# ISFNR newsletter

International Society for Folk Narrative Research
No. 1 January 2006

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Folklore research has been haunted by the idea of a vanishing heritage since the very beginning of the discipline in the mid-19th century. Our object – traditional expressive culture – has seemed to be constantly disappearing with the successive generations. It has been the mission of folklorists to save this dying culture by recording its forms for preservation in museums and archives. During recent decades a shift has occurred in our focus, as we have become aware of the existence of urban "folks" in addition to the rural communities whose lore has fascinated researchers since the 19th century. We know that there are no social groups without folklore. Thus even folklorists could become the objects of research. Although concern about the rapid disappearance of folklore has become less acute, we are now worried about the identity of our discipline, which seems to merge with the humanities and social sciences in general and the field of cultural studies in particular. The old rhetoric about a disappearing heritage has now been applied to the allegedly vanishing discipline of folkloristics.

The concept of folklore emerged when European civilization turned from tradition-bound, conservative, rural societies towards modernism, industrialization and urbanization. As life in the village started to represent the good old bygone days, it was surrounded by the aura of nostalgia. Peasants seemed to be closer to society's cultural roots and to deserve scholarly attention from the historical point of view. They were comparable to our ancestors, who were memorialized in museums and in important publications containing their oral heritage – literary monuments to the once illiterate folk. Since the concept of folklore includes associations with these old times, it is no wonder its meanings should seem obsolete in the post-modern period, in which our thinking about expressive culture has changed. Currently we are much less obsessed with historical roots and etiologies than interested in meanings, intertextual links, and aspects of performance, social context and cultural communication. Both old and new folklore is opened up from synchronic perspectives.

We can note a link between the alleged crises in folklore research and the post-structuralist turn in theory. It now seems that the concept of folklore does not have a substantial essence, a theoretically well-founded core. The existence of "folk" as a distinctive group of people – characterized as "others" by us, folklorists, representatives of the educated urban folk – has turned out to be a mental construct. Likewise we are aware that conceptualizing "lore" as unwritten literature, a set of fixed genres or items of heritage, is too narrow. It seems as if folklorists are losing the object of their studies, joining thereby many other post-structural thinkers who wander in the multidimensional labyrinth of textual space. Theoretical groundings and conceptual structures have been undermined not only in folkloristics but in other disciplines as well. Although the creation of new knowledge requires aspiration towards the truth, the concept of "truth" has been s relativized. As a result, subjective reflectem M

analysis of the weaknesses of the concept of folklore cannot demolish either the discipline or its object. Deconstruction is not a destructive practice but a creative discursive act, part of the building process of the discipline. The analytical approach to the history and conceptual field of folkloristics supports theory-formation, so essential for maintaining the identity of our discipline. Old and new concepts, and old concepts with new meanings are the basic building blocks of knowledge and our cognitive tools to understand folklore. It would therefore be unnecessary and even dangerous to build the discipline on one single or only a few basic concepts, the definitions of which would be agreed by all folklorists. Theory does not require universal technical terms with fixed meanings, but needs open and flexible concepts that enable creative thinking. Different opinions, disagreements and ongoing discussion are all signs of the healthy state of folkloristics.

The theoretically-oriented 14th ISFNR Congress in Tartu proved that folkloristics is far from being a completed project. Voice and voicing, communicability, textualization, generic practices, vernacular genres and vernacular religion are only a few of the keywords leading us to new domains of thought. We can note that several of such concepts signal an interest in studying the human agency of folklore. This is also the key factor in folkloristics and the ISFNR, whose aim is to develop scholarly work in the field of folk-narrative research. When folklorists meet in face-to-face communities, we see that their social role is always performed by people from different backgrounds and representing many cultures and world-views. We, folklorists, give life and meaning to the discipline of folklore. Thanks to the joint efforts of the organizers and guests of the 14th ISFNR Congress, for six days in July 2006 Tartu became the folkloristic capital of the world. It showed the unexhausted potential of ISFNR as one of the greatest international folklore societies. At the moment over 600 names figure in the membership list of the ISFNR, while nearly 30 new members were accepted by the General Assembly in Tartu. As can be read from this Newsletter, we are working hard to update our membership list in order to be able to reach you in the most time and costeffective ways. Making ISFNR an efficient network truly in the service of all its members is up to all of us and depends on

# Historical Reflections upon the International Society for Folk Narrative Research

*by* **Reimund Kvideland, Paradis, Norway**
**President of the ISFNR 1989-1998**

Enjoying the good company of fellow ISFNR members: Reimund Kvideland with Wolfgang Mieder (on the left).
*Photo by Alar Madisson.*

At the end of the 1950s the wounds of the World War 2 had begun to heal and the wish for international cooperation became a topic of discussion. When folknarrative scholars met in Kiel and Copenhagen in 1959, the time was ripe to reopen the discussion that had started in the 1930s about an international organization. In his paper the Swedish folklorist Jan-Öjvind Swahn mentioned this explicitly as one of the important tasks for the near future (Swahn 1961: 418).

The issue was discussed at the end of the meeting. A committee under the leadership of Professor Kurt Ranke, the organizer of the mee-ting, was appointed in order to submit a set of statutes to be further discussed at the ethnological congress in Paris the following year. In 1961 Ranke expressed the hope that the society could be nominally and legally founded in 1962 (Ranke 1961: *v*). If this happened, I have not been able to determine so from the available sources. According to Ranke the ISFNR was founded in Copenhagen in 1959 (Ranke 1965: *x*).

The aim of the Society is clearly stated in the first paragraph of the statute:
"The International Society for Folk-Narrative Research is a scientific society whose objectives are to develop scholarly work in the filed of folk-narrative research and to stimulate contacts and the exchange of views among its members."
Article 5 specifies who can become a member:
"Any person qualified by his scholarly work in the field of folk-narrative research may become a member of the Society. Requests for membership, supported by two members, shall be examined and decided by the membership committee."

The first president was Kurt Ranke 1959-74, followed by Lauri Honko, Turku, Finland 1974-89, Reimund Kvideland, Bergen, Norway 1989-98, Galit Hasan-Rokem, Jerusalem, Israel 1998-2005, and from 2005 Ülo Valk, Tartu, Estonia.
To promote international folk-narrative research, the Society arranges an international congress every 5-6 years. The 1959 congress was counted as the first.

A "Permanent Committee on International Legend Research" was founded in Copenhagen (Hand 1960:299). Two meetings on legend research were held: in Antwerp in 1962 and Budapest in1963. When the second international congress was held in Athens in 1964, it was numbered as the fourth congress. Further congresses have been hold in Bucharest in 1969, Helsinki in 1974, Edinburgh in 1979, Bergen in 1984, Budapest in 1989, Innsbruck in 1992, Mysore in 1995, Göttingen in 1998, Melbourne in 2001, and Tartu in 2005.
Interim conferences have been arranged in Lieblice, near Prague in 1966, Beijing in 1996, Nairobi in 2000, and Visby, Gotland in 2003.

According to the 14th paragraph of the statute, committees may be appointed to undertake special tasks or to study special problems in the field of folk-narrative research. Thus a "Theoretical Committee" was founded in 1974 and chaired by Lutz Röhrich.

While, since 1991 the journal *Fabula. Zeitschrift für Erzählforschung* has been publishing both ISFNR-news and selected papers of the ISFNR mee-tings, most of the Congresses have been accompanied by a publication of some sort:

1. Congress: Ranke, Kurt (ed.). *Internationaler Kongress der Volkserzählforscher in Kiel und Kopenhagen (19.8-29.8 1959). Vorträge und Referate*. (Supplement-Serie zu Fabula. Reihe B: Untersuchungen , Nr. 2). Berlin: Walter de Gruyter & Co. 1961.

2. Congress: Peeters, Karl, C. (ed.): *Tagung der "International Society for Folk-Narrative Research" in Antwerp (6.-8. Sept. 1962). Berichte und Referate*. Antwerpen: Centrum Voor Studie En Documentatie V.Z.W. 1963.

3. Ortutay, Gyula (ed.): "Tagung der Sagenkommission der "International Society for Folk-Narrative Research". Budapest, 14-16. Oktober 1963. *Acta ethnographica Academiae scientiarum Hungaricae* 13 (1964).

4. Megas, Georgios A. (ed.): "IV International Congress for Folk-Narrative Research in Athens (1.9- 6.9 1964). Lectures and Reports". *Laographia* XXII: 1965. Athens.

5. Congress: no publication.

6. Pentikäinen, Juha (ed.): "Folk-Narrative Research. Some Papers Presented at the VI Congress of the International Society for Folk-Narrative Research" [1974]. *Studia Fennica* 20. Helsinki: Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura. 1976.

One paper published in *Fabula* 38 (1997).

7. Some papers published in *Fabula* 22 (1980).

8. Kvideland, Reimund and Selberg, Torunn (eds.): *The 8th Congress of the International Society for Folk Narrative Research. Bergen, June 12th – 17th 1984*. Papers I-IV + Plenary Papers. [Preprint]. Bergen. 1984.

In addition, some papers of the Bergen Congress were published in *Fabula* 26 (1985).

9. Voigt, Vilmos (ed.): "Folk Narrative and Cultural Identity. 9th Congress of the International Society for Folk-Narrative Research Budapest, 10-17.06. 1989". Volume I-II. *Artes populares* 16-17. Budapest 1995.

Röhrich, Lutz and Wienker-Piepho, Sabine (eds.): "Storytelling in Contemporary Societies". *Script Oralia* 22. Tübingen 1990.

Yet further papers were published in *Arv. Scandinavian Yearbook of Folklore* 1990. Vol. 46, *Fabula* 31 (1990) as well as *Proverbium. Yearbook of International Proverb Scholarship* 7: 1990 and 10: 1993.

10. Petzoldt, Leander (ed.): "Folk-Narrative and World-View. Vorträge des 10. Kongresses der Internationalen Gesellschaft für Volkserzählungsforschung (ISFNR) Innsbruck 1992". *Beiträge zur Europäischen Ethnologie und Folklore*. Reihe B: Tagungsberichte und Materialien, Bd. 7:1-2). Frankf. am Main: Lang. 1996.

Further papers in *Fabula* 34 (1993).

11. Handoo, Jawaharlal et al. (eds.): *XIth Congress of the International Society for Folk-Narrative Research (ISFNR) January 6-12, 1995 Mysore, India*. *Paper*s: Vol. I-VI. Central Institute of Indian Languages. Mysore 1996: Mysore 1998-99

1: Handoo, J. and R. Kvideland (eds.): Folklore in the Changing World.

2: Handoo, J. (ed.): Folklore. New Perspectives.

3: Handoo, J. (ed.): Folklore in Modern India.

4: Handoo, J. and Anna-Leena Siikala (eds.): Folklore and Discourse.

5: Honko, Lauri, J. Handoo and John Miles Foley (eds.): The Epic. Oral and Written.

6: Handoo, Lalita and Ruth B. Bottigheimer (eds.): Folklore and Gender.

One paper of the Mysore Congress also appeared in *Fabula* 38 (1997).

12. Selected papers from the meeting in Göttingen 1998 were published in *Fabula* 39 (1998), 40 (1999), 41 (2000), and 42 (2001).

13. Selected papers from the 2001 Congress in Melbourne appeared in *Fabula* 44 (2003).

In addition, many papers presented at the interim conferences have been published in folklore journals all over the world, for example a selection of papers from the interim congress in Nairobi 2000 in *Fabula* 43 (2002).

## References:

Hand, Wayland D. 1960: Resolution for the Compiling of Folk-Legend Indexes. Passed at the final session of the International Folktale Congress, Copenhagen, Denmark, August 29, 1959. *Fabula* 3 (1960) 299.

Kvideland, Reimund 1998: International Society for Folk-Narrative Research. Brown, Mary Ellen and Rosenberg, Bruce A. (eds.). *Encyclopedia of Folklore and Literature*, 325. Santa Barbara, Denver, Oxford: ABC-CLIO.

Ranke, Kurt 1961. Vorwort. Ranke, Kurt (Herausgegeber). *Internationaler Kongress der Volkserzählforscher in Kiel und Kopenhagen (19.8-29.8 1959). Vorträge und Referate*. (Supplement-Serie zu Fabula. Reihe B: Untersuchungen , Nr. 2), *v*. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter & Co.

