

13th International Conference of Young Folklorists



9–11 October 2024

Institute of Lithuanian Literature and Folklore

ABSTRACTS



INSTITUTE OF LITHUANIAN LITERATURE AND FOLKLORE

**13th International Conference  
of Young Folklorists**

**Dark Side  
of Folklore  
and Folkloristics**

9–11 October 2024

Institute of Lithuanian Literature and Folklore

ABSTRACTS

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INSTITUTE OF LITHUANIAN LITERATURE AND FOLKLORE

**Project partners**

NORDIC CULTURE POINT

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# CONFERENCE PROGRAMME

WEDNESDAY, **October 9**

9:00–10:00 Registration

10:00–10:30 Opening of the Conference

10:30–11:30 Keynote Lecture 1

**Mirjam Mencej** (University of Ljubljana, Slovenia)

*The Dead on the Dark Side of Reason*

Chair: Radvilė Racėnaitė

11:30–12:00 COFFEE BREAK

12:00–14:00 Panels 1–3

	<b>Panel 1.</b> <i>The Dark Side of Society 1,</i> Conference Room Chair: Anastasiya Fiadotava	<b>Panel 2.</b> <i>Violent Acts in Folkloric Contexts,</i> Archive Room Chair: Giedrė Buivytė-Jokūbauskienė	<b>Panel 3.</b> <i>The Dark Undercurrents of Traditional Folk Songs,</i> Maironis Room Chair: Margarita Moisejeva
12:00–12:30	<b>Ilja Magin</b> <i>Wolf, Policeman and Other Adults: Tartu Jewish Teenagers React to a Folklore Inquiry in 1930</i>	<b>Natali Ponetajev</b> <i>Fights at the Pub, Thefts, and Immoral Lifestyles. Diatonic Accordion in the 19th Century Estonian Parish Court Records</i>	<b>Kateryna Zhuk</b> <i>Musical and Poetic Composition of Tragic Songs and Ballads (South-Eastern Slobozhanshchyna)</i>
12:30–13:00	<b>Digne Üdre</b> <i>A Faustian Bargain: Folk Culture for Sale</i>	<b>Inese Pintāne</b> <i>Justice and Punishment in Folktales: Examining Capital Punishment and its Meanings in European Folktales</i>	<b>Sasanka Dhaval Saikia</b> <i>Manifestation of Marginalization Through Songs: The Tea Tribes of Assam (Online)</i>
13:00–13:30	<b>Sanjukta Naskar</b> <i>Of Hidden Desires and Evil Intentions: A Reread of Father and Mother Figures in Popular Indian (Bengali) Folktales (Online)</i>	<b>Sayani Sarkar and Leenasri Gogoi</b> <i>Unveiling the Dark Paradigms: Abuse, Cruelty, and Betrayal in Assamese and Bengali Folktales (Online)</i>	<b>Nadiia Popyk</b> <i>Soviet “Sharovarshchyna” vs Modern Ukrainian Folk-based Songs: Struggle for Cultural Marker Change</i>
13:30–14:00	<b>Raminta Jakucevičienė</b> <i>Ethnography in Refugees’ “Welcoming” Institutions: Negatively Charged Spaces</i>	<b>Zaiga Pleiko</b> <i>Unveiling Aggression: Insights from Latvian Folk Songs on Married Life (Online)</i>	

14:00–15:00 LUNCH BREAK

15:00–17:00 Panels 4–6

	<b>Panel 4.</b> <i>The Dark Side of Society II,</i> Conference Room Chair: Raminta Jakucevičienė	<b>Panel 5.</b> <i>Folklore in the Online World,</i> Archive Room Chair: Andrius Kaniava	<b>Panel 6.</b> <i>Crisis and Resilience in Historical Folklore,</i> Maironis Room Chair: Digne Üdre
15:00–15:30	<b>Sonu Sah</b> <i>Bhojpuri Folklore of India: A Study of Cultural Dirt (Online)</i>	<b>Abhirup Sarkar</b> <i>Tradition, Academia, and the Paranormal: A Study of Experiences with the Uncanny by Members of a University in Northeast India</i>	<b>Petra Hamer</b> <i>Has Genocide Denial in Republika Srpska (Bosnia-Herzegovina) Become a Part of Folklore? (Online)</i>
15:30–16:00	<b>Asta Skujytė-Razmienė</b> <i>Syphilis in Lithuanian Folklore: A Story of an Unmentioned Epidemic</i>	<b>Polina Holitsyna</b> <i>“You are a joke”: Metal-Lore of Violence and Misanthropy in Online Gatekeeping Practices of Black and Death Metal Scenes</i>	<b>Greta Paskočiumaitė</b> <i>Repression of the Partisan War Narrative during the Soviet Occupation</i>
16:00–16:30	<b>Kinga Horváth</b> <i>“This Blog Is My Therapy” – The Online Illness Diaries</i>	<b>Abir Lal Mazumder and Anwesh Maiti</b> <i>Comprehending Cultism and Folklore: The Tantrics in Bengal and The Lord of Light Cult in Game of Thrones (Online)</i>	<b>Lilia Hanushevska</b> <i>The Influence of Political Censorship on Ukrainian Winter Rituals During the Soviet Occupation</i>
16:30–17:00		<b>Mikaela Jo Krantz</b> <i>One Foot with the Nazis, One Foot with the Nerds (Online)</i>	<b>Akvilė Sadauskienė</b> <i>“Pravilnaja skazka”: A War Refugee Reflects on the Concept of Folktales</i>

17:30–19:30 **Cultural Evening** at the Institute of Lithuanian Literature and Folklore

## THURSDAY, **October 10**

9:00–10:00 Keynote Lecture 2

**Ülo Valk** (University of Tartu, Estonia)

*Supernatural Encounters and Storytelling Framing the Unknown*

Chair: Lina Būgienė

10:00–10:30 COFFEE BREAK

10:30–12:00 Panels 7–9

	<p><b>Panel 7.</b> <i>Marginalized Women in the Fabric of Society</i>, Conference Room Chair: Eglė Gelažiūtė-Pranevičienė</p>	<p><b>Panel 8.</b> <i>Dark Laughter in Contemporary Culture</i>, Archive Room Chair: Martynas Vingrys</p>	<p><b>Panel 9.</b> <i>Folklore of Death and the Departed</i>, Maironis Room Chair: Solveiga Šlapikienė</p>
10:30–11:00	<p><b>Rūta Latinytė</b> <i>Single Mothers as Outcasts and Rivals in Modern Stereotypes and Life Stories</i></p>	<p><b>Anastasiya Fiadotava</b> “We Only Joke With Each Other in a Kind Way” vs “We Respect Black Humor”: <i>Reflecting on the Dark Side of Humor</i></p>	<p><b>Šarūnė Valotkienė</b> <i>One Foot in the Coffin – Maternal and Neonatal Deaths in 3rd-17th Century Lithuania</i></p>
11:00–11:30	<p><b>Iwona Rzepnikowska</b> <i>Between Social-Cultural Exclusion and Acceptance: the Case of the Widow in Folk Texts</i> (Online)</p>	<p><b>Salomėja Bandoriūtė-Leikienė</b> <i>Is It Funny or Scary? Mythical Creatures in Jokes at the End of 19th – Beginning of 20th Centuries and Present Social Horrors in Lithuanian Humor</i></p>	<p><b>Vita Džekčioritė</b> <i>The Living Dead in the Traditional Lithuanian Worldview: Revision of Folk Belief Legends</i></p>
11:30–12:00	<p><b>Kristina Dolinina</b> <i>Forbidden Bodies: Marginalization of Hereditary Women Performers in the Process of Decolonization, Nation-Building and Revival of Dance Traditions in 20th-Century India</i> (Online)</p>	<p><b>Brittany Dyck</b> <i>Laughing with the Grim Reaper: Constructions of Death in School Shooting Humour Told by American Teenagers</i> (Online)</p>	<p><b>Nina Anna Trzaska</b> <i>Orthodox Influences in Adam Mickiewicz’s Dziady</i> (Vėlinės)</p>

12:00–13:00 LUNCH BREAK

13:00–14:30 Round Table Discussion “Haunting Imagination:  
How to Communicate Folklore to Large Audiences”  
with Łukasz Kozak and Kotryna Zylė  
Moderator: Asta Skujytė-Razmienė

14:30–15:00 COFFEE BREAK

15:00–17:00 Panels 10–12

	<b>Panel 10.</b> <i>Exploring Incest and Castration in Folk Narratives,</i> Conference Room Chair: Inese Pintāne	<b>Panel 11.</b> <i>Personal Archives and Collective Memory,</i> Archive Room Chair: Greta Paskočiūmaitė	<b>Panel 12.</b> <i>Mythological Beings in Cultural Narratives,</i> Maironis Room Chair: Rūta Latinytė
15:00–15:30	<b>Minka Jerala</b> <i>To Punish or to Censor: Incest in Slovenian Folk Songs</i>	<b>Margarita Moisejeva</b> <i>Edges of the Lithuanian Folklore Archive: Records of Ethnic Minorities and Religious Communities</i>	<b>Andrius Kaniava</b> <i>Introduction to Dark Wizards in Lithuanian Folklore: Tips on How to Recognise Them and Protect Yourself from Evil</i>
15:30–16:00	<b>Malay Bera</b> <i>Tales of Monster Mothers: Incest and Cannibalism in Bengali Fairy Tales</i>	<b>Olga Smolnytska</b> <i>Folklore and Mystical Basis of Fiction of the 19th and 20th Centuries and Scientific Analysis (Based on Sources from the Archives of the Cantonal and University Libraries of Lausanne, Switzerland) (Online)</i>	<b>Michele Tita</b> <i>Fearful Searches, Sighting Experiences and Interpretations of the Sasquatch/Bigfoot</i>
16:00–16:30	<b>Runjun Devi</b> <i>Succumbing to Forbidden Desires: Exploring the Motif of Incest in Folktales of North-East (Online)</i>	<b>Mila Santala</b> <i>Influence of the Finnish National Epic Kalevala in the Private Archives of a Spiritual Seeker Elsa Heporauta</i>	<b>Nidhi Mathur</b> <i>Nagas: Powerful Humanoids That Lived Amongst Us (Online)</i>
16:30–17:00	<b>Martynas Vingrys,</b> <i>Obscene Motifs in Tales of the Stupid Devil: Castration of the Devil</i>	<b>Laura Suszta</b> <i>Whispers of the Forbidden: Navigating Denesuline First Nation Taboos through Samuel Hearne’s (1745-1792) Journal (Online)</i>	<b>Małgorzata Nowak</b> <i>Dangerous Waters – Demonic Motifs and Folklore in Romantic Literature</i>

18:00–20:00 **Movie session,** Theatre “Pasaka”  
Kinga Michalska, *Vampires, it’s Nothing to Laugh at*  
Hildegard Reimann, *Every Single Repressed Taboo: A Visual Journey to Abandoned Staircase through Artist’s Lens*



FRIDAY, October 11

9:00–10:00 Keynote Lecture 3  
**Łukasz Kozak** (Independent Researcher, Poland)  
*Decolonizing Demonology*  
Chair: Vita Džekčiorūtė

10:00–10:30 COFFEE BREAK

10:30–12:00 Panels 13–14

	<b>Panel 13.</b> <i>Navigating Marginalization and Identity,</i> Conference Room Chair: Salomėja Bandoriūtė-Leikienė	<b>Panel 14.</b> <i>Dialogues Between Nature and Culture I,</i> Archive Room Chair: Nadiia Popyk
10:30–11:00	<b>Ayantika Chakraborty and Raghuram S.K.</b> <i>Unveiling the Veiled: An Inquiry into Undocumented Death Rituals among the Hijra Community (Online)</i>	<b>Malikeh Rasti</b> <i>Soothing and Sinister: A Comparative Study of Whispers of Comfort and Threatening Echoes in Folk English and Persian Lullabies</i>
11:00–11:30	<b>Liveta Ūselė</b> <i>Swedish and Lithuanian People's Attitude Toward Non-traditional Gender Expressions in Swedish and Lithuanian Literary Fairytales</i>	<b>Danilo Trbojević</b> <i>Shadows and Echoes: Navigating the Hybrid Landscapes of Serbian Rural Demonology (Online)</i>
11:30–12:00	<b>Tymoteusz Król</b> <i>Folklore and Homophobia. Analysis of Discussions about the LGBT Free Zone Resolutions in Polish Municipalities and Regions</i>	<b>Martyna Šulskutė</b> <i>Rewetting Peatlands in Lithuania as Post-colonial Practice</i>

12:00–13:00 LUNCH BREAK

13:00–14:30 Panels 15–16

	<p><b>Panel 15.</b>  <i>Evil Entities in Folkloric Traditions</i>,                  Conference Room                  Chair: Abhirup Sarkar</p>	<p><b>Panel 16.</b>  <i>Dialogues Between Nature and Culture II</i>, Archive Room                  Chair: Michele Tita</p>
13:00–13:30	<p><b>Dimpi Sarma and Madhushree Saud</b>  <i>Who’s Hiding in the Dark? A Study on the Benevolent and Malevolent Ghosts and Spirits of Assam</i> (Online)</p>	<p><b>Mathilda Matjus</b>  <i>“Hunting as the Art of Silence”: Hunters as Storytellers and the Dynamics of Estonian Hunting Tales</i></p>
13:30–14:00	<p><b>Ahasan Imam</b>  <i>Naraka Chaturdashi (Bhoot Chaturdashi) in Bengali Folklore and Festivals</i> (Online)</p>	<p><b>Alena Leshkevich and Rafal Mista</b>  <i>The Transformation of Folk Interpretations of Being Killed by Lightning Among Poles and Belarusians</i></p>
14:00–14:30	<p><b>Tanjuma Mahmud Mukta</b>  <i>The Perspectives of “Olokhi (Goddess of Misfortune and Misery)” in Sayings of Khana: The Dark Side of Folklore in Bengali Culture</i> (Online)</p>	<p><b>Ulkar Yusifova</b>  <i>Azerbaijani Tales in the Context of Mythic-sacred Space</i></p>

14:30–15:00 Closing of the Conference

## ABOUT THE CONFERENCE

Since the beginning of time, the existence of the light was inseparable from the darkness. In folklore material of various cultures, darkness could take the shape of a mythological being or to be perceived as looming threat and danger. It could inhabit words, deeds, and wishes, enabling people to believe in dark magic, curses, actions that could bring harm and misfortune. It could also be attributed to the violence and crimes that took place in the community, as well as be seen as a power that can influence people to make questionable or condemnable choices.

However, sometimes even an academic approach cannot or would not cast enough light onto the matters of certain topics, leaving particular parts in the darkness. This kind of *modus operandi* might even alter the views on traditions and folklore nationwide, as (un)consciously silencing disagreeable subjects might leave a wrong impression of it not existing in the first place.

**13th International Conference of Young Folklorists** aims to explore topics that in traditional cultures were considered uncomfortable, immoral, a taboo, hid in the darkness not only because of people who did not wish to converse in them, but also by folklorists who seemed to deem them disagreeable, improper, not worthy to write down.

## ABOUT THE INSTITUTE OF LITHUANIAN LITERATURE AND FOLKLORE

The Institute of Lithuanian Literature and Folklore (formerly the Institute of Lithuanian Studies) was established in 1939, and consisted of three departments: Lithuanian language, Lithuanian history, and Lithuanian folklore. With the establishment of the Academy of Sciences in 1941, institutes of the Lithuanian language and Lithuanian literature were also set up. On the decision of the Presidium of the Academy in 1952, both institutes were merged into one, the Institute of Lithuanian Language and Literature; but in 1953, having been transferred from the Institute of History, the folklore section was established as the Department of Folklore. On 16 April 1990 the institute became an independent scientific institution with its present name and structure.

The Institute of Lithuanian Literature and Folklore occupies two buildings designed by August Klein and built in 1904–1906 by the engineer Petras Vileišis. Until 1931, this was the home of the Vileišis family, but since 1932 the buildings have been a centre for Lithuanian culture. The Lithuanian Science Society (1907–1940) and the Rytas Society were located there. The building by the street provided space for a printing press, where the newspaper “Vilnius’ News”, edited by Vileišis, was published. This building also housed a bookshop selling Lithuanian books. The First Exhibition of Lithuanian Art took place here in 1907. Since 1941 the buildings have been part of the Academy of Sciences of Lithuania, and are a valuable architectural monument of local importance.

