

THE WOMAN AS WOLF (AT 409): SOME INTERPRETATIONS OF A VERY ESTONIAN FOLK TALE

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ABSTRACT

The article* analyses tale type *The Woman as Wolf*, which is one of the most popular folk tales in the Estonian Folklore Archives and is represented there both in the form of a fairy tale and in the form of a legend. The vast majority of the versions of *The Woman as Wolf* were written down in the first part of the 20th century within Estonia and where recorded from Estonians. The article introduces the content of the tale, the origin of the first records from the early 19th century, and the dissemination area of the tale, which remains outside Western Europe: apart from the Estonian versions there are Sami, Karelian, Vepsian, Livonian, Latvian, Lithuanian, Russian, Ukrainian and Belarusian versions. While in almost all the Estonian versions the main protagonist is transformed into a wolf, in most of the versions written down in other areas and ethnic groups, another animal or bird replaces the wolf. The author is of the opinion that the Finnic area is central to the distribution of the folk tale *The Woman as Wolf*. The animal the woman is transformed into in the plot would not have been a wolf in earlier times. The article provides an explanation why the wolf is predominant in Estonian written sources. For that purpose the ways in which the wolf and werewolf were perceived in earlier Estonian folk belief are introduced. At the end of the article interpretation of the folk tale is provided. The author states that the plot and some of the motifs found in this folk tale reflect the difficulties women had in submitting to the norms and values of patriarchal order within their society.

KEYWORDS: fairy tale • legend • wolf • werewolf • women • Finnic folklore

INTRODUCTION

This article addresses one of the most popular plots in the Estonian Folklore Archives: the folk tale *The Woman as Wolf*,¹ known both in the form of fairy tale and legend. 182 versions have been defined as fairy tales (Järv et al. 2009: 561), and the number of leg-

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ends resorting to the same plot is about 70 (Metsvahi 1998: 12). Among all Estonian wonder tales – which in manuscripts amount to almost 6000 in the Estonian Folklore Archives – this plot comes fifth in its variety of versions.² The total number of legends in the Estonian Folklore Archives is not known, but it is certain that among Estonian werewolf legends,³ *The Woman as Wolf* story line is second in popularity. Adding up *The Woman as Wolf* tales classified as fairy tales and those categorized as legends, we arrive at the total of about 250 texts. Thus, the number of versions of this folk tale recorded in Estonia notably exceeds the number of versions collected in other regions.⁴ Nevertheless, the epithet ‘very Estonian’ is based not just on the great number of recordings but also on the tale’s content, to which I will refer later.

I will have a twofold approach to *The Woman as Wolf* tale – sometimes regarding the legend versions and the fairy tale versions together, and at some instances making a distinction between them. The distinction will be made because in folklore studies it is an established tradition dating back to the brothers Grimm and the first decades of the 19th century to consider fairy tale and legend as two different folk tale genres. The brothers Grimm started the tradition of publishing separate collections of legends and fairy tales, as well as the custom of conceiving fairy tales and legends as two separate genres fulfilling different functions. The post-brothers-Grimm scholarly paradigm has either contrasted fairy tales to legends,⁵ or regarded them quite separately from each other. If fairy-tale scholars emphasise the universal nature of the fairy tale, reflecting an individual’s psychology rather than specific socio-historical realities, scholars focusing on legends pay much more attention to the socio-historical context of the genre and other society- and culture-specific subjects.

The differences in approach are naturally also due to the characteristics of the genres. A fairy tale, with its unindividualised or typical characters (a king, a hunter; see Lüthi 1996: 28) addresses the problems of an individual rather than those of a group (Röhrich 1964: 229). A legend, on the other hand, addresses an extraordinary situation encountered by an individualised member of the community, but is still relevant to every member of that community (Röhrich 1973: 23). Often, the common ground uniting members of a community is belief. If fairy tale is a fictional genre with no claims on truth, the teller of a legend has at his or her disposal a whole armoury of rhetorical tools to add credence to the story (see Oring 2012: 107–108). In this light, Elliott Oring’s statement that the legend genre is closely related to the news genre cultivated in the media rather than fairy tale or myth, becomes quite understandable (ibid.: 94). Narrators of fairy tales, on the other hand, are not confined to the rhetoric of truth that is vital for the legend teller, and this enables them to add more fanciful details to the story of their own accord (Röhrich 1964: 10). In addition, fairy-tale narrators may to some extent be resorting to their own experience, although not consciously as is common when telling a legend (ibid.: 227).

At the end of this article I will try to answer the question how one and the same plot can be present as both a legend and a fairy tale.

I will now present a brief summary of contents of the fairy tale versions of *The Woman as Wolf* (AT 409), as well as a description taking into account a majority of the existing versions.

A stepmother changes her married stepdaughter into a wolf and replaces her with her own (biological) daughter. The stepdaughter's baby, left behind in her new home, is crying constantly because there is no milk in the breasts of the false mother. The nanny takes the baby to a stone at the edge of the forest and calls the baby's real mother out of the forest. A wolf comes from the forest, leaves her wolf skin on the stone and suckles the baby in human form. Her husband learns about this. A wise man tells him to heat the stone so that the wolf skin would get burnt when the werewolf again comes to suckle the baby, leaving the skin on the stone. The man acts accordingly and regains his wife. The stepmother's daughter is either executed or changes into a magpie. (Cf. ATU 409)

In shorter versions, there are no stepmothers or stepdaughters, just a woman, sometimes a queen, and the man is just a man or a young man, sometimes a king, a prince or a Tsarevich. In shorter stories, the woman is changed into a wolf by the mother-in-law, sister-in-law, an "old hag", a witch, *vanapagan* (the Old Heathen), *kurivaim* (the Evil One), or another girl who wanted to marry the same man but was not chosen; the woman may even turn into a werewolf or go to the forest of her own accord. In longer texts, the spell-caster may, in addition to the above, be the stepmother, the girl's father, the devil in the form of a village man or a poor woman, the man's former or previous girlfriend, the mother of an abandoned girlfriend, a *sortsimoor* (a sorcerer's hag), *vanapagan*, *vanatont* (the Old Ghost), *vanatikõ* (the Old Evil One), a witch who has designs on the same man for her own daughter, a witch acting on someone's orders, *kurivaim*, the wife of *vanapagan* or *vanapatt* (the Old Sin), *vanapagan's* daughter, the young man's mother, a neighbour's wife, *vanapagan's* wife, a hag from hell, a *soend* (werewolf), or a forest spirit, etc. The woman is usually changed into a wolf (more rarely a lynx or a doe) by throwing a wolf's (in some texts a lynx's or doe's) hide at her. The action often follows the course of the stepmother visiting her stepdaughter, who is either busy kneading bread dough or combing out lice from her husband's hair. The stepmother asks her to step outside, look at her or cast a look over her left shoulder. At the moment when the orphan girl does that, a wolf's hide or a *tõrvanahk* (a Setu word for an animal hide that is black and shiny) is thrown at her. In most cases, the woman turns into a wolf and runs into the forest at once, in some rare cases there is a lake instead of a forest, in which case when the hide has been cast at the woman, she is thrown into a lake. In some versions, before fleeing into the forest the woman has time to tell someone to bring the baby to the forest edge so she can nurse her. The stepmother or *vanatont* replaces the woman turned into a wolf with her own daughter, who carries on the activity that the real wife has had to break off. She does not manage the dough-kneading or lice-combing very well, or, in some cases, her hands are cold. The man may ask about this and the false wife will find some excuse – saying, for example, that her hands got cold while she was outdoors.

In most versions the man is alerted by the fact that the child's behaviour has changed – the baby is restless and crying all the time. The versions, in which the man notices that the wife's appearance and behaviour have changed, are less common. In a few versions someone explains the wife's behaviour to the man as post-natal faintness. The man does not understand why the woman, while breastfeeding, has her face to the wall, or covers the baby's head with her clothing. In several versions, the false mother has equipped herself with breasts made of birch bark or tow wrapped around copper wire or nails. Sometimes, the false mother takes the baby to the edge of the forest, where the werewolf comes to nurse it. But it is mostly the nanny (more seldom a shepherd or a nurse) who has the role of taking the child to the forest edge. She goes walking with the child towards the forest (either of her own accord or at the bidding of the woman turned into a wolf, made before escaping to the forest or during a brief secret return home) and when they come home, the child is quiet. The man notices this and asks the nanny where they have been. If the nanny keeps the truth from him, he goes to a wise man, a witch (a hag) or a *paaba* (another word for a wise old woman), and is told that the woman he now has at home is not his real wife. If he has discovered this by himself, by secretly watching the false wife or the nanny, he visits the wise man to ask how he could get his wolf-wife back. He then goes with the nanny or by himself (in some versions it is a third person, for example, a woman from the village) to the forest edge next time (in rare versions he goes to some other place or knocks against a grey stone) and heats up the stone where the werewolf usually puts her skin. Then the man sees his wife coming from the forest in the shape of a wolf, casting off her wolf skin onto the stone, and starting to nurse the baby already in human shape. In some versions the wife asks about the burnt smell and is told a lie that village people are singeing pigs. In many versions, the woman tries to grab her skin, but it is either entirely burnt or there is just a tiny piece left. There are quite a lot of versions in which the wife is not quite all right after having regained her human shape: for example, she longs to return to the forest, even without her wolf skin. In some versions, the husband captures her halfway into the forest. In several versions the wife starts weeping and moaning and there is still something wrong with her: she falls ill, she doesn't want to return home, or cannot speak, and in some cases the husband has to do something to bring the wife back to human shape. There are also versions in which the wife, before becoming human again, turns into various animals (among Ludza Estonians) or objects: a straw, a log, a bean tendril, manure, a knife or a spindle. In some versions, the husband brings the wife back home in the shape of a log or a spindle, and it is at home she regains her human shape.