Ranke, Kurt 1965. Begrüssungsansprache des Präsidenten der International Society for Folk-Narrative Research, Professors Kurt Ranke. Megas, Georgios A. (ed.). IV International Congress for Folk-Narrative Research in Athens (1.9- 6.9 1964). Lectures and Reports. *Laographia* XXII: 1965, *x-xi*. Athens.

Swahn, Jan-Öjvind 1961. Aktuelle Arbeitsaufgaben der internationalen Märchenforschung. Ranke, Kurt (Hrgb). *Internationaler Kongress der Volkserzählforscher in Kiel und Kopenhagen (19.8-29.8 1959). Vorträge und Referate*. (Supplement-Serie zu Fabula. Reihe B: Untersuchungen , Nr. 2), 414-420. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter & Co.

## Dear ISFNR Members,

in order for us to communicate with you more effectively and provide you with information about upcoming events and discussions within our organization, the Executive Committee is working hard to update our membership list. Especially if at the next general meeting we vote to adopt some guidelines outlining members' privileges, we want to have accurate information and be able to reach you in the most time and cost effective ways.

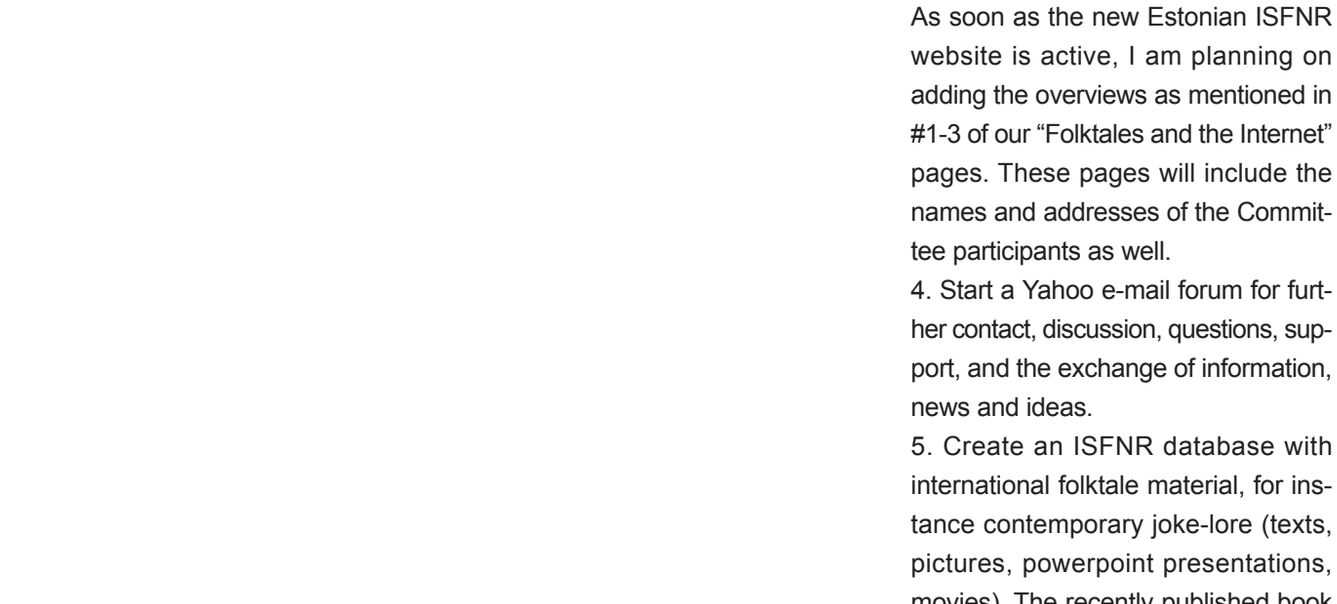
**Would you please check the ISFNR website (http://www.folklore.org.il/ISFNR/) to make sure that we have your information and that it is both accurate and complete?**
**Then, send a message to Cristina Bacchilega <cbacchi@hawaii.edu> AND to Elo-Hanna Seljamaa <elo-hanna.seljamaa@ut.ee> with your e-mail address and your preferred mailing address.**

We intend to share a printed list of ISFNR members with all active members by summer 2006. We believe this will help ISFNR serve its members better and also strengthen ties among folk-narrative scholars across the world. Please help us to attain these goals.

Cristina Bacchilega
Chair of the Membership Committee

# ISFNR Committee "Folktales and the Internet"

*by* **Theo Meder, Meertens Institute, Netherlands**



Theo Meder in Tartu talking about tales of wonder in the New Age era.
*Photo by Alar Madisson.*

At the ISFNR conference in Tartu, Estonia, one of the workshops was called "Computer Mediated Communication – How Stuff Works?" chaired by Maria Yelenevskaya. During the discussion it was established that computer-mediated communication is already an important source for folk-narrative research, and that its importance will only increase in the future. Folktales can be found on websites and in online databases, tales are told in discussion fora, jokes (either as text or as PhotoShopped images) are sent by e-mail, SMS or MMS. On the one hand the Internet makes it easy for us to find the stories we are looking for, but on the other hand we all have experienced the situation where stories that we could find yesterday seem to have vanished today – just like in the oral tradition. So, for contemporary research it is necessary ourselves to collect these stories also.

At the General Assembly of the ISFNR the birth of a committee on folktales and computer- based communication was announced by Maria Yelenevskaya and several members had already volunteered to participate. At Maria's request, I later agreed to coordinate the first steps of what I would like to call the Committee for "Folktales and the Internet".

As far as I can see, the Committee might deal with the following matters:

1. Make the ISFNR acquainted with our existing online folktale databases. In Iceland, for instance, Terry Gunnell works on his *Sagnagrunnur*[1], in Flanders Katrien van Effelterre runs her *Vlaamse Volksverhalenbank*[2], and in The Netherlands I am managing my own *Nederlandse Volksverhalenbank*[3].
2. Make a list of other useful folktale collections or databases on the Internet - be it in English, French, German, Russian, or Japanese etc.
3. Make a list of useful websites about folktale genres (such as fairy tales, legends, myths, jokes, riddles and urban legends).

Most of the ISFNR members probably have their own private list of sites, and putting them together could be a benefit to us all.

As soon as the new Estonian ISFNR website is active, I am planning on adding the overviews as mentioned in #1-3 of our "Folktales and the Internet" pages. These pages will include the names and addresses of the Committee participants as well.

4. Start a Yahoo e-mail forum for further contact, discussion, questions, support, and the exchange of information, news and ideas.
5. Create an ISFNR database with international folktale material, for instance contemporary joke-lore (texts, pictures, powerpoint presentations, movies). The recently published book *www.worldwidewitz.com. Humor im Cyberspace* by Rolf W. Brednich could be a point of reference here. Creating such an ISFNR database will – technically and financially speaking – be the hardest part of the project, as well as encouraging participants to actively put material into this database. Obviously, the features of such a database need to be thoroughly discussed in advance.

The Committee will, of course, be open to all ISFNR volunteers, and I hereby would like to invite members to join – just by sending me an e-mail.

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[1] See http://www.hi.is/~terry/database/sagnagrunnur.htm.
[2] See http://www.volksverhalenbank.be.
[3] See http://www.verhalenbank.nl.

# Meeting of the General Assembly of the ISFNR in Tartu

On the 31st of July 2005 the General Assembly of the ISFNR gathered in Tartu on the occasion of the 14th Congress under the rubric *Folk Narrative Theories and Contemporary Practices*. The meeting was attended by 62 members of the ISFNR eligible to vote.

The session was opened by Galit Hasan-Rokem (Jerusalem), the resigning President of the ISFNR, who presented a report on her presidency. This was followed by presidential elections, where Ülo Valk (Tartu) was nominated as a presidential candidate. The General Assembly elected him unanimously as the President of the ISFNR.
In addition, the General Assembly unanimously elected as new Vice Presidents Cristina Bacchilega (Honolulu) to represent North America and Lauri Harvilahti (Helsinki) to represent Europe.
Fumiko Mamiya (Kanagawa) and Donald Haase (Detroit) were unanimously elected as new members of the Executive Committee of the ISFNR.
Cristina Bacchilega (Honolulu) was unanimously elected as the new Chair of the Membership Committee.

The following new honorary members of the ISFNR were elected:
Roger D. Abrahams (Philadelphia),
Vera Gašpáríkova (Bratislava),
Jawaharlal Handoo (Mysore),
Pille Kippar (Tallinn),
Arvo Krikmann (Tartu),
Reimund Kvideland (Bergen),
Gyula Paczolay (Veszprém),
Anna-Leena Siikala (Helsinki),
Vilmos Voigt (Budapest).

The Membership Committee of the ISFNR approved the following applications for membership in the Society:
Prof. Veikko Anttonen (Turku, Finland)

International warm-up for scientific programme. From the left: Ezekiel Alembi (Kenya), Mare Kõiva (Estonia) and Ilana Rosen (Israel) discussing folk narrative matters at the opening ceremony of the 14th Congress of the ISFNR in Tartu.
*Photo by Rein Laiverik.*

Prof. Shuli Barzilai (Jerusalem, Israel)
Dr. Jürgen Beyer (Huddinge, Sweden)
Prof. Charles Briggs (Berkeley, USA)
Dr. Birendranath Datta (Guwahati, India)
Prof. Terry Gunnell (Reykavijk, Iceland)
Dr. Tiiu Jaago (Tartu, Estonia)
Kirsti Jõesalu (Tartu, Estonia)
Dr. Risto Järv (Tartu, Estonia)
Dr. Kristin Kuutma (Tartu, Estonia)
Dr. Ene Kõresaar (Tartu, Estonia)
Prof. Art Leete (Tartu, Estonia)
Prof. Mirjam Mencej (Ljubljana, Slovenia)
Merili Metsvahi (Tartu, Estonia)
Prof. Dorothy Noyes (Ohio, USA)
Dr. Hisako Ono (Aichi-ken, Japan)
Dr. Alexander Panchenko (St. Petersburg, Russia)
Dr. Marilena Papachristophorou (Athens, Greece)
Dr. Jan Pospíšilová (Brno, Czech Republic)
Zuzana Profantová (Bratislava, Slovakia)
Mari-Ann Remmel (Tartu, Estonia)
Dr. Uta Reuster-Jahn (Mainz, Germany)
Prof. Ravshan Rahmoni (Dushanbe, Tajikistan)
Dr. Luisa Rubini (Zurich, Switzerland)
Elo-Hanna Seljamaa (Tartu, Estonia)
Dr. Karen P. Smith (Suenikon, Switzerland)
Ergo-Hart Västrik (Tartu, Estonia)
Prof. Yukinobu Umenai (Kagoshima-shi, Japan)

The General Assembly ratified the admission of the applicants as members of the International Society for Folk Narrative Research.

The Greek Academy of Science presented its invitation for the 15th Congress of the ISFNR in Athens, Greece. The Assembly voted unanimously for this proposal as well as gratefully accepting the offer of the University of Santa Rosa to hold the next interim conference in Santa Rosa, Argentina, in September 2007.

*Report is partially based on the notes taken by* Rolf W. Brednich *for the journal* Fabula. Zeitschrift für Erzählforschung.

# ISFNR Special Meeting

*by* **Galit Hasan-Rokem, Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Israel**
**President of the ISFNR 1998-2005**

On the 27th of July, during the 14th International Congress of the ISFNR, at the initiative of the outgoing president, Galit Hasan-Rokem, and the local chair of folklore studies and present president of the ISFNR, Ülo Valk, the following persons convened for a discussion on the intellectual agenda of folklore departments in the world: Ezekiel Alembi (Kenyatta University, Nairobi, Kenya), Pertti Anttonen (University of Turku, Finland), Regina Bendix (Georg August University, Göttingen, Germany), Charles Briggs (University of California, Berkeley CA, USA), Galit Hasan-Rokem (Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Israel), Barb-ro Klein (SCASS, Uppsala, Sweden), Margaret Mills (Ohio State University, Columbus OH, USA) , Sadhana Naithani (Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, India), Dorothy Noyes (Ohio State University, Columbus OH, USA), Ulf Palmenfelt (University of Gotland, Visby, Sweden), Ilana Rosen, (Ben-Gurion University, Beer-Sheva, Israel) Anna-Leena Siikala (University of Helsinki, Finland), Ülo Valk (University of Tartu, Estonia).

