

Discursive Shifts in Legends from Demonization to Fictionalization

Introduction: Legends in Context

The relationship between vernacular genres and their discursive, social, and historical context is one of the major problems of folkloristic scholarship. In order to understand generic expressivity we need to look into its communicative uses and surroundings, whereas it is often difficult to identify genres, differentiate between them, and delineate the boundaries that would set them apart from the rest of discourse. Some verbal genres can easily be distinguished from the flow of communication, as stylistic or performative features mark them off, but there is also a range of verbal genres that are “not rendered as performances” (Bauman 26). Legend as a distinct communicative genre often remains indiscernible, because it is “not set apart from the flow of conversation through the use of distancing formulas” (Tangherlini 8). With its long history of research several definitions of legend exist, starting from the Grimm brothers who drew attention to their historicity, that is, their connection with their temporal and geographical environment (Gunnell 13).¹ Leander Petzoldt in his comprehensive monograph about legend research fused the results of earlier scholarship when he summarized the essential

features of the genre, describing it as a mimetic narrative form that generates an impression that the narrated event has really taken place and tries to verify this event by providing temporal, spatial, and personal data (Petzoldt 58). Remarkably, most of the existing characterizations of legend point out that claims about the veracity of the reported extraordinary event are the distinctive feature of the genre. Secondly, some definitions note the rhetoric devices employed in these narratives are to ensure believability and draw attention to the peculiar embedding of the genre in sociohistorical, natural, and psychological contexts. Definitions indicate that credibility as a potential quality of all legends is achieved through the blending of the narrative plot with a surrounding reality that is familiar to the storyteller and the audience.

The goal of this article is neither to contest nor to elaborate on the existing definitions. My intention is to discuss what happens to legends when they are shifted to new discursive contexts and media, such as books in print. These shifts can enhance or undermine their credibility and affect their rhetorical power and status among other forms of expression. As noted, legends can hardly be isolated from their context; moreover, as they circulate in communication, they are surrounded and permeated by large-scale discursive currents—ideologies and doctrines that often originate among the intellectual and social elite, spread gradually, become dominant, and folklorize. Legends are not satiated by their narrative contents but express views and ideas that proceed from these powerful discourses that encompass and affect the whole society.²

In order to distinguish legends from their concomitant context, I talk about genres and discourses in this article. According to Bakhtinian thought, genre is an artistic totality with its own methods and means of seeing and conceptualizing reality (Bakhtin and Medvedev 129–35). Genres cannot be considered as sealed containers, as the very thought of a genre implies comparison of a text or performance with some antecedent cases of textual production, thus causing the need for intertextual approaches (which also proceed from the works of Bakhtin). The article discusses interrelationships between legends and other genres, and the connections between oral traditions and other media that shape the very character of folklore (see Shuman and Hasan-Rokem 56). This broader discursive context of folklore genres can be of a different kind, but here I focus on mainstream verbal currents—discourses that manifest anonymous, collective, and authoritarian views supported by powerful institutions, such as those of religion, education, science, politics, and public media channels.³ These consistent and systematic statements

and perspectives penetrate many genres ranging from literary to oral and from official to vernacular forms. Legends often express alternative views to the public truths, although they are encompassed by these dominant discourses, which at times empower them, focus interest, and make them public, while at other times these mainstream textual currents float legends away to the social backwaters, to the private space of communication.

Although in folklore collections and in printed sources legends appear as short and seemingly simple texts, they are always accompanied by their hidden context and affected by the discursive environment, which actually makes legends bigger than their scanty textualized forms. Many discursive influxes in legends remain ephemeral and occasional. Thus medical discourse on neurological disorders or parapsychological discussions on telepathy can affect the vernacular interpretations of supernatural experiences, fashion can have an effect on the reported clothing of supernatural entities, and legislative reforms can change the norms that are negotiated in legends. Any single story that is told can be affected by a variety of contextual factors. However, some developments in legends occur due to long-lasting historical processes that lead to major and pervasive discursive shifts. This article examines some such cases using the example of legends that have been documented in Estonia.

Demonization

The majority of Estonian legends were recorded at the end of nineteenth century and during the first decades of the twentieth century, in the period before World War II. Estonian society at that time was strongly influenced by Protestant Christianity and to a lesser extent by the Orthodox Church. Many legends do not include any explicit Christian elements; however, they spread among a people whose lives were ordered according to the ecclesiastic traditions and whose worldview was formed under the hegemony of Christian doctrine. Hence, there is an implicit dialogue with Christianity even in those legends that seem to contradict it—like those that reflect the worship of holy sites in nature or stories about the restless dead (*kodukäija*) harassing the living. Beliefs that are alternative to the clerical traditions include survivals of Catholic faith and other expressions of vernacular Christianity, such as mythic stories about fallen angels who turn into nature spirits, as has been told in many countries in the Christianized world. Within the context of legendary forms,

these stories about nature spirits are unusual due to their overarching powerful ability to make general statements about those supernatural entities that are bound to the earth, providing the overall framework for their relationships with humans. These stories claim that demonic creatures animate nature and hence contact with them needs precaution. Textually, these beliefs connect vernacular orality and the Bible as the key text of Protestant religion. All three examples below about the war in heaven and fallen angels are intertexts to some passages in the New Testament:

When the world was created, the Devil (*kurat*) was one of the holy angels, but in the course of time he gradually backed away from God. He resisted God and finally became very villainous. Then God cast him down from heaven. One part of him fell into water and turned into the water spirit (*näkk*), the other part fell on the ground and turned into the Devil as he now exists. H II 38, 606 (41) Väike-Maarja parish —M. Kampmann (1891)⁴

