

Folklore Fellows' NETWORK



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Cover image: Batman slaps Robin meme produced with imgur.com.



Provincializing Modernity

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The history of human culture shows that a major advance in technology that penetrates prominently or pervasively through fields of everyday life has correspondingly transformative impacts on how people conceive the world around them and things in it. We do not periodize the past into eras like the Stone Age and the Iron Age because 'doing stuff with rocks' or the production of iron implements was a sort of incidental garnish to life at the time. The new technologies transformed societies, the size of their sustainable populations, and what today would be described a geopolitical landscapes. This phenomenon is very current to reflect on, because digital technologies have been rapidly changing our lives, from new levels of global connectivity and the widespread use of AIs to the propagation of 'fake news'. Here, however, I would like to consider the era vaguely referred to as modernity in this light.

Modernity is rooted in technological advances in mobility and communication, industrialization, and so on, which evolved in symbiosis with those for organizing societies and converting populations into a respective work force. However, the changes of modernity differ from those of, for instance, the Iron Age. The difference was not in the technology's connections to elites or to economic and social power, but in being bound to a science-based ontology and epistemology. Technologies of iron-working could be interpreted through local ontologies, reconfiguring aetiologies, associations with particular gods or cosmological features, whereas a science-based ontology provided the underpinnings of the new and increasingly complex technologies of modernity. The corresponding epistemology gradually advanced toward exclusive rights to truth claims, often with a dogmatism echoing medieval Christianity. Under that aegis, it also covertly carried complex networks of ideas and value systems that permeated societies. Through various metaphors of development and evolution that global colonization projects were believed to affirm, representatives of modernity proclaimed themselves the apex of human culture.

Across the present century, 'modernity' has come increasingly into focus as having structured the ways of thinking in the present. This topic has been prominent in folklore research, where the very concept of folklore has been shown to be a construct of modernity that could be reflected on in the construction of modernity itself. The invention of folklore was entangled with imaginations of



past, present, and future time; language, culture, and ethnicity, which blurred with both race and nation; connections between people and landscape; who was capable of (acceptable) agency; who had rights to a culture or its products; and so forth. These further intersected with visions of nationhood, race, gender, and on, and on, and on. The case has highlighted how the manifold features of modernity's ideologies form complex constellations that are deeply entangled with one another.

It is not accidental that the increasing attention to dominant ways of thinking long taken for granted are occurring in the wake of the digital turn. The internet, digital media, and associated technologies have rapidly and pervasively penetrated into almost every area of daily life on a global scale. Ideologies of modernity are mainly rooted in the Enlightenment and only gradually rose, spread, and evolved across centuries in tandem with associated technologies. In contrast, these digital technologies are achieving the same scope of impact in a matter of decades. I aver that the widespread naturalization to the digital is transforming our thinking. Whether we view the era of ideologies that are being struggled with today as mainly belonging to the nineteenth and twentieth centuries or to a period of five centuries, it is only 'five minutes of fame' in the scope of human history. Taking the dominant perspective of modernity as a default and situating an alternative position in opposition to it leads to the sort of polarizing contrasts through which modernity constructed itself. Instead, modernity should be engaged as the provincial phenomenon that it is, approaching it on equal footing with alternatives, rather than making modernity the measure of all things.



The UNESCO Process Led Kaustinen Fiddle Players to Fruitful Self-Reflection

Lauri Oino

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Kaustinen Fiddle Playing and Related Practices and Expressions" was inscribed into the UNESCO list of Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) of Humanity in December 2021, as the second Finnish element inscribed, preceded by the Finnish sauna tradition in the preceding year. What has followed is not just fame and glory, but also a change in the way the practitioners balance the significance of the past heritage with current practice. The UNESCO Convention agenda of celebrating *living* heritage seems to have found its way to the grassroots level.

Kaustinen is a rural municipality of 4,200 inhabitants in western Finland, ca. 450 km north of the capital city Helsinki. With its surrounding region, Kaustinen has been famous for its music and players ever since the nineteenth century. The tradition dates back to at least the eighteenth century and has lived on uninterruptedly until today. It is a part of Scandinavian fiddle-led traditions, with a combination of certain specific stylistic traits and a particular repertoire of tunes

producing an arguably recognizable result. The Kaustinen Folk Music Festival, established 1968, as well as many professional groups originating in Kaustinen such as JPP and Frigg, have also made the village and its musical heritage famous internationally. However, it is arguably the vitality, presence in everyday community life, and significance to the community that makes Kaustinen musical heritage exceptional to the point that Finland decided to suggest it to the UNESCO list.

The Local Musical Heritage

Week after week, hundreds of people participate in playing and dancing in dozens of groups, instructed and informal, permanent and impromptu, as well as privately. Kaustinen can be considered the capital city of Finnish Folk music; an "ecosystem" has grown there during recent decades that consists of many type kinds of activities with a variety of



Kaustinen Fiddlers get-together at a home. Photo: Lauri Oino.



organisations behind them, such as the festival, the Finnish Folk Music Institute, the state-funded folk orchestra Tallari, and tuition covering all ages and levels of ambition, from the acclaimed childrens' Näppäri pedagogy to adult starters and on to professional education in the nearby town Kokkola.

The idea of aiming for inscription into the UNESCO list was presented already before Finland ratified (quite late) the UNESCO 2003 Convention for safeguarding ICH in 2013. The process towards inscription started quickly, with an entry into the Finnish wiki inventory of ICH and successful application to Finland's national ICH catalogue as mandatory preceding steps.

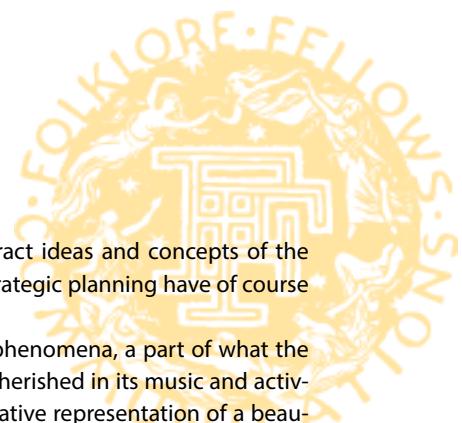
The principle of the community's will and views as the *sine qua non* of heritage safeguarding, expressed strongly in the Convention, was taken quite seriously both in Kaustinen and at the Finnish Heritage Agency that is responsible for the national implementation of the Convention. A working group of five local key associations, with administrative bodies mainly comprised of local heritage practitioners who volunteer for these roles, took responsibility for leading the process. The Finnish Folk Music Institute, which at the same time got accredited as the first Finnish advisory NGO to the Convention committee, had the possibility to

apply for grants and offer its expertise in the Convention as well as the necessary paid labour force for organising practical activities and drafting the nomination file.