The current mission of the Institute is to implement the state’s priorities for Lithuanian studies by carrying out long-term fundamental research into Lithuanian literature, folklore, and the old Lithuanian literary heritage, gathering, organizing, preserving and promoting the intangible and documental heritage of literature and folklore, and ensuring the development of Lithuanian studies on a European and global scientific level. Through its research results, the Institute strives to enhance the cultural identity of the Republic of Lithuania and its society.

**MIRJAM MENCEJ**

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**The Dead on the Dark Side of Reason**

With the advent of the Enlightenment, the progressing dominance of reason, “rationality”, logical argument, and experimental proof, the banishment of the dead from the society of the living has slowly become the dominant attitude in the Western world. The dominant ontology in the West today no longer accepts the dead as existing in external, empirical reality; ghosts were emptied of their *worldly* existence and became psychological entities, ultimately relegated to the inner realm of the mind and conceived as productions of the mind and imagination. Ghosts have been internalized as mental experiences and explained (away) as a result of some sort of altered state of consciousness, a consequence of psycho-physiological disturbances, mental illness, or pathological conditions. Scholars who feared being considered “believers” and consequently losing credibility, have thus either avoided the topic altogether or reproduced the ideas of the Enlightenment and ultimately confirmed that ghosts belong to the “dark” side of Reason.

In this paper, I will first give an overview of the approaches towards studying ghosts, addressing the strategies that folklorists and scholars of other disciplines have used to distance themselves from what their interlocutors narrated as a genuine experience of a ghost. I will then, based on my fieldwork research in rural Bosnia and Herzegovina, discuss the dead as having agency and playing a significant role in the lives of individuals and communities. Moreover, I will demonstrate that appropriated by the dominant structures in society, the dead can also play a significant role in broader ethnonationalist identity processes.

## ÜLO VALK

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### **Supernatural Encounters and Storytelling: Framing the Unknown**

In 1917, the German theologian Rudolf Otto published his influential monograph *Das Heilige* (in English, 'Idea of the Holy' [1923]), setting the foundation for the phenomenological school of comparative religion. Otto outlined the idea of numinous – an unknown supernatural force or entity – as the core of religious experience. Folklorists like Max Lüthi and Lauri Honko applied the concept in their genre theory, mainly addressing legend, memorate, and the related narrative genres.

The phenomenological approach has today declined in the study of religion, and scholars have looked for alternative perspectives towards studying mystical and religious experiences, such as Ann Taves, who discusses “experiences deemed religious,” analyzing the processes of how people conceptualize their extraordinary experiences and give meanings to them in religious terms. Rejecting binary oppositions, such as nature and culture, body and mind, the supernatural and mundane, etc., have today become common in anthropology, literary studies, and folkloristics. In folkloristics, the concept of vernacular knowledge has been proposed to study the forms of religious, socio-political, and historic meaning-making in beliefs and belief narratives as inherently intertwined.

Yet, empirical data worldwide confirm that the experience of the unknown and uncanny is real. It has been studied by David J. Hufford, Tanya M. Luhrmann, Kirsten M. Raahauge, and many other scholars whose work is based on interviews and empirical data. What interpretive frames for such experiences have been offered in academic scholarship and vernacular traditions? How do these frames provide meanings for personal experiences and related storytelling? How do these frames change over time? The lecture will discuss these questions. Also, we shall examine some personal experience narratives of people who have encountered ghosts, aliens, or other representatives of the dark powers.

## **ŁUKASZ KOZAK**

Independent Researcher, Poland  
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### **Decolonizing Demonology**

The field of folklore studies, often unfortunately referred to as “folk demonology,” imposes a perspective that is not only rooted in Greco-Roman classical terminology but also distinctly occidentalized and religiously charged. While the category of “supernatural” or “preternatural” somewhat alleviates the issue, the terminology used is still rife with colonial connotations and has been further entrenched in global pop culture through perpetuated stereotypes.

In studies of folklore, we frequently encounter “vampires” (arguably the most significant cultural appropriation in the history of civilization), “ghouls,” “goblins,” “witches,” “werewolves,” and more. All of these terms simplify and reduce the complexity of local beliefs and practices. They serve to classify these traditions narrowly and limit their full meaning.

In this presentation, I will focus on several examples of the colonial misuse of terminology and meaning with respect to folklore. The issues discussed will pertain both to academic language and the broader context of popularization and media representation.

Participants:

**ŁUKASZ KOZAK** (Independent Researcher, Poland)

**KOTRYNA ZYLĖ** (Writer and artist, Lithuania)

Moderator:

**ASTA SKUJYTĖ-RAZMIENĖ**

(Institute of Lithuanian Literature and Folklore, Lithuania)

## **Haunting Imagination: How to Communicate Folklore to Large Audiences**

This round table discussion will explore the intersection of folklore and modern communication strategies by examining how traditional legends, belief narratives, folktales, etc. can be creatively conveyed to captivate large audiences. Łukasz Kozak, Kotryna Zylė, and Asta Skujytė-Razmienė will discuss the challenges of preserving cultural authenticity while engaging contemporary readers through illustrations and the written word. The discussion will also address the role of imagination in making folklore accessible and relevant in today's fast-paced, globalized world.



MOVIE SESSION | **THURSDAY**, October 10  
Address: Theatre “Pasaka” (Paupio g. 26, Vilnius, 11341)

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## **KINGA MICHALSKA**

Queer visual artist and filmmaker, Canada  
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### **Vampires, It’s Nothing to Laugh At**

*Vampires, It’s Nothing To Laugh At* is an experimental documentary that revisits the research of vampire scholar Jan Perkowski which he conducted in the Kashub community of Wilno, Ontario in the ‘60s. In his book *Vampires of the Slavs* Perkowski describes an encounter with a self-identified vampire woman, which he recorded on tape. Fifty years later, a Polish artist, Kinga Michalska, follows in his footsteps to find the mysterious character. This layered story about various uninvited guests is told through Kinga’s interviews with local elders juxtaposed with Perkowski’s original tapes, combined with performative gestures and campy aesthetics. The journey through Slavic folklore and misty landscapes of the Algonquin people brings the artist to confront the cycles of colonial violence and oppression in which Michalska finds herself implicated. Who is the vampire? The Kashubian woman, the scientist, the migrants, the tourists, the audience, or the filmmaker? *Vampires, It’s Nothing To Laugh At* is a critical reflection on the notions of power in ethnographic and documentary research.

#### **Bionote**

Kinga Michalska is a Polish queer visual artist and filmmaker based in Tiohtiá:ke, Mooniyang, Montreal in so-called Canada. They use mediums of photography, film, and video installation to examine shared cultural spaces such as home, kinship, land, memory, and hauntings through a decolonial feminist sensibility. They hold a BA in Cultural Studies from the University of Warsaw and an MFA in Photography from Concordia University. Their work has been shown in multiple exhibitions and film festivals in Canada, Poland, UK, Korea, Switzerland, Italy, and Germany.

MOVIE SESSION | **THURSDAY**, October 10  
Address: Theatre “Pasaka” (Paupio g. 26, Vilnius, 11341)

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## **HILDEGARD REIMANN**

Independent researcher and activist, Estonia  
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### **Every Single Repressed Taboo: A Visual Journey to an Abandoned Staircase through an Artist’s Lens**

This talk presents The Daylight Project, an informal Tallinn-based art and activist community. Daylight strives towards a DIY and grassroots approach to create an open platform for young artists and experimental researchers.

My presentation will focus on a video piece by Daylight artist Nadya Tjushka. “The Secret Staircase” is a documentation of an abandoned water tower in Narva, a town between the Estonian and Russian border. The video documents endless floors of graphic and inappropriate messages and drawings – a provoking gallery of every single repressed taboo in society.

Nadya writes about her piece as follows: “We managed to sneak into the building on Halloween night and found a secret staircase that was waiting for renovations. The scribbles, doodles, and messages on these walls carry a history of 30 years, youthful, carefree, and adolescent. But it’s also frightening to see what individuals want to share when they have freedom of expression without accountability. The staircase took us through an uncomfortable journey that refers to taboo and violent undercurrents of our social lives, on symbols and topics that are not addressed in our education systems properly.”

In my presentation, I will be screening the video piece that has also been displayed through Daylight’s platform. I will open up the story of the portrayed building in the experiences of local youth. As a folklorist, I will analyze Daylight Project’s ethnographic approach, visual medium, and emphasis on everyday culture and repressed taboos in Estonian society. It will also be a possibility to dis-

cuss video as a way to represent visual folklore as well as a medium to convey atmosphere and emotion from the field.

**Bionote**

Hildegard Reimann is a fresh graduate of Tartu University with an MA in Ethnology, Folkloristics, and Applied Anthropology (2024). Her BA (2021) in folkloristics focused on drawing as a research method. Her MA project experimented with walking and sensory ethnography to understand the experiences of other-than-human animals in urban space. Currently, she is establishing herself in the field of creative research and taking part in art-science-activist movements.

## **SALOMĖJA BANDORIŪTĖ-LEIKIENĖ**

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### **Is It Funny or Scary? Mythical Creatures in Jokes at the End of the 19th – Beginning of the 20th Centuries and Present Social Horrors in Lithuanian Humor**

This paper will give a brief overview of Lithuanian humor, especially at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, when mythical creatures were present in humor (especially in jokes). The paper will mainly analyze the devil's character in jokes and will seek to answer why the devil was included in such content.

In the second part of the presentation, the author will look at the horrors of modern humor – why and what we are afraid of today, and why we joke about it.

#### **Bionote**

Salomėja Bandoriūtė-Leikienė is a Scientific Researcher in the Department of Folk Narrative, the Institute of Lithuanian Literature and Folklore, Vilnius, Lithuania. She is interested in contemporary verbal folklore forms, such as podcasts, especially, humour shows. In 2017 defended a PhD, dissertation thesis: “Homo Ridens: the Phenomenon of the Joking man in Modern Lithuania”.

## MALAY BERA

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### **Tales of Monster Mothers: Incest and Cannibalism in Bengali Fairy Tales**

What turns a mother into a monster? Can a monster be a mother? What makes a “good” mother then? Analyzing the figure of the *rakshasi* (shapeshifting demoness/ogress) mother in fairy tales from late nineteenth and early twentieth century Bengal, I will bring out the interconnectedness between the tropes of motherhood, sexuality, incest, and cannibalism in Bengali fairy tales. Well-known Bengali fairy tales such as “Neelkamal and Lalkamal,” “The Story of the Rakshasas” and many others depict *rakshasi* mothers as eating or expressing the desire to eat their stepsons and sometimes their own sons. However, this recurring trope of eating is more complex than simply a monstrous appetite for food. Through a comparative analysis between 19th-20th century fairy tales and contemporary folk narratives, I will show that the images of cannibalism are actually metaphors for incest that were sanitized in print culture during the nationalist movement in Bengal. The historical relevance of the incest trope can be traced back to medieval times when male polygamy was the acceptable social norm. During this period, an old man’s youngest wife could be the same age as his older sons from other wives. This practice left open a disturbing scope for sexual tension between the stepmother and the stepson necessitating an express prohibition of incestual relationships through prescriptive narratives. I argue that these narratives turned sexually promiscuous women into *rakshasis*, monstrous female figures who nurture and engage in taboo social behavior. Emphasizing on this discourse of taboos and prohibitions in fairy tales, I further suggest that Bengali fairy tales were not born as children’s stories as they are treated in the dominant academic discourse in Bengal. Rather, they were instructive stories meant to teach women how to be a “good” mother. This explicit pedagogical move was sanitized by the discourse of nationalism in the early twentieth century, giving rise to *rupkotha*, the genre of literary fairy tales in Bengal.

**Bionote**

Malay Bera is a PhD student in English at Ashoka University, India. He is currently working on his dissertation about monster mothers in Bengali fairy tales. He was a DoRa Plus visiting PhD student in comparative folklore at the University of Tartu. He has a BA (Honors) in English from the University of Calcutta, and an MA in Linguistics from Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. Besides working on his PhD dissertation, currently, he is also collaborating with TED-Ed for the digital reproduction of a Bengali fairy tale as part of TED-Ed's Folklore and Mythology series.

**AYANTIKA CHAKRABORTY, RAGHURAM S.K.**

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## **Unveiling the Veiled: An Inquiry into Undocumented Death Rituals among the Hijra Community**

In India, a transgender individual who chooses to join the traditional transgender community is called a *Hijra*. The community has always been an integral part of the mythology as well as the history of the country. Moreover, the community actively bears the tradition of singing and blessing people during various auspicious occasions like the birth of a child and marriage. Therefore, it can be claimed that they are also integrally associated with various rituals and devotional Indian music. Ironically, they are still feared and stigmatized because of the belief system prevailing in India. They are believed to have the power to curse anybody, and the curse will come true. Consequently, they live in secluded settlements with other *Hijras*, creating an artificial kinship with all feminine relations.

Several researchers have documented and researched this stigmatized community in India from various perspectives. An enormous number of dark legends are associated with the death rituals of the *Hijras*. However, nobody has yet documented or researched the death traditions of the *Hijras*. The community themselves do not want to reveal their death rituals. In several interviews, they gave ambiguous or misleading information or refused to answer. No existing literature reflects any evidence of participatory research in the death rituals of the *Hijra* community.

Keeping research ethics in mind and respecting the privacy of the community, the study aims to find reasons why the death rituals have not been documented to date. The research tries to argue how the descriptions of death rituals given to various researchers are contradictory and unreliable. Finally, the research explores the methodologies that can be used to document and study secretive rituals like the death rituals of *Hijras*. The study aims to collect

data through secondary literature and interviews. Purposive sampling will be applied to collect different types of data from different groups of informants.

**Bionote**

Dr. Ayantika Chakraborty works as an archivist at the American Institute of Indian Studies, Gurgaon. She has a PhD and Masters Degree in Folklore. She also has an MA in Comparative Literature. Her research interest lies in Folklore, Ethnomusicology, Culture, Community, and development.

Raghuram S.K. works as a Project Associate with IGNCA, New Delhi. He has a Masters degree in Museology. His research interest is in South Indian Art and History, Temple Architecture, Culture, and Heritage.



## RUNJUN DEVI

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### **Succumbing to Forbidden Desires: Exploring the Motif of Incest in Folktales of North-east India**

The taboo upon incest has been a prominent feature in anthropological study. Despite the diversity of cultural contexts, incest has been alluded to as an example of a cultural universal or even viewed as a defining trait of human culture. It has often been treated as a cultural trait encoding and prohibiting the darker aspects of human experience.

Westermarck (1894) noted that individuals who live in close association develop a sexual aversion toward each other. Maintaining a similar line of thought, Havelock Ellis (1906) hypothesized that long-term close association and the sharing of daily habits depress the level of sexual arousal.

However, both of these theories speculate not on blood relations but on long-term societal association. To Freud (1938), on the other hand, the incest taboo was cultural in origin and a response to the needs of human society.

The taboo imposed upon incestuous relationships has often been an *a priori* postulate for theories relating to human culture, society, and its origin. Perhaps, the biggest example would be the writings of Claude Levi-Strauss, who looked at this taboo not as a natural but, rather, more of a cultural phenomenon (1969). According to his theory, the prohibition of incest acts as a structural element that shapes kinship systems and societal order.

As Seymour Parker (1976) noted, speculation about the deleterious effects of inbreeding is part of the folklore of our society and has played a prominent role in discussions of the origins of the incest taboo. The consequences of incestuous relationships within folktales mostly serve as cautionary tales as we witness how characters who engage in incestuous unions face tragic outcomes, reflecting the societal repercussions of violating cultural norms. Otherwise,

the characters harboring such feelings are painted as irredeemable villains, whose heart is consumed by evil.

In this paper, we look upon four such tales picked from four different tribes of North-east India, which prominently display the element of incest. We shall analyze and thus attempt to decipher the cultural messages conveyed by the folklore, providing insights into the collective consciousness of the society.

### **Bionote**

Runjun Devi is pursuing her doctoral studies in the Department of Folklore Research, Gauhati University. She is an avid reader and a scholar of Astro-mythology. Her interest is in Mass Communication, Film Studies, Tolkienian studies, Fantasy literature, and ancient mythologies.

**KRISTINA DOLININA**

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## **Forbidden Bodies: Marginalization of Hereditary Women Performers in the Process of Decolonization, Nation-Building, and Revival of Dance Traditions in 20th-Century India**

The revival of traditional dance forms in India during the 20th century became a pivotal moment in the decolonization and nation-building narrative. Yet, while holding onto colonial knowledge constructions and notions of unbroken, authentic, pure, and respectable cultural forms, this narrative often overlooked the marginalized hereditary women performers who were integral to these dance traditions beforehand. Historically, hereditary women performers, including *devadasis* (dedicated temple dancers) and *tawaifs* (courtesans renowned for their artistic prowess), played a central role in preserving and propagating classical Indian dance forms. However, colonial-era moral reforms and subsequent nationalist movements led to their stigmatization, othering, and marginalization, erasing their rightful place in the cultural narrative; their association with temple and court contexts clashed with emerging ideals of purity and nationalism, as well as images of the ideal woman and body in the public sphere.