The ways of disposing of the false wife vary extensively. In some versions, the stepmother and her daughter are just driven away, while in others they are first given a beating. The motif of the husband having to dig a hole at the threshold of the house or the sauna, and either light a fire in it or fill it with something hot (for example, boiling water, manure), is quite widespread. Often the stepmother's daughter is tricked to fall into a barrel or a hole filled with boiling water, where she perishes, leaving behind just some part of her body (for example, a little finger) that turns into a magpie. In some texts, this is given as a reason why the magpie is 'of the devil' or why there is a magpie twittering 'like a witch's maid' on the fence of every farm. In addition, the motif of tricking the stepmother and her daughter to go into the sauna, which is then burnt down, has spread to some extent, probably owing to Friedrich Reinhold Kreutzwald's fairy tale "Rõugutaja tütar" (Rõugutaja's daughter) (Kreutzwald 1996 [1866]: 233–237).

Several records of this fairy tale type date back to an unusually early period when considered in the Estonian context – the first quarter of the 19th century. One of the earliest written records in Estonian of *The Woman as Wolf* (or more exactly, ATU 403C + AT 409) plot comes from Arnold Friedrich Johann Knüpfper (EKÜ, f 232a 1, 360–365 [279]) and is included in Part I of the anthology of Estonian wonder tales under the title “Ennemuistsed rõõgutajad” (The Rõõgutajas of Ancient Times) (Järv et al. 2009: 348–351). As Knüpfper titled his collection of wonder tales – including the tale type under scrutiny here – *Lieder, Märchen und Abschriften aus Glanström’s Sammlung* (Songs, Fairy Tales, and Transcripts from Glanström’s Collection), it is possible that Knüpfper received the tales from Christian Jacob Glanström (1752–1825), the pastor of Järva-Jaani. Glanström’s records have only survived in Knüpfper’s transcripts. A transcript of the same tale, written in the hand of Alexander Heinrich Neus, bears a note that an Estonian had explained the meaning of the word *Rõõgutajad* (sg. *Rõõgutaja*) to Knüpfper by calling them half-devils: “they were just apprentices, not full devils yet” (ÕES, SK 220 [Mappe IX], 2). Neus translated the story into German and published it in the Tartu weekly *Das Inland* in 1846 (pp. 1146–1148). It was one of the first fairy tales published in *Das Inland*. (Toomeos-Orglaan 2005: 153–154)

As well as the translation of the Glanström-Knüpfper version, there are two other German translations of this tale type. They are similar to each other, but different from the one named above: one in the collection of the Learned Estonian Society (ÕES, SK 220, 5–12) and one in the collection of the Literary Society of Estonia (EKÜ, f 232d, 55–59); the latter two have great similarity in wording and content, but are still not identical.⁶ Thus, it is clear that the tale has two recordings from different sources, made in the first quarter of the 19th century. In addition to the transcript of Glanström (or Knüpfper), there is also a transcript made by an unknown person at the request of Christian Hieronymus Justus von Schlegel (1757–1842). Neus, who seems to have been acquainted with both versions, refers in his introduction to the fairy tales in the collection of the Learned Estonian Society to Schlegel’s written legacy, which he has at his disposal (ÕES, SK 220 [Mappe IX], 1; Toomeos-Orglaan 2005: 161). If the Glanström-Knüpfper tale ends with the beating and drowning of the Rõõgutaja’s daughter (Järv et al. 2009: 351), the version obtained through Schlegel – generally longer and more intricate than the former – ends with the burning of the witch’s daughter (there is a witch instead of a Rõõgutaja in Schlegel’s version) in a heated hole in the ground. Only the hands and feet are left of the witch’s daughter, and those turn into mice and crows (EKÜ f 232d, 59).

If Glanström and Knüpfper were both engaged in editing the Estonian-language Bible and collected stories probably for their own use, and in order to improve their knowledge of the language, Schlegel’s travelogue *Reisen in mehrere russische Gouvernements in den Jahren 178*, 1801, 1807 und 1815* (Travels in Several Provinces of Russia in the Years of 178*, 1801, 1807 and 1815) shows his appreciation of fairy tales as part of folklore already before the publication of the brothers’ Grimm collection *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* (Laugaste 1963: 319). This was probably due to the fact that during his secondary school years in Weimar, Schlegel had also been taught by Johann Karl August Musäus, a well-known publisher of German fairy tales, who had the custom of asking old storytellers to visit him and tell their stories (Musäus 1791: 15; Laugaste 1963:

319; Viires 2001: 88). Schlegel's longest stay in Estonia occurred in 1780–1782, when he worked as a tutor. In fact, it was his interest in Estonian peasant folk, propelled by the ideas of the Enlightenment as well as Romanticism, and his Baltic German wife and her relations in Estonia rather than actual geographical presence that connected Schlegel to Estonia in his lifetime. In 1783, Schlegel married Helene Eleanore, daughter of the Dean Johann Christoph Paucker who had died in 1776, after which the girl was brought up by A. H. Lücke, the pastor of Ambla (Viires 2001: 89). Schlegel is known to have received Estonian folk songs both from his brother-in-law Heinrich Johann Paucker (1759–1819) and the latter's son Heinrich Wilhelm Christoph Paucker (1797–1833), who were both pastors at Simuna, as well as ethnographic and folklore material from a manor lord in Läänemaa (Viires 2001: 94). The assumption that Schlegel received the transcript of the fairy tale under scrutiny during a month-long visit to Simuna in 1807 seems the most probable. At the same time the possibility that he received it at another time and in a different way cannot be excluded.

COMBINATIONS AND TEXT EXAMPLES OF *THE WOMAN AS WOLF*

In Estonia, the tale type *The Woman as Wolf* is most often (73 versions) merged with ATU 403C (*The Exchanged Bride*; Järv et al. 2009: 559).⁷ About half of the plots occur independently (Salve, Sarv 1987: 78–79, 83–84; Hiimäe 1999: 53; Järv et al. 2009: 366), and a major part of those versions of *The Woman as Wolf* can be classified as legends. The combined type ATU 403C + AT 409 may in its turn also merge with such types as ATU 510A (*Cinderella*), ATU 511 (*One-Eye, Two-Eyes, Three-Eyes*) or AT 511A (*The Little Red Ox*). There have been some rare mergers with types ATU 510A, ATU 510 and ATU 511 without merging with ATU 403C, and some rare combinations with other tale types: some of the editions of ATU 480 (*The Kind and the Unkind Girls*),⁸ AT 451A (*Sister of Nine Brothers*),⁹ ATU 700 (*Thumbling*), ATU 720 (*Orphan as Cuckoo*, an Estonian version of the *The Juniper Tree*). In some cases, combinations with other werewolf legend types may occur.

The following example text represents the most popular tale type combination of *The Woman as Wolf*, namely ATU 403C + AT 409, which might even be considered as a separate tale type owing to its integrity and frequent occurrence. The version was recorded in Väike-Maarja in 1910.

There was once a mother with two daughters. One of them was her own daughter, she was ugly, and the other was her stepdaughter, she was beautiful. On Thursday evening, a suitor arrived with his entourage. The mother placed her own daughter on top of the oven and gave her bread and butter to eat, and told the stepdaughter to go and stir the mash for the pigs. She asked the suitor, which daughter he wanted. The suitor answered he wanted the one who was stirring pig mash. But the mother wanted to get her own daughter married and therefore told the suitor's entourage to come back another Thursday. Then, she put the stepdaughter on top of the oven and told her own daughter to stir the mash for pigs. But this time, the suitors chose the one eating bread and butter on top of the oven. The mother apologised and asked them to come a third time. Now again, she told her own daughter to sit on top of the oven eating bread and butter, and the stepdaughter to stir the

mash for the pigs. Once again, the suitor chose the stepdaughter. Therefore, the suit was agreed and the stepdaughter was to get married.