In addition to discussion in the working group meetings, producing necessary application materials, such as the nomination video and the practical writing work, the two-and-a-half-year nomination process consisted of public workshops, questionnaires, interviews, and a lot of information sharing in different channels and on a variety of occasions. It was most essential to find out what the community view on its heritage is and how unified that view is: what is seen as part of that heritage, what is not, who is a part of the community and who is not. This was crucial because it was clear that the heritage was not only fiddle playing but also the "related practices and expressions" (in the UNESCO Convention's language). like the local dance tradition, costumes, and instruments used, and that it was not exclusive to people living within Kaustinen's borders. A tentative definition of the phenomenon and the community was created in the working group, and the community members were asked to comment on it, for example, in an online questionnaire. The questions were expected to be somewhat sensitive, but in the end no significantly conflicting opinions seemed to appear. The questionnaire also



Näppäri Concert at Kaustinen Folk Music Festival.
Photo: Risto Savolainen.



produced valuable new information on how, where, when, and by whom the heritage is practiced and how the community members see the significance of the phenomenon both individually and collectively.

The Result

The UNESCO inscription naturally brings with it a certain amount of publicity and attention, and also commercial expectations, especially related to generating growth in tourism and event attendance. In a region where these industries are small and underdeveloped, with the exception of the Kaustinen Folk Music Festival, these expectations seem to turn into reality quite slowly. However, the threshold for getting regional development projects started and funded has lowered significantly, and a lot is going on. It is also notable that local cultural heritage has entered forcefully into local and regional strategies as an important developmental possibility.

In Kaustinen, a boom can be seen: more and more children and adults want to learn the tradition, even if it means the laborious and long path of learning to play an instrument. Within the professional folk music world, interest towards Kaustinen has grown rapidly. Local, domestic, and international networks have expanded enormously during and after the nomination process. This has been followed by significant growth in the amount and size of co-operation projects. This is largely due to the Finnish Folk Music Institute's position and activities as a UNESCO-accredited NGO, but the results have been visible also in the Kaustinen community. These new network companions are not only related through music. The UNESCO Convention has created a shared vocabulary and shared ways to understand heritage for the ICH community stakeholders. This has resulted in crossing the borders of different ICH domains in a way that has rarely been experienced before. Also the scope of partners has expanded from mainly other similar organisations to other types of organisations, such as universities, regional development organisations, public authorities etc.

The UNESCO Convention puts a lot of weight on plans and measures for safeguarding the inscribed phenomena and the community's central role in creating and implementing them. In Kaustinen the situation has been quite good, but the process has forced the community to view the issue of the viability of its heritage more systematically and strategically, with a SWOT-analysis (i.e. strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats), mapping the central stakeholders, activities and infrastructure, finding current and future deficiencies, and so on. It has also strengthened co-operation between different organisations and stakeholders that are surprisingly many related to the small size of the community. The encounters between grassroots-level

fiddle players and the abstract ideas and concepts of the UNESCO Convention and strategic planning have of course faced some challenges.

As with many similar phenomena, a part of what the Kaustinen community has cherished in its music and activities is a semi-nostalgic narrative representation of a beautiful and glorious past. At least a portion of the community members have direct kinship relations to this history and ties across several generations. Consequently, this history is an important part of their identity narratives. It is a past with huge three-day weddings (the most important original context of the musical heritage), with a flow of legendary past players whose mythical position surpasses any current player's appreciation, with an imagined rural idyll of yester-years, and so on.

It can be argued that the nomination process has been a game-changer in the way the Kaustinen fiddle playing practitioners and also the surrounding community see their heritage and themselves. The respect and nostalgia for and pride in the past is still there. However, the UNESCO Convention's message emphasizes living heritage and its social significance and that emphasis has, little by little, impacted on how practitioners and the community think about their traditions. Previously, dwelling on the past has not given much space for appreciating who and what is current in the tradition today. The self-esteem of the Kaustinen fiddle players seems to stem a bit less than before from their ancestors' activities and a bit more from their own activities and the social significance these activities have. This subject would need closer study, but signs of this change can be seen. For instance, all of the visual promotion and publicity materials have long been dominated by the black-and-white images of yesterday's individual hero-performers. In recent years, increasing space has been given to photos and videos of today's group playing activities. In addition, the most amateurish players or groups now get their share of respect and acceptance among the player community in a way that was not always obvious previously. The social ecology of the tradition is changing in ways that are breaking down the old hierarchies that had valorized the past over the present and more prestigious players as insiders over others as outsiders.

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Considering Text Ideology

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When scrolling through a social media feed or paging through a physical book, most people never consider that what makes such activities so banal is our immersion in ideologies. Ideologies operate as a filter and a lens that make the frameworks of understanding and the networks of associations self-evident and invisible. As John Miles Foley puts it: "It's precisely because we don't pause over how texts work, what they do, [...] that we're able to use them so well" (2012: 118). In other words, we take 'texts' for granted, with relatively little critical reflection on what they are as things in the world. This is particularly important to recognize in folklore research. The discipline has a long history of work with text-type genres, but the field is more broadly concerned with vernacular expression, the construction and negotiation of heritage, knowledge of the past and future, and trying to hear and understand what people today or in the past are trying to communicate or do. Just as disciplinary focus historically positioned folklore studies to become a nexus for the study and theorization of genre and various phenomena labelled 'intertextuality', it is also excellently positioned to study *text ideology* – i.e. the social sets of assumptions and evaluations about what individual texts and types of texts 'are' and how they relate to other things, such as people, places, times, situations, agency, authority, and so on.

Why Now?

The question of how ideologies shape our conceptions and perceptions of texts is an issue that warrants immediate attention. The digital turn has swiftly advanced across only a few decades, penetrating almost every area of daily life. For the first time in history, writing is not bound to a physical medium and its fixed structure, leading information to be presented in nodal networks rather than bound to the structure of a material monument, a scroll, or the sequencing of pages in a book (Jensen 2023). Video and audio recording and broadcasting have been available for many decades, but digital technologies provide platforms on which everyone can publish in these media with audiences on a global scale. These platforms have developed hand-in-hand with technologies to easily manipulate and edit the products in ways that were previously only possible in professional studios. The dynamism of the technology breaks the old dichotomy between orality and literacy as a binary



Batman slaps Robin meme produced with imgur.com.

opposition through the introduction of a third media category (Foley 2012). Breaking the dichotomy simultaneously reveals that attempts to reframe orality and literacy as on a continuum rather than as diametrically opposed (e.g. Gintzburg et al. 2020) has nevertheless reproduced and perpetuated the binary model rather than overthrown it.

