

⁴*Setukeste laulud*. Pihkva-estlaste vanad rahvalaulud, ühes Räpina ja Vastseliina lauludega, välja annud Dr. Jakob Hurt. I. Helsinki, 1904, pp. 625-630 (No 60, 61).

⁵Salve, K., Rütitel, I. *Põhja-Tartumaa regilaulud. I. Töö- ja tavandilaulud*. Tallinn, 1989.

THE COMPLICATED ROLE OF A SOVIET SHAMAN

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We are the children of the crisis era. Most of the population in the present-day Estonia has never seen peace, because World War II is not yet over for the Baltic countries. The state government has officially acknowledged the political and economic crisis as well as the unexpectedly severe moral crisis. Actually, the situation is quite the opposite: the latter has been rather anticipated to those who have followed the cultural life closely. The artists have long ago realised it and repeatedly called attention to it through their art.

Could folk traditions provide assistance in solving the problems of the present-day society?

The crisis in the nation's life calls for a solution. Death could be one possibility, especially if we take into consideration the fourth and severest crisis of our life – the ecological one. But every nation preserves the experience of which action to take in order to stay alive. It would be interesting and perhaps vitally important to learn what were the earlier solutions. For this reason we have to look back into the past millennia. The question is **whether we can recognise the familiar content behind the altered form?** In other words, can we pick the now useful tip from a runo verse, a fairy tale or a custom? It is easier for nations whose **own** professional culture has risen from their **own** folk culture. Many, if not most of the nations in the world are now split between (at least) two cultures – the ethnic and the world culture. Our official cultural politics propagated till the latest period the Soviet mass culture. The real folk culture was studied by a discipline called cultural anthropology. During the past one hundred and fifty years folklorists and ethnographers have collected a lot of information about crisis situations of different nations. The common feature for both Eurasia and America as well as for the cultures on other continents turns out to be the **existence of distinct crisis rites in folk tradition**.

This means that nature worshippers considered the world to be basically an organised phenomenon. Each event had its cause and one had to know the relations between the cause and the effect. If one link in the chain of causality was disturbed, the whole harmonious entirety was disturbed. Falling out of the poise was risky, and people appreciating the perseverance of life and society could not afford it. Help was sought for and found – besides the technological progress also in religion and magic.

Thus, crisis rites are typical to a society maintaining **belief in a supernatural power**. This power, superior to man, need not be god. We know cultures where supernatural power is attributed to Earth-Mother or Lightning, Oak or Dragon. Very often believing in natural forces (as an earlier epoch in world history) is tied to believing in totemic animals or speaking trees. At present, it has no importance what or who was believed in. It is more important to state the position of faith as a basic foundation in totally different cultures.

The belief in the supernatural serves as a foundation for every ritual. Earlier folk beliefs are also connected with **magical activity**, the aim of which was not only to get in humble contact with supernatural powers, but also certain help was sought for. Draught-period prayers for thunder, sun incantations in rainy weather, songs for Martinmas or Midsummer's Day – these genres known in Estonian folklore serve actually as rituals with magic content. However, we must discern between magical activity during really critical situation and activity for caution. The annual calendar rituals do not belong to crisis rituals. Famine or collapse of a state should bring along the rise of both theoretical and practical interest in religion and magic. And it would be wrong to say that the example of Estonia is improper here.

Why has an artist adopted the role of a shaman?

Artists and other cultural figures have often been forced into the role of a magician or diviner – for such is the will of the nation. Why are artists the ones to be destined to carry out this complicated and dangerous role in our society? Probably because the social layer of religious sages that had formed in the course of history has been partly destroyed and partly pushed aside in our society. But **their task could not fail to be fulfilled, whatever the circumstances**.

Despite all the material difficulties man's spiritual development still needs to be taken care of, and for decades art has managed to stay close to the displaced religion. Thus, the artist's role has not diminished, but grown, and now it is combined with that of a spiritual guide. Therefore also some composers had to take on the role of a wise man, maybe just because they felt the unexpressed social demand. Of course, this new social role brings along a

reaction and in the course of time the artist might turn out to be the carrier and promoter of the collective spiritual values of the nation, even if he himself is not even aware of these ambitions. Apparently in spite of themselves, the writers Runnel and Kaplinski, the painters Arrak and Põllu, and the composers Eespere and Tormis have been included in the ranks of the Soviet shamans.

While preparing for the 60-th jubilee conference in honour of Veljo Tormis (b. Aug. 7, 1930) the questions concerning the artist's role in the society rose intensely to the fore. The present paper aims at finding answers to these questions in the most general sense.

Who a shaman is, in fact, and what is his task in society?

Folk belief researchers have defined the essence of a shaman differently in different periods and in different research schools. At first this Tungus word marked Siberian witches, the mediators between people and the world beyond. The world was mostly believed to be 3-layered, people lived in the middle one. The layer above accommodated fair and good souls, the layer beyond – dark and bad souls. People had to relate to both – to discern between good and bad has been a problem for every culture. No one nation has ever been wise and strong as a whole. Just the opposite – nation in its majority has always been submissive to the individuals who lead. But these individuals have been carefully chosen. By the way, the nation was not considered wise enough to choose. The shaman was chosen by these supernatural powers themselves who had to be contacted. Cunning torture was used: the chosen person was put in a physically or materially difficult situation so that he might give his consent for co-operation. These ordeals were followed by a kind of secretive marriage with a superior spirit, who later became his protector and assistant. Here one might find an analogy with the creative torments of artists, who sometimes even against their will had to submit to an inner command to paint, write or compose, and then give their creation in the hands of the society.