Fairy (*alijas*)

Wait a minute; I know something about fairies. There was an old man who said that the old flying serpent had earlier been in the heavens. Archangel Michael (*Mihkel*) cut this flying serpent into three parts. These parts fell down from the sky. The part that fell on solid land turned into underground beings (*maa-alune*), the part that fell into water turned into the water spirit (*näkk*), the part that fell into the big forest turned into the forest fairy (*metsalijas*). [...] About eighty years have passed since the old man told me this. Then I was a small boy. ERA II 24, 141/3 (16) Türi parish —R. Viidebaum (1930)

The downfall of angels

When Miikael (one of the archangels) revolted against God in heaven, God cast him down together with his followers. Then there was a great downfall (*sadu*) of angels, which lasted for three days. The angels who dropped onto the ground mostly fell into the earth. The one who fell on his stomach cannot do harm, but the one who fell on his back keeps breathing and one can get a rash (*ohatus*) from this place. ERA II 13, 410 (34) Simuna parish —R. Viidebaum (1929)

Whereas the Revelation (12:7) in the New Testament explicitly refers to St. Michael and his angels on the side of God fighting against the flying serpent (dragon) and his angels, one can find many records in the Estonian Folklore Archives in which

St. Michael himself has been demonized as God's archenemy—an example of vernacular Christian beliefs, which contradict the holy scripture and church doctrines. The etiological part of the story that explains nature spirits as fallen angels is significant as it links the mythical past with everyday reality and warns people about the supernatural dangers in wild nature. Forest spirits who have been interpreted as fallen angels have often been diabolized in Estonian folklore—in particular as misleaders in wilderness:

If you go astray in the forest, this means that you are troubled by the Old Devil (*vanakurat*). When you turn your cap or scarf around, you would immediately find the right path. However, people did not want to do this, because the Devil would rejoice a lot about it. You should not make him happy, but rather call the name of God for help. This would help you to escape being lost. ERA II 293, 355/6 (4) Rapla parish —E. Poom (1941)

Yes, the forest fairies (*metsalijad*), they lead you astray in the forest. When I came here, it happened several times that I could not find my way on my own pasture. It deludes you in such a way that you cannot make it out. But they [people] used to say that then you should read the Lord's Prayer. ERA II 25, 279 (1) Vändra parish —R. Viidebaum (1930)

In the world, which is polarized between heavenly powers and the powers of evil, the Lord's Prayer becomes a universal charm in real life, and it also appears in many belief statements and legends as a means of defense against Evil (see Pihelgas). In addition, the sign of the cross, naming Jesus, and other references to God have the power to ward off the Devil.⁵ One can find numerous belief statements in the folklore archives, like those above, that do not present structured narratives and thus deviate from the usual definitions of legend. However, in oral communication such informal expressions of belief have the strong potential to be developed into dramatic stories involving real witnesses, or of being acted out as practical guidelines of ritual behavior in the wilderness.

It often remains ambiguous in legends how to interpret the supernatural encounters:

This happened in Kose during summer. It was sunrise when two men passed Kose church. They witnessed how eighteen people, who had been dead for some

time, entered the church in a procession. The men went to the pastor to report it. The pastor said: "I don't know whether you are so blessed or so sinful that such a thing has been revealed to you." ERA II 25, 93 (14) Järva-Madise parish —R. Viidebaum (1930)

In vernacular Christianity the church can become a place of divine experience and revelation, but also a place of demonic encounter. The event described above is not finalized through an interpretation that would identify it either as a divine or diabolic vision—based on the mental and moral state of the witnesses. It is meaningful that the local clergyman appears as the authority who has competence to interpret supernatural encounters, and, as expected, his framework of interpretation relies on clerical doctrines. Thus the text reveals that pastors were active participants in the historical process of Christianizing legends.

Let us examine two more texts that are framed by the context of Christian religion and express a worldview polarized between good and evil. The first of them presents a classical image of an evil landlord, who tended to be demonized in Estonian folklore both in life and death:

Revenant (*kodukäija*)

Once upon a time there was a very evil landlord who died and started to haunt his home from the first night. He was laid in a vaulted cellar behind several iron doors but it did not help, he kept coming home. He was taken with his coffin to the church and laid in front of the altar in the hope that this would help. It did not.

There was a brave bell ringer who asked the widow: "If I may, I shall go to the church to see what he would do when he gets out of the coffin?"

"Fine, you go," said the mistress. "Maybe you could do something to prevent him from coming home."

The bell ringer went to the church in the evening and stayed on the choir. The moon shone through the window, it was as light in the church as if it had been midday. Around midnight the lid of the coffin suddenly opened and the landlord went away, only the shrouds were left behind. The bell ringer moved quickly and took the shrouds. He wanted to see what the deceased would do if he came back and needed the shrouds. After a long time the landlord came back and started to look for the shrouds. When he walked toward the choir from the altar he grew taller and taller until he looked over the choir right at the man. The bell ringer was usually a brave man, but now he got frightened and he shouted spontaneously:

“God Father, dear Son!” (*Jumal Issa Pojake*), and threw the shroud down over the edge of the choir. Within a moment the landlord became smaller and took the same size as he had been when still alive; he took the shroud and went to the coffin.

