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Dear Friends in Folklore Research,

The successful 15th Congress of the ISFNR held in Athens from June 21-27, 2009 is still fresh in our memories. Athens as an ancient centre of European civilisation, guarded by the goddess of wisdom and brave endeavours, was an excellent venue to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the ISFNR and the 100th anniversary of the Hellenic Folklore Society. Aikaterini Polymerou-Kamilaki, Marilena Papachristophorou and Evangelos Karamanes together with their hospitable team did a marvellous job in making this excellent meeting happen and deserve the deepest gratitude from all participants. The topic of the congress, “Narratives across Space and Time: Transmissions and Adaptations”, linked continents, people, research centres, schools and disciplines. It also transcended time periods by looking back into the history of folk narrative and its research, discussing its contemporary forms, media and practices and by addressing the future of our discipline. Guided by an optimistic spirit, a sense of belonging together and by the joy of sharing knowledge, the meeting in Athens was further proof that “our discipline and research are of crucial and worldwide relevance,” as the new ISFNR president Ulrich Marzolph writes in this newsletter.

We are happy to bring to you impressions and memories of the 15th congress recorded by several young folklorists born after 1964 when the ISFNR held one of its early congresses in Athens and approved the statutes of the society. Their observations are even more illuminating when compared with the reminiscences of past meetings by some long-term ISFNR members and experienced folk narrative scholars. Carried out before the meeting in Athens, these email interviews provided a valuable addition to the 50th anniversary exhibition organised as part of the congress program and continue recollections about the society’s history started in the previous issue of the newsletter. Vilmos Voigt (Hungary) jokingly called his response “the secret history of the ISFNR” and though he makes no secret about it and is happy to share it with the rest of us, his reminiscences as well as those of Sue B. Bottigheimer (USA), Rolf W. Brednich (Germany), Toshio Ozawa (Japan) and Erika Taube (Germany) vividly illustrate the crucial role of informal communications and personal contacts in shaping the society as well as changes in organisational culture during the past decades. The latter are obvious when we compare today’s membership application procedure with the way in which Rolf W. Brednich became a member of the ISFNR in 1964 in Athens: after he had presented his first paper, Wayland D. Hand took him to the steps of the Academy of Athens, took a picture of him and said: “Now, you are one of ours and you can call me Wayland”. Twenty five years later, during the 9th ISFNR congress in Budapest, as Sue Bottigheimer tells us, the gender balance in ISFNR governance was shifted on the initiative of a group of female members who talked the men into nominating women for executive committee members. By reaching beyond political dividing lines, informal networks of individual members were able to broaden the society’s scope and strengthen the disciplinary identity of those scholars who lived and worked in more closed societies:

Erika Taube writes that at the time of the DDR, her academic contacts were mainly with the East and that she learnt about the ISFNR in Leningrad from Kirill Vasilievich Chistov, the former vice-president representing Europe; upon being elected the vice-president representing Asia, Toshio Ozawa took the initiative in involving colleagues from China. In the previous issue of the newsletter, Jawaharlal Handoo and Barbro Klein reminisced about crossing borders of a different kind by talking about struggles that took place when holding the first ISFNR meeting outside Europe. Knowledge and experiences of this kind go unrecorded and unnoticed, remain secret and invisible, unless cast into narratives.

Vilmos Voigt and Arvo Krikmann (Estonia), two honorary members of the ISFNR, recently celebrated their 70th birthdays. The ISFNR Newsletter conveys to them congratulations and wishes of happiness from both our readers and editors. The prolific work of Arvo Krikmann and Vilmos Voigt has already become a part of the history of world folkloristics, which is also discussed in this issue of the newsletter by Outi Lehtipuro and Jacqueline S. Thursby. Both articles are based on papers delivered in Athens and provide accounts of past decades’ trends in folk narrative scholarship from the perspective of...
of Finland and the USA, countries that are of historical importance in shaping the field and inspiring scholars from various parts of the world.

It is with great sadness that we bring to our readers the obituary of another important builder of bridges across continents and countries, that of Ezekiel Alembi, the Vice-President of ISFNR representing Africa who was still with us at the congress in Athens. Many of us also remember the ISN interim conference organised by him in Nairobi in 2000 as well as his thoughtful plenary lecture dedicated to the children of his country and delivered at the ISFNR interim conference in St Rosa, Argentina in 2007. On the first day of March, we received the sad news about the passing of Jón Hnefill Adalsteinsson (1927-2010), the first Icelandic Professor of folkloristics and a long time member of the ISFNR. Both of these great scholars will be missed deeply by countless members of the society and colleagues in the field of folktale studies.

Since the last newsletter published in June 2009 before the Athens Congress, the following members have joined the ISFNR: Petja Aarnipuu (Finland), Madis Arukask (Estonia), Alf Arvidsson (Sweden), Anil Baro (India), Willem de Blécourt (UK), Gejin Chao (China), Arumugam Dhananjayan (India), Vayalkara Jayarajan (India), Dilip Kumar Kalita (India), Emmanouela Katrinaki (Greece), Kaarina Koski (Finland), Anna Lydaki (Greece), Mrinal Medhi (India), Júlíana Thora Magnúsdóttir (Iceland), Yvonne J. Milspaw (USA), Rūta Muktupāvela (Latvia), Stelios Pelasgos Katsaounis (Greece), Nina Stekolnikova (Russia), Rosa Thorsteinsdottir (Iceland) and Sílvi Tomingas-Joandi (Estonia). Christa Tuczay from Austria renewed her membership – something we recommend to everybody who has lost contact with the society and not paid the membership dues for a considerable time. Our new treasurer Marilena Papachristophorou is currently working on making payment of membership dues possible via online banking.

Although regular communication over the Internet has become essential for the daily activities of the ISFNR and its members, we are all looking forward to the next face-to-face meetings. In May 2010 the ISFNR Belief Narratives Network, established at the last congress in Athens, will hold a conference called “Interpreting Belief Narrative” in St Petersburg, Russia. In June 2010 the ISFNR Committee for Charms, Charmers and Charming will organise a conference in Bucharest, Romania. Please also note the call for papers for the next ISFNR interim conference to be held in north-east India in February 2011.

We send our greetings and best wishes to all the ISFNR members whose active participation in the life of the society has made our discipline stronger. We thank the authors of this issue, our language editor Daniel E. Allen and artist Marat Viirs. We wish that the role of the ISFNR in developing international folkloristics will grow and that the society will continue to build bridges between continents, people, research traditions and historical periods. It has been a great pleasure and an immensely enriching experience to work together with our readers in order to move towards these goals.

Elo-Hanna Seljamaa & Úlo Valk, editors

Celebrating the Growing Discipline of Folk Narrative Research

by Ulrich Marzolph, Enzyklopädie des Märchens, Göttingen, Germany

President of the ISFNR

The fifteenth congress of the International Society for Folk Narrative Research, organized in Athens in June 2009, proved beyond any doubt – if such a proof were needed – that our discipline and research are of crucial and world-wide relevance. The Society was conceived in 1959 at the first conference of folk narrative researchers held in Kiel and Copenhagen. Against the backdrop of international hostility, war and destruction, this new scholarly Society aimed to encourage contact among researchers sharing an interest in the study of folk narrative, regardless of the researchers’ regional or national origin as well as their special focus. Long before the world started talking about globalization, the founding mothers and fathers of the ISFNR recognized the potential of folk narrative as a meaningful transnational mode of expression. Narratives help humanity to assess and shape the world we live in. Folk narrative research, in consequence, contributes to understanding human heritage and relations.
Most of the colleagues that participated in the constitutive meeting of the ISFNR in Antwerp in 1962 have passed away, and we cherish the recollections of the few who are still with us today as they remind us of the historical roots of our Society. Over a period of 50 years, our Society, like the discipline it represents, has been continuously growing both in terms of membership – at present some 700 colleagues from about 80 different countries are enlisted – and in terms of areas of interest. A century after Antti Aarne proposed the classification system for folktales in the Indo-European tradition – in Max Lüthi’s words the “Linné of fairy-tale research” – the task of documenting and classifying traditional folktales is the backbone of our discipline. At the same time, our research interests have widened in scope and kind.

Folk narrative research originally focussed on a limited number of traditional genres such as myth, religious and historical legend, folktales and fairy tales, or jokes and anecdotes as represented in oral tradition and literature; and it aimed at documenting, preserving, and studying humanity’s narrative heritage. Today, folk narrative research also deals with contemporary legends, everyday narratives, folklore as a source of inspiration for literature and the arts, and the fairly recent phenomenon of the Internet as a platform for the propagation and dissemination of all kinds of narratives. In other words, the current state of our discipline is living proof of its global relevance. To put it more simply, human communication essentially consists of narratives, and folk narrative research studies a key component of human competence and performance. As such, our field faces a tremendous responsibility as our established research methods are challenged and transformed in a manner similar to the way old tales are adapted to address new problems and situations.

Even though folk narrative research is concerned with a pivotal constituent of human communication, the vanishing of tradition has also been part and parcel of our discipline from its very origins. Yet lamenting the fragile and precarious state of our discipline does hardly do justice to the dozens of regional and national folktale archives, or to the hundreds of colleagues teaching and researching in a variety of disciplines, from folklore and comparative literature to sociology, history, and psychology, or to the thousands of enthusiastic storytellers and artists presenting folk narratives to their audience. Large research and publishing institutions such as the German Enzyklopädie des Märchens and a number of shorter folktale encyclopedias in English strive to preserve knowledge of the present state of our discipline in an authoritative manner. Important as they are as reference works and tools for teaching the field of folk narrative to the following generations, these printed texts cannot possibly encompass the vibrancy of a discipline such as ours. Much as any other publication, even these comprehensive assessments of our discipline in print are but a step towards opening up new areas of research, towards developing new approaches, and towards questioning our assumptions. Furthermore, reacting to the changing exigencies of the modern world, it is imperative to strengthen online communication within the Society. While the ISFNR participates in the H-Net Discussion List on Folklore and Ethnology (H-FOLK@H-NET.MSU.EDU), we need to do more to offer a platform for our members to exchange news and opinions beyond the regular meetings.

Our former president, Ülo Valk from Tartu, Estonia, invested considerable energy into the most laudable effort of founding the ISFNR Newsletter in 2006 and publishing it in annual instalments ever since. Considering the limited funds the Society commands, it will prove difficult to continue the newsletter in its printed form. Instead, fully recognizing the value of the newsletter, we plan to continue producing it on the Society’s online platform that has now been permanently installed at http://www.isfnr.org. While our secretary will make every effort to keep the news section up-to-date, all members are invited to share with us information on recent and upcoming events as well as important publications in the field to be posted on the website. Besides containing basic information about the ISFNR, our website also links to our membership roster and presents up-to-date information about the activities of the various committees. As the website showcases the current state of the ISFNR, any suggestions for making the Society more visible on an international scale are most welcome.
The 15th Congress of the ISFNR “Narratives Across Time and Space” in Athens, Greece, June 21-27, 2009

Minutes taken at the General Assembly of the ISFNR on June 26, 2009 Athens, Greece
Prepared by Elo-Hanna Seljamaa (Tartu, Estonia)

The assembly was attended by 87 members of the ISFNR out of 668 members. The meeting was led by Ülo Valk (Tartu, Estonia).

Agenda:
Report by Secretary
Elections of the President, 2 Vice-Presidents, 1 member of the Executive Committee, Treasurer
Report by Treasurer
Ulf Palmenfelt (Visby, Sweden) presented a report on society’s financial situation.
Changes in payment of membership fee
The General Assembly (GA) decided not to raise the membership fee or the frequency of collecting dues, but to postpone decisions concerning the membership fee.
Reports by chairpersons of committees
Chairpersons of special committees presented reports on the activities of their committees:
Chair of the Membership Committee Cristina Bacchilega (Hawaii, USA) presented the names of new members accepted between 2005-2009 (60) and those accepted during the meeting in Athens (10).
Ulrich Marzolph (Göttingen, Germany) presented a report on the Ethics Committee.
The GA supported the establishment of three new committees:
Committee for “Folktales and the Internet” initiated after the 2005 Tartu Congress; chairperson Theo Meder (Amsterdam, The Netherlands).
Committee on Charms, Charmers, and Charming; chairperson Jonathan Roper (Tartu, Estonia).
Belief Narratives Network initiated in Athens; chairperson Willem de Blécourt (East Sussex, UK).
Nomination of Honorary Members
The GA elected the following new honorary members of the ISFNR:

1. Report by Secretary
Elo-Hanna Seljamaa (Tartu, Estonia) gave an overview of the society’s initiatives between 2005 and 2009: new logo, new web site, updating the membership list and contact addresses, ISFNR Newsletter.
6. Invitations for the next congress and interim conference

Lina Būgienė and Jūratė Šlekonytė from the Institute of Lithuanian Literature and Folklore presented the invitation to hold the 16th Congress of the ISFNR in Vilnius, Lithuania, in 2013. The GA voted for this proposal.

Kishore Bhattacharjee (Gauhati University, India) and Desmond Khar-mawphlang (Northeastern Hill University, India) presented the invitation to hold the next interim conference in 2011 in North-East India in Guwahati and Shillong. The invitation was accepted by the General Assembly.

7. Elections of the President, Treasurer, Vice-President for Latin America, member of the Executive Committee, Vice-President

The GA elected an Election Committee consisting of Galit Hasan-Rokem (Jerusalem, Israel), Carl Lindahl (Houston, USA), and Robin Gwyndaf (Cardiff, UK).

The GA elected Ulrich Marzolph (Göttingen, Germany) as the new President of the society. Marilena Papachristophorou (Athens, Greece) was elected as the new Treasurer. María Inés Palleiro (Buenos Aires, Argentina) was elected as the new Vice-President representing Latin America. Ülo Valk (Tartu, Estonia) was elected as Vice-President. Sadhana Naithani (New Delhi, India) was elected as a new member of the Executive Committee.
The 15th ISFNR conference was organised in Athens, Greece. For me it was the second ISFNR conference after the one held in Tartu, Estonia. However, this was the first time for me as a full member of the society and therefore unforgettable.

After reading the reminiscences of senior members of the ISFNR from the last ISFNR Newsletter, I, as a first-timer, found it particularly difficult to recall the conference held in Athens. Was it different from other conferences, were there any new research trends introduced, was it better than the ones before or perhaps somewhat worse, and were the conference participants satisfied? These questions I leave for other, more experienced, members of ISFNR to discuss. The following recollection of memories contains, above all, personal impressions gained in Athens: bits and pieces that become perhaps more significant as time passes and more experiences are gained.

Apparently, many things happen before a conference of this scale takes place. It makes me think of the organisers, people who from day to day try to figure out how to make a conference with hundreds of participants work. It is not only about putting together the conference program with 10 parallel running sessions, it also means organising the travel, lodging and food concerns of the participants. Many things must be decided beforehand, but multiple questions and requests also arise during the conference and need to be tackled immediately. I wonder what the feelings of the organisers are when the conference is finally over? On the one hand, it certainly requires an enormous effort from a small country, although at the same time there are also certain benefits. Above all, it is a great success and honour for a discipline.

The conference held in Tartu, for example, boosted the self-esteem of Estonian folklorists, and this factor became well evident in Athens. I suppose that never before have Estonian folklorists been represented in ISFNR conferences with more participants than our Finnish fellows. Thus, I sincerely hope that the Athens conference encourages particularly Greek laographists to continue with narrative studies from multiple perspectives so that in the future we shall have many talented Greek scholars influencing the field of folk narrative research.

Attending international conferences is always pleasant because of the opportunity to meet colleagues from different countries and regions. These meetings may be brief but where nevertheless filled with the warmth of past experiences. Other meetings are longer, are intensive and particularly significant, and mark the beginnings of new collaborations. I must admit that, due to my Nordic character, I find small talk with people totally unknown to me difficult. Despite exchanging polite smiles with several colleagues multiple times, I still lacked the courage to go and talk with them, which, of course, I deeply regret now. Therefore, please, smile and come and talk to me next time you see me around!

Of course, as a first-timer I feel obliged to recall here the moments of meeting with the "grand-olds" for the first time. This time it was Leander Petzoldt whose writings have influenced folk narrative research for several decades. Unlike many other outstanding European folklorists, Petzoldt’s works have also been influential on other continents, which is not as common as one might think. I always find it challenging to put the image based on theoretical approaches, since the English language is increasingly dominating as the scientific language of Europe. Nevertheless, Germans prefer German, Russians Russian, and the French French in their daily scientific discussions and, therefore, finding a common language is and will be a problem in international conferences. The question is: do we really understand and catch the meaning of the words uttered? I suppose we have drawn closer to each other and thus mutual understanding should not be a problem. At least, it is not a reason to avoid or dislike such international events, and this is definitely something positive.
Unfortunately, to my great surprise, in Athens I heard several presentations presented by our fellows from English-speaking countries that did not appreciate the efforts of non-native speakers at all. I listened to presentations that contained, ‘hasty reading of fancy words that only natives master’, and this made me a little upset and even angry. I felt really sorry for colleagues who master numerous languages but whose English is perhaps somewhat less advanced. Although the time for presentations was short and the time for discussion even shorter, I believe that people who have a linguistic advantage could allow it to themselves to rethink the aims of their performance in regards of us, the non-natives. We, scholars dealing with narratives, should be particularly aware of the importance of good and balanced performance in order to make meanings graspable.

