

NEWS IN BRIEF

THE 10TH COLLOQUIUM ON PROVERBS

On November 6–13, 2016, the 10th Interdisciplinary Colloquium on Proverbs (ICP16) was celebrated as the colloquium jubilee in Tavira, Portugal. Ten years ago nobody would have guessed that this could be possible. However, the colloquium has proved the need for this kind of common conference that brings together paremiologists, paremiographers, and other people.

This 10th colloquium took place under the heading “In honorem Arvo Krikmann”. We are advantaged to have had him with us in these colloquiums. His papers were always worth listening and many of his articles published in the proceedings during these past ten years were published for the first time in English. He also introduced some issues that had not yet been known to other paremiologists before. So it was self-evident for the participants of the colloquium and members of the association behind it that it was time to honour him and his role in the colloquiums during the first ten years. Nobody could have guessed it was also the last possibility to do so, as Arvo Krikmann passed away on February 27, 2017.

During this decade not only the colloquium has changed and established its position among conferences. Something has also happened to the participants. Today many of the participants who come to Tavira year after year have become friends. I prefer to call them friends instead of family as a Finnish proverb says *Ystävät voi valita, sukulaisiaan ei* (‘One can choose one’s friends but not relatives’). We have learnt to follow the northern European concept of time during the conference and we have learnt to eat often, much, and late in the evenings in the southern European way. We have also learnt to hold discussions with each other; most often the subjects are related to proverbs and paremiology. It is not an exaggeration to talk about “our Tavira community memories” as Outi Lauhakangas and Rui J.B. Soares write in the introduction to the booklet of abstracts. We have even learnt to make lists in alphabetical order using first names! However, the most important impact on the lives of the participants is the professional one: for each of us the papers presented at the colloquiums have given new perspectives to proverbs, possibilities to exchange ideas and ask questions, possibilities to evolve into a more widely recognised paremiologist by sharing the results of the research we have carried out.

Wolfgang Mieder from the University of Vermont (USA) started the scientific programme with proverbs from Cervantes’ *Don Quixote*, a subject that every now and then is present at colloquiums. Next morning the first speaker was Mieder’s former student Elene Carter from the Institute of International Relations (Russia). She gave a paper discussing the use of English proverbs in foreign-language pedagogical practices. Databases were the subject in José Enrique Gargallo Gil’s (Spain) presentation. This year many of the first-in-the-morning presentations given by invited lecturers focused on literature, pedagogy, and databases. Altogether we heard about 60 presentations with many various starting points.



Visiting the fortress of Sagres which, according to our guide, is situated in the centre of the world. Photograph by Erkki Herranen.

Every year the organisers of the colloquium offer the participants a possibility to go on excursions, exhibitions, and concerts. For this we are grateful to the municipality of Tavira and other municipalities in Algarve region, the people of Tavira, entrepreneurs in Tavira and Algarve, different institutions, etc. Without their support we would not be able to immerse ourselves in our papers and conversations on proverbs and research thereof.

Liisa Granbom-Herranen

ORAL AND WRITTEN IN CULTURE: CONNECTIONS AND COLLISIONS

On December 12 and 13, 2016, the annual conference of the Centre of Excellence in Estonian Studies (CEES) and the 60th Kreutzwald Days conference were held at the Estonian Literary Museum. The event focused on the relationship between oral and written information in the Baltic cultures both historically and in the present time, when literary culture seems to be completely dominant. This was the third CEES gen-

