children's lore as anecdotes. Nowadays the tradition of Estonian children's thrillers and horrors consists of stories of different origin and structure. Besides playful, startling, surprising and absurd stories, the term includes also narratives (of the occasions) which have been believed and taken seriously both by children and adults.

Classification of Horror Stories

1. Horror stories belonging to classical folklore and their modernizations ("The Man with a Wooden/Golden Leg", "The Corpse-Eater" – AaTh 363, etc.). During the past hundred years, several versions of the story of a man with a wooden or golden

leg have been recorded in Estonia. The man asks his leg to be put into his grave with him, and if it is not done so, he comes to claim it later. The scenery and circumstances of the modern variants of the stories have also been modernized – the corpse-eater, for example, rides to the graveyard in a taxi. The story itself is much shorter and more naïve, but the essence has remained the same.

> *The wife of a man died. It was said that the woman had had golden hands. The man thought that if she had golden hands, he would cut off one of them. Therefore, he did. Then he went to the cemetery and buried the woman. Night was already falling when he drove back home. Suddenly he heard, "Give my hand back!" The man was frightened, whipped his horse and drove on quicker. When he was very close to his house, he suddenly heard from behind his back, "Give my golden hand back to me!" At that moment, he felt the hand move under his coat. – This is a horror story. It has to be told in a dark room. The end of it should be told in a low voice and sedately. During the sentence "felt the hand move under his coat" the narrator grabs someone else and speaks up* (RKM II 325, 80/1 (15) < Tartu – Girl, age 13 (1976)).

Estonian schoolchildren's lore includes a fair number of traditional religious narratives about the misfortunes of someone who goes to the cemetery in order to win a bet, permanent legends about ghosts and spectres in old manor houses, etc. In addition to the aforementioned, there are numerous legends about persons apparently dead, infanticides, going to the cemetery in order to win a bet, the Seventh Book of Moses, ancient prophets, etc. Although children have learnt most of these stories from their parents or peers, they usually do not include any specific characteristics of localities or persons. Stories offering a sensation of horror or those with a humorous undertone have preserved better.

In most cases these are told by children whose parents or grandparents come from a region rich in folklore. The difference between the narrative tradition of adults and that of children is not big – narratives from the adult lore that have withdrawn to secondary tradition or disappeared altogether, such as, for example, fairy stories or classical legends about the devil, are not told by children either. Children are also eager to remember and

retell legends read from books and stories heard from guides during excursions.

2. Specific schoolchildren's horror stories. These are narratives known at least in Eastern and Central Europe, part of them even more widely. Mostly, the techniques of fairy tales are used as well as some elements of classical legends. The majority of such horror stories are based on unexpected contact with an evil object (less frequently with evil beings) or on breaking rules/taboos. Most common evil objects are Yellow/Red/Violet Curtains, Black/White/Red Hands, Red Shoes, Red Dress, Pearls, Green Dot, Black/Red Roses, Doll, etc.

3. Urban legends, which in their essence are a rather labile type of stories. It seems to depend on traditions whether a story is classified under legends or as an urban legend. Thus in Jan Brunvandt's first collection, the type *Devil at a Dance* is placed among urban legends (Brunvand 1981: 135–136). In Estonia, however, this is a legend of an old type, which has already fallen into oblivion, and only indirect parallels to it can be found among schoolchildren's horror stories. Popular is the Estonian version of about *The Vanishing Hitchhiker*, the legend about lunching in a café together with a dead girl.

Each period seems to add its own areas of interest to urban legends: these can be rumours about robbing fair-skinned (Estonian) women in the southern republics of the Soviet Union, fear of new foods and drinks (Pepsi-Cola), mishaps at forbidden activities (stealing meat/calves from collective farms), etc. Stories induced by social tensions and subconscious fears do not remain in the repertoire for long; they spread quickly and disappear quickly as well. They are closely connected with urban sensations and rumours. Among these, we could mention the post-Second World War stories about making horsemeat sausage or factories where sausage was made from human flesh, and about black cars in which blood-gatherers moved around. These stories presupposed a serious belief in what happened, and they balanced on the borderline between belief and doubt.

4. Stories based on personal experience, also on personal experiences, which may have been heard from parents and other

adults. There are lots of more or less traditional memorates about meetings with supernatural powers and beings, escaping from danger in answer to prayer, about experiences with ghosts of people who have died of unnatural causes, haunted houses, etc.