The meeting opened with each participant introducing her/his department with reference to the following points:

1. Degrees awarded;

2. Requirements;

3. Size of staff and respective degrees of members of staff;

4.Number of students at each level;

5. Curriculum (Field work, Historical folklore, Languages, Archives, Ethnomusicology etc.);

6. Allies (cross-refereed courses etc.) and Competitors (potentially overlapping);

7. Major theoretical concerns and directions;

8. Career prospects and placement;

9. Inter-institutional alliances (educational, artistic and other institutions);

10. Sources of support (state, municipality, local authorities, ethnic group or professional organizations, private donors, foundations);

11. Specific large- scale research projects, past, present and future.

When viewed collectively in this manner, the general picture is quite impressive. A possible publication collected from as many institutions as possible worldwide could have many positive effects, including enhancing research cooperation and making student and faculty exchanges more efficient, engendering ideas about joint conferences and workshops. Also, by indicating achievements elsewhere, we might enable weaker institutions to find support in their efforts vis-à-vis their university leaders.

New directions for the development of the field suggested by participants:

1. Strong intellectual profiling of the discipline

2. Initiating groups at Institutes for Advanced Studies

3. Folklorists taking up key posts at their universities – heads of department, deans etc.

4. Developing methodological tools and skills that can serve many fields

5. Addressing the history of the folklore discipline in curricula

6. Participation in forms of popularization of folklore

7. Developing disciplinary terminology

8. Accessing the political sphere to create interest in folklore

Theoretical issues of common interest that were specifically mentioned:

1. Globalization/Internationalization

2. Canonization

3. Cultural industries

4. Political and ideological issues of our time

5. Technologies

6. Folklore history with reference to the history of science in general.

# Positive Provocations: Reflections on the 14th Congress of the ISFNR in Tartu

*by* **Kirsti Salmi-Niklander, University of Helsinki, Finland**

Kirsti Salmi-Niklander, currently a post-doctoral researcher at the Department of Folklore Studies at the University of Helsinki.
*Photo by Timo Salmi.*

The Tartu Congress was the first major folkloristic conference I have attended since the 12th ISFNR Congress in Göttingen in 1998. During these years I have been looking for new ideas in the field of book history, which has become an innovative field of interdisciplinary research during the last decade. I had an excellent opportunity to observe recent developments in both folklore studies and book history, since right before the Tartu Congress I participated at the conference "Material Cultures and the Creation of Knowledge" (July 22–24) organised by the Centre for the History of the Book at the University of Edinburgh.

I was quite selective in my participation in the sessions in Tartu and shall be even more selective in my reflections on the presentations. While looking at the programme before the Tartu congress I had some suspicious, observing the large amount of Finnish scholars in the sessions. Would we end up speaking English to each other? However, this premonition did not materialise, thanks to the very active participation of the Estonian scholars and the international contingent in general. My general impressions of the organisation were very positive, and even in some problematic situations (such as some chairs who never turned up for their sessions) rapid and flexible solutions were found by the friendly and efficient staff. With many parallel sessions, the competition for the audience was fierce, but still the experience was positive and worthwhile for many young scholars presenting their first conference papers.

### Communication as a key concept

For me, the most thought-provoking presentation was the plenary lecture of Charles L. Briggs. It also provided interesting points of comparison with the lecture given by Robert Darnton, which I had had the chance to listen to in Edinburgh. Both Briggs and Darnton are excellent lecturers who certainly keep their audience wide-awake and even entertained. I also noticed some parallel concepts and ideas in their presentations. Apparently, Charles Briggs and Robert Darnton have evolved similar ideas though starting from different research-materials and scholarly backgrounds. One common concept is communication. "A sphere of communicability" was one of the key terms in Charles Briggs' lecture, in which he analysed controversies between the discursive fields of "the modern" and "the traditional". According to Briggs, "texts seek spheres of communicability" in relation to the struggle for hegemony. Writers and speakers may accept or reject the hegemonic communicable projection as well as create alternative spheres.

The ideas of Charles Briggs have some resemblance with the model of "the communication circuit", which Robert Darnton has presented in some of his publications (Darnton 1995, 2000). In his lecture in Edinburgh, Darnton discussed his model in relation to the case of Marie-Josephe Jonaphon, a chambermaid who wrote a book (*Tanastés* 1745) on the love affairs of Louis XV, based on oral rumors (*bruits publiques*) and written in the form of an allegoric fairy tale. Darnton questions the separation of oral and written modes of communication, since they are all bound within "the same multi-media system". He also emphasises the position of the manuscript medium as intermediate between oral and printed communication. Similarly, he questions the opposition of elite and popular culture. Robert Darnton determines his field of study as "the history of communication" rather than "book history", which implicitly positions print culture as the final point of development.

Briggs, in parallel, examines the creation of folklore studies in relation to the hegemonic spheres of communication. The opposition of " modern" and " traditional" communication has envisioned the former as a unilinear, unidirectional process and the latter as anonymous material transmitted orally to experts. From discussions with other members of the audience, I understand that many colleagues found Briggs' lecture provocative, many pointing out that his evaluation of the tradition of folklore studies is somewhat simplified. Provocativeness is one feature Charles Briggs shares with Robert Darnton. That said, even provocative statements can lead to a positive re-evaluation of the field.

Both Briggs and Darnton are looking for answers to the question: "So what?" This is a question we have to face if we want to convince people outside our limited field of the significance of proverbs, nursery rhymes or stories told by old women, considered as objects of serious scientific research. Robert Darnton stated the question openly in his lecture, citing his critics' query: What is the point in studying pornographic booklets and libels in the periods of great political events? Darnton's one answer to this question is that these materials expose the creativity and interactivity in communication circuits. "So what?" is thus an essential question in these times, when in many countries folklore studies and folklorists are struggling for survival in the academic world. In my view, opening ourselves up to new ideas is a more positive strategy than withdrawal to memories of "the great past", but this requires a critical re-evaluation of the basic concepts, traditions and challenges of the field.

**Challenges of "post-socialist folkloristics"**

Sessions on socialism and post-socialism attracted a large audience, and many important questions were taken up in the papers and discussions. During the last ten years "post-Soviet studies" have interested many scholars in Eastern European countries and elsewhere. This new field of research has provided many new challenges, but it has also led to the creation of certain stereotypical research positions. Various kinds of research have been subsumed under this "fashionable" heading. According to my observations, the most interesting papers in the "post-socialism" sessions were presented by Baiba Bela-Krūmiņa (Latvia) and Ene Kõresaar (Estonia). Baiba Bela-Krūmiņa analysed the narrative genres of Latvian life-stories about the Soviet period: tragedy, anecdote, testimony, heroic saga, tale of adventure and humoresque. Her main point is that the traditional genres and means of narration ("culturally available narratives") are also utilised in apparently "non-traditional" life stories.

Ene Kõresaar, on the other hand, discussed the politics of memory in post-Soviet Estonia illustrating her points with two contrasting life-stories representing respectively 'national' and 'soviet' historical templates. She questioned the concept of "collective memory", which after the fall of the Soviet Union has been interpreted as "a counter-memory to the official Soviet interpretation of the past". By formulating questionnaires and publishing anthologies, professional researchers and archive workers also participate in the creation of these restricted ideas of the collective memory. Therefore, it is extremely important to take up these questions in academic research.

**Fairy tales and worksongs**

The most intensive debate which I observed in the Congress was raised by the paper of Ruth Bottigheimer. As far as I am aware, it was also the only presentation – besides my own – in which book history was presented as a challenge to folklore studies. The argument of Ruth Bottigheimer was, indeed, quite provocative, as she questioned the study of fairy tales as oral narratives. According to Ruth Bottigheimer, fairy tales were created for and disseminated to a literary audience during the Renaissance and the Early Modern period. Bottigheimer's clear and intelligent presentation provoked many comments from the audience, some quite emotional. As I am not a specialist on fairy tales, I did not take her presentation so to heart. However, I question the quite rigid opposition of "oral history" (in the sense of the oral transmission of fairy tales) and " print history" in Ruth Bottigheimer's presentation. According to my readings, many researchers in book history (e.g. Robert Darnton) have questioned this opposition and instead emphasise the interaction between the oral, the manuscript and the printed media.

Gerald Porter took up the interesting question of "plotless narratives" in his paper on English children's worksongs. The songs of young birdscarers ("rook starving") have a simple structure based on constant repetition. However, according to Gerald Porter, some of these songs have "dynamic subtexts" which question the established hierarchies.

This is only a very subjective selection of the immense variety of themes and approaches which were presented in the sessions of the Tartu Congress. Many folklorists deal with urgent problems of the modern world: globalization, problems of multi-ethnic communities and societies, new media subcultures. Many scholars at the same time still "stick to the basics", the archival materials representing the "traditional" genres of folk narrative, which also provide material for new interpretations. Even though folklorists and other researchers on folk narratives seek theoretical and methodological inspiration from different sources, we still seem to have a certain common language and common questions bringing together people from different parts of the world. The Tartu Congress stimulated me to go to library to look for both new literature and older publications. The congress also inspired me to go further in the analysis of some of my own research materials. What more could you expect of a conference?

# Some Notes on the 14th Congress of the ISFNR
## *by* Francisco Vaz da Silva, Lisbon University, Portugal

Looking for and at the revival of folkloristics. Francisco Vaz da Silva.
*Photo by Alar Madisson.*

The 14th Congress of the International Society for Folk Narrative Research took place in Tartu, Estonia, from July 26–31 2005 with the theme of "Folk Narrative Theories and Contemporary Practices". For almost a week, more than two hundred participants from a wealth of different countries exchanged ideas and presented the latest research in their respective fields. Such an opportunity to meet colleagues from distant countries and kindred fields of research has long been one main reason for the continued appeal that ISFNR meetings hold for practitioners of folklore and related fields in the humanities. The Tartu meeting added to this appeal the benefit of acquaintance with the current revival of folkloristics in Estonia.

Indeed, Tartu is a town of longstanding academic tradition in folklore and in semiotics, as the names of Walter Anderson and of Yuri M. Lotman may help remind us. In recent times, the organization of this Congress in Estonia and the ensuing election of Ülo Valk to the presidency of the ISFNR testify to the effort underway in Tartu to create a world-class center of folkloristics. It may be worth mentioning that a workshop was held on the island of Saaremaa, attended by about fifteen participants, as a sort of epilogue to the bigger event. Although this small gathering included attendants from England, India, Lithuania, Portugal, Russia, Sweden, and the United States, the hardcore of participants was Estonian and Finnish. Attending this workshop, better suited for in-depth discussions than the comparatively hectic ISFNR gathering, made me more aware of a vital folkloristic oikotype active on the eastern reaches of the European Union, and of the international scope of its ambitions.

Regarding the ISFNR congress proper, two things stand out. First, there is the matter of its outstanding organization. The Estonian Literary Museum and the University of Tartu joined hands to ensure the smooth running of the event. The Gargantuan scale of a congress running for five days, featuring forty-eight sessions per day (each comprising three presentations), requires just the sort of low-profile efficiency – and, indeed, good-humored openness to tales of the unexpected – that both organizers and staff provided. Also noteworthy is the fact that, aside from the scholarly side of the Congress, the organizers did their best to convey to visitors a sense of what Estonia is about, and of the cultural life of Tartu, by means of a cultural programme that proved to be a valuable feature of the visitors' experience.

The second thing to note about the congress has probably nothing to do with the ISFNR, and still less with Tartu. It is most likely the combined effect of the deepening crisis in folkloristics and the post-modernist hangover. While the diverse intellectual scene at the congress was certainly propitious for academic effervescence and vigorous debate, only rarely did I come across such events. Even though a couple of clarion calls for reflection were issued, in my experience vibrant debate rarely eventuated. At such a juncture, it is to be hoped that the revival of folkloristics in Estonia might inspire stimulating synergies in the international academic arena affiliated with the ISFNR.

Whilst on this subject, I must mention the sad loss of a prominent ISFNR member, Alan Dundes, who made a point of complaining loud and clear that "folklorists are too often regarded (rightly, I think) by their fellow academics as mere collectors and classifiers, but rarely if ever as bona fide scholars seeking to analyze their data meaningfully" (Dundes 2002: ix). Wolfgang Mieder, in his moving homage to Dundes in Tartu, recalled what Dundes "preached throughout his productive and fruitful life, namely that folkloristics is the key to a better understanding of the human condition and that its practitioners should conduct their work on a comparative and international basis". Could this not be a motto for the Estonian folkloristics revival as well as for folk narrative research, understood as an intellectually relevant academic pursuit?