After that the landlord stopped haunting his home. The mistress gave a lot of money to the bell ringer for the good service of stopping the revenant from torturing, bothering, and frightening her. H II 25, 1038/9 (4) Paistu parish —J. Leppik (1889)

Kaarina Koski has studied Finnish legends about church buildings as a setting for terrifying events and expressions of the otherness of the church in relation to the everyday life world (*Kuoleman voimat*). She has shown that the power (*väki*) of the church was strengthened by its integral relationship with the dead as well as by the strong normative pressure exercised by the Lutheran church authorities (Koski, “The Sacred and the Supernatural”). Estonian folklore is also rich in similar frightening stories about the night services of the dead in churches, diabolized landlords as the restless dead, tests of bravery at night when someone makes a bet to bring a candlestick or a shroud from the church—a test that often turns out to have fatal consequences. In the legend above, the dead landlord’s relationship with the Devil remains implicit. The Devil is not mentioned, but as the landlord is a favorite form of the Devil in Estonian folklore, and as the protective formula has an explicit Christian coloring, a diabolical rendering of the text seems plausible. Whereas the text above acknowledges boldness as a virtue, the legend below condemns audacity. It also presents the Christian stereotype about a sorcerer as a practitioner of black magic:

Once there was a rather clever hunter who always shot many birds. However, in the course of time there were fewer and fewer birds, so that he had nothing to shoot. He went to a wizard (*tark*) and complained to him. The wizard gave him the following advice: “When you go to the Eucharist, take the consecrated bread out of your mouth and put it into your pocket. Take it to the forest and put it into a tree. Then close your eyes and shoot it with your gun but don’t look at it.” The hunter considered this a great sin and a crime, but he had such a great desire that he finally followed the wizard’s advice. He took the blessed bread, brought it into forest, put it in a tree, closed his eyes, and wanted to shoot. However, in spite of the verdict of the wizard, he looked at it and saw Jesus on the crucifix, hanging in the tree. The man was so scared that he fell down and became badly ill, so that he could not even get home. On the next day he was found in the forest and

was carried home, where he was seriously ill for several weeks. When he finally recovered, an even bigger desire burned in him so that he could not abstain from committing the crime. In the end he followed the wizard's advice. Now the hunter had as many birds to shoot as he ever wanted. Thus, three years passed, and he happened to come to the place where he had shot the blessed bread. This tree had become withered. When he stood there, looking around, he saw the Old Nick (*vanapagan*) appearing from under the roots of the tree. He came to the man and said: "Come now, your time is up. You have received what you were looking for." With these words the Old Nick took the man alive to hell. E 17496/7 (4) Pärnu-Jaagupi parish, Vee —M. Aija (1895)

In the Estonian Folklore Archives there are many versions of this international legend about black magic, which has been widely spread within the context of Christianity. The late medieval demonological treatise *Malleus maleficarum* (1487) of Heinrich Krämer and Jakob Sprenger addresses this kind of male witchcraft, practiced by archers: "on the Sacred Day of the Passion of Our Lord, that is to say, on Good Friday, as it is called, during the solemnization of the Mass of the Presanctified they shoot with arrows, as at a target, at the most sacred image of the Crucifix" (150). Through this apostasy and by offering "homage of body and soul to the devil" they gain the ability "to shoot an arrow with such precision as to shoot a penny from a person's head without hurting his head, and they can continue to do this indefinitely" (ibid.). As typical legends of vernacular Christianity, these stories carry a strong didactic message—just as disciplining the members of congregations and preaching morals have been distinctive features of Protestant sermons. Related narrative motifs about the demonized supernatural appear in many documents of the period when Protestant Christianity gained ground. Thus legends about diabolic feasts where people gather in the wilderness to have parties with the Devil appear in witch trial documents from Estonian courts (Valk, "Reflections"). One of the early extensive documentations of the Estonian language is the set of thirty-nine sermons, delivered by pastor Georg Müller (ca. 1570–1608) in the Holy Ghost Church in Tallinn between 1600 and 1607. How to be saved from the power of the Devil (*Kurrat, Kochnrett*) is a recurrent topic in these sermons. Müller also warns his congregations against witchcraft:

We have to accept the highest wisdom of God, who punishes us with war, feuding, famine, or some other misery, without any complaints and not run to conjurers

(*Laußia*) or the devilish art of witchcraft and ask for their help in order to escape these maladies. My dear folk, if you are looking for help and advice from conjurers, which is indeed a terrible thing in the eyes of our dear heavenly father, you annoy God a lot and God doesn't want to leave it unchastised. (Müller 272–73)

Such sermons created the field of tension and anxiety about the realm of the supernatural and contributed to the discourse of demonization. From the perspective of Protestant Church witchcraft, bringing offerings to sacred stones or groves, worship of nature spirits, of ancestors, of saints, and other elements of vernacular Catholicism all became interpreted as superstition (German *Aberglaube*, Estonian *ebausk*). This category became a pervasive element of Christian discourse and a perspective that penetrated the supernatural world of legends (Valk, “Superstition”). Old beliefs were demonized but kept in circulation and maintained their credibility without transforming into the fantasy world of fiction that we find in tales of magic (*Märchen*). The empirical realm of the supernatural did not fade away but was animated and activated in its dreadful and demonic forms as *mysterium tremendum*—something “which is hidden and esoteric, that which is beyond conception or understanding, extraordinary and unfamiliar” (Otto 13). The Enlightenment and rising rationalism contributed toward legends being considered superstitions and introduced a novel perspective diminishing their value as factual reports about supernatural encounters. Instead of telling stories about one's own experiences, it became common to attribute legends and the related beliefs to others—the superstitious populace of the past or backward folks of a neighboring village.