Text ideology is also relevant to research on digital objects. The editability of written texts, such as Wikipedia pages, or their contextual variation, such as Google search results differing according to a computer's search and browsing history, have produced anxiety in some research communities concerning the ontological status of these digital entities (e.g. Allison et al. 2005: 364; Ekbja 2009: 2565; Kallinkos et al. 2013: 358). Struggling with the variability and instability of a verbal text might seem surprising or even amusing to a folklorist. However, it raises the question of whether digital media are making the dominant ideas about what a constitutes a 'text' outmoded or obsolete.

Text Ideology

The concept of text ideology adapts the theoretical perspectives and analytical tools that were developed centrally in linguistic anthropology for the study of semiotic ideologies. These tools are integrated with the long history of work on text identity in folklore studies and philology. The study of semiotic ideologies originated as the study of *language*

ideologies, a language ideology being the set of ideas, evaluations, and assumptions that surround a language, dialect, register, or other way of speaking. The concept developed with disciplinary concerns about how language varieties were linked to social categories and societal structures, such as how someone's way of speaking produced judgements about their education, social class, ethnicity, or whatever else (see Kroksrity 2001). The concept was extended to any semiotic system (Keane 2018). *Media ideologies* were distinguished as the frameworks of interpretation and evaluation that, for example, lead the same words or information to be received differently in a text, voice call, or in-person conversation (Gershon 2010). Linguistic anthropology's disciplinary concerns shaped the trajectory of the development of these concepts to focus on perceptions of difference and the processes through which people streamline contrasts (Gal & Irvine 2019). This sort of streamlining of contrasts is observable in, for instance, modernity's imagination of a polarized opposition between orality and literacy. Orality in modernized societies was subject to *erasure* (Gal & Irvine 2019: 20–21) – it was overlooked or explained away – much as literacy among folklore informants was either erased or it compromised the value whatever was collected from them. The framework for the analysis of semiotic ideologies is easily adapted to texts and text-type categories.¹ However, synthesizing it with approaches from folklore research mitigates the emphasis on analyzing difference.

The semiotics of difference was built into conceptions of folklore as fundamentally other from the position of modernity, often structured through polarized contrasts like literacy/orality, educated/uneducated, science/superstition, and so on that these mediate (e.g. Bauman & Briggs 2004; Anttonen 2005; see also Frog 2022). However, the contrasts between individual folklore texts and text-type categories have tended to be considered self-evident. There were vibrant debates surrounding how to distinguish certain genres from one another, such as myth, legend, and fairytale (e.g. Bascom 1965), but these mainly reflect theoretical and classificatory concerns. A study on the genre of legends or on a particular legend type will normally make this the focal point, and, for instance, explore how this is nested in society and operates socially. Rather than focusing on polarized difference, the long history of research on categories of text has produced an infrastructure for the detailed study of the fluidity and hybridity of such categories (e.g. Tarkka 2013). Moreover, the orientation of linguistic anthropology has tended to collapse expressions into the level of language or the mediating sign system without distinguishing linguistically or otherwise mediated signs

(Frog 2015). Folklore research may distinguish language, iconography, or enactment from traditional images, motifs, narrative patterns, and so on (Frog 2021).

This is not to say that difference is not relevant or interesting to folklore research. For example, the hierarchies of value attributed to genres, such as valorizing oral epic over lament or personal experience narrative, were built on the semiotics of difference embedded in text ideologies. Relative value was not something inherent to the individual genres themselves; people project value hierarchies when viewing the genres through the lens of particular ideologies. Text ideology provides tools for exploring the text-type categories and the value systems of, for example, folklore collectors, and also to contrast these with those of their informants. When considering difference, however, it is important to distinguish between difference that is relative versus difference that is incidental. Especially when folklore as a category was given shape through polarized contrasts with modernity, it is easy to generalize such contrasts to traditions themselves. For example, folklore texts were long conceived as inherently anonymous representations of a collective tradition without interference from individuals' agency, in contrast to literate texts produced by authors characterized by creative agency. However, viewing literacy as emblematic of modernity created the category of orality as negatively defined so that it encompassed 'everything else'. The identification of certain types of text as opposed to others with authorship, ownership, usage rights, or other connections to particular agents or groups is widely found in 'oral' traditions, where they can simply be integral to

"...have you given to another woman that [oral] poem, which you composed for me? [...] You have given my praise poem to Pórdís Grímuðóttir and twisted all those expressions that were most important that you composed about me, because you did not dare, little man, to tell the truth about which woman you had composed them about. [...] both of your eyes will burst out of your head unless you reveal to everyone your deceit, that you took my praise poem from me and gave it to another woman." (*Fósterbræðra saga*, ch.11, thirteenth-century Iceland)

the text ideology of the particular genre or text without a marked contrast to an opposing category.

Whether and how texts are connected to people also varies by text-type within modernity. Among genres in academia today, for instance, disciplines vary considerably concerning who should be listed as an author of a scientific article, which may not be dependent on a person having any role in writing. Conversely, calls for papers, informational web pages, and a variety of other text types regularly lack authorial attribution. Whether or not a text type is conventionally accompanied by an attribution of authorship is a function of the respective text ideologies. In many cases,

¹ I step back from my earlier distinction between text ideologies and 'genre ideologies' (Frog 2019).

In current academic writing in English, the identity of titles in a bibliography is situated at the level of spellings: British versus American spellings should be retained in titles, but the capitalization of titles and any punctuation between a main title and a subtitle remains invisible (Lotman 1990) to the text's identity and is regularly standardized.

this might reflect a representation of collective agency, entangled, of course, with a historical practice (see also Gray & Johnson 2013). Conversely, such conventions may be rooted in implicit evaluations no less than the evaluative hierarchies of different publication categories in bibliometrics. In other words, the lack of authorial attribution for something like a call for papers suggests that it remains outside of texts identifiable with authors, raising the question of whether it simply 'doesn't count' as a text with any value.