eral conference, organised by the working group of literary culture and literary studies of the Centre of Excellence, and aimed at instigating dialogue between viewpoints of different disciplines, proceeding from the ideas formulated by the working group. In the historical field, the deep gap that had for long existed between oral and written language use due to the colonisation of the Baltic countries needed explaining. Interest centred, for instance, on the attempts of the creators of Estonian and Latvian literary languages to describe local languages on the basis of foreign language models, and the emergence of an 'interlanguage', which influenced both the oral and written language use; multilingualism and the circulation of language elements from oral to written form and vice versa; the increasing prestige of culture in the evolution and persistence of literary language; oral and written culture and their intermediate forms; written folklore genres and those in oral form related to the written world; the transitional field between the oral and written worlds – folk literacy; oral forms in the heyday of literary culture; elements of oral speech as an integral system; studying of oral forms in writing; methods of oral language increasingly used in fiction from the beginning of the 20th century. Research topics and spheres of activities were introduced in Estonian, English, German, and Russian by speakers from the universities of Latvia, Bulgaria, Iceland, Estonia, and Germany.

The following is a cursory look into the diversity of presentations and topics, with many of them unmentioned, as due to parallel sections it was possible to listen to only a part of them.

The first speaker was Andris Levans, historian from the University of Latvia, who in his presentation "Das Wort ist mein Gesicht. Überlegungen zum Verhältnis von Mündlichkeit, Schriftlichkeit und Gedächtnis im Mittelalterlichen Livland" focused on the relationship between oral and written texts in medieval Livonia, where literacy was an elitist skill, as most people (including the nobility) were illiterate. In Livonia oral discourse persisted as the primary form of communication until the end of the 15th century, as there were only few centres that would have fostered the rapid spread of textual culture. The topic of medieval Livonia was continued by Gustavs Strenga, who introduced the guild account books of mainly Latvian-origin artisans.

The intertwining and collision of the oral and written as well as collective and personal memory is topical also in today's cultural studies – this became evident in the second presentation by Terry Gunnell, professor of folkloristics from the University of Iceland, who focused on legends and sagas, beliefs and holidays related to the cultural history of Iceland, folkloric drama and performance art. His scholarly field is extensive: Scandinavian, Icelandic, and Celtic traditional cultures, traditional games and holidays, and, besides folkloristic topics also literature: medieval drama, Shakespeare, Ibsen, Strindberg, theatre of the absurd, performance art, etc. All these were merged in his presentation titled "Performance and Audience, Time and Space, Sound and Vision: The Uses of the Performance Studies Approach for the Study of Folklore Past and Present". Gunnell explained how much of the oral text gets lost when 'translated' into written form – the elements perceived with different senses and therefore also the human experience of the live presentation and participation in it. He also pointed out that, similar to people, objects also present themselves and tell stories.

Anneli Saro from the University of Tartu spoke about the relationship between an experienced event and the read text in modern theatrical art or "the emancipation of

theatre from fiction”. Does post-dramatic theatre mark the final emancipation of theatre from fiction or is it inevitable to observe classical rules of dramaturgy at least in the drama theatre? For the time being the question remained unanswered; the answer depends on what comes after post-dramatic theatre. Eduard Parhomenko (University of Tartu), who discussed the rhetoric of philosophy in Tõnu Luik’s lectures, added an interesting shade into the comparison of reading and listening and watching the speaker: at lectures you have to listen to yourself, let yourself be carried away by thinking. Ulrike Plath discussed a genre in the transitional space between oral and written – sermons – on the example of those given by Karl Gottlob Sonntag, the general-superintendent of Livonia at the beginning of the 19th century. Although these sermons were meant for oral presentation, Sonntag also had them printed, this way making them available for research.

Several of the presentations were dedicated to the relationship between the oral and the written. Aivar Põldvee discussed the formation of literary language in connection to school teaching and the spread of reading skills in the 17th century. While the earliest variant of the literary language emerged on the theoretical example of a foreign language, at the end of the century attention focused more on the speaker of the language. Helle Metslang and Külli Habicht defined the Estonian literary language of the 17th–18th centuries as an interlanguage developed on the basis of Low, High, or Baltic German, the more marked features of which started to recede only in the 19th century. The presentation focused mainly on the materials of the 19th-century Estonian-origin literary language developers, including those of Fr.R. Kreutzwald. Reet Bender’s presentation gave an overview of the five stages in the development of Baltic German oral language during 150 years: Low German with elements of High German; Low German; a mixed version of Low and High German with predominant Low German elements; Low-High German with predominant High German elements, and finally the so-called Baltic German – High German with Low German relics. Liina Lindström’s presentation on dialecticism was initiated by the question whether some dialectal phenomena are just special features used in oral speech or certain dialectal features of a region that have not made their way to the literary language.

