SLOVENIAN AND ESTONIAN CONTEMPORARY SCHOOL LORE:
FROM MATERIAL COLLECTING TO RESEARCH METHODOLOGIES
SEMINAR

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Estonian Literary Museum, Estonia

Programme and abstracts

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Compiler: Piret Voolaid
Layout: Maris Kuperjanov

Organisers:
Saša Babič, sasa.babic@zrc-sazu.si
Piret Voolaid, piret.voolaid@folklore.ee

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Programme

Thursday, 14 April at the Estonian Literary Museum (42 Vanemuise St., Tartu)

10.00-10.10  Opening
10.10-10.20  Saša Babič (Institute of Slovenian Ethnology ZRC SAZU): Collecting Slovenian school lore via e-questionnaire: Analysis of the collected material and revision of the questionnaire
10.20-10.30  Saša Poljak Istenič (Institute of Slovenian Ethnology ZRC SAZU): Creativity in schools: from de Bono methods to artistic workshops
10.30-10.40  Piret Voolaid (Estonian Literary Museum): Representing distance learning in the memes of the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic: Internet humour as a way of coping and self-defence
10.40-10.50  Anastasiya Fiadotava (Estonian Literary Museum): Children as subjects and objects of family humour
10.50-11.00  Mare Kõiva (Estonian Literary Museum): Bag boys. History, mythologisation and demythologisation
11.00-11.10  Reet Hiiemäe (Estonian Literary Museum), Andrus Tins (Estonian Literary Museum): Suicide games and the thrill from danger: folklore-related experiences of teenagers and media moral panics in Estonia
11.10-11.20  Sergey Troitskiy (Estonian Literary Museum): Geographical schoolbooks as a source of national stereotypes
11.20-12.00  Discussion
Abstracts

Collecting Slovenian school lore via e-questionnaire: Analysis of the collected material and revision of the questionnaire

Saša Babič, Institute of Slovenian Ethnology ZRC SAZU

Although folklorists recognise the active role of children in intangible heritage, collecting and analysing children’s lore and school lore remained a side issue in Slovenian folkloristics. Especially after the beginning of the new millennium, it seems that school lore has been put aside. In order to revive collecting of school lore, the Institute of Slovenian Ethnology ZRC SAZU organised an e-collecting in the school year 2018/2019. The collecting was based on an e-questionnaire adapted by the Estonian model of the e-questionnaire. It was sent to Slovenian elementary and high schools as well as to acquaintances in order to get as many responses as possible, i.e. using the snowball method. This method was chosen mainly because the Institute of Education RS and the Ministry of Education, Science and Sports did not support the collection campaign, which was making it difficult to access the students. The survey resulted in 68 answered questionnaires. Although the number is not high, the material gives us an indication of contemporary school lore. This article presents the process of the survey, the concept of the questionnaire, and the analysis of the collected material.
Children as subjects and objects of family humour

Anastasiya Fiadotava, Estonian Literary Museum

While doing fieldwork on humorous dyadic traditions that are shared exclusively between partners or spouses, I quickly realised that children cannot be excluded from the continuum of family folklore. Much of family humorous memes are generated by children either consciously or unconsciously: humorous utterances, unexpected behaviour and funny mistakes are just a few examples. Many of children’s idiosyncratic words and idioms that provoke laughter when they are originally uttered can go on to form long-standing parts of family folklore, inevitably losing some of their humorous flavour but still cherished by parents or other adult relatives as children grow up and stop using them. A lot of family humour is also generated at children’s expense. This aspect of family humor highlights the different status dynamics between children and their parents, many of whom tend to to playfully tease their children to a greater extent than they do each other. However, when parents do laugh at one another, children may be mentioned as a point of reference: being compared to a child often means being a target of family humour. Family humorous folklore does not only assign children the roles of subjects, objects or intermediaries of jokes. It is also used by parents didactically. Humorous folklore also helps families to bond. Creating family ties through humour, however, can be somewhat different from establishing intimacy through bona fide communication. As humour often transgresses norms, parents and children are able to share certain ideas and forms of folklore that would otherwise be difficult to transmit. Therefore, introducing children to family humour can be regarded as an important step in their initiation to adult live.
Suicide games and the thrill from danger: folklore-related experiences of teenagers and media moral panics in Estonia

