

# Folklore Fellows' NETWORK



No. 42 | December 2012



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as a perspective  
on the world  
of communication

Forget inheriting  
— invest in culture!

Runo collectors and  
laments in Old Ingria

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FF Network 42 | December 2012

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Old industrial landscape in the centre of Norrköping, Sweden. The old cotton mill in the middle of Motala Ström has been fully renovated and serves now as the Arbetets museum, the museum of work. Photograph: Pekka Tolonen 2012.



# Publish or perish

The well-known headline is more apposite than ever. Throughout the world the productiveness of research is commensurate with the quantities of publications, and quality is judged on the basis of reviews. In Finland in 2012 a three-grade assessment of academic publications has been adopted, by which only rare, internationally reviewed leading publications in a field enter the highest degree. In this grade system, FFC has been ranked as level 2: a regular international publication, but one which does not reach the summit, where in fact it belongs.

Assessment of publications and counting of points is unavoidable in the modern-day research world, though many humanities scholars fundamentally shun this way of thinking, since it greatly simplifies the essence of learning. In the entanglement of assessment and funding a vicious circle may be born in which publications ranked at the highest level are offered ever more and may pick out only the best for publication, while the regard in which the publication in question is held only ever increases. A downward spiral may also arise: a publication is valued too low, and receives little international notice, at which point little is offered to it for publication, and it must be satisfied with whatever it gets. This sort of situation may put off ambitious researchers from the series or journal in favour of other fora.

Monographs have been a traditional product of research in the humanities, and have formed the main part of FFC's publications. Monographs are invariably major works, as are type indexes drawn up as aids to research. Moreover, the FFC research process typically lasts a couple of years, beginning from when the author sends a prepared typescript to the editorial office. Thereafter, peer reviews have their own timescale, and after a positive report the finalisation of the work takes place on the basis of the comments, as well as the technical editing, which may take a surprising amount of time. Under the pressure of producing results, researchers are expected, with increasing strictness, to get their research published, and this essentially favours essay collections.

What is FFC to do in these circumstances? For a good century the FFC has been the leading international publication series in the field, and it has a good reputation. This must be maintained, and attention paid so that we receive high-level works for publication. High-level content and professional technical execution, and

well-made and beautiful-looking books, are certainly prerequisites for future success. Yet this does not suffice. We must take care that the series is visible enough in the world at conferences and book fairs. Reviews of new publications in the main journals are also necessary from the point of view of being noticed and successful.

An ever-increasing portion of international book sales takes place on the internet, which has its own leading organisations for sales and communications. Cooperation with them is inevitable. Publications are also increasingly made in digital form. It is undeniably overwhelmingly convenient, if for example on a field trip it is possible to take along a thin reading tablet, with everything necessary loaded into memory, instead of a heavy case of books. Many researchers of the mature generation, however, feel a certain distrust or direct opposition towards electronic books. The feeling may have grown up over the past years and decades, when the first printed products readable on the internet had a bad appearance and downloaded slowly, so the saving of a thick book was a frustrating burden.

Many will read this issue of *FF Network* on a computer screen, since our newsletter has shifted to a primarily internet-based publication. In fact, *FF Network* has been accessible for some years on the internet, at <http://www.folklorefellows.fi>. A couple of hundred paper copies are now sent out, and only upon request, primarily to libraries and institutes and to corners of the world where internet connections are not sufficiently fast or reliable. The FFC series has, for the time being, remained a publication solely available in printed paper form. It is apparent that in time FFC too will move over in part to publication on the internet, though no plans for this are presently in existence. If such a step is taken, careful thought is needed about which publications are suitable for the internet and which need to continue on paper in the manner of handbook literature.

Folklorists by nature value traditions. It needs to be remembered that traditions too are preserved in living form only if they are up to changing in step with the world around and to adapting to new contexts. ■

# Non-communication as a perspective on the world of communication

KARI MIKKO VESALA  
& SEPPO KNUUTTILA

## Elaborating on Bateson

### Introduction

The narrative methods of folklore include the depiction of possible worlds, which uncover themselves to the person defined in the story only under certain conditions. Keeping secrets, years of muteness, misunderstandings and other gaps in communication belong to the repetitive elements in the construction of the plot. They lure the reader/listener to ponder what would happen and how the story would continue if the secret were revealed, the promise broken or the message not received. Then the idea of the narrative could be easily destroyed or fundamentally changed. The story would need to be rewritten. The notion of missing messages is an important indicator of the boundaries that are constantly updated in intra- and interspecies communication. In the following piece we propose the concept of non-communication as a tool for exploring these kinds of textual and epistemological issues.

In a posthumously published work, *Angels Fear: An Investigation into the Nature and Meaning of the Sacred*, the anthropologist Gregory Bateson introduces an interesting viewpoint on the communication that does not occur (Bateson & Bateson 1987; the book was edited for publication by Mary Catharine Bateson). This notion of *non-communication* is presented sketchily in two chapters of the book, mainly through a series of illustrative examples taken from various sources, such as folk narratives and myths, poetry, anthropology, genetics and the study of perception. At the end of the chapter entitled 'Let Not Thy Left Hand Know' he writes: 'I have now lined up a series of pieces of data – hints about how the world is – and all the pieces share the notion of not communicating something under some conditions' (Bateson & Bateson 1987: 79).

The reason for emphasizing the significance of non-occurrence of communication is that not all the consequences of communication are desired. In Bateson's own words: '(sometimes) communication is undesirable, not because of fear, but because communication would somehow alter the nature of the ideas' (Bateson & Bateson 1987: 80). Bateson uses the sacred as an example of an idea which may easily be altered by communication and thereby be invalidated. For instance, in

connection with many religious myths, rituals or places, one can identify non-communication in the prohibitions or norms seeking to protect the sacred.

Although non-communication was not an explicit theme in Bateson's earlier writings, its introduction in *Angels Fear* is quite consistent with his previous work on communication, interaction and the ecology of mind.<sup>1</sup> The notion of non-communication provides an interesting angle not only on Bateson's own theoretical thinking but also on any such fields of research which tackle the non-occurrence or restriction of communication in different settings, such as discussions concerning silence, secrecy, deception or privacy. Still, surprisingly little academic attention has been paid to this component of *Angels Fear*. Several authors have commented and elaborated on Bateson's thoughts in *Angels Fear* concerning aesthetics, ecology and the sacred (see Charlton 2008, Hoffmeyer 2008, Steier 2005). Some of them do highlight Bateson's insight according to which uneven distribution of information, for example information gaps or blockages, are necessary in living systems and thus are a fundamental issue for the study of the human mind and consciousness (e.g. Hoffmeyer 2008: 11; Cashman 2008: 57; Charlton 2008: 130–4; Eicher-Catt 2008: 267). However, some authors have paid attention to Bateson's notion of non-communication as a special viewpoint on communication and interaction (Crago 1997, Ketola *et al.* 2003, Knuuttila 2005, Knuuttila & Vesala 2008, Mattila 2001).<sup>2</sup>

In this essay, we attempt to elaborate on Bateson's initial discussion by arguing that non-communication can be understood and used as a perspective or a pattern of search (Bateson 1970), with which the non-occurrence of communication can be identified and constructed as something meaningful, and thus potentially significant in different contexts and circumstances.

### What makes non-communication meaningful?

Non-communication as a term is a rare one. In psychology and communication research it is sometimes used to refer to the failures of communication, the inability to communicate, or to phenomena which are not consid-

ered as communication at all. In communication theory the mechanical model views communication as transmission of messages which takes place between separate individuals or entities. In the light of this model it indeed seems feasible to conceive non-communication as failure of communication and, by definition, to exclude it from the domain of communication. An alternative, organic model sees communication as a continuous process of information flow within a social system, taking place on many levels and in many channels. This model portrays non-communication as a natural element in the world of communication. As Stuart Sigman (1987) writes: 'The social environment is in a constant state of messagefulness although selected channels and participants may be momentarily silent. Communication as totality takes place and endures even though certain channels are not actively employed at particular moments' (7). Thus, non-communication is relevant as an aspect or stage in the world of communication even though it denotes absence or non-occurrence of some communicative event or events.

A strong argument for including non-communication in the domain of the world of communication is offered by the relational theories of meaning (e.g. Rogers *et al.* 1999). For instance, the meaning of an utterance is always based on what is left unsaid as well as on what is explicitly stated (Tyler 1978). It is worth noting that one might overstate this observation and suggest that every time a word is uttered, a vast number of other words are left unuttered. Is it not true that all communication is based on choosing one alternative and ignoring others? If the concept of non-communication is understood simply in this way, it will appear trivial; or too broad to be useful.

There is, however, no need to understand non-communication as whatever is not communicated. This becomes evident by a look at the variety of everyday concepts in which non-communication is (overtly or covertly) involved as a central constructive element. Bateson refers to silence and secrecy. Such concepts limit the potentially huge domain of non-communication in one way or another. For example, silence may be defined as 'absence of any sound' or 'absence of mention'. In these cases it is the non-communication in a *certain* channel that is relevant. Conceptualizations of this kind can be viewed as one way of making non-communication meaningful. The viewpoint of non-communication, which Bateson formulated, helps to articulate how the absence or non-occurrence of communication events is processed and interpreted with the help of such culturally established concepts. Similarly, it can be used as a vehicle for analysing the manifestations of non-communication in a wide range of discursive and communicative contexts, be they psychological, social or ecological. Indeed, Bateson's viewpoint in itself is a way of making non-communication meaningful. According to

Bateson's often cited definition, information and meaning are based on 'a difference that makes a difference'. Following this, we must ask the question: what is a difference that makes the difference between trivial and meaningful non-communication? In the following we will indicate three aspects in Bateson's approach to non-communication: 1) context, 2) function, and 3) controversy. Although these aspects are intertwined, they can be conceptually distinguished. Furthermore, we suggest that they can be considered as aspects of a pattern of search through which non-communication can be recognized and construed as something not trivial.

### Context and construction

In *Mind and Nature* (1980: 56) Bateson writes 'The letter that you do not write, the apology that you do not offer, the food that you do not put out for the cat – all these can be sufficient and effective messages because zero, in context, can be meaningful.' In this case, Bateson is arguing for the importance of the recipient's ability to create the context and recognize the absence of the message. In a similar vein, some of Bateson's colleagues from Palo Alto emphasized the social context of communication with a well-known maxim: You cannot not communicate (Watzlawick & Weakland 1977). The main point of the maxim is that in the presence of others all behaviour is potentially communicative. It further suggests that non-communication may be understood as a message; for example, keeping silent may be interpreted as a wish to be left alone or as an expression of anger, etc.

In *Angels Fear* Bateson draws attention to non-communication as a message. For example, he notes that 'secrecy can be used as a marker to tell us that we are approaching holy ground' (Bateson & Bateson 1987: 81). Nevertheless, he also analyses cases in which the most crucial idea is that the very fact of non-communication, such as the existence of a secret, ought not to be communicated. Indeed, it is important to note that the context of non-communication can also be such that non-communication does not appear as a message received by all the parties involved in the interactional system in question. It is not only the supposed recipient of the message who has the ability to recognize the absence of the message as meaningful. The context can be such that only a bystander or an outside observer, like a researcher, recognizes or is able to identify the non-communication. Nonetheless, we are dealing here with multi-layered social realities, the study of which demands what Clifford Geertz (1973) calls 'thick description'.

Accepting the importance of the context leads to questions about the construction of meaningful non-communication. In *Angels Fear* Bateson approaches these questions with short narratives where non-communication is contextualized in different ways. We shall

offer one example, an anecdote, which was not used by Bateson but by Ted Cohen in his article 'Jokes' (1983).

This anecdote is about an old couple, living far away in a remote region, neither of whom has ever seen a mirror. One day the man finds a piece of a mirror. He takes it up to his attic, carefully polishes it and gazes for a long time into it. Finally he calls out, 'Father!' During the following weeks he often goes up to the attic and spends many hours there. His wife starts getting worried about the way he is behaving and doubting his fidelity. One day while he is out, she goes up to the attic and immediately spots the mirror. She gazes into it and goes back downstairs, muttering to herself, 'What a relief. My husband would never fall for such a wrinkled old woman. She looks just like my mother.' (Cohen 1983: 231.)

The point and the comic effect of this narrative rely on certain premises. One explicit premise is that the old couple do not know what they look like. Another implicit or unspoken premise (enthymema) is that neither of them says a word to the other about the mirror (or indeed about anything else in this text). According to the narrative logic, the discussion they do not have is important as regards both the humorous effect and the preservation of their marriage. Furthermore, the communicative context is constructed out of the fact that both know of the mirror's existence, but the man does not know that his wife knows. It is easy to imagine the discussions stimulated by such anecdotes and ask, for example, why the man did not tell his wife about the mirror and the experience. The answer is quite simple:



Greek mythology proposes the danger of knowledge, especially cross-sex knowledge, which is always fatal. Actaeon, who accidentally spied on Artemis (Diana in Roman mythology) bathing, was torn apart by her dogs. (Bateson 1987: 80.) Titian, *Diana and Actaeon*, Photo © The National Gallery, London/ The National Galleries of Scotland. Bought jointly by the National Gallery and National Galleries of Scotland with contributions from the Scottish Government, the National Heritage Memorial Fund, The Monument Trust, The Art Fund (with a contribution from the Wolfson Foundation) and through public appeal, 2009.

because then there would be no story. All in all, the anecdote itself constructs a context in which non-communication becomes meaningful, and by analysing this construction we can create a larger context – including both the narrative and the person who is analysing it. In this way the unspoken premises of the narrative can also be interpreted as meaningful non-communication.

### Function and frames

In addition to the processes that are more conventionally considered under the rubric of communication, Bateson also associates non-communication with questions of human consciousness, such as not knowing and unawareness.<sup>3</sup> According to Bateson, our perceptual images would cease to be credible if we were continually aware of the mental processes involved in

image-making. Similarly, the idea of spontaneity will be invalidated by the presence of conscious instrumental intention. Furthermore, in a chapter entitled 'Defenses of Faith' Bateson phrases his viewpoint by associating non-communication with biological processes, for example, paralleling it to the notion that there can be no inheritance of acquired characteristics in living bodies. He points out that this kind of non-communication is necessary because of the loss of flexibility that would result if the acquired characteristics of an individual were transmitted to the genes of the offspring. Moreover, Bateson refers to the fact that mental systems must rely on many premises and propositions that are fundamentally unreliable and thus must be supported by trust or faith. From this perspective, messages that communicate doubt are potentially damaging. Unawareness of



Titian, *The Death of Actaeon*, Photo © The National Gallery, London. Bought with a special grant and contributions from The Art Fund, the Pilgrim Trust and through public appeal, 1972.

certain mental processes protects us from that doubt. (Bateson & Bateson 1987.)