While the question of Eurocentricism still seems to be an unsolved problem for ISFNR, there was one presentation that made me think of national aspects of narrative research. The performance of Finnish scholar Outi Lehtipuro (University of Joensuu) was given in the section dealing with the past and future of folk narrative research. She used the adjective ‘nationalistic’ several times to point out the importance of Finnish scholars studying Finnish materials in order to gain the most accurate results. First of all, this was a striking statement for me personally as my doctoral thesis concerns Finnish cancer patients’ narratives and I am not an indigenous Finnish scholar. Is it possible that I would not read my materials correctly? However, on the other hand, I recalled an endless list of scholars who have studied and are still studying foreign cultures without even knowing the language (think for example of Albert Lord or Lauri Honko). As I understood from the later discussion with Outi Lehtipuro, her idea was that researchers, in order to be able to study and interpret their materials correctly, should have a very good knowledge of the culture and language they are dealing with. Here, I totally agree, although, at the same time, I also recall the enthusiasm of Lauri Honko as in 2000 we worked together on the Setu epic presented by Anne Vabarna. Honko did not understand Setu but was really pleased with every word and syllable interpreted because he saw the big picture: the short epic from Setu in the context of world epics. I am quite convinced that Honko’s enthusiasm and passion were the same when working on the Siri epic or interpreting the Kalevala. Honko’s passion and daring has left more than one landmark in the history of folklore studies, and these footprints may be researched by other scholars in the future. Although narrative research has always carried some nationalistic value (and here I probably understand what Outi Lehtipuro meant with the nationalistic adjective), it should not stop scholars from other countries studying texts from cultures different from their own. In my opinion, having various perspectives is more than beneficial in terms of finding new meanings and presenting different aspects of a subject, even if they do occur as untraditional in the context of nationalistic discourse. In terms of an overall viewpoint, it is even more important to try to overcome the still ongoing Eurocentricism at ISFNR meetings; following on from this we should stop thinking that there are only counted narrative researchers in the other regions of world.

For me, the most memorable presentation on narrative interpretation was the paper presented by young scholar Kristiana Willsey from Bloomington, the United States. Her study focused on women recalling their favourite, and therefore intimate, fairytales from childhood. As the examples given demonstrated, recorded narrative events were rather unsuccessful, lacking the qualities of a good performance. In many places it also seemed that the whole storyline or plot was absent. It was difficult to figure out what emotions occurred during these performances but according to Kristiana Willsey, they were present. This reminded me of a recent study by the Swedish sociologist Lars-Christer Hydén who has examined the storytelling of women with Alzheimer disease. In Hydén’s materials the story never comes to an end, lacking equally a beginning as well as content. However, storytelling creates a good atmosphere (see Hydén 2008). Dealing with similar materials raises the question of what to do with such narratives? Kristiana Willsey offered a most elegant solution for the investigation of intimate narratives that lack performative values. Namely, she proposed interpreting the collected stories as ‘broken baskets’ lacking the roots or branches required to become wholes. In my opinion, the image of a broken basket allows the intimate narratives to be imagined as wholes, and thus to interpret their meaning to storytellers, as well as the importance of intimate storytelling in general.

Naturally, numerous other papers that could be discussed for one reason or another were presented in Athens. While writing the current overview I went through the conference abstracts once more and I felt really sad that it was impossible to attend more than one session at a time. This means that while listening to one paper I missed the nine parallel ones and this is a
Multiple Voices from Various Corners of the World

by Kati Kallio, Finnish Literature Society, Helsinki, Finland

There is still a polyphonic choir of intertwining, discussing, encouraging voices in my mind when thinking back to the ISFNR Congress Narratives Across Space and Time: Transmissions and Adaptations in Athens last summer. Visiting the Congress for the first time, I was overwhelmed by the diversity the scholarly traditions, point of views, and ways of speaking of scholars gathering from all over the world. We, the participants, do share a deep gratitude to our hosts at the Hellenic Folklore Research Centre of the Academy of Athens for the lively atmosphere, elegant practicalities, and grandiose physical setting.

There are several good strategies to participate in this kind of congress with seven plenary lectures, six subtopics and two symposia, producing altogether over 200 papers. I chose to listen to some sessions that were essential for my own specific research questions, but for most of the time I roamed around, trying to listen to the variety of voices that were gathering around. For me, that was probably the best part of it: listening and talking to various people, trying also to understand scholarly traditions far from those with which I am most familiar.

For a postgraduate student concentrating primarily on oral poetry, the seminar was a thorough introduction to the diverse lines of narrative research. The themes and interpretive frameworks of the various disciplines within our field overlap continuously. In addition, similar problematics are to be solved whether studying tales, oral history, jokes, belief stories, charms, songs or some other cultural phenomena: Would it be fruitful to concentrate on one good narrator or singer, one small community or some large geographical area, on what level should the scope be set, how should meaningful contexts be framed, which questions should be asked? I enjoyed what I interpreted as the generally inclusive atmosphere of the event: various starting points and theoretical approaches do complete each other, even though in harsh academic life they sometimes compete for the very same resources.

The theme of the Congress, Narratives Across Space and Time, invited us not only to ponder our own relationships to the theoretical frameworks of the early 20th century and the very beginnings of the folklore studies, but, likewise, to discuss future visions of the disciplines involved with the study of narrative traditions. This was particularly the target of a series of sessions under the title The History and Future of Folk Narrative Research, consisting of nearly 40 papers. The themes ranged from critical perspectives on scholarly history, to the variety...
of contemporary theoretical currents and the possibilities of taking advantage of the modern technologies of digitised materials and databases. As shown, for example, in the symposium on Belief Stories, narrative research gives the possibility to focus on the layers of both history and the present.

Under the six subtopics and two symposia of the Congress, many papers highlighted the complexity not only of narrative traditions and theories, but also of historical situations. The last of the plenary lectures posed questions that may be relevant in various historical contexts. How to make what you feel scientifically or personally important, when the actual ideological, political or social conditions are not favourable? The lecture by Gabriela Kilíanová (Slovak Academy of Sciences) gave the audience a glimpse of the complex and varying scholarly settings of the second half of the 20th century in Eastern Europe, concentrating on the situation in Slovakia. She showed how much we should know of the various political and ideological backgrounds and constraints when reading the works of past decades and when trying to understand what scholars actually wanted to say. Without knowledge of both contemporary overall rhetorics and local situations which, in this case, varied both according to the country in question and the historical moment, misinterpretations are a constant risk.

“To be joked about is to be politically relevant,” stated Gary Alan Fine (Northwestern University) in his plenary lecture when talking about various interpretive frameworks and the politics of joking. He saw jokes both as “markers of belonging and excluding,” although he gave no easy-to-apply-everywhere guidelines for the situational interpretations of joking. Similar themes of both the complexities of interpretation and of constructing others and ourselves through narration were to be found in many speeches. Ulrich Marzolph (Enzyklopädie des Märchens) lectured on Intellectual Property and the Power of Interpretation, concentrating on the situation in Iran. Chao Gejin (Institute of Ethnic Literature, Chinese Academy of Sciences) compared the same Ge-sar epic in two cultures, Tibetan and Mongolian. Here, the practices of epic singing and the roles of the singers are strikingly different, although the story pattern remains similar. Michael Meraklis (National and Kapodistrian University of Athens) drew attention to the multiple aspects of variation, while Stephanos Imellos (National and Kapodistrian University of Athens) demonstrated the use of the gods and heroes of antiquity in modern Greek folk legend, and raised the difficult and complex questions of oral continuities in history.

In some discussions during the symposium on Charms and Charmming, the scholars made explicit the necessity and purpose of international collaboration. In addition to common indices as a shared tool, the knowledge of and research into various language areas, with material that is published and commented upon, is essential not only to create a global view of the phenomena, but also to achieve a deeper understanding on the micro-perspective of local and small-scale matters. On the other hand, the indices remain partly silent if we do not have other means of approaching the processes, dynamics and meanings of particular cases, in particular historical situations. In the various sessions of the Congress I was, at first, somewhat surprised by the abundance of ATU numbers around me, as I am not studying prose narratives. Evidently, the Congress made apparent the usefulness and economy of communication of this kind of established, well-developed tradition, which also makes it easier to acquire wider perspective on folktales in time and space.

The very first session I attended, under the subtopic of Storytelling and Storyteller, already demonstrated how very diverse topics may resonate with each other, and how fruitful it is to bring together concrete cases and broader perspectives. Manuel Teodoro Dannemann (Universidad de Chile) gave a thorough theoretical analysis of performance with lively video demonstrations. Rachel Zoran (Haifa University) set a Hasidic story within the theoretical frame of Bibliotherapy, discussing the silences and the gaps of indeterminacy in the story. Finally, Miranda Terzopoulou (Hellenic Folklore Research Centre, Academy of Athens) gave voice to a Greek man singing his life story from the Civil war onwards. He had begun to compose autobiographical oral poems, using traditional verses and formulae, on a tape-recorder, erasing and re-recording until he felt the song to be complete. These poems were a way to speak of events which, decades later, were still taboo in spoken language.

Many of the various sessions during the week were tied together with multiple intertextual and interthematic links, far as the subjects seemed, at the beginning, to be from each other. Listening to Congress papers that were both geographically and theoretically distant, I was thrilled by the possibilities the narratives, in various forms and studied within various interpretive frameworks, give us to make sense of our lives and of the world we live in.

Just before leaving Athens, I took a solitary walk to the Acropolis by a small sideway. The air was bright, with a light wind blowing from the sea. All the discussions of the past week were still going on silently in my mind, and I needed some peace to give all these voices some more space. Olive trees, hills, the city below: Athens gazing far to the sea. On the way back, as I was descending to the Roman Agora, I met with two musicians from Congo jamming with guitar, djembe and human voice: African, Western, popular, jazz, traditional, modern, mixing it all tenderly together. Like all good storytellers, musicians and scholars, they were making it their own sound, fitting their performance to the place, to the audience, to the moment. With their music, they were evoking a draught of pure water and wind and happiness under the glaring afternoon sun, a sound that is echoing in my mind still, giving me a synthesis of the whole week.
Kristiana Willsey is a doctoral student at Indiana University. Her research interests include narrative and oral performance (particularly as it relates to memory, embodiment and the senses); children’s material culture, fairytales and feminism; and theories of collection and consumption.

Photo by Jeana Jorgensen.

Almost the first thing I did upon registering for my first ISFNR meeting, in the impressive, pillarred Academy of Athens, was to drop my bottle of complimentary olive oil on the polished marble floor. The noise rolled around the vaulted ceilings like an oenophile tasting a particularly fine wine, and conversations between various respected and thus terrifying scholars broke apart, but the bottle miraculously remained intact. I righted it hastily, intensely grateful to have made my entrance into the international Folklore scene with a bang, rather than a splash.

The terrifyingly respectable scholars were not, of course, ogres. On the contrary they were largely kind, encouraging people who went out of their way to make me feel like I was one of them. I was introduced to people whose work I had read and admired, like Ulrich Marzholph, and to people whose work I did not yet realize I admired, like Ülo Valk. I had a long conversation with Sue Bottigheimer, who listened with flat-tering patience to my description of my dissertation topic. The hallways between panels were crowded with overlapping conversations on the nature of orality and literacy, the place of traditional storytelling in the increasingly mediated world, fairy tales and pedagogy, narrative and dreams, a hundred voices in a handful of languages constantly at the periphery of my attention.

In short, the whole thing was kind of idyllic. At the American Folklore Society meetings or smaller regional Folklore meetings, I typically spend hours poring over the program, carefully marking the papers on storytelling or narrative. I quickly realized, looking through the dauntingly fat book of abstracts for ISFNR, that this process of elimination was utterly useless to me here. The usual dismay at how much I would inevitably miss was multiplied tenfold. I regretfully passed up an intriguing panel that promised Icelandic legends, werewolves and changelings in favor of a panel on folk narrative in modern media. Highlights of that panel were Cristina Bacchilega’s (University of Hawai’i at Mānoa) paper on generic complexity and hybridity in film adaptations of classic tales, and Anne Duggan’s (Wayne State University) analysis of the camping of Perrault’s “Donkey Skin” in French cinema. The panel was followed by an involved discussion of the dubious applicability of the motif index to film studies, which already has its own well-developed conventions and genres. I made painful choices between Vilmos Voigt’s (Eötvös Loránd University) take on new theories that had emerged in past ISFNR meetings, and conflicting papers on performance and embodiment. I came perilously close to missing my flight home, because I lingered at Gary Alan Fine’s (Northwestern University) Friday morning lecture on politics and humor.

Naturally there were aspects of the conference that were less idyllic. For one thing, the far-flung nature of the conference venues meant that one often had to structure the morning or afternoon around one or two key, unmissable talks—ducking into a room down the hall to catch a paper mid-panel is somewhat more complicated when “down the hall” becomes five or six blocks of blindly hot Mediterranean summer. But this unlooked-for commitment to a venue ended up surprising me. I heard papers I would not have heard otherwise. I came for Harold Neemann’s (University of Wyoming) paper on Madame d’Aulnoy, but I stayed for Maria Cortez’s (University of Aveiro) paper on 19th century Portuguese fairy tales, and found that her presentation on the relationship between folklorists and children’s educators at that time was one of the papers that stayed with me long after the closing ceremonies.

Another memorable panel was the excellent, cohesive group of papers given by my friends and colleagues Linda Lee (University of Pennsylvania) and Jeana Jorgensen (Indiana University) with the always thought-provoking Kimberly Lau (University of California, Santa Cruz). Their subject was transformation: of bodies, of tales over time, of audiences’ generic expectations, and of the use to which tales of transformation have been put. Lau’s paper served as an especially apt anchor, speaking to transformation as a kind of stability, and the persistent appeal of the fairy tale genre. Appealing enough, indeed, that this panel drew more listeners than chairs, and the audience crowded the doorway and spilled out into the hall.

Initially I tried to use the three-hour-long afternoon breaks in program scheduling to see the sites and visit museums or exhibits. It took several
failed ventures for me to realize that it was not simply the conference that rested afternoons, it was the entire city of Athens. The only exceptions were the nodes of tourist activity—sidewalk cafes and busy souvenir shops where I mysteriously found myself on a daily basis with no conscious effort to visit. But while it would clearly take a far longer (and less preoccupied) visit to Athens to do that ancient and beautiful city justice, the schedule did permit a visit to the newly opened Acropolis Museum, a graceful building with clear glass floors to show off the archeological layers beneath this most recent construction, and views of the Parthenon from the tall windows. We trekked up the steps to the Acropolis itself shortly after, and though it was not a crucial moment in the study of Folklore, I will always remember watching a clutch of clumsy, half-grown falcons learning to fly off the cliffs overlooking the Odeon. I can’t imagine a better place for a meeting of ISFNR: to leave a complex, wide-ranging discussion of folk narrative in a darkened auditorium and stumble out into millennia of human history and mythology under an overturned blue bowl of light and heat. The 16th Congress has a lot to live up to.

Exhibition dedicated to the history of the Hellenic Folklore Research Centre, Greek Folklore Society, and the ISFNR.

Photos by Veikko Anttonen.
My impressions of the 2009 Congress in Athens were framed by both intellectual and cultural components of the conference. This was my second time attending an ISFNR Congress and it was also my second time visiting Greece, so without having to deal with the initial anxieties that often accompany rites of passage — the excitement and fears of presenting a paper at my first international conference; the apprehensions of navigating public transportation in Athens and spoken greetings in Greek — I was able to focus on the more enjoyable aspects of the conference. Several themes in the papers, addresses, and discussions emerged in my experience of the conference, ranging from the interactions of humans with culture, nature, and context, to the variety of approaches to narrative folklore, from textual to theoretical emphases. In this reflective piece, I mention many of the papers that for me exemplify important trends in current folk narrative research.

In the very first session I attended, I noticed these themes in the papers presented and the resulting discussion. Aggeliki Komphoholi (University of Athens) presented on her research with a storyteller in a hospital setting. This woman retold folktales from her childhood while in a therapy group for fellow patients, and yet the narrator’s relationship to contemporary culture and the hospital setting prevented her from telling her favorite folktale, ATU 310 (Rapunzel), as it would have been insensitive to dwell on the motif of long hair in a context where many female patients had undergone chemotherapy. This first paper, with its lively yet heartbreaking depiction of folk narrative in the modern world, demonstrated the ongoing relevance of folk narrative research and the significance of cultural context in our scholarship.

The other papers on that panel by Piret Paal (University of Helsinki) and Tatiana Minniyakhmetova (Institute of Strategy for Region Development, Udmurtia) focused on dream experiences, the former on dreams relating to cancer narratives and the latter on dreams in Udmurtian culture. The entire panel led to a stimulating discussion of the relationships between folklore, culture, and other learned behaviors, and biological constants, such as sickness, sleep, and health.

