

## DISCUSSION

**INTERVIEW WITH EMILY LYLE AT THE 14TH CONGRESS OF THE ISFNR, 27 JULY 2005, TARTU**

*Interviewed by Ave Tupits*

**Could you please say a few words about your origin, your childhood? How you got to study folklore?**

Well, I come from Scotland and I'm a lowland Scot. That means that I speak a language that is very like English – just a light accent, sometimes dialect words – that can be called Scots, but I don't speak it very broadly. And the other part of the country would speak Gaelic, which is the language very close to Irish, it's a Celtic language. So it is a big distinction. So I'm on the Scots side of Scotland and I grew up in the Lowlands, west of Glasgow, in a small village. It was just a half an hour from Glasgow, but it felt quite isolated then, you know. We didn't travel very much at all, just grew up in a very small community. I went to university at St Andrews and I chose that, in fact, on not terribly good academic grounds, but that it was the smallest in the smallest town. We have several universities, old universities, in Scotland, and St Andrews is a medieval university, with a good tradition. But I really chose it because I didn't like big cities. And I studied English and did English Language and Literature, particularly literature, I suppose – Chaucer, and particularly Shakespeare, which I enjoyed. So that was my career up to that point and then I went into school-teaching, including a visit to New Zealand for two years. But I'd always wanted to do research and I got a job in a College of Education, teaching teachers, and this gave me a little more opportunity for academic contacts. So it was then that I did a PhD in the North of England where I was lecturing, at the University of Leeds, and I did Scottish ballads there, particularly with the supernatural interest.

**Scottish ballads is your favourite theme? Or one of them? Could you talk about that?**

Well, you're right to say "one of them" because I've two main lines and they both developed in a way after my thesis. One was sheerly looking at the ballads in themselves and there was a great deal of editing to do of the materials that were collected in the 19th and early 20th century, still in manuscript. So I've spent a lot of my life, actually, editing these earlier collections of ballads and songs. And the other side was, when I studied ballads, it was the fairy ballads I did for my thesis, about visits to the other world. And I chose that because I really was interested in getting to grips with, I suppose, what I felt was something lost in our Western-



**Photo 1.** Emily Lyle speaking at a plenary session in Tartu at the ISFNR 14th world congress, July 27, 2005. Photo by Alar Madisson.

European culture. There was something that we'd perhaps lost the key to. And I have been working since then on, I suppose, thinking, and finding some of these keys in structures to do with both the ritual year – Hallowe'en is a big one in Scotland as a ritual event – so, partly the ritual year, partly mythology, partly looking at stories and seeing structures there. So I founded my own line, in this respect, more. I mean, the editing is routine work, which is interesting up to a point. This is totally fascinating, trying to work out how we get our concepts from a deep past, I would say.

**Do you have some favourite ballads or favourite stories?**

Well, the two I studied in my thesis are still favourites with me. One is called "Thomas the Rhymer" and he was called "the rhymer", because he was a poet. He was a man who lived in the 13th century in Scotland. But he got turned into a legend and it was said he got his power from the fairy people. So he was both a poet and a prophet. And the prophecies were quite well known in Scotland. He got his gift from the Fairy Queen and the ballad tells how she comes out of a hill in the south of Scotland and he's lying there under a tree at the beginning of May and she comes out from the fairy hill on horseback, on a white horse, and takes him with her into the other world. So it's a good story in itself. It's a positive view of the fairies. Often you get the other view, which, in fact, comes up in the other ballad, where the man in this case is called Tam Lin and he's been snatched by the fairies, he's been stolen by them. As a boy actually, as a child. And he manages to get out on visits among mortals and he falls in love with a young woman and

she falls in love with him. And she's pregnant with his child. And she gets concerned as to what the child is going to be like, because she thinks he might be an otherworld being, and he explains: no, although he lives with the fairies, he's really a mortal. And she can get him back at Hallowe'en, at midnight, if she stands at a particular cross. All the fairies will ride past on horseback. They're changing at that time of year, they go from one home to the other, from their summer quarters to their winter quarters. And so he says: let the first horse go by, let the second horse go by, I'll be on the third horse. Pull me off the horse and hold on to me. And even though the fairies will change me into shapes like a lion and a bear and a snake, hold on to me and throw me into the well, the water of the well, and after that I'm back into a man again. So she does so. That again, is a happy ending.

**It's a lovely story!**

It's quite well known. These are both, what they call "Child ballads". A 19th-century Harvard professor called Francis James Child, did the categorization. So these ballads, "Thomas Rymer" is number 37, Child 37, and "Tam Lin" is Child 39. So if you ever wanted to follow them up, or anyone else, all the versions are there.