If we compare the Christianized legends with these international migratory legends, which most probably continue pre-Christian traditions, we can note remarkable differences. Many migratory legends described by Reidar Christiansen (1958), such as “Fairies send a message” (ML 6070), “Midwife to the fairies” (ML 5070), “The river claiming its due: The hour has come but not the man” (ML 4050), and others, present dramatic plots without teaching lessons of Christian morality, although they sometimes carry the warning message of remaining cautious in any contacts with the supernatural. The Christianization of legends brought about some ambivalent developments in their contents and pragmatics. By the second half of the nineteenth century the Devil (*kurat*) had occupied the central position in Estonian folk religion, and the vernacular know-how of dealing with supernatural powers mainly relied on Christian means of defense. Demonization as a discursive shift in legendry did not cause the decline of the genre, but rather, intensified its

social impact through the growing role of didactics. Thus legends became a tool of upholding Christian values and morals. Laura Stark has noted that the Christianization of nature spirits in Orthodox Karelia brought them close to humans due to their shared ethics (Stark 97). This can also be observed in Protestant Estonia, and thus the demonization of nature spirits in legends was far from absolute. In any case, these entities had to be taken seriously, and they were not diminished to fictional characters—a tendency that we can observe in the next major discursive shift, which we discuss below.

Fictionalization

Johann Gottfried von Herder (1744–1803) historicized oral traditions, considering them carriers of memory, when he wrote about ancient peoples: “Their songs are the archives of their people, the treasury of their science and religion, their theogony and cosmogony, the deeds of their fathers and the events of their history” (229). Considering folklore as heritage is necessary in order to start collecting it for the sake of building up literary monuments of the past. Herder saw great potential in textualized oral traditions—“it offered a ready-made literature to peoples that lacked it” (Ó Giolláin 76). In the introduction to the collection *Volkslieder* (1778–79) Herder regarded folklore as a resource for artistic creativity, as he encouraged young poets to look for inspiration in folk songs, tales, and legends of the common people (Koepke 222). Boundaries between individual authorship and oral traditions became blurred in several literary works of the same period, such as “Fragments of Ancient Poetry Collected in the Highlands of Scotland” (1760) and the epic poem *Fingal* (1762) by James Macpherson (1736–1796), who attributed these works to an ancient bard, Ossian. According to Donald Meek a by-product of “Ossianism” was romantic supernaturalism in a non-Christian form (Meek 39), which appeared in many mystifications that blended folklore with literary elaborations. When Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm published their “Children’s and Household Tales” (1812) and the “German Legends” (1816, 1818) and Jacob Grimm published his “Teutonic Mythology” (1835), the canonical set of principal folk narrative genres was established, consisting of folktales, legends, and myths (Bascom). The Grimm brothers contributed greatly to the construction of a “contrived, stylistically pure, well composed and refined folk tale which we come across [in] the printed collections” (Palmenfelt 16). Thus one of the basic narrative genres of European tradition has its roots in the Romantic period

of literary mystifications, in the complex relationship between often-fragmentary oral traditions and authorship as a synthesizing force in constructing neat and coherent narratives.

As German was the language of high culture and education in Estonia, these new literary developments soon reached the intellectual circles of the country. In 1839 Friedrich Robert Faehlmann (1798–1850) delivered a long speech at the meeting of the Learned Estonian Society in Tartu, where he devised the plot of the future Estonian epic *Kalevipoeg*. In his artistically composed presentation Faehlmann appears as a storyteller who reports another case of storytelling among Estonian peasants during a night in June when an old man with a snow-white beard addressed his young audience at a bonfire, telling them a “cycle of legends” (*Sagencyclus*) about Kalevipoeg, the main Estonian hero (Faehlmann 55). The elaborate depiction of this imaginary scene, at which the author claims to have been present, helps to veil the gap between orality and the literary world of fiction. Faehlmann indicates the exact place of the original performance near the meeting point of two major roads, 66 versts from Tartu (Faehlmann 57). Rhetorical devices, such as localizing extraordinary events in geographic settings and involving reliable witnesses (such as the narrator him- or herself) are similarly used to enhance the credibility of legends. Faehlmann’s audience and later readers are left with an impression that the high-style narrative in German represents “authentic” storytelling in vernacular Estonian.

Friedrich Reinhold Kreutzwald (1803–1882), who accomplished what Faehlmann began in composing the Estonian epic, was among the first authors to elaborate local legends and give them back to native readers. In 1860 he published a book called “Ancient Tales and Old Songs of the Estonian Folk, collected and written down as a memory for the young generation” (Kreutzwald, *Eesti rahva ennemuistsed jutud ja vanad laulud*). Juxtaposing ancient folklore and young readers in the title underlines the value of old heritage for modern times. In the book’s introduction Kreutzwald writes: “Our Estonian people have a great treasury, inherited from the ancient times, which lies underground in several places in our country and is so much hidden that no small light appears even in St. John’s night to give evidence of the buried money” (*Eesti rahva ennemuistsed jutud ja vanad laulud* 3). With this poetic metaphor Kreutzwald refers to popular legends about buried treasure and the mysterious lights that burn over it on midsummer night. Kreutzwald obviously addresses a readership that is very familiar with oral traditions of legends, and he presents his book as a literary monument of ancestral heritage that is worth being preserved as an “honor and joy of the Estonian people” (5).