When the wedding party arrived back from the church, the mother took the stepdaughter's clothes and put them on her own daughter, and shut in the stepdaughter under a vat. The wedding party started off towards the groom's home. Under way, they heard a voice calling:

Bridegroom, stop your sledge,
You took a stranger, left your wife!

But the bride reassured the groom that this was nothing:

Those're my beads jingling,
My pins rattling,
My brooches banging,
My silver singing.

The wedding party continued for a long time, and again there was a voice calling:

Bridegroom, stop your sledge,
You took a stranger, left your wife!

On a bridge, they stopped and the groom saw his wife, naked, running after them. The rooster had jumped up to crow on the edge of the vat, the vat had tipped over and the wife had escaped. Now the wedding garments were taken from the false wife and put on the wedded wife. The false wife was left behind under the bridge.

In a year's time, the mother was on her way to see the daughter's new baby, and had a pot of porridge hanging from a spurtle on her shoulder to take some porridge to her granddaughter. On her way, she reached the bridge and went underneath to pluck some (chervil) straws, saying:

Picking straws, plucking straws,
For my granddaughter to play with!

The chervil answered:

Don't you pluck, mother dear,
Your own daughter's navel string!

So the mother took her daughter along and they went together to where the stepdaughter was living with her husband. The nanny was outdoors and the child was already playing. Knowing the child's mother to be indoors, the mother entered the house, tore off the young wife's clothes and put them on her own daughter, then she cast a wolf's hide on the young wife, so that she ran into the forest and became a werewolf; her own daughter stayed behind as the child's mother. Every time she started nursing the baby, she turned her face towards the wall; the baby couldn't suckle and was screaming all the time. There was no other way, the husband went to the wise man and told him about his trouble: every time his wife nurses the baby, she turns herself towards the wall, and the baby is screaming. The wise man understood and said:

Let the nanny take the baby and go to the big boulder in the field on Thursday night, and sing:

Come home, baby's mother,
Come suckle the child,
Give the little one some milk,
From her we get just birch bark
And copper wires to gnaw on!

The husband thanked the wise man and went home. On Thursday night, the nanny took the baby to the big boulder in the field, and sang as the wise man had told him. After that, the wolf came out of the forest, threw her wolf skin on the boulder and suckled the baby. When she was done, she put on the skin and went back to the forest again. On another Thursday night, the nanny went to the field again and sang:

Come home, baby's mother,
Come suckle the child,
Give the little one some milk,
From her we get just birch bark
And copper wires to gnaw on!

And again the werewolf came out of the forest and suckled the baby. When leaving, she said:

– I will come once more, but after that I will not be able to come, I have to run with the big pack.

On the third Thursday night, the nanny sang the same song. The wolf suckled the baby and said:

– This is the last time, I cannot come any more, but what is it that smells burnt here?

– They are singeing pigs in the village – the nanny answered.

The wolf turned to go, and took the wolf skin from the stone, but it was quite burnt and didn't fit her any longer. The woman had to stay naked and wanted to run into the forest, but the husband caught her and took her home. Now, the man had two wives. What to do about it? He heated the sauna oven very hot. He dug a big hole in front of the ladder and put a pot of boiling water there, which he covered with a white sheet.

He told the women that the one who got to the sweating bench first would remain his wife. Then he told his real wife quietly:

– Don't you run too fast!

The unwedded wife wanted to be first on the sweating bench and rushed to the ladder. There she tumbled into the cauldron of boiling water. After a while, a magpie flew out of the cauldron. The woman had turned into a magpie. This is how magpie came into being.¹⁰

For comparison, I will provide two legend versions recorded in Hageri and Rõuge parishes:

At Oru, near Tõnuhansu farm there is a big stone. There was a woman who was a werewolf. She came to the stone, walked three times around the stone and said:

Sniff, snuff, see my nose,
Swish, swoosh, watch my tail,
Click, I prick my ears!
And then there was a wolf.

That woman was a nursing mother. She took off her wolf skin, threw it on a stone and suckled her baby. Her husband didn't like that. The wise man of the village told him:

– Take a load of brushwood and heat up the stone!

The man did as he had been told. Soon his wife came from the forest, threw her wolf skin on the stone and started to nurse the baby. Suddenly she smelt burning. Sniffed and said:

– Bad, bad, burning smell, old hag's singeing smell!

The nanny answered:

– That's nothing. A pig was slaughtered at Tõnuhansu, they are singeing the hairs now.

The woman raised herself to go, but the skin was burnt. So she could no longer become a wolf.¹¹

There was a woman who was a werewolf. She only came home to nurse her child. One day she said that she would come one last time the next day and then join the other werewolves. She had had the habit of coming at a certain hour to a big stone in the pasture, where she threw off her wolf skin to suckle the baby a little way from the stone; the baby always had to be taken to her there. Someone told her husband that he should heat up the stone. Before it was time for her to come, the husband took some brushwood to the stone and heated it up. Then he hid the cinders. The woman threw the skin on the stone again and started to nurse the baby. The stone was boiling hot and the skin got burnt, so the woman asked:

– What smells burnt here?

The husband answered:

– I don't know what's burning in the village.

The woman continued to nurse the baby. The skin shrank, and got quite burnt. When the woman went to put the skin on, there were just burnt bits left. Thus, she could no longer become a werewolf, and stayed at home.¹²

WHEN WERE SUCH FOLK TALES TOLD?

Rudolf Schenda, scholar of folklore and literature, has asserted, proceeding mainly from German, Swiss, French, and British sources, that the telling of fairy tales was extremely rare among the lower classes. When people gathered, they mainly discussed village rumours and tales of their own experiences, illness and misfortunes and other everyday topics. Fairy tales, as a rule, were not told and even the telling of legends was rare. In Schenda's opinion, the fairy tale and legend publications give a totally false impression of the peasant lore of a century and more ago (Schenda 1993: 265–273). Later scholars repeat the same opinion (for example, Beyer 2011). Willem de Blécourt claims explicitly that lower-class people did not tell each other fairy tales. In his opinion, fairy tales

found their way to the people via nineteenth-century literature, but were not even then popular among lower classes and only reached the folklore collectors owing to their insistence that their informants recollect some fairy tales, which had actually reached the informant via literature (de Blécourt 2012: 8). Willem de Blécourt's ideas resemble Ruth B. Bottigheimer's hypothesis that a fairy tale did not exist before the publication of Straparola's book *Le piacevoli notti* (Bottigheimer 2002: 5–6).

The information known about Estonian fairy tales and tale telling would enable an Estonian folklore scholar to enhance the discussion about the ways of the spreading of fairy tales in several respects. The first versions of *The Woman as Wolf* collected among the peasants in the first quarter of the 19th century provide no basis to assume that fairy tales reached the people via the upper classes. Germans or Swedes have no stories with the same plot, although the Karelians and Samis do, as I shall indicate in the next subchapter. Also the fact that we have numerous notices about fairy-tale telling occasions in earlier times (Viidalepp 2004 [1965]), corroborates the thesis that fairy tales unquestionably formed a part of peasant lore. Thus, we can read in the memoirs of Jakob Hurt that when he attended Põlva Parish School in the middle of the 19th century, it was a custom in the school dormitory to tell folk tales every night before going to sleep.¹³ In addition, the following quote indicates that the telling of a genre that is called *jutus* (a Setu word for fairy tales and other fictional folk tale genres) was not unusual in Setu village communities in the late 19th and early 20th centuries: *Is käu-õs meil latse kooli – õs. Käve küla peale kokku – jutusit jutuste, mõistatusi mõista.* (Our children didn't go to school then. They came together from all the village, told tales, set riddles.)¹⁴ In the course of my own fieldwork I have also been told that in early 20th century, children gathered around certain elderly people to listen to tales. Ksenia Määrsepp (1911–2004), interviewed by myself and Risto Järv, still remembered in the 21st century several fairy tales she had heard as a child in her native village of Kuurakeste, when she and other village children visited a neighbourhood farm and an old man called Vassil from the neighbouring village, whose daughter had married into that farm, had come to call on her (Metsvahi 2007: 16).

It is known that fairy tales have also been told in Estonian territory for ritual purposes. In Setumaa, for instance, the most popular time to tell fairy tales was between Christmas and Epiphany. Then tales were told both in the family circle and on visits to the neighbours. In addition to fairy tales, riddles were made. When the first new calves and kids were born in the cowshed, telling was no longer allowed. According to Richard Viidalepp, this ban is based on an ancient taboo that people dared not break, fearing serious damage to the cattle (Viidalepp 2004 [1965]: 52). When on her way to collect folklore in 1938, Ello Kirss was warned by her father, an inhabitant of Setumaa, that it was not a very good idea to collect folklore in summer:

In summertime no one will bother about tales and songs, because the Setus have their own time for such things – the winter meat-time (the time after Christmas [no meat was to be eaten for 6 weeks before Christmas] until the Butter Week [Russian Maslenitsa, the week of Shrove Tuesday and the beginning of Lent] which ends 8 weeks before Easter) (Remmel 1997: 163).