Bateson states his interest in examining non-communication as follows:

Often A will not tell B a given truth because the telling will hurt either A or B. We protect our own and each other's feelings, and sometimes we may be wise to do so. There are, of course, people who see it as almost a duty to communicate information that will give pain; and sometimes such people have wisdom on their side. I am not concerned here to judge these cases, except to note that these people form a subspecies of those who rush in where angels fear to tread. I am here concerned only with the formal characteristics of sequences in which damage to the system (A plus B) results from the message and/or its communication. (Bateson & Bateson 1987: 89.)

Throughout his career Bateson was interested in pathogenic processes, an example of which is his work with the double bind and schismogenic processes (Bateson 1972). His approach focused on systems theory and relational communication. It is thus quite understandable that he wanted to see non-communication in the light of the possible damage to a system caused by the occurrence of a certain type of communication. Thus, from the viewpoint presented by Bateson, non-communication is meaningful when it serves to protect, preserve or maintain ideas that are somehow vital or fundamental to a system.

In this connection we wish to draw attention to the concept of communicational frame, which Bateson introduced in the 1950s (1972). Frame refers to the ways in which the message is interpreted by participants in an ongoing process of communication. Within the frame of play, for example, events are interpreted differently from within the frame of struggle. One and the same event can be framed in alternative ways and can also be reframed. In *Angels Fear* Bateson does not systematically apply the concept of frame, although he states, for instance, that certain kinds of communication may easily reframe religion and turn it into secular entertainment.

Erving Goffman has insightfully developed the use of the concept of frame. In his book *Frame Analysis* (1986) he views the whole organization of social experience as a multilevel process of framing and reframing. By making distinctions between primary frames and secondary frames, showing the multitude of culturally established secondary frames, analysing the processes of creating and changing the frames (keyings), and by analysing these processes in the construction of social relations, Goffman points out the fundamental role of framing processes in social experience. He pays special attention to the argumentation and debates concerning the frames, the processes of frame breaking, and to

generating negative experience through framing. In this way he also tries to reveal the vulnerability of social experience.

Some of Goffman's observations appear to be very closely related to those emphasized by Bateson in *Angels Fear*. For example, Goffman (1986: 462) speaks of a woman who is desperate because her husband wants to divorce her after twenty years of marriage. According to the woman, in the midst of a heated quarrel two years earlier, she told her husband that she had never really enjoyed their lovemaking, but had only pretended. After that the husband refused to even touch her again, even though the woman tried to assure him that what she had said was not true, that she had only said it in a fit of anger. This one sentence changed the frame of authenticity into a type of masquerade or an act of play, and it was enough to bring about serious and irreversible consequences in the system. The nature of some vital ideas – including trust between the couple – changed.

Similar examples of fatal changes in framing caused by careless or thoughtless communication are easy to find in folklore and other popular texts, where as a rule, the lesson involves a warning. These stories are told to stress the desirability or even necessity of a given type of non-communication. Keeping secrets, as a precondition of trust between people, is perhaps an even more familiar example underlining Bateson's insight into the conservative function of non-communication.

The very idea of secrecy implies that one should not reveal it or even remain silent about being aware of the existence of the secret. It is particularly this latter dimension of non-communication that turns out to be fatal in the fairytale about a man who understood the language of animals (ATU 670).<sup>4</sup> A snake whose life the man saved gave him this ability as a token of gratitude. But the gift was on the condition that the man should not reveal to anybody, not even through his overt responses, that he understood what 'the animals say'. Otherwise he would lose this ability, and even endanger his life. Once, however, as it happened, listening to the animals' talk made the man laugh in the presence of his wife. The wife asked 'What are you laughing at?' The man did not answer, and so the existence of a secret was revealed. But the man did not say what the secret was. According to some versions of this fairytale, the wife dies because of her curiosity. In a Finnish version (from 1846), the man decides to reveal the secret and die. But before he does, he hears a cock who is wondering why the man is not able to control a single woman when the cock is mastering a whole hennery. 'Then the man stands up and starts to beat his wife. The secret remained unrevealed, and they lived well ever after.' (Rausmaa 1988: 420–1.)

Bateson uses a Balinese version of this fairytale as an example. The main character here is a hero of the old folk, Adji Darma, whose wife finds out that Adji is



keeping a secret. Since the man does not reveal the secret, the wife dies of curiosity and suspicion. As conspiracy theories attest, to puzzle over the question of the existence of a secret may be highly daunting. Bateson stresses: 'After all, Adji must not conceal the fact that he knows the language of the animals; he must conceal the fact that there is a secret, and this is what he failed to do' (Bateson & Bateson 1987: 80).

In a metalogue, 'Secrets', Mary Catharine Bateson agrees with her father that the importance of keeping secrets is emphasized in the myths of many cultures and eras, but notes that the story of Adji Darma presents the woman as a fool who rushes in where the angels fear to tread (Bateson & Bateson 1987: 83-4). Indeed, in fairytales, myths and anecdotes the secrets of men are often associated with success, prosperity and power, while the women's secrets concern their possible sins.

However, non-communication can also be used, or be in use, when making and creating frames. For example, a well-known strategy in creating a certain kind of therapeutic frame of social interaction is for the therapist to refrain from all kinds of self-disclosures or, in the client-centred therapeutic tradition, from making direct recommendations concerning the way clients' problems ought to be solved. A slightly different type of example is the frame which Adam Jaworsky (1993) calls 'casting oneself into silence'. As Jaworsky suggests, a retreat of solitude or the practice of meditation can be viewed as a communicational frame which is constructed through silence. Silencing those channels of communication which are active during everyday social life enables and facilitates new kinds of experiences, which may, for instance, be interpreted as giving valuable insights about one's own self. Thus, while Bateson stressed the conservative function of non-communication, ideas may also evolve with the help of non-communication.

### Controversies

The aspects of context as well as functions/frames are explicit in the way that Bateson writes about non-communication. The third aspect, argumentation and controversy, is more implicit. Bateson does mention a debate about an incident in which the representatives of the Native American Church did not allow their ritual to be filmed. In this debate, according to Bateson, some of his colleagues, unlike himself, could not approve of this kind of non-communication. However, as a whole, Bateson does not pay much attention to the fact that the evaluation of non-communication is very often a controversial matter. His daughter, Mary Catharine Bateson, who edited the manuscript of *Angels Fear* for publication, introduces controversy in a metalogue she added to the book. In this metalogue, entitled 'Secrets', she says: 'Secrecy is an instrument of power and control. It always horrified me to see my academic colleagues

trying to control the flow of information, sanctimoniously claiming it was the responsible thing to do, protecting the rights and privacy of others etc., but all the time using it to manipulate' (Bateson & Bateson 1987: 84-5).

Secrecy may also be seen as an instrument for protecting the individual against manipulation by others, as in the following example. This quotation is from *The Los Angeles Times* (30.12.1993), a letter sent to the 'Dear Abby' column:

Dear Abby, I have just had a huge argument with my boy friend that was very disturbing. We are both 22. He is angry because I refused to let him read my diary. He said that when two people are in love (and we are), there should be no secrets.

Abby, I don't write dark and dirty secrets in my diary; I record certain events and express my feelings rather than keep them bottled up. It also helps me blow off steam and sort out my thoughts.

He says 'that's what I'm here for'. He thinks that if he reads my diary, he can help me sort out my problems. He doesn't see that it makes me feel violated.

Abby, I tried explaining that one's privacy is part of being an individual. He said that two should be the same as one and that maybe I didn't want to become part of his life. He says he doesn't keep anything from me, and I shouldn't keep anything from him.

No matter how I try to reason with him, he doesn't understand. We really love each other, but his insisting that he must know my most private thoughts is driving me away.  
PRIVATE PERSON

Dear Abby answers Private Person by suggesting that the boyfriend is violating her privacy, and recommends that the girl should not let the boy 'bully her into caving in', appealing to the fact that 'he is your love interest, not your therapist'. Thus, the argument is for the use of non-communication and not against it, as in Mary Catharine Bateson's metalogue. Nevertheless, non-communication is viewed in the context of controversy over control and manipulation.

The ethics of secrecy is a culturally pervasive topic of argumentation (Bok 1983). The question of whether lying is right or wrong is also controversial. Of course, lying – or not communicating the truth – is usually evaluated negatively, but there are exceptions as well (Ekman 1992). The evaluation of silence is also controversial (Tannen & Saville-Troike 1985). Furthermore, the controversy over evaluation of non-communication is central in the study of self-deception (Goleman 1997). All in all, in many cases non-communication seems to be made meaningful, above all, through controversies over its evaluation (Ryan-Flood & Gill 2010).

Returning to the case of Private Person and the argument about the diary, one might ask, for example,

why the girl did not keep the diary secret. What things would have been different if the boy had not known about the diary in the first place? Or does the very idea of privacy imply some kind of struggle over power? Was it necessary for the boyfriend to know about the diary? Would the ideas of 'blowing off steam', 'sorting out one's thoughts' or 'expressing one's feelings' have borne a different meaning for the girl if nobody knew that she was writing the diary? Was there really something lost because of the controversy or, in this case, was non-communication itself constructed to serve the struggle for autonomy and power?

It is noteworthy that Bateson chose to focus especially on the constructive side of non-communication, avoiding the controversial contextualization. He was, of course, very much familiar with the fact that non-communication is often viewed in the context of manipulation and dubious uses of power. Already in his early work *Naven* (1936) he wrote about the role of secrecy in the rivalry relations among the Iatmul people. For example, members of a Iatmul clan shared mythological knowledge, which was hidden from the members of the other clans. Secret mythology was conceived as a source of power, and in the heated disputes between the clans the Iatmuls boasted about their own secrets and tried to find out the secrets of others. In *Angels Fear* Bateson, however, turned attention away from such contexts. Why?

The answer is evident. Bateson wanted to emphasize the fact that there are circumstances, phenomena or matrices of mind which are very vulnerable to changes brought about by communication, and which, for this reason, ought to be approached in subtle ways. Controversy in itself is a form of communication which may turn many ideas into something else. The sacred seems to be a prototypical example of this. Following Bateson's thoughts, the social relations of power and the controversies concerning them are not the only, or even the most relevant, contexts for viewing the sacred. However, more generally speaking, we believe that Bateson's viewpoint is very well suited to analysing the ways in which non-communication is constructed in controversial contexts. In fact, it should be remembered that Bateson wrote about the sacred unity in living systems within the context of world politics, economy and environmental problems. With this wider debate as a backdrop, he criticized the hubris that science, or any other worldview for that matter, could reach total knowledge of reality. Bateson recommended the attitude of acknowledging that something will always remain mysterious and beyond the control of man within living systems.

## Conclusion

In this essay we have discussed the viewpoint of non-communication presented by Gregory Bateson. We have elaborated on the viewpoint by distinguishing

three aspects in how it can be considered as a search pattern, a perspective for making non-communication meaningful and analysing the processes and instances of such meaning making. In this treatment non-communication denotes neither the failure of communication, everything or anything that is not communicated nor something that is not of the world of communication in the first place. Instead, non-communication is approached as an absence or non-occurrence of a communication event or events that is made, or can be made, meaningful in some way. We have proposed that systemic functions, contextual embeddings and evaluative controversies can be identified as three overlapping yet inherent aspects of the viewpoint, or pattern of search, sketched by Bateson.

We believe that the notion of non-communication should be counted among the many contributions of Bateson that still have potential to inspire future research. In our essay we hope to have shown that non-communication is a pervasive yet far from a simple or clear-cut phenomenon. Although many terms, such as secrecy, silence, the unsaid or deception, serve as familiar and useful entry points, the concept of non-communication provides a more general, multidisciplinary and systemic perspective to tackle the various cultural, social, psychological, folkloristic and ecological issues in which the non-occurrence of communication events might bear special relevance. ■

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## Notes

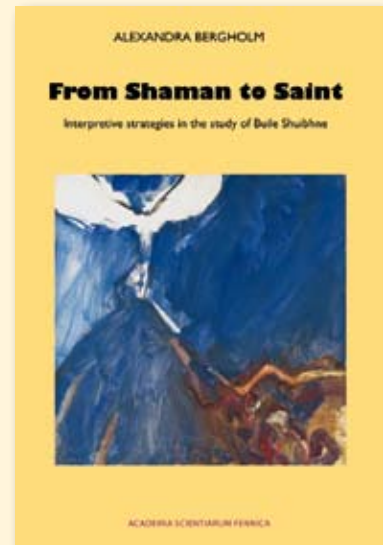
- 1 Ecology of mind refers to Bateson's general systems theoretical approach, which according to Ronald Rieber (1989) was meant to serve as a worldview as well as a vehicle for scientific inquiry.
- 2 Notably, Daniel Goleman's *Vital Lies, Simple Truths* (1997) draws on Bateson and well represents the spirit of the non-communication viewpoint, although Goleman does not make reference to *Angels Fear*.
- 3 Michael Billig (1999) reformulates the Freudian unconscious by interpreting the concept of repression from the perspective of discursive psychology as 'learning what not so to say'.
- 4 ATU refers to the international folktale typology by Antti Aarne, Stith Thompson and Hans-Jörg Uther (Uther 2004).

## Literature

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## A new publication in the FF Communications



### From Shaman to Saint

Interpretive strategies in the study of Buile Shuibhne

by Alexandra Bergholm

A shaman, a saint, a remorseful penitent, or a mad novice? Since the publication of J. G. O’Keeffe’s edition of the medieval Irish text *Buile Shuibhne* in 1913, the enigmatic presentation of its main protagonist Suibhne Geilt has become a subject of a plurality of scholarly analyse, which have sought to understand the true nature of his madness. This study charts the ways in which *Buile Shuibhne* has been interpreted in twentieth-century scholarship, by paying particular attention to the religious allegorical readings of the text. The examination of four prevalent interpretative frameworks – historical, pre-Christian, Christian, and anthropological – relates theoretical conceptions of literary theory, comparative religion and historiography to the study of medieval narrative material, by considering the nature of different methodological presuppositions that have guided the scholars’ understanding of the tale’s meaning. The integration of issues relating to text, context, and interpretation raises the issue of communally shared reading strategies in the explication of interpretive variety, thereby highlighting the importance of asking not only *what* a text means, but also *how* it means.