The complete set of Kreutzwald's folktales was published in 1866 with a slightly modified title, as the author had omitted the words of addressing the book to young readership but added the confirmation of authenticity, saying that he had written them down from the "mouth of the folk" (*rahvasuust*). In the introduction to the second edition he notes that the Estonian people know so many ancient tales that one "could probably fill several books with them" and that they express "the childhood of a single man and of peoples" (*Eestirahwa Ennemuistsed jutud* V–VI). Addressing old stories primarily for children is an important aspect of their fictionalization and placing them at a distance—far away from the world of adults and educated man, and into a different time of the childhood of humankind. As Kreutzwald notes, as well as children there are "people with childish hearts who read the old tales with joy, even though they know clearly that they cannot be true, and memorize the happy time of the spring of their life" (*ibid.*). He recollects long and dark winter evenings, when "old woman and girls were sitting behind spinning wheels at night, and it was the sweetest storytelling time" (*Eestirahwa Ennemuistsed jutud* VII). Kreutzwald spent his childhood among the peasant folk in Kaarli manor in Rakvere parish, so in this description he probably relies on his memories. However, in the context of booklore this nostalgic image becomes an authorial device of the authentication of his stories.

In 1888 Jakob Hurt (1839–1907) started the documentation of folklore all over Estonia with the help of local correspondents, which became a large-scale patriotic undertaking. Ado Grenzstein, the editor of the newspaper *Olevik*, explained Jakob Hurt's work as an important scientific project:

Someone is knocking on our door. This time the knockers are learned men, servants of science. What do they want? What makes them offer this honor to the Estonian folk that they are opening their high temple of science and knock at our small Estonian door, which until now has been of no importance? They are asking for one copy of the book of Estonian spiritual treasury (*vaimuvara*) in order to take it to the grand temple of science and elevate it, placing it next to other, famous books." (Grenzstein 1)

Collecting folklore thus became a national project of turning orality into literacy, marked by the book as a symbol of modernity, education, and enlightenment. Whereas textualization of some genres, such as songs, riddles, or proverbs, does not radically change their poetic qualities, the outcome is different for legends,

as this genre does not need elaborate poetic features. Rather, artistic eloquence undermines the credibility of legends as a conversational genre. When written down as pieces of old folklore and turned into book chapters, legends become fiction; reliable witnesses of the supernatural turn into anonymous representatives of the “old folk,” and the sense of familiar places fades away. Jakob Hurt saw folklore as a huge and valuable reservoir of undocumented history, a testimony about the past. In a public letter to the folklore collectors, published in 1888, he praised their work, as follows:

This is the way in which we worship our ancestors as earnest children and such a testimony elevates every man and all people. Only a numb and foolish man can disregard his parents and ancestors. Moreover, through this work we are putting together a lasting and living chronicle of the Estonian folk that will carry, even after hundreds and thousands of years, clear tidings of bygone times and generations to posterity. Posterity will be thankful to all collectors and writers of memories, as we are grateful to the ancient priest Henry of Latvia⁶ who composed his chronicle almost seven hundred years ago and left behind fair pictures of Estonia. (Hurt 1)

Interpreting legends as ancient relicts transformed them from contemporary narratives into survivals of the pre-Christian past:

Taaralasku hill

In Jüri parish, Mõigu district, Pajuba village on the hayfield of Salu and Uuetoa farms there is a hill in the bog, which is called Taaralasku and Taaralaste⁷ hill by the local people. One can assume that in ancient times when Estonians were still pagans this was a place where sacrifices were brought to the idol (Taara). There is an old story about the hill. In olden times the mistress of Vaskjala Raudsepa [farm] dreamed that one should dig from the southern side of the hill. Then a cellar will appear with an iron gate. In this cellar the sacrificial instruments of ancient Estonians can be found. E 39495 (1) Jüri parish —J. Kurgan (1899)

While legends were fictionalized, they were attributed with the additional value of representing national heritage—not just mythology but Estonian mythology. Folklorist Matthias Johann Eisen (1857–1934) was particularly consistent in Estonianizing local folklore, as he published numerous books and booklets, the titles of which explicitly reflect the national paradigm: “Ancient Tales of Estonia” (*Eesti*

ennemuistsed jutud), “Ancient Gods and Heroes of Estonia” (*Eesti muistsed jumalad ja vägimehed*), “Estonian Mythology” (*Eesti mütolooogia*), “Local Legends of Estonia” (*Eesti kohalikud muistejutud*), “Recent Estonian mythology” (*Eesti uuem mütolooogia*), “From the Estonian World of Wonders” (*Eesti imede ilmast*), and such. Fictionalization and Estonianization of legends continued the project of romanizing folklore collections through mystification:

Sacrificial stone

In olden times, when drought had lasted for several years, an old farmer with gray hair walked sadly in the field and shed tears, looking at the dry crops. In the middle of the field there was a big stone. Every time the master took a seat on this stone he sighed and raised his eyes towards Taara. When he came to the stone, suddenly an old man with gray hair appeared to him and asked: “Why are you shedding tears and crying? I can see that you walk every day sadly around the meadow and shout wholeheartedly to Taara, begging for help. Taara has taken notice of your prayers. However, don’t forget to bring to this stone a bit of all fresh things as an offering to God. When you do the threshing, brew beer and pour the first mug on the stone. If you butcher an animal, you must pour a drop of blood here on the stone.” With these words the honorable old man disappeared. The farmer looked with thankful heart toward the sky, whence the messenger of God had declared the end of drought to him. Soon it started to rain and the autumn was rich in blessings. The master acted every year in the same manner, as he had been taught, and soon became a rich man. There was a bachelor whose name was Jüri, living in the same family. Jüri had gone to work for the manor, and the master was preparing beer for the holidays. He had put the first tankard aside for God, but the bachelor came home in the evening and drank the tankard empty, so that not a single drop was left. On the next morning the lad complained about a strong stomachache. The master thought immediately that he had displeased God. Now the lad confessed that he drank the beer. At this very moment he died.