According to Viidalepp, the custom of telling tales after the *talsipühade paast* (winter fasting) was parallel to the custom on the north coast to have a twilight hour during

jäguaeg, a period lasting from the beginning of November to St. Martin's Day. At that time tales were also told and riddles made. About *jäguaeg* in Kuusalu parish, the folklore collector Gustav Vilberg wrote:

Also in older times, and at some places even nowadays, curious *jäguhtud* (*jägu*-evenings) have been held from 1 November, All Hallows' Day, up to St. Martin's Day. On these evenings no work was done, but families visited each other, telling old-time tales and making riddles. Those skilled in posing and guessing riddles were held in great respect. (Remmel 1997: 54)

In the rest of Estonia, this period was called the Time of Souls. During that period, dead family members were commemorated and visits were made to relatives and neighbours (Viidalepp 2004 [1965]: 50).

Thus in the Estonian context it cannot be stated that fairy tales were never told a hundred years ago or earlier. The telling of fairy tales could not have had a very marginal role, if there was a custom to resort to that genre in specific situations, especially if the telling of that genre had ritual significance (see also Bódis 2013). It must be admitted – as with several aspects of the study concerning the folk tale we are addressing – that applying the visions of Western scholars must be done proceeding from the Estonian cultural and historical perspective. The idea that the interpretation frameworks of Western Europe should not be applied automatically is also supported by the fact that the diffusion area of the tale type *The Woman as Wolf* remains outside the confines of Western Europe.

CIRCULATION OF *THE WOMAN AS WOLF* TALE OUTSIDE ESTONIA

As I have earlier presented a brief account of the circulation of *The Woman as Wolf* outside Estonia (Metsvahi 2010; 2011), I will now provide a more detailed description of the fairy tale versions recorded from the Sami, Karelian and Vepsian people; the existence of those versions was either unknown or relatively unfamiliar to me when writing the above articles, but they are comparatively close to the Estonian versions of the tale. In addition, I will give a brief introduction to the tales of other peoples.

There is a fairy tale known all over Lapland, classified under type AT 409, which has been called the *Tale of the Golden Merganser*. The first printed versions of this tale were published more than a hundred years ago, and in earlier times it was a popular folk tale. (Aikio, Aikio 1982: unnumbered pages) In 1932, the tale was recorded by Paavo Ravila, who published it in the following year with a Finnish translation. The tale was told by Nils Mathiesen Mienna, an informant above middle age, speaking the northern Sami language, in the village of Goadát (Sami) or Sandnes (Norwegian) on the Varanger Peninsula. The AT 409 plot here is not combined with any others, and starts with a prince marrying the princess of Nävešan-land. Already in the second sentence, it is announced that the Hättešan-hag would come and change the young woman into a golden merganser, and make her jump into the water. About the name Hättešan, Ravila writes that in addition to a vicious hag, it means a type of black worm. (Ravila 1931: 186) This clarification helps to explain why the woman, when back in human shape at the end of the

story, refuses to come indoors: she smells the terrible smell of the worm in the room,¹⁵ which can be banished first when a lock of hair from the daughter of the Hättesän-hag is discovered attached to the door post. Breastfeeding is not mentioned in the story, and even the child is only mentioned once in the plot – saying that the mother, transformed into a bird, comes to see the child every night. When the mother comes out of the water to see the child, she hides her plumage under a stone.¹⁶ The husband realises that he has a false wife when the Hättesän-hag's daughter feels the soft bed to be very hard, while the bed full of lumps of wood and balls of wire feels soft to her.

Thus the Hättesän folk and humans – while living in the same time and side by side – are opposite by nature. The same opposition exists in Setu fairy tales between humans or christened people and (*vana*)*pagans* ([old]heathens) or (*vana*)*halvad* ([old] evil ones), among whom even the Rõõgutaja may be counted. These are tales of which the narrators themselves have said that they are not real fairy tales (*jutus*), but rather true stories from very ancient times. For instance, Veera Tubli in Podmotsa village in Järvesuu parish remarked in 1937, before starting the telling of *The Woman as Wolf* tale (more specifically, the combination of types ATU 510A, ATU 403C and AT 409): *vanast näet ellevä na halva inemeisiga poolõst* (you see, in the old times, the evil ones lived among people) (Metsvahi 2007: 798).¹⁷ There are also other parallels between the Sami and the Estonian tales, namely, some of the Lapp versions of AT 409 contain an etiological ending: the prince pushes the witch's daughter onto a flaming stake, and she burns up and her ashes turn into serpents, spiders, snakes, frogs and flies (Aikio, Aikio 1982).

A relatively large number of stories containing the AT 409 story line have been recorded from Karelia. The plot seldom occurs separately, it is generally merged with tale type ATU 510A or ATU 511. The combination type most common in Estonia – ATU 403C + AT 409 – is very rare in Karelia. When *The Woman as Wolf* has been combined with ATU 403C, a third type (either ATU 510A, or ATU 511) has in most cases also merged with them (Pentikäinen 1978: 291). The young woman's adversary in the Karelian stories is Syöjätär, or the witch Jaagibiha, who turns the woman into a (female) reindeer in the north Karelian versions (Konkka 1963: 74–75; Rausmaa 1972: 197), or a goose or a swan in the south Karelian versions (Konkka 1963: 506). In one version, the witch tries to curse the young woman in many different ways, and when she does not succeed, the maid turns into a reindeer of her own accord and flees from Jaagibiha (Chistov 1958: 26–31). Compared to the Sami stories, the Karelian tales lay more emphasis on the small baby left behind at home, who in some stories is a daughter (Konkka 1963: 127–132) and in some versions a son (Chistov 1958: 26–31). As in many Estonian versions, there are songs included: in most cases the shepherd calls the child's mother home with a song (Konkka 1963: 130–132). It is characteristic that the mother, having arrived and shed her animal skin or bird plumage, says that the next day she is coming for the last time, and must thereafter stay in the forest/water, sometimes because her flock is leaving for another territory (when in fact, already on the next day the critical moment – her retransformation into human shape – is going to occur). This is similar in several Estonian, Russian, Belarusian, Vepsian, and Livonian versions. In addition, the wolf turns into several other animals and objects – a bear, a snake and a spindle – before regaining human shape in a similar way to several Estonian and Lapp versions. The transformed woman struggles and tries to tear her wolf, bear- and snakeskin. Only the spindle rests quietly in the husband's lap so he can take it home. (Chistov 1958: 26–31) The methods

for punishing the witch and her daughter are also very similar to the Estonian versions: they are burned either in a sauna or a heated hole, tricked into a hole to die or torn to pieces by stallions (they are tied behind the stallions who then drag them across a field).

The Vepsian versions of AT 409 are close to the Karelian stories. The young couple's baby in this story is a girl. The difference from the Karelian and Lapp tales is in the result of the transformation: Jaagibaaba turns the young woman into a swan and lets her fly away. As in the Estonian and many Karelian tales, the woman recovers her human shape irrevocably when her skin or feathers are burned. (Salve 1993: 6)

The Ingrian tales are but few and they probably bear an Estonian impact. An evil stepmother turns a young woman into a wolf. Finally, the stepmother's daughter is destroyed by tricking her to step down from the sweat bench in the sauna, and into a tub full of hot tar. (Rausmaa 1988: 141–145)

In Russian folklore AT 409 is not a popular plot, and very seldom occurs separately; it is generally combined with type ATU 511 or type ATU 450 (*Little Brother and Little Sister*). In total, 19 Russian, Belarusian or Ukrainian versions of this tale have been published in print. (Bagar et al. 1979: 130) Most often, the young woman in Russian stories is turned into a lynx, but in other versions also into a fox, a goat or a deer; in the Belarusian and Ukrainian stories also into a fish or a duck (Vedernikova 1980: 253, 258). In Vedernikova's opinion, changing into a bird or a fish in most Belarus stories and in all Ukrainian stories is an impact of the fairy tale *Little Brother and Little Sister*, or connected to the vicinity of bodies of water in certain regions (Vedernikova 1980: 259). Several Russian tales have been recorded from regions in the vicinity of non-Slavic territories, where AT 409 is popular. Even the male protagonist's name Stroj is common to several Karelian versions and one of the Russian versions known to me (Bazanov, Alekseyeva 1964: 85–87). In other respects too the tale is similar to the Karelian fairy tale versions. At the end, when the man burns the animal skin, the woman turns into a snake, a frog, and finally – just before turning back into a woman – a spindle. If the gender of the young couple's baby is named, it is male.