The folkloristic point of view was represented by Tiiu Jaago, who discussed the process of oral tradition becoming part of literary culture as well as changes in the folkloristic viewpoint in describing this process. Kärri Toomeos-Orglaan spoke about Seto narrative tradition. On the example of Brothers Grimm’s legends and fairytales, Liina Lukas showed how written text moves to oral lore and vice versa. The Grimms’ fairytales, which started to be translated into Estonian in the mid-19th century, quickly found their way into folklore. The influence of the Grimms’ legends (*Deutsche Sagen*, 1816–1818), however, was more indirect, exerting an impact rather on the formal means of story-telling (genre, way of telling).

In addition to history topics, the conference also discussed several phenomena of modern culture, which remain on the borderline between oral and written: interview (Triinu Ojamaa), diary (Leena Kurvet-Käosaar), dream diary (Mare Kõiva), life story (Tiina Ann Kirss), *online* commentaries (Ell Vahtramäe). Hille Pajupuu and Rene Altrov spoke about how it is possible to record and scientifically describe such an oral phenomenon as human voice.

This topic arouses interest also in the international arena; this was proved by Linda Kaljundi, who introduced a related project of the Finnish Literature Society, “Letters and Songs”, which is aimed at crossing the borders of modern nations and scholarly traditions, focusing on the materials on the crossroads of different social networks, expressive registers, belief systems, and smaller traditions. The research objects are connections between high and low cultures, ecclesiastical and secular, oral and written. The project is divided into four smaller research topics: social and religious correspondence; hymnals, manuscripts, and networks as linkages between socio-cultural strata; changes in local singing cultures; poetic registers in the junction of oral and written cultures. The idea of the project is to reassess the earlier Finnish poetics as well as social and cultural history.

Peeter Tinitis, Oleg Sobchuk and Artjom Shelaya introduced the cultural evolution seminar, which analyses cultural processes, digital humanities, cognitive research, and their related fields. Liina Lukas and Leena Kurvet-Käosaar introduced the special issue of *Methis: Studia Humaniora Estonica* (17/18), which is dedicated to comparative literature. Kanni Labi, language editor of *Methis*, spoke about the yearbook of the Estonian Literary Museum. Heinike Heinsoo opened an exhibition “Researchers of the Finnic Languages and Cultures I: Enn Ernits”.

Hegely Klaus

SOME THOUGHTS EVOKED BY REET HIEMÄE’S DOCTORAL DISSERTATION

On January 4, 2017, Reet Hiemäe defended her doctoral dissertation titled “Folklore as a tool of psychological self-defence: About the pragmatics of belief traditions” at the University of Tartu. The dissertation discussing Estonian folk belief is comprised of a detailed introduction and four articles, the first of which was published already in 2004, and the latest is yet to be published.

Hiemäe boldly integrates tools of different disciplines with folkloristics: various trends in psychology, narrative studies, narrative medicine, human geography, and communication studies. Interdisciplinary attempts may result in a dead end situation in case the approaches used in them cannot be connected due to their too different geneses, objectives, or theoretical baggage. Even one humanitarian discipline has no general matrix for all possible approaches and methods to be systematically arranged, not to mention a common matrix for the humanities and social sciences, in which everything could be combined with everything. It is an arduous process to search for and find compatible approaches, but if it is successful, it may result in the discovery of phenomena and regularities not noticed before, creating through this new and interesting information about the world.