EKS 4^o 5, 801/2 (7) Pilistvere parish, Kõo —T. Kümann (1888–89)

Accounts of sacred stones that have received offerings in the manners described above have been widely known in Estonia and recorded by many folklore collectors. The last episode of supernatural punishment for religious offence or desacralization of a holy site also follows the standard pattern of many legends. However, the main god Taara, the mysterious messenger, and locating the story in olden times are

stereotypical elaborations of folklore in early collections, following the standards of “authentic” Estonian heritage as it was imagined and represented in romantic literature. Records like the one above have been discarded as fake lore by many scholars, although they deserve scholarly attention as examples of vernacular writing in the late nineteenth century that have contributed to the formation of Estonian national identity at the grassroots level.

When Mihkel Kampmaa⁸ (1867–1943), a teacher and literary scholar, published his systematic and comprehensive history of Estonian literature, he started the survey with an extensive discussion of folklore (Kampmann 6–136). He introduced different categories of legends, such as those about spirits, transformations, and Old Nick (*vanapagan*), but he did not distinguish them clearly from other folktales. When Kampmaa discussed nature spirits, he turned great attention to the daughters of the meadow mother (*murueide tütrede*)—“a particular kind of forest fairy—tender and merry—the glory and pride of the Estonian spirit world (*vaimude-ilm*)” (20). Later scholarship has shown that these erotic creatures were fictional characters who had been introduced into folktales by Kreutzwald, who found inspiration in the fairy poetry of the ancient world and of Western Europe (Annist 103).

Kampmaa’s rendering of folktales relies on several authored books, and he made a clear and qualitative distinction between folklore (*rahvaluule*) and literature (*kirjandus*). He remarked that folklore was created “at the time period when people had not reached this height of culture when individuals could adopt independent and personally authoritative standpoints” (Kampmann 2). In his overall assessment of folklore he says that it cannot be considered equal to artistic poetry, as regards its richness and artistic value. The latter is subtle and individualized, but folklore is “simple, sometimes drab, too general and often vague” (Kampmann 134–35). This weakness can be explained through the archaic nature of folklore. He writes:

The majority of folktales were created during the age when people were living in their spiritual childhood, when the horizon of knowledge was narrow, the spirit was weak in thought and the hand was numb to help oneself.” (Kampmann 8)

Moreover, it was the time period when people “had to be constantly afraid of both real and fictional foes” (8)—obviously referring to supernatural creatures in legends. Whereas in the first edition of the book Kampmaa does not clearly distinguish genres of folk prose, he later notes the difference between entertaining folktales (*ennemuistnejutt*, *muinasjutt*) and objective legends (*muinaslugu*, *muistend*) that

depict events considered as true. However, he remarks that the boundaries of the two genres are vague and that there are many tales that are semifictional, as they contain elements of both folktales and legends (Kampmaa 17). While many scholars today would totally agree with Kampmaa about the abundance of generic hybrids, the development of folkloristics in the twentieth century needed clear and contrastive definitions of genres. As concepts and terms carry their historical meanings and connotations, it is no wonder that the archaizing view of folklore affected the emergent genre terminology of prose narratives. The Estonian appellations for folktale (*muinasjutt*) and legend (*muistend*) were both derived from the root *muinane/muistne* (“ancient”), reinforcing the view that both represent the heritage of bygone days (see also Beyer).

Considering folklore as a kind of preliterate production of an uneducated and semi-illiterate populace continued in Soviet Estonian scholarship, which echoed evolutionary views of civilization. Study books on the history of literature started with chapters on folklore, and as the school program was composed chronologically, from early literature to the modern times, folklore was assigned to younger classes, reinforcing the impression that it is something simple and childish, distant and different from the professional modern literature.⁹ A typical assessment of legends from a study book for secondary schools noted:

Although these legends contain a lot of fantasies, they were still told as true stories in bygone days. In many cases these legends were actually based on events that the narrators had experienced but misunderstood and explained wrongly. (Sõgel 101–2)

The author also remarks that both folktales and legends have emerged from the fantasy of the people, and their origin goes back to the age of cavemen, although legends have developed toward more realistic stories throughout the ages (Sõgel 98).

In 1947 Yuri Sokolov’s book “Essence of Folklore and Historiography of Folkloristics” was published in Estonian in order to set models for new, Marxist scholarship. Sokolov considers folklore to be “oral poetic work of broad masses of people,” and “a special part of literature” (Sokolov 4). Following this new research model, folkloristics in Soviet Estonia became an auxiliary discipline of literary scholarship. Whereas research on folk beliefs and rituals was assigned to ethnography—an auxiliary science of history—legends were separated from vernacular religion and became a genre of poetic expression, detached from empirical reality.