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# Forget inheriting – invest in culture!

**H**eritage is one among many historically derived options to bestow value on cultural monuments and intangible practices.\* Such valuation and valorization (Kirshenbaltt-Gimblett 2006) show the resource quality of culture. Divesting the heritage discourse of its more moralistic components – or rather understanding these as a further resource within a market of emotions and power – frees one's visions to see what kinds of resource qualities individuals and groups recognize in cultural expressions and cultural knowledge. This allows one to place heritage within a spectrum of productive options individuals and groups currently engage in. I begin by recapping the hidden proximity between heritage and inheritance, seeking to strip the ideologically laden layers off the heritage concept to show off its insufficiently acknowledged economic underpinnings; I then replace 'inheriting' with 'investing' to ask what the effect might be on heritage semantics and practices. It is hoped that a thought experiment of this nature creates opportunity for more holistic assessment and decision-making in the realm of cultural preservation and innovation and opens a path toward grasping the shifting power and (al-)location of Culture and culture. The argument arises out of several years of interdisciplinary work at Göttingen University on the constitution of cultural property, where we are investigating heritage arenas shaped by UNESCO, areas such as the World Intellectual Property Organization's discussions on 'traditional knowledge' and 'traditional cultural expressions', fields such as the restitution of cultural property as well as the allocation of geographic indicators to culturally marked agricultural products.<sup>1</sup>

## Heritage and inheritance

The term heritage invokes semantically the concept of inheritance without, however, dwelling on the question of how heritage differs from the processes of inheriting we are familiar with in the family arena.<sup>2</sup> In UNESCO's 1972 convention, we read 'parts of the cultural or natural heritage are of outstanding interest and therefore need to be preserved as part of the world heritage of mankind as a whole'.<sup>3</sup> The question 'who will take responsibility?' is answered more obliquely, together with the recognition that this 'need' carries a considerable cost: the international community as well as the state nominating a given site are to somehow share in the expense of preservation.<sup>4</sup> It is then hardly surprising that establishing heritage regimes on the state level – as all international conventions need to be ratified and implemented by every state individually – proves to be a complex matter. A moral call asserting 'outstanding interest' and preservational 'need' requires translation into legally binding instruments which in turn designate responsible actors or institutions, outline procedures for nomination and implementation and (potentially) allocate funds to proceed.<sup>5</sup> Inheritances in the realm of kinship carry their own emotional and moral complexity but build primarily on the question of property: kin or legally designated heirs inherit goods left behind – without pronouncements over 'outstanding value' or lack thereof on a collective basis beyond the heirs named. Furthermore, heirs may not just inherit property, they may also be faced with debts to be shouldered. Acknowledging that UNESCO's world heritage throws open a whole string of questions regarding ownership and responsibility with economic ramifications, it is advisable to re-examine the parallels between kin-based

\* *Acknowledgments:* The present paper is a work in progress, in particular the concluding sections are still undergoing transformation and expansion; parts of the paper were presented at the Folklore Fellows' Summer School in Lammi in the summer of 2010 and at the 'Interim Results' conference of the DFG research group 772 in Göttingen in June 2011. For comments I am particularly indebted to Kilian Bizer, Don Brenneis, Karin Klenke, Ejan Mackaay, and Sven Mißling.

1 For a quick glance at the research group on cultural property, consult 'Interdisziplinäre Forschergruppe' (<http://cultural-property.uni-goettingen.de/?lang=en>; accessed 26.4.2012); first results can be gleaned in Bendix, Bizer and Groth (2010) and Hauser-Schäublin (2011) – both of these volumes are also accessible in pdf through this homepage.

2 A full exploration of the difference between implementing heritage conventions and inheriting a familiar inheritance is ventured in Bendix (2009); an earlier attempt to lay bare the opaque semantics of heritage can be found in Bendix (2000), cf. also Swenson (2007).

3 From the convention text accessible under 'Unesco World Heritage Center' (<http://whc.unesco.org/en/conventiontext>; accessed 26.4.2012). For a cogent assessment on 'heritage uses' as they present themselves particularly in the material heritage realm, see Smith (2006).

4 Same as footnote 3, articles 11.4, 21 and 25.

5 On the emergence of divergent national world heritage implementations, cf. Bendix *et al.* (2012).

inheritance practices in both social and legal terms and the claims made by various actors in the realm of cultural heritage processes. Most startling surely is the invocation of a global community of cultural heirs, which stands in sharp contrast to the economic, social and political burden placed on local individuals and groups as a result of a nomination.

The UNESCO convention on intangible heritage formulated in 2003 has its own spread of problems (Borlotto 2011, Kurin 2004), but it addresses the question of inheriting in a more careful fashion: 'This living heritage, known as intangible, provides each bearer of such expressions a sense of identity and continuity, insofar as he or she takes ownership of them and constantly recreates them.'<sup>6</sup> This convention made a great effort to focus attention on human creativity and its traditionalization. By naming the 'owners' of tradition and their task to 'constantly recreate' their intangible heritage, the responsible parties are also named and the convention foresees the costs of implementation as well.<sup>7</sup> Naming owners much as one might name owners in a will, the convention nonetheless implies – through its promise of worldwide recognition – a global community of heirs. Whether 'bearers of such expressions' opt to take on the ownership depends also – much as in taking on the debts inscribed in a personal inheritance – on the economic context within which for example traditional knowledge and skills are to be constantly recreated. The resource potential inherent to intangible heritage has to be weighed in terms of what benefit may come from its safeguarding.

In reading this convention, even more so than the 1972 convention concerned with tangible heritage, Kirshenblatt-Gimblett's assertion from the early 1990s still rings true: 'Heritage is a new mode of cultural production in the present that has recourse to the past' (1995: 369). Oddly, that very present-orientation and the considerable focus on economic productivity keep slipping away in the heritage discourse in cultural research, which more often than not borrows from the concept of inheritance the continuity with the past but obfuscates the complexity of ownership and property. There is, of course, a considerable literature on heritage preservation and heritage management.<sup>8</sup> But UNESCO-

criteria demand a strong focus on culture and history based arguments for nomination which hide the complex and often hotly debated local and regional discussion among potential 'owners' concerning the political, social and most of all economic implications of putting cultural heritage to work (cf. Peselmann 2009).

### 'Cultural resource' as a conceptual alternative

In 1995, Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett introduced notions such as 'cultural production' and 'value-added industry' to the heritage discourse, thus squarely pointing the way towards the heart of the heritage field. Building on the notion of cultural economics, adopted from that field by Kirshenblatt-Gimblett in her further work (2006), it is worthwhile exploring the concept of cultural resource. This is conceptually helpful as it allows for side-stepping an often nostalgic discourse that carries and simultaneously hides utterly non-nostalgic heritage decision-making. Cultural resources can be placed next to the natural resources that human survival and well-being also rest on. The term opens one's view towards the labour that flows into making the resource useful and the cost entailed in the process. Economic 'cost and benefit' models are not devoid of social, emotional and political components – just as social, emotional and political heritage considerations should not be devoid of economic aspects.

As resources, bodies of heritage can be carefully evaluated in terms of their properties. This in turn also allows one to point to some of the considerable differences between tangible and intangible heritage. Tangible heritage as a material expression of past traditional knowledge has distinct, material properties which may require preservation as well as protection, both of which demand investment of finances and labour. A UNESCO heritage nomination calls for a clarification of ownership so as to regulate both the flow of labour and financial investment and profit. Quite frequently, however, this issue is only fully grasped once a nomination is successful. Application dossiers do require a 'management plan' and UNESCO has increased pressure for all nominations to involve the 'community' that has generated a given heritage.<sup>9</sup> Yet there is plenty of ethnographic evidence that points to the complex network of interest in nominations: often, they are verbalized by a mix of actors, not necessarily beginning at the local level, and without the aspirations of more determined individuals and the know-how and circumspection of NGOs or state-employed actors, many applications would never get off the ground. The motivation to participate in heritage endeavours is, furthermore, often propelled by a competitive spirit that aligns but

6 From 'Unesco Culture Sector – Intangible Heritage – 2003 Convention' (<http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/index.php?lg=en&pg=00006>; accessed 26.4.2012).

7 Same as footnote 6, Articles 22, 24, 25.

8 This literature is too comprehensive to be properly sampled here, as many individual sites have attracted their own preparatory studies. Ashworth and Tunbridge (1995) and Ashworth and Howard (1999) can be named as prominent examples; Ashworth, currently a member of the association for place branding and public diplomacy, has consistently seen a continuity between cultural tourism and heritage marketing and promoted the economic dimensions of heritage matters for socio-politically productive ends.

9 The problematic nature of the concept of community has been expertly addressed by Noyes (2006).

poorly with the discourse of preservation but has a great deal in common with the market place.<sup>10</sup> For the newly founded field of critical heritage studies, the competitive dimension of heritage listings certainly ought to be an important component.<sup>11</sup>

John and Jean Comaroff have theorized marketing by tribal groups themselves with labels such as 'ethno-corporations' and 'cultural futures' (2009). Their work is particularly important, as it demonstrates how groups themselves opt for transforming aspects of their culture into a resource. The two models they focus on are on the one hand groups – such as a number of native North American tribes – who make proven tribal membership the foundation for economic activity. Here it is descent that entitles participation in ventures which need not have anything to do with tribal culture, such as casinos. By keeping the capital within the group, however, the economic base of the tribe is fortified, which presumably allows for a more vigorous identification with other aspects of tribal sociality. The other model shows groups seeking intellectual property rights for aspects of cultural knowledge, such as in the pharmaceutical realm. Though the Comaroffs themselves verbalize their own unease when initially venturing into this topic, they also acknowledge, as their study unfolds, that a given group's self-assertion growing through participation in the capitalist market place is also heartening or admirable, particularly among postcolonial and marginalized groups. The unease, shared by many folklorists, ethnologists, and anthropologists, likely stems from cultural scholars' own choices to study cultures of the past and present and their general assumption that capitalist intrusions are destructive. Perhaps it also reflects the sorrow that the folklorist's or anthropologist's role as interlocutor or spokesperson for such groups is waning, as representatives within these groups take on such roles themselves. Despite all reflexive turns scholarship has taken, a remnant of this nostalgia, a wish for some realm devoid of capitalism, remains.

Heritage with its semantic orientation towards the past via preservation in the present is then not the only arena within which cultural resources are being negotiated, and the Comaroffs' work is not the only cultural

research that has drawn attention to such alternative realms. The proprietizing of culture has drawn scholarly attention particularly in areas where there are few other resources for marginalized groups to draw from, such as for instance Siberia (Kasten 2004). Elements of culture have, of course, been marketed for centuries. But with the insertion of ownership questions for those holding 'cultural copyright', another United Nations' organization has been entrusted with a different set of issues from UNESCO. After a series of preliminary studies concerned with piracy in the realm of traditional knowledge the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) instituted in 2001 the International Governmental Committee concerned with Traditional Knowledge, Genetic Resources, and Traditional Cultural Expressions/Folklore. Abbreviated as the IGC for TKTRTCE, this committee has attempted to bring clarity to the question of how ownership can be granted for a good – cultural knowledge and cultural expression – that is communally created. For cultural scholarship, this reawakens and redirects older questions of property, its role in constituting social order, and its impact in realms where one might rather have operated with a notion of a commons – that is, shared ownership and shared responsibility for a resource, such as land, water – or culture. But when claims are made on cultural resources by actors who have not been part of husbanding the resource, other kinds of scholarship are called upon, such as law and economics.

WIPO has traditionally been concerned with patents and copyrights (cf. May 2007). Complaints particularly on behalf of indigenous groups victimized by bio-piracy in the realm of traditional pharmacological knowledge (which explains why genetic resources are part of this committee's negotiation task) showed the need to address TKTRTCE in a focused manner.<sup>12</sup> WIPO prepared an initial set of case studies exploring where ownership claims for traditional knowledge had surfaced and what form they took (Janke 2003). In the eleven years of IGC meetings, the committee has accumulated a great deal of information, has invited many groups to present their particular ownership concerns in a special panel, and WIPO has, in addition, made available a series of resources and co-sponsored documentary activity on the part of concerned communities.<sup>13</sup>

International negotiations are a slow endeavour, and it will probably be years before the IGC will progress to a point where an agreement for potential ratification

10 Research on competition is thus far but marginal in cultural research, including folkloristics. A conference held at the University of Kiel in December 2011, organized by Markus Tauschek, is hopefully the kick-off for further work in this direction; the event was entitled 'Vergleichen, bewerten, prämiieren: Dimensionen des Kompetitiven' (Comparing, Evaluating, Awarding: Dimensions of the Competitive). Hessen and Eriksen's recent interdisciplinary study on competition employs among others an evolutionary perspective (2012).

11 The Association of Critical Heritage Studies was founded within a first conference, held in Gothenburg from June 5th through 8th, 2012. The *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, edited by Laurajane Smith, is its main publication outlet.

12 On the history of questions of cultural property and how international bodies have addressed it, see Lewinski (2004).

13 The IGC's work as well as WIPO's supplementary efforts can be viewed on 'Traditional Knowledge...' (<http://www.wipo.int/tk/en/>; accessed 31.5.2012). The site links, for instance, into the capacity building efforts of WIPO.

by WIPO member states will be reached.<sup>14</sup> Yet NGOs and other observing interest groups at this forum as well as a number of other international fora carry the question regarding cultural property – which in some cases also entails issues in land rights, habitat protection, diversity rights and human rights – forward far less with an aim of preserving heritage than with the goal of securing cultural futures, in both the temporal and monetary sense of the word. Like many others who would like access to facets of cultures ‘not their own’, such actors have acknowledged the resource nature of culture and are seeking to gain rights to protect and/or market this resource. This activity, more so even than the many problems manifesting themselves within the heritage regime, suggest that heritage is a misnomer for practices of cultural selection and certification.<sup>15</sup> It is time to explore instead the actual and scholarly opportunities inherent in refocusing the discourse.