5. Thrillers based on stories read from books, seen on TV and in video films, heard on the radio. The stories inspired by the mass media can be divided into reproductive narratives, variations and free fabulations, which have been processed into folklore-like shape. Radio, TV and literary sources mediate a remarkable number of plots to children. Well-known horror films, science fiction stories, characters of international film folklore, e.g. werewolves, vampires, space invaders are likely to be used in situations of narration. This way Estonian schoolchildren's lore has been enriched by stories about vampires and UFOs. *Dracula* which was retold in the 1970s inspired the creation of other vampire stories as well. It became one of the favourite topics for improvisations. Vampires turned into peculiar frightful images for children, into beings that were believed in. Years ago a third-form boy I know well refused to stay overnight in the tent because at nights vampires moved around, surely sucking blood. Overcoming the fear of vampires was instructive for both sides: it was surprising for me that there are children who believe that such creatures exist in Estonia, and for him it was news that the kin of vampires emerged in the Balkans centuries ago and were hardly known anywhere else.

A horror film that has become popular is *Krüger*, a story about a demoniac dead man who penetrates into people and urges the physical characters he has conquered to violence and hideous murders. In the final scenes of the film, it is revealed that the monster has entered several youngsters. Stories heard on the radio, particularly in evening and midnight programs, are also in circulation. Works of literature that have most often served as sources for fabulation are a series of horror stories published early in the century (*Hirmu- ja õudusjutud*), stories read from special collections and collections of short stories compiled by Alfred Hitchcock. Along with the sensation of horror, an unexpected or witty ending also seems to be a criterion of choice.

Besides directly borrowed stories, the mass media influences folklore in a more oblique way, encouraging the spread of new creatures to be believed in and influencing viewpoints and attitudes. Creatures without any local identity, who have abandoned their habitat, are flocking in through TV and computer networks. Devils, trolls, fairies, gnomes, zombies, witchcraft and magic are standardized. For the viewers whose background knowledge of their own belief is insufficient, television replaces folklore. Children spend a lot of time watching TV, and therefore they are dependent on modern film fairy-tales and myths that adults address specially to teen-agers. During the last decades, when analysing the relations between TV and folklore, it has been stated that the mass media are eager to use and spread folk tales and beliefs. The written and audiovisual press also favours the circulation of rumours and various types of folklore. TV organizes the everyday life of the adults, structures the calendar year, and creates its own sacramental temporal and spatial relations. Mass media news have been classified under everyday rites, they have been regarded as ceremonies with the elements of transitional rites (Selberg 1993: 211). For the young viewer the TV screen replaces part of immediate oral communication, grandfather's or grandmother's traditional tales, which in the urban setting, where usually only one generation lives together, can seldom be heard. Visualized mythology, which is often adapted and authorized, unifies rural and urban folklore.

6. Pseudothrillers – the stories ending with a point. Very often, a story is fashioned to be a thriller by the way it is presented, actually, it may be an anecdote (The Dripping Tap:

> *Father, mother, brother and sister are watching TV. Suddenly they hear water dripping. Father goes to see what is up but does not return. The others continue watching and hear the dripping. Mother goes to see what is up and does not return. Brother and sister watch TV on and hear the dripping. Sister goes to see what is up and does not return. Brother watches the film to the end and then goes to see where the others have disappeared. He goes to the kitchen and what does he see (the last sentence must be said slowly and with emphasis) – father, mother and sister are hold-*

ing the tap (RKM, Mgn II 4108 (9) < Tartu – Girl, 11 yrs. (1988)), a story of everyday life, etc.).

7. Children's "original creations" are considerably wilder than the traditional stories. The latter, as a rule, lack longer or more detailed descriptions of possible horrors and crimes. The subject of children's original creations may be dead bodies in neighbours' yards, or in a solitary ravine, or other similar fantasies. Even pieces written on assignment as school compositions play some role in this group of stories. Good knowledge of the tradition and fantasy make it easy for children to create narratives where parts of traditional horror stories are used. So, one's "own creation" often resembles a traditional narrative. "The original creation" may be put down (together with other kinds of horror stories) in a notebook that is passed from person to person. The notebooks themselves may become objects of belief (the parents of a girl destroyed the notebook, and all kinds of misfortunes befell the family).

From Urban Legend to Horror Story

In the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s, an extraordinarily great amount of stories about infanticides and various crimes spread in Estonia. Their action was localized in and connected with Estonia's new industrial towns which were established after the war and where the inhabitants were mostly immigrants, including Russians (before Second World War 80% of Estonia's inhabitants were Estonians, at present around 60%). Most of such stories are based on ancient plots of legends (for example: a mother decides on demand of her lover to kill her child, ties him naked to a tree, an occasional passer-by saves the child and takes the mother to the police station). Various social tensions, lack of information, uncertainty about one's existence, unexpected and numerous bearers of alien tradition in ones surroundings and many other reasons induce the horror stories of adults. Obviously, these things together with the stories about wartime events, about black cars for arresting people, the stories about Jews and others experimenting on people or collecting human blood, which were propa-

gated by the KGB, were the starting points for the stories about the sausage factory. This variety of the tradition is closely connected with folklore known probably all over the territory of the former Soviet Union. This kind of stories may have been partly inspired by the nighttime deportations that were practised by the Stalinist regime in the 1930s and later. People were quietly gathered into black cars, and they disappeared. The trials of physicians and geneticists could also inspire and propagate such stories. The borders between real-life events and fantasy are labile.