Through a multi-dimensional analysis encompassing historical, cultural, and sociopolitical perspectives, this presentation examines the intricate dynamics of their marginalization/othering amidst the backdrop of nation-building efforts, paralleled with the revival of classical dance forms. It delves into the complex interplay of gender, caste, and nationalism in perpetuating the marginalization of hereditary women performers. It also explores how their exclusion from mainstream discourse not only deprived them of socio-economic opportunities but also contributed to the loss of their cultural heritage and artistic legacy.

Furthermore, this presentation examines ongoing processes of marginalization that are based on gender and caste, cases of discrepancies and conflicts of tradition, and changes in the contem-

porary dance scenario in India and South Asian diasporic locations. It also looks into the efforts to decolonize dance bodies, that involve reclaiming agency over movement, challenging normative standards, and amplifying marginalized voices within the dance community.

The study is based on material from ethnographic fieldwork conducted for various periods throughout 2017 and 2020 in various Kathak communities in central northern territories of India and my own experiences as a Kathak student and practitioner in Delhi from 2003 to 2010. It also looks at diasporic spaces through my continuous practice of Kathak, traveling between India and other locations, and under the recent circumstances, online. Thus, the study uses the perspective of the double positionality of practitioner and researcher and also of insider and outsider.

### **Bionote**

Kristina Luna Dolinina teaches Hindi Language, Literature, and Performative Traditions of South Asia at the Institute of Asian and Transcultural Studies at Vilnius University. Recently she is also a postdoctoral research fellow at the same institute, working on performative traditions in the South Asian diaspora around the globe. Kristina graduated from the School of Indian Languages, Jawaharlal Nehru University, and got the opportunity to practice Kathak under the guidance of Padmashree Guru Shovana Narayan and Guru Teerath Ajmani. Later she started Odissi Dance training with Guru Sharon Lowen and joined Sri Ram Bharatya Kala Kendra under the Odissi Guru Priyamvada Pattnayak. Kristina defended her dissertation at the Ethnomusicology Department of the Lithuanian Academy of Music and Theatre. Her research delves into Kathak Dance and Kathak Performative Communities. In 2009 Kristina founded Natya Devi Dance Theatre in Vilnius, which is involved in various dance events, festivals, and intercultural projects.

## BRITTANY DYCK

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### **Laughing with the Grim Reaper: Constructions of Death in School Shooting Humour Told by American Teenagers**

In the 25 years since the Columbine High School shooting in Colorado, USA, there have now been multiple generations of American students that have moved through the school system under the looming threat of potential future shootings. One of the results of such experiences has been the emergence of a vast joking culture centered on school shootings, which is especially prevalent in on-line spaces. Based on the MA Thesis “All the Other Kids with the Pumped-Up Kicks’ - An Investigation of School Shooting Jokes Told by American Teenagers on TikTok,” this presentation explores how American teenagers use this humor to express their fears and anxieties, political opinions, and perceptions of school shootings. Specifically, this presentation is interested in looking at the ways that death is presented and constructed in this humor corpus. Dark humor typically involves a level of abstraction used to mentally distance the concept of death, particularly the teller and audience’s deaths. However, school shooting jokes violate this notion, as the students telling them often seem to refuse and reject this mental distance and fully embrace the morbidity of joking about one’s own death. By examining this more closely, school shooting humor can reveal students’ anxieties about potential future shootings, a lack of trust in adult institutions like the school system and the government, and a general sense of ambivalence towards death.

#### **Bionote**

Brittany Dyck is a second-year PhD student at the University of Alberta, having graduated from Memorial University of Newfoundland and Labrador with her BA and MA in Folklore. She specializes in exploring folklore found in online communities, with a specific focus on folkloric content related to the topics of death and disability. Her current PhD work is related to personal narratives regarding the diagnostic process shared by autistic adults within online autism-focused communities.

# VITA DŽEKČIORIŪTĖ

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## The Living Dead in the Traditional Lithuanian Worldview: Revision of Folk Belief Legends

The living dead as mythological beings are common in many cultures around the world. Vampires and zombies, popularized by modern media, are among the best examples. The mythological images that are prevalent in the modern world often come from traditional cultures. Yet unlike modern culture's focus on entertainment, stories of ancient times about the living dead were also used to express a relationship with death and to regulate certain social norms.

This paper aims to show how the image of the living dead has been expressed in traditional Lithuanian culture. Although the living dead have attracted the attention of some researchers (Balys, 1936; Korzonaitė, 2002; Korzonaitė, 2003a; Korzonaitė, 2003b; Skujytė-Razmienė, 2020), the extremely rich folklore material relating to them has not yet been systematically studied. The living dead can be found in folklore of various genres (folk tales, legends, beliefs). Nevertheless, they are most common in folk belief legends. Based on Lithuanian folklore material from the late 19th and the first half of the 20th century, the presentation discusses the characteristics of the living dead, how they behave in the stories, how dangerous they are, and how to protect oneself against them.

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### Bionote

Vita Džekčioriūtė (PhD) is a folklore researcher who focuses on traditional Lithuanian worldviews. Her main interest is mythology and how mythological images express themselves and function in culture. She also works in the fields of paremiology, ethnomedicine, and biocultural diversity.

## ANASTASIYA FIADOTAVA

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### **“We Only Joke With Each Other in a Kind Way” vs “We Respect Black Humor”: Reflecting on the Dark Side of Humor**

Humor often has positive connotations both for academics and for the general public. In the discussions of humor, we tend to underscore that it alleviates tension, helps to cope with stressful situations, contributes to the intimacy of interpersonal relations, and just brings more joy and pleasure to our lives. However, there is also a dark side of humor as it can cause discomfort to its targets; it can also be used as a disguise for hate speech. While analyzing the use of humor in communication, it is often next to impossible to separate these two sides as humor is subtle, context-dependent and can be perceived differently by different audiences and under different circumstances.

At the same time, my fieldwork experience shows that sometimes people do tend to downplay the dark side of humor. In the interviews on family humor that I conducted during my PhD studies, my research participants often explicitly mentioned that they use only good humor in their family and refrain from making aggressive or offensive jokes on each other's behalf. However, when bringing particular examples of their family humor, they also cited the instances when they mocked each other. Moreover, there were also those participants who, on the contrary, embraced black humor and considered it an important part of their family folklore.

The presentation discusses these two attitudes to black humor and their implications. It also shows how the closeness between self-image and the sense of humor can impact the reflections on the dark side of humor.

#### **Bionote**

Anastasiya Fiadotava (PhD) is a Senior Research Fellow at the Department of Folkloristics of the Estonian Literary Museum, Tartu. Her fields of interest include the use of humor in family communication, the spread of jokes and memes in social and mainstream media, and the reflections of current political and social issues in humor.

## PETRA HAMER

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### **Has Genocide Denial in Republika Srpska (Bosnia-Herzegovina) Become a Part of Folklore?**

Traces and wounds of the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina (1992-1995) are still very much visible in practically every segment of the post-war society. In the last twenty-nine years, the topic of the war has created many significant and impressive studies on different aspects of it. In the mass media, we could follow the images of the siege of Sarajevo, the concentration camps and mass graves in the Prijedor region, the demolition of an Old bridge in Mostar, the genocide in Srebrenica, and convictions of war criminals in The Hague court ICTY. One would think the wounds will heal, but quite the opposite happens. Looking at the inhabitants of B-H, one can detect a constant preoccupation with the war period, starting with three main different ethno-national war narratives, which have very limited common points. Rethinking crimes and violence and addressing the taboo topics in contemporary fieldwork are rarely mentioned still today when talking about the war in B-H. While conducting ethnographic fieldwork in the North-western B-H city of Prijedor, I noticed that one ethno-national narrative stands out. The Bosnian Serb narrative, which includes the genocide denial, visible in many communities throughout the Republika Srpska – a Serbian-controlled entity that resulted in the Dayton peace agreement in 1995. This presentation will address the taboo topic of genocide denial, the existence of mass graves, and the role of the dead in the Prijedor region, by looking at the monuments, public opinion, political ideas, music, and folklore from the war-period till today.

#### **Bionote**

Petra Hamer (1988) is an ethnologist and cultural anthropologist interested in popular music and culture in Southeastern Europe in the 20th and 21st centuries. She holds a PhD from the University of Graz, where she researched the production of popular music of Bosnian and Herzegovinian army artistic units, focusing on the question of national identity construction in multi-ethnic society. Currently, she works as a Postdoc researcher at the DEAGENCY project, researching the role of the dead in Bosnian and Herzegovinian contemporary society reflecting on the mass graves in two B-H cities Prijedor and Ključ. The research is funded by the European Union (ERC project DEAGENCY, No 101095729).



## LILIA HANUSHEVSKA

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### The Influence of Political Censorship on Ukrainian Winter Rituals During the Soviet Occupation

In recent decades Ukrainian ethnomusicologists have devoted a lot of research to winter ritual traditions. Understanding how political censorship affected traditional culture during the Soviet occupation helps us understand the past changes and their influence on contemporary traditions.

*Vertepuvannia* (folk theater held at Christmas) refers to folk and church genres. In contrast, the New Year's Eve performance with dressing up – *malankuvannia* – has remained a secular rite. While *Vertepuvannia* includes biblical characters with occasional secular figures (Grandparents, Death, Doctor, Goat), the main characters of *malankuvannia* are always Malanka and her husband Vasyl. Over time, however, real popular figures from Ukrainian life have been added, such as political figures or popular culture characters. The performers go around the courtyards, sing carols, have fun, etc.

During the Soviet occupation, *Vertepuvannia*, *malankuvannia*, and other Ukrainian rites were prohibited as they were considered opposed to the ideology of communism. Restrictions included censorship not only of the plot of the performances and texts but also prohibition of public performance. In particular, soviet agents persecuted children and young people who participated in performances on Christmas Eve and New Year. Adult performers were persecuted as well; often they were accused of ideological crimes, arrested, or fired. Despite the ban, people took risks and gathered to visit the families of their relatives with holiday greetings.

In addition to direct prohibitions, the Soviet authorities tried to rewrite carols in their own way. There were also attempts to “replace” Christmas in favor of the so-called “Komsomol Christmas”. The research activities of ethnomusicologists were also limited, as many works were falsified or not published at all.

With the restoration of independence, Ukraine went through the path of democratic reforms. Since 1991, there has been freedom of speech and expression of national identity in Ukraine.

Today, the successor of the USSR pursues a similar policy in the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine: for any manifestation of Ukrainianness, civilians face different forms of repression from the occupying authorities (forced relocation, imprisonment, and other human rights violations).

**Bionote**

Lilia Hanushevska is a student of the Department of Musical Folkloristics at the Mykola Lysenko Lviv National Music Academy. She has participated in conferences on the topics of wedding song research, archival materials, etc, as well as in ethnomusicological expeditions.

## POLINA HOLITSYNA

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### **“You Are a Joke”: Metal-Lore of Violence and Misanthropy in Online Gatekeeping Practices of Black and Death Metal Scenes**

For metal fans around the world, the notion of “being true” to the scene is well-known and acknowledged. Yet, the subcultural understanding of “true” differs from literal to mockingly figurative. In this paper, I argue that metal-lore related to violence, doom, and mankind-hating narratives acts as a means of measuring the “true”, i.e. communal gatekeeping and boundary-setting practices in black and death metal scenes. To explain it further, I will introduce a novel and underexplored concept of metal-lore as it covers the cultural and artistic expressions that are specific to the metal subcultures, including lyrical themes, visual aesthetics, symbols, folklore (community-based stories of the metal-lore) and rituals associated with metal music. My main focus will be on the intra-subcultural online narratives reflected in posts, comments, and media articles. The thematic threads of the matter will be the ones based on the emotions of resentment and disgust towards “inauthentic” subcultural members; more specifically, towards those who interpret the notions of violence and hate in black and death metal either too seriously or too skeptically. Essentially, I will demonstrate how the in-group understanding of the “authentic” perception of hate in metal shapes the subcultural boundaries. The paper will mainly operate with examples from Estonian, Finnish, and Ukrainian black and death metal scenes as I have done the most fieldwork in the given scenes. However, examples from other European countries and the USA will be used as well. In addition, as there was only one use of the concept of metal-lore I detected (Araste, Ventsel 2015) in the former investigation, I conceptualized it myself for my doctoral research, and for this presentation. I will also include my findings from the master’s research on the authenticity and community of the Estonian pagan metal scene.

#### **Bionote**

Polina is a researcher in subcultural studies, specifically focusing on extreme metal scenes of Estonia, Finland, and Ukraine. Her current research project explores how subcultural authenticity and metal-lore impact the boundary-setting processes within and between the given scenes.

## KINGA HORVÁTH

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### “This Blog Is My Therapy” – The Online Illness Diaries

In the first half of my presentation, I would like to explore a small part of my doctoral topic, the diary as a crisis genre, by looking at Hungarian online, disease, and coronavirus diaries. With the spread of the Internet, the medium of keeping a diary has changed, so we have to look for diaries online. How much do social media diaries stretch Philippe Lejeune’s definition of the diary? In a 2020 study, Jill Walker-Rettberg claims that social media has pushed personal blogs out of the competition, bringing changes such as the abolition of the diary writer’s need for anonymity. Rettberg points out that social media already keeps our “diary” for us, but it focuses on our more quantitative actions instead of the emotional or confessional context.

I try to find answers to questions such as: Does the coronavirus or quarantine diary as a genre exist at all? Where and for how long did people keep a “diary” during the quarantine? Are these entries preserved at all? To what extent has the personal nature of the writings remained in social media? In general, what did they share with their acquaintances and unknown readers? Can the diarists openly write about their illness or crisis on online platforms, or is it still taboo?

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#### Bionote

Kinga Horváth is a fourth-year doctoral student at the Eötvös Loránd University in the Doctoral School of Literary Studies, Hungarian and Comparative Folklore Program. Her main research topic is online diaries, such as illness, coronavirus, and life-crisis diaries.

## AHASAN IMAM

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### ***Naraka Chaturdashi (Bhoot Chaturdashi) in Bengali Folklore and Festivals***

In Bengali folk life, the belief in ghosts is an age-old thing and the presence of ghosts can be observed in various aspects of people's lives. Ghost-centered folklore and prejudices have been noticeable in the Indian subcontinent since ancient times and almost everyone is acquainted with different anecdotes about them. Some believe that palm trees, tamarind trees, bael (marmelos) trees, teak trees, bushes, and abandoned landlord's houses are the haunts of ghosts. Tales of ghostly apparitions, such as jingling anklets and murmuring voices, are echoed in folklore, stories, movies, and literature of the region. The story of "Shakchunni" stands out in this regard.

The region hence has many superstitious beliefs and even festivals associated with ghosts. One such festival is *Naraka Chaturdashi* which corresponds with several Hindu religious traditions such as Kali Puja, Shiva Puja, etc. In Bengali tradition, *Naraka Chaturdashi* is celebrated in the Bengali month of *Kartik*, the night before *Kali Puja* as a festival, ritual, and folk belief with the belief that ghosts manifest on this day. People believe that various types of ghosts manifest around their homes on this day such as: a beheaded ghost, handless ghost, eye gouging ghost, limping ghost, and so on, which are also featured in different Bengali stories. The festival is observed to prevent anyone from encountering misfortune, and lamps are lit at the entrances of homes to ward off any adversity from entering. It is believed that ancestors return to this world on this day to visit their living relatives. With this belief arrangements for food are made at their homes, especially in Hindu tradition. They bless their descendants for prosperity, well-being, and happiness in this world, and return to their own ghostly world upon seeing the light of the lamps. *Naraka Chaturdashi* is applauded with various arrangements and feasts. In Hindu Bengali homes, fourteen varieties of dishes are prepared, believing that consuming fourteen types of food items can ward off illnesses and prevent ghosts from causing harm. Serv-

ing vegetables flavored with bitter gourd is considered auspicious, as bitter gourd drives away demons. Various beliefs and superstitions of this kind centering ghosts are prevalent among the people of Bangladesh. This article discusses all such beliefs and customs associated with *Naraka Chaturdashi* and tries to locate them within the tradition of Bengali festivity and cultural practices.