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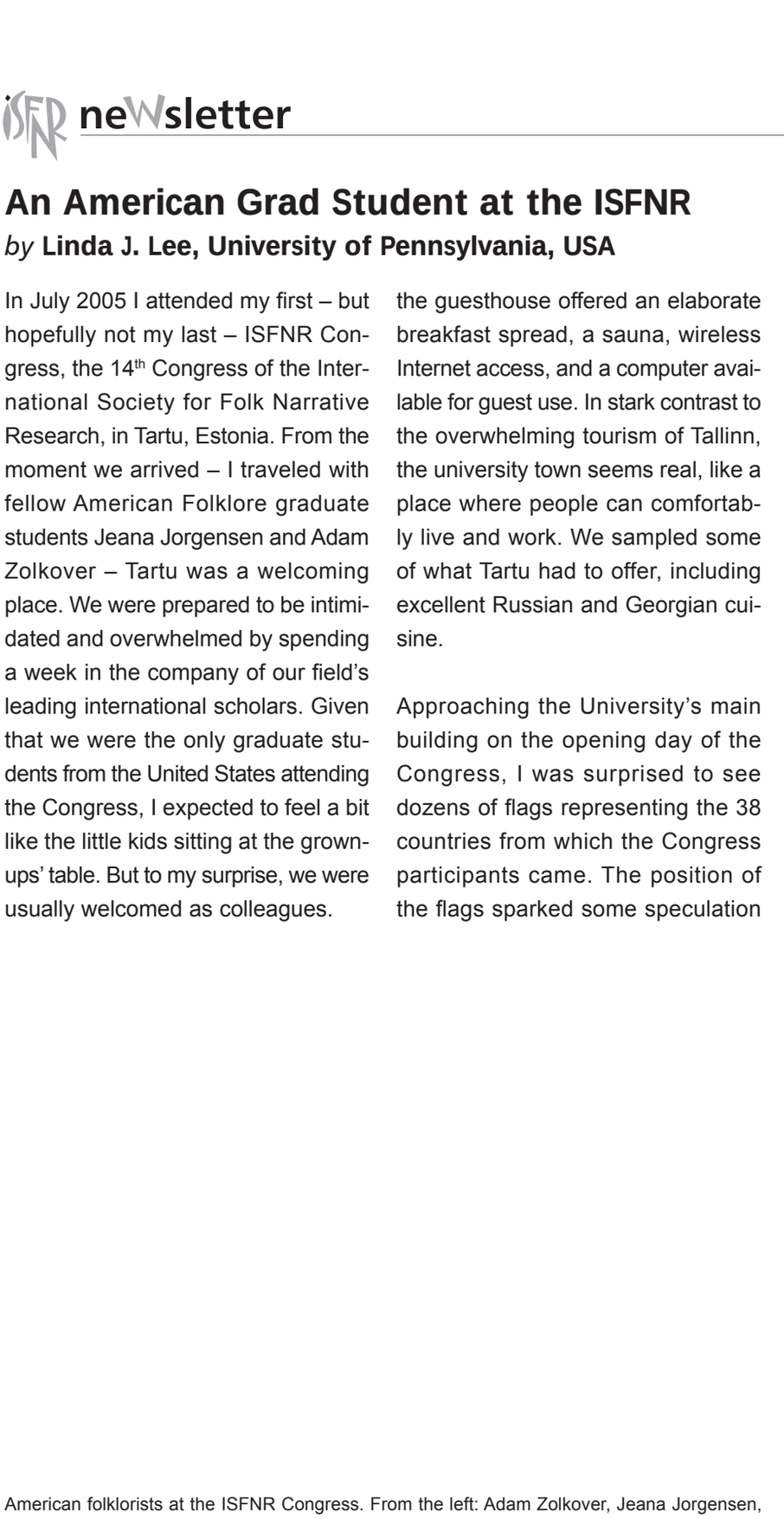
# An American Grad Student at the ISFNR

*by* **Linda J. Lee, University of Pennsylvania, USA**

In July 2005 I attended my first – but hopefully not my last – ISFNR Congress, the 14th Congress of the International Society for Folk Narrative Research, in Tartu, Estonia. From the moment we arrived – I traveled with fellow American Folklore graduate students Jeana Jorgensen and Adam Zolkover – Tartu was a welcoming place. We were prepared to be intimidated and overwhelmed by spending a week in the company of our field's leading international scholars. Given that we were the only graduate students from the United States attending the Congress, I expected to feel a bit like the little kids sitting at the grown-ups' table. But to my surprise, we were usually welcomed as colleagues.



American folklorists at the ISFNR Congress. From the left: Adam Zolkover, Jeana Jorgensen, Linda Lee, and Dorothy Noyes.
*Photo by Ülo Valk.*

In spite of our rather late arrival from Tallinn, we had no difficulty getting to our surprisingly comfortable guesthouse conveniently located just two blocks from the University. We were housed in a wonderfully spacious apartment with a full kitchen, and the guesthouse offered an elaborate breakfast spread, a sauna, wireless Internet access, and a computer available for guest use. In stark contrast to the overwhelming tourism of Tallinn, the university town seems real, like a place where people can comfortably live and work. We sampled some of what Tartu had to offer, including excellent Russian and Georgian cuisine.

Approaching the University's main building on the opening day of the Congress, I was surprised to see dozens of flags representing the 38 countries from which the Congress participants came. The position of the flags sparked some speculation among some conference participants, especially Americans who could not fail to notice that the American flag shared the center with the Estonian flag. A few days into the Congress, Ülo Valk cleared up our confusion: Except for the Estonian flag, which was placed in the center, the remaining flags were organized alphabetically. He also described the difficulty in obtaining all of the flags, citing numerous organizations in Estonia that had lent them for display. It is difficult to imagine most American universities doing this.

Congress secretaries Elo-Hanna Seljamaa and Renata Sõukand, and others involved in the planning and organization of the ISFNR Congress, did an impressive job. Although I have not yet been to other ISFNR meetings, it seems that the Estonian folklorists have raised the bar of what can be done. Certainly compared to most academic conferences in the United States, the 150 Euro (student) registration fee (approximately $188 US) now seems like a bargain. The registration fee covered many meals, including a couple of dinners and lunch each day, as well as various cultural events in the evenings and a full-day excursion. Our conference registration package included a sturdy bag, notepad, a nicely printed formal conference program, and a copy of *Studies in Estonian Folkloristics and Ethnology: A Reader and Reflexive History* (2005), a collection of articles edited by Kristin Kuutma and Tiiu Jaago. An unexpected assortment of goodies, to be sure! Coffee, tea, and snacks were thoughtfully provided during the half-hour breaks between sessions.

As a first-time attendee at ISFNR, I was overwhelmed by the volume and variety of papers. The plenary sessions, workshops, and papers presented at ISFNR last July spanned the gamut of research related to folk narrative. In contrast to national and

regional folklore conferences in the United States, it was exciting and informative to hear about what scholars internationally are researching. There were more than 200 presentations, and as many as eight sessions ran concurrently at any given time. These were often conveniently organized into discrete “tracks” that made it easy to attend the sessions of interest. The tracks addressed such broad areas as “Theory and Method,” “Tradition and Performance,” “Fairy Tales,” and “Computer-Mediated Communication and Databases.” There was also a symposium on Vernacular Religion and a full-day Bibliography workshop. The Congress was marked by lively debates and discussions just about everywhere: bars and restaurants, the streets of Tartu, walking through the bog in Soomaa National Park, and over breakfast at the guesthouse. Although most attendees were appropriately respectful when engaging in intellectual debates, the ISFNR Congress also held some surprisingly intense moments when scholars expressed their diametrically opposed positions.

My only criticism is that the acoustics in the Assembly Hall, where the plenary sessions were delivered, often made it difficult to understand what was being said. I think I speak for many attendees when I say that I am looking forward to reading some of the papers based on those plenary sessions.

The 14th Congress also provided an

# In the Land of the Olive Branch: Our Visit to Estonia in July 2005

*by* **Eleri and Robin Gwyndaf, Museum of Welsh Life, Wales**

One Welsh poem contains the following lines: 'There are things which we will for ever remember; there are stars in the sky whose light will for ever shine.' (English translation) And, yes, we too will for ever remember our visit to Estonia in July 2005.

First of all, we will re-live our day at the Estonian Open Air Museum, near Tallinn, in the company of Merike Lang, Director, and Elvi Nassar, Chief Curator, and we will better appreciate the vital role this museum plays in safeguarding, presenting and re-interpreting the Estonian folk culture inheritance. In Tallinn also we will long remember our visit to the Institute of Estonian Language, in the company of our very good friend, Andre Help (who can speak some Welsh), and the equally kind, Eha Viluoja, who gave us a vivid insight into her most important work in the Fenno-Ugria Foundation.

In Haapsalu it was a great thrill to be present at the Sunday morning service of the Baptist Church and to give greetings on behalf of our own Tabernacle Church in Cardiff (the two churches are twinned). What a pleasant surprise it was to re-listen to these words and the whole service on the Estonian radio that Sunday evening. That same evening, what a wonderful time we had, and a taste of true Estonian welcome, in the company of members of two very dedicated church families: the Jätsa family, with four boys, and the Kopli family, with four girls.

Then the final eight days in the beautiful and historic city of Tartu, attending the 14th Congress of the International Society for Folk Narrative Research – without doubt one of the most successful Folk Narrative Congresses ever held. The Congress theme: 'Folk Narrative Theory and Contemporary Practices', was an important one for all of us living in the 21st century, and we did have numerous fascinating and thought-provoking papers by young and older scholars from many countries. Dr Mare Kõiva, Professor Ülo Valk, and all the able and hard-working organizers of the Congress deserve our highest praise. Who will ever forget the great kindness of all the Congress assistants, including the ever attentive young guardian angels in yellow T-shirts?

Eleri and Robin Gwyndaf – together at ISFNR Congresses since 1974.
*Photo by Rein Laiverik.*

Our first visit to Estonia was in October – November 1990 when we attended an international conference in Tartu: 'Traditional Folk Belief Today', a conference dedicated to the memory of Oskar Loorits (1900 – 61), the great Estonian folklorist. We also attended the 4th Visual Anthropology Film Festival in Pärnu. What a tremendous privilege and joy it was to set foot on the treasured land of Estonia once again. Estonia and Wales are both small nations, ever-conscious of their struggle for survival. The perseverance, suffering and heroism of the Estonian people will always be an inspiration to all those of us in Wales who care for our language and culture. Inspired is exactly how Eleri and I felt once more during those memorable two weeks in Estonia, July 2005. We returned to our own country of Wales with a wonderful sense of companionship and determination and a re-assuring feeling: no, we are not alone; we too have a role to play in building bridges between east and west, and in saving the rich and beautiful tapestry of our culture for all to enjoy.

My first Folk Narrative Congress was in Bucharest, Romania, in 1969. Our second one was in Helsinki, Finland, in 1974. Since then the world family of folklorists has continued to grow and has become an intrinsic part of our lives. It is a world family of friends – a priceless gift which we treasure beyond words. And that was part of the joy of being in Estonia in July 2005: the joy of meeting once again with so many old and dear friends and making so many new ones. It was a great pleasure for all of us to see scores of young scholars and researchers present at the Congress and to realize that folklore – and folk narrative in particular – is still being so much appreciated by the younger generation.

What else do we remember of that glorious week? The list is long, but we will especially mention the following:

- Our visit to Estonian Literary Museum, and, once again, being reminded of our immense debt to some of the great Estonian folklorists of the past and of the excellent work being undertaken today by this institution.
- Our visit to St John's Church and the singing of some Estonian folk hymns by *Triskele*.
- The storytelling evening, with Piret Päär, Estonia, and Nigel Watson, Wales, the latter presenting one of our classic medieval tales, the Fourth Branch of the Mabinogi.
- The performance of *Lemminkäinen*, a play based on myth, folk poetry and folk music, by the Estonian Heritage Theater *Loomine*.
- The cultural tour of Tartu, especially the visit to see some of the many statues commemorating such famous persons as Kristjan Jaak Peterson (1801-1822). He was a student at the University of Tartu and a poet who sang the praises of the Estonian people, their language and culture. He is regarded as one of the first truly Estonian poets, and how apt it is that his birthday (14th March) is celebrated as the 'Estonian Language Day'.
- The day-visit to Setoland. This, certainly, was one of the highlights of the week. Setoland is a region in the south eastern corner of Estonia, and home of the Seto (in Estonian: Setu) people, who have retained their own language and identity. At the small open-air Seto Farm Museum we will surely remember the food – especially the huge plate of tasty pea soup! But, more importantly, we will remember the Seto lady, our guide, who spoke from her heart with so much feeling, understanding and empathy about her own people.