In Lithuania, this tale type is not widespread. Nor does it ever merge with tale type ATU 403C. As the Lithuanian word denoting a wolf is masculine, the young woman in Lithuanian tales is never turned into a wolf, but generally into a roe deer or a lynx. The motif of burning the animal skin never occurs in Lithuanian tales, the animal is just caught and brought home or into the sauna where she regains her human shape.¹⁸

Latvian lore is the only one besides Estonian in which the woman in tale type AT 409 is turned into a wolf. Versions that can with certainty be classified under this tale type are twice as numerous as those in the Lithuanian Folklore Archives – about 25, and yet this is about 10 times less than occurrences of the same plot in Estonian folklore collections. In Latvian folklore, the combination of AT 409 with tale types ATU 511, ATU 510A and ATU 403C is the most common. There is even a version combining all four plots.

One of the notable differences between AT 409 in the folklore of the Northern Peoples (Sami, Karelian, Vepsian) and Latvian folklore is the greater emphasis on the description of the initial situation in the Latvian versions. For example, in a story recorded near Daugavpils, the situation is the following: an orphan gets married, but her husband does not want the bride's stepmother to come and live at his home. The husband's father dies and there is lack of working hands in the household. The young woman's stepmother then moves in with them. (Šmits 1925–1937a) In another version, also recorded near

Daugavpils, there is a grandmother with a little boy who has no father and no mother. When the grandmother dies, the boy needs someone to help him with the household. He marries. For a long time, the couple has no children. (Šmits 1925–1937b)

In the detailed descriptions of the family situation, the Latvian versions are close to Russian versions of the tale. For example, one of the Russian versions starts as follows: Once upon a time, there was a beautiful daughter. While her father had not remarried, they had a nice and quiet life. But when the father took a new wife, she appeared to be a witch. The witch told the father that he should throw his daughter out. The father then sent off his daughter to marry a good man. Soon a son was born to the young couple. And, still, the stepmother could not leave the young woman alone. (Afanasyev 1982: 213)

Livonian folk tales also describe the starting situation. For example, one of the Livonian stories – admittedly not a folk tale, but a literary version – starts in this way: Once upon a time there was a king, who had two sweethearts, one of whom he married, but the other bore a grudge against him for her whole life. (Löwis of Menar 1922: 279)

In Latvian and Livonian folklore, the ways of transforming into a wolf are different from those characteristic to Estonian lore: for example, the stepmother hits the young woman on the head with a ladle or on the forehead with a spoon, and says a certain magic spell. In the Livonian version, the abandoned bride first turns herself into a werewolf, learning from a Gipsy woman how this is to be done: you have to crawl nine times through a passage under tree roots. Later, when she becomes a servant at the queen's house, she will use the wolf skin obtained this way to make a wolf of the queen. (Löwis of Menar 1922: 279) In the Latvian werewolf legends, the common method of transformation is crawling under the roots of a tree (Metsvahi 1998).

LOOKING FOR A FRAMEWORK OF INTERPRETATION

The Woman as Wolf is not a typical wonder tale. It cannot be subjected to the fairy tale function scheme of Vladimir Propp (2003 [1968]). Nor do most of the theories of well-known fairy tale scholar Bengt Holbek seem to be relevant to this fairy tale. According to Holbek, the structure of a wonder tale is based on the oppositions young–adult and low–high, and the main subject is the protagonist's fate: a young man (more rarely a maiden) of low status becomes an independent adult of high status. In this process, love for a member of the opposite sex plays a significant role and the fairy tale culminates with a happy wedding, which the narrator in fact has had in mind from the beginning, although only reaching it at the end of the story. (Holbek 1987: 410–411) Fairy tales addressed by Bottigheimer (2002), on which she based her hypothesis, have a similar structure.

What about stories that belong to the tale type combination ATU 403C + AT 409? The first half of the tale describes a young girl brought up as a stepchild. When the suitor or suitors arrive(s), the stepmother (human, or half supernatural) preferring her own daughter to the stepdaughter, tries to hinder him. Her repeated attempts to deceive the suitors fail, and the stepdaughter is taken away as a bride. The stepmother does not give up, and immediately before (or after) the wedding she succeeds in exchanging the stepdaughter for her own daughter. The stepmother locks up the stepdaughter, but the

latter manages to escape and sit beside the groom in the wedding procession. The first part of the story has a happy ending. And, although in most versions it is not obvious that the stepdaughter has left a lower social level for a higher one, we can agree with Holbek's basic thesis, confirming that even this fairy tale tells us about becoming adult and independent, leaving the childhood home and creating a new nuclear family.

Although the marriage is proposed by the husband's relatives or the husband himself, the more active part and the protagonist still seems to be the maiden or the woman, when considering the plot as a whole. Still, we should consider Holbek's opinion that many fairy tales were relevant for both men and women. Expressing this opinion, Holbek has criticised several earlier fairy tale scholars, who considered the fairy tale to be a story with a single hero and denied the possibility that in this genre masculine and feminine visions might be intertwined. (Holbek 1987: 434)

The other half of the fairy tale – the main story line under consideration in this article – tells about the progress of the young couple after the birth of their first child. The couple's peaceful existence is interrupted by the stepmother, who changes the woman or the wife into a wolf. The wife's closest tie to her home is the child, so that even as a wolf, she sometimes comes to the boundary between the forest and civilisation to feed the child. Finally, following the advice of the wise man, the husband succeeds in regaining his wife.

It is my opinion that neither structuralist nor psychoanalytical fairy tale theories are helpful in the interpretation of this part. The approach connecting the plot to a specific historical and cultural context seems more fruitful. Paradoxically, Holbek (*ibid.*: 390) emphasises the importance of a cultural context, but in his own attempts of analysis, he uses ideas derived from psychoanalysis, notwithstanding that the latter are not universally applicable. Sigmund Freud's theories grew out of his own patriarchal socio-cultural context, and were shaped by his fear of facing the dark, a suppressed side of the Austrian society of his time. Furthermore, Freud abandoned his theory that sexual abuse in childhood was one of the main causes for the psychological problems of adulthood at an early stage of his research career. Jeffrey Moussaieff Masson, who brought to light Freud's early correspondence and dared to claim that adult sexual violence towards children constituted a grave problem in the Western society of Freud's time, was discharged from the post of Director of Freud Archives for 'undermining' psychoanalytical theory, and later changed the subject of his studies (see Masson 1984: xv–xxiii). If Freud had not replaced childhood experiences in his theory with childhood fantasies, neither Holbek nor a countless host of other humanities scholars would have been able to write about the Oedipal complex being manifest in culture in various ways. However, thanks to the fact that folklore owes its life to the inherent opportunity of expressing thoughts and feelings about subjects that were thought improper or too immodest for explicit discussion, the psychoanalytical approach is quite appropriate for analysing several motifs and plots found in the folklore of the peoples of Western Europe (*cf.* also Vaz da Silva 2007).

Yet Western Europe is not the whole world. Non-Indo-European peoples – especially those who have lived in less patriarchal circumstances, or whose patriarchal history has been relatively short – do not have as many stories that can be readily subjected to Freudian analysis. For instance, in Estonian folklore there are almost no stories about father-daughter incest. As the diffusion area of the tale under scrutiny in this article

remains outside the Western European cultural space, we should look for possibilities of elucidating its contents outside the framework of Freudian theories.

POSSIBLE INTERPRETATIONS OF *THE WOMAN AS WOLF*

As I wrote in the introduction, a scholar of folklore interpreting a folk tale is first wont to ask whether the tale under question belongs to the fictional fairy-tale genre or appears to present a true story. With folk tales, the most universal formula for distinguishing the one from the other is to ask whether the tale is based on truth or fantasy (see Bascom 1984: 8–10). It is clear that for narratives in many cultures, this is a very important distinction, but is it still universally relevant for the analysis of each and every folk tale in all cultures alike?

As a rule, representatives of oral cultures do not reflect upon or analyse the tales they tell, but generally tell these tales to affect the listeners (for example, Hendricks 1990). The criterion of truth is not as important to them as it is to an individual who has grown up in a literary culture. If the truth criterion had been primary, then my Setu informant Ksenia Mürsepp would not have given answers open to so many different interpretations when asked about the truth value and genre of the stories she told. For instance, to the question asked by a scholar of folklore about a tale falling into the category of a fairy tale: “Is this a *jutus* [fairy tale]?” Ksenia answered: *Ma ei tiä^q, kas jutus vai... No timä vöidsö jutus olla^q, a vöidsö... Kui üteldä^q? Midägi oll’ vöipolla olnu^q, a muidogi mitte nii.* (I don’t know, a fairy tale or... this might have been a fairy tale, but might... how to put it? There may have been something like this, but of course not quite in that way.)¹⁹ During another visit, she answered a question about the truth-value of the fairy tale she had just told: *No kuigi vöipolla om olnugi midägi, a kyik öks tegelikult nii saa-s olla^q* (Well, there may have been something, one way or another, but everything could not have happened this way).²⁰ The fictional status is especially doubtful with the Setu *jutusõq* that have an etiological ending: if the story tells about how something came into being, it is difficult to imagine that it has no connection at all to the real world.