Shamanism could not be taught, **it was given by birth**. Only when the community had acknowledged his superior capabilities was he given the possibility to devote himself to his calling. The shaman was inaugurated, his activity was accepted. At the same time he was kept under special surveillance – the world of the spirits holds risk. There are 'black' and 'white' shamans, but the distinction is never clear. That is why people have always treated shamans with both great awe and watchfulness. When the shaman's soul was ready to contact with alien and powerful spirits, a concrete situation for getting into contact had to be found. A good many media and methods for it were transmitted by oral tradition from generation to generation.

First, the shaman's appearance had to differ from an ordinary person. Therefore the dressed unconventionally and put on a headgear with magical signs in it. Usually a drum was used, with a drawing of the celestial map understandable only to the shaman for orienting in the world of the spirits. As an effective means for gaining entrancement, psychotropic substances were used in order to assist the transition from consciousness into the playground of unconsciousness and dream. (Alcohol also belongs to hallucinogenic substances.)

The shaman set to work openly, using several helpers. Personal experience was supported by the centuries long traditions of shaman ritual. An important role played also dance and music which assisted through rhythm, pitch, timbre and movement in influencing human emotions. Namely the emotions, not the intellect, help to cross the barrier to one's pre-consciousness and from there to other spirits. In this sense, ritual is a fore-runner of art, which has initiated modern aesthetic spiritual therapy. Modern art also tries to integrate the material and spiritual sides of reality and to reach equilibrium in man.

The tasks of shaman rituals were various. If the winds were unfavourable for a long time and turned away the prey, the shaman was to sing weather incantations. If the reindeer refused to get caught, the wise man had to charm. Evil spirits had to be driven out of a sick person. The souls of the dead had to be sent back to the forefathers' temples to be of help to their tribe in case of need.

One of the most important tasks was to give people vitality, because it was the foundation of everything.

How it all happened is difficult, if not impossible, to explain. Still, it is evident that a shaman ritual was effective in a crisis and was never dismissed as worthless. The power of the ritual became greater inside a limited space and time, thus concentrating the activity in a single spot. The emotions and thoughts of the people participating in the ritual were integrated and amplified; here lies the source from which drama and concert forms developed later on.

It is natural that crisis rituals differed depending on the time and place of action. We know descriptions from the 18th century Siberia or the 16th century Lapland which we meekly call folklore. But shouldn't we rather adopt the treatment of shamanism as **a system of world view**, existing even at present?

We have been taught at school that matter is primary, that consciousness is a product of matter, and all this was presented in the narrow frames of positivist philosophy which considers real knowledge to be tangibly proved. The shamanic world view, however, should proceed from an idea that human nature is difficult to explain and that man's patterns of thought are mostly unconscious, and, after all, there is seems to be no sense in opposing conscious to pre-conscious thinking. Both logical and intuitive thinking could be equal. The rebirth of

shamanism in contemporary society means restitution of intuitive thinking, which has been rejected for some centuries.

The rapid growth of interest in supernatural phenomena in the Soviet Union has been a natural reaction to the long period of oppression. The re-birth of shamanism in the broad sense is quite regular, and it is also inevitable that beside honest truth seekers crop up charlatans and traffickers. While we ridicule or scorn the latter, we need not throw the child out with the bath-water, by ignoring shamanism as one stage of the spiritual culture. We shouldn't deny the shaman as the receiver of superior spiritual experience and its mediator through words and deeds, according to the necessity and possibility in a certain situation.

At present it is impossible to prove that the great men of the Estonian culture belong to the circle of present-day shamans. Maybe it is just a case of after-waves of the national romantic movement, which in order to strengthen its national consciousness, wants to see Väinämöinen as shaman and Lönnrot as his closest assistant? Maybe every nation yearns for its heroes whose supernatural strength and spiritual light portray their nation? This would give us the possibility to identify ourselves in thought with the hero, hold him up as an idol and move towards his ideals.

In conclusion, the important thing is, which aims have been set to a nation. And it would be preferable if these aims were set not by large-scale businessmen or politicians, but by high-principled persons who provide the cure of souls for one's nation. If we call them shamans, we do so with respect and hope. The principles of neo-shamanism are the same throughout the world – to save one's own culture and the environment vital for human life. No doubt, Veljo Tormis has long ago perceived the crisis of society and fought a good battle against it. His method is music and he moves towards his goal through artistic means. The cultural secret code is transmitted by short, narrow-ranged folk melodies, which might not be of special interest to a musician outside the context. Certainly, the texts of those folk songs have not been chosen at random. These, too, have to be treated as poetry in symbolic language, the interpretation of which needs engrossment. Tormis himself gives hints and variants to decode the symbols through the form, manner of structure, harmony, etc. of his treatment of folk songs. These concerts where the folklore **interpretations** by Tormis have been performed during the last decades, have acted as musical crisis rituals for the decaying industrial society. There the complicated role of the Soviet shaman has been carried by the composer Tormis.