In the village of Saatse we were entertained by a group of elderly Seto women who sang some very beautiful Seto folk songs. During our visit to the cemetery some of us were fortunate enough to be invited to join two Estonian Orthodox priests and a family of Seto people, eating and drinking at one of the graves. We also witnessed the custom of leaving some food and drink 'for the dead'. Later, a group of us were privileged to visit the Ort-hodox Church of Saint Paraskovja nearby, accompanied by one of the two priests. One of the most moving experiences of the whole week was listening to a reserved young Estonian girl singing a hymn of praise to God, in a manner so calm, so serene and sincere, it filled the whole church with an atmosphere of tranquillity and peace.

But the day was not yet over. We visited Piusa sand caves and the beautiful Pühajärve Lake and its many legends. And we also visited Obinitsa and the statue of Seto *Lauluimä* ('Song Mother') in memory of Seto women, renowned for their folk singing – the most well-known being Hilana Taarka and Anne Vabarna.

* * *

We conclude these brief recollections of a memorable visit to Estonia with the following three quotations.

First, an old Irish proverb which, translated into English, reads:
'A tune is more enduring than the song of birds;
And a tale more enduring than the wealth of the world.'
Secondly, a translation of a welsh couplet composed by the renowned scholar and poet T Gwynn Jones (1871 – 1949). It refers to the Llangollen International Musical Eisteddfod (Festival). This festival, in a small town in north Wales, was founded in 1947 and it was Wales' contribution towards peace, music and dance, following the destruction and suffering of the Second World War.
'Blessed is the world that sings;
Its songs are cultured.'
And, finally, an English translation of a saying I first heard in Welsh by one of my elderly informants whose rich oral testimony was recorded on tape for the Museum of Welsh Life. (The original saying may be from China?)
'Keep an olive branch in your heart and the birds will return to sing.'

In Estonia, July 2005, the birds certainly returned to sing. The Estonians are often called the 'Singing People', and long may that song continue. To all our friends and colleagues who belong to this nation, and to all the delegates at the Congress in Tartu, we wish you health and joy and every blessing. And *Diolch o galon*: our heartfelt thanks: *tänan kogu südamest.*

# Bringing the Subject Alive: the 14th Congress of the ISFNR from the Perspective of a Folklore Student

*by* **Katrina Kink, University of Tartu, Estonia**

It was in May 2005, around the end of the spring semester at the University of Tartu when in various university buildings calls for help from the Department of Estonian and Comparative Folklore started appearing on notice boards: volunteers were needed for a congress to be held in Tartu in July. And not for just "a congress", but for the 14th Congress of the ISFNR, the world's biggest society of folk-narrative researchers. At least what we were told, for I guess most of us signing up as volunteers had never heard of the ISFNR before.

What follows is a reflection upon the Tartu Congress from the perspective of a member of the volunteer team, but more particularly, of a folklore student. Inspired by the theme of the Congress – "Narrative Theories and Contemporary Practices" –, I try to cast my report in the form of a narrative analysis by considering my own impressions as well as the storytelling amongst us volunteers in the light of ideas expressed in some of the Congress papers.

Since context matters in narrative analysis, I would like to start by briefly introducing the members and tasks of the volunteer team, known by the end of the Congress as the yellow guardian angels. From a chemistry student to assistants and research fellows of the Estonian Literary Museum, the party in yellow T-shirts consisted of people of various ages and with different backgrounds. Most of us, however, were students and had at least some previous knowledge of folklore as well as personal connections with the field. The regular day of a volunteer was busy and filled with various duties and tasks,

Katrina Kink – one of the guardian angels in yellow T-shirts.
*Photo by Epp Kubu.*

the main goal of which was "just to be helpful and polite". Simple as it might sound, it nevertheless turned out to be not the easiest obligation to fulfil. The Congress brought together for almost a week over 200 participants; a collection of strong personalities and along with them varying cultures.

In situations like this, when a conglomerate of cultures comes into being instantaneously, differences become highlighted and need to be talked about. Thus, amongst the volunteers too one could sense a need to share impressions and experiences in order to negotiate for cultural differences and orient oneself in such instances. This is exemplified by a misunderstanding between some volunteers and Congress delegates from Japan. Seeing the guests looking puzzled, the volunteers had hurried to offer their help. The delegates, however, were convinced they would find a solution without assistance and thus declined help by bowing. This in turn confused my colleagues, since they felt they had not been able to help and were thus unworthy of bows, but as a reaction to being thanked they expressed their gratitude as well. Later we discussed the incident together, pondering over what the most adequate reaction would have been.

As the Congress proceeded, certain favourite topics and incidents developed that would draw people together and trigger the narrating of anecdotes. These communal processes of casting lived life into stories makes me think of what Terry Gunnell said in his keynote about the importance of the relationship between space and narrative, as well as aspects of space connected to narratives. Since in narrative-research stories are treated as inseparable from the context of their performance, the "congress-stories" too should be examined in the context of their creation. Time and space as well as the narrator and characters are all constituents of this context, and partly constitute the various conditions determining the subject matter of a given narrative.

While the principle of being always present and helpful supported the creation of good stories, it didn't leave us volunteers much time and opportunity to delve into the Congress programme. Though most of us did spend a considerable time in various sessions assisting the chair and making sure everything ran smoothly, my own attention at any rate was even on those occasions so fully on organizational matters I could at most observe the personal performance styles of various presenters. This, however, was very instructive and interesting as well, with one of the most outstanding presenters being Robin Gwyndaf. Also, the busy

days were somewhat compensated for by similarly busy evenings offering the chance of following scholarly discussions in informal settings and listening to delegates share their impressions at receptions and in pubs.

From the presentations I did manage to listen to, however, it was the plenary session of Sadhana Naithani that impressed me the most. Citing examples from all around the world, she talked critically about the position of folklore in history and called upon her audience to see folklore in a context defined by new terms that signified the international nature of the subject of our study, and the human condition of its existence". Unlike folklorists of previous times, we should not justify colonization as a precondition for collecting (and perhaps also for the very existence of) folklore.

The plenary lecture given by Dan-Ben Amos, on the other hand, addressed one of the central questions of narrative research – why do people keep telling narratives? Although I guess it would be impossible to give a single, definite answer to this question, the one proposed by Ben-Amos seemed a simple and natural one – we narrate because we are humans and because narrating is intrinsic to us. The claim that narrating is an inherently human activity found in every society was proven in our little team as well. When with the other volunteers I would often remark – sometimes by eavesdropping – the role of and amount of narrating between other activities. While each of us would talk about his or her day, the most memorable stories about amusing incidents in the Congress bureau or elsewhere were "accepted" into the collective repertoire and passed on by word of mouth. Reflecting upon these processes sheds light on narrating in general, while also suggesting new angles for approaching oneself. Thus, Elo Kuuste's article in this very Newsletter suggests an inspiring role-reversal by examining folklorists as narrators.

The essence of narrative is that traditional and unique unite. I am thereby reminded of an axiom used by Dan Ben-Amos – tell me your story and I will tell you who you are. Since any narrative is based on choices made by the narrator, it reflects her worldview and attitudes. Unfortunately, there have been times when this very fact has become fatal for narrators. In her presentation Naithani reminded the audience that historically folklore has been in the service of ideologies and a justification for persecution, a pariah that can only be exhibited in an embellished form. Folkloristics has accordingly been a leading "European science" in the service of European interests, despite the fact that many of the stories do not originate in Europe in the first place...

All in all, I find these encounters with different researchers and diverse approaches to folkloristics most inspiring. From what I have heard I'm not the only one, for other folklore students-volunteers also found encouragement in the Congress to continue in their chosen field. One of my fellow-students told me that participating in the Congress simply as a volunteer had already changed the impression she has of folkoristics so far: witnessing this multiplicity of topics and methods with her own eyes, the discipline became alive for her once again. Quite a radical change, I would say, and I am reasonably sure it was partly brought about by contacts with researchers who are anything but dull scientists.

Terry Gunnell (Iceland) giving the opening keynote of the Tartu Congress.
*Photo by Rein Laiverik.*

# Some Summer Recollections

*by* **Elo Kuuste, University of Tartu, Estonia**



Elo Kuuste and Veikko Anttonen (on the right) she watched the clouds of Setumaa with. *Photo by Ülo Valk.*

When preparing for this article, I recorded congress-memories from some Estonian folklorists. We sat at the table, sipped tea and took a trip down memory lane. Everything went rather well until I got home to enjoy the fruits of my harvest. I put on the headphones, sat back and relaxed, pushed "play" and… nothing happened! Now, it seems that every time I go to record something or someone, I get a different minidisc recorder. And so far I've managed to operate all of them just fine – they even worked in the proximity of my great-aunt! But with 4 folklorists around the table all you get is silence, and not because they aren't talkative, I can assure you of that. I cursed the god of technology and blessed the one that had the wit to create humans and our secret weapon – plain old organic memory.

And if my memory serves me right, one of the most unofficial congress days was naturally Friday, the sightseeing day[1]. Or at least I've both told and heard stories of things that happened on that day. And it seems that at least for some that day proved to be pretty exciting and adventurous. They tasted various dishes and drinks and got to see different "faces" of Estonia. And some people were betrayed by the ground under their feet – namely, Anders Gustavsson from Oslo, Norway who told me how he and Veikko Anttonen from Finland were wandering around in Piusa caves, with only a tiny candle lighting their way in the darkness: "*When Veikko and I went together into the half-dark caves, he fell down about 2 metres and I couldn´t see him. I shouted and asked what had happened to him. I couldn´t see him any more. But he answered from down there that he was alive and not seriously injured. I went back to another exit from the caves. Outside the caves I met Veikko, happy but also confused."*

Some others however, taking a trip to northeastern Estonia, had to wander even deeper underground, driven by a pretty prosaic reason – in addition to their curiosity – rumbling stomachs: "*At first when we got there, behind schedule, of course, the stomachs of the delegates were so empty that they didn't want go under the ground at all. And some of them were perhaps a bit afraid too. But then they were told, that lunch would be served under ground in a shaft, and they had no other choice than to groan, smirk and put on a miner's outfit (a helmet with heavy lamp and overalls of durable fabric, because water tended to drip down your collar in the shafts). It was very amusing under the ground. For starters, for example, we were offered vodka, while the miners' lunch itself consisted of thick Russian soup, a cooked-meat sandwich and* "kissell" *– thickened fruit juice – with a bun for desert. One girl from Bosnia-Herzegovina confessed jokingly, that she had never drunk vodka before, so in response I moved the pickled cucumbers nearer to her, for* "sakuska"*. No wonder. She comes from a warm country, after all,"* Pille Vahtmäe, a young folklorist and congress volunteer, concluded. While sharing these recollections of Kohtla Mining Museum with me, Pille also admitted that the trip to the depths of the earth was a pretty adventurous experience and the train they took there seemed to drive very fast: *"We were taken on a ride on the underground railway used for taking miners to the end of the shafts at the beginning of the working day. Actually these wagons were very cramped containing about four crouching people. There were no doors, it rocked a lot and the wind whistled in your ears."* But it seems

that the meal was worth the risk – for example, Haya Gavish (Jerusalem, Israel) told me that she would love to have the recipe for the soup. This reminds me of the tasty pea soup other Congress delegates were offered at the Seto Farm Museum during the trip to southeast Estonia. I had too much of it. And I have this feeling that I wasn't the only one. Looking around in the dining hall as I was eating my potatoes, salad and ham 'n' eggs, I saw quite a few people with the same "I am sooo full" expression on their faces. Later though, it felt so good to rest on a wooden stage outside, breathe the fresh air, let my face soak up the sunshine, watch the clouds and tell Veikko Anttonen what creatures and faces I saw there.