Text ideology provides a framework for approaching the *emic* perspectives on how the identities of individual texts and text types are understood. Such perspectives have been a point of research interest especially for traditions rooted outside of modernity. The lively discussions about the differences in understanding text identity in an oral tradition versus a culture of literacy and print stems from attempts to understand variation in the otherness of oral traditions (e.g. Lord 1960; Ong 1986). The boom in Oral-Formulaic Theory (following Lord 1960) also led to rethinking text identity for scribal texts in relation to oral variation (e.g. Slotkin 1977; Zumthor 1983 [1990]; Foley 1988). However, these discussions tended to remain at an extremely broad level, focusing on how texts in oral and scribal cultures varied differently than 'we' expected from the perspective of modernity. Text ideology offers a lens that may help to bring such variation into clearer focus.

Text ideology extends beyond questions of the organized arrangement of signs to other properties and potentialities of the texts. Such properties are particularly appar-

"[A] sorcerer does not recite a full incantation in the hearing of strangers, so that the hearer cannot learn these and thereby take their power from him, for which reason he makes them useless to a student by concealing a few 'words' or lines." (Borenius 1872 [1904]: 478 on Karelian traditions.)

ent when they present features that seem fantastic from a science-based ontology, entailing supernatural empowerment or *emic* materialities. In such cases, the alterity of the conception of the text's nature has often reduced it to novelty or superstition without critical scrutiny, for instance in a tradition of carrying a prayer in a hat and delivering it by shaking the hat out over the person in need (Baiburin 2003:

167); transferring a ritual repertoire into a beverage so that it will be learned by whoever drinks the mixture without verbal communication (e.g. SKS KRA KRK 137:90); or conceiving that a verbal charm can only be possessed by one person at a time, although, if a person dies before passing it on, they can come and teach it in a dream to restore it to the living community (Vaitkevičienė: 2008: 91, 93). The intention here is not to exoticize such traditions, but to promote exploring them on their own terms in order to model the text ideology that underlies them, which simultaneously fosters denaturalizing aspects of text ideologies in which we are immersed ourselves. Exploring text ideologies across different traditions offers points of reference to consider the potential scope and diversity of what a conception of a text or text-type can encompass, facilitating critical perspectives on text ideologies more generally. Texts 'do things' all around us, such as laws and signs that govern our actions and behaviour, and people 'do things' with texts, such as forbid a practice. When text ideologies are brought into focus, the fantastic becomes a question of perspective, for instance in the power of a red octagon with the word "STOP" to affect traffic, or an imagination that a statement in a social media post has the power to affect Meta in the manner of a verbal charm on supernatural agents and forces in a non-modernized milieu (Liljequist et al. 2025).

Text Ideology versus Media Ideology

The rich work that has sought to elucidate fundamental differences between societies with and without literacy has been centrally concerned with forms of technological determinism (Chandler 1995). Such approaches construct media ideologies as general determinants on text ideologies. This line of discussion was not without nuance, and Foley's "ideology of the text" (2012: 117–125) was a forerunner to what is here called text ideology. However, Foley's was a media-centered concept that concerned texts according to an oral, written, or digital medium. The relationship between media or technology and dominant principles of text ideologies is extremely interesting, yet maintaining media as the primary frame of reference levels differences between text ideologies within each category.

Media-centered approaches are particularly problematic for 'oral' texts because the category of orality was negatively defined in contrast to the written medium. Basically, 'orality' covers any non-written usage of language throughout the scope of human history, or at least outside of modernity, while modernity has built up the primary point of reference for text identity through consumer print culture, as an invariant sequence of visually representable linguistic signs. However, a fairytale like Snow White (ATU 709) is not bound to a particular medium. For those familiar with it, it can be recognized both generally and in culture-specific forms (e.g. that of Walt Disney, the Brothers

Grimm, etc.), as long as one can understand the language of the spoken, written, or recorded text, or it is in a medium like animation or a graphic novel not dependent on language comprehension. In such cases, text identity is not at the level of verbalization: the text is situated in the organized arrangement of signs that are mediated as the story or plot. Even when a form of verbal art is crucial, some oral traditions are characterized by ideals of verbal variation in the reproduction of 'the same' text, while others maintain an ideal of non-variation (Frog 2019). Somali oral alliterative poetry, for instance, is at the opposite extreme: it situates text identity at the level of the verbal medium and with ideals of non-variation, which is supported by a poetic form that facilitates verbatim reproduction without a written text exemplar (e.g. Johnson 2002). The diversity within 'orality' is confounding because the medium is common to such diverse text types with equally diverse text ideologies.

The category of literacy is no less problematic. Literacy is viewed as emblematically represented through modernity's print culture, which Espen Aarseth (2025) recently described as an anomaly in the 5,000 years of the history of writing. The same ideologies that exempted the 'folk' from agency also excluded the scribes who manually copied written texts. This view was nurtured by the development of the methods for the stemmatic analysis of manuscript variation through the study of authoritative texts like the Bible (Mostert 2016). The respective text ideologies conferred value on the copy according to its accuracy to the exemplar. In contrast, value was conferred on a text intended for public reading as entertainment according to serving that purpose, leading copyists to update the language, smooth phraseology, and potentially to correct, elaborate, or summarize content (Haraldur Bernharðsson 2023). Scribes' lack of agency was critically challenged in the turn to so-called 'new philology' (e.g. Speer 1979). Oral-Formulaic Theory research opened into work on 'scribal performance' (Doane 1994; Ready 2019). In tandem, the orality/literacy divide was broken down through work on social reading practice (Coleman 1996), and approaches were developed to 'scribal cultures' (Carr 2005) and their relationship to cultural memory (Assmann 1992 [2011]). Although conceiving variation in terms of orality in a written medium was sometimes overstated (see Orton 2000), this work made significant advances toward emic perspectives on text identity (e.g. O'Keeffe 1990).

While the text ideologies of scribal cultures could be easily brought into focus as 'other' from the perspective of modernity, modernity's dominant text ideology has kept remarkably firm footing. The emblematic characterization of modernity through literacy has produced a streamlined imagination that not only erases orality, but also variation in modernity's own written milieu. However, this way of thinking is currently challenged. Digital media have wrested

publications accessible to large publics away from mass media institutions and consumer print practices, leading to critical considerations of what indeed is meant by 'text'.