### **Bionote**

Ahasan Imam is an Associate Professor at the Department of Bangla at Jahangirnagar University, Bangladesh. He has recently published two poetry books titled “Mukhosh”, and “Elebele” and two Essay books “Bimbito Shor”, and “Oitijjer Uttoradhikar.” Besides extensive study, he has a huge fascination with film and media and has directed one short film named ‘Compendium’ in 2023 with which he participated in distinguished International Film Festivals in India, Nepal, and Bangladesh.

## RAMINTA JAKUCEVIČIENĖ

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### **Ethnography in Refugees' "Welcoming" Institutions: Negatively Charged Spaces**

Conducting fieldwork in governmental institutions that work with the registration and reception of migrants from non-European countries is a very demanding place for the ethnographer in terms of access, emotions, and the general atmosphere it creates. Despite the efforts of NGOs to offer various activities and the progress institutions have made to improve the living conditions of people residing in these institutions, it still feels the spaces are negatively charged. First, the institutions are closed to the public. Lack of communication with the outside world leads to people feeling sad and frustrated. Second, people living there have hopes and expectations – first and foremost – to receive permission to reside in Lithuania, then to have a smooth start, to have dignified living conditions, and to be accepted by Lithuanian society. Not all asylum seekers receive permission to reside in Lithuania, and not all expectations are met; therefore the residents' disappointment adds to the general negative atmosphere. Third, the inner order of these institutions – strict rules, schedules, and imposed power relations adds another layer of negativity to the places. For the ethnographer, these institutions are "not welcoming" as it takes time to overcome distrust and build rapport with employees to gain access to the residents of the institutions. The ethnographer has to work through the negative emotions of the participant of his/her fieldwork while going through negative emotions him/herself, created by the atmosphere of the institutions while complying with the order and rules.

#### **Bionote**

Raminta is a PhD student of Ethnology at the Institute of Lithuanian Literature and Folklore. She is currently carrying out ethnographic research under the working title of "Gender in the Ethnography of Asylum: Muslim Women and their Bonding Practices." For over seven years, she has been engaged in the field of migration – first as a volunteer at various NGOs working with refugees and asylum seekers, then as an employee at the Lithuanian Red Cross organization, and now as a researcher.

## MINKA JERALA

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### **To Punish or to Censor: Incest in Slovenian Folk Songs**

Incest as a taboo par excellence has long been analyzed by various anthropologists and psychoanalysts. Nevertheless, to gain a clear picture of this phenomenon in oral literature, we must first examine the censorship that the taboo topic entailed in the portrayal of such acts. Interestingly enough, as we will see in the Slovenian case, censorship was not aimed at all incest in general but at incest that showed no repercussions for the perpetrator.

The presentation looks at the theme of incest in Slovenian folk songs, with special attention paid to their censorship. The renowned 19th-century Slovenian folklorist Karel Štrekelj erased texts containing incest from his monumental collection titled Slovenian National Songs. Štrekelj was forced into censorship by publishers who doubted that incest was, in reality, present to a high degree among common people. Some of them suspected the theme arose from a mythological background and not from real-life experience. The other thing that bothered the publishers was a lack of punishment for songs containing incest. They maintained that songs describing punishments for the horrible act could be beneficial for readers, showing them the horrible outcome of immoral deeds. In actuality, we find numerous examples of songs that portray the exact opposite outcome. The person who rejects or opposes incestuous sexual relations gets the short end of the stick. Štrekelj eventually succumbed to the pressure of publishers and removed incest from his collection. However, this decision was frowned upon by his colleagues, who accused him of being unscientific. The omission of incest from Slovenian folk songs also gave foreign researchers the false impression that, contrary to other nations, incest was never present in the Slovenian oral tradition. Incest was indeed much more common than certain folklorists would have us believe. The incestuous songs left out of the collection are also particularly violent, including murders committed out of unrequited feelings.



**Bionote**

Minka Jerala is pursuing her MA in ethnology and cultural anthropology at the University of Ljubljana. Her BA dissertation followed the migration of Panchatantra fables from India to Europe.

## ANDRIUS KANIAVA

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### **Introduction to Dark Wizards in Lithuanian Folklore: Tips on How to Recognize Them and Protect Yourself from Evil**

In Lithuanian folklore, witches and wizards (also known as *sorcerers* or *witchers*) are mythological beings that are intimately associated with everyday life. In folk tales, it is possible that the wife of your neighbor may be a witch who uses charms to corrupt the yield of your crops or the health of cows. Witches and witchers may be encountered at weddings, where they disguise themselves as musicians or guests. It is even possible to employ a witch or wizard to assist with health problems, to deal with snakes or ghosts, or to cause harm to enemies. In this presentation, I will focus on the latter category of wizards, who are believed to cause harm in a variety of contexts. In the course of my research, I analyzed folk tales about male wizards, as their functions differ from those of female witches. This presentation will focus on folk narratives that are more commonly associated with men and which involve the use of dark, harmful magic.

After the presentation, you will be able to distinguish the most common types of Lithuanian wizards and apply this knowledge to everyday situations. I will also provide insight into the main features of dark wizards and their deeds in folk tales. Furthermore, you will be instructed on some of the most effective ways to protect yourself from evil, according to folklore. Finally, the question of whether a “dark lord” equivalent exists in Lithuanian folklore will be addressed. This will be achieved by presenting tales of the “King of Witches” and the “King of Snakes”, and examining their connection with the Devil.

#### **Bionote**

Andrius Kaniava, PhD, works as a research fellow at the Institute of Lithuanian Literature and Folklore in Vilnius, Lithuania. In 2022 he defended his PhD thesis *Story-places. A Phenomenological Study of Relationship with Place*. His main research interests are theoretical approaches to mythology, religion, folk narrative, phenomenology, place lore, pre-Christian sacred sites, and post-processual archaeology.

## MIKAELA JO KRANTZ

Independent researcher, United States of America  
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### **One Foot with the Nazis, One Foot with the Nerds**

The fascination with extremist worldviews evokes sometimes fear, sometimes disgust, but very often a desire to understand. Folklorists differ in that we may actually act on that curiosity. I present an autoethnography of my research doing fieldwork for 15+ months within two online folk religious communities, interviewing, observing, and participating in the discussions and ritual practices of each. Both pull from the same pre-digital, pre-Christian, pagan and heathen historical source materials (e.g. Eddic poems, Sagas, artifacts, 13th-century law codes), yet they diverge in seemingly irreconcilable ways (and overlap in ways they would prefer to be overlooked). As I spent time in these groups, my 20+ years as a classically trained, professional actor pulled me into a torrent of affective reflections. I have practiced embodying so many types of characters (from the most beloved to the most despised), that the behavior now comes as naturally as breathing. So I could easily slip into the shoes of the first community: of self-deprecating, self-referential 'chaos gremlins' as they nerded out on video games, sci-fi films, or Pennsylvania Dutch poetic meter between community ritual nights. I could easily then slip into the shoes of the second community: of optimistic, family-focused homesteaders as they shared traditional Latvian dress and made-from-scratch lavender bread, and advocated for environmental protections before jarringly posting abhorrent racist, violent, and Nazi-sympathizing memes, bolstered by emojis of solidarity and support. What was I doing there? And how was I to balance the clinically analytical, the unbiased descriptive, and the affectively reflexive elements that academic research in the humanities instills?

#### **Bionote**

Krantz received her BFA from the University of Minnesota's Guthrie Theater Actor Training Program and has performed professionally in live theater, film, television, and voiceover for radio, Anime, and video games spanning nearly two decades. She successfully defended her MA thesis and graduated cum laude from the University of Tartu Folkloristics and Applied Heritage Studies Program in 2023. She focuses on interdisciplinary work at the intersections of Folkloristics, Ecosemiotics, Religious Studies, and Theater.

## TYMOTEUSZ KRÓL

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### **Folklore and Homophobia. Analysis of Discussions about the LGBT Free Zone Resolutions in Polish Municipalities and Regions**

In 2020 over 100 municipalities and regions of Poland adopted resolutions characterized by them as “LGBT free zones” or “LGBT-ideology free zones”. Under pressure from the European Union and Norway, which have stopped financial support for these regions, most of the homophobic resolutions have since been revoked or withdrawn by the end of 2023.

In this paper, I argue that homophobia has not disappeared in these local communities despite the revoked resolutions. I analyze the statements of the local councilors, which appeared during the discussion about these resolutions in municipalities, in small towns and villages in Southern Poland. These statements are full of homophobic linguistic fossils, topoi, and interpretive models, which are present in the local communities. One of these elements of narration, shared by many members of local communities, is the topos of gay-pedophile. The connotation of the words “pedał” (“fag”) and “pedofil” in the Polish language seem to be important for this case. I analyze the stories that some councilors told about LGBT people as memorates or fabulates, according to Carl von Sydow. They were often taken from television or other media. I will also show how the narration changed after right-wing politicians started to convince the authorities of the EU that these resolutions are not homophobic. The issue of these resolutions was discussed in many council sessions during the three years of their existence.

As an academic and a local activist, I hope that the results of my research could be helpful for understanding the homophobic worldview, and then also for changing it in small villages.

#### **Bionote**

Tymoteusz Król is an anthropologist, folklorist, and activist for the revitalization of the Wymysorys language. When the homophobic resolution was adopted in his hometown, Wilamowice, he also became an activist for the LGBT community.

## RŪTA LATINYTĖ

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### **Single Mothers as Outcasts and Rivals in Modern Stereotypes and Life Stories**

This paper will introduce the “dark side” of being a single mother in a contemporary society that still believes in stereotypes and superstitions. One example taken from real-life stories is an experience when children in the playground are not allowed to play with the kid of a newly divorced mother, out of fear that if that woman becomes a family friend, she will try to lure away the husband. Another group of stereotypes are observed in the working environment, such as the fear of an employee who will always be on sick leave, when in reality working mothers try to prove their value and often put enormous efforts to not disappoint the employer.

The paper will reveal some of such stereotypes and fears, making the lives of single mothers even more complicated. At the same time, these stereotypes tell us more about the fears and insecurities of society itself, blaming vulnerable social groups.

The paper will be based on wider research aiming to explore the experiences of single mothers in Lithuania through in-depth interviews and narratives as well as media contexts. It seeks to understand how these experiences are expressed and how personal, social, and cultural aspects impact the well-being of single motherhood families in Lithuania. This research applies methods from ethnology, semiotics, and phenomenological anthropology.

The paper will review the analysis of several interviews with various groups of single mothers, including those by choice, after divorce, widows, non-married, and single mothers in a relationship. These interviews will be analyzed using the attentive reading method.

The objectives of the research include exploring personal experiences, contextualizing single motherhood in Lithuania, investigating coping mechanisms and support systems, and analyzing the cultural factors that influence these experiences. One of the objectives is to analyze how cultural factors, including traditions, gender

roles, stereotypes, and expectations, influence the experiences of single mothers.

**Bionote**

Rūta Latinytė, PhD in ethnology, is an Assistant at Vilnius University, where she teaches courses in Creative Writing and Family Studies – the core topics to understand modern society. As a researcher, she is interested in contemporary Cultural Anthropology, everyday practices, and life stories, analyzed with an in-depth view of Greimas semiotics and phenomenological anthropology.

## ALENA LESHKEVICH, RAFAŁ MIŚTA

Independent researchers, Poland

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### **The Transformation of Folk Interpretations of Being Killed by Lightning Among Poles and Belarusians**

Based on ethnographic research, Kazimierz Moszyński noticed differences in folk connotations of lightning deaths – in the west of the Slavic region, negative sentiment dominated, and in the east, positive ones. As part of a cursory interpretation of the range of beliefs about being killed by lightning, he hypothesized that positive connotations are an older phenomenon, while negative connotations are a newer phenomenon and that the process of transformation of one into the other “is gaining ground in recent times.” In the presentation, we will show the results of a comparative analysis of 19th-century and later texts regarding folk interpretations of being killed by lightning among Poles and Belarusians, verifying the hypothesis that the transformation of positive into negative connotations has progressed particularly rapidly over the last 200 years.

#### **Bionote**

PhD Alena Leshkevich is an independent researcher, folklorist, and journalist from Belarus currently based in Poland. She is the author of the book “Tradycyjny kaliandar: narysy [Traditional calendar: essays]” (2021) and co-editor of the collection of archival and field materials “Maslenica. Abrad. Pyesni. Napyevy [Maslenica. Rite. Songs. Melodies]” (2020). Both books have been written in Belarusian.

Rafał Miśta has an MA in econometrics but is now preparing a doctoral dissertation in social geography on the statistical and cartographic analysis of Oskar Kolberg’s collection of musical folklore. His research interests focus on the use of quantitative methods in cultural anthropology. He is a proponent of the four-field approach in anthropology.

## ILIA MAGIN

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### **Wolf, Policeman, and Other Adults: Tartu Jewish Teenagers React to a Folklore Inquiry in 1930**

In 1930, all-Estonian school folklore inquiries reached the Tartu Jewish school. The model inquiry, already tested on Estonian and local Russian children, included a question: “What do adults scare children with?” This question was presented within a framework of others, which requested children’s knowledge: what rhymes and lullabies they know, and what to do when a milk tooth falls out. The answers were straightforward.

This seemingly simple question, successfully answered by Estonian and Russian children aged twelve, proved to be tricky for 18 Jewish pupils of the same age. The question, “How do parents scare children if they don’t obey?” brought ambiguity: who are “the children,” “us,” or “they”? This ambiguity was reflected in most of their answers: “When I was a kid and did not eat, my mother told me a bear would come and eat me.”

However, if it’s “they” or “us,” how should one describe the act of frightening, from the adult’s or child’s point of view? Opinions were split: “Parents come out to shout and knock on windows to frighten children and say a Gypsy is already here.”

This minimal disagreement, as expressed by self-interviewees, contrasts with other reactions which were more critical: “When a child does not sleep, one says [...] that the ‘buzlman’ will come or a lot of other terrible creatures of which children are afraid, and almost all children get scared and therefore wet themselves.”

Reactions could go even further: “Mother told me: the mother is most dear; when mother dies, you have to follow her. Will you? She still frightens me with that.”

The report compares answers from three national groups, presents scary creatures of Tartu, and concentrates on inconvenient students’ answers.

#### **Bionote**

BA “Old Believers’ subdialects of Zarasai (Lithuania) in a foreign environment”, MA “Food prohibition narratives of Old Believers in Lithuania”, current PhD “Estonian Jewish Folklore collection (ERA, Juudi 1, 2), its formation and dynamics”.



## NIDHI MATHUR

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### **Nagas: Powerful Humanoids That Lived Among Us**

Most people across India know “Nagas” as a word we use for serpent. The “Nagas” mentioned in Indian scriptures are neither completely snakes nor humans. They were completely different species that looked like humans but they could also shape-shift. They could change into whatever they want to be. *Nagas* are understood as reptilian beings that came from celestial space. The same version of such a being is found in different parts of the world, like in the Maya civilization, “Amaru” in Peru, the Great Serpent Mount in Ohio, or temples in Cambodia. This paper will focus on the process of demonization and alienation in traditional folklore of “Nagas” in the modern world by considering how the sense of fear, disgust, and other uncomfortable emotions are related to “Nagas” within modern Indian folklore.

#### **Bionote**

Nidhi Mathur is an independent research scholar with a PhD from Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. She specializes in Folklore and Human-Animal relations.

## MATHILDA MATJUS

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### **“Hunting as the Art of Silence”: Hunters as Storytellers and the Dynamics of Estonian Hunting Tales**

Folklore emerged as a discipline driven by ethnocentric ideology. At the beginning of folklore studies in the 19th century, the Estonian folklorists sought the rather beautiful and sublime in folklore, which would support the idea of high morality of the people. Nowadays, folklore studies encompass a wide range of interdisciplinary approaches including topics that have been considered taboo, such as death and violence toward animals.

Nowadays, most Estonians live in cities or in suburban areas. Subsequently, the number of people who regularly encounter animals due to their profession or lifestyle has decreased. Despite that, people still feel that the connection with nature and environmental issues are relevant. Individual experiences vary, leading to diverse understandings of animal protection and welfare. Folkloristic material, such as tales, provides an opportunity to explore this topic. Animal tales have been considered the oldest heritage of Estonian folklore and the earliest genre amongst Estonian folk tales. These tales serve as informative sources narrating the relationships between humans and animals.

One of the communities that maintain constant interaction with animals are the hunters. Hunting tales stemming from personal experience and direct observation reflect on animal behavior in various situations, their anatomy, and their habitats. What might be even more important – those tales also reflect upon hunters' changing perspectives and relationships with nature. I will analyze hunting tales collected from interviews I conducted with members of The Estonian Hunters Society in 2023 and 2024.