The themes of human relationships to nature continued to draw my attention throughout the conference. Scholars from various regions of the world contributed diverse perspectives on the geographic foundations of many folk narrative genres. Aado Lintrop’s (Estonian Literary Museum) work on shamanic stories, which incorporate aspects of legend and memorial, displayed the regional concerns of shamans in caring for specific communities and the illnesses they might encounter in those environments. The spiritual and spatial dimensions of the shamanic experience narratives were especially striking, and provided another good example of how folk narrative can help us to understand spiritual and mental topographies. Desmond L. Kharmawphlang (North-eastern Hill University, Shillong) lectured illuminatingly about intellectual property and folk narrative research in Iran, illustrating his points with information about archives and historical attitudes about informants and collaborators. Maria Kaliambou (Yale University) discussed the reception of folktales in nineteenth century Greece, differentiating between scholarly and folk publications, and how the marketing of booklets reflected educational norms.

Context played an important role in many of the papers and discussions I saw, ranging from conversations about broad cultural contexts to data about specific storytelling contexts. Ulrich Marzolph (Enzyklopädie des Märchengenres) lectured illuminatingly about intellectual property and folk narrative research in Iran, illustrating his points with information about archives and historical attitudes about informants and collaborators. Maria Kaliambou (Yale University) discussed the reception of folktales in nineteenth century Greece, differentiating between scholarly and folk publications, and how the marketing of booklets reflected educational norms.
Outstanding examples of folk narrative scholarship appeared on a spectrum, some privileging theoretical questions and others relying on close readings of texts. In the instance of the former, the papers delivered by Sadhana Naithani (Centre of German Studies, New Delhi), Lee Haring (Brooklyn College of CUNY), and Pertti Anttonen (University of Helsinki) raised important and intriguing questions about the relationship of folktale (and all genres) to reality; the appropriateness of using metalanguage to elicit oral-literary criticism from narrators who may or may not be interested in analysis; and the advantages of using intertextuality to create agent-centered accounts of tradition and transmission of folk narrative. Other papers employed or investigated specific theories, such as Kimberly Lau’s (University of California, Santa Cruz) ruminations on the application of Lacanian psychoanalysis to fairy tales, and Lauri Harvilahti’s (Finnish Literature Society) analysis of ideologies that dominated folkloristic practices in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in Europe, from Romanticism onward.

Those papers that approached important questions in folk narrative research from a textual perspective were also fascinating. Linda Lee’s (University of Pennsylvania) paper on monstrosity and (dis)enchantment in contemporary fairy tales, Cristina Bacchilega’s (University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa) paper on generic complexity in recent fairy-tale films, and Anne E. Duggan’s (Wayne State University) paper on camp and agency in the French film “Donkey Skin” all exemplify the highly nuanced types of analysis that folk narrative scholars perform upon rich and complex texts. Donald Haase (Wayne State University) discussed texts about texts, criticizing the colonizing rhetoric of scholars who know nothing about folk narrative scholarship yet insist that folktales contain universal, general truths and are simple, direct expressions of some ideal folk worldview. The importance of research that historicizes and contextualizes folk narrative cannot be underestimated, returning us to the very basic—and yet still very pertinent—idea of the interdependence of the texts and contexts of folk narrative.

In closing, the major themes that I noticed at the Congress—culture, nature, context, theory, and text—were evident in the papers I mentioned in this brief reflection, as well as in many others I did not. I think it indicates the strength of our field that there were so many sessions scheduled simultaneously that I couldn’t possibly attend all of the papers I wanted to hear! The informal opportunities to converse with other scholars, at dinners and receptions and the like, were also valuable. Meeting so many international colleagues and participating in so many lively discussions contributed to my sense of being part of a thriving and worthwhile intellectual community. I am especially grateful to our Greek colleagues for working so hard to make us feel welcome as visitors and fellow scholars. I found the trip to be personally gratifying as well, as I was able to go on marathon training runs around the Acropolis. The interweaving of my personal narrative—the quest for fitness—with historical narratives—the origin of the marathon in Greece—made the travel experience meaningful on multiple levels for me. And as my reflections on the Congress hopefully convey, folk narrative research as well as the venues in which we gather to discuss our research are vibrant and exciting, inviting participation from a broad and knowledgeable scholarly community of which I am happy to consider myself a member.
May 2010

15th Congress of the ISFNR in Athens, the Belief Tales Session
by Tiina Sepp and Siiri Tomingas-Joandi, University of Tartu, Estonia

In June 2009, under the blazing hot Greek sun, the cradle of Western civilization and the birthplace of democracy welcomed scholars of folklore from all over the world to take part in the 15th Congress of the International Society for Folk Narrative Research. The congress, organized by the Hellenic Folklore Research Centre of the Academy of Athens, was titled Narratives Across Space and Time: Transmissions and Adaptations.

During the seven congress days, scholars from all four corners of the world presented their papers on different subjects – mythologies, charms, storytelling, belief tales etc., divided into nine parallel sessions. The Belief Tales Symposium was held between June 23-26 as part of the 15th Congress on the ISFNR.

The Papers

There were 32 registered participants from 20 countries. The Belief Tales symposium had five subtopics: History, Change, Development; Figures; Genres and Sub-Genres; Tale Types; and Patterns.

Several papers were dealing with the social role of folklore, both in ancient and contemporary society. This seems to be one of the current trends in the discipline. The other trend could be related to the development of the discipline. The first speaker in the History, Change, Development session was Ülo Valk (University of Tartu) who talked about christianisation and folklorisation as discursive shifts in genre formation. Toward the end of the symposium the papers concentrated on the subject of folklore research more generally, starting with Timothy Tangherlini (UCLA), who talked about approaches from machine learning and historical geographic information system to belief tale research. Heda Jason (Jerusalem), who did a great job preparing the program of the symposium and establishing the Belief Tales Network, was unfortunately not able to go to Athens. Her paper “The Legend of the Miraculous and Its Subgroups” was read out by Michele Simonsen. Pekka Hakamies (University of Turku) shared with the participants his views on narratives and reality, followed by Christine Shojaei-Kawan (Enzyklopädie des Märchens), who discussed the issues of genre classification in her “A Closer Look at Contemporary Legend as a Cross-generic Genre”. The final paper of the symposium was by Magdalena Elchinova (New Bulgarian University), who discussed legends and ethnic boundaries.

Although there are still many nationally-oriented researchers, i.e. scholars studying their own culture, many are interested in completely different cultures. A good example of the latter is Maria Palleiro (Buenos Aires University), whose paper “The Lady Ghost and the Black Devil. Colors of Memory in Argentinian and Estonian Folk Narrative” compared the presentation of supernatural figures in Estonian and Argentinian folk narratives.

As the Devil plays a central role in many aspects of folklore and especially belief tales, many of the papers presented were dealing with different views of the Devil – in addition to Maria Palleiro’s paper also Paulo Correia (University of Algarve) from Portugal (“From Christ as a Child to the Devil as a Goat: Carrying a Supernatural Being who Becomes Heavier and Heavier (AT 768)”) and Özkul Çobanoğlu (Hacettepe University) from Turkey (“The Concept of Saytan in Turkish Folklore”).

When dealing with folklore of the North-European, especially the Nordic countries, the continental Scandinavia tends to be left in the shadow of the rich Icelandic heritage of magical beings and valiant kings described in the sagas. Although Iceland was represented with Terry Gunnell (University of Iceland) speaking about modern legends in Iceland, it was also possible to hear about Danish
There were many very interesting and very inspiring papers presented during the symposium, but unfortunately our space is limited and it is impossible to discuss them all here.

**Belief Narrative Network**

Towards the end of the conference, on the 25th of June a meeting was held to discuss the matters of the Belief Tales Network and elect its executive committee. The committee was elected as follows (names in order of suggestion): Terry Gunnell (Iceland), Mare Kõiva (Estonia), Timothy Tangherlini (USA), Úlo Valk (Estonia), Heda Jason (Israel), Ezekiel Alembi (Kenya), Desmond Kharmawphlang (India), Maria Ines Palheiro (Argentina), Willem de Blécourt (Netherlands/UK) with Willem de Blécourt as the committee’s chairman. Irma-Riitta Järvinen (Helsinki) was suggested as a member of the executive committee later. After a suggestion from Robin Gwyndaf (Cardiff, Wales), the name of the network was almost unanimously changed from Belief Tales Network to Belief Narratives Network (BNN), to better match the ISFNR name, which refers to narrative. Also, “narrative” is a neutral and clear term, but “tale” has many interpretations and can therefore cause confusion. During the meeting the statute of the BNN was formulated, and Alexander Panchenko, who unfortunately couldn’t participate in the conference himself, invited all the (new) members of the BNN to join in a Belief Narrative Network Conference in St. Petersburg, in May 2010.

**Social program**

Wednesday was reserved for extra curricular activities and for that purpose our hosts had prepared for us a variety of trips to different sights nearby, all of great historic importance. One could visit the site of Delphi, take a day tour to Corinth and the ancient city of Mycenae, or enjoy a full day cruise in the Saronic Gulf islands.

The Hellenic Folklore Research Centre had organised events presenting theatrical and musical narrations as well as dance performances that were inspired by Greek traditions. In addition to all that, the guests were both welcomed and bidden farewell with a small cocktail party.

Many thanks to the entire organising team for a well-organised and memorable congress. The wonderful antique city of Athens was the perfect venue to celebrate the 50th anniversary of ISFNR – scholars of folklore from all over the world exchanging ideas of different subjects, all under the watchful eye of the patron of the city, the goddess of wisdom Athena. The overall inspiring ambience of the congress left us with many interesting ideas for future research and hopes of meeting again soon.

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L-R: Guntis Pakalns (Latvia), Timothy Tangherlini (USA), Ulf Palmenfelt (Sweden), and Marju Köivupuu (Estonia) with her son Martin enjoying the Mythos bear and other treats during the excursion to Hydra Island on June 24, 2009.

*Photo by Úlo Valk.*
The committee has had an active year – at the Athens ISFNR, we hosted 5 sessions: one on charms in the Greek-speaking world (Komposhli, Passalis, Iona), one on picturing charms (Kapalo, Roper, Arukask), one on charms texts (Olsan, Timotin, Naiditch), one on the Bone to bone charm-type (Pócs, Toporkov, Roper), as well as a round table on the state of charms studies led by Andrei Toporkov.

Online, our annotated bibliography of charms collections and studies from a variety of languages and nations continues to grow. It is intended to provide information on reliable source materials and studies internationally, and we would welcome any additions.

And we are due to have another conference midsummer this year:

**Charms, Charmers and Charming**

International conference at the Romanian Academy, Bucharest, Romania June 24-25th, 2010

Organised by:
International Society for Folk Narrative Research – Committee on Charms, Charmers and Charming;
Institute of Linguistics ”Iorgu Iordan – Al. Rosetti” of the Romanian Academy;
Institute of Ethnography and Folklore “C. Brâiloiu” of the Romanian Academy.

The conference will focus on the following topics:
- the relationships between charms and apocrypha
- ethnographic approaches to charmers and their clients
- philological approaches on the historical variation of charms
- the Flum Jordan charm-type
- the practice of charming in contemporary communities.
- charms as one genre among others (prayers, legends, sayings, etc.)
- how a typology of charms might be constructed (for this topic it is desirable that speakers take into account the proposals made by Agapkina and Toporkov in “Charm Indexes: Problems and Perspectives, see http://www.isfnr.org/files/toptransl7.pdf)
- and related topics

Some practical details:
The official languages of the conference are English and French. The length of each paper must not exceed 20 minutes. All the costs (travel, accommodation, food, health insurance) are to be paid by the participants. On Saturday, the 26th of June, we intend to organise a trip outside Bucharest, to Sinaia, to visit the Peleş Royal Castle, the Sinaia Monastery and George Enescu Museum.

For further information please contact the organisers:
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Emanuela Timotin (organiser of the forthcoming Bucharest conference) and James Kapalo (specialist on Gagauz charms) in conversation.
*Photo by Jonathan Roper.*

Lea Olsan discussing the connections between classical and Anglo-Saxon charms.
*Photo by Jonathan Roper.*
How did you become a member of the ISFNR?
When I was a student at the University of Mainz, I received the invitation of Prof. Kurt Ranke to come to the Kiel and Copenhagen conference in 1959. I had met Prof. Ranke a year before at the German Volkskunde Congress in Nürnberg and had expressed my interest in participating. He even provided me with a travel grant from the funds of the German Endowment for Humanities. The conference was particularly memorable for me because I was able to meet the leading authorities on folk narrative research, including Walter Anderson, Harald von Sicard, Archer Taylor, Stith Thompson, Maja Bošković-Stulli, Linda Dégh, and others. And I received great support for my doctoral dissertation about the fates, which was under way during this time and was later published as FFC 193.

Are there any ISFNR meetings that have been particularly memorable and why?
I do not think that the Kiel/Copenhagen conference of 1959 was an ISFNR event, because this organisation did not exist at this time. It definitely existed when the next conference in Athens took place in 1964. This was another remarkable event for me, because I could present my first paper. After my lecture, Prof. Wayland D. Hand took me out to the steps of the Athens Academy. He took a picture of me and said to me: “Now, you are one of ours and you can call me Wayland”. I think I became an ISFNR member during the first business meeting in Athens. The next ISFNR conference was held in Bucharest in 1969. Again, I remember it very vividly for a number of incidents. One was caused by my ‘Doktorvater’ Prof. Lutz Röhrich during his paper about political jokes. He told the audience a joke about the Russian cosmonaut Gagarin, which led to a formal protest from the Russian delegation and a threat to leave the conference. Prof. Mihai Pop was able to soften the situation. I gave a paper about 16th century broadsheets as a source for folk narrative research. It was the first ISFNR conference paper ever with a slide presentation and it caused the organisers a big problem to find a slide projector and have it installed at the venue. Prof. Ranke was my chairman and he invited me to contribute the article, titled “Flugblatt”, to his planned encyclopaedia, *Enzyklopädie des Märchens* (EM), which I later did.

My personal contribution to the next ISFNR conference in Helsinki 1974 was a paper about “Comics and Folk Narrative Research” which raised some eyebrows (Folklore research was then still strictly bound in its traditional canon) but again brought me an invitation of Prof. Ranke to write the article called “Comics” for his EM.

The Bergen conference in 1984 was particularly memorable for me and many others because it dealt with fundamental theoretical and methodological issues of folk narrative research and marked a breakthrough into new dimensions and directions of our discipline from text to context, performance and meanings. Everybody who attended the Budapest conference in 1989 will remember the event of the re-embedding ceremony of the corpse of Imre Nagy, which marked the beginning of the big political changes of 1989. With the exception of Mysore, I have attended all ISFNR conferences in the past, and published congress reports and keynote papers in *Fabula*, which was made the official journal of the ISFNR in Göttingen in 1998.

What is, in your view, the role of the ISFNR and what are your expectations regarding the 2009 Congress in Athens?
The ISFNR has an important role in the development of folk narrative research worldwide and has been successful in integrating researchers from countries other than European/ American. It now offers a worldwide network for comparative research and is crucial for the future of the discipline. But as we can see from the recent programme of the Athens conference, this change from
European/American to a worldwide perspective has negative impacts on the conference agenda. 300 papers during a six-day conference in 10 parallel sessions is a monster of a conference. “Narratives Across Time and Space” is obviously a topic that covers all and everything and leads to the neglect of basic theoretical and methodological problems. I also regret the absence of papers about the role of the media and the Internet. Theo Meder has invited the contribution of papers for a special workshop of the Internet working group but has only received three entries. It may be useful for further ISFNR conferences to consider actively asking researchers to deliver papers which address fundamental questions of narrative research; I am aware that restricting the number of accepted papers is not practical for many reasons, but maybe this should be counterbalanced by innovative sessions to avoid an overload of the prevailing detailed regional type and motive studies.

Vilmos Voigt  
Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest, Hungary  
Honorary Member of the ISFNR, founding member of the ISFNR Theoretical Committee

0. Not asked, but important.

The ISFNR started to exist and then flourish at the time when international comparative philology was being reshaped worldwide and having successful and regular international conferences. It is true for Finno-Ugric Studies (from the 1960s onward), for the International Comparative Literature Association (also from the 1960s), for comparative religion and the International Association for the History of Religions, the International Association of South East European Studies (AISEE), international congresses of Slavists, scholars of Altaic languages – I could name dozens of similar societies. All of them made a new ‘international’ start in the early 1960s. As far as I know, all of them still exist today, but their importance has definitely decreased. Until about 1985 they represented a forum for the most important topics, for new trends, and their leaders were acknowledged scholars both at home and on the international stage. Now this time is over. Regular conferences of these international associations bring nothing important and new – they function as a meeting place for old and new generations who have no common topic to study or to discuss. The ever increasing number of parallel sessions and strictly limited time for papers made most of the congress sessions automatically simply a waste of time. Today, most of the participants at home have a minor position and have no impact upon cultural politics in their own country. The opposite was the case during the first ISFNR years, i.e. the years of Kurt Ranke, K. C. Peeters, Mihai Pop, Gyula Ortutay and many others.