In her articles Hiemäe merges different disciplines, above all, psychology, with folkloristics. The main emphasis of the dissertation is on folkloristics – a field of humanities studying culture and its expressions. Psychology – the basic principle of which is that the psyche is similar for the whole humankind – considers culture (cultural differences)

as second-rate. (Although the fields of psychology also involve cultural psychology, its importance is marginal and its basic principles contradict other trends in psychology.) So Hiimäe has to cope with a difficult task: how to integrate the approaches, one of which deals with a human being whose psyche is seen as universal, and the other with culture different across different regions and ethnoses.

In order to merge different disciplines, Hiimäe has taken into use the terms “mental self-defence” and “belief-based defence mechanisms”. She admits that a psychologist’s interest in these terms is somewhat different than that of a folklorist and a researcher of religion: “in psychology, when describing defence mechanisms, one proceeds from their general validity, yet in the case of belief-based defence mechanisms the main characteristic is rather the fact that they can be inherent in a smaller or bigger group and more or less changing in time by their forms of appearance” (Introduction, p. 42). The use of the term “defence strategy” or “defence mechanism” in a treatment with folkloristic emphasis is novel and necessary for making the dissertation a coherent whole, although my personal opinion is that instead of “defence” the author could have used “management”, which can occasionally also be encountered in the dissertation. Anyway, it is positive that with the help of these concepts Hiimäe is able to point out cross-time parallels in disease lore, which result from the universal traits of the human soul and behaviour. As usually researchers of legend fail to pay attention to the universals resulting from human psyche, but rather focus on cultural and historic features (Metsvahi 2013: 66), Hiimäe’s approach is relevant and eye-opening.

Yet, we should ask if such an approach to the subject matter does not diminish the depth of analysis. In order for the worldview basis of the approach not to diverge from that dominant among psychologists, Hiimäe cannot apply the most innovative approaches in the humanities and social sciences, but has to resort to the more traditional ones. So she postulates, as the starting point of her work, the objective world outside the experiencer’s consciousness, which is common for everyone. I consider the clear split between the objective and subjective worlds as a factor inhibiting in-depth analysis. This approach reveals in several places that one thing (the objective one) is real life, and the other (the subjective one) is the belief world. These two as if do not originally and intrinsically belong together but rather meet at certain points and in certain ways. This is similar to Lauri Honko’s approach in the introduction to his classical work *Geisterglaube in Ingermanland* (1962); he has also made an attempt to merge psychology (more exactly, social and perceptual psychology) with folkloristics and religious studies. (As a negative point, it could be mentioned here that Hiimäe, when presenting ideas similar to Honko’s, in most cases fails to refer to his works.) So Hiimäe’s approach ensues from the worldview similar to that of a medical worker or an acting psychologist rather than emerges from contemplating ontological questions or the newest theories of religious studies.

From this starting point, Hiimäe’s ambitions to improve the world become more understandable. It is a correct and significant observation that human fears are channelled into narratives; yet, it remains unsolved how, knowing these channelling processes, it is possible to predict people’s and groups’ future behaviour and decrease social stress (see Introduction, p. 9; Article 1, p. 79). The possibility to predict the future is also eliminated by Hiimäe’s own observation that individual’s belief images are not stable and change when new circumstances and experiences occur (see Introduction,



*Reet Hiimäe at autumn doctoral school “Dialogues with Subcultures” at Jäneda in 2016.
Photograph by Astrid Tuisk.*

pp. 34, 31, 14; Article 4), whereas often the individual fails to formulate all the religious concepts in words (see pp. 42–43). Instead of thinking about immediate usefulness (see Pärn 2014: 30), scholars in the humanities should focus their attention on the analysis of verbal expressions in the multi-layered relationship between the individual and the environment (see Kivari 2016: 70).