Beyond the Tyranny of Modernity's Imaginations

Dominant Western text ideologies are rooted at the intersection of the Enlightenment's conception of language, the rise of print consumerism, and literacy as emblematic of modernity. These text ideologies have long been challenged by research on oral and scribal traditions. However, such traditions were categorized as 'other' and marginalized as anomalous and imperfect owing to their inferior technologies. The alternative views made little headway beyond discipline-specific discussions. These also normally remained tethered to the position of modernity, for example, bound to thinking of 'text' as a thing made of language even when the same story or knowledge is found in other media, as in the case of Snow White above. The permeation of digital media into daily life is breaking the tyranny of dominant text ideologies, shaking them to their foundations, by naturalizing us to multimedial communication that cannot be dismissed as 'other'. Digital technologies are received as a new apex and 'our' culture, in which the foregrounding of visual and audio features drives us to revise our thinking about 'text'.

Modernity's dominant text ideologies are rooted in an associated conception of language. This conception took shape on the backdrop of the emergence of commercial print culture, in which printers drove the standardization of spellings, orthographies, and languages. 'Science' took shape with a fetishized compulsion to compare and categorize (Graff 2015; Griffiths 2017). The medieval Christian ideal of *claritas* ['intelligibility, coherence, and inner logic'; literally 'clarity'] passed through this prism, producing ideals of 'communicability' of language, in terms of literal semantic transparency (see also Briggs 2024). Within this matrix, language became, in effect, what was seen and represented through the orthography of print: 'words' as signs that communicate particular meanings. Manuscripts had earlier tended to be taken at face value: whatever was written was the 'text'. The lens of communicability combined with comparison to sort variations between copies of the same text, distinguishing what it 'should' be from scribal errors, and reverse-engineering one-time communicable utterances behind these (e.g. Lachmann 1830 [1876]; Frog 2025). The rise of interest in folklore was cast through the same lens: folklore only had value as cultural capital when it was recognized by people. Its documentation was subject to the constraints of contemporary writing technologies, and the resulting text-scripts were edited into consumable publications – a process that was entangled with the development of academic research. Traditions were reduced to sequences of linguistic signs through which they could become known

and recognized nationally and internationally as cultural capital. In tandem with this process, print consumer culture developed literary fiction and the market for its production (e.g. Clery 1995), which makes it unsurprising that narrative genres dominate in early folklore research (e.g. *Congrès internationale des traditions populaires* 1891).

The paradigm of viewing folklore as text-scripts dominated until the so-called performance-oriented turn (e.g. Bauman 1975; Ben-Amos & Goldstein 1975). The performance-oriented turn was contingent on advances that made recording technologies affordable and practical to carry around (Katajamäki & Lukin 2013). The leap from pen and ink to audio and video recording facilitating the documentation and study of features other than linguistic signs. This turn was a transformative push away from 'texts' in the earlier sense. This push significantly advanced a few decades later through semiotic approaches to culture as constituted of signs that could be 'read' (Silverstein & Urban 1996: 1). Nevertheless, 'language' has remained predominantly conceived more or less exclusively in terms of signs produced with the mouth and their written counterparts. Gesture, facial expression, haptics, and so on remain regularly treated as 'para-linguistic', without critically re-evaluating language: a nod may be interchangeable with verbalizing yes or a wave with an utterance of greeting or farewell (e.g. Sherzer 1983: ch.6). However, they are non-verbal and therefore are not normally considered linguistic signs, which is interesting to consider when approaching text-scripts of folklore or other discourse.

When modernity's dominant text ideologies are brought into critical focus, the naturalization to digital media appears to be breaking its enduring paradigm. Digital media have made audio, images, and video organic to technologically mediated communication. The circulation of information and entertainment in print now has a prominent counterpart in audio books, podcasts, and so on. It seems that technologies have finally caught up with the multimodality of oral traditions. In a long-term perspective, modernity's narrow view of language and text is an outlier rather than an apex, bound to the technologies characterizing an era. Consequently, modernity's text ideologies cannot be taken as a standard point of reference, and must be treated instead as on equal footing with those of different technologies and milieux (see also Foley 2012).

Text as an Etic Concept

When considering text ideology, a crucial point is that an identification as 'text' is by a researcher. Things constituted of signs can be described as characterized by *ontological ambiguity* – i.e. the nature of their existence is unclear. Modernity's dominant text ideologies tend to erase such ambiguity because text is emblematically imagined through writing, which gives it an enduring materiality. Consumer print

culture's mass production has also built confidence in conceiving texts as invariable sequences of (written) linguistic signs, because every printed example is only one of innumerable identical duplicates. This identity is assumed in a quotation by page number – i.e. that your copy of the book will have the same text verbatim, or, if there is a difference, you can assume that my quotation, rather than your copy of the book, contains an error. The fixed, objective existence of the text's identity seems assured. However, this conception of text conflates a text with the material products of certain technologies, which present the exception rather than the rule. Recognizing Snow White or a particular Somali alliterative oral poem is to apprehend the identity of something made of signs. An apprehension of such an identity requires imagination, but it does not mean that both of these would be recognized as belonging to a single category 'text'. 'Text' is an etic concept – it is a category applied by the researcher that forms a point of departure for an investigation into emic perspectives.

What is meant here by ontological ambiguity can be illustrated by a rather mundane example:

If I orally give you a message that you convey to a third person, the identity and nature of the message seems self-evident, yet what is the thing that you have received and given? Is it something made of language, like a necklace of words? Is it a unit of knowledge, like an invisible gem wrapped in verbiage? Or is it an arrangement of information, with several moving parts that sparkle and shine when you clothe them in language? Where is it located? Do I retain it after I give it to you? What happens to it once you deliver it? Does it even exist when it's not being spoken?

From an etic perspective, the original message was empirically constituted of a particular and invariant series of linguistic signs, in which case verbal variation in its reproduction represents some sort of error in recall or representation. From an emic perspective, however, the linguistic signs may only be an incidental medium of communication, in which case verbal variation is invisible to the person mediating the message. Although the metaphors might simply seem amusing, they highlight the ontological ambiguity of the 'text' as a thing and the role of imagination in sense-making. That role of imagination opens to interpretation within the respective ontology, where it may be either feasible or impossible to transfer the entity into a material object, such as putting it in a hat or mixing it into a drink, or where its utterance may have the power to protect one from Meta.