In addition, around the same time ‘international associations and congresses’ became really worldwide. For example, congresses for teaching folk dances run today subsequently in Norway, South Africa, Philippines and the Czech Republic, etc. The safeguarding of peasant houses congress convened in South Korea. The ISFNR is a fairly good example of the same development. However, the ISFNR has two distinctive features. First, the ISFNR was first based in Germany and ruled by the methods of German philology: from Walter Anderson to Kurt Ranke, then from Lutz Röhrich to Rolf Brednich, from Max Lüthi to Rudolf Schenda, from Archer Taylor to Wolfgang Mieder. And, as long as the Enzyklopädie des Märchens is published in German, and the ATU was made in Göttingen, the situation remains the same. It is a considerable difference, compared, for example, to the International Union of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences, which has always been a US-dominated phenomenon, in spite of its truly world wide distribution.
Second, with a few exceptions among international societies, the ISFNR has one ‘central’ journal: *Fabula*. (Today this is a stark exception. Perhaps the International Association for Semiotic Studies and the journal *Semiotica* is another one breaking the rule.) Unfortunately the book series of the ISFNR died out quickly.

1. How and when did you become a member of the ISFNR?

I was a university student when my teachers received ‘questionnaires’ from their colleagues in the fresh-made ISFNR. Being a folklorist, I can tell a “true narrative” about collecting Hungarian data for the monographs of these scholars. This is how it went. Full professor Ortutay received the letter and gave it to the associate professor Linda Dégh, who gave it to the assistant professor Tekla Dömötör, and finally the young student Ákos Dömötör or myself collected the materials and mailed them to the now-famous ISFNR colleagues. We thus became automatically members of the network. Everybody who received a letter from Kurt Ranke (or, better to say, from Fritz Harkort [secretary of the ISFNR – ed.]) received thereafter information about forthcoming congresses, everybody could become *de facto* a member.

2. You were one of the main organisers of the 1989 Congress in Budapest. What was this process like?

Budapest was the last ISFNR congress that embraced all kinds of folk narrative research. We also had an institutionalised parremiological meeting. Paremiology had been well represented at previous congresses as well, but in a less organised, à la Matti Kuusi, style. After some troubles, we could accept all applications for participation, even from the Apartheid country, though this person finally did not show up. We also had problems with a lecture titled “About the Folklore of the Intifada”. We did not want to merge with politics, but as soon as we saw the scholar – Monim Haddad, a wonderfully nice man – all problems were over.

We had in fact no money for the congress – only free rooms for the meetings, flowers on the table, and our young colleagues. Not very many participants paid the congress fees and Lauri Honko asked that we transfer the sum we did collect to Turku. Thanks to Juha Pentikäinen we did not do it. Instead, we tried to publish the conference papers. But with the printing costs increasing constantly, we always ran out of publishing money. After a while we said to a publisher’s assistant who had just been fired that we have so much money: if she could make the publication happen, she would get the whole sum (without tax). Knowing all the three congress languages, she did it. So *Artes Populares* 16-17 appeared. It brings together all the papers we received (without the papers published elsewhere, e.g. in *Fabula* and ARV). Only the programme of the folk-dance event was left out from the two volumes due to the lack of money. We tried to send the volumes to participants, but soon ran out of mailing money. Then a miracle happened. One day Reimund Kvideland (then the President of the ISFNR and since 1991 director of the Nordic Institute of Folklore in Turku) asked me whether this misery was true? And how much money we needed for mailing the rest of the copies? I told him a moderate sum. He gave it to me in cash, directly out of his pocket. It happened in the famous cafe at the Senate’s Square in Helsinki... (Even today, I can only guess who had told Reimund about our troubles.)

The Budapest ISFNR congress took place in the days of the Tien An Men massacre in Beijing and the “reburial” of the heroes of the 1956 Hungarian revolution (not to mention other im-
portant events in Hungarian political life at the time). All of this happened very suddenly and we had to make changes in the programme during the congress in order to make the reburial day a 'free day' for the participants. I know that many of them witnessed the event. However, from the very beginning it was planned that at the inauguration meeting Zoltán Kodály’s music to Dániel Berzsenyi’s poem “To the Hungarians” was going to be performed with repeating of the key words “Lélek s szabad nép tesz csuda dolgokat” (The Spirit and the Free People make wondrous things).

Among the participants were poor persons too who could not afford to attend the expensive gala-dinner – a tradition of ISFNR meetings and forced by the then outgoing presidium. There was therefore an alternative folk music event, free of charge, with an exceptional folk music band. It was unforgettable and more valuable than the otherwise sumptuous gala-dinner at Hotel Gellért. Only days later did I notice that Hans-Jörg Uther had organised another nice evening for the not-so-rich which took place at the same time. Yes – in Budapest too the ISFNR was more than a scholarly association; it was a friendly group of folklorists.

One should also mention that we had two “preparatory” meetings for the Budapest ISFNR. More precisely, two scholarly meetings with some business negotiations. One in Visegrád (Hungary)2, a scholarly and friendly one, and one more business-like in Paris (thanks to Madame Veronika Görög-Karády – who, in fact, is Hungarian). At this latter meeting, simply impossible changes in the programme during the congress were uttered: what and how much we should do in Budapest. It never found any discrimination there. Kurt Ranke was forcing contacts with East European and Israeli scholars. The ISFNR and Fabula, later the EM, worked on the principle of equal opportunity. I only ever heard anti-Soviet biased comments from one (then Soviet) member. Looking down on East-Europeans disappeared pretty soon. Colleagues understood quickly that there are good folklorists behind the Iron Curtain too. Another anecdote. At the Bucharest meeting in 1969 I met Alan Dundes (and introduced him to Eleazar Meletinsky as well). Dundes pointed at me and told the following story. “My Dean did not want to give me travel money for the Bucharest congress. Then I presented him with a copy of some pages from Acta Ethnographica (from Hungary), showing Vilmos Voigt’s long review of my book, and said: ‘I must meet him!’” So, in California it was a positive sign that somebody writes about Dundes in a “Communist” country. In Hungary the fact that there were excellent folklorists in the United States was only welcomed.

Perhaps we in Hungary had a more liberal attitude toward international folklore than other socialist countries... However, I have often admired Polish and Romanian folklore research possibilities, although I could tell about contrary cases too. When in 1966 we published a Hungarian anthology of Korean folktales, the first translations were made from editions published in Pyongyang, but the second half of the book came from collections published in Seoul, Tokyo and Bloomington. The ISFNR is worldwide folklore research in a nutshell. And it is a true mirror of worldwide folklore. Let it remain so.

3. How do you see the role of the ISFNR today and also in the past, for example during the Cold War era?

Today the ISFNR is the only international association of folklorists; folk music and folk dance scholars have their own associations and conferences. Among the experts of folk literature only folk ballad scholars held regular meetings. However, some members of the above mentioned groups also visit ISFNR meetings. The ISFNR is now really worldwide. We have to thank the two last presidents Galit Hasan-Rokem and Úlo Valk for this, as well as some earlier initiatives. This must also be the direction in the future. And folklore too is worldwide indeed.

As regards the Cold War era, the ISFNR emerged after that time, in the strict sense of the word. And I never found any discrimination there. Kurt Ranke was forcing contacts with East European and Israeli scholars. The ISFNR and Fabula, later the EM, worked on the principle of equal opportunity. I only ever heard anti-Soviet biased comments from one (then Soviet) member. Looking down on East-Europeans disappeared pretty soon. Colleagues understood quickly that there are good folklorists behind the Iron Curtain too. Another anecdote. At the Bucharest meeting in 1969 I met Alan Dundes (and introduced him to Eleazar Meletinsky as well). Dundes pointed at me and told the following story. “My Dean did not want to give me travel money for the Bucharest congress. Then I presented him with a copy of some pages from Acta Ethnographica (from Hungary), showing Vilmos Voigt’s long review of my book, and said: ‘I must meet him!’” So, in California it was a positive sign that somebody writes about Dundes in a “Communist” country. In Hungary the fact that there were excellent folklorists in the United States was only welcomed.

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How and when did you become a member of the ISFNR?

I stayed in Göttingen in 1966-67 and worked for the Enzyklopädie des Märchens, translating Japanese folktales into German and studying under Prof. Kurt Ranke. Prof. Ranke told me about the ISFNR and invited me to the Helsinki congress in 1974. At this meeting I became a member of the ISFNR.

Are there any ISFNR meetings that have been particularly memorable and why?

One of my most memorable ISFNR meetings is my first Congress in Helsinki in 1974. Precisely because it was “my first” meeting and gave me the opportunity to meet many researchers from around the world; and because I was elected the vice-president of the ISFNR for Asia. Next comes the 1989 meeting in Budapest. Since I became the vice-president of ISFNR, I felt it to be my task to invite Chinese scholars to the ISFNR. I visited China several times and made contact with researchers there. They promised me they would come to the Budapest meeting. I told this to the ISFNR president Lauri Honko. But they didn’t appear. At last, on the third day of the meeting they appeared and told us that because of the brutal incident in Tien An Mien square the border was closed and they couldn’t fly out. During the meeting Hungarian colleges described to us the Soviet army’s invasion of Budapest in 1956. The last day of the meeting was the day of the rehabilitation and reburial of the executed Prime Minister Nagy. Next comes the meeting in Edinburgh that Max Lüthi attended as well. By that time I had already translated his theoretical book Das europäische Volksmärchen – Form und Wesen into Japanese. I told him that the Japanese folktales correspond to his characterization European folktales.

Erika Taube

Kawasaki, Japan

Honorary Member of the ISFNR, former Vice-President representing Asia

I have liked folk narratives and folklore of various kinds since my early years. It is because our father would read a fairytale to us in the evening, while our mother sang with us every day in the twilight hour. And so I did later with our children. We used to spend vacations in the native places of our parents in the Saxonian Erzgebirge, where I very much liked to listen to the grown-ups talking about former times and strange things that had happened. Father’s older brother was a good storyteller and liked to make us children shudder by telling stories about strange events that had happened to him or other people from the village. And so he did later too, not only in former but still in socialist times. But the thought never came to my mind that folk narratives might be an academic subject. So I studied Sinology with Eduard Erkes, who didn’t once refer to the fairytale motifs well known from our German tradition, and Tibetology at the Leipzig University; I graduated with a study about fables by a modern Chinese author.

Fortunately just at that time Gerhard Kahló taught Indonesian at our institute, and so I heard his – first of all for me – very interesting “Introduc- tion into Indonesian folklore”, and from this followed a private lecture, “Volkskunde”. He encouraged me to continue my academic way with studies in Chinese oral traditions and my professor of Sinology agreed to this. But during an additional one-year of
studies at Peking University our pro-
fessor died, and when I returned the
situation at the institute had changed
seriously. So I started working in a
Tibetan geographic project. However,
I was soon asked to initiate myself
into spoken Mongolian, and, to quote
the tale The Coral from Australasia:
“This was the head/beginning of the
island”. Step by step I took the path
of Mongolian folktales, dedicated my
dissertation to Mongolian fairytales
and soon came across a small Tuvan
group in the uttermost west of Mon-
golia who speak a Turkic language
and are related to Tuvars in southern
Siberia, although they have no written
script of their own still they have many
storytellers and some famous rhapsodists. It was the proverbial last minute
to document some of their fairy- and
hero-tales. So I returned to my be-
loved fairy tales, and experienced
the truth in the German proverb Der
Mensch denkt, und Gott lenkt.

How did you become involved in the
ISFNR?
When I was preparing the second edi-
tion of Tuvan Fairytales, I became
acquainted with Gisela Burde-Schnei-
dewind and Friedmar Geißler, editors
of the well known Berlin Academic se-
ries “Volksmärchen - eine internatio-
nale Reihe”. Later – inspired by Gisela
– I translated and compiled “Mongol-
lische Volksmärchen” a second edition
for this series to be published in 1991.
However, with the reunion of Ger-
many serious changes took place in the
sphere of publishing and the Berlin
Akademie-Verlag was affected too. I
decided not to trouble Gisela, for she
tried to keep the folktale series alive
– unfortunately in vain. The whole
process of destroying something like
a life’s work, all the endeavours and
– sometimes offending – disappoint-
ments, must have been very hard for
Gisela. And then I heard that she had
passed away. When I tried to get my
manuscript back, there was another
publisher, the old editor was no longer
there and my manuscript had disap-
ppeared. Thanks to Siegfried Neumann

one copy was found in the archive of
the former Academy of Sciences of
the former GDR – it was the one from
Gisela’s writing desk.

Being no folklorist and living in the
former GDR, most of my scientific
contacts were to the East. When I was
preparing Tuvan Fairytales, I had to
work in the then Leningrad’s libraries
in order to become acquainted with
editions from Tuva, and Gisela had
established a contact with Kirill Vasi-
lyevich Chistov [former Vice-President
of the ISFNR representing Europe –
ed.] by writing him a letter. When I
arrived in Leningrad, Kirill Vasylyevich
was so kind to meet me at the station
together with his wife Bella Yefimovna
and brought me to an aspirant’s guest-
house just close to their own dwelling.
This acquaintance very soon changed
into a deep and lasting friendship
between our families. In Leningrad’s
public library, the department with
south Siberian editions was under
reconstruction and closed. But Kirill
Vasylyevich ensured that I was able
to work with catalogues and every
needed edition there as well as in the
Academy of Sciences and the Kunst-
kamera, where he himself had his
sanctum and where he acquainted me
with ethnologists working on Tuva and
south Siberia in general. Later, when
I had compiled the edition of Altai Tu-
vanes fairytales and (other) traditions, I
stayed in the Chistov’s home for about
five or six weeks where I proof-read
dear Bella’s translation into Russian
and together we settled every open
question. It was a very inspiring time
there, when I learned a lot about the
ISFNR and its congresses, and full
of cultural events in the evening and
good talks at the family’s table. I miss
them so much.

Some time later the Göttingen Con-
gress took place, where I had the
pleasure of becoming acquainted
– among other dear colleagues, for
instance from the Enzyklopädie des
Märchens – with Kirill Vasylyevich’s
former student Bronislava Kerbelyté,
whose name I heard more than once
in the Chistov’s home. It was my first
ISFNR Congress and I felt happy
among so many people with the same
interest in and love for folklore in all its
aspects. I remember having felt in high
spirits, because in my very academic
surrounding at Leipzig University influ-
ential colleagues had considered my
engagement with the folk-narratives
and folklore in general and – more
besides – of an at that time almost
unknown people like Tuvans, to be
not a serious scientific subject com-
pared with linguistics, history or politi-
cal economy, and smirked at it a little.
So it was wonderful and encouraging
to experience such a great commu-
nity of scholars engaged in studying
folk traditions and lore, which were
so close to my heart from early child-
hood.

So I am glad to be here at the Ath-
ens Congress in your capital rich in
historical and cultural tradition. Now
I am looking forward to the congress
and the meeting with old and – so I
hope – new friends.

1 Folkloristischer und sachlicher Gehalt mongo-
lischer Märchenstoffe (1964 - not published).
2 Tuvinische Volksmärchen, Berlin 1978; (1977
appeared: Das Leopardenschreckige Pferd,
Berlin; 1980 Tuwinische Lieder, Leipzig; 2004
Volksmärchen der Mongolen, München).
3 Skazki i predaniya altayskikh tuvincev (Moscou
1994) in the academic series “Skazki i mify nar-
odov Vostoka.”
How and when did you become a member of the ISFNR?

It was 1984, and I was talking with Alan Dundes at Princeton, where I had organized a conference on fairy tales. He said I should be a member of the ISFNR, and put me up for membership. But that was just the first step. That fall I was giving a talk on the Grimms’ tales in Kassel, and also finishing up research on my book about the Kinder- und Hausmärchen by visiting several libraries and archives in Switzerland and Germany. Through reviewing a book by Jack Zipes for Fabula, I had come into contact with Elfriede Moser-Rath. Not only did Elfriede invite me to stay with her, she also introduced me to everyone at the Enzyklopädie des Märchens and then made arrangements for me to meet Rudolf Schenda in Zürich and Herman Bausinger in Tübingen. The warm welcome that she and the whole team at the Enzyklopädie des Märchens gave me made me feel embraced in a wonderful way, a sense that has continued to this day.

Are there any ISFNR meetings that have been particularly memorable and why?

The 1989 meeting in Budapest was quite interesting, because that was the one in which the gender balance in ISFNR governance shifted. I remember coming into the great meeting room and being struck by the fact that all of the officers except for one, I think, were men, but that in the audience, women predominated. That seemed odd, and a group of us set about to rebalance the makeup of the elected officers. We went around sounding several women out about whether they’d be willing to stand for election, and then we went around to find men to nominate them. Bengt Holbek was one of the men we asked to nominate a woman, and he did so, but he didn’t hear very well and ended up nominating one woman for a different office than we had envisaged! It would be fun to ask everybody who took part in that little revolution to write down what they remember, because there were many people, including for instance, Galit Hasan-Rokem, who took part in it.