Zuni (native American) informants, questioned by Denis Tedlock, gave answers very similar to Ksenia’s when asked about the truth-value of fictional stories. According to Tedlock (1983: 159–160, 164–165), they answered, when asked about the *telapnaawe*, folk tales told after nightfall, that in their opinion, the tales contained some part of the truth, and often linked the truth to the etiological ending. Yelezar Meletinsky’s remark, that in Inuit and Chukchi folklore it is almost impossible to differentiate between an epic and a fairy tale, also supports the opinion that for non-European peoples, the genre boundaries run differently from those of Western European peoples (Meletinsky 1958: 41).

The factor that makes it compelling to retell and listen to a story again and again, and keeps up the suspense during the telling, has been described as constant tension between reality and fiction (Tedlock 1983: 177). Yet it may be said that suspense during the telling was maintained because the story related to important topics in the world that the narrator and the listeners inhabited. As to *The Woman as Wolf*, it is probably less relevant to brood on whether it was received as fantasy or a tale somewhat related to reality, the main thing was that in the opinion of the contemporary audience, it was worth hearing and retelling because it did not leave the listeners untouched, but was topical for their own lives.

If we wish to find out which parts of the *The Woman as Wolf* were most significant for the audience of a certain period, we first have to place the telling environment into a certain timeframe. We know for certain, that the story was told in Estonia in the early 19th century. From the circulation area we can deduce that the folk tale belongs to an earlier stratification than the greater part of fairy tale types spread in Estonia. The latter statement is corroborated by the fact that the fairy tale includes songs, and fairy tales with songs belong to an earlier Finnic-Baltic stratification (Salve, Sarv 1987: 23; Salve 2006: 351). But this tale is not just a Finnic folk tale; we have to keep in mind that the same plot is spread among the Sami.

When reading Sami fairy tales, it sometimes seems as if the gender roles were reversed. Girls and women kill each other, and in the *Cinderella* tale the protagonist is a male Cinder-Boy, who wears very fine garments at a leaping-contest (Ravila 1931: 12, 178–185). These are the traces of a matrilineal society, which are often preserved in folk tales and customs much longer than in everyday norms of behaviour. Several motifs of tale *The Woman as Wolf* date back to those times, when the transfer from a matrilineal to a patrilineal social order had been completed,²¹ although people's mentality had not fully adjusted to the change. The attempts of female characters to be in control of their own life seem to be one of the leitmotifs of *The Woman as Wolf*.

Patrilineal and patrilocal societies are patriarchal. In such societies, the woman is subjugated to the man and the man is the one who chooses the woman, makes a suit and takes the wife to his home after marriage. Nevertheless, in Estonian and Karelian customs and folk tales, we can notice several traits dating back to the period of matrilineal social order, and women are presented in a more active role than is customary in a patriarchal society. For example, in a tale recorded in Karelia *The Sister's Flight* (ATU 313E*), the plot begins with the brother telling her sister that she must go and find him a wife (Rausmaa 1972: 98–99). One of the Estonian versions of *The Woman as Wolf* begins with a sentence: *Ilusal suvisel päeval oli küsinud poeg ema käest, et kas ta lubab võtta temal naist, aga ema ei nõustund selle üle* (One fine summer day, a son asked his mother whether she would allow him to marry, but the mother did not agree to that).²² In a patriarchal society with large or extended families, it is normally the father or some other male relative who decides marriage issues, and not the mother or the sister.

In southern Karelia, and even in the regions now belonging to Finland, recordings have been made of an old custom preceding the suitor's visit called *tuppikosinta* (the sheath suit). On a certain Sunday – usually at Michaelmas, the last holiday of the summer period –, the girls went and stood in front or in the vicinity of a church, or in the church vestibule, bringing with them their advocate or chaperone – an older female relative – and carrying on their belts an empty sheath intended specifically for this purpose. The advocate called out that the girl had come 'for a sheath', and the young man who wished to have that girl came and put his knife into her sheath. If some young man did not have a knife with him, he could put his finger into her sheath or step on the girl's foot. If the girl was not interested in the man, she could ease the knife out of the sheath or throw it at the boy's feet. When the boy then visited the girl's home in a week's time, and saw the knife hanging on the back wall with the family's own cutlery, this was meant as an encouragement for him to come and ask for the girl's hand in marriage. If the knife had been attached to the door post, it would have been pointless to cherish any further hopes about this particular girl. (Sarmela 1994: 66)

The plot of ATU 403C + AT 409 starts with the episode of a marriage suit. The stepmother knows that it is the suitors and the girl in question who make the decision. Therefore, she first resorts to cunning: she tries to confuse the suitors and substitute her own daughter for the stepdaughter. When the cunning before the wedding fails, she takes to more violent tricks during the wedding feast and locks the girl in somewhere. When that does not work as intended, she tries an even more powerful agency (witchcraft) – again, at this time when the young wife is in a state of passage. Several texts mention that she is still in confinement: this means that she has recently given birth. It is always her first child.

In a traditional Estonian wedding, the rites of passage culminated with capping: from the moment when a cap was tied on the bride's head by a *kaasanaine* (elder female relative, representative of the bride's family at the wedding), her status changed: she became a *noorik* (young wife) (Tedre 1999: 58). She became a woman as late as after the birth of her first child. The change of status after childbirth was just as important, or more important than going through the wedding ritual. Unmarried girls who had a child were still capped in the 18th and 19th century (by their mother or another woman in the mother's presence), although the custom was officially forbidden in 1792. The practice continued despite the ban and the demands of the church were met with a compromise: the headdress of an unmarried woman was changed to look slightly different from that of a wedded wife. (Hupel 1795: 564) The pastor August Wilhelm Hupel, who lived in Estonia from 1757 to his death in 1819, and thoroughly described Estonian customs and traditions, wrote at the end of the 18th century that women wanted to 'get under the cap', to escape the status of an old maid, and that there were even unmarried women who wanted to have a child (Hupel 1777: 137).

In most of the fairy tale versions of the Finnic peoples in which the sex of the baby is mentioned, it is female. In Baltic and Eastern Slavic fairy tales, where the child's sex is mentioned, it is a boy. Already the fact of a daughter being born may refer to traces of the matrilineal society in this tale type. Even centuries after the transfer to a patriarchal social order, some traces of girls having been preferred to boys still remained. For instance, the Votes, a neighbouring Finnic people whose language is very closely related to Estonian, had a custom in the 18th century that having given birth to a son, the young wife continued to wear a certain type of headdress (a so-called *päästäs*-cap) worn by young wives, whereas the birth of a girl entitled her to the 'white caps' that she was then to wear for the rest of her life (Õpik 1970: 152).

Until now, the plot of *The Woman as Wolf* has been explained in the framework of a conflict between women: the stepmother desperately wants to marry off her daughter and wishes ill to her stepdaughter, who is not her flesh and blood. Yet, after the woman has been turned into a wolf, other topics enter the story. The woman, who has newly undergone a change of status and is still on the boundary line or very close to the boundary line between the two statuses and therefore very vulnerable and prone to be subjected to witchcraft, has been turned into a wolf against her will and has found herself among a pack of wolves in the forest. Because of the spell cast on her, she cannot become human and return home.²³ She needs someone to break the spell and her husband fits into that role. The husband does what is in his power, but the wife does not cooperate much. She is suspicious and tries to grab her wolf skin even when it has almost burned up. In many versions, the wife also tries to run back into the forest, although

she no longer has a wolf skin. In several versions, the husband has to go to a lot more trouble to get the wife back to normal: in some cases he has to handle the regained spindle, log or wife in a certain manner. There is a Karelian version, quite characteristic and helpful in explaining the Estonian versions, in which the wife, desperate because her animal skin has burned up, announces to the husband: "I will not live with you! I would rather run on the pebbles of the beach than be caught by Syöjätär again. I will not come back!" (Konkka 1963: 104)

The first half of the tale tells about a woman of an elder generation who feels unable to succumb to the patriarchal social order, who cannot accept a stepchild who is not of her own blood, and the other half tells about a young woman who cannot make herself subservient. She is glad to leave her stepmother's home for the house of the parents-in-law, but finds there that her life after becoming a young wife and a mother is by no means easier. In Setu bridal laments and several Estonian *regilaul* songs, the young wife's complaints about her hard life at the husband's home, where she has to live by the rules of her parents-in-law, and longs back to the time when she was with her own parents, are a very common motif. In this story, apart from the law laid down by the parents-in-law (which is not mentioned directly), the fact that old social relations have not been broken off becomes relevant – the stepmother still wishes her stepdaughter ill. Therefore, the burning of the skin cannot be unambiguously interpreted as the freeing or liberation of the wife. What we see at the end of *The Woman as Wolf* is not the turning frequent in Western wonder tales, where love breaks a terrible curse impending upon the protagonists and delivers them into the happy world of a young married couple in love with each other (Röhrich 1999: 211), but rather a transformation from animal to human form, which still retains some mental associations of the animist-totemist kind.