When the item in question is not a situation-specific communication like a message but an oral fairytale, historical knowledge, or a blood-stopping charm, language may be essential, but that does not mean that people conceived it as 'a thing made of language' (Frog 2019). How 'a text' is defined by a researcher is *calibratable* – i.e. it can be adjusted according to the primary materials and research questions of the particular study. For texts in print consumer culture,

a text may be narrowly defined as a sequence of linguistic signs. This might also be sufficient for a scribal culture, although it may be necessary to extend the concept to the affordances of the material medium, which can include variations in writing style, size, colour, direction or arrangement, and use of space, all of which may have meanings, not to mention the lack of language standardization. When considering oral traditions, early collectors often saw them as 'texts' only constituted of linguistic signs, streamlining them to the media of documentation and publication and thus rendering invisible features that could be considered essential from an emic perspective. In cases where one or more additional features are considered crucial, such as costume, embodied behaviour, objects, spaces or landscape, and so forth, a more dynamic approach to text is needed in line with approaching 'culture' as 'text' that can be 'read' (Silverstein & Urban 1996: 1). Digital discourse makes a broadened approach crucial, so that it is possible to approach a YouTube video or the Batman-slapping-Robin meme above as each constituting 'a text'. I thus consider a text *any coherent and delimited complex of signs* (cf. Bakhtin 1986: 103), which can then be calibrated according to relevance.

Digital objects and digital entities are ultimately and invariably code – text – that exists somewhere on a material bearer (Faulkner & Runde 2019). Of course, few are those who recognize a Word document, pdf, web page, or an e-mail as code. Instead, we construct our understandings of these objects through interfaces. Text ideology is also applicable here to explore the role of imagination in how people conceive of these objects, and, like the message in the example above, how they localize them and conceive of their existence when they are not 'open'. Similarly, text ideology can be used to explore why holding up a flash drive with the Bible on it will not protect you from the Devil in the manner of a physical book. From this perspective, algorithms and AIs can be analyzed through text ideology as code-texts that people conceive through imagination as having agency, intentionality, and potentially even personality. Although this might be considered stretching the concept, the point is that the identification of something as 'a text' is up to the researcher, allowing flexibility in what text ideology is used as a lens to study.

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World Philology Union – WPU



The World Philology Union (WPU) is an international association of philologists – curators of the oral and written cultural heritage of the world's languages and literatures. WPU was founded on 2 December 2021 in Oslo, Norway. It is an international association whose purpose is to promote philology worldwide, in research, education, society and culture. Our first General Assembly was held in Rome, 15 December 2022 during the first WPU international conference, held, 14–16 December, hosted by the Sapienza University of Rome and The International Association of Mediterranean and Oriental Studies (ISMEO). This conference discussed the current state of philology at universities and other academic institutions worldwide. The Second General Assembly of the WPU was held in Uppsala, 6 December 2024 during the second WPU international conference, 4–6 December, hosted by Uppsala University, with the theme Philology and the Narrative Heritage.

The Cause

The philological study of ancient and classical texts, traditionally the very core of the humanities, has during the last generation or so been either completely marginalized within university departments or, at some universities, even altogether banished from the academic portfolio. This development is partly due to general policies of higher education, but one can argue that it is primarily a consequence of trends within the humanities themselves. While there is ample reason to lament this development, one must also take action to ensure the preservation and flourishing of the rich academic traditions within the different fields of philology. Without these fields, which historically

and conceptually lie at the very core of the study of human culture, the very existence of the humanities as a meaningful academic activity is at risk. It should also be emphasised that any effort to sustain and develop studies and research on historical languages today must include all the major literary traditions of the world. Philologists in all fields should unite to promote philology as a unified discipline on all levels of education and research!

This is the purpose of the World Philology Union (WPU).

The Uppsala Declaration

At the 2nd International Conference of the WPU in Uppsala, Sweden, 4–6 December 2024, the association issued the Uppsala Declaration on the Preservation of Philology and the Study of Historical Languages. The Uppsala Declaration is a succinct formulation of the worldwide importance of philology in education and in society at large, which we share here:

The Uppsala Declaration on the Preservation of Philology and the Study of Historical Languages

adopted by the General Assembly of the World Philology Union in Uppsala, Sweden, on the 6th of December, 2024
The signatories to this Declaration hold that

- § 1 Philology, defined as the grammatical and literary study of the oral and written heritage of the world's various languages, is the ultimate foundation of the humanities.
- § 2 Philology, as an academic pursuit, should be a central component of the curriculum of any modern university.
- § 3 More specifically, competence in one or more philological fields is inherently a prerequisite for all informed study of both historical human cultures and present-day societies in their diversity.



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WORLD PHILOLOGY UNION



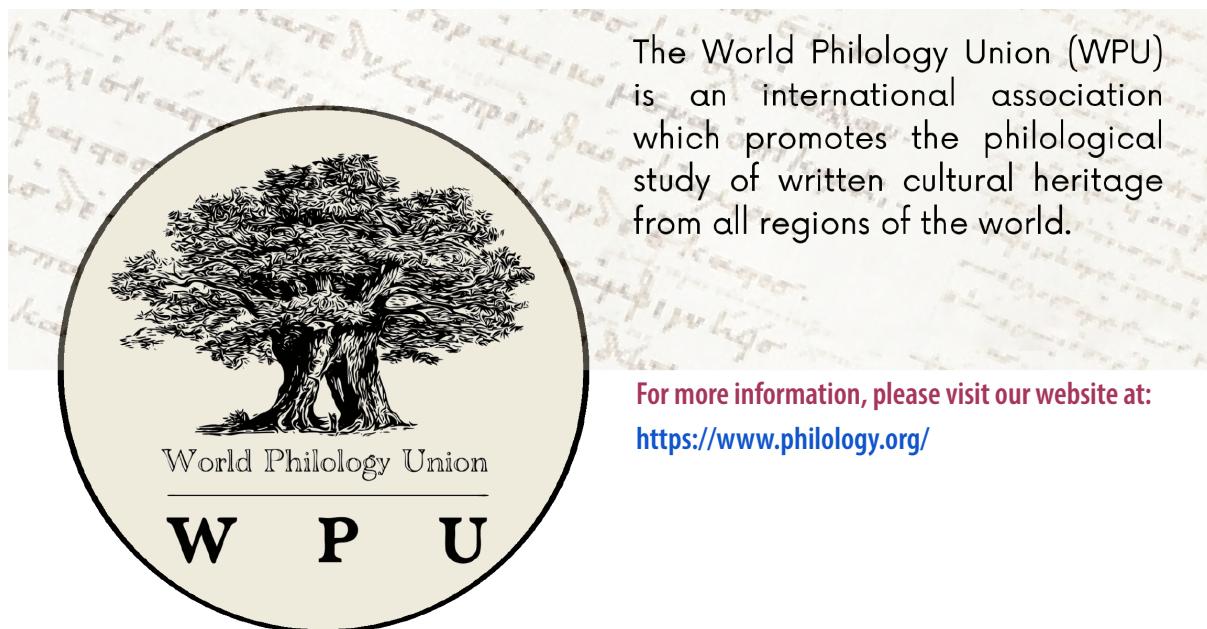
§ 4 Philology is an important element in education on all levels, as a method to access classical texts that preserve the cultural heritage, and as a mode of reading which advances a more comprehensive literacy.