### **From preserving heritage to investing in culture(s)**

Allowing for a perspective that acknowledges the resource qualities of culture – much as many actors have long embarked on – permits a better grasp of what is at stake when segments of culture are selected for further treatment, be this within the available heritage regimes or within other spheres of present-day life. The specific qualities of a given resource can be properly considered and the corresponding investments in time, labour and finances can be assessed. Thus, for instance, tangible cultural goods have distinct material properties, which may require restoration, preservation and protection – all activities that demand considerable investment. This in turn calls for a clarification of ownership to regulate both who might be parties responsible to invest and potentially profit.<sup>16</sup> Intangible culture – or what the WIPO IGC calls traditional knowledge and traditional cultural expressions – show dynamic, immaterial properties which, when not turned into artefacts, resist preservation and lose their dynamism when placed under protection. In the age of industrial production, a good number of such intangible cultural resources may require incentives to be carried into the future. Heritage

nominations – such as for instance the nomination of the French journeymen – may bring the kind of boost needed, but what journeymen and countless others within the traditional handicraft domain require is pay that acknowledges the power of non-industrial skill. Again, the issue is thus not one of heritage but one of reasonable investment in the future. Determining ‘ownership’ of skills and tacitly held knowledge is even more complex than in the case of tangible cultural goods (Noyes 2006), yet avoiding questions of rights and entitlement opens the door to continued cases of piracy such as those that led to the founding of WIPO’s IGC.

If one acknowledges that heritage is not created by tradition but rather by consumption, then it will also become obvious that its underlying resource, culture, requires steady investment. Many societies, not just of the global North, invest in ‘culture’, occasionally called high culture or culture with a big C: theatre and dance, opera and symphonies, painting and sculpture, with new technologies such as photography and video, holograms and so forth, broadening the spectrum. State, regional and local governments invest in these art forms to insure their continuity as they are considered part of an educational canon one would be loathe to lose. While most of these segments of cultural production will lament, today, that they are underfunded, and many of them are seeking access to wider, paying audiences outside the palaces constructed for them in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, they nonetheless remain, in public consciousness, peculiarly different from the kinds of cultural selections suggested for treatment within the heritage regime.<sup>17</sup> Hence the sponsorship – and customary investment – accorded to these kinds of cultural resources emanates from a different logic from the one accorded to heritage. The classic heritage discourse foregrounds aesthetics, uniqueness, authenticity and, perhaps, identity politics as cornerstones legitimizing preservation. A shift to an investment perspective might begin to liberate ‘traditional’ culture from its particular island and consider it to be part of the socially and economically necessary investment in culture, broadly configured.

### **Conclusion: shifting cultural hierarchies**

Placing heritage within the broad spectrum of activities that treat culture as a resource should make it easier to abandon some hard-to-overcome barriers in cultural research: economic considerations are as deeply in-

14 On the negotiation process, see the study by Groth (forthcoming) whose fieldwork foregrounded particularly the communicative processes of the IGC.

15 See Bendix and Hafstein (2009) for a set of European case studies that explore precisely this nexus between heritage and property thinking.

16 In numerous cases of UNESCO world heritage nominations one witnesses situations where wealthier groups or entire nations (and frequently also former colonial powers) assist poorer nations to nominate and restore sites deemed of world heritage caliber. It is a gift, however, that is not without problems, and I would argue that these problems stem from the lack of clarification of rights of ownership, attendant responsibilities, and likely participation in profits. For particularly troublesome case studies, see Hauser-Schäublin (2011).

17 There is not enough space here to fully account for the peculiarity that this is, ultimately, only true for the global North; the heritage regime, though one can no longer claim it to be Western dominated, nonetheless subsumes forms of ‘high cultural arts’ of other cultures within heritage lists while – thus far – classic ballet, porcelain manufacturing or gold smith arts are not considered.

grained in human existence as are aesthetics, politics or spirituality. 'Culture' past or present is not tainted when we acknowledge its place in economic practices. Considering questions of value addition to be a part of the heritage logic does not detract from other values also inscribed in cultural goods. But it frees the view toward questions of rights and responsibilities that are part and parcel of ownership whether inherited, earned or acquired.

Thinking about culture as a resource and the investments a group, a polity, a global ecumene is willing to make in it also has the potential to shake up long-standing hierarchies with regard to different types of cultural creativity and resulting artefacts. Folklorists in particular have worked for decades to bring to attention the artistry, skill and power inherent in verbal arts, crafts and traditional knowledge of individuals and groups outside high cultural canons. One thus might hope that folklorists would also assist in the opportunities of the moment to contribute to further shift and problematize long-standing cultural hierarchies. The attention that cultural property debates have stirred may not result in a satisfactory solution (an internationally acceptable cultural property scheme), but they contribute to shifting values accorded to types of cultural production and they move to the foreground actors and their interests in rights of ownership and control of production. ■

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# THE ROLE OF THEORY IN FOLKLORISTICS AND COMPARATIVE RELIGION

21–23 August 2013, Turku, Finland

The Departments of Folkloristics and Comparative Religion at the University of Turku and Åbo Akademi University, together with the Donner Institute, are organizing an international interdisciplinary conference to honour the work of Professor Lauri Honko (1932–2002).

Lauri Honko's research interests covered a vast area, both theoretically and methodologically. He elaborated methods in the tradition-ecological perspective, applied sociological role theory to folklore research, guided the debate on theories of genre, fostered research on cultural identity, and developed methods of folkloristic fieldwork and data archiving. The aim of this conference is to bring together and discuss the new developments, tendencies and theoretical innovations within the areas Honko contributed to.

Suggestions for possible approaches include:

## Genre theory

- Genre as a tool of research in the study of religions
- Comparative research on epics
- Genre from the point of view of communication and performance
- The development of genre and the new genres

## Functions and ecology of tradition today

- Meanings and uses of folk religion and folklore
- Ecological viewpoints on tradition
- The rite theory
- Variation and context

## Tradition processes

- Tradition and cultural identity
- Safeguarding and cultural heritage
- Research ethics
- Epics and their use



Lauri Honko (right) with colleagues at the panel discussion, Turku, 14.3.1970. Photograph: Matti Morottaja, Archives of Cultural Studies, University of Turku.

The plenary speakers of the conference are: **Regina Bendix** (University of Göttingen); **Marion Bowman** (The Open University); **Matti Kamppinen** (University of Turku); **Håkan Rydving** (University of Bergen); **Joseph Mbele** (St Olaf College); **Viveka Rai** (University of Würzburg); **Ulrich Marzolph** (University of Göttingen). The language of the conference is English. The admission to the conference is 200 euros.

Call for papers, deadline 31 March 2013

Registration, deadline 31 May 2013

Instructions for submitting an abstract and more information can be found on the conference's homepage <http://honkoconference.utu.fi>. Additional information: [honko-conference@utu.fi](mailto:honko-conference@utu.fi)

Organisers: Department of Folkloristics, University of Turku; Department of Comparative Religion, University of Turku; Department of Folkloristics, Åbo Akademi University; Department of Comparative Religion, Åbo Akademi University; The Donner Institute for Research in Religious and Cultural History

In collaboration with: Kalevala Institute; Folklore Fellows' Communications; *Temenos: Nordic Journal of Comparative Religion*; The Finnish Society for the Study of Religion; ISFNR

# The International Society for Epic Studies



Chen Tianlun performing a chapter of the *Epic of King Yalu of the Miao*. Photo: SKS/Lauri Harvilahti

The International Society for Epic Studies (ISES) has been established by the participants of the “2012 International Summit on Epic Studies: Toward Diversity, Creativity and Sustainability”, which took place in November 17 to 18, 2012 in Beijing, P. R. of China.

The Organizing Committee of the Summit decided to initiate a regular forum for international epic studies and to bring together researchers from interdisciplinary fields in order to discuss key issues on the forefront of epic studies throughout the world. The participants of

the Summit recognized that epic poetry is one of the most important genres of verbal art and paid attention to the urgent necessity for international cooperation individually and organizationally for safeguarding of traditions of the global epic heritage.

The participants came to the consensus to establish the Society, and nominated Chao Gejin (Institute of Ethnic Literature, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences) as the first President. The Vice-Presidents represent Russia (Dmitry Funk, Russian Academy of Sciences), USA (Gregory Nagy, Harvard University), Germany (Karl Reichl, Bonn University) and Finland (Lauri Harvilahti, Finnish Literature Society).

The Society has an Advisory Board consisting of 12 members from different continents. The purpose of the ISES is to promote scholarly work world-wide on epics and epic poetry of various kinds, such as the coordination or organization of workshops, seminars, conferences, exhibitions, performances, fieldwork, and other activities.

Membership of the ISES is open to all individuals, institutes and non-governmental organizations that are involved in activities related to epics and epic poetry, such as archiving, researching, revitalizing, performing, and transmitting the world's epic heritage.

ULLA-MAIJA PELTONEN

## FOHN – Finnish Oral History Network

In 2004, a group of Finnish oral historians founded a network called FOHN – Finnish Oral History Network. This network consists of cultural studies scholars and historians from different universities. The activities of the network are international in scope, and its overall aim is to increase the visibility of the network's members and their work. Nevertheless, it is not the intention of the members of FOHN to establish a scientific society. Rather, the network aims to provide a wide variety of inspiring activities for a broad range of participants.

In addition to organizing these seminars, FOHN and its members have published numerous articles and books on oral history. In 2006, FOHN published a collection of articles on methodological issues in oral history entitled *Muistitietotutkimus. Metodologisia kysymyksiä* ('Oral history. Methodological issues'. Eds. Outi Fingerroos, Riina Haanpää, Anne Heimo and Ulla-

Maija Peltonen. Helsinki: SKS). Along with chapters by distinguished Finnish oral historians, the volume includes a Finnish translation of the classic article by Alessandro Portelli, *What Makes Oral History Different?* FOHN has also published two themed journal issues on oral history: *Elore* 1/2006 [www.elore.fi/arkisto/1\\_06/elore1\\_06.html](http://www.elore.fi/arkisto/1_06/elore1_06.html) and *Finnish Anthropology. Suomen Antropologi*, Vol. 32:4.

The organization welcomes all scholars who take an interest in the collecting and use of oral history and oral tradition, autobiographical sources and materials.

For further information, see the FOHN website: [www.finlit.fi/tutkimus/fohn/index.htm](http://www.finlit.fi/tutkimus/fohn/index.htm)

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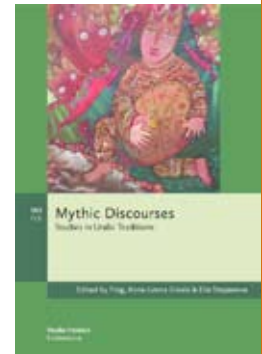


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### Mythic Discourses

Mythic discourses in the present day show how vernacular heritage continues to function and be valuable through emergent interpretations and revaluations. At the same time, continuities in mythic images, motifs, myths and genres reveal the *longue durée* of mythologies and their transformations. The eighteen articles of *Mythic Discourses* address the many facets of myth in Uralic cultures, from the Finnish and Karelian world-creation to Nenets shamans, offering multidisciplinary perspectives from twenty eastern and western scholars.

Frog, Anna-Leena Siikala & Eila Stepanova, *Mythic Discourses. Studies in Uralic Traditions*. SF Folkloristica 20. SKS 2012.



### Where is the field?

The book sheds light on the experiences of immigrants in different parts of the world and other insightful reflections on the art of carrying out fieldwork in the present day, when the task of locating the 'field' seems to present a particular challenge for researchers. This book is of interest to experienced ethnographers working in the discipline of migration studies and also to scholars conducting ethnographic research in other fields.

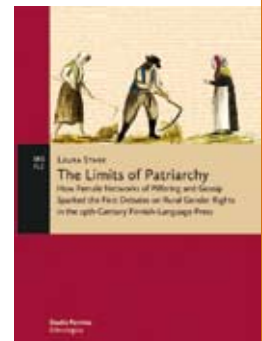
Laura Hirvi & Hanna Snellman (eds.), *Where is the Field? The Experience of Migration Viewed through the Prism of Ethnographic Fieldwork*. SF Ethnologica 14. SKS 2012.



### The Limits of Patriarchy

In the mid-19th century, letters to newspapers in Finland began to condemn a practice known as home thievery, in which farm mistresses pilfered goods from their farms to sell behind the farm master's back. Why did farm mistresses engage in home thievery, and why were letter-writers so harsh in their disapproval of it? This book explores theoretical concepts of agency and power applied to the 19th-century context and takes a closer look at the family patriarch, resistance to patriarchal power by farm mistresses and their daughters, and the identities of those Finnish men who, even in the 1850s and 1860s, sought to defend the rights of rural farm women.

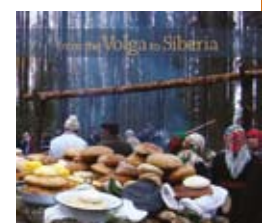
Laura Stark, *The Limits of Patriarchy. How Female Networks of Pilfering and Gossip Sparked the First Debates on Rural Gender Rights in the 19th-Century Finnish-Language Press*. SF Ethnologica 13. SKS 2011.



### From the Volga to Siberia

How are Finno-Ugric peoples faring in today's Russia? Are these minority groups surviving the pressure of globalisation? This book takes a look at the recent history and current situation of Finno-Ugric peoples from the Volga bend to Siberia. The articles provide a first-hand view of the current status and identity of the Khanty, Komi, Mari and Udmurts. Extensive image material shows us their everyday lives today, while archive pictures offer glimpses of life more than a century ago.

Ildikó Lehtinen (ed.), *From the Volga to Siberia. The Finno-Ugric Peoples in Today's Russia*. SKS Publications 1361. SKS 2012.



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# Runo collectors and laments in Old Ingria

AILI NENOLA

## Introduction

Elias Lönnrot's *Kalevala* attracted much attention both in Finland and abroad as soon as it appeared. In Finland it was understood that the *Kalevala* represented only a part of the old folk poetry and there was enthusiasm for collecting more so-called 'Kalevala variants'. A number of Lönnrot's contemporaries were already collecting old poems and songs, and on the basis of the material collected it was possible to infer that the tradition was still alive in many places. Those who received grants from the Finnish Literature Society, founded in 1831, and others recorded folk poetry both from the regions of Finland and from Karelia and Ingria in the latter part of the nineteenth century. The *Kalevala*-metre folk poetry materials which were collected were mainly published in the early twentieth century in the original 33 volumes of the *Suomen Kansan Vanhat Runot* ('Old Poems of the People of Finland').