In psychoanalytical interpretation, this kind of liberation also means letting go of the negative ties with the (step)mother (ibid.: 216). In the context of interpreting AT 409, the burning of the animal skin does not mean liberation from the stepmother. It is when living with the pack of wolves that the young wife is free of her stepmother, and real freedom is finally gained first when the stepmother has been destroyed.

THE WOLF AND WEREWOLF IN ESTONIAN FOLKLORE

Why, then, is it life as a wolf that seems tempting to a young woman at some point in her life? And why is the woman not turned into a wolf in the AT 409 tales of any other Finnic peoples? Knowledge of the folk belief of this region will be helpful in finding the explanation. Estonian and Latvian folk belief and tradition have been influenced by European literati, none of whom, when writing about the Eastern Baltic regions during the period from the mid-16th century to the late 17th century, failed to mention the local peoples' ability to turn themselves into wolves and bears (Donecker 2010; Donecker 2012: 300–303). Judges and men of letters connected the fantasy of turning into a wolf with the werewolf idea that was earlier known to them from literature.²⁴ Owing to the witch trials, where questions about becoming a (were)wolf were asked and answered, the image of transformation into an animal/bird (probably also into a wolf, although I dare not assert this with absolute certainty), whose deeper origins may lie in totemism, and which by that time was probably falling into oblivion, gained new intensity.

Thus we may assume that Germans and other Western men of letters facilitated the survival of ancient beliefs among Estonians. The idea of the survival of totemistic beliefs and images arises when considering that in a region where the nature of folk tradition is quite similar to that of Estonian folklore, namely in the Karelian regions, the traces of such imagery were distinguishable well into the 20th century. Notably, in 1925, an allegedly true story was published from the Karelian village of Voronye Pole in the Olonets province. The story began with the villagers' annoyance over a bear persistently attacking the village cattle. One of the old men suggested that they should offer a girl as a bride to the master of bears, so as to pacify him. The girl was dressed as a bride and sent to the woods. She put up a fight, but was tied to a tree by force and left in the forest. Luckily, she managed to free herself and run to the neighbouring village. When the police interviewed the old men, the latter said that this was an old custom they had from olden times. To pacify the bears a girl must be given as a bride. (Oinas 1999)

No human sacrifices to wolves are known from Estonia. There is, though, a notice from Hiiumaa, saying that offerings were made to pagan/heathen gods to counteract the damage done by wolves. From the 19th and 20th centuries there is information from mainland Estonia that offerings must be brought to the wolf (leaving him 'his share'), so that he would not kill the cattle. Several different records confirm that the wolf was called when sending out the cattle for the first time in spring, and offered part of a slaughtered sheep; it was believed that the wolf must eat a dog every year, etc. When the wolf was fleeing with his catch, he was not to be interrupted, and the animals killed by the wolf were not to be touched. Wolf's fangs were worn as a talisman to banish evil, and girls of marrying age were slapped with a wolf tail; it was believed that a human hand injured by a wolf had healing powers. (Rootsi 2008) The particular significance attributed to the wolf was also manifest in more than a hundred euphemisms used to denote the animal. The wolf was never to be named on an alien territory (Russwurm 1855: 200). The wolf merited at least as much reverence as the forest itself. Just like the forest spirits, the wolf – who has also been considered one of the manifestations of the forest spirit – could punish or hurt people who did not behave properly in the forest (Paulson 1997: 54).²⁵

The earliest records of the belief that a human being could turn into a wolf of her/his own accord date back to 1550. It was Sebastian Münster who wrote about the werewolf belief of the Livonians, which the Livonians had allegedly admitted in court (Metsvahi, forthcoming a). The belief that a human being can turn into wolf was widespread not only among the peasants, but also among the local Germans. For example, Christian Kortholt has described an incident that befell one of his German acquaintances in a Courland inn in 1637. The German travelling in Courland visited an inn in Dubeln with some local Germans. There were some Latvian peasants sitting at a nearby table, and one of them came over to the Germans' table and said, with a friendly face, raising his tankard for a toast: "To you, sir, as it is to me." The traveller understood no Latvian, but still tried to reply something in the same spirit. The local Germans jumped up and told him to keep silent. They beat the Latvian peasant up and threw him out of the inn. When the German traveller, with astonishment, asked why they had treated that friendly man in such a manner, they answered that if the traveller had blessed the peasant's drink, the latter would have been bound to turn into a werewolf that night. (Donecker 2012: 305) Johann Kanold, on the other hand, gives an account of the impression of another

anonymous traveller in Courland in 1719: “[...] many peasants liked to boast that they were werewolves, knowing that such tall tales would strike other villagers with terror and wonder” (ibid.: 311).

The Latvian word for werewolf, used then and even today, is *vilkatis* (*vilkats*, *vilka-cis*). The word is included in the annex of Georg Mancelius’ first Latvian dictionary (in the form *Willkatz*)²⁶ in 1638,²⁷ and can also be found in farm names of the 17th century (von Bruinik 1924: 194). On the other hand, the word *libahunt*, used in literary Estonian in the 20th century, denoted not a human wolf but rather something different as late as in mid-19th century.²⁸ In his dictionary, which was published in print in 1869, Ferdinand Johann Wiedemann described a common superstition that the wolf’s ninth cub is a *libahunt* – an especially ravenous beast with a narrow muzzle who attacks animals from behind, tearing out their entrails (Wiedemann 1973 [1869]: 493). The Estonian Folklore Archives also has several hundred records of a similar *libe-* or *libahunt*, who is described as being smaller than an ordinary wolf, with a narrow muzzle and tiny ears, and is said to attack by entering their prey from behind and tearing out their entrails (Hiimäe 2007: 352–354). Mall Hiimäe believes that such tales could be recollections of the wolverine (*Gulo gulo*),²⁹ a species more numerous in Estonia in those times. As people’s notions of zoology were not very advanced a couple of centuries ago, it should not be surprising if the wolf was confused with some other forest predator. The Estonian Swedes, for instance, borrowed the Finnic word *lipa* from the Estonian language (the Estonian forms are *libe* and *liba*, meaning slippery and false), and used it to denote the lynx instead (Metsmägi et al. 2012: 238).

CONCLUSIONS

The traces of animism and probably even totemism in the folk culture, as well as stories spread among the Western literati about the local inhabitants’ custom of turning into wolves from time to time, the impact of the witch trials, the great distance between the upper and lower classes of the society, and the serfs’ hard living conditions with the constant threat of starvation³⁰ created a favourable basis for the widespread circulation of werewolf stories in the Estonian territory. Against this background, it is not surprising that the folk tale *The Woman as Wolf*, featuring other animals or birds in the lore of other Finnic peoples, in Estonia casts the protagonist as a wolf. Christianity presented the wolf in negative light, but for the Estonian peasantry it took time to fully recognise this point of view. In the image of the wolf, negative and positive characteristics were entwined in a truly unique manner. Being turned into a wolf was a punishment that the victim still could turn to her advantage to some extent. This is a way to explain the motif – admittedly not present in all the versions of folk tale AT 409 – of the young woman banished into the woods in the shape of a wolf almost starting to enjoy her life there. As briefly mentioned above, the wolf was also associated with fertility. Whether relating to the growth of crops, or the multiplying of animals or humans, fertility is always seen as a positive value. It is the fruit of the woman’s womb, the offspring of the family that first brings the wolf-woman back home. As no principal difference was seen between human and animal procreation, ideas about human congress with animals also formed part of the oral tradition.³¹ From Estonia’s largest island Saaremaa, for exam-

ple, several legends have been recorded in which a woman gives birth to wolf cubs, or becomes a werewolf and mates with wolves in the woods.³²

Considering that pre-marital sexual relations have been common in Estonia throughout the ages (in late 19th and early 20th century they were probably no longer so widespread, but still occurred in certain regions of Estonia),³³ it is no wonder that a flight from the conjugal duties of a wife could be imagined as sexual freedom. The Finnish folklorist Laura Stark has found in her study of incantations that the forest was regarded as the only place where defiance of social norms was possible (Stark 1999: 107, 109). Just like the forest, a wild animal represented freedom from social constraints. The attempts of the church to subject the peasantry totally to the norms of a patriarchal social order were partly successful, but on the other hand, created a counter-reaction. The part of the fairy tale that talks about the wife getting used to life in the wild and being reluctant to return home may be seen as such a reaction. The transformations at the end of the Karelian versions, when the husband wants to bring his recovered wife back home, are characteristic: the woman who has been turned into a reindeer or a bird, changes into a bear, a wolf, a snake and a spindle in the process of regaining her human shape, and it is first in the form of the spindle that the transformations stop and/or the husband manages to carry the wife home.³⁴ Are the wolf, the bear and the snake as symbols of (longing for) premarital sexual freedom here contrasted to the spindle as the characteristic attribute of a housewife, referring to her perpetual indoor chores? Even if the contrast looks too marked, it seems certain that the mental associations created by the telling of and listening to that part of the tale retained their actuality after the abolishment of slavery in the first decades of the 19th century, and after the middle of the 19th century, when the Estonian peasantry was no longer haunted by ever-impending famine and starvation.³⁵ Owing to the survival of those mental associations, the same plot also lived on as a legend, which was presumably still especially popular among women in the 20th century.³⁶ It is apparent that the earlier mental associations of the wolf did not fade irreversibly from the minds of the people, but found their covertly way into the werewolf legends still in circulation in the 20th century.