For me personally I suppose the Tartu meeting will remain more vivid than any other, because of the reaction to the talk I gave there. The uproar was so at odds with the calm beauty of the 18th-century lecture hall. People stood up and shouted, or stormed out of the room. I’d never seen anything like it.
Preparations have started for the next ISFNR interim conference to be held February 22-25, 2011 in North East India. This easternmost part of India is a homeland for many peoples and languages; it is a wonderful destination for visitors because of its beautiful landscape, historical monuments and rich variety of folk cultures. The first Indian Department of Folkloristics was founded here in 1972 at the University of Gauhati, the oldest university in the region. The interim conference will be organized by the Department of Folklore Research, University of Gauhati, and the Department of Cultural & Creative Studies of the North-Eastern Hill University (NEHU) in Shillong, the capital city of the state of Meghalaya in North-East India.

**Conference Venue:**
Multi-Purpose Convention Centre, North-Eastern Hill University, Mawkynroh-Umshing, Shillong – 793 022, Meghalaya, India

The main topic of the conference will be:

**Telling Identities: Individuals and Communities in Folk Narratives**

We invite you to contribute a paper on one of the following subtopics:

1. Ethnicity and Cultural Identity
2. Identity and Belonging in a Transnational Setting
3. Identity in the History of Folkloristics
4. Places and Borders
5. Belief Narratives and Social Realities
6. Revisiting Colonial Constructs of Folklore
7. The Making and Mapping of Urban Folklore
8. North-East India and South-East Asia: Inter-Cultural Dialogue
9. Critiquing the Paradigm of “Folklorists’ Paradise”: A North-East India Perspective

A Book Exhibition will be scheduled in the context of the ISFNR Interim Conference in North-East India. Authors-participants are earnestly requested to donate a copy of books exhibited to the Departmental Library of the Department of Cultural and Creative Studies, North-Eastern Hill University, Shillong.

Please submit your registration:
by E-mail: isfnrshillong@gmail.com
by fax: +91 364 272 1010/2551634
by mail: ISFNR Interim Conference in North-East India, Department of Cultural and Creative Studies, North-Eastern Hill University, Umshing-awkynroh, Shillong – 793 022, Meghalaya, India
Phone: +91 364 272 3371/72/74/79

**Registration Fee (Last date for Regular Registration October 1, 2010)**

- Full Registration: $200
- Accompanying person: $150

**Late Registration** until December 1, 2010
- Full Registration: $250
- Accompanying person: $200

**No request for registration will be entertained after this date**

**Submission of Abstracts** (Deadline: September 1, 2010)
Sessions and panels will be structured according to topics (with a maximum of three participants). Participants are kindly asked to indicate the sub-topics for their papers while submitting the abstracts.

Format: RTF, Rich Text Format
Font: Times New Roman, 12 point
Length: up to 300 words
Space: single (double space between title/subtopic/author/address and the body of the abstract)

You will be notified about the acceptance or proposed modification (if any) of your abstract by November 1, 2010.

Please note that presentations should not exceed 20 minutes followed by 10 minutes of discussion.

**Secretary of the conference** is
Prof. Desmond L. Kharmawphlang
desmondkharmawphlang@gmail.com

Email correspondence should be addressed to Dr. Rabindranath Sarma / Mr. Macdonald Lyngdoh Ryntathieng/ Ms. Margaret Lyngdoh with a cc to rsfolk@gmail.com
mac50@rediffmail.com
ninilyngdoh@gmail.com

**Further Information**
A second circular including further information will be issued in July, 2010. A third circular including the congress programme will be issued shortly before the congress dates.
For updates please check the ISFNR website at http://isfnr.org/files/nextinterimconference.html

Welcome to North-East India!
In the middle of January, the unexpected news of the death of Ezekiel Alembi shocked folklorists all over the world. A young man, scholar, a pillar of support for his family and kin, the tribe, neighbourhood children and young Kenyan playwrights, colleague, companion, friend, poet, actor, speaker for his culture and African languages. Death has no heart, wrote an anonymous Kenyan web commentator in conclusion of an article in memoir of Ezekiel Alembi. Yes, that is so! Death has no heart.

Ezekiel began his education in 1971 in the Ziwani primary school in Taita Tavesta, graduated the local Ebwirany school in Kakamega, and went on to secondary education in Kakamega and Kangaru Embu high schools. His studies next took him to Nairobi’s Kenyatta University where he defended his MA on local children’s songs in 1991. His further education was tightly interconnected with the Finnish Folklore Fellows’ summer schools. It was in Helsinki that he wrote his doctoral thesis entitled “The Construction of the Abanyole Perceptions on Death through Oral Funeral Poetry”, on Abanyole death culture. Ezekiel used to reminisce about how the village people gathered to give their opinion on the study written about them and gave their approval. As a scholar, Ezekiel became a member of the ISFNR, taking part in the Society’s congresses and conferences from 1995. Since 1998, he was Africa’s representative on the ISFNR board. The year 2000 interim conference gave the Society a chance to, in turn, get acquainted with the work of Kenyan folklorists and philologists. He belonged to the editorial boards of several American folklore journals. He was a long-time member of the editorial board of the journal “Folklore. EJF”, published in Tartu, and also a valued reviewer and publishing author.

Ezekiel had a most contagious laughter, which helped him overcome every difficult problem and he never tired of repeatedly saying that happiness and luck do not go hand in hand with riches. “Look at the people of my home country, they are happy despite being poor and the earth being overworked.” There were only a few times that I ever saw Ezekiel look worried. In November 1999, he came to my office, looking disturbed, and said that he needed to phone Patricia in Nairobi right away. He had dreamed that the graves of his parents in their home garden were disorderly. “It is a bad sign, it needs to be looked into at once, even though it is far from the capital.” His home village and the folklore of the region, his tight connections with the local people and their heritage were very much an integral part of his life, the source and support from which he drew his work as a lecturer on literature at the Nairobi Kenyatta University. “One day I will be writing on entirely different topics that I do not have a blood tie to,” he used to dream. Years later, we travelled from Nairobi to Abanyole through the open spaces of Kenya: past the houses of cattle breeders, through the lands of the Lous and other tribes. The bountiful trees, tea and coffee plantations, cornfields, national parks, the shores of Lake Victoria pink with flamingos, roadside churches with a black-skinned Jesus and apostles, the fire-red soil clashing with the green of the grass so that it hurt the eyes. Every square inch of arable earth seemed to be in use.
Ezekiel was, as anyone can attest, a most enchanting narrator and a wonderful dancer. It was difficult to tell where fantasy and international story motives ended and where personal belief experiences began, so well were they mixed into stories. Good narrators, dancers, local healers, good local drummers, gifted students – those were his interest and care. His mission was to record the rich panoply of human knowledge before international flights and tourism erase them to oblivion.

Ezekiel’s interests and community work were bound up with children’s literature published in African languages. “School textbooks and children’s books must be in the mother tongue. We have reason to be proud of our rich culture and not just copy the example of American commercial culture.” He considered it his mission to provide African children with literature and education in the mother tongue. Egara Kabaji reminds us that “His first publication, ‘Don’t be Long John’, was a hit. It was followed by yet another puller, ‘High Adventure’. These two publications launched Alembi as a writer with great promise.” By 2003, when he was awarded a literary prize, he was already author of more than 40 children’s books and a published poet.

Already as early as 1988, he had attended a short course on creative writing in Sydney, Australia. He was for years also the National Chairman, Kenya Schools and Colleges Drama Festival, as well as during last years director of Kenyatta University Radio Services. One of the last things he did in support of his home village children’s quest for education was to set up a library. It is a worthy addition to the house where once his father used to teach children how to read.

There is a mighty fig tree, a symbol of vitality, growing near Ezekiel’s village house. The thousand-year-old tree is a silent witness to the flow of village people: children going to school, parents going to market or work. A few meters from the tree, in the yard of the farmstead, people of the Alembi family lie in their final resting place. Now Ezekiel has joined them, under the beautifully blooming trees and cicadas singing at night, being mourned by thousands of Kenyans.

Mare Kõiva
Tartu, Estonia

Locating Folk Narrative in the Scheme of Contemporary Folklore Scholarship
by Jacqueline S. Thursby, Brigham Young University, Provo, USA

Jacqueline S. Thursby is the author of Funeral Festivals in America: Rituals for the Living (The University Press of Kentucky, 2009) and several other books.

When I entered my last stage of graduate work for a PhD in American Culture Studies, I was told that ethnographic research was a waning practice...
In the following discussion, variant one of his books, it is
tus Folklore professor from Brigham
of motifs. As William A. Wilson, emeri-
tions, customary behaviors, folk and
vernacular traditions, material crea-
cultural, not biological, and includes
and attempted to communicate. It is
so since humans first began to dis-
revived and reinvented, and has been
It is constructed, consciously or not,
limited corpus of components (1) that
are ‘remains and debris of events’ or
‘fossilized evidence of the history of an
individual or a society,’ and (2) that are
continuously ordered and reordered
by a particular mode of thought (called
‘mythical thinking’ by Lévi-Strauss)"
(Georges and Jones 1995: 258-259).
Folklore is bricolage, a multi-faceted
(reedited components and sources.
It is interdisciplinary, synchronic and
diachronic, and like the rising waters
of a tide inundates every molecule on
a coastal beach, folklore inundates the
human condition.

It is constructed, consciously or not,
revived and reinvented, and has been
so since humans first began to dis-
cover the meanings of one another
and attempted to communicate. It is
cultural, not biological, and includes
vernacular traditions, material crea-
tions, customary behaviors, folk and
deep religious beliefs, and thousands
of motifs. As William A. Wilson, emer-
tus Folklore professor from Brigham
Young University stated by the title of
one of his books, it is The Marrow
of Human Experience (2006).

In the following discussion, variant
perspectives about folklore and folk
narrative, historical and contemporary,
will be presented. I teach introductory
and graduate classes in folklore and
literature, and my primary objective
in those classes is to help students
prepare for their own life experience
by catching a glimpse of folklore,
and how it can enhance their own
life journey. I begin with many defini-
tions: “Artistic communication in small
groups (Ben-Amos 1971); “express-
ive culture” (Feintuch 2003); “dy-
namic variation” (Toelken 1996), and
perspectives: ideological, functional,
structural, psychological, feminist,
mass culture, and others, but to help
students new to folklore understand,
I find it effective to reach far back in
time to the bards and lays, griots (gri-
ou) and ancient tellers.

Most students new to folklore have
a misunderstanding of what folklore is.
They assume that we will read and
discuss familiar childhood tales. We
do that, but they soon understand that
folkloristics is a much broader study.
Some literary scholars wave folklo-
rists away as simple story collectors
and suggest that folklore could not
survive without literature, but I know
that literature could not survive without
folklore. Folklore transmitted culture
long before writing was invented; it
is a complex vessel through which
expressed human behaviors have
flowed abundantly since humanity
began.

In the last several years there has
been an ongoing debate about “ora-
liness” and “literacy” specifically of Old
English verse. How has it come
down to us? Has it been through oral
composition or primarily written? Af-
ther all, it has been transmitted only
by manuscript for centuries? Well-
known scholars, names familiar to
many of you such as Albert B. Lord
(1965) and John Miles Foley (2002)
have expertly studied and theorized
ancient oral and written poetry. Kathe-
rine O’Brien O’Keeffe has used the
term “residual orality” to suggest that
the scribes were apparently “familiar
with a system of oral formulaic com-
position which led them to substitute
metrically and lexically acceptable
variants into the text as they were writ-
ing it” (O’Brien O’Keeffe 1990: back
cover). In her text, Visible Song: Tran-
sitional Literacy in Old English Verse
(1990), she takes us to a new level of
understanding about ancient bardic
lore, and how it was embedded into
manuscripts.

Uses for the Tales
In his essay “Folklore, Nationalism,
and the Challenge of the Future,”
William Wilson wrote that “It may be
true that folklore captures the soul of
a people, but it is equally true that the
image of that soul reflected in folklore
is also a constructed image, a reflec-
tion not necessarily of an objective
reality but rather of the ideological
predispensation of the individual holding
the mirror” (Wilson 2006: 147). As is
well known among folklorists, Johann
Gottfried von Herder believed that a
folk poetry revival would move Ger-
man literature away from the rational-
ism and the Enlightenment. His mirror
reflected a desire to revive the voices
of the fathers, the “heroic customs, of
noble virtues and language” (Herder,

Jack Zipes wrote in Breaking the Magic
Spell: Radical Theories of Folk and
Fairy Tales (2002: 31) that: “Herder
borrowed heavily from folklore and
used it in order to try to forge a sense
of unity among the German people.
A second wave of German bourgeois
writers, the romantics, went a step fur-
ther at the end of the 1790s by radic-
ally utilizing the folk tradition in hea-
vily symbolical literature to criticize the
restraints and hypocrisy of bourgeois
codes which were gradually being in-
stituted in public spheres of interest.
It should be stressed that, while the
romantics assumed a positive attitude
toward the folk tale and its tradition,
these writers represented a minority
position”. Zipes explains that the most
popular tales among the middle class
Germans were rationalistic and moral-
istic stories and novels, and traditional
folk tales were dismissed “as nonsensi-
cal, irrational, and trivial” (2002: 31).
The folktales make use of the care of it for the rest of their days. Their selfish neighbors in Phrygia were suddenly lost in a lake that appeared out of nowhere. Their wish to die at the same time was granted, and long after, when that occurred, they were transformed into an intertwined oak tree and a linden tree, long-time symbols of hospitality. I see the elements of the rise tale in this ancient narrative, though the couple was married when the magic took place. An interesting footnote to this tale is that later Biblical tales seemed to emerge from it including the story of St. Paul and St. Barnabas when they cured a cripple at Lystra, a small town of Lycaonia. The villagers hailed them, much to their embarrassment, as Zeus and Hermes.

Franz Boas, anthropologist and early editor of the *Journal of American Folklore*, noted in 1927 that “All human activities may assume forms that give them esthetic values” ([1927] 1955: 8). Humans obviously create language, texts, and cultural history to find and express meaning and beauty in the present, and Henry Glassie suggested that folkloric scholars must “Accept, to begin, that tradition is the creation of the future out of the past” (2003: 176). He continued, “Our understanding begins as we refine tradition in conjunction with history and culture.” (ibid.).

Today’s quest for folk narratives has gone in myriad directions: tradition, context, performance, identity, genre, and more labels for vast, complex concepts continue to attempt to explain the slippery rocks of folkloristics. We capture the tales now electronically, and as Deborah A. Kapchan wrote, “We become taxidermists, mounting, naming, and numbering it. Some would even like to breathe new life into the beast. But once a performance has been turned into a text, the original is, in fact, dead, its simulacrum fit only for a museum or book” (2003: 122).

As contemporary ethnographers become more reflexive, the writing can easily become more about the author than the subject. One recent text that demonstrates that trend in contemporary folk narrative scholarship is Deborah E. Reed-Danahay’s edited volume, *Auto/Ethnography*: Rewriting the Self and the Social (1997). In this anthology, Reed-Danahay discusses Mary Louise Pratt as describing auto/ethnology as linked to “relations between colonizer and colonizer, and to modes of resistance to dominant discourses offered by the native account.” For her, however, auto/ethnography is a form of ethnography of one’s own culture, rather than a piece of autobiography” (Reed-Danahay 1997: 7). Pratt defines auto/ethnography as “a text in which people undertake to describe themselves in ways that engage with representations others have made of them” (Pratt 1994: 8). Is this not representative, again, of the ancient tales of resistance to the dominant discourse told from a contemporary perspective?

Over the last ten years, two books with very similar titles have been released; *Being There: The Necessity of Fieldwork* (1998) by Daniel Bradburd, and *Being There: The Fieldwork Encounter and the Making of Truth* (2009) by John Borneman and Abdellah Hammoudi. Bradburd (1998), denying post-modernist arguments against authentic understanding of others, contends “that the knowledge achieved through field experience holds the potential for bridging the world’s increasing – and increasingly destructive – cultural divisions” (back cover).

Borneman and Hammoudi (2009) continue the defense of fieldwork suggesting that strategies of theoretical puppeteering (building on former theories), textual analysis, and surrogate ethnography slur over relative truth gained through fieldwork. They laud encounter, fieldwork, gathering the folk narratives from the subjects, and laying aside fear of the so-called ethnographers’ “gaze” (2009: 2). Collaboration as a way of understanding fieldwork with new openness and truth
and less risk for the participants is the key to both of these texts.

On collaboration, George Marcus stated: “the vision of a collaborative relationship between anthropologist [folklorist] and informant as authors of ethnography in the field has provided a strong reimagining of the regulative ideal of rapport in the ideology of anthropological [folkloric] practice. (…) (112). The collaborative ideal entails the notions that knowledge creation in fieldwork always involves negotiating a boundary between cultures and that the result is never reducible to a form of knowledge that can be packaged in the monologic voice of the ethnographer alone” (Marcus 1998: 112, 113). Marcus also recalled the particular influence Mikhail Bakhtin, mentioned earlier, has had on Anglo-American ethnographers by exposing and approving of: “The craft and technique of polyphonic representation. (…) This strategy of experimentation in ethnography, which has already been well-labelled as dialogic, has generated a literature of collaborative works, confessional texts reflecting on the conditions of fieldwork discourses, and works with the heightened attention to the character and content of the multitude of distinct discourses (voices?) that compose any project of ethnographic research” (1998: 37).