Karelia was well known as a treasure trove of old poetry, thanks to Lönnrot's work, but the collectors of the latter nineteenth century also discovered Ingria, the song district south of the Gulf of Finland and arching round to the north of St Petersburg. Ingria turned out to be comparable to Karelia in its poetic richness, but differed from Karelia in that the old *Kalevala*-metre song/poetry tradition was largely preserved by women, and differed in many respects from the songs of Karelia, although well-known *Kalevala* and other mythological materials were found there too. The focus of the collectors in Ingria was the original population of Finnic Ingrians and Votes, whose territory (Ingria) was joined to Russian Novgorod and the population converted to Orthodox Christianity. The Ingrians in particular showed themselves to be competent in the old *Kalevala* song tradition, but the Ingrian Finns were too, who had moved there during the Swedish period (1619–1721), and who were Lutheran. These populations were peasants, who were predominantly feudal serfs, either to individual estate owners or to the state or crown until 1861. In addition, in Ingria, the territory where Peter the Great had built his capital St Petersburg in the early eighteenth century, there lived Russians, Germans and Estonians. (On Ingria and Ingrians, see e.g. Nenola 1982.)

In 1904 A. R. Niemi edited a collection of travel ac-

counts of Finnish Literature Society grant recipients. The collectors recount the successes and failures of their collection work, but also their knowledge and assessments of places and the people they encountered and their lives. While carrying out research in the 1970s for my dissertation (Nenola-Kallio 1982) into Ingrian laments one of my sources was, in addition to archived lament materials, unpublished accounts by Niemi and other poetry collectors who visited Ingria. At that time I was naturally most interested in explaining what the collectors knew about laments and lamenting – as marginal information in records of laments is as scarce as in *Kalevala*-metre songs, though here the information was at this point being uncovered.

Laments were strange to most collectors, and a type of song tradition that was difficult to record. I remember noting the bewilderment associated with encountering them the very first time I read the travel accounts. Now, several decades later, when I read the accounts again, I notice how many matters overall in Ingria afforded similar experiences of strangeness to the collectors. These experiences and judgements based on prejudices especially about the Orthodox Ingrians ('Russian believers') and their ways of life arose in Finland out of distrust and distaste directed towards the east and Russian culture, behind which lay and lies a centuries-old history of conflict and regional war between east and west. A similar sense of alienation had already been directed towards the Ingrians under Swedish rule (see Sivonen 2007), and it is still evident in the ways in which a position was adopted with respect to the descendants of Ingria's Lutheran Finns, who acquired the so-called status of returning migrants in Finland in the 1990s. (See Nenola 2002, introduction, on the history of the Ingrians.)

Behind the collectors' stances and concepts, the contemporary determination to see the traditions of Ingria, and of Karelia, as Finnish, and to accommodate them as expressions of the 'Finnish folk spirit', is also patent. It must be remembered that the situation was one in which the significance of folk tradition, and especially of *Kalevala*-type tradition, was seen above all as developing from the perspective of national Finnish culture.

The following presentation of some collectors' accounts often shows evidence of the alienation felt towards Ingrians as discussed above, but it also demonstrates the writers' lively interest in the tradition they encountered.

### **A collector who admired the songs of the *Kalevala* encounters Ingrians and laments**

A word ought now to be said about the common folk amongst whom I dwelled in the summer, but I am too weak for this, all the more since I did not, in the spring before my departure, find time to make ready for these reflections, nor did I think that on such a small journey it would be so unavoidably necessary. Yet it were good, should the Society ordain this, that one who sets out on collection expeditions should by all means possible prepare himself in folk-knowledge, for even short journeys and observations would explain much which by mere reading he would not clearly conceive, but which, having once been carefully read, in strange conditions, as when living amongst the folk in Estonia and Ingria, would be a good way in many places to uncover many very important insights. (Länkelä, in Niemi 1904: 278; other citations from Länkelä are from the same publication.)

So wrote Jaako Länkelä, a 25-year-old student, who later became a pioneer of popular education and a lecturer at Jyväskylä teacher training college, in his account to the Finnish Literature Society of his expedition to collect poems in Ingria in the summer of 1858. The observation, intended as advice to the Society, may be interpreted as indicating that if there were written information about an area, its inhabitants and aspects of their life available to some extent beforehand, it would be possible to gain a better understanding of what was encountered – and at the same time, what had been read would gain a more concrete meaning through experience. A good while was to pass from the time of Länkelä's expedition before even this sort of advice was offered to Finnish Literature Society grant-holders or other collectors of folk poetry.

It becomes clear from Länkelä's account that in the mid-nineteenth century appreciation of the old tradition was to an extent contentious: on the one hand there was a desire to record old songs (or other traditional materials), but on the other the singers of these songs and their living conditions were despised as uncivilised, superstitious and backward. The tradition as such rose in estimation as material for the project of Finnish nationalism, but the contention certainly continues to be evident well into the twentieth century – although it is hidden beneath an idealisation of the singers and lamenters, as exhibited e.g. by Martti Haavio (e.g. *Vii-meiset runonlaulajat* ('The Last Runo-singers'), 1943). An example of a Haavio-type assessment of singers and tellers is the folklorist Elsa Enäjärvi-Haavio's character-

isation of three Ingrian women encountered in Ingria in 1936, whose songs, laments and other traditions she recorded:

(Anna Bussina was, apart from Juljaana Pohjolainen and Katri Vohta, our best narrator.) Anni was a *charming person*, and, apart from her foot problem, well-preserved (for a 55-year-old), *intelligent and clear in her thoughts*.

Katri Vohta . . . was *modest and refined in her behaviour*, with wrinkles furrowed into her face from cares and hardships; her eyes were pale grey, a little sorrowful and calm. Face and hands were burnt dark brown by heat. Her hands were knobably from rheumatism and it was difficult for her to stretch out her fingers straight. *Much work had been done with these hands and those eyes had doubtless shed many tears*. . . . She did not know many songs, *as she had taken little part in festivities, had been quiet and self-effacing by nature*. She knew wedding songs . . .

Valpuri Vohta is a mother of twelve children (seven of whom were dead). . . . Regardless of all this, Valpuri Vohta's step is young and strong: she is a tall and brisk woman. Nearly all her teeth were gone, however. Valpuri Vohta has sung and danced throughout her life, despite her children . . . Valpuri Vohta is fast. She is keen to narrate with unusual strength. *Her family is not at a specially advanced level, however. Her husband and son may be Red sympathisers*. . . . Valpuri Vohta does not approach the word of God particularly respectfully each time; and she utters profane and daring stories. But *she is certainly a good person at heart*, and received the collector in a friendly manner as well.

I will not set out to analyse the passages highlighted in these texts any further, but simply note that the presentations speak both of the people depicted and of the author and her own values. The wary observation is interesting, that 'Valpuri Vohta does not approach the word of God particularly respectfully each time.' Even though there were eighty years between Länkelä's and Enäjärvi-Haavio's expeditions, and times had changed both in Finland and in Ingria, Enäjärvi-Haavio's observation brings to mind the disquiet felt by the early collectors when the folk being encountered did not share their Christian views – they appeared either 'pagan' or wrong (Russian) believers. Let us continue with Länkelä.

Despite the initial apology, Länkelä's account is quite broad and full of details, nor did the recognised lack of 'folk-knowledge' of the region really prevent him expressing his ideas and views of the people and their customs, ways of life, traditions and religious circumstances. The view appears constantly in the account that the 'Russian believers' or Izhorians (Ingrians) were in all respects at a lower level of civilisation than 'Finnish believers.' Thus, the citation given above continues: 'As

I walked around I noticed the paupers, among whom I managed to go, to be divided in their civilisation into three parts: on the lowest level the folk of Soikkula, higher up those of Kosemkinä, and highest those of the islands (Lavansaari, Seiskari). Of the knowledge held by the people of Soikkula of good and evil, of right and wrong nothing, generally speaking, can be said clearly. The reason for this may be the almost universal Russian faith.’ (278–9)

On the other hand Länkelä notes that not even the ‘Russian faith’ is particularly deep: ‘Speaking plainly, their faith is still built upon an old pagan foundation. Is their situation not the same as the departed Castrén said of the Samoyeds: “The Samoyeds live under a dim and dark belief that death ends a person’s whole being.”’ (280) As evidence, Länkelä presents a description of how the (Russian-faith) ‘Izhorians’ behave towards the dead. It is interesting that as evidence that the Izhorians believe the soul lives in the body and rots and disappears along with it, Länkelä cites the death laments:

The body is placed in the coffin, which is guarded by men until the funeral begins. Now laments are sung in turn. . . . There is nothing spiritual in the laments, just secular requests and hopes. . . . Indeed, the soul is believed to live in the body. The soul’s life in the grave until the body rots is quite clearly affirmed by the lament at the grave and the offering of food to the body. There are likely to be few Russian believers here who do not go lamenting to the grave. (Länkelä in Niemi 1904: 280–1.)

Länkelä also asserts that

neither the laments nor weeping at the grave have disappeared among Finnish believers. One astonished woman said: ‘Our new pastor does not allow weeping at the grave or at the funeral procession, although the Russian priest does not think anything of it.’ For often these people are kneeling on the grave, when only the priest does not see. From this it may be concluded that these too have the same belief about the death of the soul once the body has crumbled to dust, although they do not recognise this at all. (Länkelä in Niemi 1904: 282)

Länkelä’s description contains interesting and useful details and information about the funerals and laments of the Ingrians – but his interpretation of laments and their significance is very idiosyncratic. The reason is not just the lack of ‘folk-knowledge’, but a personal attachment to the superiority of Christianity, specifically Lutheranism, which colours his views of ‘Russian believers’ and of old traditions. In some sentences an almost missionary perception is visible: ‘The longer I dwelled among them, I would for sure come to see Christianity as being merely an outer shell, and their true faith

as being pagan.’ The assertion is similar to that of the sixteenth-century Orthodox monk Makarii, influential in Ingria, who claimed that the Votes were completely pagan and more vigorous missionary work needed to be carried out among them, which led to the destruction of old offering places and to other measures.

Observation and evaluation in themselves could hit the mark. The problem was that the old traditions on the trail of which Länkelä came to Ingria, and with success, since his records contain around a thousand entries for different songs and other traditions, were part of that ‘paganism’ which he despised. The local inhabitants too could be knowledgeable about their traditions’ unsuitability in the Church’s eyes, since Länkelä often bemoans the fact that the women would not agree to ‘give’ him songs, because they believed them to be sinful – as the priest had taught. On laments Länkelä asserts in his account, in addition to what was described, only that ‘wedding and lament songs are esteemed by them – the Russian believers – more than among Finnish believers. Laments are difficult to gather, for they are never alike, but each laments just as she is able. She does not wish to announce this in any way, for a drop of weeping is awaited in the eyes if she just begins a song. With all my effort I did not get more than 24 laments, and these with great hardship.’ (Länkelä in Niemi 1904: 290.)



Girls in Soikkola costume. Kaprio 1911. Photograph: Samuli Paulaharju, Finnish Literature Society.

Of more or less the same opinion about the Ingrians was the folk poetry collector Vihtori Alava, who traversed the region from the 1890s onwards. He writes in his portrayal of Ingria and the Ingrians: 'Enlightenment is at a rather low level among Russian believers; among the Lutherans it is better. However, morality is at an almost commendable point.' (SKS, Alava, Ingrida.) But Alava praised the songs and singing skills precisely of 'Russian believers' (the Izhorians or Ingrians), and on this basis extolled their 'Finnishness': 'But above all the Finnishness is noticeable among these Ingrian folk: they are Finnish to the heart. They are sensitive, they put much store in thought. In their liveliness they have preserved a rich world of poetry to this day. Nowhere nowadays are so many *Kalevala* poems sung as in Ingria, western Ingria. They are the people's joy, comfort, instruction.' (SKS, Alava, V. XIII, 183 etc.) So thought Alava in the 1890s.

The significance of the songs was also emphasised by Länkelä thirty years earlier: 'Their songs and liveliness are worthy of note. What would this folk's life be, if there were no songs? Songs sustain in them, as evil presses upon them from every corner, a spirit of uprightness. Were there no counsel and admonition from songs, they would sink beneath the level of Russians here. If the Russian priests get the songs and verses to disappear, for sure they will perish.' (Länkelä in Niemi 1904: 283.) However, Lutheran priests too were onto the matter: working in western Ingria, the pastor J. W. Murman expended great efforts to destroy old wedding customs, for example, and naturally, along with them, the songs and laments, as well as the funeral laments (cf. Länkelä's reference to the Lutheran laments).

The students Theodor Tallqvist and Antti Törneröos travelled a year after Länkelä (1859) in southern Ingria to the villages of Moloskovitsa and Gubanitsa, and the southern part of the peninsula of Hevaa; it is to be counted to their credit that laments from these regions were written down, though like others they focused mainly on other songs. They witness that 'there was an immense number of laments or weeping songs in these villages, but we did not have time to write down many of them' (Tallqvist and Törneröos in Niemi 1904: 394). 'An immense number' may point to the skill of lamenting being still widespread in these areas. Although Tallqvist and Törneröos regarded Ingrian customs as 'peculiar' or 'strange', their description is to a degree more neutral than Länkelä's. The strangeness caused them more astonishment than judgementalism, and they for example assert just that 'it is still to be mentioned how the Ingrians' faith and magic are often intertwined. They do not really regard magic as sinful. Both, faith and magic, are in certain circumstances equally valuable and both are used alongside each other.' (Tallqvist and Törneröos in Niemi 1904: 397.)

Tallqvist and Törneröos clearly had as little knowledge of laments as they travelled in Ingria as Länkelä. Yet laments obviously made a strong impression on them, as is evident in their description:

The reason for the number of laments is that the lamenters usually craft them from their own heads and their own lives. Rarely does one meet two lamenters whose poems are very similar. In similar circumstances they do indeed in many respects follow the same thread in their content, but the lamenters' skill and sense, and life experiences, define the length of each. – Perhaps their poetic value is not great, but they are pleasing to the Ingrians. They are moved by them to an extraordinary degree, especially the women. We did not meet anyone who would not weep as they were performed. Not just the lamenters, but all the women arriving there were induced to weep by the performance, for as soon as it began 'the heart broke'. They always fell to thinking about the turns of their own lives and their black sorrows, and could not look 'with two narrow gazers' without tears rising in them. (396–7)

In contrast to what has been mentioned, the linguist Volmari Porkka, who went on poetry collection trips in 1882 and 1883, spoke in 1883 in his collection account (Porkka 1886) of laments as a familiar phenomenon. He had already been asked to gather them, naturally alongside poems.

In my travel directions the hope was expressed that, as opportunity allowed, I would also collect laments, old tales and charms. If a smaller area had come to be investigated, a comprehensive collection might have taken place. Already when on the way to Hevaa I noticed how much time a thorough poetry collection took, I saw it would be more useful to give up on collecting laments and tales. However, I put on paper fifty pieces as a sample of the laments of those parts. From Soikkola I picked up quite a number of them the previous year and wrote down even more from around Laukaa. (Porkka 1886: 167.)