Translated by Aet Varik

NOTES

1 The English tale type name *The Girl as Wolf* (ATU 409) is misleading, as the tale is about a young woman or wife, not a girl. Instead of *The Woman as Werewolf* I prefer to call the tale type *The Woman as Wolf*, as in this type of folk tales, the word 'wolf' is much more common than 'werewolf'. While analysing this tale type I prefer to refer to the AT catalogue and not the newer ATU catalogue, as the latter contains a number of misleading references to tales that in fact do not represent the same plot at all. With regard to the other tale types, I usually refer to the ATU catalogue; only when the tale description in the AT type catalogue is clearly more precise do I refer to the older catalogue.

2 Information received from Mairi Kaasik April 21, 2010.

3 In the Estonian Folklore Archives there are about 1400 werewolf texts that cannot be classified as fairy tales; about a half of those could be categorised under legend types.

4 In addition, the Finnish folklore scholar Pirkko-Liisa Rausmaa wrote in her comments to AT 409, that this tale type was extremely widespread in Estonia; see Rausmaa 1988: 483.

5 See, for example, Röhrich 1964.

6 In both, the versed parts are included not just in German translation but also in the original Estonian, both of which are fully identical.

7 One possible summary of this combined tale type is provided by Toomeos-Orglaan 2005: 160. For examples, see Kunder 1885: 152–155; Viidalepp 1967: 160–164, 165–167; Salve, Sarv 1987: 79–81, 81–83; Peebo, Peegel 1989: 168–170; Järv et al. 2009: 359–36, 362–365.

8 For tale type titles, I use those established in Estonian folklore studies; see Järv 2005: 223–224.

9 See Kunder 1885: 71–81 (ATU 451A + ATU 511 + ATU 403C + AT 409).

10 EKnS 43, 19/23 (1) < Väike-Maarja parish – Osvald Miller < Mari Essenson, about 50 years old (1910).

11 ERA II 20, 93/4 (9) < Hageri parish, Hageri commune, Adila village, Kloostri farm < Kose parish, Tuhala commune, Oru village – Rudolf Põldmäe < Ants Mesikäpp, 62 years old (1929).

12 ERA II 126, 330 (58) < Rõuge parish, Laitsna-Rogosi commune, Pundi village – Amanda Raadla < Peeter Kapp, born in 1853 (1936).

13 “Mountains of fairy tales and folk tales heaped upon one another”; see Mälk 1963: 50.

14 RKM II 44, 30 (4) < Setu, Meremäe commune, Navige village < Vastseliina parish, Obinita rural council – S. Lätt < Anna Järv, 75 years old (1956); see Viidalepp 2004 [1965]: 40.

15 Väino Klaus has translated the name of the worm as a beetle worm; see Klaus 1995: 25.

16 In several Estonian werewolf legends, as well as in witch trial transcripts, it is said that while in human shape, the werewolf hides her/his wolf skin under a stone.

17 See ERA II 174, 641/54 (25).

18 For more details on the Lithuanian versions, see Metsvahi 2010: 618.

19 ERA, MD 108 (31).

20 ERA, MD 106 (10).

21 About the matrilineal social order in Estonia during the first millennium AD, see Mägi 2009 and Metsvahi, forthcoming b.

22 ERA II 244, 332/4 (7) < Rõuge parish, Viitina village – A. Reiljan, pupil of the 6th class < E. Reiljan, 40 years old (1939).

23 In Estonian werewolf legends it is common that people who have turned into wolves of their own accord can also resume their human shape; while a person turned into wolf by someone else cannot regain his/her humanity without help. This rule is not valid for werewolves only, but more generally for people on whom a spell has been cast; see Röhrich 1999: 212.

24 Apart from the authors of classical or late antiquity, demonologists also mentioned werewolves. I will here refer to a single excerpt from demonological literature that is interesting for the gender difference it establishes regarding transformation into animals with the help of witchcraft. Eberhard David Hauber writes that by means of witchcraft, it is possible to assume the shape of different animals, thus women transform into cats, or sometimes hares, and men into wolves; see Hauber 1738–1744: 309–311.

25 The cult of the wolf among Estonians has been mentioned already in the 19th century. It was Kreutzwald who claimed that in earlier times, the Estonians had an attitude to the wolf that is comparable to the cult of the bear among the Finno-Ugrian peoples in Siberia (see Kreutzwald, Neus 1854: 119). Reverence for the wolf is obvious even in the fact that several literati and men of the Enlightenment admonished the people not to hold the wolf in too high esteem. For instance, Carl Körber, the pastor of Vändra, wrote in a book intended for the peasants in the mid-19th century, that wolves were evil and there was no need to respect them, instead, they should be killed, as had been done in Britain where there were no wolves left (see Körber 1850: 39–40).

26 The Latvian word for wolf is *vilks*.

27 Here I wish to thank Sandis Laime, as this information was included in his e-mail from October 30, 2013.

28 The human wolf used to be denoted by the Estonian word *soend*; in witch trial transcripts, the words *nõiahunt* (witch wolf) and *hunt* (wolf) are the most common.

29 The wolverine has a special significance in several cultures, for example, native Americans, the Inuits, the Samis, and the Mongols (Hiiemäe 2007: 358). For the Dolgans' beliefs about the wolverine, see Grachova 1995: 77.

30 I mention the threat of starvation as that had a certain impact on the spreading of werewolf stories: in legends, a frequent reason for turning into a wolf is the opportunity to get fresh meat.

31 For the use of the word *libahunt* to denote a lecherous woman, see Vähi 2008: 135.

32 An example of such a tale:

One man had a wife who used to turn into a wolf, kill animals and bring home meat. Once, their home was very cold, and the man said: "This room is so cold, also the child is cold here." The wife answered: "The child who is indoors is all right! But what are those children to do who are hiding in the straw behind the house!" The man went out to see and found wolf cubs in the straw. He took them and struck them dead against the fence. On Saturday evening, his wife heated the sauna and the man went into the sauna. He was sitting on the sweat bench and whipping himself with birch branches, when a wolf pushed open the sauna door and made a rush at him. The man's only recourse was to grab the poker from the corner and push it down the wolf's throat. The wolf leapt out of the sauna. After that, the woman's throat was sore for a long time. The woman went to punish the man for having struck the wolf cubs dead against the fence, for those were her other children. (ERA II 157, 398/9 (2) < Mustjala parish – Amanda Raadla < Aadu Väärt, born in 1865 [1937].)

For comparison, here is a transcript of a Lapp folk tale from 1750:

There was a girl who was treated badly by her brothers. She went to the forest, married the bear and gave birth to a son. Finally, feeling that his life was coming to end, the bear asked that the girl's brother would kill him. (Oinas 1999: 214)

33 Hupel (1777: 136–138) wrote that among Estonians, it was not considered strange when a girl was found sleeping in a boy's arms in the morning. Estonians themselves said that this is an old custom of theirs. Pregnancy did not dishearten them and they quickly married the child's father or another man or stayed and lived with their parents together with the child. If a young person had never had sexual intercourse, this was considered weird. Hupel added that after the wedding, the young people who had behaved with such immodesty, became faithful spouses.

34 In some Estonian versions it is the spindle that can be brought home.

35 See Seppel 2008.

36 About Ann Pilberg, a self-assured woman who went to court to seek justice for herself, and told in 1933 with great evocative power her version of the tale *The Woman as Wolf*, see Metsvahi 2000.

SOURCES

Audio collections at the Estonian Folklore Archives of the Estonian Literary Museum:

ERA, MD – Digital sound recordings on MiniDiscs (2003–).

Manuscript collections at the Estonian Folklore Archives of the Estonian Literary Museum:

EKnS – Folklore collection of the Estonian Literature Society (1872–1924).

EKÜ – Folklore collection of the Literary Society of Estonia (Ehstländische Literarische Gesellschaft) (ca. 1800–1890).

ERA – Folklore collection of the Estonian Folklore Archives (1927–1944).

ÕES – Folklore collection of the Learned Estonian Society (Gelehrte Estnische Gesellschaft) (ca. 1800–1936).

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