**Do you have anyone who has influenced you during your studies and research. Some great names or perhaps even local people, your informants who have influenced you?**

I think I've come in rather independently. I think my influences have been later, with scholars' books, where I've thought of something and they've sort of seemed to take it a step further. And I mentioned one or two of them in my talk this morning [July 27th – A.T.]. One is Margalit Finkelberg, and that's an Israeli name and that's her husband's name, but she was actually born in Minsk, so she's from that part of the world. And I think she got sort of a structural thinking perhaps, from that tradition. Not so far from here. Anyway, she and I realized, we'd both been working with the idea of a line of queens, and she's a really fine classical scholar, specializing in Greek, and it was wonderful to have our two minds – it very rarely happens in fact – that we were able to interrelate, and we pulled each other forward into the next stage.

**What are the special features of Scottish folklore in the second half of the 20th century or the beginning of the 21st century? What has changed and what are the processes?**

Well, I suppose we did quite a lot of things from about 1950, when the department's collecting started. It was called the School of Scottish Studies at that time at the University of Edinburgh. It's now jointly Celtic and Scottish Studies. But we feel that things started then partly because of tape recorders that had got a little more manageable, you could carry them about. That was the beginning of quite a gush in recording, people going out in the field. One of the things that happened then was that – I wasn't there at that time, I was still in university myself as a student at St Andrews – but they realized that people that were called the travellers in Scotland, equivalent to gypsies as you might find it in parts of Europe, not perhaps ethnically, but that same lifestyle...

### **Like travellers in Ireland?**

That's right, you know about this, yes, just the same. In fact, the same travellers quite often travelled between Scotland and Ireland; they weren't controlled by one nationality. So they did retain these old traditions, both of song, as people discovered first, and then they realized they were telling the old stories too: fairy-tales, that had probably died out in the settled community for about a hundred years and they were still just telling them around their camp fires. So that was one of the interesting things in the latter half of the 20th century. The other interesting thing perhaps is that, we never quite lost the threads of tradition in Scotland, partly through the travellers, but also the Gaelic tradition was going on strongly in song. So when the feeling of revival came along, there were traditional performers that people could learn from. So there's been a strong feeling in Scotland of a revival that wasn't starting from scratch, it was that people could really hear the traditional singers and bring things into the modern age, with perhaps accompaniment. The traditional song in Scotland, both Scots and Gaelic, was unaccompanied, but in recent times a number of people use a variety of instruments, although it's still possible, and quite enjoyed, for people just to sing ballads. There's quite an interest in that, without any accompaniment. So I suppose, these are two facts from that period – a discovery that there was a wealth there, that had been realized among the travellers, and also that young people, if they wish, can have a sense of connectedness to the past.

### **Do you have many students at the university who take an interest in folklore?**

Well, our first-year course is called Scottish Ethnology, I think it's about eighty people, eighty students. Many of these just take it as a one-year interest thing. Our second year is often about fifteen-twenty. Our Honours are taught two classes together, so again we have about twenty, perhaps. And they do specialist topics, including for instance, place names is one area, or song or music, and some of them will choose some, and some others. I do some teaching still, not very much, but in the custom and belief area I do a bit on cosmology, as I call it, this is the deeper mythological material.

### **Would you say a few words on that as well? Is this part of your research?**

That's right, I did a complete course on it at the Honours level, so students were doing it, about eight at a time, it wasn't everyone's choice. But they were really fascinated if they did choose it and stayed with it. It's highly structural. I mean I talk about archaic kinship patterns that I'm projecting backwards. They had, in a way, to trust, that I was modelling something. So I really, what I was, I suppose, training to do was to free up their thinking. Just relax, and, this is a possibility, this is a model. I think it's a valid one, but you don't need to agree, you just need to understand it. So they were understanding, in a way, my conceptualisation, and I thought I was understanding something from an archaic period. And it's developed every time I've taught it, it's been growing very quickly.

**You as the President of the International Cosmology Society.**

I'm calling it Traditional Cosmology Society. I called it that, because cosmology can have a scientific sense. It can mean the study of the stars and the creation of the universe, in a scientific way. Traditional cosmology is more towards the anthropological side of things. It might be called worldview. I started that when I realized I seemed to have got to a new field of study and that I had better not just think my own thoughts, but create a field into which they could be put and other people could relate.