Altogether, many factors have contributed to the fictionalization of legends in Estonia: the rhetoric of enlightenment, the resituation of legend in the context of literature, the professionalization of folklore scholarship and its dialogic relationship with its research object, systematic school instruction, Marxist views on religion, and the atheist propaganda of the Soviet state. However, fictionalization of the legendry never became absolute. It has been influential and has weakened the status of legendry in living folklore by casting it to the sphere of private communication and to less prestigious, alternative media channels, although this has not eradicated legendry as true stories. The contemporary Estonian legend tradition has to a great extent been emancipated from the demonizing discourse of Christianity, which in the nineteenth century seemed so pervasive.

As we saw, the fictionalization of legends has been a by-product of their “folklorization”—conceptualizing them as a part of heritage and binding them with the historical connotations of “folklore,” which has been gravitating toward the concept of literature, its more esteemed counterpart. This major discursive shift, which has strongly affected the rhetorical power of legends to present arguments of belief, cannot be detached from the old dichotomy between the notions of creative authorship and tradition-bound folkloric reproduction, which has been developed by generations of scholars. In his recent article “The Constant Muse: Copyright and Creative Agency,” Valdimar Hafstein has discussed the historical emergence and uses of the contrary categories of “author” and “folk” and their mutual dependence:

A critical genealogy allows us to understand folklore as a constitutive outside of authorship. Folklore is the nonauthored. Better yet, it is the antiauthored. It circumscribes the discursive domain of authorship and defines the criterion of originality. (Hafstein 22)

Subjection to creative authorship affects “true stories,” such as legends, crucially, and deprives them of their distinctive charm—their veracity. Legends can be legends only if they are not authored. They rely on a long tradition of storytelling and on shared beliefs, or they appear as renderings of genuine supernatural experiences. Invented stories of the supernatural do not qualify as legends but as lies or as pieces of creative fiction. This might also explain why legends can be affected by the fictionalizing discourse so easily. They lose their argumentative power as statements of belief when they are published together with folktales and retold by writers of fiction, such as Kreutzwald, or by folklorists such as Eisen, whose

names appear on the title pages. When a folklorist identifies a legend told in the daily flow of communication and calls it a legend, it is likely that this assessment also undermines its rhetorical power of speaking for truth. Hence, legends seem elusive. At the very moment we identify a story as a legend, it ceases to function as a legend and turns into fiction.¹⁰ The fictionalization and folklorization of legends are related, because both shift them into a new discursive context, subject them to its supremacy, and treat them as verbal arts, not as statements of truth.

Conclusion: Interdiscursivity and Genre Dynamics

Legend as a conversational genre differs from authored narratives because of the different positioning of the storyteller vis-à-vis the plot and the storyworld. Vernacular legends express an insider's perspective, but artistic stories are crafted by individuals who do not dissolve in the world of fiction. The folklorist's distanced position in relation to the textualized legends that are collected during fieldwork is similar to the author's positioning. It is of crucial importance by whom and for what purposes legends are relocated from their native conversational contexts to new textual environments. Christianized legendry with its diabolized storyworld and disciplining impact is a result of the persistent missionary activities of the church. Fictionalized legends as belles lettres are evoked by individual writers for other, artistic reasons—mainly in order to enliven national literature and serve the growing readership, which craves forms that seem familiar from oral traditions.

When I started this article, it seemed to me that demonization and fictionalization should be considered as opposite tendencies because of their different effects on the argumentative power of legends: either endorsing the reality of the supernatural or transforming it into a play of fantasy. But thinking further these contradictions appear in a new light because both reflect the historical transformations of the same society, which moves from a state of social suppression toward gaining control over its cultural resources and achieving political power, from the domination of the Lutheran faith to secularism, from orality to literacy, from tradition to modernity. We are not facing a watershed between two contradictory discourses but rather are observing parallel shifts within the same current of textual production, within the course of unruptured history. The demonization of legendry was due to the recontextualization of the supernatural world within the framework of the master narrative of the church about the world as a battleground between

God and Satan (see Almond 31–48). Demonization thus appears as a consequence of recontextualizing legends within a scriptural framework, and it can be considered a form of fictionalization within the world of Christianity. As a response to the Protestant *interpretatio christiana* of seeing supernatural phenomena and all evil in the world as manifestations of the Devil's power, an innumerable number of counternarratives circulated, ascribing similar powers to the spirits of nature, to the restless dead, ghosts, and other supernatural entities with agency of their own, independent from the Devil. And in the long run all of them were engulfed in the realm of fiction, whereby the Devil lost his dominant position and became just one character among many others.

Considering legends from a *longue durée* perspective, within the massive discursive currents and in changing contexts, reveals the functionality and flexibility of the genre. Legends can be used for a variety of purposes, and they appear in multiple forms in various channels of communication, both in oral and literary sources. Some of the first collections of legends in European history are demonological treatises, such as *Malleus maleficarum* (1487), which consider them as sources of empirical evidence about the power of the Devil and the dangers of witchcraft.¹¹ Later, literary collections of legends continued the project of the fictionalization of the genre by employing it for the sake of preserving national heritage and promoting individual authorship. Legends that are resituated time and again in literary contexts reveal “how folklore and literature are systematically imbricated with one another” (Bacchilega 452). Even more, we can see how the recontextualization of legends in new discursive environments activates the genre dynamics. As legends circulate within the interdiscursive space of the textual universe, their essential generic features change.