Reading the congress-memories Estonian folklorist Piret Voolaid sent me, I got the impression that the most exotic and mysterious-sounding meal was served to delegates who visited Soomaa (Swampland) National Park[2]: "*The lunch in Sookolli Söögituba (Sookoll's Tavern) was a very pleasant and interesting experience, not only for the foreigners, but for the natives also. How often does one get a chance to eat swampsoup or moorstew, prepared on the campfire, from grandmother's recipies...*" The same tour also had an opportunity to sample local organic wines in the wine cellar of Põltsamaa Felix. "*Based on the expressions of the faces of the guests one can see that for many the currant-wine, for example, seemed truly exotic. But at least the foreign folklorists had a chance to try our wine for themselves, accompanied by our explanation that it was through the influence of the local wine-making that people started to call currants the grapes of the north. The guests liked it. Why else would some of them have taken the chance to take a wine-bottle back home as a souvenir,*" reckons Piret Voolaid.

Folklorists in the field: colleagues observing colleagues observing the natives who for sure took their own observations on the foreigners visiting them on *Päätnitsapäev*. Photo by Veikko Anttonen.

As you might have guessed, I went on the Setumaa tour and I think that the highlight of the trip was perhaps when we made a stop in a little village called Saatse. What made the place special was the fact that they were celebrating *Päätnitsapäev*, the most important church feast of that region[3]. Our huge bus parked in the middle of the village, at the edge of the road. Right next to it was a field, and across the road a small village shop. While we were getting off the bus, some old women came out of the church and told us that they don't sing by the shop because they don't like to disturb the men. So instead they went to stand in the middle of the field! And all our folklorists formed a line right next to the bus. Eyes shining and cameras ready, they watched the old women, not daring to step any closer, as if fearing to scare away their prey. Or so it seemed to me. And then the leader of the women told us "Why are you just standing there? Come closer!" and so we went. They even managed to get us all to sing along during one song – a lullaby. Anne Heimo from Turku, Finland remembered this episode well and mentioned an interesting fact – namely, that the singing women weren't the only ones being observed*: "At Saatse: there were two groups of folklorists enjoying the old women's performance. Some watched the ladies perform and the others (including me) watched and photographed the folklorists observing the performance."*

Later in Saatse we went to see the church and explore the village. This takes us to one of those stories that was already circulating in different versions during the Congress. The one presented here was told by Katrin Alekand from Estonia, who said the following about herself as a narrator: "*I have deeply moominpappaish in-*

*clinations to depict life as more exciting and vivid than it really is. And with this same moominpappaishness I tend to think that if I add something somewhere, that it isn't lying really – in fact I myself believe that it was indeed so."* But she also told me that this time she had tried to be as truthful as she could. Anders Gustavsson, the main character in this story, himself remembers the episode well, although some details differed in the version I presented to him and his own recollections. There were no candies or sausage sandwiches, for example. But I'll let Katrin tell the story now:

*For me all this started, when a priest walked by and offered to re-open the church for us, no problem there, and show it to our cherished guests. Since the party had become scattered all over the graveyard or was just strolling elsewhere, I walked around to invite everybody to come and have a look at the inside of the church. And behind the church I see hastening towards me that same Norwegian man who I'm still not sure if he was indeed Anders Gustavsson or, on the contrary, whether I'm able to establish the name based merely on the way it's written down and then connect it with the right person. Anyhow, the man was extremely happy that he is suddenly surrounded by all this rich living folklore in the graveyard. Eyes shining, he asked if I could help him to communicate with the locals – ask if he may take photos and things like that, to translate basically. His congress note-book was thickly filled with hasty notes, in his hand he had candies and between the sheets of the notebook a sausage-sandwich. Then we approached a grave, on which were placed a table and chairs, and we asked a man sitting there if it was OK to take pictures of the grave and the table. "Be my guests," the man replied kindly. "It's not my grave anyway..." It turned out that the owner of the grave, in a manner of speaking, was an aunty, who chatted with people on the next grave-plot and kindly allowed us to photograph the grave, table, tombstone, her neighbours and herself. And wanted us to eat sweets and drink vodka in honor of the deceased. She shoved first one glass of vodka into my hand and then another. I then palmed one off on the Norwegian, who gratefully accepted it. Aunty realised that we didn't want to drink it straight and gave us cup of Sprite too, good to drink right afterwards. The Norwegian started to head towards the church, vodka glass in hand and candies in his pocket. I explained that he must drink the vodka right there in honor of the deceased and his/her close relatives, at the same time shoving a cup full of lemonade into his hand too. The man nodded and drank dutifully a cupful of Sprite first and then the glassful of vodka, and gave the cups back to the aunty, thanking her at the same time. Such vodka-drinking impressed the locals too, so they amicably invited him back to take more photos."* I guess I should explain here, that Estonians usually drink the vodka first and then some juice or lemonade to ease the intensity of the spirit.

While the people on the Setumaa tour have vivid memories of the Saatse graveyard and got to observe how families spend their time on the graves, the Virumaa excursion made yet another interesting stop in addition to the visit to the Kohtla mines mentioned above. Pille Vahtmäe told me about the site of an ancient grove called Kassinurme: *"That place was indeed filled with immense power and it seemed that it had an effect on the foreigners too. With us was a younger man, who came to this excursion precisely because once there had been a time when he had wanted to become a monk (we visited Kuremäe too, after all ), but now he asserted with a smirk, that it was too late for that because he is married. But he managed to find a village swing in the grove and became enthusiastic about it. I went on the swing too, because I love swings, and I told him how in the past people used to go swinging in our villages and on what occasions and who swung. The smile on his face grew wider and wider. And when the bus was already signaling us to hurry up, he told me, that he would take the idea home with him and build himself a similar swing."* I think and hope that most of the participants have strong, vivid memories of both the official and un-official parts of the ISFNR congress this summer. It's most likely that not all of us are going to build a village swing, but at least some of us added to their store of personal experiences.

[1] Participants at the Tartu Congress could choose between four different excursions, heading accordingly to the capital of Estonia, Tallinn, to Setumaa in Southeast Estonia, to eastern Estonia, and to the Soomaa National Park – in addition to visiting Pärnu, Viljandi and some other Estonian towns. (Comments by eds.)

[2] Soomaa National Park in south-western Estonia was established in 1993 in order to protect extensive bogs, floodplain meadows and forests in Estonia, and to preserve as well as present cultural lore characteristic of this area.

[3] *Päätnitsapäev* (from the Russian *пятница* – Friday) is celebrated on the Friday preceding the feast of Elias on July 20th.

[4] Moominpappa is one of the Moomintrolls characters created by Finland-Swedish artist, novelist, and children's author Tove Jansson.

[5] Pühtitsa or Kuremäe Convent, home to some 80 nuns, is the only Orthodox nunnery in the eastern part of Estonia.

# Interpreting Hindu Myths Connected with the History of Tribal Kingdoms in North-East India

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Kishore Bhattacharjee (on the right) talking with a Brahmin in the temple dedicated to goddess Kamakhya. This temple in Guwahati is one of the oldest pilgrimage centres in Kamrupa (Assam). On the background: medieval Tantric figures on the temple wall.
*Photo by Ülo Valk.*

In different regions of India kingship was connected with divine descent. The tendency to trace the descent of the kings from Vishnu or Siva, two Hindu *puranic* gods, or from lineages mentioned in epics and *puranas* is common in India. But historians have paid adequate attention to this as a historical process only recently (Dirks 1989: 55; Thapar 1994: 152-60). This practice also influenced the tribal kingdoms which established contact with the wider polity (Sundar 1997: 52). Even in the rudimentary states like the Jaintias of Meghalaya, through the process of Hinduisation, indigenous deities have been appropriated and identified within Hindu tradition (Sen 1985). In such areas, the tribal kings have been accorded slightly lower status than the kings of the Gangetic plains. But the issue has not been systematically add-ressed by scholars. In a state system made up of hierarchical rulers, chiefs at the local levels had less direct connection with the Hindu myths. At the local level stories about kingship enter into a dialogue with the Hindu myths.

In Assam, Hinduised tribal kingdoms and chiefdoms were connected to the partially sacred and mixed ancestry of *devatas* and *asuras.* Different regions of northeast India, in particular Assam, were connected with the narratives of the epics and *puranas.* These myths granted legitimacy to the kings, as the rulers of advanced chiefdoms could ascribe sacredness to their origins with the help of these stories. In Assam, inscriptions provide evidence of the fact that different dynasties from the Varmanas up to the Palas, stretching over a period of seven hundred years (350-1100 AD), traced their origin using the myth of Naraka found in *Vishnu Purana* and other texts. Later the expanded version of the myth was canonized in the regional *upapurana Kalika Purana* – (eleventh century); see Sircar 1990: 87.

Historians have mainly read such myths as are connected with kingdoms purely literally or have ignored them. This paper argues that these origin-stories cannot be regarded as direct evidence as traditional historians treat them but are akin lo folkloric texts and connected with the social transformation process of the folk-classical continuum. The poetics of these myths, written and oral, are related to different forms of politics. I shall examine the texts of two myths, a folk myth connected with the *Purana* tradition, and position them in the broad context of political history; an attempt will be made to arrive at some understanding of the myths. I shall also search for a tribal perspective on the issue by considering the motifs of certain stories recorded among the tribes. This investigation is in the initial stage and its purpose is primarily to address certain historical issues from the folkloristic standpoint. The aim is to explore to what extent the tools of folklore can throw light on texts that are usually taken at the face value, but not to attempt a rigorous reconstruction of history. Neither can this paper also do complete justice to the texts, as the discussion is based on already-recorded texts which have lost nuances of folklore-performance.

### State Formation and Assignment of Sacred Geography

In Northeast India, state formation first started in Assam, where the ancient Kingdoms of Kamrupa developed on the basis of tribal chiefdoms. Inscriptions seem to suggest that these kings were subordinate allies of the Guptas (Sircar *ibid,* 97). In the later periods

described below the other kings of Kamrupa also came under the influence of the wider polity and helped in the process of Hinduisation. In the process of the formation of states, Brahmins assigned a sacred status to some places. A sixteenth century text entitled *Yogini Tantra* also presents extensive materials connected with this process.

As a result, ancient kingdoms derived their names – Progjyotish Pura or Kamrupa – from the Hindu myths. These two names can be traced to epics and *puranas,* and probably became connected with the region after the beginning of the Common Era (Kakati 1989: 1).

The name Kamrupa is connected with the myth of Siva and Kamadeva. In *Kalika Purana,* a story suggests that Kamrupa was once such a holy kingdom that Yama could not take anybody from there to his land for the blessings of Parvati. Yama approached Brahma who discussed the problem with Krishna, and all of them went to Siva. Siva requested the goddess Ugratara to evict all castes, even Brahmins, from Kamrupa. Neither did she spare the sage Vasistha, who became furious and threatened that she would be worshipped in Kamrupa according to *non-shastric* rites, that it would become a land of the *mlechas*. Gods and humans alike would be ignorant of the holiness of the place and that Brahma would hide its sacred water. Because of this, Brahma gave birth to his son in the womb of Amogha, wife of Shantanu, a sage. Brahma became charmed with the beauty of Amogha and tried to touch her but she hurried home. Meanwhile, Brahma discharged his semen outside. Shantanu came to know the purpose of Brahma's visit and asked his wife to drink the semen, but she requested that Shantanu drink the fluid first and then mix it with his blood and impregnate her. The pregnant Amogha gave birth to a volume of water that encompassed and hid all the *tirthas* (pilgrim centres) of Kamrupa so that they should remain accessible only to pious people.

The first part of the myth highlights the opposition between gods and human beings, who are mortal. Then come the contradictions of holy and unholy places, pious and impious acts and finally *shastric* and *non-shastric* worship. The curse of Vasistha on Ugratara, probably a local form of Durga, transforms Kamrupa to a land beyond the reach of civilization, and later, through divine intervention, it regained its sac-redness for persons who practised Brahminical customs. The image of hidden *tirtha* ideologically established the role of the Brahminical religion and representation. The basic point is that a sacred region was converted to a profane one, and later its sacredness was made available to the followers of Hinduism.

A Brahmin purifying a sacrificial goat in the pool of Kamakhya temple, a place that is connected with many myths.
*Photo by Ülo Valk.*

The river Brahmaputra has also been connected with the expiation of Parasurama for the killing of his own mother, as found in a legend of the Mahabharata. There are several other connections to this location, such as the passing away of Sati at the sacrifice of Daksha, the creation of one of the 51 *pithas* (highly sacred places of pilgrimage) in Kamakhya, and many other references in other stories of the *puranas* and epics. The sage Vasistha also figures in the myth of Narakasura, the most important myth of Assam history.