**How many members are in this society?**

Well, we publish about 250 issues of a journal. It's probably about 150 actual members and some other interested people.

**You have a PhD student here at the congress? Would you mind saying a few words on her?**

Karen Bek-Pedersen, you meant, I think? She's from Denmark, and she's currently, this summer [2005], living in Iceland because she's learning Icelandic, partly so she can read the Old Norse sagas in the original. Karen has lived for a long time in Scotland and her English is outstanding. So she came through our Scottish Ethnology course and she sat in on my Traditional Cosmology twice, so she knows more about it than practically anyone else. She isn't following closely what I'm doing. She's looking at the Old Norse material as one of her possibilities and she has sometimes interpreted in terms that fit with my broader theories.

**You and fieldwork?**

Well, I've had some substantial periods.

**Do you have some vivid memories, that you would like to tell, about your fieldwork?**

Well, I suppose, the thing that was a bit different, was six months in Australia, I was recording Scottish tradition there. But of course, you also do that here with Estonians in Australia. It's the same sort of thing, except, I suppose, that the Scots were probably there from an earlier point and of course they got totally absorbed into the population. They were, in fact, part of the basic population in the English language. So it was quite interesting to do the odd bit about a kangaroo. Otherwise, my main fieldwork that I've had continuously in Scotland is – because I haven't done very much, I've tried to do a little most years – about a little play, that was done by boys as a house-visiting custom at Hallowe'en. It stopped about the 1940s. It was people's memories only, but that was very vivid, both people that had seen it performed and people that had taken part. It's a death and revival; there are two boys fighting, one kills the other and then a doctor comes in and magically heals the one who's died. Well, it was just generally very... they enjoyed remembering it so much, that it was a pleasant sort of thing to be doing.

## **I've seen it as the mummers' play in Ireland.**

That's right, yes, you know about this too. In Scotland it became very much... in fact, we don't really have evidence of anything other than a boys' tradition. In England there was an adult tradition. But as far as we can go back in actual field recording in Scotland, it's been a children's thing.

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## **NOTES BY EMILY LYLE**

Information about The Traditional Cosmology Society that I founded in 1984 and which publishes the journal *Cosmos* is on line at [www.tradcos.co.uk](http://www.tradcos.co.uk) It later seemed to me that there was a need for a forum devoted specifically to the ritual year, and so I proposed the working group on The Ritual Year which was established by SIEF in 2004 and has since held conferences in Malta (2005) and Gothenburg (2006) and has plans for future annual conferences; see [www.ritualyear.com](http://www.ritualyear.com)

## **Some books and articles of interest in connection with this interview are:**

Bek-Pedersen, Karen 2006. More Than Just Functions: Oppositions and Cooperations in the Baldr Myth. *Journal of Indo-European Studies*, 34, pp. 5–26.

Finkelberg, Margalit 2005. *Greeks and Pre-Greeks: Aegean Prehistory and Greek Heroic Tradition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Hayward, Brian 1992. *Galoshins: The Scottish Folk Play*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Lyle, Emily 1990a. *Archaic Cosmos: Polarity, Space and Time*. Edinburgh: Polygon.

Lyle, Emily 1990b. Winning and Losing in Seasonal Contests. *Cosmos* 6, pp. 161–171.

Lyle, Emily 1997. Age Grades, Age Classes and Alternate Succession: A Restatement of the Basis at the Societal Level of Indo-European Symbolic Partition. *Emania*, 16, pp. 63–71.

Lyle, Emily 2002. Vaenulike kaksikute positsioon etteantud teogoonilises struktuuris. Translation into Estonian by Elge and Elsa Leitan of *Archaic Cosmos*, ch. 11 2002. *Mäetagused* 19, pp. 7–24.

Lyle, Emily 2004. Which Triad? A Critique and Development of Dumézil's Trifunctional Theory. *Revue de l'histoire des religions*, 221, pp. 5–21.

Lyle, Emily 2005. The Question of the Ritual Year and the Answers to It. George Mifsud-Chircop (ed.). *Proceedings of the First International Conference of the SIEF Working Group on The Ritual Year*. San Gwann, Malta: Publishers Enterprises Group (PEG), pp. 373–381.

Lyle, Emily 2006. The Importance of the Prehistory of Indo-European Structures for Indo-European Studies. *Journal of Indo-European Studies*, 34, pp. 99–110. (Finkelberg's work is mentioned in relation to the matrilineal model given here.)

Lyle, Emily (forthcoming). 'Galoshins': the Scottish Death-and-Revival Play Performed by Boys at Yule or Hallowe'en. Bregenhøj, Carsten & Gunnell, Terry (eds.). *Traditional Masks and Mummung*.

