

## NEWS IN BRIEF

### THE INNER AND THE OUTER IN THE RITUAL YEAR: TRADITIONS AND TODAY

The Ritual Year Conference 6, titled “The Inner and the Outer”, took place in Tallinn from June 4 to 7, 2010, convening the SIEF Ritual Year Working Group, formed in 2004 at the International Society for Ethnology and Folklore (SIEF).

The conference was prepared by the Estonian Literary Museum and the Estonian Institute of Folklore, under the guidance of Mare Kõiva, the chairperson of the organising committee. The theme of the conference allowed for an observation of the ritual year, proceeding from spatial indicators and oppositions (house–street, participant–observer, ours–other), instilling to rethink, conceptualise the above-mentioned and other oppositions in rituals. In addition, the conference also dwelled upon neo-paganism, neologisms and the transformation of customs and rituals in current times.

27 presentations, in total, on the subject matter of the traditional and archaic, were delivered during the conference, by researchers from Bulgaria, Hungary, Norway, Russia, Finland, Czech Republic, Poland, United Kingdom, Latvia, Lithuania and the USA.

The range of topics and methods included traditional attitudes, like in the Elizabeth Warner (United Kingdom) who talked about the beliefs connected with the beings in homesteads and the other ones inhabiting the outer reaches, focusing on the imagination of inner and outer space among the family members of the deceased person, and his or her soul leaving the house. The narratives analysed by the presenter showed that the presence of the soul is associated with certain places and items in the house.

The researchers developed also new directions, like Emilia Karjula (Finland) observed the rituals of a group with non-traditional orientation, Kinga Povedák (Hungary) talked about the development of religious music in contemporary Hungary and the use thereof in the church calendar.

Some of the presentations analysed the functioning of calendrical and other rituals in educational establishments: Taive Särg (Estonia) talked about the celebration of folk feasts in Estonian kindergartens; Carola Ekrem (Finland) about the dance of the “Elders”, students of upper secondary school, and about the semantics of school rituals. Bożena Gierek (Poland) focused on feast narratives among university students, taking a closer look at Christmas celebrations.

The first session of the conference was opened by Emily Lyle (Scotland) who dwelled upon the “being space” and “play space” in the Scottish winter-time “Galoshins” custom. E. Lyle drew attention to the main actors of the performance, the symbolic associated with the boys and the relevant semantics. Differently from other calendar feasts, galoshins involves house-visiting and also an active use of the space inside the house. The notion of threshold, as the distinct boundary between the inner and outer space, was first mentioned in this presentation and was also repeatedly discussed by the speakers who followed afterwards. Emily Lyle differentiated between the rituals associated with the crossing of the threshold (moving inside and outside) – one-directional

(e.g. funeral customs) and two-directional which is also intrinsic of galoshins. The boys acting the performance have clear-cut ritual obligations (roles), both when entering the house and when leaving from there (giving gifts).

Irina Sedakova's (Russia) delivery *The Inner Meets the Outer: The Ritual of First Footing in the Wider European Perspective* provided a detailed description of two main types of celebrating the New Year. All European peoples know the belief associated with the first visitor on the New Year day and the relevant impact on the entire year. The other ritual is the one associated with the reception of the first (random or invited) guest, known in the Carpathian region of the Balkans as *полазник*, with surprisingly similar parallels in the complex of rituals "The First Foot", well-known in Scotland and Northern England. During the discussion inspired by the presentation, a number of participants stepped up as informants. It turned out that the "first" rituals are still present in many countries and develop according to the current circumstances. In Estonia, for example, there is a belief that if the first person who calls on the mobile phone at the beginning of the New Year is a boy, the coming year is going to be a happy one. Thus, the traditional belief that a male (boy) would bring luck in the house is transmitted into new situations.

In her presentation, *Pagan Ritual Practices and Magic for Protection from Illnesses in Bulgarian Orthodox Folk Ritual Calendar*, Katya Mihaylova (Bulgaria) analysed the ritual practices during the days of honouring Orthodox saints (St. Barbara, St. Harlampi and St. Catherine), calling for the protection and leniency, identical with the healing rituals in folk religion whereby diseases assume an anthropomorphic shape. These rituals are based on the clear distinction between the *outer* (illness, epidemic) and *inner* (house, yard), where the *outer* should in no case enter, but once it does, it has to be expelled.