**The Mythological Canon and the Position of the Local Rulers**

Historians have come to agree that the Kings of ancient Kamrupa were of mongoloid origin or *Kiratas* (Chatterjee 1970). These kings traced their origin from Narakasura, a character found in the *Vishnu Purana*, the Mahabharata and other texts. The Brahmins probably constructed a sacred genealogy for them and located the genealogy using their mythological knowledge. Kings were given higher status but were regarded as descendants of the *asura* (demons). The subjects were regarded as *mlechas, asuras* or *Kiratas.* Thus a symbolic representation for ascription of low status functioned in the process of Hinduisation. A summary of the version of the myth as presented in the *Kalika Purana* is given below:

Naraka was born as a result of the union of Varah and an incarnation of Vishnu, and the earth. Gods knew he would become a *vira* (hero) and would pose a threat to them, so they tried to obstruct his birth. His mother approached Vishnu and he predicted that Naraka would be born in the *yajna* land of Janaka after the death of Ravana.

When Naraka was born, God said as long he followed the path of humanism every

one would remain happy, but the moment he strayed he would meet his destiny (a panegyric to Naraka follows and epithets place it in a larger context of meaning).
Vishnu took away Naraka, who worshipped him with folded hands, and the god touched him with the edge of a *samkha* (conch shell) and he became very strong. They reached Pragjyotisha and Naraka killed Ghatotkasura. He also killed the *Kiratas* and received the blessings of Vishnu, who told him of the glory of the place and gave him *sarva satruvinasini shakti* (the power of killing all enemies). Vishnu forbade him to become hostile to the Brahmins and ascetics.
Naraka established a friendship with the Vanasura of Sonitpur and insulted the sage Vasistha, who cursed him, and the goddess Kamakhya disappeared from Kamrupa. Following the advice of Vana, he worshipped Brahma, and order returned.
Naraka again became hostile and appointed renowned *asuras* his Generals. Krishna killed him, and according to his mother's request made his son Bhagadatta the ruler of the kingdom.
(Kalika Purana: 294-353.)

The striking part of the myth is that Naraka established order and civilized practices in the land of *asuras* and *Kiratas*. But later he himself resorted to the practice of the asuras; humiliation of the sages and war against the gods. He was killed by the god and the supernatural power was given to his son. The notable element of the myth is the paradoxical character of Naraka – he first established the Hindu order and later was punished for destroying it. The professional Brahmins who traced genealogies not only established divine connections but also demonstrated that if Brahminical order is not maintained consequences would follow. Again, supernatural help was retained through his son. The myth presents a tension between the Brahaminical order and the local society.

In the myth, the opposition between *deva* (god) and *asura,* the birth from divine contribution and the death from divine wrath (reversal), submission to god and opposition to god, victory and defeat are all exemplified. The birth of Naraka was a mediation of nature/culture, *asura/devata* and mortal/immortal. The myth touches on issues of birth, power and social position. The media-ting roles of pious acts and divine bles-sings are important in all transactions. But, for the better understanding of its elements, the myth could be related to the other stories of Hindu mytholo-gy and can also be seen as a part of a metonymic chain (Ramanujan1999: 44).

The elements of metonymy directly discernible in the texts are: the emergence of Naraka from the land *Yajna* made him a part of the sacred, when Vishnu touched Naraka with the edge of his *sankha* he became very strong, and Naraka became as powerful as god when Vishnu gave him the *shakti* (power). Thus his power was part of the divine power that was withdrawn. Secondly, characters like Naraka, Ravana, Sita and Vasistha are part of the Hindu mythological tradition. Finally, the establishment of order by destroying *asuras* is the general symbolic structure of a set of Hindu myths used in this context.

The Hindu mythological canon conferred a status on the local overlords which is partially sacred and was bestowed on condition of showing respect to the Brahmin and his religion. Historians have shown such ideology was part of the greater politics of the country (Thapar 1994). In Assam, inscriptions and genealogies created an inferior representation for the local population, described as *asura, mlechas* and *Kiratas* in the Sanskrit text. This discourse to some extent influenced tribal transformation till the early part of the twentieth century. The 'little kingdoms' of lesser kings and chiefs also traced their origin to similar models, often relating themselves to *puranic* characters of obscure lineage. These stories are not part of written *puranas* but drew from them, remained mainly oral in circulation, and some were included in the later texts.

**Emergence of Folklore Texts from the Puranic Myths**

Different versions of a legend about the king Arimatta are found in Assam. The legend emerges from the mythical base. Apart from the oral versions, there are *vamsavalis* (lineage charts) which connect minor kings of tribal origin to this mythical figure (Chowdhury 1959: 29). Different 'little kings' in diffe-rent areas of Assam in different historical periods used the same narrative to trace their descent, and the tradition continues into the present. This indicates these genealogical claims constitute a representation of status and a type of politics rather than tracing a real origin (according to historical estimation the legend came into currency in the thirteenth century). A summary of a version is given below:

A king named Pratap Singha became a big king. Once his wife went to take a bath in the river Brahmaputra. On that night, the river approached the king in a dream, and demanded he give him the queen. Otherwise ill-luck would befall his kingdom. The ministers asked the king to sacrifice his wife in the interests of the kingdom. The king offered his wife to the Brahmaputra. Later a Brahmin looked after the queen. She gave birth to a son. At his birth a serpent spread its hood over his head.

The goddess Kamakhya told the Brahmin in a dream that their boy would become the king of Kamrupa. The Brahmin gave him the name Arimatta because his face resembled the *Ari* fish. After some years he became a king and unknowingly fought against and killed his father.

The above version (Bhuyan 1987: 2) is one the many versions reported (Chowdhury 1959: 27-30; Barua 1972: 32; Gohain Barua 1976: 15-16). In some versions Arimatta was the son of a Hindu queen and a tribal prince. Both tribal chiefdoms and higher-caste chiefs used this legend to trace their descent. Nishis and Akas of Arunachal Pradesh also connect their history with this legend. The most striking motif is the birth of Arimatta as a result of his mother's union with the Brahmaputra river. This motif is comparable to Naraka's birth. Bearing in mind the historical and geographical context, it could be proposed that mythographic knowledge was part of cultural politics and related to the expansion of the process of Hinduisation.

These versions are intriguing and at this stage only a very tentative interpretation can be attempted. The following motifs form the basic outline (i) Brahmaputra gives birth to Arimatta (in most of the versions) by entering into a relationship with a queen legendary or historical (ii) Arimatta is brought up and shows extraordinary qualities and establishes a new line (iii) he unknowingly kills his father (in some versions as a result of violation) (iv) in some versions he performs *prayaschitta* – expiation of his crime – and in other versions he commits suicide (v) in some versions he is killed in war by a Kachari king.

View on the river Brahmaputra from Nilachal Hill in Guwahati in Assam. Brahmaputra is the father of Arimatta – the king of Kamrupa – and appears in several other myths.
*Photo by Ülo Valk.*

An Assamese writer and historian has compiled the stories of Arimatta and his descendants (Gohain Barua 1976). According to this text, Arimatta's grandson killed him in a forest, while he was meditating in expiation of his patricide, thinking he was a deer (an allusion to Ramayana). A Kachari king also killed his grandson. Barua's interpretation suggests that Arimatta was probably a Hinduised Kachari king who fought the chiefs of the Kachari tribe and extended his kingdom.

The motif of patricide is rare in India, the aggression of the father being more common (Ramanujan 1999: 385-88). In one version Arimatta justified his act of murder by citing the neglect of his mother. Though the story is an allusion to the story of Parasurama, it may be a reversal in the Levi-Straussian sense. Parasurama killed his mother for adultery and to expiate his sin purified himself in the Brahmaputra. Accor-ding to some versions, Arimatta went to Brahmakunda or Lauhitya in order to atone for his sin. The act of maintaining order involved Parasurama in committing another sin and the sacred act of pilgrimage is glorified in this myth. In the Arimatta legend, the first motif is inverted. But a paradox is evident - can sin (disorder) be contained by violence, punishment or war (Arimatta's war against his father and the death of his grandson who killed him); through the procedure of *dharma* can one absolve oneself of guilt for crimes?

The motif of relating an obscure line to a high origin becomes possible through the birth of Arimatta. Claiming divine origin was also a procedure for exalting one's position. This legend's versions present two contrasting messages: one set of versions uphold the Hindu moral order in another set the tribal voice provides a counterpoint. It has already been mentioned that in one version Arimatta's father is a Kachari prince. According to another version, Arimatta's father ruled in Arunachal.

The attempt to relate Arimatta's origin to *Puranic* or historical characters was a device to bestow higher status on the little kings by the Brahmins.

In one version his line is traced up to Yudhisthira, the eldest Pandava of the Mahabharata, and in this respect it is similar to the Naraka myth. Such motifs as the serpent spreading its hood and the goddess Kamakhya saying something in dream are common in Hindu legends, and tell us that he was an extraordinary boy.

At this level, the legend expresses a common theme of the folk-mind – that an extraordinary person becomes a king, and this notion is also found in other legends. Arimatta legends show a discontinuity with the earlier lineages and point towards a new beginning. The legend perhaps shows an ambivalence towards this continuity – at least in some versions.

**A Dialogue with the Mythical Representation**

The mythical representation has been internalised by the tribes to a large extent. Many tribes connect their low status to their *asura* origin or to the persecution of the Kshatriyas by Para-surama *and* they have internalised an 'exoteric' image. The Boro Kacharis and Dimasas trace their origin to the story of Hidimba in the Mahabharata.

But some tales about the Kachari kings present stories about the origin of kings or chiefs. Those narratives present certain interesting motifs: (i) A Kachari's wife was made pregnant by a *sanyasi* (sage) and gave birth to a golden cat which brought prosperity to the family (ii) A widow's son becomes king because of his extraordinary qualities (iii) In a kingdom no drums produce any sound; only the drum in the house of the would-be king can be played. There are two different motifs of a bird impregnating a girl and Siva making a Kachari *deodhani*, women who become possessed to transmit the message of a god (Bhuyan 1951: 1-7).

Some motifs present a view that is similar to the notion of kingship evinced in the Boro Kachari folktales (Bhattacharjee1996). Though the notion of *asura* or divine descent is presented in some legends, this view is combined up with views exemplified in the folk tales. The discourse of ordinary people is articulated in folk tales, and the ordinary people's discourse of kingship is different from the regional rulers, whom they criticise in their narratives of kingship – which mix elements of tales and of legends. Sometimes these narratives produce a parody of classical stories, adulterating them with the motifs of folktales.

There was a Kachari king, and in his kingdom bad time started and the queen became very powerful. Once a bird cried and the queen asked for the bird. In the meantime, the bird flew away. A platoon of the king's men could not catch the bird and the queen rebuked the king. The king finally said that if the bird was not brought the men would be killed. They prayed to Brahmaputra and the river took them to another country. The daughter of a Muslim minister of the king (she had a Hindu name) had a secret relationship with the king, and she attained puberty in the new country. Once she was weeping for her fate when Mahesh and Parvati were flying over, so Parvati asked Mahesh to help her. The god came in the shape of a bear and made her puberty fruitful; a son was born with hair on his body and was given the name Bhalukpang. He became a king and took a Hindu name (Bhuyan 1987: 7-9).

This is a parody of the narratives of state-formation. Finally, I shall present the Boro-Kachari version of the story of Hidimba and Bhima of the Mahabharata:

Hidimba was once worshipping the goddess Bhagabati when her drunk brother kicked in her chest. The goddess became angry and cursed him, saying that his brother-in-law would kill him. Once Hidimba went to fetch someone to sacrifice to the goddess and met the Pandavas. Her brother was killed for trying to use Bhima as a human sacrifice, and later Bhima and Hidimba established the kingdom of the Kachris. (Narzi 1985: 9.)

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# Charms, Charmers and Charming – Warburg Institute, London, September 23rd-24th, 2005

*by* **Jonathan Roper, National Centre for English Cultural Tradition, UK**

Jonathan Roper from the University of Sheffield is currently working on a historical typology of charms in Europe.
*Photo by Alar Madisson.*

Of all traditional verbal genres, charms *(Segen, charmes, scongiuri, trylleformler, loitsut)* are perhaps the least studied. The golden age for charms studies can be thought of as ending forty or so years ago with the publication of Spamer's study of the *Romanusbüchlein* and van Haver's edition of the Netherlandic charms. However, in the last decade or so, there has been an upturn in charms studies. The purpose of this conference, its predecessor in January 2003, and (one hopes) its successors in years to come, is to connect charms scholars who often work in near-isolation to their international colleagues and to encourage an interchange of information based on the different corpora and varied approaches and foci that the various scholars have. To that end the Folklore Society (the organisers of the conference) were pleased to welcome seventeen scholars representing to a warm pre-autumnal London for the two-day colloquium to discuss charms as texts, charming as an activity and charmers as historical (and contemporary) actors. Once again we were fortunate to have the use of the facilities of the Warburg Institute in the Bloomsbury district of the city.