Lyle, Emily (forthcoming). *Fairies and Folk: Approaches to the Scottish Ballad Tradition*. Trier: WVT Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier.

**INTERVIEW WITH REIMUND KVIDELAND AT THE 14TH CONGRESS OF THE ISFNR, 27 JULY 2005, TARTU**

*Interviewed by Ave Tupits*

**You come from Norway. Can you tell me just a little bit about your background and how you found folklore for yourself?**

Well, when I started studying in Oslo, I met a student from a neighbouring place and he said, this year, folklore was started, the folklore studies were started for the first time. So, instead of going to [study] history as I had planned, I started studying folklore, and then I studied history and Norwegian or Nordic languages and literature. But I always kept my mind on folklore. And I decided to ask my professor, if I could take folklore as a major. He said: yes, you can, because you can work as a university librarian – I was educated as a university librarian in between – and he said: you can go to school as a teacher as well. You'll never have a job in folklore, he said, because there are no such jobs. Then, when I was finishing my master's degree, he came into a room where I was writing my paper and he said: Hurry up! There are two new jobs now, and you will have one of them! And one in Oslo, one in Bergen on the west coast, and he said: You are the youngest, so we'll send you to Bergen. I started there as the only folklorist, building up an institute or a seminar. And that was my fate, so to say. I stayed up in Bergen and my only "break", so to say, was the period of 7–8 years in Turku as the leader of the Nordic Institute of Folklore there. And I soon found or understood that folklore was an international discipline. And I started engaging myself in international organisations. Already in 1965, I think, or 1964 I attended my first ISFNR conference in Athens. That was a very interesting experience. We [met] the old and well-known folklorists internationally... That's how it began.

**That's the same kind of experience that I am having at the moment! What have been your main interests in folklore? I understand you have studied various kinds of stories?**

I could not really just study one subject. Maybe because of my teaching obligations. One term I had to teach folksong, another term riddles and folktales and so on – because I was the only one, the only teacher. And I soon became fascinated by the fact that folklore wasn't something historical, it hadn't died out, as I had learned during my studies. So very soon in the middle of the 1960s I started a rather big project on children's folklore, especially children's storytelling – some ten thousand stories and jokes from schoolchildren. Because that was also, in my opinion, a very good topic to use in teaching, and teaching the students that folklore was something living: it was a part of our culture, our daily culture. So for some years I concentrated on children's folklore. But I've also been involved in folksong studies. And one important ... how should I say, an important part of my understanding or the way I understood folksongs was when I read Ina-Maria Greverus' *Der territoriale Mensch*. And she had an anthropological-literary ap-



*Photo 1. The summer of 2005, ISFNR congress. Reimund Kvideland (right) projected the image of a social and happy researcher. On the picture with his colleague Wolfgang Mieder from Vermont University. Photo by Alar Madisson.*

proach to folksong. Later on I came to the conclusion, maybe under the influence of Ernst Klausen in Neuss, Germany, that singing is one of the important human activities. And that we should try to see ... to analyze not only song texts but the singing itself as a cultural process. And my main interest has been folk narratives, folk tales. And my first research was on the archive material on folktale tellers. Of course, that's one way of seeing or studying the social context, the social function of folk narratives, using archive material. I think we can do field-work in the archives.

### **How is that?**

Well, trying to read the archive material in a more anthropological way, not only as texts. And we can, using such a method, we can see the functions of folklore. But on the other hand, we should go and study the actual telling. And I think that storytelling is a very important part of our contemporary society, our culture. Maybe we have never told so much in the earlier period of our history as we do now. When I was a student, we didn't see that, we didn't know that. We were blind in some way, thinking of the fairy-tales and of the supranormal legends. But when you observe people in their daily life today, they always tell something. For that reason I also became fascinated with jokes. Everyone can tell a joke, I think, some can tell hundreds of jokes. It's nearly impossible to document the extent of the joke tradition today, because it's so wide and so extensive. And you find it in print and in oral communication and now in the Internet as well.