Reet Hiiemäe, Estonian Literary Museum; Andrus Tins, Estonian Literary Museum

The article looks at the dynamics of the media and real life in relation to the so-called dangerous folklore of teenagers, which includes, for example, contacts with aggressive (semi-) supernatural fear creatures, frightening experiences in abandoned houses and notions of so-called suicide games. The authors analyze the interactions between media reality and youth behavior and related developments in folklore. The authors conclude that the presentation of media information in the form of moral panics mainly based on the concept of young people’s vulnerability, which focuses on extreme risk examples, does not support safer coping, but focuses only on certain types of risk behavior, often ignoring other concerns and the complexity of problems.
Bag boys. History, mythologisation and demythologisation

Mare Kõiva, Estonian Literary Museum

One category of child fears and intimidation concerns strangers, certain professions, nationalities and marginalized persons of society and has so far received got less attention than connections to mythology. Estonia’s large schoollore collections cover the traditions of Estonian and Estonian-Russian children for about a hundred years. Based on the answers, it is possible to study not only pedagogical method, but also children’s fears and values, to observe how children themselves verbally describe and materialize the beings they know through parental prohibitions, folklore and cultural texts and their own imagination.

On the example of a bag man (bag boy) that belongs to a cluster of characters with mythical and historical backgrounds, I consider:

   a) the historical and realistic view of the character;
   b) connection with the clergy, teachers and other professions;
   c) connection with social margins;
   d) connection with autumn-winter masking customs.

The study focuses on the changes in the years before and after the Second World War and in the 1970s.

We can create some models of the persistence of stereotypes, the repeated patterns / connections with history, but does this help to preserve the explanatory model? Or do the explanations change? On the example of the bag boys, we can see how socio-historical and cultural realities influence the ontology, models and category of child scare as a whole.
Creativity in schools: from de Bono methods to artistic workshops

Saša Poljak Istenič, Institute of Slovenian Ethnology ZRC SAZU

Creativity has been a buzzword in many academic disciplines, applied fields, and everyday life for several decades, especially after the mid-1990s when the perceived personal characteristic became the object of economic interest and the states recognized the need to nurture creativity in order to build a “creative class” (Florida 2002). Children became increasingly understood as “future human capital” (Millei 2020), which influenced pedagogical approaches to teaching and learning focusing on “creativity” and “entrepreneurship.” Methods and approaches, ranging from de Bono’s most popular methods of lateral thinking (1970) and six thinking hats (1985) to rapid prototyping (Zupan et al. 2017) have been constantly evolving and transmitted to people expected to do (even) better in a knowledge-based economy, whoever, there is no systemic program in Slovenia to apply them regularly in educational settings.

The article provides an overview of the concept “creativity” in different academic fields and then ethnographically examines how the concept is applied in Slovenian schools. Its aim is to assess the top-down views on nurturing creativity in school settings, arguing that they often neglect artistic creativity on the account of the neoliberal view of the concept as gaining problem-solving and entrepreneurial skills.
Geographical schoolbooks as a source of national stereotypes

Sergey Troitskiy (Estonian Literary Museum)

The presentation shows how cultural stereotypes (cultural reputation of a nation) produced by Geography schoolbooks, have influenced the political discourse. I suggest comparing the descriptions of a nation by a schoolbook author with corresponding country images created by a political caricaturist.
Representing distance learning in the memes of the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic: Internet humour as a way of coping and self-defence

Piret Voolaid, Estonian Literary Museum

Restrictions and special measures were imposed around the world to prevent the spread of the COVID-19 virus, one of the most important of which was certainly the reorganization of learning and work as a home-based activity. The new way of life that accompanied the special situation was also reflected in widespread folklore, including internet memes. Defining memes as “(post)modern folklore” that expresses and shapes shared norms and values within communities, my article analyses the depiction of distance learning in Estonian memes, highlighting different points of view: the position of the students, the teachers, and the parents. The source data comes from the meme collection of the research archive of the Department of Folkloristics of the Estonian Literary Museum, which consists of more than 2,000 meme units collected during the crisis period. Some data were collected separately, for example, Tartu Variku School organized a meme competition “My distance learning” for the students of Tartu schools in April 2020 (541 memes).

The meme material which has been inspired by distance learning is a fascinating contemporary subject that combines the challenging COVID-19 pandemic and distance learning as a characteristic feature of this period. Students who are the main creators of the memes regard the humorous memes about distance learning as a form of communication which offers an alternative and multifaceted perspective on this important method of learning during lockdown. The study addresses the following questions: What local features emerge in distance learning memes that spread during the pandemic? How have students used other cultural resources in these memes (e.g. pop culture elements known from literature, cinema, music and other important cultural texts)? Whether and how these memes express, for example, family relationships (between children/youngsters and parents), school relationships (between students and teachers), what patterns of distance working are prevalent, etc.