§ 5 Philology is also of crucial importance to society at large, since (1) we need to listen to the human voices of the past, in their own languages, if we want to understand the history and cultural traditions of any society; (2) only a society that studies and actively reflects on its own past can be a healthy and truly prosperous society; (3) the philological mode of reading historical documents can be an antidote to ideological abuses of history, in particular ideological readings of national literature or religious writings.

§ 6 Seeing that Philology has always been the foundation of the humanities, the signatories are alarmed that during the last half-century many philological fields have been either completely marginalised within university departments and faculties or, at some universities, eliminated from the academic portfolio.

§ 7 When universities, and even faculties and departments where the humanities are otherwise promoted, do not acknowledge the pivotal role of Philology in underpinning and preserving the relevance of the humanities to society at large, Philology becomes an endangered species among academic disciplines. Without Philology the very existence of the humanities as a meaningful academic activity is at risk.

§ 8 Accordingly, the signatories resolve to take action to ensure the preservation and flourishing of the rich academic traditions within the different fields of philology.

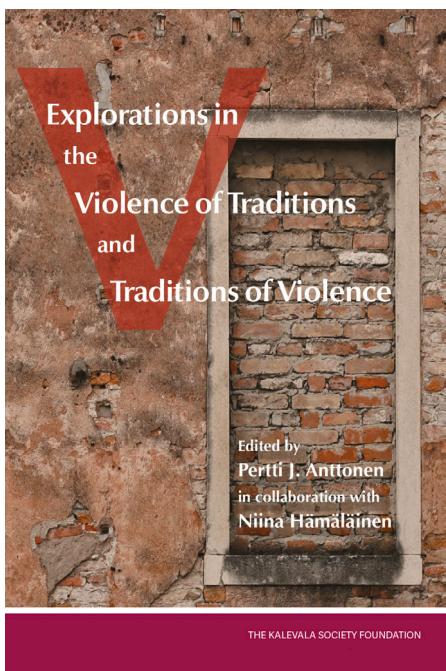


The World Philology Union (WPU) is an international association which promotes the philological study of written cultural heritage from all regions of the world.

For more information, please visit our website at:
<https://www.philology.org/>



FFC 328: Explorations in the Violence of Traditions and the Traditions of Violence



Ed. Pertti J. Anttonen in collaboration with Niina Hämäläinen.
FFC 328. The Kalevala Society Foundation, 2025.

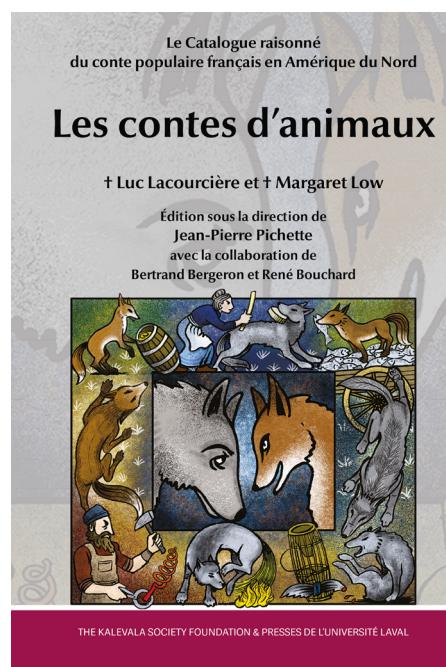
Violence in culture and society is widely studied and hotly debated issue. Researchers of vernacular traditions or folklore have a special entrance point into studying violence, as many forms of violence are based on traditions and are justified with a reference to tradition. Some of these violent traditions are openly supported in their respective communities, but others call for research to explain how they survive when they are not explicitly and intentionally sustained or why they persist while being perceived as negative, oppressive, or degrading. The challenging point in understanding violence is that it is not always clear what counts as violence.

The present volume explores a variety of issues in research into traditions of violence from all over the world and through the ages. The book contains an introduction and thirteen chapters with diverse and complementary perspectives, written by both younger and more established scholars in research into traditions.

Available at the Bookstore Tiedekirja, 38 €.

Link: <https://tiedekirja.fi/en/explorations-in-the-violence-of-traditions-and-traditions-of-violence>

FFC 329: Luc Lacourcière & Margaret Low: *Le Catalogue raisonné du conte populaire français en Amérique du Nord – Les Contes d'animaux*



Édition sous la direction de Jean-Pierre Pichette avec la collaboration de Bertrand Bergeron et René Bouchard. FFC 329. The Kalevala Society Foundation in Collaboration with Presses de l'Université Laval (PUL), 2025.

Synthèse d'une somptueuse tradition orale déployée sur quatre siècles, le Catalogue raisonné du conte populaire français en Amérique du Nord repose sur le système international de classification du conte populaire, dit Aarne-Thompson-Uther (ATU). Ce tome est consacré aux Contes d'animaux, ceux mêmes qui ont inspiré les fabulistes depuis des siècles.

Les curieux – chercheurs, pédagogues, artistes et praticiens – trouveront encore dans l'introduction historique et l'abondante bibliographie de ce Catalogue les ressources essentielles d'une francophonie originale.

Avec la précieuse collaboration des ethnologues Bertrand Bergeron et René Bouchard, fervents admirateurs de l'œuvre de Luc Lacourcière, Jean-Pierre Pichette a mené l'indispensable mise à jour du manuscrit original. Ils livrent enfin l'édition posthume du premier tome du Catalogue raisonné du conte populaire français en Amérique du Nord, le projet d'une vie de leur maître et ami.