Nancy McEntire (USA), in her presentation, *St. Brigid's Day in Ireland: Crossing the Threshold*, took a closer look at the threshold as such in the folk beliefs surrounding the activities on St. Brigid's Day, opposing these to contemporary time-wise and spatial boundaries *own-other, inner-outer, new-old, etc.*

Tatiana Minniyakhmetova's (Russia–Austria) presentation, *On Structuring of Spaces and Boundaries*, touched upon the boundaries of "owned" and "foreign or strange" space in Udmurt folk tradition, characterising everyday and feast-time rituals associated with crossing the boundary of *own* and *other* by entering the gate, stepping into the house, etc.

Evy Johanne Håland (Norway) provided an insight into the Markopoulo village on the island of Kephallonia where people believe snakes to have a healing power during an annual festival – the serpents come to the sacral place at the beginning of August and disappear by the Dormition festival when a lot of pilgrims gather in the vicinity to be healed by touching the snakes. Relying on her fieldwork, the researcher juxtaposed the Greek rituals with similar celebrations in Italy (Cocullo village in Abruzzi). The cult of serpents and the belief in their healing power was observed by the presenter from the ancient Greco-Roman mythological context.

Kinga Gaspar (Hungary) examined death and funeral ceremonies – not only from the aspect of mourning but also from the process of remembering the deceased connecting these with the places inside the house.

The presentation by Arkūnas Vaicekauskas (Lithuania), *Semantic Field of the “Outer” in Lithuanian Masking Custom*, probed the image of “the others” in Shrovetide carnivals in Žemaitija (Samogitia), relying on his fieldwork experience.

Within the series of papers on neo-paganism, Leon van Gulik, a specialist in psychology, referred to the fact how neo-pagan groups borrow, openly and eclectically, rituals from other religious trends. Whereas in other religious groups the religion prevails over the ritual, but in the case of the neo-pagans, it is the ritual that is predominant. Therefore, it necessary for the leaders and the participants in the ritual to be creative. On frequent occasions, neo-pagans use archaic methods and relevant adaptations in designing their rituals.

Kamila Velkoborská (Czech Republic), in her presentation *Neo-Pagan Winter Solstice: Three Examples*, relied on her personal experience and compared the eclectic rites of a druidic group, an ethnic pagan ritual grouping, and the practitioners of magic. All these three groupings are popular in the Czech Republic, whereas the third group unites healers and those in awe of magic.

Molly Carter (United Kingdom) talked about the remembering of the dead in San Francisco and in Salem, a location renowned for witch-trials. These rituals are actively participated in by neo-pagans who attempt to re-enact archaic rites and create new, reflecting, by way of these rituals, their attitude towards death as transformation

Several presenters talked about the transformation of old customs at the present time. István Povedák characterised the process of filling the mental vacuum, relying on calendar-based pilgrimages in modern society. The syncretism of religious and other similar views (this tendency is also observable in Hungarian Catholicism), together with national and commercial endeavours, affects the emergence of new sacred places and the relevant development in Hungary. His presentation focused on the concept of alternative science – pseudo-scientific historical, cultural and linguistic searches attempting to perpetuate the connection of the Hungarian people and culture with Sumerian, Etruscan and other cultures. Similar “alternative” tendencies can also be noticed in Russia (cf. A. Zalisnyak’s articles on amateur etymology).

Mare Kõiva talked about women’s holidays and porridge rites and showed how, in the course of revival, traditional rituals merge into other customs according to the present-day needs. The almost forgotten tradition of making porridge is currently being revived in Estonia, inspired by esoteric healers and present-day shamans, and acquiring new ritual nuances.

A similar process was also described by Helena Ruotsala (Finland): the Orthodox Karelians’ custom of ritual tapping (*virpominen*) on Palm Sunday is mixed with the ritual of scaring off witches during Easter time. As a result, disguised children walk from house to house, and their appearance is in accordance with the modern urban “witch-parties”. The presenter noted that this tradition has created a huge debate in the media and on the Internet.

Laurent Sébastien Fournier (France) analysed the current tendency to use vegetal and animal figures in contemporary local festivals. In his opinion, this can be associated with commercialisation and the desire to develop tourism, borrowing elements from other cultures and rendering significance to decorative components.