In his collection account Porkka comments mainly on the finding of poems or songs and their quality, the proficiency of the women's singing skills, differences between Lutheran and Ingrian villages, etc. But the collection of laments he mentions only a couple of times:

In Tönttölä I also wrote down the first laments. As I came into the village an old woman came up to me asking me to a meal. I was amazed at first at this hospitality shown to a complete stranger, for which, however (to mention as an aside), the old woman gladly accepted the payment I offered. As I feasted, the old woman related that she was the sister to the above-mentioned old man Sinoi, and had as it were in her brother's memory invited me to her house, when she

heard that I was collecting old poems. With emotion she spoke of her departed brother's poetic gifts, which, however, had come to her in part, as little as to her sister in Lenttinen. 'Well, I can't sing, but I can weep,' she said hesitatingly, and so I wrote down some of her laments, which, however, like the others I got from Hevaa and Tyrö, are not comparable with the laments from Soikkola. (Porkka 1886: 154–5.)

I arrived in the village of Yhimäki or Lemmityinen high on the sea cliff. The renowned runo-singer of the district, Olena, lay on her death-bed and another well-regarded runo-woman died the same day as I

arrived in Yhimäki, so their songs remained hidden from me. But instead the widow Paroi, from Kantokylä, was not at all stingy in making clear her poetic gifts, but offered me all she could of poems, charms and laments. Paroi spoke with some pride of her singing skills, exclaiming: 'Fifteen bridegrooms went without me.' To the fifteenth she got married, but then came to experience the truth of the proverb: 'sorrow breeds words, grief turns to tears' (Porkka 1886: 158.)

Thus in his collection account, which was published three years after the expedition, Porkka does not comment precisely on laments. But in 1883, the same year as he made his second expedition, he published a description of Ingrian laments with examples in the paper *Valvoja*. The description is based on records from the 1882 trip (and possibly earlier ones) to western Ingria, to the areas of Laukaa and Soikkola.

The picture Porkka presents of the quality of Ingrian laments, the contexts of their use and their performers was already quite broad. It had already become clear to him that it was a matter of an old tradition, and he refers to knowledge of laments and lamenters in the Old Testament, ancient Greece and Rome and so forth. He also investigated the relationship of Ingrian and Russian traditions to each other and pondered whether 'the lament type is borrowed from our neighbouring peoples to the east, or whether it is, like our epic and lyric poems, a product of the Finnish folk spirit' (emphasis mine).



Savimäki villagers. Soikkola 1911. Photograph: Samuli Paulaharju, Finnish Literature Society.

Porkka is not in a position to formulate a clear answer, but argues that, at least in content and language, 'the Finnish people has formed them according to its own spirit'. However, the influence of the Russian laments should, felt Porkka, be investigated – there were more of these, gathered from different areas and more thoroughly investigated. (Porkka 1883: 204–5.)

### The ideology of collecting and assessing

The work of the collectors of folk poetry – and it is to be remembered that it was a matter of collecting song or poetry texts, not of fieldwork – and the collection ideology exemplified in these and many other samples coloured the enthusiasm, in the nineteenth century and on even up to the Second World War, for the search for 'the poems of the *Kalevala*', even if other traditions were also recorded. The enthusiasm was guided by the desire to find yet more evidence for the existence and productivity of the 'Finnish folk spirit' in the past. In other words, evidence for the history of Finnish culture, for the history of the Finnish folk. Ingria appears more contentious as a focus of collection from this perspective than Karelia: the singers' 'Russian faith' did not appear to be a problem in Karelia, unlike in Ingria, where 'Finnish believers' and 'Russian believers' lived side by side and were thus easier to compare with each other, which was done most often to the detriment of the latter.

'Epic and lyric songs', as Porkka said, were recog-



nised unquestionably as products of the 'Finnish folk spirit', whereas laments were and still are rather dubious from this perspective. Apart from being part of women's tradition, they also, from the point of view of Finns, clearly belong to eastern cultural circles, with suspicions of Russian influence, as Porkka suggested. In the light of recent knowledge it is not at all certain that the influences worked in this way; we may equally well think of the song culture as a Finnish or more widely Finno-Ugric tradition exercising an influence on the formation of the culture of the Slavs who moved into the area. It is a different matter, of course, to what extent the song culture, more Karelian than Ingrian anyway, can be characterised as 'Finnish' other than from a strongly nationalistic or 'Finnish tribes' perspective. Yet our national culture and the picture of its past has been built on the foundation of this viewpoint, and this is pertinent too to the subject of the collectors of folk poetry.

Let us return to the laments and the Ingrian singers whom the collectors described in the passages cited above. The strangeness of both the laments and the Ingrian way of life are visible in the accounts. It is not just a question of doubt and alienation over the 'Russian faith', but more widely of the xenophobic view of Finnish students or scholars encountering the lives and inhabitants of the Ingrian territory. Evidence is clearly visible of the culture shock the collectors experienced upon entering the Ingrian countryside and meeting true 'runo-singers'. Strangeness was experienced on both sides, indeed: the collectors were at times suspected of being spies, sometimes of being the Antichrist or spreaders of the plague. Nor was it immediately understood why these young gentry wanted to write down women's or men's songs, and who needed them.

On the collectors' part, the encounters were clearly influenced by the concept of an idealised spiritual ('Kalevalaic') meaning to the old songs, which did not in any way feel as if it corresponded to the actual singers' outward forms of existence or their daily thoughts or behaviour, and which perhaps therefore proved that these people merely preserved old traditions, as was then believed. The same incompatibility between the quality of the tradition and its bearers seems to lie behind the attempt, seen in the Enäjärvi-Haavio citations, to see 'charm', 'modesty' and 'intelligence' behind the worn faces, clearly witnessing to their poverty, of the easy-going women she met – to say nothing of the description, built up from passages of purple prose, of Karelian and Ingrian singers that Martti Haavio offers in *Viimeiset runonlaulajat* ('The Last Runo-singers'), where they are put on a pedestal alongside other idealised singers of Antiquity and the Renaissance, while the drudgery of their life and circumstances is at the same time – beautifully, indeed – depicted.

In my dissertation I read texts of Ingrian laments

alongside other old songs. Laments were but a part of the multifaceted song culture preserved by women, as is illuminated more thoroughly by Senni Timonen in her dissertation (2004) on the singing of Ingrian women and its meaning. Elsa Mahler's work, *Altrussische Volkslieder aus dem Pečoryland* (1951), the material for which she gathered in 1937–9 in the Pskov–Pechory area from archaic Russian villages, describes a similar female song culture. Although the songs and laments published in the work differ in their content and melodies from the Ingrian ones, the singing and its meaning which Mahler gives a picture of are strongly reminiscent of the Ingrian and other song cultures of the vicinity. The songs are primarily women's songs and they are said to have accompanied a person's life and work from 'birth to death'; in other words all the significant stages of a person's life and work were accompanied by a 'peasant woman's song' – even the building of a house was accompanied by women's songs. (Mahler 1951: 18 ff.)

Mahler's work stands out not only for its perceptive way of discussing songs and laments both as texts, music and presentations, without forgetting the singers. Her presentation totally lacks the reserve and pejorative emphasis which colour the comments of the aforementioned travellers to Ingria. She sees merely folk art, which is visible both in people's old-fashioned ways of dressing and in other aspects of material culture as well as in songs, laments, dances and customs. It may well be that the poverty and other miseries of existence evident in the behaviour and life of the Ingrians were matters which the collectors frowned upon. Yet it was the old beliefs and customs, linked for the Finns with the strange and repulsive 'Russian faith', that constituted from the outset a stumbling block to the understanding of the people and their way of life.

### The development of an understanding of laments

The samples of collection accounts need to be read in the context of a development of understanding of laments. There were more than twenty years between Länkelä and Tallqvist and Törneröos, and Porkka, and the amazement and alienation towards laments felt by the former had progressed for Porkka into an exceptionally clear view of what laments were. For this, it was not, however, enough that he had written down in 1882 around 150 laments and listened to and watched performances of laments many times. Only the perception that it was a matter of a type of song which was familiar too to the neighbouring Russians, and that the tradition perhaps had something to do with ancient traditions known elsewhere from literary sources, brought out the distinct quality of laments. They were not merely local, chance songs of wailing by women, but were connected with archaic ways of dealing with sorrow or other feelings. The value of laments began to emerge – though

they still remained in the shadow of other 'Kalevala' songs, 'a thorough runo-collection takes a lot of time', and hence Porkka recorded a mere fifty laments on this trip. Thank goodness he recorded them at all.

Porkka, then, already knew how to answer many 'what' and 'what sort of' questions. When Porkka's 1883 investigation is compared with Martti Haavio's presentation from the 1930s on Finnish-Karelian laments, the level of knowledge is not much different. Haavio merely had a broader body of material at his disposal, including Karelian texts, and he described both the content of laments and the contexts of their use more broadly – and referred to many mentions of laments elsewhere in the world. From the writings of them both it is clear that lamenters were women, and the conclusion of them both was that it was largely a question of women's feelings. Haavio of course was fifty years more sophisticated, and proposes that laments described 'the psyche of the Finnish woman' (Haavio 1934, 1935).

Lauri Honko's 'Itkuvirsirunous' (Lament poetry) from 1963, which has been of great importance for later research into laments, is reminiscent to an extent of Porkka's and Haavio's writings, and repeats the same sources, but here other factors are linked to the information. In addition to the presentation of the details of the tradition and its historical and cultural contextualisation, Honko has to present a theoretical support. There begins to arise a perception of what laments were needed, presented and crafted for. The placing of ritual lamenting and laments in a van Gennep type rite of passage framework brings out the far-reaching and deepening understanding of the existence and preservation of tradition. Lamenters no longer appear as private women releasing their feelings in a traditional manner, but as cultural agents who play their part in maintaining, proclaiming and interpreting the community's views of mankind and the world, especially at those points when fundamental twists in the life of the individual and the community take place, and where women are of course central participants: marriage, death, orphaning, widowing, loss of children to illness, death and war.

The place of laments and lamenting aloud within the ritualisation of turning points in human life, and the naming and investigation of them from this perspective, open up additional viewpoints as they refer not only to the identification and categorisation within a 'lament culture' of the passage of an individual's life, but also to changes in the internal relationships within the community and to the renewed social order, and to the beliefs and other opinions and notions associated at any time with them. Moreover, the language of laments, and the context and manner of their performance, are flooded with feeling and feelings, and in and through

laments the feelings of the objects of the weeping and of those present are expressed.

It is precisely in rituals concerned with the turning points in human life, which deal not only with feelings and beliefs connected with living as a person, with life and death, but which also define the relationships, responsibilities and rights existing between an individual and the community, that folk concepts and customs, including women's laments, end up in conflict with the Church and its representatives, be they Lutheran or Orthodox. The community of family and village, which until the coming of the Church had, according to its own customs and ways of looking at things, legitimised the taking of a child into membership of the community, the joining in wedlock or the burial of the dead and passage to the otherworld, gradually lost this legitimacy. Children had to be baptised into membership of the parish, marriage had to be a blessing by the Church, and the departed could be buried only in hallowed ground according to the rites of the Church. It was always in part a question of failure to observe these strictures when Ingrians and Votes were reproached for being primitive and unbelievers. And singing and lamenting women in particular appeared thus, whose traditions were valued by neither the Lutheran nor the Orthodox Churches, and who yet held firm to the old ways and so challenged the clerics. ■

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# The Department of Estonian and Comparative Folklore, University of Tartu

ERGO-HART VÄSTRIK & PIHLA SIIM

The Chair of Estonian and Comparative Folklore at the University of Tartu was founded in 1919 soon after the birth of the independent Republic of Estonia. The first professor of folklore was Walter Anderson (1885–1962), who served in this position between 1920 and 1939. Since then folklore has been taught in Tartu at university level continuously, including during the turbulent years of Soviet occupation. However, the status of folklore studies has changed considerably in these decades. For example, during the Soviet period, when the responsibility for teaching folklore was carried out mainly by Eduard Laugaste (1909–94), the chair of folklore was united with the Department of Literature, but the possibility of specialising in folklore remained. Great changes within academe, alongside political sovereignty, were introduced in 1991, when a new credits-based system allowed the development of a four-year

bachelor's programme with a systematic three-level curriculum.

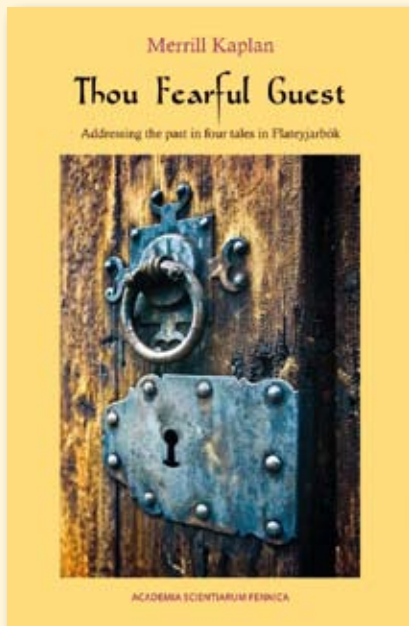
In 1993, the department regained its independence and its former name – the Department of Estonian and Comparative Folklore – which also indicated the phase of opening to the Western world. In 1995, Ülo Valk was invited to lead the department, first as an extraordinary professor and from 1998 onwards in a permanent role. After the university reforms of 2007, the department acquired its current status within the Institute for Cultural Research and Fine Arts. Since 2008, the department has participated in the activities of the Centre for Excellence in Cultural Theory. Recently the discipline of folkloristics has gained a professorship of Estonian studies, which guarantees priority state funding for the coming years.

During the last two decades a gradual broadening



Rolandas Petkevičius, Madis Arukask, Pihla Siim, Ranibala Khumukcham, Margaret Lyngdoh, Kristel Kivari, Merili Metsvahi and Carley Frances Williams at the conference 'Theoretical Frames and Empirical Research' in Vilnius, April 2012.

## A new publication in the FF Communications



### Thou Fearful Guest

Addressing the past in four tales in Flateyjarbók

by Merrill Kaplan

A stranger appears at the court of a Norwegian king known best for bringing Christianity to the North. Variations of this scene appear four times in the fourteenth-century manuscript Flateyjarbók. *Thou Fearful Guest* analyzes how these episodes create meaning by their connections to custom, law, myth, discourses of historical and spiritual truth, typological understandings of time, and the historical context of the manuscript in which they appear. *Thou Fearful Guest* explores how and to what end medieval Icelanders thought about tales of heathen gods and heroes.