Marcus wisely cautions as he describes collaborative methodology, but it is the direction of the field. Human performances of personal narratives and lived stories, simply narrated occurrences in human interaction and experience, continue to be the primary source for the “study of the present” as Linda Dégh stated in her book Legend and Belief (2001). Barbara Myerhoff, in Number Our Days (1978), on her own voyage of meaning, wrote: “The tale is told to tame the chaos of the world, to give it meaning” (1978, n.p.). The work continues and feeds new generations of cultural researchers.

Examples of recent ethnographic related publications in well-known and respected folklore journals include an excellent, in-depth book review of Folklore: An Emerging Discipline: Selected Essays of Herbert Halpert, edited by Martin Lovelace, Paul Smith, and J. D. A. Widdoson (2002) by Margaret Bennet (2006). Halpert was a professor at Memorial University of Newfoundland, and the reviewed book speaks of Halpert’s fieldwork methods, and the continued relevance of his scholarship. Dating back to 1946, his essays on “Issues and Approaches” are as relevant today as then, as Halpert tackles basic questions – fieldwork methods, classification, interpretation, the occurrence of obscene or sensitive material, or (in today’s terms) the absence of political correctness, copyright, and the questionable “right to publish” (2006: 347). His “greatest legacy, however, must be in the realm of the folk tale” (Bennet 2006: 348).

According to the editors, his research superceded in scope and rarity collections made by Stith Thompson (his PhD chair), and Richard Dorson, past chair of the Folklore Department at Indiana University at Bloomington. Halpert fervently believed that the folk narrative traditions of the British Isles and Ireland must be mastered before the English-language-folk-narrative of Canada and the United States could be studied properly.

A recent issue of Western Folklore included an article by Timothy Corrigan Correll, called “‘You Know About Needle-Boy, Right?: Variation in Rumors and Legends About Attacks with HIV-Infected Needles” (Correll 2008). In addition to broad historical and academic research, Correll included a long list of UCLA Folklore and Mythology Archive materials (18 entries) gathered from narrative performances. Most were less than ten years old, and the information presented in the up-to-date article will be useful in the public sector. These are frightening stories meant to give form to disturbing realities of today’s world. Correll (2008: 60) states: “The main group of narratives I consider include: (1) a victim in a public place who (2) feels a mysterious prick, and (3) shortly thereafter, learns that he or she has been purposefully wounded with an HIV-tainted needle. (…) In one version (…) the culprit pokes the victim then whispers, “Welcome to the world of AIDS,” laughs, and runs off. In many of the stories it is (4) related that the message is later confirmed when the wounded party is tested positive for the virus.”

Coralynn V. Davis reveals in her ethnography called “Pond-Women Revelations: The Subaltern Registers in Maithil Women’s Expressive Forms” (2008) the women’s knowledge and influence in shaping their society through the dialogic nature of their expressive practices: “Maithil women (…) tell folk stories. By attending to these women’s stories, one of my aims is to bring these narratives and the lives, perspectives, and insights of the women who tell them to the attention of those for whom their existence, and the value of that existence, is unacknowledged” (Davis 2008: 297).

Ülo Valk (2006: 4) wrote that “Theory does not require universal technical terms with fixed meanings, but needs open and flexible concepts that enable creative thinking. Different opinions, disagreements, and ongoing discussion are all signs of the healthy state of folkloristics”. The point, as I tell my undergraduate and graduate students, is no longer a search for the Ur-form, the original, but rather it is an accept- ance of the many forms that present themselves – the dynamic variation. Henry Glassie stated that “Ethnography is interaction, collaboration. What it demands is not hypothesis, which may unnaturally close the study down, obscuring the integrity of the other, but the ability to converse intimately” (1982, n.p.).

In closing, we are all folklorists, anthropologists, ethnographers and hu-
man beings concerned about the state of world culture. Some focus on oral-ity; i.e., vernacular transmission, and others on literary evidence of record. Are we all not seeking links to the meaning of the human condition? Do we not all recognize residual ori-ality in literary works? Do we not all recognize the bricolage of the folks? And did not Alan Dundes remind us that we are all folks? Quoting Francisco Vaz da Silva’s notes on the 14th Congress of the ISFNR, “Wolfgang Mieder, in his moving homage to Dundes in Tartu, recalled what Dundes “preached throughout his productive and fruitful life, namely that folkloristics is the key to a better understanding of the human condition and that its practitioners should conduct their work on a comparative and international basis” (Vaz da Silva 2006: 13).

I feel greatly privileged to be permitted to participate in the 2009 ISFNR Congress. Thank you, and I hope this paper has contributed in some way to our mutual dedication to the dynamic and vital discipline of folkloristics.

Works Cited


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I have a strong feeling of owning the ISFNR congresses of the seventies as I reported them journalistically in real time and wrote the scholarly reports of both Helsinki and Edinburgh, and am the only person who really did read every single paper that the congress organisations received from the speakers. I took these jobs to clear my mind about this discipline after having changed my object of study from kalevalametric songs to narratives in a village and in many ways these two meetings, very different from each other as they were, have shaped my idea about the scope of folkloristics.

Now again we have a new generation of scholars. Doubts have been voiced whether such a thing as folklore really exists. Then, suddenly, an outline of a new almost Herderian theory of folklore appears from a multitude of current approaches and from the development of our old allies linguistics and aesthetics. This development, this outline, I will discuss in my paper.

I will conclude by sharing with you my current understanding of the value of the multiplied national in our discipline.

Two textual concepts have been at the core of folkloristic thinking: genre and Folklore. As long as Finnish folklorists practically and symbolically were working at and on the Folklore6 is Finnish. Don’t be surprised to recognise familiar things: folklorists have been an international crew from the very beginning.

The ‘Finnish’ method along with the national fervour had lost its potential; scholarly ambition was targeted at understanding folklore in general. The 1974 ISFNR meeting in Helsinki (cf. Folk Narrative Research, Studia Fennica 20. 1976) was a watershed. It gave us the chance both to define the agenda and to measure up the leading international scholars in the field. One thing was clear. The new American concept of folklore as artistic communication in small groups did not meet our needs: a Finnish theory of folklore should also cover the variation in time and space offered by large archive collections.

The Finnish Method – was not ignited by genre, but by the origin, distribution and essential meaning (fi. sanottava, what it has to say) of items of oral tradi-
tion, which could be recognised as variants of a ‘same’; the same story, same song, same proverb. Inspiring heights in this research were reached by Martti Haavio (1899-1973), scholar and a poet, not much translated. It was only when this line of research had reached its potential that genre became interesting. Large folklore collections provided a solid empirical base for scholarly genre descriptions and genre analysis, which then came to be a central theme at the Helsinki congress, began to appear as a universal tool in a discipline for which folklore was the target of the research. For other disciplines – like history or comparative religion – for which folklore was a possible source, genre consciousness would serve as a tool of source-criticism. Over time this approach has become ours too. What used to be a tool of categorisation has become a key to interpretation.

The possibility to easily record speech to be listened to and analysed over and over again is an important agent of progress, and was at first underrated. It has taken decades to understand how much can be said that was left out when writing with pencil or pen. While the new technique has given us tools for virtually total coverage of folklore performances it has also provided possibilities to theoretically update earlier primary findings and interpretations.

What has been needed for the contemporary understanding is both a scholarly turn of aesthetics and linguistics and a new democratic concept of people that turns “tradition bearers” into subjects, active agents “bearers” into subjects, active agents, capable of mastering various registers of language. At the time when aesthetics only dealt with high art, and linguists avoided forms larger than words and sounds, genre discourse pursued metaphors (cf. note 11) that did not recognise forms of folklore as aesthetic registers of spoken language, which have a rhetoric distribution of labour in dealing with socially important issues or expressing cultural consciousness.

In spite of a few early openings it was only from the sixties when the emergent scholarly turn in the humanities and the advance of the social sciences, along with the widening of folkloristic interest brought along by general cultural change, led to problematising the concept of folklore: what it is, what are the functions of folklore in society, and not least what in this perplexing concept with many uses, both academic and popular, delivers disciplinary identity and the basis of expertise when the focus is on our contemporary multimodal situation? An early sign of this interest was the fiercely Finnish article on the concept of folklore in Midwest Folklore by the fresh immigrant Elli-Kaija Kängäs-Maranda (Kängäs 1963).

The word folklore appeared in scholarly use without much theoretical concern. Still effort has been invested in attempts to theoretically define the concept, and by so doing establish the academic status of folkloristics as an independent, theoretically and methodologically sound discipline.

The problem appears in Finland in a different light compared for instance with the United States: for us it is not as obvious: I can no more write as I did in the seventies and eighties, using folklore and perinne as synonyms. Lack of strong focus on authenticity or tradition has had consequences. Ever since folklore – instead of national or ethnic heritage (fi. esi-isien hengenperintö, literally “heritage of the ancestors”) – came to be studied as a universal mental resource of all peoples and every individual, the largest folklore archive in the world and the field research capacity, which grew out from the old Lönnrotian collecting practice, has yielded many things in the search for a new Finnish folkloristics. It has made it possible to present well founded large scale generalisations of various forms of folklore to demonstrate how the tiniest textual changes create new meanings, and how folklore works as the verbal mani-
festation of the surrounding social order, economic structure and Lebenswelt, providing for both the social and individual need of expression, without either of which folklore would neither be born nor survive.

2. The Kalevala factor.

The birth of scientific (methodological) folkloristics as comparative research, which gave our national epic the Kalevala a glorious history and humble Finnish items of folklore a place in global and European stream of culture, furnished Finnish folklorists with a status as researchers of important matters. This ethos can be maintained when (1) research proves that important matters can be expressed by everyday, even seemingly trivial, forms of folklore, and (2) when the turn in aesthetics makes us understand how aesthetic expression, while maintaining emotional continuity, is universally linked to matters of social value. If folklore is a system, as has been suggested, it is useful to see it as an aesthetic system (Lehtipuro 2008a).

The Balto-Finnic and Finno-Ugric (cf. Honko et al. 1993) and even a Darwinistic element in the research of kalevalamic song tradition has over the decades with sociological dominance reminded us of the original linguistic and philological interest in the study of folklore, and of the basic fact that as an aesthetic register, bestowed with the simultaneous capacity to create new and store ancient things, folklore belongs to the realm of natural spoken language and in the development of man has had important functions, not yet fully understood. The need to express mythical meanings and common social understanding still exists and it is met even in new venues of communication.

3. The Finnish method

…and the text-critical tradition before it equipped us from the very beginning with a perplexing dualistic view of folklore as something very tangible, with variants to be studied by scholars, and at the same time as an abstraction like original form, tale- or proverb type, mentifact or invariant looming behind it. This abstraction can be discussed and have a name, like Cinderella, and it used to be the very object of scholarly interest.

And now comes the news: 4. The language factor

The fairly recent linguistic idea of units of variable size offered by language to its speakers, so that every speaker need not formulate everything from scratch inevitably calls for a redefinition of this dualism embedded in classical folkloristic research practice, and to combine the new idea with the Aristotelian discussion on topics, the proper use of which belongs to common linguistic competence. Many folklorists have over the past twenty years in their research practice taken this sense of topics to new domains, but this kind of connection with the older folkloristic practice has not been explicitly stated – as far as I can see.

In this context the old folkloristic virtue, love of the language and deep appreciation of the people who use it better than most becomes important. This very sentiment inspired meetings with singers and storytellers and made fieldworkers – often students who did not belong to the same world with their informants – invest much effort in grasping the essential formulations as they came out of the mouths of their informants – even if no-one on the spot understood what it meant. It is no wonder, that tape recorders were eagerly accepted in use, even when doubts were raised about where the beef in the new technology might be.

Without this strongly felt experiential relationship with language many important findings over the last few decades would not have been made; and the more folklorists turn to contemporary culture, the more important their own linguistic competence as a tool of interpretation will be.

I promised not to bombard you with difficult Finnish names, but I must mention one. Pentti Leino, professor of Finnish language at the University of Helsinki, who at the time of the ISFNR Helsinki meeting in 1974 still had one foot in folkloristics, and who brought new linguistic ideas to the folklore discussions of the seventies. He left folkloristics – so he used to claim – partly because it is not a real discipline like linguistics. However, when I now read his old, and at the time very inspiring, folkloristic writings I can easily see that he almost came to where we in my opinion now are. He was on the right track, but did not follow it through. Cognitive linguistics with the idea of units of language had not yet entered the scene.

Another piece of the puzzle was missing too, and the same piece was lost by the whole group of Scandinavian and Finnish folklorists that surrounds Lauri Honko, and also in the intellectual sphere of the Nordic Institute of Folklore, where I was a participant and a public scribe.

We did not think of folklore in general as poetry but as cultural communication and it has taken me a quarter of a century of life with an aesthetician and participation in various conferences in aesthetics and philosophy to understand how deeply aesthetic a matter folklore is, not only a ‘how to do things with words’ resource (cf. Austin 1976) as we learned in the sixties. The updated understanding of folklore gives old metaphors like ‘another sacred language’ (by Elias Lönnrot), or ‘eine besondere Form des Schaffens’ (by Roman Jakobson & Pyotr Bogatyrev) new meaning and fits in with the ‘how to do things with words’ idea as well. It covers equally both the kalevalamic song which derives authorship from tradition or its cultural partner the Balto-Finnic lament, and from the various forms of narratives and minor genres, jokes and children’s lore that live their lives hidden from adult eyes and ears.
Combining the idea of aesthetic expression as a universal tool for enhancing matters of social value (cf. note 34) with the idea of units of language derived from cognitive linguistics plus the philosophical idea of the we-mode of sociality (Tuomela 2007, see note 36) makes it perfectly clear why various forms of folklore exist. Proper forms are needed when things must be expressed and everyday language is not enough. These intertextual aesthetic registers of spoken language grow from the environment, religion and the Lebenswelt61 as well as from the everyday language of the speakers, just as Johann Gottfried Herder understood over two hundred years ago.52 In these natural contexts folklore can also be interpreted as has been done over the last decades.

What still needs a theoretical update is the classical observations of the astonishing tenacity of folklore and its ability to cross cultural and linguistic borders. I think we may need some updated Darwinism here.

To conclude as I promised:

As folklorists are folk too, I think that every national53 academic scene and group of scholars with a common language is a homeland of folkloristics, with its own unique contribution to make. This insight began to grow in me early when I spent the spring term 1967 at Københavns Universitet (University of Copenhagen) and met Irm Pio, the archivist, Laurits Bødker, the lecturer, Brynjulf Alver, the leader of Nordisk Institutt for Folkedigting (the Nordic Institute of Folklore), Bengt Holbek, the continental scholar, and went to the field with Carsten Bregenhøj. I started to understand that Nordic folkloristics, with much in common, is not as I had thought the same in Finland, Sweden, Norway and Denmark. Later, living in the United States, seeing Alan Dundes in his office in Berkeley surrounded by his students, and attending the yearly meetings of American Folklore Society, I under-

stood that the thing which makes a flourishing scholarly atmosphere is the lively exchange of ideas within a circle of students and scholars who share a common language, who can say exactly what they mean and deeply understand each other and know the folklore they are talking of.54 Only when common understanding is achieved within these kinds of scholarly circles can it – our teachers Matti Kuusni and Lauri Honko would say that it must – be brought out to the world. I think we are getting there now. International congresses are just the tip of the iceberg. The spirit of the seventies, relying on rapid universal scholarly progress led by chosen theory committees of the kind that was working between the Helsinki and Edinburgh congresses (Bauman et al. 1982) – and which Vilmos Voigt just reminded us of – does not work.55

The 7th ISFNR Congress in Edinburgh in 1979. Rolf W. Brednich (left) and Lauri Honko (right) at the University reception.

Photo by courtesy of Rolf W. Brednich.
peared I decided to take a closer look at the groundbreaking thinking of young Lauri Honko (Lehtipuro 2006 and 2008b), for a session about the classics at the 30th Nordic conference for ethnology and folkloristics in Stockholm 2006. It is obvious now – looking back at these experiences over almost 40 years later – that advance in a science like folkloristics is a slow and meandering process with various undercurrents: it is often necessary to go back for decades, sometimes even longer, to understand what has happened. 4 “My generation” was born from some years before, to a couple of years after, WW II and came of age as folklorists in the sixties and seventies in the electrifying atmosphere around two inspiring professors, Matti Kuusi (1914-1998, occupant of the Helsinki chair 1959-1977) and Lauri Honko (1932-2002, founder and holder of the Turku chair 1963-1996). Each of us gathered his/her own plate at the academic smörgåsbord offered by these two very different scholars, in an atmosphere of increasing internationalisation, lure of sociology and disintegration of the so-called national sciences. Many of us were tempted to folklore studies by books of Kuusi’s predecessor Martti Haavio. 5 A constant reminder of the Finnishness of the folkloristics and of our responsibility in developing the discipline was Jouko Hautala (1910-1983), archivist, esteemed Nordic theorist (Hautala 1971(1962); Biographica 1971) and early mentor to Lauri Honko, personal professor by the side of Kuusi and the author of the history of Finnish and comparative folklore research (fl. suomalainen ja vertaileva kansanrunoudentutkimus) (Hautala 1954, abridged version in English 1969). Students of Martti Haavio (cf. note 5) seem to form a middle generation between us and those who experienced the war (see note 29) as adults.