Aida Rancane (Latvia) contemplated on how the ritual format of celebrating the turn of the year has become more important. She is of the opinion that the secularisation

of society, withdrawal from traditional faith and the emergence of person-centred religiousness, causes people to turn to the space, archaic paradigms, founded on respect towards nature and the change of seasons. The role of the mass media should not be underestimated in the revival and inventing of traditions.

Ekaterina Anastasova's (Bulgaria) presentation was on the modern cult of saints and the relevant reflections in the church calendar, using the example of the Ukrainians and Bulgarians living in Odessa, and their current feasts for honouring St. Cyril and St. Methodius; she also compared secular and ecclesiastical feasts associated with these saints within the diaspora and in the metropolis.

Aado Lintrop and Janika Oras (Estonia) discussed inner outerness on the example of an ethnologist-researcher participating in a wedding ceremony. The authors of the presentation came into contact with the notions of *other* and *own* while filming a Seto wedding in South-Estonia, and described the emergence of a new role in the tradition – that of a photographer or operator. This person has definite functions as a professional, and with regard to his/her tasks, is involved in the teams of both the bride and the bridegroom (irrespective of the fact that men are not allowed to be present at certain particularly female wedding rites). The film about the three days long wedding of the Seto people was shown at the end of the day, after the presentations.



*Conference participants on an excursion to historical and neo-pagan places in Northern Estonia, Rebala burial site. Photo by Andres Kuperjanov 2010.*

A number of presenters showed videos and abundant illustrative material, incl. Mare Kõiva and Andres Kuperjanov in their deliverance on the masquerade festival in Pernik, Bulgaria, and David Stanely (USA) in his presentation on the customs of shepherds in the Trans-Carpathian region.

The members of the SIEF Ritual Year working group discussed further cooperation, joint publications and the distribution of subject matters. Among a number of research directions, great interest has been shown in the structuring of folk calendar in post-socialist countries – an international interdisciplinary project will be devised for researching these processes.

Conference programme and abstracts are available at <http://www.folklore.ee/ri/fo/konve/ritualyear6/abstracts.pdf>.

Irina Sedakova

## **22ND INTERNATIONAL HUMOR CONFERENCE IN HONG KONG**

At the time when Estonian people celebrated Midsummer night, more than 200 researchers from all over the world convened for the 22nd annual conference of the International Society for Humor Studies (ISHS) in Hong Kong, China, from June 24 to 27. The conference was organised by the Department of Applied Social Studies of the City University of Hong Kong. The four-day event provided an opportunity to listen to presentations in five concurrent sessions, in addition to several symposia with a more narrow insight into the subject matter.

Inter-disciplinary approach and new developments in humour studies were the key words of the conference, with the main focus on 1) the role of humour in psychological well-being, stress management, self-development and social interaction; 2) the role of humour in culture, education, creativity and management training; 3) the use of humour in business, media communication and advertising, and 4) humour in psychotherapy and psychological counselling. Proceeding from these foci, the subject matters of the concurrent sessions were specified as follows: culture, psychology, stand up comedy, society, linguistics, Chinese humour, with an emphasis also on the psychological, linguistic and socio-cultural aspects of humour.

The keynote address was delivered by Elliot Oring, the current President of the ISHS, his theoretical and extremely elegant speech was titled *Shaken, Not Stirred: Blending and Humor*. This title, inspired by the favourite drink of the secret agent James Bond, the character created by the British writer Ian Fleming, was ideally appropriate for the presentation focusing on the implementation of the contemporary metaphor theories in current humour research studies in the broader sense. Bearing in mind the fact that the conference took place in China, the peculiarities of Oriental humour were presented on a number of occasions during the four days of plenary and concurrent sessions. The keynote speaker of the second day, Xiaodong Yue, professor at the organising university and also the governor of the conference, gave a good overview about the past, present and future of Chinese humour therapy, elaborating on the four basic forms of this: joke therapy, clown performance therapy, ridiculing therapy and happy event therapy. The third day of the conference started with the plenary speech of Jocelyn Chey, professor at Sydney University, on *youmo*, the Chinese counterpart of the concept of *humour*, introduced by Lin Yutang in 1933.