Merrill Kaplan is Associate Professor of Folklore and Scandinavian Studies at the Ohio State University. She writes on Old Norse myth and mythography, legend and folk belief, and folklore on and off the Internet. She is co-editor with Timothy R. Tangherlini of *News from Other Worlds: Studies in Nordic Folklore, Mythology, and Culture*.

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236 pp. 2011. ISBN 978-951-41-1068-9

30 euros (hardback)

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of the scope of folklore studies and a continuous internationalisation of scholarship has taken place. The department is at present providing BA, MA and PhD programmes in folklore and in addition to preparing professional staff for academic institutions dealing with folklore in Estonia it has considerably expanded its geographical reach in recent years. As a result of DoRa scholarships (funded from the European Social Fund) the department has hosted since 2009 more than fifteen international PhD students from Belarus, Finland, Hungary, India, Latvia, Lithuania, Russia, Slovenia, South Korea, Turkey and the USA, working in Tartu for two semesters or longer. This means that many classes, especially those for PhD students, are taught in English and preparations are made to open a full curriculum in English.

As of 2012 academic staff of the Department of Estonian and Comparative Folklore consist of more than ten people, the majority of whom work in the department full-time. Members of the department run and participate in numerous research projects and initiatives that conceptualise folklore as a tradition-bound expressive practice that is embedded in social and communicative contexts and can be studied on both individual and collective levels. The research topics reflect a variety of interests.

The most long-standing member of the department, Senior Lecturer in Estonian Folklore, Tiiu Jaago, is a specialist in studying life stories and oral history as well as folk songs (from micro-level interpretations up to broad social-historical contextualisations). She has also examined the academic process of source creation and research history. Currently Jaago's main focus is on real-life narratives and the contexts of storytelling: How are archive texts shaped by the moment of their creation and collection? How have the periods of national independence and Soviet period affected the publicness and privacy of the narrating of real-life events? How are stories told at different times in dialogue in opposition to or in continuation with each other?

Professor of Estonian and Comparative Folklore Ülo Valk leads the new Estonian Science Foundation project 'Alternative Discourses of Belief: Folkloristic Perspectives' (2012–15). During recent years he has mainly been working on belief narratives and vernacular religion, interpreting them in their social and discursive contexts. With Marion Bowman he co-edited the collection of articles *Vernacular Religion in Everyday Life: Expressions of Belief* (Equinox 2012), which is representative of the current trends in belief narrative studies in Estonia. The book analyses vernacular religion in a range of Christian denominations from the nineteenth century, as well as in contemporary indigenous and New Age settings. Valk has also been working on temple legends and vernacular demonology of

North-East India in close cooperation with folklorists and research centres in the region.

Researcher Merili Metsvahi has recently studied legends of werewolves, analysing the reasons why female werewolves appear relatively often in Estonian legends. Currently her main interest lies on changing female status and position in society and in folklore. Metsvahi has been studying various folk narrative genres in order to find evidence to support a hypothesis concerning the matrilinearity of society in the territory of Estonia before the thirteenth century.

Researcher Elo-Hanna Seljamaa completed her doctoral studies at Ohio State University in 2012. Her dissertation is an ethnographic study of ethnic interactions, state-building and minority policies in post-Soviet Estonia, focusing on calendar customs and other performances of identities as means for negotiating the public sphere. Seljamaa has also studied the history of folklore studies in Estonia, focusing on the historic-geographic method.

Jonathan Roper, a Sheffield-trained folklorist, is Senior Researcher in English and Comparative Folklore. He is interested in traditional linguistic genres and devices. This first interest is evident in his recent guest-editing of the inaugural issue of *Incantatio*, an open-access online journal dedicated to the study of charms,

charmers and charming. And the second interest is reflected in his recently edited book, *Alliteration in Culture* (Palgrave, 2011), and the conference *Alliterativa causa* he is organising and which will take place at the Warburg Institute in January 2013.

Ergo-Hart Västriik, Senior Lecturer in Estonian and Comparative Folklore, has studied vernacular culture and religion of Finnic peoples, concentrating on Votians and Ingrians. Right now he is leading the Estonian Science Foundation grant 'Ethnicity, Nation Building and Nationalities Policy in Soviet and Post-Soviet Russia: The Finno-Ugrians' (2012–15) that aims to study among other things ethnic festivals and grass-root-level museums in north-west Russia. Since 2009 Västriik has been the editor-in-chief of the *Journal of Ethnology and Folkloristics* published jointly by the University of Tartu, the Estonian National Museum and the Estonian Literary Museum.

Research on folklore of Finno-Ugric minority groups has been developed also by Senior Lecturer Madis Arukask, who has studied the vernacular religion of the Finnic peoples, especially that of Vepsians, among whom he has conducted extensive fieldwork. In his research he has concentrated on various aspects of lament tradition as well as on the customs and beliefs related to herder magic. Arukask's second field of inter-

Private collection



Ergo-Hart Västriik, Jnan Sarma, Ülo Valk, Merili Metsvahi, Pihla Siim, Liilia Laaneman and Faguna Barmahalia next to the Kāmākhya Temple in Guwahati city in Assam, India, February 2011.

est concerns cultural processes and modernisation in Estonia.

Research Assistant Pihla Siim is writing her doctoral dissertation for the University of Eastern Finland. She is studying identity creation and family negotiation processes in transnational families by analysing personal experience stories and family storytelling. The study focuses on what interviewees (choose to) remember and tell, and how stories are used for shaping personal and group identities as well as for establishing, strengthening or loosening people's relation to different individuals, groups or places.

Maili Pilt, Librarian and a PhD student in folklore, is studying online discussion forums centred on family and (personal) relationships. These virtual environments are asynchronous, based mainly on texts and enabling anonymous social interaction, making it possible for people with the same kind of interests to exchange information and experiences. Pilt's research focuses on personal experience stories written down by members of these virtual communities and the ethical questions the researcher needs to solve before collecting, publishing and analysing stories that often include very delicate information.

Risto Järv, the Director of Estonian Folklore Archives, is working part-time at the department as a senior lecturer. Järv is leading the fairy-tale research group, the department's joint initiative with the Estonian Literary Museum, that aims to systematise and publish the typology of Estonian fairy tales (*Tales of Magic* vol. 2 will be published soon) as well as other publications and studies in this field. In addition, he has conducted research on the relationships between folklore and tourism, reflected, for example, in his recent article in *Fabula* titled 'Fairy Tales and Tourist Trips'.

Also Kristin Kuutma, Professor of Cultural Research, has part-time affiliation to the department. She is leading the Estonian Science Foundation project 'Analysis of Knowledge Production in the Context of (National) Heritage Scholarship' (2009–12) and is the principal investigator in Estonia for the 7th Framework Programme's project 'EuNaMus – European national museums: identity politics, the uses of the past and the European citizen'.

The department is involved in close co-operation with the Department of Ethnology, University of Tartu, the Estonian Folklore Archives, the Department of Folkloristics, the Estonian Literary Museum and other institutions of folklore studies and ethnology. International partners include many research centres in Europe, India and the USA. Among joint initiatives one should mention WCTB-Network, H-Folk, joint conferences and other projects. Below are given just a few examples of the co-operation that brings folklorists together from near and far.

The Department of Estonian and Comparative Folklore and the Institute of Lithuanian Literature and Folklore in Vilnius are establishing a tradition of organising annual academic meetings of young folklorists taking place alternately in Tartu and Vilnius. In 2011, a two-day symposium entitled 'Belief, Tradition, and Identity as Vernacular Practices: Current Issues in Ethnology and Folkloristics' was organised in Tartu, and in April 2012 it was followed by a conference 'Theoretical Frames and Empirical Research' in Vilnius. The call for papers for the third International Conference of Young Folklorists entitled 'Analytical Categories' is now open, abstracts should be submitted by 1 February, 2013. The conference takes place in Tartu on 14–16 May, 2013.

One of the events organised recently by the Department of Estonian and Comparative Folklore together with the Department of Scandinavian Studies is the 6th Nordic-Celtic-Baltic folklore symposium 'Supernatural Places'. The symposium took place on 4–7 June 2012, with 70 participants representing 19 different countries presenting their papers. ■

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**FFC 276.** Ülo Valk, *The Black Gentleman: Manifestations of the Devil in Estonian Folk Religion*. 217 pp. 2001. 22 euros.

**FFC 288.** Jonathan Roper, *English Verbal Charms*. 242 pp. 2005. 28 euros.

**FFC 289.** Kristin Kuutma, *Collaborative Representations: Interpreting the Creation of a Sámi Ethnography and a Seto Epic*. 282 pp. 2006. 30 euros.

# John Miles Foley (1947–2012)

Professor John Miles Foley departed this life on 3 May 2012, in Columbia, Missouri, USA. He was a leading scholar in the field of oral tradition research. He was a recognized specialist of international repute and founder of the journal *Oral Tradition* (<http://journal.oraltradition.org>). Professor Foley was the director of the Center for Studies in Oral Tradition ([www.oraltradition.org](http://www.oraltradition.org)) and holder of the William H. Byler Chair in the Humanities, Curators' Professor of Classical Studies and English (University of Missouri). In 2006 he founded a new research centre, The Center for eResearch ([www.e-researchcenter.org](http://www.e-researchcenter.org)) at the University of Missouri to serve as a campus and international focus for digital and internet-related research.

In his early major work, the annotated bibliography *Oral-Formulaic Theory and Research* (1985), Professor Foley mentions over 1800 monographs and articles from over 90 language areas. In his numerous monographs Foley stresses the importance of the inherent features of a given tradition in comparing ancient Greek, South Slavic and ancient English epic poetry and many other traditions, presents an interpretative model, and suggests the factors to be borne in mind in comparing different oral literatures. Further, his approach represents a shift away from the world of grammar-like structures and compositional device systems towards a new synthesis that we know by now as his Theory of Immanent Art, Traditional Referentiality and Word-Power. His single-authored monographs include: *The Oral Theory of Composition* (1988), *Traditional Oral Epic: The Odyssey, Beowulf, and the Serbo-Croatian Return Song* (1990), *Immanent Art: From Structure to Meaning in Traditional Oral Epic* (1991), *The Singer of Tales in Performance* (1995), *Homer's Traditional Art* (1999), and *How to Read an Oral Poem* (2002).

During the last ten years of his life John Miles Foley dedicated a significant part of his work to digital and internet studies, as he himself expressed: 'to illustrate and explain the fundamental similarities and correspondences between humankind's oldest and newest thought-technologies: oral tradition and the Internet.'

The first volume in a series of electronic publications in this field of studies was Foley's multimedia work on Serbian Moslem epics, *The Wedding of Mustajbey's Son Bećirbey* (FFC 283, 2004) that can be used together with an 'e-companion', available at <http://www.oraltradition.org/zbm>. Foley was awarded the biennial award (2004–5) for a distinguished scholarly edition of the Modern Language Association for this volume. This monograph and e-edition is an illustrative example of Foley's ingenious and creative approach.

The South Slavic *guslar* Halil Bajgorić sang a version of the epic *The Wedding of Mustajbey's Son Bećirbey* in 1935 to Milman Parry and Albert Lord in the village of Dabrica in Herzegovina. The performance was recorded on aluminium records with the aid of the native *guslar* and co-fieldworker Nikola Vujnović. The volume



Yin Hubin, Lauri Harvilahti and John Miles Foley during the Folklore Fellows' Summer School in Viena Karelia, Russia, in 2007.

Stein R. Mathisen

includes an informative introduction, a biographical portrait of the singer, a synopsis of the epic, the original text of 1030 poetic lines as an accurate transcription of the acoustic recording, and the translation of the text into English. The translation intends to give an understanding of the recurrent phrases and scenes of the text, instead of trying to attain to any poetical quality. This method of scientific translation gives very convincing results. After the translation the volume continues with an impressive performance-based commentary. The commentary provides us with information about poetical and ethnocultural peculiarities of the performance and, more especially, information about the singer's personal idiolect. The chapter 'Nikola Vujnović resinging' describes the checking process of the transcription made in Cambridge by Nikola Vujnović. Foley notes that being himself a singer, Nikola had made eliminations, substitutions and additions, or 'hearings', for what Halil had originally sung. Nikola's own idiolect influenced him while making the transcription. The next chapter, 'Apparatus Fabulosus', is an analytical idiomatic lexicon of the local tradition. The lexicon is based on performances by several singers from the Stolac region. The book further includes an ethnomusicological analysis of the *guslar's* music by Wakefield Foster. The core idea of the book, as Professor Foley himself has written, 'is to ask not only what the poems mean, but also, and more fundamentally how they mean'.

The last book that Foley was able to complete is entitled *Oral Tradition and the Internet: Pathways of the Mind* and it appeared in August 2012, published by University of Illinois Press.

Foley had very close connections with the Finnish folkloristic institutes. Foley was a full member of the Folklore Fellows organization and the Folklore Fellows in Oral Epic. He was also a member of the editorial board of the internationally renowned series Folklore Fellows' Communications published by the Finnish Academy of Science and Letters. Many of us have worked together with Professor Foley at the international training courses Folklore Fellows' Summer School in Finland in 1995, 1997, 1999 and for the last time in 2007 in Kuhmo, Finland, and in Viena Karelia, in the Russian Federation. We also co-directed group discussions on international oral epics for the Folklore Fellows' Summer School and a series of workshops in the field of study of the world's epics, organized by the late Professor Lauri Honko. At the Department of English of Helsinki University his colleagues included Professor Matti Rissanen, who was the editor of *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* for many years, the journal where Foley published his first scholarly article as early as 1976, entitled '“Riddle I” of the Exeter Book: The Apocalyptic Storm' (*Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 77: 347–57).

A number of Finnish folklorists and scholars in other disciplines have undertaken many research projects, conferences and publications together with professor Foley. He was a corresponding member of the Finnish Literature Society. During the period 15 October to 25 November 2006, Foley acted as a Guest Professor Fellow at the Centre of Excellence of the Nordic Centre for Medieval Studies (NCMS). During his stay in Scandinavia he lectured in Finland (at the Finnish Literature Society and Department of Folklore Studies at Helsinki University), Sweden (at the University of Gothenburg), Norway (at the Centre of Medieval Studies of the University of Bergen) and Denmark (at the University of Odense).