**What would you say about the position of folklore or folkloristic research either in Norway or in the world today? Would you dare to predict our future?**

I would say it's... I dare to say that folklore will never die out, but it will change. Some genres will die, other, new genres will develop. So I'm very optimistic when it comes to the future of folklore itself. Whether folkloristics, the study of folklore has a future, is more doubtful. It's difficult to say why, but if we look back historically, in the 19th-century folklore studies, folklore was a national force, it was a political force. Folklore was a tool in building up national identities in many countries – in Norway, Finland, Estonia, just to mention a few; in Germany for instance, while Germany was divided in so many states. But in other countries like France and England, it did not have that function, it wasn't that necessary, because they were strong nation states. Today, at least in Norway, politicians are not interested in folklore studies any longer. So I think, there I'm not that optimistic. The trend seems to be that folklore is turned or understood more as cultural studies. I have a feeling that the students today don't get the real knowledge of the folklore genres, of folklore in general. And if you don't have that knowledge, it's difficult to study folklore in my opinion. But of course it's difficult to predict what will happen in the future.

**Maybe you could say a few words about the congress here in Tartu? Some of the emotions you have now and maybe a few words about your expectations?**

To me these congresses have always been a huge inspiration for further work, further studies. Here we witness such a wide range of themes and subjects for the papers. I have experienced lots of new ideas, new themes, new folklore material. I think that it is very important, a conference like this is very important event to all of us here, because we get all these new ideas. It's not only the papers we listen to, but it's the informal discussions in-between the papers and in the evenings, it's just as important as the papers. So far I've..., what I can see of the programme as well, the conference is very well organized.

**You have been the President of the ISFNR yourself. What are your memories of that time?**

That was a very, very nice period. I learned a lot. I had the privilege in that way to learn to know very many folklorists from all over the world. It gave me the possibility to travel around and meet the scholars that I wouldn't have met without being involved in the ISFNR. I think, especially today we need a forum like the ISFNR, partly because, as Galit Hasan-Rokem said on the first evening, we see so many methodological and theoretical possibilities today, there's no school that dominates. Therefore it's so important that we meet and discuss all these possibilities, that we are open to new approaches. I think that's maybe one of the most important functions of a conference like this. That it gives us the opportunity to learn or get to know the new approaches or at least the modernized form of older approaches.

**Is there anything else you would like to add to conclude our interview?**

Well, what should I say ... I hope that it will be a help to Estonian folklore research in the future. That this will be some kind of a help to go on with the folklore studies in Estonia. Not that I think it's necessary, but even so I hope that you will get new ideas, that you maybe get some new ideas to work on in the future. Because you have great opportunities here in Estonia, you have a marvellous archive and you can still do fieldwork, you are experts on the fieldwork and archive research as well. So in that respect I'm very optimistic.

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**REIMUND KVIDELAND BELIEVED THAT FOLKLORE WOULD NEVER DIE**

**On June 6, 2006 Norwegian folklorist Reimund Kvideland died at the age of 71**

Kvideland (1935–2006) studied Nordic languages and literature, history, literary studies and folk literature at the universities of Oslo, Frankfurt am Mein, and Copenhagen, and started his career in folkloristics as the lecturer of the newly established Chair of Folklore Studies at the Bergen University in 1966, where he soon became a pioneer in the field. He achieved in demonstrating the urgent need for the academic discipline both in terms of contemporary processes as well as the study of the discipline. Kvideland displayed his competence as a leading scholar and an efficient administrator. He was also the first head of the working group of Nordic Ethnologists and Folklorists (NEFA – *Nordisk Etnologisk Folkloristisk Arbejdsgruppe*), a work group established in 1963, joining students and young scholars in the field. In 1971 he established *Tradisjon*, the journal of folklore studies, which shortly became the leading publication of folklorists in Scandinavia, and was the journal's editor in chief for 25 years. During 1987–1990 he acted as President of the International Society for Ethnology and Folklore (SIEF – *Société Internationale d'Ethnologie et de Folklore*) and in 1989–1995 as the president of the International Society for Folk Narrative Research. In the years 1991–1997 he held the post of the head of the Nordic Institute of Folklore (NIF) in Turku, Finland.

In 1998, Kvideland became the professor at the University of Bergen, Norway. Over a number of years he was a contributor to *Internationale Volkskundliche Bibliographie* and *Nordische Bibliographie für Ethnologie und Folkloristik*, and contributed articles to many academic publications in Europe and Asia.

The thematic spectre of Reimund Kvideland's scholarly interests and publications was broad. He explored both narratives and the singing tradition. In the field of ethnomusicology he became eminent researcher of emigrant songs and ballads of railway workers. As a narratologist he studied fairy tales, legends and memorates, analysing their functional aspects and genre peculiarities and observing the issues of repertoire and distribution. Kvideland found time to study the history of folkloristics, edit folk tale anthologies and reference books, and contribute to *Enzyklopädie des Märchens*.