I certainly cannot claim that Hiimäe has failed to do the latter in her dissertation. On the contrary, most of her work is imbued with it, and her valiance in attempting and combining different approaches is remarkable. However, the author deserves to be reproached for adapting the theory in case it is incompatible with her subject matter, sometimes also exaggerating with it. So, for example, the communication theory initially taken as the basis for analysis in the third article, has been distorted into a theory of “nonverbal event”, and in places it is difficult for the reader to understand whether this theory is applied in the story world or world of narration. Excessive adaptation of the subject matter could be mentioned in connection with the second article, in which problems in the analytical part result from the fact that there is a too wide temporal distance between the spread of the plague and the collection of plague legends, so that in the case of these narratives one could hardly speak about mental danger maps in the literal meaning (see Article 2, p. 32ff.).

Hiimäe is not interested in how a certain belief image emerged; nor does she make attempts to reduce to elements the relations between a human being, his or her psyche, narratives, and the environment. In her research she postulates a ready-made world with action mechanisms explained by scholars, which from the very beginning involves

something negative that one needs to be protected from. Where did this negative come from and how? Have belief images and narratives or even warning legends played a certain role in the formation of fears? Do fears constitute, independently of culture, an intrinsic part of each society and individual? These are the questions that remain unanswered in Hiimäe's work. From her point of view, narratives do not create worlds or define who we are and what we feel and experience, but rather merely influence our emotions and us as we are.

In order not to deviate too much from the content of Hiimäe's thesis, I would like to highlight the strong points of her research. One of them is definitely the usage of relevant and diverse source material. It can be clearly seen that Hiimäe has good knowledge of both the old archival materials and today's ordinary and social media texts. She herself has also created new sources, conducting face-to-face interviews and using questionnaires. The latter has also yielded surprisingly good results, as due to the sensitivity of the topic, Hiimäe has preserved the respondents' anonymity. The fourth article reveals that in the cases when the topic is clearly related to the respondent's experience, which so far has not been sufficiently formulated, the respondent may open up even in such an impersonal manner, writing down long and fascinating answers.

In summary, I would like to say that Hiimäe has made some brave combining attempts and written a thought-provoking dissertation. She has convincingly explained how belief-based behaviour and belief narratives help people manage in the world. In an exciting way the research also highlights the continuity of old and new folk stories and past and present belief-based behaviour. A parallel approach to the past and present material has enabled the author to make interesting juxtapositions and place today's phenomena in a wider context. It is most welcome that the author has not contradistinguished Christianity with folk belief, and that she has highlighted the common features of belief-based and non-belief-based behaviour. Although the expression 'defence mechanisms' made me think in different directions, several of which remain outside the borders of Hiimäe's dissertation, it is actually a resourceful term which in this research successfully connects the domains of psychology and folkloristics.

Merili Metsvahi

References

- Honko, Lauri 1962. *Geisterglaube in Ingermanland*. I. FF Communications 185. Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia.
- Kivari, Kristel 2016. *Dowsing as a Link between Natural and Supernatural: Folkloristic Reflections on Earth Radiation and Dowsing Practice*. Dissertationes Folkloristicae Universitatis Tartuensis 24. Tartu: Tartu Ülikooli Kirjastus. Available at <http://hdl.handle.net/10062/51501>, last accessed on May 17, 2017.
- Metsvahi, Merili 2013. The Woman as Wolf (AT 409): Some Interpretations of a Very Estonian Folk Tale. *Journal of Ethnology and Folkloristics*, Vol. 7, No. 2, pp. 65–92. Available at http://jef.ee/index.php/journal/article/view/153/pdf_100, last accessed on May 17, 2017.
- Pärn, Katre 2014. Pastöriseeritud semiootika ehk vajaliku teaduse viisidest. [Pasteurised Semiotics or Ways of Indispensable Science.] *Müürileht*, No. 32, pp. 30–31. Available at <http://www.muurileht.ee/pastoriseeritud-semiootika-ehk-vajaliku-teaduse-viisidest/>, last accessed on May 17, 2017.