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Folk Narrative in the Modern World: Unity and Diversity  
The 16th Congress of the International Society for Folk  
Narrative Research

*Vilnius, June 25 – 30, 2013*

The sixteenth congress of the ISFNR was organized by members of the Institute of Lithuanian Literature and Folklore (chairman of the organizing committee: Mindaugas Kvietkauskas; secretary: Lina Būgienė), in the city of Vilnius, the capital of Lithuania – a country that after centuries of Polish and Russian rule has only recently regained its national independence, while Vilnius itself had formerly been a multicultural city, a centre of Polish, Jewish and Belorussian life. The proceedings were held at the architecturally magnificent complex of the old university, founded in 1579 as a Jesuit academy by Stephen Báthory, king of Hungary and of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. Congress participants had to find their way through a labyrinth of courtyards and corridors, and if not all the conference rooms had an air of grandeur, some of them were indeed impressive. Apparently it was the period of the exams, and the courtyards were filled with people coming and going, especially young women carrying colourful flower bouquets, creating an altogether cheerful atmosphere, which combined with the (mostly, but not always) estival weather contributed to a general feeling of gaiety.

About 240 papers were presented at the congress, including those delivered at the symposia of the Belief Narrative Network and the ISFNR Committee on Charms, Charmers and Charming. Eight plenary papers provided introductions to the daily sessions:

Vilmos Voigt (Budapest; *Nunquam revertar*) stated rather pessimistically that with the disappearance of storytelling communities the social basis of folklore was dying out, and that in a not too faraway future folklore might not continue to exist. Giedrė Šmitienė (Vilnius; *The World that Thinks Itself in Me*) talked about human relations with animals and plants, as expressed in folk culture and contemporary life. JoAnn Conrad (Berkeley; *Time, Space, and Narrative ... Again, this Time with Feeling*) showed how Parisian avantgarde art from the 1920s, especially by Russian emigrants, came to influence illustrations in mass-produced picture books and the Disney movies. Francisco Vaz da Silva (Lisbon; *Tradition as Translation: The Byways of Symbolism in Folktales*) exemplified the notion of allomotif with a convincing example from *Little Red Riding Hood* versions, namely how the motif of picking flowers could be understood as a symbolic equivalent of defloration in a widespread sexualized understanding of the tale. Valdimar Hafstein (Reykjavík;

*The Condor's Flight*) described the mass commercialization of an Incan melody. Diarmuid Ó Giollain (Notre Dame, Indiana; *Province, Nation and Empire in Folklore Studies*) traced the development of two folklore journals – *Béaloideas* and *Revue de folklore français (et de folklore colonial)* – in connection with their national/political backgrounds.

No place could be more appropriate than Vilnius, the former ‘Jerusalem of the North’, with a Jewish population of more than 40% until the Second World War, to remember Jewish folklife of the past and reflect on Jewish scholarly activities. This was done in a plenary paper by Haya Bar-Itzhak (Haifa; *National Movements and the Study of Jewish Folklore in Eastern Europe*), a panel (*The Litvaks: Perspectives on the Folklore of the Jews of Lithuania*, with papers such as *From the Folk, for the Folk, with the Folk: The YIVO Institute in Vilna and the Study of Yiddish Folklore* by Cecile Kuznitz, Annandale-on-Hudson; or *The Litvaks and the Others: an Auto-Ethnographic Reconstruction of a Childhood across the Baltic Sea* by Galit Hasan-Rokem, Jerusalem), a round table discussion (*Narrating the Litvaks Today*), moderated by Galit Hasan-Rokem, and a guided walking tour through the old Jewish district.

Pertti Anttonen’s (Helsinki) plenary paper (*Lost in Intersemiotic Translation? The Problem of Context in Folk Narratives in the Archive*) tied in with another round table discussion, *Why Should Folklore Students Study Dead Legends?*, moderated by Terry Gunnell (Reykjavík), with speakers Barbro Klein (Stockholm), John Lindow (Berkeley), Elliott Oring (Los Angeles), and (via Skype) Timothy Tangherlini (Berkeley). Whereas Anttonen argued that folk narrative texts as preserved in the Folklore Archives of the Finnish Literature Society were rather literary texts processed by the collectors than oral narratives, contributors and discussants at the round table made a still more crucial point: the majority agreed that archive texts, long despised as lifeless by contextualists, were worth being studied as an essential source for the understanding of social life and history, folk religion and folk artistry, gender issues and the human psyche.

Another panel, dealing with folklore databases and the problems these involve, was convened by Theo Meder (Amsterdam); among the participants were Carme Oriol and Emili Samper (Tarragona), Christoph Schmitt (Rostock) and Violetta Krawczyk-Wasilewska, Łódź.