In recent years, due to pressure from radical animal rights activists, a common stance among hunters is that it is advisable to speak as little as possible about their activities outside of their narrow circle. This pressure has led to the point where even the most

factual writings about hunting are often followed by public criticism towards hunters and hunting.

In my presentation, I will examine the hunters' changing views on the perception of hunting in society. What was a hunter's role as a storyteller in the past and what is it today? How are certain topics transmitted within and outside the hunting community? Why has hunting become perceived as the "art of silence"?

### **Bionote**

Mathilda Matjus (b. 2002) is a bachelor's student of folkloristics at the University of Tartu and works as an assistant at the Estonian Folklore Archives of Estonian Literary Museum. She is one of the creators of Estonian Nature Folklore Anthology (Tartu 2024) and has conducted EFAs collection campaign "Encounters with wild animals" (2023).

**ABIR LAL MAZUMDER, ANWESHA MAITI**

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## **Comprehending Cultism and Folklore: The Tantrics in Bengal and The Lord of Light Cult in the Game of Thrones**

The 'Nishi'r Dak or the Call of the Night in Bengali folklore refers quite literally to a familiar voice of a near and dear one calling out to a sleeping soul in the dark. The tales around 'Nishi'r Dak' in Bengal's villages have been layered around fear of the unknown, something that mystics who practice dark art have wielded successfully. The mystics or Tantrics in Bengali know how to recall the dead and have often been portrayed using the technique of Nishi'r Dak to capture souls. Nishi'r Dak plays on the theme of life and death utilizing tropes of fear and manipulation. The Game of Thrones franchise took a dark twist when Melisandre, the Red Priestess, is introduced in the scheme of the popular HBO Series. The priestess in the first season serves at the pleasure of the eldest of the Baratheon brothers, King Stannis, who in his obsession to capture the seat of power in King's Landing would go to the extent of killing his brother Renley. This is achieved when Melisandre invokes her mystical powers of the Lord of the Light and gives birth to a shadow that murders Renley in the middle of his preparations for battle against Stannis. The Lord of the Light is a group of cultists in George R. R. Martin's Song of Ice and Fire who follow the Lord of the Light or the Red God. The group believes in resurrection from the dead and sacrifices of living people, as shown in the case of Stannis' daughter being burnt at the stake. The Tantrics of Bengali society are a cultist group who are capable of similar psychological manipulation and play a prominent role in social life. The paper will look at how cultism develops as a psychological feature of both the reel and the real community at play. Further, the paper will also study the rise and growing features of cultism through anthropological tropes of magic and witchcraft and their continuing relevance and role in modern society.

**Bionote**

Dr Abir Lal Mazumder teaches Social Anthropology to undergraduates and postgraduates in the Dept of Anthropology in Hyderabad, India. His interests include the anthropology of citizenship, diasporas, AI, and Indian society.

Anwasha Maiti is a PhD scholar in the Department of English at Bankura University. Her interest in popular literature and culture led her to work on post-humanism and dystopian literature for her doctoral research. She also has an MPhil in Translation Studies from CALTS, University of Hyderabad.

## MARGARITA MOISEJEVA

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### **Edges of the Lithuanian Folklore Archive: Records of Ethnic Minorities and Religious Communities**

The Lithuanian Folklore Archive, as the largest platform for the collection and storage of folklore in Lithuania, has collected and continues to collect endless folklore material (photos, records, manuscripts) over many years, which is intensively processed, researched, digitized, and eventually returned to the public in the form of digital databases, books, seminars, and exhibitions. Preserving, updating, and presenting old material in a new form was and remains an important function of the archive in the context of its development. To realize the full potential of the archive, you need to know what is hidden in the archive drawer. The Lithuanian Folklore Archive is known for the largest collection of Lithuanian folklore. Yet among this treasure, records of various ethnic minorities and religious communities are stored. The archive stores Polish, Belarusian, Ukrainian, Old Believer, and other records, the processing and research of which requires additional preparation and sometimes new employees. While such additional material may be called the fringes of the archive, it remains an important part of the archive that can also be updated and presented to the public. During the presentation, the author will present part of the Old Believers collection, which is unique due to the rather closed way of life of the Old Believers community until today. For this reason, these records of Old Believers are quite exceptional, as they present events where the presence of non-Old Believers is mostly “forbidden.”

#### **Bionote**

In 2020, Margarita Moisejeva defended her dissertation in humanities (ethnology) “Liturgical Orthodox Chanting in Lithuania: Tradition and Change” at the Lithuanian Academy of Music and Theater. Since 2021, she has been working at the Institute of Lithuanian Literature and Folklore, digitizing and archiving the collection of Old Believers.

## TANJUMA MAHMUD MUKTA

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### **The Perspectives of “Olokkhi (Goddess of Misfortune and Misery)” in Sayings of Khana: The Dark Side of Folklore in Bengali Culture**

This study will analyze Bengali folk belief, folk rituals, patriarchal social psychology, folk maxim, folk slangs, and linguistics about ‘Lokkhi’ vs ‘Olokkhi’ concept to frame the perspectives of “Olokkhi” from the sayings of Khana. Sayings of Khana refer to any of the numerous rhymed sayings such as “‘Olokkhi’ will soon enter the house of a woman who eats a meal she cooked before her husband” or “Eating loudly pleases ‘Olokkhi’”. Khana is a lady of ancient Bengal celebrated for her uncommon proficiency in astronomy and mathematics, and the ‘sayings’ of Khana’ have been passed down through the ages as valuable guidance for tilling soil, planting, harvesting, etc. The perspective of “Olokkhi” found in the sayings of Khana brings up a dark side of folklore in Bengali culture with regard to portraying it as an epithet for a bad woman or bad thought.

This paper is based on descriptive, bibliographical data, and contemporary theory. At the same time, the study adopts quantitative contextual analysis based on the sayings of Khana. Finally, this paper will reflect on how Bengali women are treated by the concept of ‘Olokkhi’ (Goddess of misfortune and misery). In colloquial Bengali usage, such words depicting Bengali women expose their negative image, misfortune, misery, or poverty, and reveal conventional thought and social construction of Bengali women’s image. This image is usually steeped in the sayings of Khana, which often carry negative connotations, mostly without much logic, and is very much a dark side of folklore in Bengali culture.

#### **Bionote**

Tanjuma Mahmud Mukta, Honors (BSS) & Master’s (MSS), Department of Folklore, Jatiya Kabi Kazi Nazrul Islam University, Trishal, Mymensingh, Bangladesh.

## SANJUKTA NASKAR

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### **Of Hidden Desires and Evil Intentions: A Relook at Father and Mother Figures in Popular Indian (Bengali) Folktales**

Folktales have essentially always been part of our childhood experience and consciousness. Replete with characters that are both from this world and outside, these tales have a unique ability to capture the fancy of young minds. Familiar figures within the family, of mother, father, brother, sister or friend juxtaposed with a simultaneous presence of supernatural creatures of flying horses, demons and demonesses, and landscapes that can change their character and features carry an essential believability in the stories. The natural and the unnatural together combine to generate experiences of thrill and carnivalesque without much challenge to viability for the young mind.

Almost all stories have figures of authority and dominance in the form of father, mother, elder sister or brother, and also witches and wily tricksters. The protagonist (much younger in age in comparison) is at the receiving end of their devious plans and intentions which are mostly countered with the help of a pliant and patient approach by the protagonist. Popular tales from Bengal in India are mostly around and about stories that emerge from within the construct of families or at least some kind of filial association. Two very popular collections are *Folk Tales of Bengal* by Rev Lal Behari Day and *Thakurmar Jhuli* by Dakshinaranjan Mitra Majumdar. The stories make us aware of the father and mother figures who are constantly posing difficult situations and complications for their children. The traditional concept of fathers and mothers as doers of good for their children is challenged, reversed, and rendered redundant. This projection of an evil father and conniving mother figures is completely removed from the idea of parents as caregivers and brings out a crucial and dark representation of fathers and mothers in folktales.



In my paper, I intend to raise questions of such extensive parental and filial representation defying standards of love and affection endowed to parents, and attempts to bring out a crucially different narrative and marker for accepted norms of social behavior and the reasons thereof.

**Bionote**

Sanjukta Naskar is Associate Professor in the Department of English at Janki Devi Memorial College, Delhi University. Her area of interest, among others, lies in Modernism, Shakespeare Studies, Folklore and Caste in Bengal. She has presented papers in various national and international conferences. She has also received the Charles Wallace Trust Scholarship in 2010 during the course of her PhD from Jawaharlal Nehru University.

## MAŁGORZATA NOWAK

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### **Dangerous Waters – Demonic Motifs and Folklore in Romantic Literature**

In Romantic literature, which frequently drew inspiration from folklore (in Germany or Poland, for example), creatures belonging to the dark side of existence often appear in this context (such as the *świtezianka* in Mickiewicz's ballad of the same name, which is a certain variation of E. T. A. Hoffman's *Ondine*, or outright satanic figures like Mephistopheles in Goethe's *Faust*, or the devil in Mickiewicz's *Pani Twardowska*). Literary studies have repeatedly pointed to the folkloric roots of these motifs, but usually stop at demonstrating the relevant sources and inspirations as part of broader, differently oriented interpretations. The purpose of this paper is to describe the creatures associated with the aquatic world (with particular emphasis on maritime folklore) in the context of the problem of evil and possible theodicy. The specific research questions are as follows:

- what is the relationship between folklore and biblical tradition in the context of the problem of evil;
- how does the romantic philosophy of nature affect the processing of particular demonic motifs;
- whether and how motifs taken from folklore fit into secularization processes associated with modernity.

Works such as Herman Melville's "Moby Dick" (especially sailor's superstitions, the symbolism of waters and animals, and also the crew's relationship with Fedallah), Adam Mickiewicz's aforementioned "Świtezianka" (woman, nature, seduction, and the devil), and Samuel Taylor Coleridge's "Rimes of The Ancient Mariner" (meaning of the killing of albatross) will be analyzed. The methodological background of the speech will be a compilation of the tools I use in literary studies: Odon Marquard's concept of linking theodicy to modernity, Paul Ricoeur's symbolism of evil, close reading, and comparativism (understood as practice, not theory).

**Bionote**

Małgorzata Nowak is a PhD researcher at Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań, at the Faculty of Polish and Classical Philology. Her research is focused on the problem of evil in the Romantic era, the Romantic breakthrough, comparative literature, and the history and criticism of literary translation. She is the PI of the project Theodicy Motives in Juliusz Słowacki's Works – on the Modernity of Polish Romanticism which received funding from the National Science Centre, Poland (call: PRELUDIUM 21).

## GRETA PASKOČIUMAITĖ

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### **Repression of the Partisan War Narrative during the Soviet Occupation**

The Lithuanian partisan war (1944-1953) was a large-scale resistance against Soviet occupation. Participants in the partisan war created distinctive images to justify and legitimize their struggle. Even during the years of resistance, various stories about the partisans' aims and activities circulated. Many memories persisted among the civilian population—some joyful and patriotic, others cruel and mystical. Over time, these stories evolved into folklore, which strengthened Lithuanian identity and opposition to the Soviet regime. However, these stories were kept secret during and after the resistance years. Lithuania remained occupied by the Soviet Union until 1990. Throughout the occupation, efforts were made to suppress the memory of the resistance or to alter it by demonizing the partisan war participants.

This study explores the methods used by Soviet authorities to erase the memory of the partisan war from public consciousness and to rewrite history in a way that delegitimized the resistance. The primary focus is on the memories of resistance participants and their family members. The paper also examines the impact of this repression on the collective memory and identity of the Lithuanian people, highlighting the enduring challenges in recovering and preserving the true narrative of the partisan war in post-Soviet Lithuania.

#### **Bionote**

Greta Paskočiūmaitė is a researcher with a deep focus on guerrilla warfare, particularly in the context of the Lithuanian partisan war. Her work delves into the memory and identity of individuals who have endured political repression, exploring how these experiences shape personal and collective narratives. Greta is actively involved in preserving the history of partisan resistance in Lithuania, conducting thorough research, and engaging in various educational efforts.

## INESE PINTĀNE

Charles University, Vytautas Magnus University, Czech Republic and Lithuania  
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### **Justice and Punishment in Folktales: Examining Capital Punishment and its Meanings in European Folktales**

*“While the soldier was appointed as the first minister, the water carrier was condemned to a gruesome fate. He was placed into a barrel studded from the outside to the inside with sharp nails as a flax comb. The barrel with the water carrier was let from a high mountain so that the water carrier’s body would get pierced through and through.”*

Contrary to initial impressions, this passage does not originate from a fictional horror narrative. Instead, it represents a brief excerpt from a Latvian folktale, “The Dragonslayer with Dogs,” published by Pēteris Šmits in 1926. Notably, such portrayals of capital punishment transcend the boundaries of Latvian folklore, frequently appearing within folktales across various European nations. Beyond the captivating tales of mythical creatures and enchanted forests, European folktales often hold dark reflections of our human realities. One chilling yet crucial theme that often emerges within these narratives is the one of capital punishment.

This paper undertakes a comparative analysis of examples of capital punishment found in the folktales of different European nations, with a particular focus on Baltic and Slavic folktales. This analysis delves deeper than simply examining the methods and justifications for this ultimate penalty. By exploring themes of justice, power, and social norms, this study aims to illuminate the reasons why capital punishment appeared in these folktales and how it functioned within the specific contexts of the targeted cultures. Furthermore, this analysis aims to understand whether gender and social class served as implicit biases in the narratives, potentially skewing the selection of individuals subjected to the death penalty.

Analysis of the interconnectedness of these factors yields valuable insights into the social dynamics and implicit values reflected in the folktales’ representations of capital punishment.

**Bionote**

Inese Pintāne is a PhD student of Slavic Philology at Charles University. Her PhD dissertation is devoted to the structural-functional analysis of folktales of different nations. She is also currently studying in the master's program "Modern Linguistics" at Vytautas Magnus University. In 2023, she became a member of ISFNR.

## **ZAIGA PLEIKO**

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### **Unveiling Aggression: Insights from Latvian Folk Songs on Married Life**

The representation of verbal and physical aggression in Latvian folk songs on married life provides a unique window into the complexities of traditional Latvian culture. This paper delves into the thematic exploration of spousal relationships and household dynamics as depicted in Latvian folk songs, particularly focusing on the portrayal of various types of aggression and its implications.

Central to Latvian traditional culture is the concept of “married life”, which encapsulates the period between such fundamental rites of passage as marriage and funeral and is richly reflected in folk songs. While these songs often idealize married life as a harmonious union, they also candidly depict the adversities faced within familial relationships. Dislike, irritation, and annoyance, stemming from practical and emotional challenges such as forced marriage, poverty, or alcoholism in the homestead, are intricately woven into the narratives. Economic disparities, familial disapproval, and physical hardships further compound the challenges married people encounter in their roles. Verbal and physical aggression emerges as a recurring motif within these folk songs. While it is often depicted as a necessity with a nurturing function, excessive or unjustified aggression inflicts physical and emotional wounds, causing shame and inadequacy among those involved. Through an analysis of these narratives, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of Latvian societal dynamics, familial expectations, and the lived experiences of individuals within the spousal household in the context of Latvian folk songs.

Drawing from the 13th academic edition of “Latvian Folksong”, this study examines previously unexplored textual material that predominantly portrays the adverse experiences of married life. A higher proportion of domestic hardships are depicted in folk songs due to their role as outlets for emotional expression and as components of ritualistic practices aimed at averting unfavorable

outcomes. These songs embody a traditional approach to conflict resolution, with negative experiences often kept within the family and hidden from the outside world.

The unfavorable aspects of married life in Latvian folk songs are thoroughly examined using a contextual approach and semiotic analysis. The research results indicate that the main aspects of married life are shaped by traditionally defined reasons for marriage, the characteristics of both parties involved, their interactions and contrasting attitudes, their evaluation, as well as socioeconomic status and quality of life.

### **Bionote**

Zaiga Pleiko is a project manager assistant in the Archives of Latvian Folklore at the Institute of Literature, Folklore, and Art of the University of Latvia. Currently, she is also a student at the University of Latvia, pursuing a Master's degree in Cultural and Social Anthropology after earning her Bachelor's degree in Baltic philology (specialization in Folkloristics) from the same institution. Her research interests include representations of societal dynamics in folk songs and exploring the manifestation of collective subconsciousness in oral traditions.