> *It was told that after the war there had also been blood-takers, bloodsuckers in Tartu. They had been dark-skinned men, but they had also had some Estonians in their company. A blond girl had danced with a young man at a party and had started to try how her ring fits on the boy's finger. And finally she left it there. However, later she phoned and asked him to bring her ring back. The boy went but did not come back. His family started to look for him and found him when half of his blood had been sucked out of his body and he had fainted. However, he still survived* (< Tallinn – Woman, 74 yrs.).

In the adult tradition, the stories about sausage factories are in the style of seriously believed legends. People claim having been lured to the sausage factory or near it and having miraculously escaped. A concrete town or streets of ruins in it where that kind of factory had been situated are mentioned.

> *I know, it was in the fifties, I went to Tartu with my mother, and she knew a hospital assistant, and they were just building a new cinema across the river. And then she showed us several houses where the sausage factories had been. They were in ruins as a rule* (Man, 50 yrs.).

> *In Turu Street in Tartu there was a sausage factory after the war. An acquaintance of an acquaintance of mine, who had been in Tartu in hospital together with a woman who had escaped from there, told me about it. Once she had come to Tartu with a horse and cart from the countryside to sell milk at the market. A man walked up to her and said that he would buy the whole barrel of milk if she just*

drove with the horse into his yard. The woman had driven in through the gate, but the man had closed the gate at once behind her back. The woman had then understood that something was wrong and ran out through the wicket. The man threw an axe into her shoulder. However, people came to risqué her and took her to hospital. Then those sausage manufacturers were caught (< Tallinn – Woman, age 74 yrs.).

Such stories were not told only about towns but also about remote village farms. Similar stories can be found in older folklore as well, usually they deal with farms whose owners catch travellers and rob them; sometimes the criminal property owner salts his victims in a barrel, and the meat is used for eating or for feeding the pigs. These are old motifs again (for Swedish parallels about murdering of wayfarers, see, e.g., Ljungström 1995: 283). A transitory form from the old tradition to the new one can be seen in the following story.

A sausage factory on a farm amidst a forest

In the time of flax cutting we went into a house to stay overnight. We were given a place to sleep on the kitchen floor. The kitchen cupboard was closed. We heard something dripping in the cupboard. The hosts went all to sleep. My mates got up and somehow managed to open the cupboard. In there we saw a man hung up by his feet, his throat cut. Put on hook on the hang so that sausage could be made out of him. That was in Metsküla village. We quickly put on our clothes and ran away from that house in great horror (< Võnnu parish – Man).

In the adult tradition, these stories are in the style of seriously believed legends or memorates. Contemporary children's horror stories partly copy the tradition of adults, but a part of them are quite different from those that the grown-ups tell, although the latter have undoubtedly been the sources of inspiration and have also had some exceptional influence on the children's lore. Yuri Lotman has said that playing and believing are similar for people and often they do not know whether they are pretending to be afraid or are really afraid.

Children's stories are very rarely told in the first person, and they are only seldom connected with their personal memories. It is also quite common that the events occur only once.

> *A mother had a daughter. She gave her child a ring as a birthday present. Soon she sent her daughter shopping. The daughter went along an asphalt road and disappeared underground. Mother waited and waited, waited but her daughter did not come. Mother went and bought some minced meat. At home, she began to fry the meat. Suddenly she saw the same ring in the minced meat. Then she realized what had happened to her daughter* (RKM II 324, 274 < Nõo parish (1976)).

Mostly the stories told by children resemble specific children's horror stories; they have a fixed structure, which resembles a fairy-tale. The story begins with breaking some taboo (the child steps on forbidden ground), the character may be a wicked woman or a hateful grownup, and everything is repeated three times (on three following days three members of a family get lost and only the last one escapes by chance). The main evil character may also be White Hand or Black Hand or some other typical character of horror stories. As a rule, children do not believe in such stories, they are equated with thrillers which everyone can invent at their own will and which have no connection with real life. These stories seem to have stopped halfway in their development, so that connections with legends, various rumours and sensational events have also influenced children's repertoire, which has sporadically retained some memorate-like character and some variants have not completely acquired the style of a horror story.