5 Before settling abroad both studied in Helsinki, Eli-Kaaja Kögäs with Martti Haavio (along with Lauri Honko and Leena Virtanen) and Gailt Hasan with Matti Kuusi, as one of our generation, learning from both Kuusi and Honko. Kögäs is still remembered, by those who started their studies in 1957, as the energetic and inspiring assistant who introduced the world of folklore to the newcomers under the vaults of the “biggest in the world” folklore archive of Finnish Literature Society (SKS).

6 To systematically separate folklore (material, object of study) and folkloristics (science) has been a long standing Finnish pursuit both in our dealings with US colleagues and in all international contexts. 7 The bond between academic teaching and the Folklore archive was gradually loosening during the sixties when the Department of Folklore was formed and first got its own rooms at SKS, and then moved away from the house, where the discipline has had its home base together with Finnish language and literature from the time of Kaarle Krohn. Still at the time of the Helsinki congress it felt natural to begin a review of trends in Finnish folkloristics (Lehtipuro 1974) from this building. SKS was in many ways the hub of congress arrangements, with Pirkko-Liisa Rausmaa from the Folklore archive as the secretary general. 8 First Honko (1967) and at the Helsinki congress Roger Abrahams and Dan Ben-Amos (Pentikäinen & Juurikka 1976) told us of other approaches.


9 Some articles plus bibliography in Essais folkloriques (1959), and only two books, Väinämöinen, Eternal Sage (1952) and Heilige Heine in INGEMARLAND (1963). A symposium might be in place with our colleagues in Athens about Haavio’s (1963) northern view of Dionysos and Greek mythology in general.

10 The word used for Gattung/genre was first mainly perinteenlaji or perinnelaji (a species of tradition). From the eighties onwards the word genre has gained terrain even in Finnish contexts as a move toward art talk. More research is needed to understand the subtle relationship in our folklore discourse between art and science, Linné and Darwin.

15 In hindsight it is easy to understand why many scholars at first did not think tape recordings add much value to folkloristic research: the interesting thing is that the topic was there already in the handwritten manuscripts and few saw the value of situational information.

16 A breakthrough was under way from the seventies until Anna-Leena Siikala (1984, in English 1990) and Annikki Kaivola Bregenhøj (1988, in English 1996) in two parallel studies inspired by new linguistic and cognitive ideas, presented a line of research, which accurately shows how meanings are expressed in narratives.

17 A grand realisation of an old dream – to present an oral epic of the length of the Kalevala – was in the nineties the documentation of the Indian Siri-epos, sung by Gopala Naika (Honko et al. 1998).

18 The whole interdisciplinary repertoire of new insight, theory and methodology within the humaniora and the behavioural sciences is available, when the long gone informants who left us their proverbs, songs and stories are seen as people like us.

19 Folklore was discussed in Kaarle Krohn’s Folkloristische Arbeitsmethoden (1926/1971) and the ideas of Roman Jakobson and Pyotr Bogatyrev (1929) were known – but rejected – in Finland in the early thirties.

20 The urbanisation and modernisation, the loosening of local ties and the diminishing domain of oral communication, seemed to mean the end of folklore. Matti Kuusi addressed the issue in his provocative inaugural lecture Kansanperinteen metamorfoosi (On the metamorphosis of folk tradition) in 1959 and still in 1968 I finished an illustrated ma-
gazine article about the good storytellers in Kauhajoki parish (see Siikala 1990) with a question (“Will there still be storytellers in 2000?”) which implied a strong disbelief in the vitality of folklore – and I was not alone in this. Two years later I set out to ‘my village’ to find out more: if folklore is universal, it must exist everywhere.

21 It was the interest in the institutional & ritual functions of folklore that launched Lauri Honko’s academic career and through his strong personal influence inspired the Finnish and Nordic scholarly community around him. The change of paradigm that he started was a slow process and as often is the case with breakthroughs, he was obviously not fully aware of all the consequencies, of what the change really was about (Lehtipuro 2006, 2008b). It took some time and a new generation of scholars to understand that the power of the word exists in expressive forms of folklore as well.

22 Jouko Hautala’s (1957) writings on history and theory of folkloristics loom behind the article and its approach is European and very Nordic (cf. Boberg 1953), with some influence from David Sidney’s teaching at Harvard. The article has not been (as far as I have noticed) discussed in Finland: at first it may have been too self evident and then it was forgotten.

23 Without such a core there is a danger that in hard academic competition the discipline will disappear among various directions of cultural studies. For many reasons the status of folkloristics in Finland seems to be stronger now than at the turn of the century. An active crowd of scholars in search of new domains meet new openings in the classic areas in an emerging common understanding.

24 Among the latest ‘what goes around comes around’ appearances from a neighbouring discipline is the 13.2.2009 Lectio praecursoria, “The social of social sciences” by Olli Pyhältönen (2009) at the University of Turku in which he introduces his doctoral dissertation (Bringing the Social Alive. Essays on Georg Simmel’s Social Theory) reminding us of the importance of the social behind society. This is the reality of which folklorists possess much subtle first hand knowledge, in the words of the people who live in it.

25 The dialogue in a way started in the 17th century with the king’s order to the clergy to collect information on folk tradition (for the build-up of a glorious past for the emerging European power, Sweden) and even before, when the church wanted information on pagan belief. We do not know much of this information was lost in the Turku fire of 1827, but this cumulative (even silent) knowledge was available to the early scholars and students (among them Elias Lönnrot) who wrote about Finnish folklore and folk belief at the old university Turun Akatemia (founded in 1640), which after the fire was moved to Helsinki. Finland had in 1809 lost its 600-year-old status as the eastern part (östra nöshalan) of Sweden, and got its own government as a Grand Duchy of Russia. By this turn, along with Herderian influence, interest in folklore got new meanings.

26 Around the Folklore archive the object of research, kansanrunuous (folklore) had been self evident and unquestionable to the late sixties and students were guided to specialise in a genre. The five criteria definition – oral, anonymous, communal/folk, stereotypical – was adopted to use in the new discipline folkloristics in the early seventies at the University of Turku to make a distinction with Helsinki (where popular culture was included in folklore studies) and to emphasise the face-to-face, community and field aspect of folkloristics. It was in line with Lönnrotian field practice and with the old instructions by SKS Folklore archive concerning the material which could be collected/sent to the archive: kalevalametric poetry fills all the criteria. Over the years the definition has increasingly assumed the quality of family resemblance (Lehtipuro 2003). See also note 28.

27 I could in principle go back to kansanrunuous. If only the word didn’t have so strong a connotation to a poetic metre. It feels good that the Folklore Archive has kept its old name, Kansanrunuousarkisto, and so recognises the creativity of the people who send in their contributions.

28 The notion of traditionality – as well as stereotypicality – is the result of comparative research, so it cannot be given as an instruction of collectable items. Orality is empirical fact: no personal stories, nothing copied from written sources nor directly adopted from the authorities of great society. There must be an individual who has heard from others: a ‘natural’ oral conduit (which does not prevent the existence of influence from other media in addition) must exist. In that way orality was the central thing.

29 As formulated by Jouko Hautala in 1957; the same ethos was strongly present in the paremiological interest of Matti Kuusi. The turn in approach happened after WW II when the dream of a greater Finland (including the land of the Kalevala, the greater part of which had never been part of Finland) was lost in the trenches on the Karelian Isthmus in the summer of 1944. An outsiders’ view (Wilson 1976) was needed for our generation to start thinking about the role of folklorists as national ideologists. What Wilson seems to miss, though, is the constant tension between strict scholarship and national interest, which has had its consequences.

30 The grandest, and to a degree collective, achievement in this line, drawing on the expertise of many scholars, may be the Peninnietailt (Folkslore Atlas) by Matti Sarmela, which was started again in the early sixties after a long break (from the thirties through the post war years) and after many turns was published in 1994.

31 From Julius Krohn (1885) to Martti Haavio this was the central – and controversial – pursuit. It was reassuring to know that we are not alone far in the north but share a cultural heritage with other peoples. On the other hand, how can oral tradition, which is full of international loans, be the building block of something national. The answer was often found in aesthetics, in the high quality of Finnish folk poetry, which only a Finn can duly appreciate. An early (1789) advocate of this view was Henrik Gabriel Porthan, who understood the importance of a proper fit between a poetic form and the natural resources of a language: poems in the old vernacular meter (kalevala-meter, as it later became called) were more pleasing to the ear than those using imported European metrical systems.

32 If authenticity is the key word in discussing German and American folkloristic pursuit, importance could be the keyword for us. In Finland – unlike the US (cf. Briggs 1988: 5; Dundes 2005) – folklorists have from the very beginning seen themselves in a pursuit of serious and important things and the Finnish society at large has over more than a hundred years – thanks to the Kalevala – understood us as such. The search for new importances has been going on in various directions since the demise of the Finnish method, in changing cultural situations (cf. notes 20 and 37)
In the preface to his dissertation on jokes – the first of its kind as an attempt to grasp the human core of a genre – Seppo Knuttilla (1992) could not avoid joking about the disreputable status of jokes as research object, but ended up proving that essential cultural matters are expressed by this undignified genre.

This insight was in 2000 embedded in the very personal book Estetillika (aesthetics) from the aesthetician, professor emeritus Aarne Kirnunen, but similar understanding seems to be hiding in the key word social value by A. R. Radcliffe-Brown in The Andaman Islanders (1922; cf. Lehtipuro 1971: 83).

The development of the Finnish method was influenced by the Darwinistic ideas of the time. The Finnish-minded folklorists at the University of Helsinki may have missed something important when they did not discuss (so it seems) the ideas of the Swedish-speaking Darwin-inspired aesthetician Yrjö Hirn, who had made an international breakthrough with The Origin of Art (1900) and who sat in the same little faculty with Kaarle Krohn and the linguist E. N. Setälä, two leading thinkers of folklore.

An interesting concept, we-mode was introduced by Raimo Tuomela (2007) in his Philosophy of Sociality: The Shared Point of View. We all may have our opinions, however, in societies there are matters in which we need to have a common understanding. This philosopher's approach is in a tempting way compatible with both my findings in the village and those of Anna-Leena and Jukka Siikala in their major work (2005) about oral tradition and society in the Southern Cook Islands.

It is obvious by now that the power of folklore can be transformed and be used in modern media (including the Internet) as well as for political and commercial purposes and in the creation of new communalities and animosities. Among the most obvious cases to demonstrate this seems to be the development of Serbia (cf. Colovic 2002) in the nineties, but we only need to turn on the news to get fresh examples.

Described by Matti Kuusi (1974; 1980).

Not only by scholars. It is a common human skill to discern which story or proverb is the same as another and which is different. These discussions about proverbs were hot stuff among Helsinki folklorists around Matti Kuusi at the time (1962) I started my studies.

I have so far – advised by an old friend Fred Karlsson, professor of linguistics at the University of Helsinki, whom I thank for the clue – only consulted a single author, Ronald Langacker (1990) on this, simultaneously recalling formative talks of the sixties, mainly about proverbs.

It is tempting to explain my own and some others’ post-Sydowian (cf. von Sydow 1948) interest (at the Helsinki and Edinburgh congresses) in not-so-good storytellers with the not yet fully formulated insight that if folklore has important tasks in communities, it is not enough to consult the few talented: others must have some competence in the domain of folklore as well (as we have in everyday language). Without a common understanding topicality does not work and metaphors remain inaccessible. This insight led me to choose the informants in the village by random sample (cf. Lehtipuro 1980) but the value of this – at the time – very controversial decision has become obvious much later and after many turns: when interest in distribution was gone, I simply put v. Sydow’s observations about active and passive tradition bearers, which I had learned as a comment on the Finnish method, into a social context, just as Abrahams (1964) did with von Sydow’s ociotype.

Leaving the verbal as the sole object of interest and presenting a remarkable skill in discovering the topicality of everyday behaviour, at schools and in working environments as well as in the media, the topical/rhetorical potential of folklore seems to attract various cultural researchers, historians and ethnologists as well. A spontaneous, instinctive understanding of this potential comes through in utterances like kertoivat miellelään osin tarinoiutunutta versiota sitä miten... (...) they liked to dwell on a partly legendised version of how...) by Kaaja Heikinen, ethnologist, about a field experience, in the Joensuu daily paper Kajalainen 13.7.2009.

The Athens congress offers ample evidence of these connections, in the great interest in belief stories as well as in papers like, “Narratives and reality” by Pekka Hakamies: the truth value (true/possible/imagined) has always played an important role in our – scholars’ and peoples’ alike – evaluation of folklore, especially narratives (cf. af Klintberg 1973).

Interest in those people, kielimestari (master of language) or mestarikertoja (master narrator) was shared by folklorists and linguists alike, who still in the sixties were often the same people, doing fieldwork both for the Folklore Archive and dialect collections. This sentiment took Juha Pentikäinen to the singer, laments and storyteller Marina Takalo, providing for one of the important works (Pentikäinen 1978 – in Finnish 1971) in contemporary folkloristics.

The important thing was not the dialogue but offering the narrator-informant a chance, an attentive audience, if only one person, and making the recording as accurate as possible. For various reasons collectors' possible competencies as insiders in the communities they worked within came to be appreciated much later.

Without this ethos many old expressions had not been recorded for scholars to interpret and the inner logic of Sami environmental narratives had remained a secret (Huuskonen 2001, 2004).

Many of the writings were reprinted in his Festschrift in 2002 (Leino 2002).

On many forums, including the NIF News-letter and the article “Trends in Nordic folkloristics” (1983), which once again demonstrated both the differences on the common Nordic scene and the fact that to grasp the Nordic you must be able to read both Finnish and the Scandinavian languages.


Honko approached the issue in the context of healing (1959) and folk belief (1962, 1964) bringing psychology and sociology to the interpretation of old archive material (Lehtipuro 2006). The same lesson about folklore as the verbal means of expressing social relations was learned in the US in a contemporary field setting (Abrahams 1964, cf. Lehtipuro 1971, 95).

The Habermas-inspired Danish folklorist Birgitte Rørbye (1982) suggested folkelige erfaringsverden as a general frame for folkloristics, but she did not include in her discussion empirical material to substantiate her thinking.

A collection of articles (Ollitervo & Immonen 2006) from a Turku symposium on Herder offered a totally new perspective on the global and in a contemporary way inspiring thinking of the often misused German scholar.

In this context the word is stripped of poli-
tical content and means just living in a common world, in the same Lebenswelt. Here our Swedish speaking folkloristic community offers an interesting case for comparisons: our country and history are the same, but there seems to be differences in the Lebenswelt and in the order of folkloristic importances, in the same way as among the various Nordic countries. In our talks in the organizing committee, we very well know, the most cherished and meaningful position, seems to have its own ways of speaking and its own importances and relationships to various intellectual and academic traditions. There is no reason to spoil this strength embedded in the very core of our humanistic discipline, but be conscious and explicit about it and use it for the advancement of the whole discipline.

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Proverbs in my suggested Finnish theory of folklore

A first draft, written in Tartu, the city of good thoughts

for ARVO KRIKMANN THE PAREMIOL OLIST on the occasion of the conference

From Language to Mind (September 10-11, 2009) to celebrate his 70th birthday

by Outi Lehtipuro, University of Eastern Finland, Joensuu

In the abundance of folklore materials Kaarle Krohn saw the strength of Finnish folkloristics and its Method. Proverbs have been collected more than any other forms of folklore — millions. Would it be so? That the key to a general theory of folklore should lie just here, in the study of minor forms? Precisely to this direction our thought was wandering in the sixties in the folklore archives, just a few meters away from a wall full covered with proverbs, and in the seminar of Matti Kuusi: structural analytic terminology was polished, basic questions formulated. What sets proverb (folklore) apart from the ordinary sentence (speech) and what does it take to make two texts variants of the same thing, a proverb type?

The Matti Kuusi concept of formula (unlike the one developed by Albert Lord) gave a tool with which to grasp the creativity of folklore formation by pointing to the fact that the art of abstraction is in no way the privilege of the educated. It was also easy to see how those who speak using proverbs move along a scale from the concrete to the abstract: a proverb may depend on a distinct environment and Lebenswelt, as well as flying away to become a generalised metaphor.

It may well be that the well-researched proverb is a better choice for a paradigmatic case of “oral, anonymous, communal, folk and stereotypical” folklore than the historically important Kalevalametric song. The proverb is living and universal and is not specialised but covers the whole of life. The proverb is easy to set apart and discuss as an entity, look at from all sides and see the changing surface and the identifiable core when so much intriguing variation can be presented on a single A4 sheet.

Proverbs as compact constructions represent real vernacular speech before there were tape recorders. Scholarly descriptions of kōlli, kiel-tosutkaus and other minor forms, as well as making a distinction between sananlasku (proverb) and puheen-parsi (saying) played with the idea of folklore as a vital element of spoken language, while comparative research put the global-and-local essence of folklore in a nutshell: the number of important matters is smaller than the number of ways of expressing them.