## NATALI PONETAJEV

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### **Fights at the Pub, Thefts, and Immoral Lifestyles. Diatonic Accordion in the 19th Century Estonian Parish Court Records**

The diatonic accordion was invented in the 1820s, and by the mid-19th century it had probably reached Estonian territories. The diatonic accordion took over the repertoire of former main dance music instruments – bagpipe and fiddle –, and quickly became the most popular instrument to accompany village parties, weddings, and daily life. It was a culturally revolutionary period, with the dance repertoire being renewed and functional harmony becoming prevalent in folk music.

This paper delves into Estonian village life in the second half of the 19th century, specifically focusing on the first decades of diatonic accordion playing. Unfortunately, there are no records of the tunes from that time. Therefore, I will focus on the context of playing the instrument and investigate it through the voices of local people. The study is based on the parish court records that are entered in the parish court records database of the National Archives of Estonia (<https://www.ra.ee/vallakohtud/>). During that time, the parish court was the primary authority that peasants could approach with legal questions.

I will give an overview of the type of material one can find about diatonic accordion in the parish court records, as well as the approaches the material offers for research. I will also discuss the contexts in which the diatonic accordion appears in the records and the role the instrument plays in criminal cases. Although the diatonic accordion quickly conquered dance floors due to its suitable characteristics, the instrument has been called “the hell’s organ” and was associated with immorality. I will examine the attitude towards diatonic accordion playing, the instrument as an object, and the social status of the owners and players of this instrument.

Moreover, the records also contain information about the cost of instruments and details of instrument construction.

This presentation introduces the parish court records as one possible source for research on folk music instruments. Through the vivid and brutal case descriptions, the local village life and interpersonal relationships open up. At the same time, the records provide a broader context in which to place the repertoire of the diatonic accordion preserved in the folklore archives.

### **Bionote**

Natali Ponetajev (b. 2000) is a master's student of folkloristics at the University of Tartu and works as an assistant at the Estonian Folklore Archives of the Estonian Literary Museum. She graduated with a bachelor's degree in musicology from the Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre and is interested in Estonian instrumental folk music, particularly the diatonic accordion and its historic repertoire in Western Estonia.

**NADIIA POPYK**

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## **Soviet “Sharovarshchyna” vs Modern Ukrainian Folk-based Songs: Struggle for Cultural Marker Change**

Taking into account the rise of Ukrainian culture during the time of independence, especially during the war since 2014, and to a greater extent over the years of the full-scale war, the report examines the transformation of its cultural markers. Ukrainian folklore presented as “*sharovarshchyna*” in Soviet period is changing into the modern high-quality performances of folklore brought about by society’s request to replace “*sharovarshchyna*” with more authentic Ukrainian forms.

*Sharovarshchyna* is a cultural term with a negative connotation, which characterizes pseudo-folkloric elements in mass culture, mainly music and stage costumes, and carries a distorted concept of traditional Ukrainian culture. Based on the image of the peasants of the 19th century, as well as the semi-mythologized collective image of the Ukrainian Cossack warrior, “*sharovarshchyna*” gained popularity during Soviet times. The concept of “*sharovarshchyna*” is associated with wide Cossack trousers - *sharovary*, which became stereotyped thanks to the works of ethnographers of the 19th century. The embodiment of the image of a Cossack in the 20th century (usually a staged one) had to be supplemented with trousers similar in cut to *sharovary* pants, but were made of bright red or blue satin fabric, which at the same time simplified and created the comic feature of this character. Along with other, no less distorted, hyperbolized or exaggerated details of appearance and behavior, the “kitsch” character of the Ukrainian peasant/Cossack was created under Russian imperial influence in order to marginalize authentic Ukrainian culture.

The same trends are clearly visible in music. Soviet club culture (cultural and educational institutions that organized the leisure of workers) deliberately planted simplified and primitive forms of collective music-making. It displaced ancient forms of developed

polyphonic traditional Ukrainian singing, and replaced the concept of “folk song,” making it unrepresentable and unpopular among new generations.

With the development of mass culture, which today is largely based on authentic Ukrainian samples, young performers are re-interpreting folk songs with a qualitatively new image of Ukraine. It is interesting to analyze how the performers are gradually moving away from the imposed “sharovarshchyna” and are looking for ways to revive ancient Ukrainian culture in an updated style. Over the past two years, it has become noticeable how the mass audience in Ukraine and beyond began to follow, take an interest in, and most importantly, evaluate the quality of these songs.

Thus, the study uses comparative and historical methods to reveal three main stages of the transition from “sharovarshchyna” to the presentation of true Ukrainian cultural markers: total social rejection of the song “Норак” by Julia Lushchinska (2023) because of the pronounced “sharovarshchyna” concept; audience’s partial recognition of a few coded motifs of “sharovarshchyna” in the song “Москаль некрасивий” [An Ugly Moskal’] by Jerry Hail (2022) based on a folk song “Ой на горі, та женці жнуть” [Oh in the Mountain, the Reapers are Reaping]; full recognition of modern re-singing of the folk song “Ой на горі” [Oh in the Mountain] by Artem Pyvovarov (2023) with no motifs of “sharovarshchyna”.

### **Bionote**

Nadiia Popyk worked in education upon receiving her MA in Philology with research in literature from the Kyiv National Linguistic University in 2018. In 2022, due to the war, she moved to Lithuania. Since 2023 Nadia has been pursuing her academic research at the Institute of Lithuanian Literature and Folklore.

## MALIKEH RASTI

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### **Soothing and Sinister: A Comparative Study of Whispers of Comfort and Threatening Echoes in Folk English and Persian Lullabies**

This paper embarks on a comparative exploration of the dichotomous themes present in folk English and Persian lullabies, unraveling the intertwined narratives of comfort and threat embedded within these traditional musical expressions. Lullabies, typically associated with nurturing and solace, often harbor undercurrents of darkness and unease, serving as conduits for cultural anxieties and cautionary tales. Through a meticulous analysis of lyrical content, thematic motifs, and cultural contexts, this study delves into the nuanced interplay between whispers of comfort and threatening echoes in the lullaby traditions of both cultures.

Drawing upon a rich array of folkloric sources and scholarly discourse, the research elucidates how English and Persian lullabies evoke feelings of security and tranquility while simultaneously weaving narratives of menace and foreboding. By juxtaposing and examining the personal themes interwoven within these musical forms—ranging from promises of presents and depictions of utopia to senses of moans, sorrows, and regrets—the study illuminates the diverse emotional landscapes that lullabies traverse.

Furthermore, the paper explores the historical, social, and cultural contexts that have shaped the evolution of lullabies in both English and Persian folklore, shedding light on the ways in which geopolitical, national, and familial dynamics influence the portrayal of comfort and threat within these musical traditions. Through this comparative lens, the study aims to deepen our understanding of how folklore reflects and responds to the complexities of human experience, offering insights into the universal themes of protection, vulnerability, and resilience that resonate across cultures.

Ultimately, this comparative analysis seeks to contribute to interdisciplinary discussions on the multifaceted nature of lullabies as cultural artifacts, highlighting their capacity to simultaneously

soothe and unsettle, comfort and caution, in the intricate tapestry of folk traditions.

**Bionote**

Malikeh Rasti, is a Ph.D. student from Iran currently pursuing her studies at Masaryk University, Brno, Czech Republic. With a great passion for literature, her research primarily revolves around Folk Literature and Comparative Literature.

## IWONA RZEPNIKOWSKA

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### **Between Social-Cultural Exclusion and Acceptance: the Case of the Widow in Folk Texts**

The presentation will explore ways of understanding the status of widowhood reconstructed on the basis of ethnographic sources and verbal folklore texts recorded in the latter 19th and early 20th centuries in regions ethnically identified as Polish. This issue has not yet received the attention it deserves from folklorists. My findings so far show that in folk culture, individuals whose marital status changed due to the death of their spouse usually generated negative associations, and at the same time, the attitude towards them was full of contradictions. On the one hand, the local community exerted some pressure on such individuals, for instance, through ritual stigmatization of their status as socially undesirable. This may stem from widows and widowers embodying the idea of oddity, which is negatively valued in traditional culture. Moreover, these individuals themselves strived to remarry as quickly as possible, which resulted from purely practical reasons related to running a farm. On the other hand, they were not attractive marriage candidates, especially for single women and men. This results from their portrayal in folklore songs and fairy tales, fortune telling, proverbs, and wedding customs, depicting them in terms of deficiency, incompleteness, wear, and even lack. This may be partly related to the folk concept of 'dola', i.e. a certain resource of vitality each person receives at birth. In the case of widows and widowers, some of this vital force has already been used in their previous marriage.

This necessarily shortened overview of issues related to the folk understanding of widowhood does not exhaust all its complexity. One of the most interesting problems is the gender aspect of the above-mentioned phenomenon, especially since it is visible in the position of folklore collectors themselves, as well as members of the traditional community.

#### **Bionote**

Her research interests include Eastern Slavic and Polish verbal folklore, connections between literature and folklore, the heroic myth of the communist era, folklore and politics, Soviet mythology, contemporary manifestations of mythical and religious thinking, and the specificity of translating folklore texts.

## AKVILĖ SADAUSKIENĖ

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### **„Pravilnaja Skazka“: A War Refugee Reflects on the Concept of Folktales**

The tense geopolitical situation in the modern world is even spreading its circles in the ethnographic study of folktales. The stories of the oldest generation in Lithuania echo the healed, but still alive, wounds of World War II. And the concept of our present-day society has been enriched by those with the status of “war refugees”.

This presentation shares the reflections of a war refugee from Ukraine on her relationship with folktales and her concept of what a “pravilnaja skazka” is. We will observe how sensitively the Ukrainian folklore performer and leader of the Ukrainian community choir opens up about the painful experiences of her own childhood when the illegitimate interest of a foreign state, which is also well known to Lithuanians - the ideological propaganda of Russification - was carried out in every possible way, even through selected children’s tales. We will find out why the presenter would never tell her child the fairy tale “Morozka” and teach him that it is wrong to strive for oneself, or, on the contrary, encourage him to believe that in life you do not have to make an effort to get what you want, it is enough to want it, to go and take it. No matter the cost.

We will reveal how a woman’s perception of a tale that has a harmful effect relates to the insights of a Russian scholar who, less than a year before the outbreak of Russia’s wide-ranging war in Ukraine, published an article on the concept of success in Russian folk tales. The author states that folktales, which reveal the worldview of the Russians, that links to history and culture are characterised by concepts of success, such as “the absence of the need for hard work, a successful marriage, material prosperity, and the possibility of demonstrating one’s own success to those who previously did not believe in it” (Komarova 2021: 207).

Is the desire to preserve one’s personal and ethnic identity a bright enough light in a dark geopolitical period in the third decade of the 21st century?



**Bionote**

Akvilė Sadauskienė is a Doctoral student at the Department of Ethnology and Anthropology, Lithuanian Institute of History since 2022. She is also an author and leader of the educational activities and programs at “Tales for Growth. Personality Development Classes,” since 2016. She has compiled and published the following books: “*The Red Apple*. A collection of Fairy Tales from Different Nations of the World and Methodological Guidelines for Working with Fairy Tales” (2022), “*The Blue Bead*. A collection of Folktales from Different Nations of the World and Methodological Guidelines for Working with Folktales” (2022, 2nd revised edition), “*Happiness*. A collection of folktales from different nations of the world and methodological guidelines for working with folktales” (2021), “*The Blue Bead*. A collection of folktales from different nations of the world and methodological guidelines for working with folktales” (2020).

## SONU SAH

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### **Bhojpuri Folklore of India: A Study of Cultural Dirt**

Dirt is not just an empirical substance that we can see, smell, and touch; dirt is an idea that shapes our perception of the world around us and how we interact with the world and the people in it. This research paper examines the concept of cultural dirt or impurity and the politics behind it, especially focusing on the Bhojpuri language and culture through an analytical study of its folklore. The significance of this folklore lies in suggesting and hinting at themes, rather than directly addressing them: women sing what they often cannot talk about. The songs offer an entry into the everyday cultures of marginalized groups of people who have rarely been the focus of systematic analytical inquiry. Sometimes these folksongs give voice to those without voice, but at the same time, they promote such concepts of cultural dirt based on caste, class, color, gender, religion, etc. in the name of cultural heritage that is passed on from one generation to another. This study will try to situate these folk songs in an interdisciplinary context of social exclusion and marginalization of people based on caste, class, gender, and culture, and will consequently explore the traumatic experiences in people's lives. Such folk songs are embedded in the everyday life and struggles of people of different classes, castes, genders, and cultures. These folk songs can be considered as performances and reflections of socially excluded people, especially women. This study is a compelling cultural analysis of folk songs sung primarily by lower-caste women in north India in the fields, at weddings, during travels, and in other settings. These folk songs are tools to explore how ideas of caste, gender, sexuality, labor, and power may be strengthened, questioned, and fine-tuned through music.

#### **Bionote**

Sonu Sah is a PhD research scholar at the Institute of Language Studies and Research at Jadavpur University, Kolkata, West Bengal, India. He completed a Masters from Banaras Hindu University in 2017, and a Masters of Philosophy in English from Sikkim University in 2023. He is presently working on Bhojpuri Folklore, specifically on Bhikhari Thakur's folk drama from the perspective of Migration, Memory, Marginalization, Resistance, Representation, etc.

## SASANKA DHAVAL SAIKIA

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### **Manifestation of Marginalization through Songs: The Tea Tribes of Assam**

Having their origins in the Indian states of Chhattisgarh, West Bengal, Bihar, Orissa, and Chota Nagpur Plateau, the Tea Tribes of Assam were recruited to work in the tea plantations by the British in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. Since their recruitment, the tea tribe community has been exploited and oppressed by the tea plantations in almost every sphere. Many resisted but without any positive outcome. Even after the end of colonial rule in India, the fate of this community did not change much as their woes continued for an indefinite time. Very often, communities adopt cultural tools such as songs, dance forms, etc. to assert their identity and position. Those also help them to express their antagonistic views against a larger section of society. The tea tribes are no exception in this regard. They express their agony, resistance, and marginalized position through various songs. This paper analyzes the folk songs as a manifestation of their marginalized position mainly in the tea plantations across Assam. This study finds that those songs represent not only the century-long exploitation but also their identity. Songs remain a powerful tool to express their antagonism and opposition to the oppression and marginalization they face.

#### **Bionote**

Sasanka Dhaval Saikia has been teaching Political Science at J.D.S.G. College, Bokakhat, Assam, India since 2006. His areas of interest are Social Movements, Indian Polity, Women's Empowerment, Folklore, etc. He authored a book titled "Indian Government and Politics" and co-edited a book titled "Extremism and Mass Violation of Human Rights in India with Special Reference to the North East." He has also co-edited a blind peer-reviewed annual journal titled "Beeksha". He has been the coordinator of two national seminars on "Biodiversity Conservation: Issues and Challenges" and "Prospects of Tourism in North East India." He has received graduate and postgraduate degrees from the University of Delhi, and is currently pursuing a PhD from the Centre for North East Studies, Mahapurusha Srimanta Shankardeva Viswavidyalaya (MSSV), Guwahati Unit.

## MILA SANTALA

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### **Influence of the Finnish National Epic Kalevala in the Private Archives of the Spiritual Seeker Elsa Heporauta**

In my doctoral thesis, I study the cultural activist and author Elsa Heporauta's (1883–1960) spiritual seeking and the formation of her personal archive through her spiritual quest. In my thesis, I combine folkloristics, archival science, and comparative religion. Heporauta has never before been studied scientifically, with the exception of my own master's thesis in 2022, even though she was an influential character in Finland in her lifetime. Despite Heporauta's influence on the culture of Finland, she is largely forgotten and her spirituality has been left in the dark. Her influence lives on in the Kalevala Women's Association that she formed in the 1930s, which promotes cultural heritage and women's status. Heporauta also formed one of the most famous Finnish jewelry brands, Kalevala Koru, which is still owned by the Kalevala Women's Association. Although she is somewhat remembered through her cultural work, not many know about her spiritual side even though it was an inseparable part of her cultural and literary life. Studying her personal archive and its formation I examine what kinds of spiritual seeking activities produced the archive's papers. Heporauta combined traditional Christianity with esoteric elements, drawing upon spiritualism, theosophy, and other spiritual movements that were popular amongst the cultural circles of the time. Following her own path, she never committed to any one movement. Spiritual seeking wasn't uncommon in her time but still frowned upon. Heporauta felt that the world wasn't yet ready for her spiritual thoughts and said she censored herself in her books. I also examine what kind of material was left out of the archive, whose decision it was, and why it was left out. Was something left out because of the spiritual and esoteric thoughts and opinions? Did Heporauta censor her personal papers herself, or did the archive or her family

cancel them? Has something been left in the dark intentionally because of her spiritual seeking?