Given that many of the major developments in recent charms scholarship have appeared in the medium of Russian, we were glad to welcome three Russian speakers to our conference. Andrei Toporkov of the Institute of World Literature in Moscow, opened the conference with a broad-ranging review of 'Russian Charms in a Comparative Light'. The husband and wife team of Vladimir Klyaus and Maria Shchapova both presented papers with video illustrations – Vladimir used vi-deos to reveal the common elements in charming procedures, while Maria spoke of a neo-traditional healer in contemporary Moscow, again with video of her healing activity.
Video material was also illuminatingly present during the papers of Monika Kropej of the Institute of Slovenian Ethnology in Ljubljana, who discussed 'Slovenian Charms and Conjuring: Between South Slavic and Central European Tradition' and Maria Vivod of the University of Marc Bloch in Strasbourg, who showed us the activities of the "bajalica" (or 'conjurer') Biljana from the village of Budisava in Serbia.

Two of the doyennes of European folklore studies spoke at the conference - Jacqueline Simpson and Éva Pócs. Jacqueline discussed the background and interpretation of the well-known 'Nightmare Charm' in Shakespeare's *King Lear*, and Éva gave a wide-ranging paper discussing incantations giving protection from childbed demons as found in south-eastern Europe and the Near East.

As is often the case at folklore conferences, the Nordic countries were well represented: Henni Ilomäki of the Tuglas Society, Helsinki, spoke on Finnish snake charms, Ritwa Herjulfsdotter Andersson of the University of Gothenburg viewed snakebite charms from a gender perspective, and Ulrika Wolf-Knuts of Åbo Akademi University, Turku, discussed 'Charms as a Means of Coping'. As far as discussions of the charms corpus of the host country went, there was a concentration on the Middle English period (1100-1500) – while this is the least-researched period of English charms, it is ironically the period with the greatest amount of surviving material: Lea Olsan discussed the physcial context of charms when found (as is usually the case) along with other manuscript material in her paper 'Charms in Late Middle English Recipe Collections', while T.M. Smallwood attempted to answer the provocative question 'Were some Middle English charms essentially original compositions?'

A welcome extra-European note was provided by Lee Haring of Brooklyn College, New York who gave a presentation on 'Verbal Charms in Malagasy Folktales'. It is to be hoped that future

colloquia will contain more extra-European papers. The youthful Paul Cowdell of the University of Sheffield attempted, in his paper 'If not, shall employ "Rough on Rats"', to identify common elements in charms to deter rodents in various times and cultures. The equally youthful Donald William Stewart of the University of Edinburgh dealt with the very necessary topic of the history of charms scholarship in his discussion of 'Alexander Carmichael (1832-1912) as charm collector and political activist'.

The final presentation of the conference was given by David Hunt of the Folklore Society, London, on behalf of Meri Tsiklauri of the Institute of Georgian Literature in Tbilisi, on 'The Structure and Use of Charms in Georgia'. This was followed by a closing discussion panel featuring Andrei Toporkov, Lea Olsan, Jonathan Roper, Lee Haring, Maria Vivod and Ulrika Wolf-Knuts, discussed the conference as a whole, and means by which we can continue our discussions. Just as there was a book based on the first conference [ed. Roper, J., *Charms and Charming in Europe* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004) ISBN 1-4039-3925-X], we intend to produce a book based on this conference too.

## CALL FOR PAPERS
## Interim Conference of the ISFNR "Folk Narrative and Society"

For several years, folklorists from Latin American countries and international colleagues with an academic interest in folk narrative studies have participated in small, but intense meetings organized by the *Instituto Nacional de Antropología y Pensamiento Latinoamericano* and the *Departamento de Investigaciones Culturales de la Subsecretaría de Cultura de la Provincia de La Pampa*. Today we are preparing the interim conference of the ISFNR scheduled for September 20-22, 2007 in Santa Rosa, La Pampa, Argentine Republic. The conference will be opened both for members of the ISFNR and Latin American folklorists.

In the hope of finding a theme of mutual interest we are especially encouraging papers on the topic of "Folk Narrative and Society".
The Conference will be structured thematically in four sessions:
1) Folk Narrative: Structure, Process and Context
2) Folk Narrative and Mass Media
3) Folk Narrative and the Construction of Social Identities
4) Folk Narrative and Social Memories
We hope that presentations on such issues and a range of related topics will generate a productive and lively dialogue.

The official languages of the Santa Rosa Conference will be Spanish, Portuguese and English.

**If you would like to participate, please contact the Organizing Committee of the Conference:**

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# Folklore, Equal Access, and Social Action in Atlanta and Elsewhere – 2005 Annual Meeting of the American Folklore Society

*by* **Elo-Hanna Seljamaa, University of Tartu, Estonia**

Secretary of the ISFNR Elo-Hanna Seljamaa. *Photo by Ülo Valk.*

Reading American folklore studies is a different experience from suddenly being immersed in it, yet once the latter has happened, even for only a short period of time, for barely a week, the former will never be the same again. Such at least is my impression from the Annual Meeting of the American Folklore Society (AFS) held at the Renaissance Atlanta Hotel Downtown in Atlanta, Georgia, from October 19-23. While it was the 117th event of its kind for the AFS, it was the first one for me, as well as my first ever trip over the Atlantic. The following could thus be described as an overview of the Atlanta meeting from the perspective of a young European folklorist. And also, by reflecting upon my observations and the personal meaning of the Atlanta experience, I would once more wish to render my warm thanks to the AFS for a travel-grant enabling me to attend the meeting, as well as for their kind help with all the travel arrangements.

Inspired by Atlanta's significance as one of the historical centres of the Civil Rights Movement and the native city of many of its leaders, the 2005 Annual Meeting of the AFS revolved around the topic of *Folklore, Equal Access and Social Action*. Appropriately defined yet open-ended, the theme addressed various relationships of folklore and folklore studies to processes of social change, empowerment and social equity, while at the same time aiming at creating a space for people of every cultural heritage. The triad in the title of the conference could thus be said to be pointing at the mediating role of folklorists between various cultures, groups and time-periods. Becoming conscious of this mediating capacity is a way of thinking about the goals, practices and meanings of folklore studies both past and present, which in turn is part of envisioning the future of the discipline.

The programme of the meeting was full and varied, including plenary sessions, organised panels, forums and round-tables concentrating on specific topics, as well as poster and film/video presentations. Furthermore, targeted at students and new professionals in particular, there were also professional-development sessions discussing employment, writing and presentation skills and other practical issues of vital importance. Being a first-time attendee myself, I was pleasantly surprised by the welcome and orientation breakfast organised by the AFS Executive Board on Thursday, in the morning of the first full working day. Two elementary pieces of advice given there particularly stuck in my mind: firstly, in order to get an idea of the wide variety of topics covered and, as a next step, to find sessions and presentations that interest you most, time should be taken to carefully study the programme. Secondly, to avoid getting sick after a meeting, it is worth getting some fresh air and taking little walks between sessions, instead of spending the whole day indoors, just moving from one room and session to another.

While there really isn't anything special about these guidelines – apart from the warmth and caring attitude towards younger colleagues to which they attest – I think their slight contradiction nevertheless vividly expresses the somewhat irritating situation one often finds her/himself in at big conferences when having to decide between two or more equally interesting simultaneous sessions. However desperately I might have wished to possess the ability to be simultaneously in different places, at the end I too had to make tough choices and could only listen to some of the presentations. Moving on to discuss some of these sessions and papers, I am inevitably directed and limited by these same preferences of mine, reflecting, for example, my interest in genre-related theoretical questions.

Since genre continues to be one of the key concepts in folklore studies, ideas about genres could be gleaned almost everywhere. On Thursday, however, a double panel took place, aiming at invigorating discussion about the current theoretical and methodological developments in the folkloristic treatment of genres. While the four papers of the first session looked upon genres in the field, in everyday discourse and the practices of various groups, the second part concentrated on mediated genres – videos, novels and fairy tales both in print and on stage. The theoretical

framework for approaching and analysing both performed and mediated genres was nevertheless the same, relying heavily on Richard Bauman's and Mikhail Bakhtin's ideas and works in this field. As well as making use of Bauman's definition of genres as conventionalised frameworks for the production and reception of discourse, panelists drew on notions of complex and simple genres, the dialogue of genres, intertextuality and intratextuality. Conceptualising both verbal and non-verbal genres as channels of communication, emphasis was laid on their power as tools that do not just enable their users to accomplish various social tasks, but also shape and transform their discourse and experiences.

While treating genres as orienting frameworks in mutual dialogue helps to shed light on, for example, processes of generic creativity, it also enables us to raise new questions about the relationship between genres and ideologies. Thus Ray Cashman (University of Alabama) explored in his paper how ballads, parades, local-character anecdotes and various other genres popular in Northern Ireland implicate certain ideologies by expressing different orientations toward the conception of community, belonging, and identity. The connection between genre and ideology is therefore not just one of plain reflection, but, according to Cashman, is one of radical integration: a conflict of genres equals a conflict of ideologies. Based on consideration of his insightful comments and well-chosen examples, one might initiate discussion as to what extent ideologies are determined by genres, as well as conceptualising the relationship between, for example, genre, parody and ideology. Further topics covered by panellists included, for example, the dialogism of complex genres in the performance of a specific political dance in Malawi, (Lisa Gilman, University of Oregon), and intratextuality – the self-referential negotiation of meaning within a single performance – in personal narratives told by pottery collectors in North Carolina (Tim Mould, Elon University). Opportunities for using genres in interpreting literary forms were presented by Greg Kelley's (Indiana State University) analysis of the novel *Treasure Island* as a legend-narration utilising elements used in legends for situating and fixing the story in lived reality.

In two sessions of the genre panel seven papers were presented altogether, followed by Richard Bauman's compendious comments on the panel. Referring repeatedly to Bakhtin, Bauman further confirmed the immense influence and inspirational potential of Bakhtin's ideas in contemporary genre discussions. Indebted to both Bakhtin and Bauman myself, I cannot but agree with this. At the same time, however, or maybe precisely because of the resemblance between the panellists' and my own approaches to genres, the rather homogenous picture the panel created of current folkloristic research on genres left me somewhat perplexed and wondering about future developments. I was therefore especially inspired by a session titled *The Carnalization and Carnivalization of Fairy Tales*, where Linda J. Lee from the University of Pennsylvania and Jeana S. Jorgensen, Adam D. Zolkover and Sarah Lash from the Indiana University analysed traditional folkloristic models in comic books, romance novels and erotic fiction as modern reinterpretations of fairy tales.

Various questions about the status, identity and role of the discipline and its practitioners were addressed and raised in the plenary session, provocatively titled *Why Is There No "Grand Theory" in Folkloristics?* Short, but sharp presentations by Richard Bauman (Indiana University), Dan Ben-Amos (University of Pennsylvania), Gary Alan Fine (Northwestern Universtiy), Margaret A. Mills (The Ohio State University), Dorothy Noyes (The Ohio State University) and Lee Haring (Brooklyn College) were followed by a lively debate, with contributions from both speakers and the audience. From the points of view expressed, two broad visions about the function of theories became apparent. While some of the participants stressed the political importance of broad theories as a means of integrating various schools into a disciplinary community and creating scholarly networks, others stressed folklorists' humble mediating position between the grand and the local, and their capacity to make absent voices present. Questions about the necessity and functions of theory are, as several speakers stressed, inseparable from the relationship of current research to the history of the discipline, as well as to politics and to various deeply-rooted stereotypes. Instead of ignoring this legacy, it should be confronted and valued by reflecting upon not *why*, but *how* there is no "grand theory" in folkloristics.

Often such subtle re-formulations of questions and shifts in perspective seem to suggest more fruitful paths than grand and broad highways ever could. If analysing where one comes from and why is a prerequisite for both understanding the present and moving forwards, the same *how* question could be applied to folklore studies in other localities as well, maybe resulting in a better understanding of the broader framework.