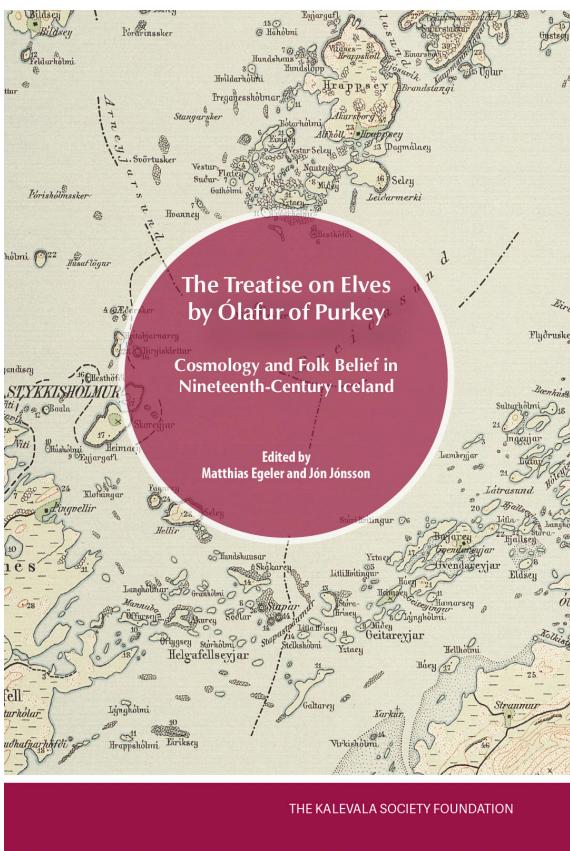
Will be available in spring 2026.



FFC 330

The Treatise on Elves by Ólafur of Purkey: Cosmology and Folk Belief in Nineteenth-Century Iceland

Book & Symposium



Edited, translated, and with an introduction by Matthias Egeler and Jón Jónsson. FFC 330, Helsinki: The Kalevala Society Foundation, 2026.

In the years around 1830, the Icelandic farmer, fisherman, and scribe Ólafur Sveinsson (1761–1845) set out to prove the existence of the 'hidden people' (huldufólk) or 'elves' (álfar), which he experienced as an everyday part of his life as a man working the land and the sea. In order to achieve his aim, he collected memorates, traditional tales, poems, and literary references, focusing on his extended family, neighbours, and acquaintances especially in the fjord of Breiðafjörður in Western Iceland. In doing so, he compiled an ethnography of local traditions about elves, which stands out through its remarkable richness of detail and an attention to context that makes it a testimony not only to Ólafur's personal beliefs, but also to attitudes towards the 'hidden people' in his wider local community. The resulting Treatise on Elves is perhaps the single most detailed account of living folk belief as seen from the inside perspective of a tradition bearer and believer to survive from the whole of pre-industrial Europe.

This book presents the first edition and translation of Ólafur Sveinsson's treatise on elves that makes its text accessible in the way how it was laid out by Ólafur himself. The text is accompanied by an analysis of its social, literary, and economic context that shows the rich contributions which Ólafur's unique testimony can make to our understanding of the workings of pre-industrial folk belief in a sparsely settled North Atlantic landscape.

zoom

Living with Elves and Fairies: A Symposium in Honour of Ólafur Sveinsson (1761–1845), Icelandic farmer, copyist, and author of a Treatise on Elves.

To mark the occasion of this first publication of Ólafur Sveinsson's treatise on elves in its originally intended form, and to celebrate Ólafur Sveinsson and his world, the editors of the text invite to a workshop **Living with Elves and Fairies: A Symposium in Honour of Ólafur Sveinsson (1761–1845), Icelandic farmer, copyist, and author of a Treatise on Elves.**

This one-day online conference will be dedicated to setting Ólafur's work into a wider comparative context ranging from Iceland, Ireland, and Britain to continental Scandinavia and beyond, including the wider circum-Baltic area. It will be held via Zoom on 16 March 2026.

More Information

Those interested in attending are welcome to contact the conference team by writing to LivingwithFairiesConference@gmx.net to receive, closer to the date of the conference, both the detailed symposium programme and the Zoom link.



CFP: 54th International Conference of the Kommission für Volksdichtung | 16th Conference on Traditional Singing

Songs in Archives and Communities: Texts and Living Practices

August 24–28, 2026, Estonian Literary Museum, Tartu, Estonia

Traditional songs and ballads circulate continuously between singing communities and multifaceted archival environments of today's world, shaped by ongoing reciprocal exchange. These movements are often unpredictable and nonlinear, especially in the digital age, challenging established hierarchies and inviting new social and cultural structures.

The contemporary concept of an archive embraces a wide spectrum of repositories—including printed texts, manuscripts, audio and video materials, libraries, and digital platforms—and may be maintained by various people or communities (Manoff 2004, Zavala et al. 2017). Institutional archives operate as instruments of cultural memory and may become indispensable when a community's continuity is broken, but they are also shaped by power structures, formal regulations, and canonising practices (Stoler 2009). Community and individual collections—often referred to as non-institutional or vernacular archives—are typically more flexible, shaped by local values and personal agency.

Through living communal singing practices and rituals, communities preserve local meanings and lived experiences that are largely absent from institutional and vernacular collections. Singing together embodies elements that cannot be fully captured or archived, evoking emotional and embodied experiences, fostering communal belonging while also defining cultural boundaries and exclusions.

We invite discussion on relationships, cooperation, and the exchange of songs and related materials between contemporary practitioners and various vernacular and institutional archives.

Topics include, but are not limited to, the following:

- The movement of songs between various types of archives and living community practices, both before and during the internet age.
- Singing together as a practice of inclusion and exclusion: belonging, boundary-making, intersectionality.
- Songs, singing, and related archival practices that transcend community boundaries: transnationality, multiple identities, cultural hybridity, conflict, appropriation.
- Ritual singing and other bodily and musical practices in lived experience and archival representations.
- Individual experiences of singing—affectionate and embodied dimensions; the challenges of documentation.
- Both innovative methodologies and established theoretical approaches in the study of songs and singing practices are welcome.

Propose an abstract by 15 Feb 2026

Proposals with abstracts of 250–300 words and a short biographical note should be sent by extended deadline of **15th of February 2026** to efa.conference@folklore.ee. A confirmation will be sent to all applicants as soon as their proposal has been received. The acceptance of proposals will be informed by **20th of February 2026**. Please feel free to forward the invitation.

The conference will be held in English. We invite speakers to include audio or visual recordings in their presentations, since all required technical support will be available.

Organising team

Janika Oras, Liina Saarlo, Andreas Kalkun, Olha Petrovych, Mia Marta Ruus
Estonian Folklore Archives, Estonian Literary Museum
Estonian Literary Museum: <https://www.kirmus.ee/en>
Kommission für Volksdichtung: <https://kfvweb.org>

Conference website: <https://www.folklore.ee/KfV2026/>