During the 1995 Folklore Fellows' Summer School held in Joensuu, Finland, Foley made the acquaintance of Chao Gejin, a Mongolian epic specialist from the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, who was a member of the discussion group that Foley and I led. Many further developments have taken place: a research agreement between the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences and the University of Columbia, Missouri, Dr Chao's Chinese translation of the book by J. M. Foley entitled *The Theory of Oral Composition*, and cooperation projects undertaken quite recently between the Centre for the Study of Oral Tradition of J. M. Foley, the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences and the Finnish Literature Society. One idea to honour Foley's memory would be to develop a versatile international web-infrastructure that would be applicable to diverse epic traditions and frameworks, adaptable to the culture-specific features of individual epics, oral traditions and languages. The Museum of Verbal Art in Pathways Project ([www.pathwaysproject.org](http://www.pathwaysproject.org)) established by Foley at the University of Columbia, Missouri, is one central model to be used in building up an interdisciplinary web-portal, research platform and interactive scientific forum in the field of research on oral traditions of the world.

As a conclusion I cite the most popular among Foley's homemade proverbs: 'oral traditions work like languages, only more so'.

LAURI HARVILAHTI  
Finnish Literature Society



# Belonging to and in Russia

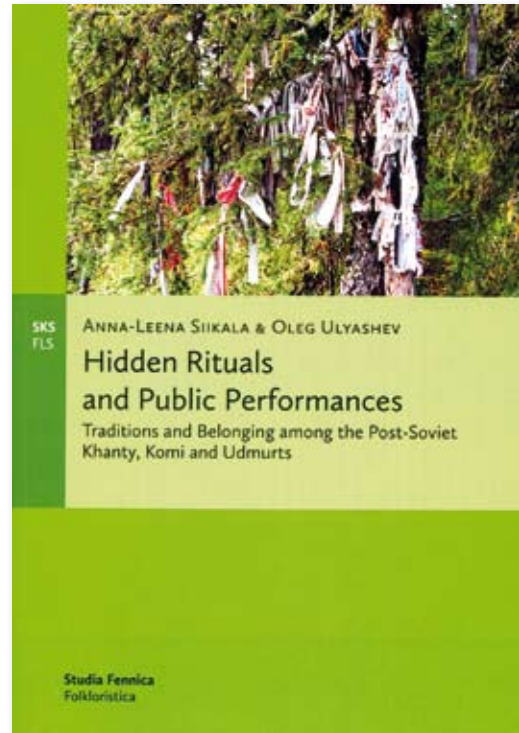
Anna-Leena Siikala & Oleg Ulyashev,  
**Hidden Rituals and Public Performances: Traditions and Belonging among the Post-Soviet Khanty, Komi and Udmurts**

Studia Fennica Folkloristica 19. Helsinki: Finnish Literature Society, 2011. 365 pp. [www.finlit.fi](http://www.finlit.fi)

The historically important fields of Finnish linguistics and ethnography, including folklore studies, lay not only in Finland or Russian Karelia, connected to Kalevalaic poetry, but in the wide and multi-cultural areas situated on the both sides of Ural Mountains, where the speakers of the Uralic languages, related to Finnish, live. At the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, researchers from the Grand Duchy of Finland, and later from the independent state, collected linguistic and folklore materials so vast that some still lie in archives almost untouched. It was a tragedy for the Finnish Finno-Ugric research tradition that the Soviet Union slowly but surely reduced the research contacts and prevented further documentation. When the Soviet Union collapsed, Finnish researchers, some of them students of those that had once had the opportunity to carry out field work amongst the Finno-Ugric minorities of Russia, were all the more eager to set out for the regions now opened up.

The Finns did not leave for Siberia on their own. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, a battery of Western researchers targeted the Eastern Europe and Russia. The field was quite quickly designated 'post-Soviet' and a range of research and publications resting on the notion were made. The rush of Western researchers into Siberia gave rise to discussions on, for example, who owns Siberian ethnography, as many of the experienced Russian ethnographers had simply to stand to one side while the budding Western fieldworkers documented indigenous cultures during the economical and political turmoil (e.g. Gray *et al.* 2003). There are few researchers who have been able both to carry on field work together with Russian colleagues and complete a study based on it. Anna-Leena Siikala's and Oleg Ulyashev's study is a delightful exception reflecting a result of a process of gaining a shared, yet not necessarily unanimous, understanding of what is going on among the peoples studied. The book is a result of a long-term collaboration of two unique researchers who represent different research traditions, cultures and societies but have found a common language.

In *Hidden Rituals* Siikala and Ulyashev concentrate on three ethnic groups, the Khanty, Komi and Udmurts, their traditions and the mechanisms of creating belongingness



in post-Soviet Russian contexts both official and unofficial. Komi and Udmurt are closely related languages, but their cultures differ to some extent. The Khanty are semi-nomadic, small-scale reindeer herders, hunters and fishers. While the Komi and Udmurts have had and still have their own titular republics with universities training local intelligentsia, the Khanty are regarded as hopelessly backward in contemporary Russia. Hence the research area is not only geographically vast, but culturally varied, and for a while the reader wonders if the research task of the writers is too wide or impossible. Yet *Hidden Rituals* gains its strength specifically from the diversity and points particularly at the multiple ways to exist in Russia. It shows that the authoritarian Soviet Union created a spectrum of local activities, practices, choices and interpretations and demonstrates how this happened in the respective fields studied. With the three examples, Siikala and Ulyashev reveal not only the cultural variety and richness of the Russian Federation, but also how belongingness is created at the local and official levels and in the interplay between them.

## Myths and rituals

About half of the book consists of Siikala's and Ulyashev's study of the Northern Khanty living along the shores of

the tributaries of the lower reaches of the River Ob 'as a pocket among the Nenets, the Russians and the Komi'. The field work became a part of the researchers' summer activities for several years, when time and again they headed for the settlements of the Shuryskary area, on the lower reaches of the River Ob. Repeated visits and a rapport developed, as reflected in the materials that Siikala and Ulyashev were able to document. The analysis concentrates on classic themes of Ob-Ugrian and religious studies: the dual organization of the community, mythic folklore, rituals and the notions connected to them and shamanism, leaving only the revived bear rituals out of the discussion. Outlining the spatial aspects of religious practices, the study discusses the totemistic notions framing the Northern Khanty communities through memorates that relate to the Moś and Por phratries, holy places and idols, and through the beliefs connected to *laksas*, the reincarnation of a person. These lead to discussions about myths and tales, which provide the reader with the most challenging passages of the book. Siikala and Ulyashev examine the Khanty myths in a way that could be described as both historical and comparative, though their aim is not to find any *Ur-forms*. Instead, they tend both to compare the contemporary Khanty materials with the historical ones, collected at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and to demonstrate the variation existing today. The result is a demanding but rewarding analysis on different temporal and local levels.

The same is true of the analysis of the local spirits and the rituals connected to them, where the mundane nature of the Otherworld, easily missed by Westerners, comes across beautifully. Both worlds, as the writers emphasize, make up a sphere of everyday actions where humans and spirits live. The Khanty spirits form a hierarchical scheme that has absorbed the Christian God and Orthodox saints within it. The immensity of the geographical area of Khanty habitation and the infinite variation in mythic folklore refute the notion of the hierarchical scheme being always precisely adhered to. Still, the overall pattern has been detected and is described from the Shuryskary point of view. The rituals are set in this hierarchy: while the hidden rituals in homes and within families concentrate on special occasions and family spirits, the holy groves manifest different levels of spirits. The writers describe rituals vividly and contextualize them, for example within the soul concepts. The description of the part taken by women in the rituals is notable, as previous researchers on Khanty have argued that women do not take part in rituals at all. This aspect is further elaborated by presenting both Siikala's and Ulyashev's field notes about the same ritual, showing not only both genders participating, but also view points of two researchers representing opposite sexes.

Dealing with shamanism, Siikala and Ulyashev note that the need to redefine shamanism through concepts such as shamanship or shamanhood arise from the post-Soviet context, where the shamans did not practise as specialists of traditional communities. Instead, the field workers encountered individual shamans and occasional performances. Holding to the notion of shamanism, the

writers emphasize that regardless of individuality, the shaman has to have a connection with the society he or she serves. The analysis of the new, public, still hidden shamanic rituals and the negotiations connected to them is a sharp-eyed glance at the heritage processes in Siberia. It demonstrates that there are many things happening in the official festivals and that they cannot be analysed only as 'public folklore' or 'museification', as the participants constantly rewrite the official agendas.

### Performing and singing for the community

The examination of the Khanty public festivals serves as a good introduction to the following chapters, where Siikala and Ulyashev focus on the speakers of Permian languages (Udmurt and Komi). Especially the chapter on Komi women's singing collectives is a stunning testimony to the tight but still sensitive touch that characterizes the whole book. The singing collectives were created on the basis of a Soviet state project, where peasant culture was to be developed and ideology and civilization spread. This kind of activity was soon institutionalized and became part of communal cultural activity. The collectives used their own ethnic traditions, both oral and material, as building blocks of the performances, but also official and artistic pieces of poetry and songs were demanded. Over the years the men's interest in the collectives diminished and they became part of women's village and inter-village culture. Nowadays, the collectives perform both in village clubs and in the official festival organized by the Komi Republic. Some might be familiar with Buranovskiye Babushki, a singing group of Udmurt ladies, representing Russia in the Eurovision Song Contest in 2012, that could easily be seen in a similar, albeit Udmurt context.

Siikala and Ulyashev offer the reader a survey of the historical and cultural background, after which they give voice to the singers themselves. The memories of the singers present a picture of the practical organization of the work and highlight the unofficial side of the collectives. They emerge not as a state project, but as a meaningful and vital part of the personal life of the singers. Singing is a way of being together and many say they sing 'for the soul and the self', which is powerfully represented in the pictures that help the reader to grasp the feeling of togetherness and the affective side of the singing. The close examination of the programmes of the folklore groups provides the reader with an introduction to Komi (and Russian) genres and official Soviet pieces. Comparing the previously known or official versions with the actual versions performed demonstrates the variation involved in the process of folk-editing.

This editing does not take place only from the written to the oral. The study shows how oral poetry has also served as an inspiration for literary products that have become part of the programmes of the choirs. Hence, the singing collectives are an excellent example of a phenomenon where the official and unofficial, public and private and oral and literary are so tightly intersected that it would be impossible to define the collectives as reflecting either official or unofficial practice. As a meaningful action the

collectives gain their power from the Komi women's joy of life and the public contexts where the collectives create a local and Komi-wide sense of ethnic belongingness based on the familiarity of the songs to the audiences.

### Reopening and re-forming the field

In the concluding chapters the writers compare the Udmurt village sacrificial rituals and public festivals with the Khanty and Komi phenomena and set them all in the context of "encircling modern culture and social interventions." Here, the focus is on both local, hidden rituals and their historical and cultural backgrounds and on national festivities where the local has served as an ingredient for the heritage. The writers also present the intellectuals, journalists, researchers, museum-builders, artists and international audiences taking part in the festivals and emphasize that their role is decisive in the process of heritage-making.

The concluding remarks of the book provide a well-knit and challenging overview of the local, interlocal, national and global processes of tradition and heritage as tightly intersected. Rejecting the political murmurs of past Finnish researchers, Siikala and Ulyashev bring the Finno-Ugric research tradition's ethnographic orientation to the present day, asking how the diverse local and cultural levels of globalization and ethnicity are represented and lived in post-Soviet Russia. This serves also as an indirect comment on current Russian discussions, published by the Russian Academy of Sciences, where Finno-Ugric research is accused for example of nationalism and political propaganda (Shabayev & Tsharina 2011). The present accusations arise from past excesses and concentrate only on them, whereas *Hidden Rituals* builds on past documents and discussions and gives attention to their value today, when interpreting the life of the speakers of Finno-Ugric languages. Old fields are opened, and new phenomena in new contexts found. Siikala and Ulyashev compare Khanty, Komi and Udmurts on a wide Russian and global scale: the study of Russian minorities is perceived as an integral part of Russian studies and in this book the processes taking place among them add to the ethnographic discussions on globalism.

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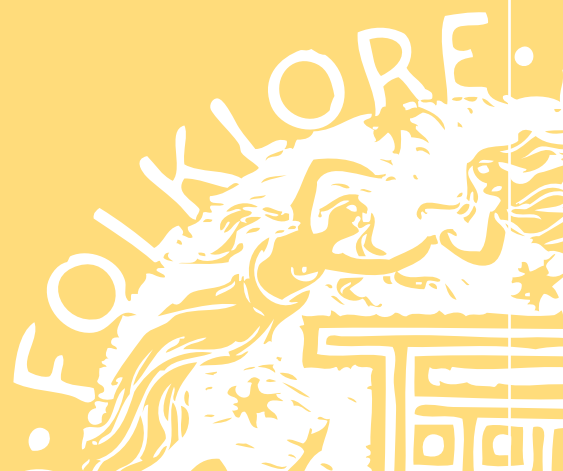
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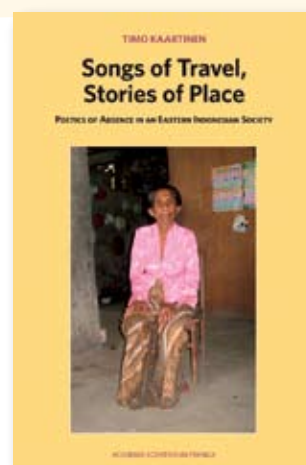
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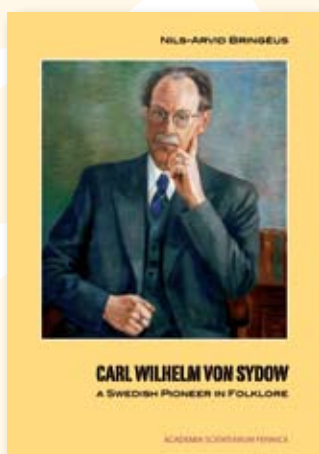


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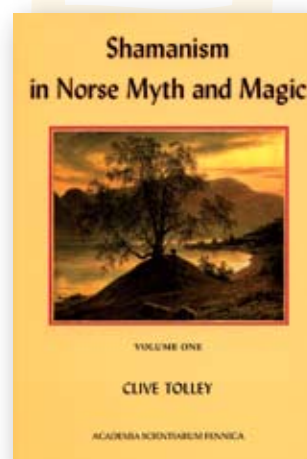
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