

BOOK REVIEW

NORDIC EVERYDAY POPULAR STORYTELLING

Blanka Henriksson & Susanne Nylund Skog (eds.)
Vardagens triviala allvar och berättandets kraft: En festskrift till professor Lena Marander-Eklund. Åbo: Åbo Akademis förlag, 2024. 322 pp. In Swedish.

The Festschrift to the Finnish-Swedish folklorist Lena Marander-Eklund has everyday storytelling as its general theme. The editors are the Finnish-Swedish folklorist Blanka Henriksson together with the Swedish folklorist Susanne Nylund Skog. Of the eighteen authors, eleven are from Sweden, six from Finland, and one from Norway.

The book starts with Eerika Koskinen-Koivisto's investigation of emotions related to stories about simple everyday objects. These stories can be about family, upbringing, grief, and happiness. Emotions regarding the past emerge at the encounter of objects.

Susanne Österlund-Pötzsch investigates objects at three museums in the UK, Croatia, and the USA. These objects are considered powerful tools for creating stories that can produce strong emotional messages.

Helena Ruotsala has been doing fieldwork related to the Finnish-Swedish national border in Tornedalen and has studied how life changed for individuals living along the border during the COVID-19 pandemic. People in this area used to have close contacts across the invisible border regarding, for example, trade and commuting. There were many mixed marriages between individuals coming from either side of the border. There has been a lack of understanding of the significance of this invisible border from governments in Helsinki and Stockholm. Ruotsala uses the terms transnationalism and multilocalism in her analysis of the encounters across this border. Torneå in Finland and Haparanda in Sweden have grown together as twin cities. Ruotsala's observations are well in line with what I have found at the Swedish-Norwegian national border when it was closed during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Ulf Palmfelt has performed a narrative analysis of stories he collected from fourteen Gotland farmers about the rationalization of farming in the 1900s. The farmers, nine men and five women with fictitious names, told him about how they perceived this change. Together these individual stories create an understanding of the transformation process that took place in Gotland's way of farming, from small scale family farming to



specialized large scale production. This pilot study bears actual relevance to what happened in rural areas in large parts of the rest of Sweden during the same time period.

Charlotte Hyltén-Cavallius has collected stories of experiences among the Romani people. She demonstrates how they, through their presentations of themselves in interviews on their life stories, are trying to appear as respectable citizens with no criminal records in Sweden. They have, however, felt themselves to be the target of negative treatment from the environment, which has produced feelings of shame. As of year 2000, the Romani people are included in the category of five Swedish national minorities.

Alf Arvidsson analyzes the description of the life story of a minister and son of a farmer, Pehr Stenberg, at the end of the 18th century. The focus is on Stenberg's studies at Åbo Akademi University, where he made a living as a tutor in Finnish-Swedish upper-class families. His own feelings are front and center when Stenberg describes the encounters with the upper-class families, the culture of which he does not understand. He reacts with shyness when he is unable to understand wordless communication such as the looks from younger single women.

Ulrika Wolf-Knuts has performed in-depth interviews with five informants in the revival movement of Laestadianism, which is widely prevailing in the northernmost Nordic areas. The interviews are about experiences in this movement in connection with revealed pedophilia cases regarding a highly appreciated member and preacher within the movement, who sexually molested his grandchildren. The abuse was carried out in the mid-1900s but was revealed first in 2009 when this man was already deceased. How could tolerance be achieved following such a disclosure that shook the whole movement? After all, the informants wanted to move on. One opinion was that God likely had a plan for the association concerning what had happened. It was important to be able to believe in the power of forgiveness.

Sverker Hyltén-Cavallius has interviewed an eighty-year-old musician, finding out how this person speaks about his life through his musical models, which have been guiding his life as spiritual signposts.

Kerstin Gunnemark and Susanne Rothlind, both born in 1953, returned, with an autoethnographic objective, to their hometown Örebro. Their aim was to investigate what individual recollections come to life when visiting places often frequented during childhood and adolescence in a medium-sized Swedish town. Gunnemark grew up in a middle-class home and Rothlind in an upper-class environment. The recollections of both authors are quite similar though, as they experienced that cross-boundary activity existed within social contacts.

Camilla Asplund Ingemark has analyzed answers to questionnaires from Finland, Norway, and Iceland. The informants talk about everyday phenomena relative to climate change and the future. One theme in this respect is laziness. It is lack of waste sorting that is bugging the informants and raises concern for the future. The view on climate change highlights issues of morality and responsibility.

Sven-Erik Klinkmann, using media information, discusses two statements allegedly made by Elvis Presley in the 1950s, linked to the black and white race issue in the USA. This happened at the beginning of the civil rights movement and the emancipation process for the black population. Presley came from a home emphasizing the equal value of all human beings and therefore deprecated racial prejudice. He belonged to the first generation of white Americans that showed an active interest in Afro-American music. Nevertheless, early in his career there were rumors that in his two statements he had expressed humiliating opinions about the black population. Elvis denied this, though, when answering questions from various journalists. However, the rumors still lived on in Afro-American circles.

Tove Ingebjørg Fjell has looked into new funeral customs implicating an increased individualization in Norway during the years 1990–2022, as evidenced in media debates where most cases (i.e., 41 out of 46 examples) are from 2014–2022. This occurring development potentially became the ground for tensions between funeral homes pointing to the respect for individual preferences, and ecclesiastical representatives that emphasize the solid structure of the funeral ceremony as a feeling of safety in the grieving process. The dividing line is related, for example, to what kind of music should be played.

Birgitta Meurling has, in the estate of her father, minister Hans Meurling, found a collection of sixteen personal letters addressed to him during the years 1953 and 1954. The female author of the letters, with the fictitious name Mimmi, herself married and from a middle-class environment, had a very personal writing style in her letters to the minister. Birgitta Meurling studies the narrative technical concepts used by the author of the letters and stresses the norms and ideals appearing in the texts. The letters present a lot of humor, as well as dreams and self-irony. The friendship with the minister developed into an infatuation at least from Mimmi's side.

Lars Kaijser has visited different places in Europe and the USA and observed various memory icons, both real and fictional, recurring in different locations. Memory icons tie together the local with the global. Kaiser takes three examples as his starting point: The Beatles, the scientist Carl von Linné, and the white iconic Shark from the movie *Jaws* (1975). This shark creates a link to global environmental issues. The reasoning in this chapter is based on what memory icons can contribute to popular culture and international studies on cultural heritage.

Fredrik Nilsson highlights the UNRRA-action in the summer of 1945 when more than 9,000 survivors were evacuated from the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp to Sweden. The idea was to rehabilitate the survivors to normal life during six months and then send them back to their home countries. Conscientiousness and working ability were to be enforced, as evidenced by medical reports. The traits of discipline created problems in the encounter between the survivors and Swedish medical experts, though. There are reports about lack of discipline and non-compliance among the care recipients.

Nevertheless, in summary these care recipients seem to have perceived themselves as being grateful for the care they received.

As a conclusive opinion of this book, I would like to emphasize the coherence of the book in concentrating on the analyses of everyday stories. Here the editors have done a great job. The stories have so many different dimensions and can be found in various types of source materials used by the authors. The book highlights current narrative research both in Finland and in Sweden and should be read by anyone with a folkloristic interest. I miss a presentation of the authors at the end of the book, though.

Anders Gustavsson