Composition and Character of Children's Horror Stories

Let us have *a closer look at specific children's horror stories*. The world of specific children's horror stories is sterile; there are no descriptions of the situation, characters or the action. First, short and passionless introductions are given, and then follow the presentation of events and dialogues. Strict didacticism is usually quite characteristic of the stories. The content and composition of the stories are improperly primitive for the children's age; this, however, does not inhibit their spread. Mostly the stories

are based on breaking a rule/taboo (the child steps on forbidden ground, buys a forbidden object), or an evil person (object) comes unexpectedly into a house, or an object in the house suddenly turns hostile. Similarly to fairy-tales, with which these stories have much in common in their structure and motifs, everything is repeated thrice (on three following days three members of a family get lost and only the last one escapes by chance). The characters of children's horror stories are mostly families with three or four children, parents, and a grandmother. One of the grown-ups (grandmother, mother, shop assistant, and teacher) proves to be the hostile person. Mall Hiiemäe has pointed out that in most cases these are adults with whom the children are most familiar or with whom they most often come into contact (Hiiemäe 1990). The main evil character may also be an abstract, non-existent or absurd character – White Hand or Black Hand or some other typical character of horror stories. Usually the evil characters are a hand (more seldom a foot) of an extraordinary colour, a detail of clothing, a piece of furniture, a toy, flowers, a piano, an abstract notion, etc. The human character is most often one of the living or dead members of the family who can be associated with a witch or who reveals supernatural (magic) powers. The human characters (family, child, man, woman) are generally passive, the evil object or person (Red/Black/White Hand or Foot; Black Piano, Yellow/Red etc. Curtain, etc.) is active.

About thirty types of popular horror stories are known all over Estonia. According to the archive materials, a great deal of these stories has stayed in the repertoire of children during the last decades, but there are not enough documented versions to say anything exact about their distribution. Quite often, the stories form groups where in some aspects they are similar to each other, but the relations and developments as well as the culmination or the negative characters may be quite different. Usually the more popular types of stories have two or three variants, which circulate simultaneously: a version with a fatal ending, a version where the evil object or person destroys itself, and a version with an absurd or impressive ending. Some examples of the development of stories of the most common type *Step on the Windowsill*. The common form of the type is as follows:

> *Once upon a time, there were three sisters. Their mother told them never to buy yellow curtains. After their mother's death, the girls went to town and saw beautiful yellow curtains there. The youngest sister did not want to buy the curtains, but the elder sisters still bought them. At night the curtains said, "The eldest sister, wake up." The girl did. "Girl, make up your bed." The girl did. "Girl, step on the chair." The girl did. "Girl, step on the windowsill." The girl did and the curtains strangled the girl. The same happened to the next sister. On the third night the curtains said, "The youngest sister, wake up." But the girl didn't* (RKM II 354, 52/3 (14) < Viljandi (1981)).

Only a third of the stories of this type have some kind of introduction with a prohibition or warning; in the rest of the stories new curtains are bought which prove to be evil objects, or the story begins (after some introductory words about the family) with commands. Usually there are 2–5 or 4–5 characters in the family (mother, father and three children, or mother, father and two children, sometimes a grandmother as a prohibitor). In the case of the grandmother as the prohibitor, the characters are mother-father-grandmother-children (child). The action is repeated (depending on the number of characters) 2–4 times. The most common evil objects are Yellow or Red Curtains, more seldom Black or Red Hands, or just Curtains, a Black Carpet. The evil object may also be indefinite – we only know that a *voice* said something; in a couple of stories the dead grandmother turns out to be the Red Hand or Yellow Curtains. Three kinds of endings can occur: a) all the characters are killed; b) the last character (who is one movement belated from the action) survives; c) the same as b, but the evil object destroys itself.

Principally analogous, with the same characters and solutions is the type of stories called *The Black Dot*. Most of these stories have an introductory part where grandmother forbids her children to wipe the black dot off the ceiling after her death. In all variations of such stories the grandmother proves to be the one who "eats the flesh and drinks the blood" of those disobeying. The resolutions of this kind of stories belong to type *a* or *b*. The type of stories called *The Black Piano* is usually formed in the same style (someone is heard to play the piano, the Black Hand/Foot, etc. or the Piano itself is playing). The number of charac-

ters is the same as in the type *Step on the Windowsill*. The story has two versions. In the second version, the second child or the last member of the family injures the Piano or the Hand, the wound is transmitted to an existing evil person – teacher/aunt/parents – who have tried to put the children to death. The resolutions of these stories belong to types *a*, *b*, *c* or *a+f* (the police arrest the evil person), *b+f*. The specific feature of this version of stories is the police, who come to help, and a miraculous transmission – injuring of the Hand causes wounds on the teacher's hand; a corner is cut off from the evil person. A common and typical feature of legends and horror stories is that the wound is transferred to the person who causes evil. This is analogous to images spread in the old tradition, where a blow delivered with a sharp iron object at a nightmare or witch (who appears in the shape of an object, a whirlwind, etc.), is transferred to a real person.