Numerous contributions to the congress were dedicated to the study of traditional folktales and storytelling, e.g., by Merili Metsvahi (Tartu; *Brother and Sister in Estonian Fairy Tales in Comparison to Other Genres*), Marianthi Kaplanoglou (Athens; *Social Contexts of Oral Storytelling in Modern Greece*), Monika Kropce (Ljubljana; *Folktale Today: From Preservation to Enhancement*), Kimberley Lau (Santa Cruz, California; *The Gender of Enchantment*), Licia Masoni (Bologna; *How Do Traditional Fairy Tales Fit into Our Lives Today?*), Sanatombi Singha Soram (Imphal, India; *Manipuri Cinderella: Local Variants and Global Character*), Lubomir Suva (Göttingen; *‘She Has Killed Her Sister Good and Hid Her Body in the Wood’*. *Cruelty and Character of the Innocent Persecuted Heroine in Czech Fairy Tales of the 19th Century*) or Rosa Thorsteinsdóttir (Reykjavík; *The Fate of*

*AT 556\**: *Icelandic Tale Types in the International Context*). The study of Grimm tales, lately so prominently dealt with at various conferences dedicated to two hundred years of the *Children and Household Tales*, was espoused by two Japanese researchers, namely Yoshiko Noguchi (Osaka; *Influences of Victorian Values in Japanese Grimms' Fairy Tales Used by English Translations*) and Fumiko Mamiya (Tokyo; *Grimms' Fairy Tales in Modern Japan*); Helmut Groschwitz (Bonn) thematized the work of another nineteenth century German collector ('*Five Hundred New Fairy Tales Discovered in Germany*' – *On the Construction of a 'Sensation' around the Legacy of the Folklorist Franz Xaver von Schönwerth*). Heteronormativity in tales of enchantment and fantastic literature was questioned in 'queer study' papers by Anne Duggan (Detroit; *The Queer Fantastic*), Kay Turner (New York, *At Home in the Realm of Enchantment: The Queer Enticements of 'Mother Holle'*) and Cristina Bacchilega (Honolulu; *Queer Relations: Magic, Enchantment, and Wonder, Oh My*). Anne Duggan also chaired a panel on gender and identity in fairy tales by women writers such as Madame d'Aulnoy and Karoline Stahl; Óscar Bernao Fariñas (Valladolid) found folklore in classical sources (*The Structural Device of 'Unsuccessful Repetition' in Two Ancient Greek Healing Narratives*).

Another major topic was the study of legends (e.g. by Bronislava Kerbelytė [Vilnius; *The Development of the Lithuanian Mythological Legends in the Second Half of the 20th Century/Beginning of the 21st Century*] or Kaarina Koski [Turku; *Giants as Morally Compelling Symbols: Narrating the Local Christianity*]), belief narratives (e.g. by Kirsi Hänninen [Turku; *Extraterrestrial Visions of the Future*], Reet Hiiemäe [Tartu; *Talking about Nightmare Experiences in Internet Discussion Forums*]) or Mirjam Mencej [Ljubljana; *Ghosts at the Department of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology: Guards as Bearers and Controllers of Tradition*]) and contemporary legends (e.g. by Eda Kalmre [Tartu; *Truth and Ethics in Memories about Post-War Tartu: Tracing a Cannibalistic Rumour*], Ambrož Kvartić [Ljubljana; *Legends of the Ice-cream Cone: Contemporary Narratives of Contamination and Otherness in Practice*] or María Palleiro [Buenos Aires; *The Vanishing Hitchhiker: From Southern Routes to Northern Highways*]). Papers by Marion Bowman (Milton Keynes; *'I Think I Knows What I Owes Him': Narrating Devotion to St Gerard in Newfoundland*), Irma-Riitta Järvinen (Helsinki; *Functions of Saints in Mythic Spaces*), John Lindow (Berkeley; *A Nineteenth-Century Greenlandic Christian Vision*) or Christine Shojaei Kawan (Göttingen; *Saint Walburga: Aspects of Sainthood, Aspects of a Saint*) dealt with religious lore, while Kati Kallio (Tampere; *Singing the Myth* – the technical equipment failing, she sang herself, and did so beautifully) turned to an intermediary form. Genre problems were addressed by Pekka Hakamies (Turku; *Defining Genre in Paremiology*) and Elliott Oring (Los Angeles; *What is a Narrative Joke?*). TV series were also present (e.g. Terry Gunnell, Reykjavík; *The Vampire Returns to Britain: Considering the Images of Vampires, Werewolves and Ghosts in BBC's 'Being Human'*), as was political folklore (e. g., Anastasiya Astapova [Tartu; *Biography of the President: Official Discourse vs. Alternative Beliefs*] or Mariann Domokos [Budapest; *Presidential Jokes: Folkloristic Aspects of the Hungarian Scandal*]); food narratives seem to be

a newly discovered genre (e.g., Fionnuala Carson Williams [Belfast; *What's in a Name? The Underlying Narrative Behind Contemporary Names for Small Businesses in Belfast, Ireland, and their Use of Forms Common in Oral Tradition*] or Jón Þór Pétursson [Lund; *Eduardo's Apples*]).

Some scholars presented more than one paper, a practice that seems to have been adopted at the congress in Athens but which is questionable considering the size of the programme. Also on the agenda was Sudheer Gupta's impressive documentary film *Dancing Pāndavs* (with the participation of Sadhana Naithani), about the ritual enactment of the Indian epic *Mahābhārata*.

After the dispersal in different sections, the participants were reunited at lunches and the opening and concluding receptions, enjoying each other's company with good food and conversation, renewing old acquaintances and making new ones. The atmosphere was relaxed and friendly, and the farewell overwhelming, as always.

The next ISFNR conference will take place in Miami, Florida; an interim conference is planned to take place in Ankara; the Belief Narratives Network will meet in Zugdidi, Georgia, in October 2014.