**Bionote**

Mila Santala is a first-year doctoral researcher of folkloristics at the University of Turku. She specializes in archival science, the study of Western esotericism, and personal papers.

## **ABHIRUP SARKAR**

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### **Tradition, Academia, and the Paranormal: A Study of Experiences with the Uncanny by Members of a University in Northeast India**

Among the Khasi community of Northeast India, everyday narrations of storytelling about encounters with the paranormal in urban settings comprise parts of casual conversations. This presentation will focus on the collection and analysis of paranormal memorates as shared by the people of a University in Northeast India. I explore how different members of an educational institution situated in the Northeast Indian state of Meghalaya perceive and engage with the paranormal. I look at these memorates as shared by the interlocutors through a narration-based approach. The narratives range from paranormal encounters experienced by the interlocutors themselves to second-hand experiences they have heard within and beyond the University. Sharing such memorates fosters an increased enthusiasm towards building a transcultural bond in a multicultural environment. This work is based on data from fieldwork carried out with fifteen members of the institution over the course of three months of recorded conversations and approximately two years of unrecorded conversations and community building. Paranormal experiences are shared as a mode of entertainment, simultaneously fostering empathetic bonds which is used as a genre category to look at these memorates as a part of intersubjective supernatural experiences within an educational institution. Such memorates become a medium through which space, negotiations with cultural diversity, experiences of trauma, fear of transgression from prescribed beliefs and practices, and further, negotiations between rationality and belief by the community of an educational institution in the 21st century, are processed.

#### **Bionote**

Abhirup is currently pursuing a graduate degree in folkloristics at the North-Eastern Hill University Shillong. His primary area of research is belief narratives focusing on diabolical beliefs and memorates revolving around uncanny experiences. Prior to this he completed his graduate degree in English Literature and under-graduate degree in Computer Science and Engineering.

**SAYANI SARKAR, LEENASRI GOGOI**

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## **Unveiling the Dark Paradigms: Abuse, Cruelty, and Betrayal in Assamese and Bengali Folktales**

Folktales of any region offer a glimpse into the traditions, beliefs, and values of its people reflecting their deep connection to nature, humanity, and society. Folktales provide insight into the societal norms, ethos, and values of the culture from which they originate. In the rich tapestry of Assamese and Bengali folk tales, beneath the facade of humor and moral teachings, there is a dark strand that dives into the terrible reality of human nature. Assamese and Bengali folktales are extremely culturally significant within the communities, functioning as stores of collective wisdom, moral lessons, and cultural identity. While these folktales are acclaimed for their deep cultural significance and moral lessons, there are many stereotypes and dark sides of society that are revealed through these stories. Caste discrimination, gender inequality, and class disparities are woven into the folktales, reflecting the harsh realities that communities face. They also elicit fear and anxiety by reflecting deeply rooted cultural superstitions and beliefs in both Assamese and Bengali society.

This study delves into selected folktales from Assam and Bengal using two foundational texts: “Burhi Aair Sadhu” and “Thakurmar Jhuli: Banglar Rupkotha”. Authored by Lakshminath Bezbaruah, “Burhi Aair Sadhu” is a compilation of Assamese folktales, while “Thakurmar Jhuli: Banglar Rupkotha” is a collection of Bengali folktales compiled by Dakhinaranjan Mitra Majumdar. By analyzing some selected tales from these two texts, this paper aims to illuminate the diverse narrative styles, motifs, and themes present in the folklore of Assam and Bengal in light of the dark paradigm.

This study conducts a comprehensive analysis of the themes of abuse, cruelty, and betrayal found in Assamese and Bengali folktales, intending to unravel the complexities of these dark paradigms. It aims to understand the cultural relevance of these themes

using a multidisciplinary approach that includes cultural studies, literary analysis, and socio-historical contextualization. Through close textual analysis, this study explains how these themes are linked with cultural, historical, and socio-political settings, influencing the collective awareness of communities. This study contributes to a deeper understanding of Assamese and Bengali culture by focusing on the darker paradigms.

### **Bionote**

Sayani Sarkar is pursuing her PhD in the Department of Folklore Research at Gauhati University. She is a folklore enthusiast and is working on the subject of Folkloric motifs in choreographing Rabindranritya. She has qualified for Junior Research Fellow & Assistant Professor in UGC NET in 2021. Her area of interest is Indian Folk and classical dance and Music.

Leenasri Gogoi is a research scholar at the Department of Folklore Research, Gauhati University. She is working on the subject of memory and folklore for her Ph.D. She is a folklore enthusiast and has a keen interest in Folklore studies, History, Music studies, Memory studies, and Heritage studies. She qualified as a Junior Research Fellow & Assistant Professor in the UGC NET exam in 2020.



**DIMPI SARMA, MADHUSHREE SAUD**

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## **Who's Hiding in the Dark? A Study on the Benevolent and Malevolent Ghosts and Spirits of Assam**

Folklore is an indispensable part of society and is present in almost every part of the world. India is no exception in this regard. Assam, a state in the North Eastern part of India is home to several tribes and communities and is rich in its folklore. This place is famous for its relationship with myth, mysticism, and magic.

The Assamese folk culture is filled with a significant number of accounts and oral literature on spirits, ghosts, and supernatural powers. They can be classified according to the places where they keep lurking like aquatic, celestial, etc. These spirits and ghosts are either benevolent or malevolent in nature, not all of them are friendly or harmful. Various types of ghosts and spirits prevalent in the folklore of this state include water demons like *Baak*, *Bira* which is often portrayed as frightening and malevolent, *Ghorapak* which is mostly seen in the river banks, ponds, and swampy areas, *Jokhini* which is a witch that visits a pregnant lady to steal her child from her, and the benevolent spirit of an old man named *Burhadangoriya*. These spirits and ghosts usually protect their own territory creating fear and horror in the minds of the people who dare to venture into those areas. They represent the dark side of Assamese folk culture that has been evoking emotions of fear and disgust since time immemorial.

This study is an attempt to understand how the ghosts and spirits constitute the dark side of the culture and folklore in Assam. In order to execute the study, ghosts and spirits across all communities in Assam are divided into benevolent and malevolent groups. The study also aims to explore the relevance of the ghosts within folk culture and analyzes how they construct the 'other world' away from the real world, i.e, the darkness where they reside.

**Bionote**

Dimpi Sarma is a final year PhD scholar in the Department of Folklore Research, Gauhati University, Assam, India. She has been working on Fairytales, Ecocriticism, Ecophobia, Folktales and Folk narratives of North East India.

Madhushree Saud is a PhD scholar in the Department of Folklore Research, Gauhati University, Assam, India. She has been working on *Satras*, Neo-Vaishnavism, Folk narratives, Gender and History.

## ASTA SKUJYTĖ-RAZMIENĖ

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### **Syphilis in Lithuanian Folklore: A Story of an Unmentioned Epidemic**

Sexuality, sexual relations, and, consequently, venereal diseases – these are the topics that have hardly found their way into the context of folklore studies even during the past decades. Meanwhile, the talks of virtue and chastity that supposedly prevailed in the traditional Lithuanian community are widespread, implying that we are now living in times of moral degradation. However, as is often the case, silence towards one or another topic does not represent reality, which is quite eloquently illustrated by plenty of folk couplets (Lith. *talalinės*), various proverbs and sayings, as well as the press of the time, where articles on prostitution, abortion, and the spread of the so-called “venereal diseases” were published, painting a somewhat different picture of the late 19<sup>th</sup>– early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

In this presentation, I will focus on one of the sexually transmitted diseases – syphilis. By examining relevant publications in the press, taking a look at the statistics, as well as the public information on health and medical research, I will attempt to reveal possible reasons for the virtual absence of information on this disease in folklore texts (especially folk medicine and belief narratives), and what it tells us about the Lithuanian society at that time.

#### **Bionote**

Asta Skujytė-Razmienė, PhD, ethnologist, head of the Department of Folk Archives Department of the Institute of Lithuanian Literature and Folklore. Her research interests are Lithuanian ethnomedicine and ethnobotany, mythology, anthropology of death, contemporary Lithuanian literature, literature for children and teenagers.

## **OLGA SMOLNYTSKA**

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### **Folklore and the Mystical Basis of Fiction of the 19th and 20th Centuries and Scientific Analysis (Based on Sources from the Archives of the Cantonal and University Libraries of Lausanne, Switzerland)**

The study provides a comparative analysis of printed and handwritten sources of Ukrainian and other literature discovered in the rare archive (now closed) of the Cantonal and University Library of Lausanne (BCUL), Switzerland. A unique material has been researched. The identified books have not yet been scientifically systematized, processed, and analyzed. The editions of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries are analyzed, focusing on the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Scientific studies on the topic of Ukrainian ethnography, history, and mythology devoted to rites and demonology turned out to be unexpected finds. A comprehensive analysis of Ukrainian and other folk tales with existing “dark” plots was carried out from the literature. Scandinavian folklore is of particular interest. It was revealed that certain texts in Slavic and other literatures can only be conditionally called fairy tales and folk tales, and they have features of tale, story, lore, legend, horror, and other genres.

In comparison with folklore, the author analyzes literature created on a demonological basis with special attention to prose and an emphasis on the epic genre. The question of the national unconscious and the interweaving of mythological motifs of different peoples in the tradition of classical literature and modernism is singled out. A textual analysis comparing different editions and common plots in the folklore of different peoples reveals common motives and the basis of artistic works in the directions of symbolism, neo-romanticism, naturalism, etc.

**Bionote**

Olga Smolnytska is a Ukrainian philosopher, philologist, translator, writer, artist, as well as the author of 8 books, almost 400 scientific publications and translations. She has been a member of the Editorial Board of the edition “SlavicumPress. Laboratory of Slavic Studies” (Zurich, Switzerland) since 2023, and a member of the Ukrainian Kipling Society since 2017.

## MARTYNA ŠULSKUTĖ

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### Rewetting Peatlands in Lithuania as Post-colonial Practice

This paper examines the practices of conservationists working on the landscape of the former peat excavation sites. Peatland rewetting projects in Lithuania and around the world seek to restore drained mires. During the era of industrialization and agricultural production intensification, Lithuania became one of the most drained countries in the world (Povilaitis, 2015). Most of the intensive melioration and peat excavation in the territory of Lithuania was executed by the Soviet Union's colonial regime. In this sense, landscape transformations became not only the means of technological industrialization but also a tool of social engineering, memory politics, and colonial knowledge production. Looking at the restoration project at Baltoji Vokė peatland, this paper analyzes NGO conservationists' projects as practice on the post-colonial landscape. Drawing on the ethnographic fieldwork among nature conservationist NGO workers and other groups of society, this paper discusses past narratives about mires. The paper examines how conservationists encounter, negotiate, and navigate such narratives to shape the present-day landscapes and create future imaginaries of them. This paper argues that conservationists act upon the landscape of silenced memory and, through engagement with the water, soil, plants, species, and narratives, work the past into the future. Through such labor (Ogden, 2011), both the colonial past and transnational conservation trends are shaped into more localized socio-nature (Claus, 2020).

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**Bionote**

From 2012 to 2014, Martyna Šulskutė studied social anthropology at Vytautas Magnus University and conducted fieldwork in Germany and Portugal in communities of van and wagon dwellers, examining the concepts of the good life and well-being in counterculture communities. Since 2022, she has been a doctoral candidate at the Institute of Asian and Transcultural Studies in the joint ethnology program of Vilnius University, the Institute of Lithuanian Literature and Folklore, and the Lithuanian Academy of Music and Theater. In 2024, she had a 5-month fellowship at the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology, Department 'Anthropology of Politics and Governance'.

**LAURA SUSZTA**

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## **Whispers of the Forbidden: Navigating Denesuline First Nation Taboos through Samuel Hearne's (1745–1792) Journal**

This academic research explores the cultural taboos of the Denesuline First Nation, as documented in the journal of Samuel Hearne during his exploration of the Canadian Arctic in the late 18th century. The Denesuline people have a rich cultural heritage deeply intertwined with the vast landscapes they inhabit. Samuel Hearne's journal serves as a valuable primary source, offering unique insights into the Denesuline worldview, social structures, and the significance of taboos within their community.

Hearne's observations reveal a complex tapestry of taboos that played a pivotal role in shaping the Denesuline way of life. These taboos, ranging from hunting practices to interpersonal relationships, were not merely restrictive guidelines but integral components of the community's spiritual and social fabric. The Denesuline, like many Indigenous cultures, maintained a profound connection with the natural world, and Hearne's accounts shed light on how taboos were employed to ensure sustainable resource management and ecological harmony.

The journal highlights the intricate web of beliefs and practices that governed the Denesuline social structure. Hearne notes that certain areas were deemed sacred, and access was restricted to specific individuals during particular times of the year. This reflects a deep spiritual connection to the land and a commitment to preserving the ecological balance necessary for the community's survival.

Furthermore, Hearne's documentation delves into the interplay between taboos and interpersonal relationships within the Denesuline community. Marriage customs, familial interactions, and communal harmony were all influenced by these cultural restrictions, underscoring the integral role of taboos in shaping and preserving the unique identity of the Denesuline people.



This presentation contributes to a broader understanding of Indigenous cultures, emphasizing the importance of context and historical documentation in unraveling the intricate tapestry of traditions. By examining the Denesuline First Nation taboos through Samuel Hearne's journal, this research seeks to foster a nuanced appreciation for the symbiotic relationship between cultural practices and the natural environment, ultimately enriching our comprehension of Indigenous worldviews and the enduring legacy of these communities.

**Bionote**

Laura Suszta is currently studying in the Doctoral School of Literary Studies at Eötvös Loránd University. She finished her BA degree at Károli Gáspár University of the Reformed Church in liberal arts, with art history and religious studies specialisations in 2018. She received her MA degree in religious studies at the Károli Gáspár University of the Reformed Church in 2020.

## MICHELE TITA

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### **Fearful Searches, Sighting Experiences, and Interpretations of the Sasquatch/Bigfoot**

The Sasquatch or Bigfoot is among the most famous American cryptids, namely animals or creatures whose existence remains scientifically unproven. The most popular imagery of the Sasquatch/Bigfoot portrays it as a large primate covered in fur and leaving huge footprints. Most sightings of the creature have happened in the Pacific Northwest and Rocky Mountains areas.

Originally a creature from local Native American folklore, the name Sasquatch comes from the Chehalis language and refers to a race of tall humans inhabiting the woods. Sasquatch/Bigfoot-like creatures were not exclusive to the Chehalis. Other Native American groups told stories about wild giants and humans to white American ethnographers and reporters in the Pacific Northwest between the 19th and 20th centuries.

The Sasquatch/Bigfoot became popular in white American communities in the 1950s due to the hunting expedition for the creature in 1957 and frequent sightings in the following years. One of the most notable sightings of the cryptid is the controversial Patterson-Gimlin short film, shot in 1967, which portrays a giant and hairy primate walking in the woods of Northern California.

Other expeditions in search of the Sasquatch/Bigfoot have been conducted throughout the years, especially in forests and wild areas with scarce human presence. People taking part in these expeditions are usually expert hikers, with skills in photography and filming, due to their need to collect documentation that might prove the existence of the Sasquatch/Bigfoot. Furthermore, searchers reveal a peculiar emotional and affective engagement with the environment where they look for the Sasquatch/Bigfoot. While experiencing fear, excitement, and curiosity for their potential findings in the wild, searchers navigate through their own emotions and feelings, which have an impact on their mood and motivations during the search.

This presentation aims to investigate experiences of Sasquatch/Bigfoot searches and sightings from ethnographic conversations and second-hand writings. A peculiar focus will be given to the individual interpretations of the sightings and engagements with the environments where the Sasquatch/Bigfoot has been spotted.

**Bionote**

Michele Tita is currently a PhD student in the Department of Estonian and Comparative Folklore at the University of Tartu (Estonia). His research revolves around the folkloric figures of wild men and the image of wilderness in different areas of the world. Previously, he obtained a BA in Anthropology in his native country (Italy) and an MA in Folkloristics at the University of Tartu.