Only part of horror stories circulate as *frightening stories* or *pseudo-thrillers*, at the end of which the narrator frightens the listener by making a terrifying noise, grabbing him unexpectedly, or in some other way.

Horror stories are transformed into frightening stories by different presentations and solutions. The type *Corpse-Eater* has two popular solutions: a) the taxi-driver is killed; b) the listener is frightened by a phrase or a horrible sound, or by clutching at the listener's arm or neck, etc. A very popular type of stories, *The Radio Announces*, may also end as a horror, frightening or absurd story. A man/woman/girl/boy/Brezhnev, etc. is alone at home, listens to the radio and hears that a Black Hand/Red Hand/White Lady/Bloodstain/Footprints/Skeleton/Fire Dot, etc. is approaching a certain town. Soon it is announced that the evil person is looking for a certain street, house, and flat; that he is reaching the door, entering the room. Solutions are the following: a) the evil character kills the person; the same final solution, but the listener can also be frightened; b) the absurd ending – the radio tells the person to jump out of the window and while falling down the person hears on the radio, "Today's midnight story is over. Good night!" or "You heard a Swedish folk-tale", or the "surprising solution" – the person hides himself and jumps out to meet the Black Hand, shouting, "Hands up, pants down, I'll shoot!"



Photo 1. On of the places of telling horror stories are children's camps. On of my fiends remember having heard these stories in her first camp summer in 1963. Girl spending their summer holidays in former Valkla pioneers' camp and belonging to the youngest group stayed with fifteen in the big room of the ground floor of the summerhouse (window at the left side on the photo). The photo is made in the beginning of 1980s. Private collection.

Part of horror stories are downright made for frightening. This depends neither on the length of the story (both a longer and a shorter story may have a frightening ending) nor even on the number of repetitions. Often a story is made frightening by the manner of presentation. The narrator speaks in an intentionally monotonous way; the repeated parts of the story can also tune the listener to the clichéd solution; therefore, the frightening ending functions well. In order to frighten, it is necessary that the listener should not have heard the story before; therefore, improvisational variations of the main types of stories or anecdotal absurd stories are used.

Moreover, some anecdotes can also be performed in a way that makes the impression of a horror story. By repetitions and manner of presentation, the listener is made to expect a fright-

ful ending, but afterwards he can state that he had to do with a trick or a joke. The most widely spread among the stories with the characteristics of an anecdote are the story about the sound of dripping in the neighbouring room, where all the members of the family, who go to see what has happened, disappear, and the story about a traveller who asks to be accompanied through the graveyard at night. In the first story, everyone proves to be alive, they are simply trying to stop the dripping water-tap. In the second story the escort, when asked whether he is not afraid, answers that he was afraid when he was still alive. In a similar story, it is forbidden to beat a nail into the floor or to pull it out. After the third breach of the ban, an angry neighbour arrives from downstairs and says that his chandelier has fallen down from the ceiling. There are also stories where a cupboard, which is behaving strangely, contains a starving monkey who has been forgotten, or inside a flying mitten, there is Karlsson from the Roof (a popular character from Astrid Lindgren's stories).

Changes in Horror Stories. Creation of New Stories

In the 1980s the number of stories with an absurd ending has increased, also there are details that are more absurd and cumulating of evil characters in the stories. The 1980s and 1990s have added a whole range of new stories based on letter magic, thrillers about spiritualism, about divination with plates, with the help of a mirror or cards – one may observe the development of several magic or oracular practises into horror stories. The children themselves have reshaped methods of divination re-discovered by 10–14-year-olds. They have elaborated the rules of communication with the spirits. The majority of narratives are based on the act of breaking these rules or on communication with spirits in general, i.e., on dangerous contact. Mikhail Muchlynin has dated the spread of horror stories based on invocation of spirits into the 1970s (Muchlynin 1990). In Estonia, these tales have spread since the 1980s (Vahtramäe 1996). With their simple structure and presentation, they resemble memorates and are close to urban legends. In the 1980s the genre as a whole becomes more heterogeneous.

The nature of horror stories is quite variable, quite often; a new story may be created by only changing the characters. More mobile details, by which the story is easily renewed, can be the characters or the details of everyday life. The application of the numbers three and four is also general.