The two discursive shifts that we discussed in this article—demonization and fictionalization—have much in common. Both discourses offer unified, almost normative perspectives on legends, but they take a different color if seen through their respective lenses. Demonization manifests an uncanny world of dangerous powers, the fictionalizing view a fascinating realm of entertainment and fantasy. Both perspectives have considerably changed the status of the genre and attitudes toward it. The Christian category of superstition, as imposed on legends, reinforced tensions between humans and the other world, which was increasingly explained as the playground of the Devil. When the religious fervor of fighting pagan superstitions started to fade away in the nineteenth century, legends were increasingly fictionalized and transformed into the cherished heritage of the ancestors. However,

legends also lost their credibility, their numinous otherworldliness and value as practical guidelines in confronting the supernatural. They turned into entertaining children's literature stories, and their characters were detached from the real world and belittled to fit the poetic framework of fiction. In contrast to the institutionally grounded and anonymous discourse of demonization, the fictionalization of legends has been performed through the power of individual authors, who have overwritten the anonymous traditions. In liaison with authorship, creativity as the generative power of all textual production can thus become a force that deprives legends of their vital capacity of telling the truth about the supernatural. Reality becomes a fantasy.

This essay has outlined some prominent discursive changes in legends, but certainly did not exhaust the topic. Legend as an open and adaptive genre can assimilate elements from many discourses, such as those of politics, medicine, sport, or the sciences, and expressive forms, such as film or hypermedia. Interconnections with other forms of cultural expression have changed the genre, and its boundaries within folkloristics have been opened to discuss related forms, such as rumors, conspiracy theories, personal narratives, and esoteric literature. Legend has become a major topic in folkloristics, yet we might ask what happens to the genre when it becomes entangled in the discursive web of analytical research and theoretical discussion. Do folklorists undermine the argumentative power of legend, or vice versa, enhance it by elevating the genre to the center of attention, turning it into a target of scholarly enterprise? Fortunately, the contemporary folkloristic discourse that surrounds and addresses legend is far from homogeneous and normative but offers a variety of complementary and alternative approaches. Legend research today is not limited to formulating more elaborate definitions of the genre, characterizing its location in the overall genre system, collecting texts for new publications, or composing indexes of legend plots. Scholarship today abounds with multiple approaches and ideas—like the dynamic and inexhaustible world of legends.

■ ACKNOWLEDGMENT

I thank Regina F. Bendix and Ulrich Marzolph for their valuable comments and Daniel E. Allen for improving the English language of this article.

This research has been supported by the European Union through the European Regional Development Fund (Centre of Excellence, CECT) and by the Estonian Ministry of Education and Research (Institutional Research Project IUT2-43).

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■ NOTES

1. Timothy Tangherlini synthesized the results of earlier scholarship and defined legend as “a traditional, (mono)episodic, highly ecotypified, localized and historicized narrative of past events told as believable in a conversational mode” (22). According to Linda Dégh, legend is an overarching term to denote all stories that entertain debate about belief (97). Elliott Oring shifted the assessment of the genre from matters of belief to presentation, defining legends as narrations that invoke the rhetoric of truth (“Legendry and the Rhetoric of Truth” 151–52). For a concise synopsis of legend definitions, see Oring, “Legendry and the Rhetoric of Truth” 105–6.
2. Linda Dégh has described the important contextual components of legends as follows: “These components include the global cultural tradition of Western Christian civilization, its standards of morality, and its distinction of good from evil; and it also includes the common cultural knowledge of local supernatural and extranormal beliefs that is inherited and learned formally and informally in actualized, contemporary versions sanctioned by the media” (138).
3. According to the Foucauldian line of thought, discourse is “the general domain of all statements” and “a regulated practice that accounts for a certain number of statements” (Foucault 80). These statements constitute discursive formations, characterized as enunciative systems (*ibid.*, 116) and as dispersed milieus of statements, concepts, enunciative modalities, and thematic choices (Yurchak 161).
4. Reference to the collections of the Estonian Folklore Archives in Tartu.
5. Similar means of defense from demonized nature spirits have been used in Orthodox Karelia (Stark 124–25).
6. Henry of Latvia (Henricus de Lettis) is the author of a chronicle in Latin that describes the conquest and Christianization of Livonia (today Estonia and Latvia) in the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries.
7. *Taaralane*—an adherent of Taara, the alleged pagan god of Estonia. Taara

appeared in romantic literature and was folklorized in late nineteenth-century Estonia concurrent with the modernization of society and the spread of education.

8. Kampmann Estonianized his name in 1936 to Kampmaa. Before him a few other histories of Estonian literature had been published and some of them had introduced the topic with the discussion of folklore (e.g., Sander 1908). However, Kampmaa was the first scholar to offer a thorough, systematic, and comprehensive presentation of folklore within the context of Estonian literature.
9. The general fictionalization of legends has been supported by the tradition of publishing them in books for children, such as the recent massive anthology, "The Golden Book of Estonian Legends," which belongs to the series of classics of Estonian children's literature (Krusten). Eija Timonen has studied the process of transforming archived legends into children's culture in contemporary Finland (*Perinteestä mediavirtaan*). She has noted that in works for children, a pictorial, aestheticized, and humorous style dominates, and the "fingerprints" of the author become visible (Timonen 36).
10. Elliott Oring has discussed this paradox by indicating that the category of legend needs someone, usually a folklorist, who fundamentally doubts the truth of the story. He writes: "the legend is a category defined by credibility within [the] larger frame of incredibility" (*Just Folklore* 92).
11. Among many legends and memorates, used as *exempla* to endorse witch persecutions, *Malleus maleficarum* also includes early records of some international migratory legends, such as "The Daughter of the Witch" (ML 3035) (Krämer and Sprenger 144).

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