## DANILO TRBOJEVIĆ

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### **Shadows and Echoes: Navigating the Hybrid Landscapes of Serbian Rural Demonology**

Since the beginning of the 19th century in Serbia, throughout the 20th century in Yugoslavia and postsocialist Serbia today, ethnographers, folklorists, ethnologists, historians, and other researchers, especially those engaged with national heritage and demonological narratives, have been part of the dialogue concerning both local heritage and national identity. The role of folklore, depending on the discourse of the state and the ideal of the nation, has been either a constructive or oppositional social element. As the world changes, with the overlapping of local and global, “ours” and “the other’s”, or traditional and modern, facilitated by state-mediated dialogue, the world of rural communities, now at the center of the glocalization currents of the postmodern world, is also changing. In this text, through demonological motifs, phenomena, spaces, or characters as elements of demonological traditions, I highlight the changes in the local contemplation of the world of supernatural beings. However, this is not the goal but rather the basis for questioning the factors behind these changes, which I map out in the ethno-explanations of individuals who have discussed the past and present, or rather, the changes reflected on the physical and metaphysical world of rural imagination, through stories of demonological traditions. The text deviates from ethnographic assumptions which consider beliefs to be mere survivals today, while “true” forms and logics of beliefs are placed in a distant, almost mythical past. The research is based on the analysis of statements from culture bearers, in the form of memories, stories, or experiences, which are inherited not only by the oldest residents of villages but also by younger generations who reproduce or build upon traditional ideas, always within a contemporary socio-political context. The text relies on narratives about the influence of communist discourse on the oldest interlocutors and post-socialism on their descendants, as the foundation for creating new contexts of dialogue

at the community level, but also hierarchical, dominative, or even hegemonic dialogue with the state, elites, and cultural policies. The focus of this text is not on the reasons for the fading of demonological traditions, but rather on their endurance and the significance of this culturally intimate facet of village identity within the context of Serbia's progressively hybrid society today.

### **Bionote**

Danilo Trbojevic is an ethnologist and anthropologist from Belgrade, Serbia. He completed his undergraduate, master's, and doctoral studies at the Department of Ethnology and Anthropology of the Faculty of Philosophy, University of Belgrade. To date, he has published two monographs as well as numerous scientific articles both domestically and internationally. He has participated in national and scientific conferences in Croatia, Bosnia, Portugal, Germany, and Romania. His research fields primarily encompass the culture of memory, identity politics, folk culture and religion, folklore and demonological traditions, subculture, thanatology, visual anthropology, and the anthropology of virtual worlds.

## NINA ANNA TRZASKA

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### Orthodox Influences in Adam Mickiewicz's *Dziady* (*Vêlinês*)

Adam Mickiewicz is a key figure of Polish, Lithuanian, and Belorussian Romanticism and, at the same time, a poet who introduced local vampires, so-called *upior* (singular: *upiór*), to the literature of the territory of the former Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth. However, his portrayal of *upior* has changed through the times. Consequently, at least three various depictions could be distinguished in his writings during different time periods:

1. *upior* in *Dziady* (*Vêlinês*) Part II and IV are probably the closest to Belorussian folklore (1820s);
2. *upior* in *Dziady* (*Vêlinês*) Part III could be seen as motifs inspired by English literature (1830s);
3. *upior* in Parisian lectures are shown through the lens of ethnography, based mostly on the works of Ivan Vahylevych (1840s).

In my presentation, I will pay special attention to the first stage of this timeline by focusing on the depiction of *upior* created during Mickiewicz's stay in Kaunas and Vilnius, as it seems the most natural portrayal derived from observation of folk beliefs, not contaminated with academic or Western literary influences. What is important is that Mickiewicz's *upior* do not fit into any of the folk explanations of *upiorism* (vampirism) known from the literature dealing with this topic. Łukasz Kozak in his book *Upiór. Historia naturalna* wrote about the two typical ways of understanding the ontological status of *upior*:

1. the 'laic theory' considered *upiór* to be a person with two souls (or two hearts); at the time of death the first soul moves to the afterlife and the second soul gains control over the body;
2. the 'theological theory' was based upon the belief that the devil could reanimate the carcass.

During my talk, I will present the third explanation which suits *upior* in *Dziady* II&IV. It is derived from Orthodox popular beliefs – during my PhD research on modern Greek vampiric beliefs I dis-

covered that in popular Orthodoxy *upiór* is a repenting soul trapped in a corpse (similarly to the Catholic concept of souls atoning for sins in purgatory). In my paper, I would like to dwell on the topic, support my hypothesis, and show the potential reasons behind this portrayal of *upióry*.

### **Bionote**

Nina Anna Trzaska defended her PhD thesis on Modern Greek vampiric beliefs in October 2023, and currently works at Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań. She is a frequent participant of the International Dracula Congress and other vampire-related conferences. Her articles were published in journals such as 'Porównania/Comparisons' or 'Byzantion Nea Hellás'; she is also a translator of Modern and Ancient Greek literature (i.e. novel 'Murderess' of Alexandros Papadiamantis, poems of Cypriot poet Kyriakos Charalambidis and speeches of Isocrates).

## DIGNE ÜDRE

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### **A Faustian Bargain: Folk Culture for Sale**

The title of this paper is inspired by the words of Jean and John Comaroff that “the intensive marketing of ethnic identity may well involve a Faustian bargain of sorts, leading to self-parody and devaluation.”<sup>1</sup> A Faustian bargain, originating from Germanic folklore and most known from Goethe’s *Faust*, is a poetic trope used to describe the exchange of moral values for earthly gains. Faustian bargains are inherently tragic and detrimental to those concerned, as they often involve sacrificing something immensely valuable for comparatively trivial rewards. In this presentation, I use the trope of the Faustian bargain to explore the inherently ambiguous relationship between folk culture and commodification.

The theoretical part of the presentation will delve into the question of the commodification of traditional culture and folklore as it has been dealt with in the history of folkloristics. The commodification of traditional practices, on the one hand, has a generative and empowering potential. On the other hand, the concerns about the trivialization of traditions, devaluation of folk practices, and cultural objects turned into kitsch resulting in mockery are justified.

To illustrate these concerns on the ground, I will introduce a case study of an intensively commodified example of visual ethnicity for sale – the contemporary use of Latvian folk ornament. Although the commodification of folk ornament is something that quite expressly characterizes ornament practice in contemporary Latvia, at the same time, it coincides with the global tendencies of ethnic visuality selling well. Rhetorics of tradition and inspiration from traditional culture are often a part of marketing strategies. Traditional culture-inspired design objects and other goods with folk ornament are marketed as having an added value due to their roots in traditional folk culture. The commodification undoubtedly contributes both to the visibility and attraction of these tradition-inspired products but it also has led to humorous and mocking responses in public discussions on the quality, price, and content of marketing narratives of ornament goods.



**Reference**

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**Bionote**

Digne Üdre is a PhD candidate at the University of Tartu, Department of Estonian and Comparative Folklore. The topic of her dissertation is folk ornament in Latvia in the context of tradition, its mythological interpretation, and layers of historical meanings and contestations connected to it. Besides PhD studies, she is a researcher at the Institute of Literature, Folklore, and Art at the University of Latvia.

**LIVETA ŪSELĖ**

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## **Swedish and Lithuanian People's Attitudes Toward Non-traditional Gender Expressions in Swedish and Lithuanian Literary Fairytales**

A fairytale (folktale) is the result of fantasy that reflects the collective wisdom passed down through generations. It serves as a tool to ponder and gain insights into the different situations of life. Judith Butler (2004) in her book "Undoing Gender" says: "Fantasy is not the opposite of reality; it is what reality forecloses, and, as a result, it defines the limits of reality, constituting it as its constitutive outside. The critical promise of fantasy, when and where it exists, is to challenge the contingent limits of what will and will not be called reality. Fantasy is what allows us to imagine ourselves and others otherwise; it establishes the possible in excess of the real; it points elsewhere, and when it is embodied, it brings the elsewhere home" (Butler, 2004). Despite the differences in genre (animal, realistic tales, tales of magic, etc.) fairytales imprint upon our consciousness common situations and their optimal resolutions drawn from the collective wisdom of past generations. These solutions repeat the same things in similar and completely different ways and make it possible to compare them with real life (Kerbelytė, 2011). Literary folktales reflect the actualities of reality even more appropriately. They are created by one author, based on motifs and plots of folklore and myths, but the characters exist in the real world and time (VLE, 2023). Literary tales are often aimed at children and cover different topics depending on the culture. For instance, in Lithuania ten years ago, there was controversy over a book by Neringa Macatė, which featured two princes embracing and expressing love for each other. The distribution of the book was initially banned. At the same time, in Sweden, numerous children's books discussing homosexuality, bisexuality, and transgender issues were already in circulation. This work will represent how Swedish and Lithuanian people react to non-traditional gender expressions in Swedish and Lithuanian literary fairytales. There

will be an analysis of several newly written (2013–2023) fairytales and discussions about them in the news and social media. The main purpose of this work is to show how contemporary authors use the fairytale genre and what kind of non-traditional gender features (in relation not only to sexuality but also gender roles or attributes, e.g. boy who has polished his nails) they choose to express, and to analyze how people react to these non-traditional gender expressions in Sweden and Lithuania.

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2. Kerbelytė, B. 2011, *Lietuvių tautosakos kūrybinių prasmės*, Vytauto Didžiojo universitetas.

### **Bionote**

Liveta Ūselė is a PhD student in Ethnology at Vytautas Magnus University. She is also a lecturer in Regional studies and a translator. Her research interests include Scandinavian and Lithuanian cultures, gender studies, literature, and folklore.

## ŠARŪNĖ VALOTKIENĖ

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### **One Foot in the Coffin – Maternal and Neonatal Deaths in 3rd-17th Century Lithuania**

Pregnancy and childbirth are significant moments in a woman's life. Today, much information reaches us about these life events –doctors dole out various pieces of advice, mothers share their experiences, and often, the media discusses special cases. But is it possible to discover what these experiences were like in prehistoric times and beyond? Which material evidence can tell the stories of these women? Does archaeological evidence provide any insight into this? This presentation employs an interdisciplinary research approach to examine data from 10 graves spanning the 3rd to the 17th centuries, where pregnant women and mothers with newborn babies may have been interred. While the limited dataset prevents firm conclusions, cautious assumptions can be drawn. For instance, the age of the buried women, correlating with their childbearing period, and the spatial arrangement of deceased newborns in relation to the woman's body – notably, the babies were found in the head-shoulder area. The report also raises the question of why so few such cases have been discovered—is this a reflection of specific burial rituals or rather of archaeological research methodology? Historical sources complement and enhance the overall understanding. While there is an abundance of visual evidence depicting the challenges faced by noblewomen from the 16th to the 18th century, there is less data on the simultaneous situation of peasant women. Ethnographic customs and folklore from the 19th and 20th centuries contribute to illuminating this aspect of the narrative. Of particular value are the beliefs and superstitions, encompassing various prohibitions for pregnant women and mothers.

#### **Bionote**

Šarūnė Valotkienė, PhD, defended her thesis “Burials in Samogitia in the 1st to 16th centuries: the custom of placing graves goods” in 2019. She currently works at the Lithuanian National Museum.

## MARTYNAS VINGRYS

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### Obscene Motifs in Tales of the Stupid Devil: Castration of the Devil

Tales of the Foolish Devil is a genre of folklore that comically interprets the natural and ordinary actions of humans, which the devil is unable to understand and repeat. Most frequently, in such tales, a clever man or a clever woman deceives a devil and thus escapes death or the transfer of her soul to the devil. Erotic, vulgar, and sometimes overtly obscene motifs are very common in such stories. What unites these motifs is that the devil is depicted as completely clueless about human sexuality. For example, when the devil sees people having sex, he thinks that it is drilling a hole into which he had been locked and imprisoned for years. When he sees a naked woman on all fours walking backward, he is amazed at the creature he has never seen before: two large jaws on the face, a neck behind, the longest beard at the crotch, and, when the beard is lifted, teeth. When the devil sees a male genital organ, he is frightened, thinking it is a stick that has been hammered into a hole in the wall. Interestingly, the devil, although he is depicted as having genitals, is ignorant of them and is happy to be castrated, believing that this will make him much stronger.

The presentation mostly will focus on tales that refer to the castration of the devil. It will analyze the plots of the tales about the castrated devil and the methods of castration, delve into other obscene details, and try to identify the origin of the devil images in these stories.

#### **Bionote**

Martynas Vingrys is a PhD student at the Institute of Lithuanian Literature and Folklore. His research focuses on vulgar and obscene narrative folklore, as well as sex education as reflected in folklore. In 2024, he produced a book of aetiological tales, 'Adam Misses Eve' (*Adomas pasiilgo levos*), which presents interpretations of the origins of sexuality.

## ULKAR YUSIFOVA

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### **Azerbaijani Tales in the Context of Mythic-sacred Space**

This paper uses the comparative method and the concept of chronotope to talk about mythical sacred places in Azerbaijani tales. In fairy tales, the mythical place usually refers to places such as caves, under the sea, under the earth, sky, and cemeteries. A cemetery is a mythical place in most fairy tales where the hero meets the source of a power given to him, or falls asleep on a grave.

Sleep itself is a mythical place, too. Dreaming was a phenomenon that people could not explain in ancient times. Although sleep is called the second death for warriors, dreams are an important moment when heroes of fairy tales receive special powers or information such as the location of their lover, or the place where their future spouse lives.

The cave is one of the most memorable mythical places in fairy tales. Although a large number of wild animals live there, dervishes, sacred persons, and prophets usually chose such lairs as their sacred place. In Azerbaijani folklore, the cave was a place of worship for Sufi dervishes. At present, there are many cave-type sacred places where people believe in the mystical power of those places.

The underworld is usually depicted in fairy tales as a place where evil forces reside. In the mythology of most people, the devil and other dark forces live underground. Underwater mythology recalls a place where unusual creatures live, including figures like mermaids and water mothers. In one of the tales, the prophet Khizir lives underwater on a fish. He is immortal, and water symbolizes immortality.

#### **Bionote**

Ulkar Yusifova is a lecturer at the Department of Azerbaijani Literature of Baku Slavic University. She teaches several periods of Azerbaijani Literature. She is a PhD student at Folklore Institute of Azerbaijani National Academy of Sciences. Her articles represented Azerbaijani Literature in several conferences in Türkiye, Georgia, Russia, Ukraine, Kazakhstan, and the UK.

## KATERYNA ZHUK

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### **Musical and Poetic Composition of Tragic Songs and Ballads (South-eastern Slobozhanshchyna)**

Ukrainian non-ceremonial song folklore is a broad, vivid, and extensive phenomenon. The vibrant life of the people found its expression not only in everyday life but also in creativity - in song narratives. The latter depict love stories, the beauty of youth, flirting of young people, or homesickness, and simple, everyday life stories. The highly artistic imagery of the lyrics is also reflected in the widespread song themes of violence, murder, and death.

For instance, the song type “Vasyl sino kose”, which is widely spread throughout Ukraine, according to L. Yefremova, tells about a girl who brings a newborn baby to a boy with the intention of throwing it under his scythe or drowning it in a river. This comes as no surprise to an ethnomusicologist or a person who is well acquainted with folklore texts. A similar subject is also common in Slobozhanshchyna, but with the lyrics “Oi, ty koval, koval kovalenko,” although this territory is rich in other songs of family and domestic themes, as well as ballads with more terrifying and “bloody” themes which highlight instances of “irreversible action”. Eight samples from five villages in the south-east of Slobozhanshchyna demonstrate descriptions of the horrific details of murder, violence, and infanticide.

The oldest ballads with the structure of 2-line stanza AB can be attributed to the following song plots: “Ta, oi tam na hory” from Geniivka village of Zmiiv district, “Oh, gore zhyty lebedyku samomu” from Morozivka village of Balakliia district, “Shcho, i uchora za nedilka bula” from Sheludkivka village of Zmiiv district, and three ballads from Lyman village of Zmiiv district: “Oi, bula u Nasti, ta i neridnaia maty”, “Oi, yakby to ridnaya maty”, “Na clodochzi nogy myla”.

There are also two song samples of the 3-line ABB form, with a verse repetition of the 2nd line of the stanza from Kutkivka, Dvorichansky district: “Tyha, tyha nadvori pogoda”, “Oi, sorvu,

sorvu, ia ta i z rozy tsvitochok". The 2-line and 3-line structure of the form with concatenation testifies to the antiquity of these song melodies. The choice of themes and their permanence in the above-mentioned old song forms probably indicates that such "criminal" details of Ukrainian life were familiar to the population even 300-400 years later.

However, the structure of the form of these ballad songs is a secondary feature. The main features of this genre in the geographical context of southeastern Slobozhanshchyna include the following: the repetition of musical lines, stable "darkened" harmonic coloring, the absence of a wide range, and in general a small range of voices, moves in fourth intervals, and a stable, gradual movement of the melody, as well as a certain restraint of the musical text.

### **Bionote**

Kateryna Zhuk is a 2nd year postgraduate student at the Department of Music Theory and History of the KhSAC.









## Notes

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# Notes

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