Creation of new stories seems to be easy for children because they know the inner logic and requirements of the tradition. Ready-made details are often used. In one of my articles (Kõiva 1996) I have mentioned that 8–10-year-old boys and girls create new horror stories that resemble the tradition very closely. They can almost be mistaken for the traditional ones. Although such stories are unique, and no one else need perform them in the same form, they do not stand particularly out among the others. No obstacle can be felt at their interpretation or reception; we can notice the functioning of Y. Lotman's often-quoted pattern and flavour of one's own culture. Improvisation proves necessary because old types of horror stories become too well known and exhaust themselves; in the case of horror stories, novelty is necessary. It is also possible to attract attention with improvised stories, to show one as particularly courageous, knowledgeable or experienced. The need to speak about indecent things may also be one of the driving factors. I recall here a memorate heard from Enn Lillemets, a poet in Tartu, about a girl in Tartu Secondary School No. 8, who told her classmates horrible stories about a green man who usually appeared when a swearword was pronounced. Reimund Kvideland states that children's attitude to death is psychologically quite different from that of the grownups. Therefore, he considers the frequent mentioning of death in the stories and children's conversations on this topic part of their socialization process (Kvideland 1989: 233).

Improvisations of schoolchildren at the intermediate and senior levels differ from the tradition much more considerably. They add numerous details from films seen and books read. The folk tale canons are violated; detailed descriptions of the facial expressions and appearance of the characters and longer naturalistic depictions of crimes and corpses become intentional. Teachers also direct children to write horror stories as obligatory essays at school. Although these stories are written to order, they also have their own audience and are told in the company of peers.

Narrators

The golden age of tellers of specific horror stories is nowadays 7–10 years. The age limit has decreased during the recent decades, it also effects upon the style of storytelling. Often a child knows 3–4 different stories. At this age children decorate rooms of horror, and they like to tell horror stories at various camps, during class gatherings and in other situations when adults are not present (the same is true about children's stories in general, which are not meant to be heard by grownups; cf. Virtanen 1992; Kvideland 1989). Although all the pupils in the class may know horror stories, the storytellers are usually one or two children, whose repertoire may include up to 12 stories. There are also many children who themselves never tell stories, although they know them. Among them, there are those who are afraid of these stories and who find them nasty, and those who think they are not able to tell them sufficiently well. The attitudes towards other types of thrillers may vary greatly at this age. The personal religious experiences and parts of the grownup's repertoire may receive a less negative appraisal. However, children at the age of 15–16 years are more ready to experience something supernatural; they value these stories more highly. When real experiences and the stories based on them are told by schoolchildren, they usually have a small group of apprehensive listeners. Their general attitude towards this kind of stories is also more favourable than that of the younger children. 15-year-old and older pupils accepted that a few of them had extraordinary powers. For some others it was an exciting experience and a subject for lively discussion that one of them was able to cure headaches. The students of the Music School of Tartu seemed to have more unusual experiences than the pupils of ordinary schools. As a rule, pupils at the intermediate stage had not thought deeply about such topics and considered them fabrications of fantasy. Still, their attitude was not uniform. Many children confessed that they eagerly read all kinds of science fiction and horror stories, were interested in stories published in the magazine *Paradoks B,* and considered truthful the information about the migration of souls, reincarnation, poltergeists and mediums. Quite a few had visited, together with



Photo 2. In the tent camp there are more real and imaginary fears than indoors. Therefore, it is more attractive for telling horror stories. The first camp experience of eight-year-old Agnes (standing at the right side) from Annimatsi in summer 2005. Photo by Maarja Lõhmus.

their parents, witchdoctors or fortune-tellers. Brian Inglis has reported that in Britain the number of those who believe in telepathy and paranormal abilities rose unexpectedly in the 1970s-1980s (Inglis 1985). Obviously, the same is true about present-day Estonia as well.

Memorates are not told to the public at large, without selection. As Linda Dégh has reported, telling of memorates/religious stories proceeds according to entirely different rules, and the narrator primarily needs people who share his views (Dégh 1992: 104). Therefore, a big audience is not essential, first of all it is necessary to find contact with people with similar ideas. People who themselves have special powers or experiences are more easily accepted as narrators of religious stories. Memorates expose more clearly the religious attitudes and close relations with the supernatural. A certain spontaneous philosophy of religion is characteristic of them.

Leea Virtanen states that in present-day society visualizations are on the decline; they are replaced by aural experiences (Virtanen 1992: 229). Primarily in family tradition, we can still

meet stories, which are based on seeing something or someone. The share of prophetic dreams has grown. It happens namely in sleep that people meet different spiritual beings or the deceased and receive essential messages from the otherworld. Probably this relatively hidden and highly personal tradition was collected less often in earlier years; therefore, its abundance and significance for the narrator may be deceptive.