Studies of phraseology between the oral and the written remind us of the unity of the aesthetic register of language: the power of folklore is in between the mind-and-language environment and it has not vanished since we left the dominance of the oral.

At the time of the ISFNR Congress in Helsinki in 1974 the avant-garde of the textual tradition of Finnish folkloristics seemed to be paremiology. What happened then?

When the folklore archive came to be seen as the cemetery of folklore, small forms were left behind in the rush for the living narrative in the field, and for context. This development went on somewhat ominously at the same time that students and professors moved away first from the domain of the archive and then from the building of the Finnish Literature Society. It is obvious now, though, that the context — even of the Kalevalametric song — can be built in a scholar’s mind by utilising the resources of various humanistic and behavioural sciences and even archival materials other than the one and same genre file.

In the process toward a new Finnish folkloristics the strong Balto-Finnic strain of paremiology emphasised the embedded linguistic and even philological interest of folklore research, which in the sociology boom was about to be forgotten. Now these things can be brought together.

At the core of the geographic-historical method as the foundation of Finnish folkloristics is the embedded idea of its applicability to the study of all folklore. While the Method proved to be problematic, the idea that folklore is a special domain of mind and language, separate from other kinds of texts and deserving its own specialists and its own theory, prevailed. Elli-Kaija Königäs-Maranda formulated this idea very clearly after moving to the U.S. and creating a nostalgic and clear-sighted distance to her academic home base. One reason behind Matti Kuusi’s attraction to the proverb, after a heroic and somewhat frustrated battle with the verse masses of the Sampo cycle, may well have been that the minor form is the easiest way to make the case, to show how the tiniest textual changes create new meanings and to build representative scholarly generalisations.

In the end it may be the proverb that is the purest representation of the es-
sence of folklore as a shared rhetoric repertoire, belonging to the aesthetic register of language, for the expression of important things when the ordinary speech is not enough. Various intellectual cultures publicly recognise this rhetoric role of proverbs, a proof of which is that the first published item (1544) of Finnish folklore was a proverb, and the first folklore publication (1702) a collection of proverbs.

Baltic Worldview: from Mythology to Folklore in Vilnius, Lithuania, July 8th – 10th, 2009

by Eila Stepanova, University of Helsinki, Finland
and Frog, University College London, UK/ University of Helsinki, Finland

In the heart of the summer of 2009, the Institute of Lithuanian Literature and Folklore, in collaboration with the Centre for Research in Imagination at Grenoble’s Stendhal University (Centre de Recherches sur l’Imaginaire, Université Stendhal Grenoble 3), organised an international conference entitled, “Baltic Worldview: From Mythology to Folklore”. The conference was held in the conference hall of Europos Parkas, the beautiful Open Air Museum of the (geographic) Centre of Europe, located about 20 kilometres from Vilnius. The language of the conference was English, with the program of the conference and abstracts published in both English and Lithuanian.

The focus of the conference was the Baltic worldview as cultural content, which manifests itself through a multitude of linguistic, religious, mythological and other spiritual and material forms of culture. The aims of the conference were to emphasise the Baltic worldview’s role in the historical and geographic context of the Circum-Baltic region while demonstrating the worldview’s continuity from prehistoric times to the present. Special emphasis was given to Baltic religion and mythology.

The conference was organised over three days. It brought together a variety of interdisciplinary perspectives which presented and highlighted the urgent issues in the study of Baltic religion and mythology. The researchers came from eleven countries (Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Finland, USA, UK, Poland, France, Czech Republic, Slovenia, and Russia). They represented a wide range of disciplines and offered over thirty papers in the nine plenary sessions. Plenary sessions were organised around few central themes: Baltic Mythology from an Indo-European perspective, the functioning of myths in the Baltic region, the reconstruction of worldview and its elements, sources and methods, the sacred landscape, belief legends in time and space, the symbolism of plants and folklore aesthetics, pre-Christian religion in the Baltic region, and approaches to living indigenous traditions. In addition, one plenary session was devoted to poster presentations.

The first day of the conference was primarily concerned with the different aspects of myths, mythology and methodology. Emily Lyle (University of Edinburgh) opened the first session with her paper,
“The Indo-European Pantheon and the Cultic Cluster in Grunau’s Chronicle.” The Chronicle describes a banner with images of three gods as well as an oak tree with images of the same gods. Emi-
ly Lyle related these images and the cul-
tic cluster surrounding them to the Indo-
European pantheon, and more specifi-
cally considering the semiotic signifi-
cance of the oak in relation to the ap-
proach to the Indo-European pantheon
which she has developed across her
career. Lyle set a brisk and exciting
pace for the first day. Philippe Walter
(Centre de Recherches sur l’Imaginaire,
Université Stendhal Grenoble 3) fol-
lowed suit in spotlighting a central medi-
eval text, and then Daiva Vaitkevičienė
(Institute of Lithuanian Literature and
Folklore) kept up the pace of Lyle’s
strong opening with a fascinating ex-
amination of Indo-European parallels
to Baltic libation rituals, the most com-
monly encountered Baltic ritual practice.

Vykinas Vaitkevičius (Klaipėda Univer-
sity) turned our attention from the ritu-
als to the background of the Lithuanian
term stabas, ‘pagan idol’, examining
its occurrences in relation to cognates
used in place names distributed around
the southern half of the Baltic Sea re-

gion. Vaitkevičius’s study shifted our
focus from continuities in mythology
and ritual practices stretching back to
common Indo-European roots, to phe-
nomena concentrated around the Baltic
Sea which appear to be related to more
recent contact and interaction among
Indo-European linguistic-cultural popu-
lations. Frog (University College Lon-
don/University of Helsinki) followed in
this new direction, turing from ritual
and sacred sites back to mythology,
addressing the myth of the Theft of the
Thunder-Instrument (ATU 1148B) as a
common mythological narrative found
across Saamic, Finnic, Baltic, and Ger-
manic linguistic-cultural groups. He ar-
gued that this is a consequence of the
history of intercultural contact around
the Baltic Sea, and that it is more ap-
propriate to approach the narrative and
its evolution as a Circum-Baltic myth.
Frog stressed the importance of de-
veloping a Circum-Baltic perspective
in the treatment of mythologies and
belief traditions, concluding his pres-
entation by proposing the develop-
ment of a large-scale Circum-Baltic
project to make sources in the many
diverse languages accessible to
researchers. Jūratė Šlekonytė (Institute
of Lithuanian Literature and Folklore)
addressed the issue of cultural contact
and exchange in the example of the
Wild Hunt tradition in Lithuanian mate-
rial and its relationship to the Germanic
tradition. Leszek Słupecki (Rzeszów
University) then turned our gaze from
contacts with the west to contacts with
the east, discussing werewolves in Bal-
tic and Slavic beliefs. These papers
emphasised the dynamic and stratified
nature of Baltic traditions and their evo-
lution through a long history of interac-
tion with other cultures.

Our attention was carried from myths
and mythic conceptions to mytho-
genes in Rolandas Kregždys’ (Institute
of Culture, Philosophy and Art, Vilni-
us) discussion of the value of linguistic
data for insights into the worldview of
the ancient Balts. Eila Stepanova (Uni-
versity of Helsinki) then took us from
etymologies to the poetics, motifs and
reflections of the otherworld emerg-
ing in Lithuanian and Karelian lament
traditions. Teuvo Laitila (University of
Joensuu) discussed the activities of
healers in Border Karelia focusing on
ethnic conceptions of well-being and
the idea of the ‘limited good’. Musicolo-
gist Aušra Žičkienė (Institute of Lithua-
nian Literature and Folklore) offered an
excellent account of the musical code
of Pre-Christian culture in Lithuanian
ritual songs. Žičkienė revealed six his-
torical strata of Lithuanian folksongs,
beginning with the most archaic melo-
dies near the border between music
and speech, through Pre-Christian
ritual music including Lithuanian la-
ments, and on through the music of
the Christian culture with examples of
funeral chanting, building up to con-
temporary folk music. Žičkienė pointed
out that the melodies of the oldest layer
quite remarkably formed new deriva-
tives and even started appearing in the
most recent entertaining melodies in
archetypal forms. She observed that
melodies associated with non-Christian
ritual were otherwise not used outside
of their conservative performance con-
texts and suspects that the essential
changes in this layer which appears to
have existed for thousands of years,
are very slow, as slow as the changes
in landscape.

The session devoted to methods and
the sources for mythology studies was
extremely useful and interesting. Aldis
Pūtelis (University of Latvia) displayed
his acumen in his paper on historical
written sources used in the research
of Latvian mythology. Pūtelis stressed
that there are no reliable sources that
were written by individuals from within

Excursion to sacred places in the Vilnius region.

Photo by Jūratė Šlekonytė.
the culture. Instead, researchers have, for example, chronicles by foreign authors describing local inhabitants that approach vernacular religion from a heavily biased Christian perspective. Pūtelis drew attention to the fact that later authors who attempted to explain the history or culture of a land used the written documents available to them. Through the example of Latvian, he showed that they combined these sources with materials describing neighbouring or related peoples. These early studies on mythology were heavily influenced by political and ideological interests. When dealing with mythology, it is essential that scholars keep these factors in mind: having sources is not enough; we must also understand what those sources signify, and recognise that fictions, errors and confusions could be reduplicated through the sources, echoing through history as a tradition – not of Latvian culture – but a tradition of academics who never reached for realities beyond the smoky haze of candlelight in their labyrinthine libraries. The torch was then passed to Toms Ķencis (University of Tartu/Archives of Latvian Folklore), who led us on through the corridors of history with his paper, “Latvian Mythological Space in Scholarly Time”, turning from the sources and what they reflect to the history of research practices in Latvian mythology. This was followed by David Šimeček’s (Charles University in Prague) more focused address of the article “Baltic Mythology” written by one of the leading Czech folklorists Jan Hanuš Machal (1855-1939).

The first day of the conference concluded with the discussion session Studies of Myths Today at the French Cultural Centre. This was an evening session. It was conducted in French and Lithuanian without English translation, and was not attended by all of the participants.

The second day of the conference opened with panoramic displays of the sacred landscape. Andra Simniškytė (Lithuanian Institute of History) focused on barrows in the landscape of the Iron Age in relationship to ‘ancestors’ and ancestor worship. Simniškytė addressed how barrows were used and reused, pointing out that the place names associated with the barrows from different eras have maintained continuities and distinctions even through their transformations: the typologies of barrow are reflected in the onomastics up to the present day. Andrej Pleterski (Scientific Research Centre of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts) drew attention to Baltic parallels in Slovenian old beliefs, presenting a series of photos arguing that the mythic female of a local tradition is expressed in the contours of the landscape itself. Janis Cepitlis (University of Latvia) and Lilija Jakubenoka (Museum of History and Art, Aizkraukle) offered a discussion of the symbolic meaning of materials and tools used in making clothing, presenting their connections with deities, mythical beings and the sacral landscape, augmenting their discussion with a number of photographs of the landmarks connected to those sacred places.

Turning from the landscape to the mythic beings encountered there, Christian Abry (Centre Alpin et Rhodanien d’Ethnologie, Grenoble) offered a very enthusiastic presentation with an Indo-Europeanist bent which attempted to connect experience-narratives about naroves in Savoy, France, with Lithuanian nėrōvė and the nereides of ancient Greece. Lina Būgienė (Institute of Lithuanian Literature and Folklore) returned to the traditions around the Baltic Sea which spread beyond the Indo-European cultures, addressing the image of the supernatural milk stealer ‘aitvaras/kaukas’ in Lithuanian folklore. This being has close counterparts, for example, in Finnish (‘para’), Estonian (‘puuk’) and Latvian (‘pūkis’) traditions. Ülo Valk (University of Tartu) carried the mounting discussion surrounding belief legends to a climax with his insightful paper, “Ghosts and Social Change in Contemporary Estonian Folklore”. Legends and memorates about ghosts are widespread in contemporary Estonia. Valk revealed that these narratives are mediated by tour guides, Internet websites, newspapers, TV and radio broadcasts, presenting us with a cascade of stimulating examples. He emphasised that in periods of social and historical change, populations propagate narratives in a manner symptomatic of a new need for ghosts. Within Valk’s paper, ghost legends emerge as a metaphor for a rapidly changing society, and he lays out a foundation for approaching legends as a collective phenomenon related to tensions on the level of individuals in society which can be applied by analogy to offer insights into many different traditions in their specific cultural contexts.

Valk left us with an abundance of food for thought as the conference moved...
upstairs for lunch. Following the session devoted to poster presentations, Jūrga Sadauskienė (Institute of Lithuanian Literature and Folklore) analysed the symbolism and aesthetics of the ‘flower garden’ as a predominant motif in traditional Lithuanian folksongs, and Daiva Šeškauskaitė (Vilnius University Kaunas Faculty of Humanities) addressed the folklore surrounding plants associated with Lithuanian belief legends and mythology.

The focus then returned to considerations of Pre-Christian religion in the Baltic Sea region. Valdis Rūsiņš (Riga) offered a discerning look at relationships between Baltic and Finnic mythological traditions in his paper, “Influence of Contacts between Balts and Baltic-Finns on Development of Deities in the Territory of the Present Latvia in Prehistory”. An excellent illustration of the complexities and subtleties in the exploration of belief traditions was offered by Ergo-Hart Västrik (University of Tartu) through his examination of Pre-Christian features in Seto vernacular religion by revisiting the Peko-cult in a Baltic context. The cult of the fertility god Peko is one of the most celebrated examples of Seto vernacular religion and championed representations of archaic mythology. A statue of Peko in the form of a robust man-shaped wooden doll was used during the communal secret celebrations held twice a year for worshipping this deity. Västrik discussed interpretations of Peko, parallels from neighbouring regions, and presented considerations of the dynamics of the tradition in the 20th century, when Peko was, on the one hand, demonised, and on the other, was turned into a fictional character in the Seto national epic.

Throughout the days of the conference, discussions surrounding the papers continued over coffee breaks and lunches, and they were carried from the rich and bountiful sessions into the pleasant evening receptions. The Embassy of the French Republic hosted a reception for the conference participants on the first evening, where the pleasure and nourishment which discussion offered the intellect was augmented by delectable French delicacies. On the second evening, the hospitality of our hosts, which we enjoyed throughout the conference, came to a climax at the beautiful Institute of Lithuanian Literature and Folklore with its magnificent Baroque architecture. The evening opened with a marvellous concert of Lithuanian folksongs, sutartines. The performance group Trys keturiose was led by Dr. Daiva Račiūnaitė-Vyčinienė, who bears the honourable title ‘the queen of sutartinės’. Račiūnaitė-Vyčinienė has been perfecting the performance of the old polyphonic songs, sutartinės, for twenty years, reconstructing the melodies that have been preserved in archives and also those which have been published. Following this performance in song, the famous Lithuanian jazz musician Skirmantas Sasnauskas offered a performance on various folk instruments.

For the third day of the conference, all of the participants had the opportunity to experience the sacred places and see various holy stones and barrows on the full-day excursion. Vyktintas Vaitkevičius was an excellent guide, as we travelled the countryside of the Vilnius region.

This interdisciplinary and international conference incited deep discussions on issues associated with Circum-Baltic mythology. Comparative research and the development of contexts for approaching traditions and their sources stood at the heart of this conference. Perspectives associated with an Indo-European heritage were augmented by the complexities of the long history of cultural contact between Balts, Slavs, Finnic populations, Germanic populations – and even more distantly Saami cultures were shown to be relevant. This conference revealed that an understanding of a tradition is tied up in the history of that tradition, and in the Circum-Baltic region, understanding that history requires the development of an appropriate contextual framework, not just a contextual framework of one performer among performers or of one genre among genres, but of one culture among cultures.

This revelation highlighted the tremendous problem of the diversity of languages involved in developing such a context, and that researchers simply do not have sources available in accessible languages. However, the conference opened up possibilities for collaboration between scholars of different countries and different cultures – possibilities to make traditions and sources available to one another for comparative research. It is essential for us to be able to develop a Circum-Baltic context for approaching any one culture among these diverse cultures. This meeting was itself a very important step along that road.

In the end we would like to extend our thanks to the organising committee of the conference for the wonderful job they did in coordinating such a large and complicated gathering. We would also like to thank the Council for the Commemoration of the Millennium of Lithuania at the Administration of the Office of the President of the Republic of Lithuania, Ambassade de France en Lituanie et Le Centre Culturel Français, Lithuanian State Science and Studies Foundation, for supporting the conference which benefited the participants so greatly.

We are pleased to report that the conference organisers have determined to persist with their labours above and beyond the scope of the original event. They are orchestrating the publication of a volume of papers selected from the conference presentations, which will offer the benefit of the fruits of this conference to those who were unable to attend.
The International Society for Folk Narrative Research is a scientific society whose objectives are to develop scholarly work in the field of folk narrative research and to stimulate contacts and the exchange of views among its members.

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The opening ceremony of the 15th ISFNR Congress in the Ceremony Hall of the University of Athens.

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