> *It is said about my grandfather that he had seen a ghost. My grandmother told me about it when I was younger. We used to live on Saaremaa Island. There, in Veeriku village, in Valjala parish there is a hill where in the olden times there had been a graveyard. Nowadays only three big trees grow there, they are said to make a weeping sound in strong wind. On a hot summer day my grandfather came from this hill with a horse and cartload of hay. Suddenly my grandfather noticed that a white old-fashioned car was approaching him. It had been quite near. Grandfather drove the horse into the roadside ditch because the horse was awfully afraid of cars. Grandfather waited for a long time but the car did not come. Then he climbed out to see and there was no car at all. At closer examination it came out that the car couldn't have gone anywhere else or turned around. Thus, no one knows where the car had disappeared. Questioning people he met afterwards didn't give any results either. Simply, no one had seen a car of that kind* (RKM, KP 9, 552/4 (7) < Tallinn – Riste Keskpaik, b. 1978, Tallinn Secondary School No. 7, Form 8 (1992)).

Contradictions can be found in the performance of horror stories. These are stories, which presuppose open communication. Perhaps only in the case of frightening stories with a surprising end it is essential that the listeners do not know how the story ends – otherwise it is impossible to frighten them effectively.

In the case of horror stories, everything depends on the type of the storyteller as the same story may be given shorter or longer introductions, or epithets that are more colourful may be used to make the story more artistic. However, generally it seems that children's rich fantasy does not need much material to start working upon. The fact that this kind of stories is

known, and has been heard before, also makes it easier to tune in to them. In the presentation of horror stories children use a special tone of voice, touch the listeners and suddenly change the speech rhythm. Children do not really expect horror stories to be believed, they mostly tell them for excitement and kicks. As customarily as in the old tradition, one story-teller may tell the repetitive parts of the story very thoroughly, another may give only an account of all the misfortunes, and a third one tells the story only once and thoroughly. The number of characters may be reduced (the family consists only of a mother and a child, etc.). In one locality (narrators from the same school), a wicked character of a certain colour (Yellow Curtains) may consistently appear in some types of stories. Very small changes in a story can make it seem like a new one, and the audience is ready to appreciate it again (in one variant the Corpse-Eater is a man, in another – a woman; the final sentence is different). In most cases, the storytellers are not conscious of the didactic core of the story; when it is pointed out to them, they are very much surprised. They cannot express the didactic aim of the story but offer emotions caused by the story instead (*gives kicks, frightens*). Most children do not draw any conclusion from the story, such as a strange person or a ghost is dangerous. The unreal and impersonal dangerous world is not connected with the real home, and, in general, no conclusions concerning the real parents are drawn from the treachery or supernaturality of parents or grandparents in a horror story. Even the family in a story sometimes consists not of a mother and a father but of a man, a woman and children. In some cases, a direct connection is made with the mythologized world and the storyteller admits that the mother in the story was a witch, or a skeleton (in most cases a corpse or a ghost) taking part in the action.

In children's oral communication, one's own attitudes and beliefs are specified by the viewpoints and comments of the conversation partners. One who has experienced a supernatural contact or speaks about it presents several considerations and arguments why he interprets the story this way. Often doubts or several interpretations are presented. The listeners, in their turn, can actively intervene and ask about the details and credibility of what has happened.

Conclusion

We do not know what legends children told one another a hundred years ago. Maybe they told classical legends, which their parents also told one another. Maybe these were childlike, more naïve variants of classical legends, perhaps something similar to the contemporary specific horror stories. In the 30s many reports were collected during the campaign of gathering children's lore about horrible beings used for terrifying children. The objects used for terrifying were of different nature: among them, one can find many natural and supernatural beings, for example, the Firetooth, the Bloodbeard, the Sack-Thomas, the Bloodpaw and others. There are no legends about them in the Estonian Folklore Archives, therefore they have been considered to be pedagogical fictions (Västrik 1994). Such characters as the Bloody Hand or the Black Hand sometimes appear even in classical legends. Until the last decades, no one had collected folklore from the children themselves. Even in the 1930s, children were asked to write about the things parents used for frightening them, but not stories about these beings. However, I think that children still told stories about horror beings.

I believe that children's horror stories mostly include ancient motifs and fears: being eaten up, being kidnapped, getting lost, finding oneself in an unknown place, fear of death, etc. Horror stories are not used merely for getting a thrilling experience. Not infrequently, they offer a good opportunity for using puns, pulling the other person's leg, inducing laughter of relief, or also, an opportunity to use indecent words with impunity. Horror stories help children to settle the boundary between fantasy and reality. Sometimes they also enable one to assert oneself as an extraordinarily brave person in a small group of people. Specific children's horror stories have also influenced other subtypes of horror stories. The need to parody horror stories also creates several transition zones where either some important characteristic feature (members of the family get lost by one), abstract wicked characters (Black Hand) or significant colours (black) are transformed, thus creating an effective parody, a story of deception, a frightening story or a pseudo thriller. There is no doubt that these horror stories are influenced by the fairy-tales children read; in some regions, children may hear that kind of stories straight

from traditional sources. Most usually, however, these stories are influenced by secondary tradition and the reproduction and elaboration of these stories is a kind of psychological training, a need to experience fear.

Manuscripts and Recordings

RKM – Manuscript folklore collection of the Folklore Department of Estonian Literary Museum in the Estonian Folklore Archives (1945 to 1995)

RKM, KP – Manuscript folklore collection of the Folklore Department of Estonian Literary Museum in the Estonian Folklore Archives, contemporary schoolchildren's lore, started in 1992

RKM, Mgn II – Collection of analogue recordings of the Folklore Department of Estonian Literary Museum in the Estonian Folklore Archives (1953 to 1993)

References

AaTh = Aarne, Antti & Thompson, Stith 1961. *The Types of the Folktale: A Classification and Bibliography.* Folklore Fellows' Communications, 184. Helsinki: Academia Scientarium Fennica.

Brunvandt, Jan Harold 1981. *The Vanishing Hichthiker: American Urban Legends and Their Meaning.* New York & London: Norton.

Dégh, Linda 1992. What Kind of People Tell Legends? Kvideland, Reimund & Herranen, Gun *et al.* (eds.). *Folklore Processed: In Honour of Lauri Honko on His 60th Birthday 6th March 1992.* Studia Fennica: Folkloristica, 1. NIF publications, 24. Helsinki: Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura, pp. 104–113.

Hiiemäe, Mall 1990. *Kaasaegne folkloor* [Contemporary Folklore]. Suuline ettekanne Emakeele Seltsi rahvaluulesektsiooni koosolekul [Oral presentation in the meeting of the folklore unit of the Estonian Mother Tongue Society].

Inglis, Brian 1985. *The Paranormal: An Encyclopedia of Psychic Phenomena*. London & Glasgow: Grandada.

Kõiva, Mare 1996. Siis astu aknalauale [Step then on the sill]. Kõiva, Mare (ed.). *Mängult-päriselt.* Tänapäeva folkloorist, 2. Tartu: Eesti

Keele Instituut, pp. 166–188 (http://folklore.ee/rl/pubte/ee/cf/mjap/mare.html – June 20, 2007).

Kvideland, Reimund 1989. Stories of Death and the Socialization of Children. Kvideland, Reimund & Sehmsdorf, Henning K. & Simpson, Elizabeth (eds.). *Nordic Folklore: Recent Studies.* Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, pp. 232–238.

Ljungström, Åsa 1995. The Shepherd turns into a vanishing Hitchhiker. Kõiva, Mare & Vassiljeva, Kai (eds.) *Folk Belief Today: Materials of the Conference of Folk Belief Dedicated to Oskar Loorits.* Tartu: Eesti TA Eesti Keele Instituut, pp. 283–288.

Muchlynin, Mikhail A. 1990. Pikovaya dama v russkom detskom folklore [Queen of spades in Russian childrens lore]. Grigorjev, Vladimir M. & Muchlynin, Mikhail A. (eds.). *Mir detstva i traditsionnaya kultura: Materialy III Chtenij, posvjachsh. pamjati G. S. Vinogradova* (*Vinogradovskie chtenija).* Moskva: Vserossiiski nauchno-meditcheskii centr narodnogo tvorchestva i kul'turno-prosvetilel'noi raboty imeni N. K. Krupskoi, pp. 65–68.

Selberg, Torunn 1993. Folklore and Mass Media. Anttonen, Pertti J. & Kvideland Reimund (eds.). *Nordic Frontiers: Recent Issues in the Study of Modern Traditional Culture in the Nordic Countries.* NIF Publications, 27. Turku: NIF, lk 201–215.

Vahtramäe, Ell 1996. Vaim, vaim, ilmuta ennast! [Ghost, ghost, show yourself!] Kõiva, Mare (ed.). *Mängult-päriselt.* Tänapäeva folkloorist, 2. Tartu: Eesti Keele Instituut, pp. 156–165 (http://www.folklore.ee/rl/pubte/ee/cf/mjap/ell.html – June 20, 2007).

Virtanen, Leea 1992. Have ghosts vanished with industrialism. Kvideland, Reimund & Herranen, Gun *et al.* (eds.). *Folklore Processed: In Honour of Lauri Honko on His 60th Birthday 6th March 1992.* Studia Fennica: Folkloristica, 1. NIF publications, 24. Helsinki: Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura, pp. 225–233.

Västrik, Ergo-Hart 1994. Lastehirmutised. [Frights of children]. Oras, Janika (ed.). *Loomine.* Pro Folkloristica, 2. Tartu: Fr. R. Kreutzwaldi nim. Kirjandusmuuseum & Tallinn: Eesti TA Eesti Keele Instituut, pp. 57–61.