

On the Position of the Religious Legend of St. George in the Mental Universe of the Setu Woman

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Introduction

We are living in the midst of stories.* The ubiquity of narrative is obvious not only in the fact that novels, commercials, films and next-door ladies tell us tales, but also in that our ability to render sense to our surroundings and to maintain our identity is directly related to narrativity. It is easy to recognise a serial film or a fairy tale as a narrative. Identifying the narrative form of a contemporary legend or a rumour may prove somewhat more difficult. Yet the attempt to regard as narratives the stories that we ourselves inhabit and that shape our identity, may prove to be most difficult of all. After all, the history of our nation or our state¹ – as well as our private life histories² – are stories made possible only thanks to the narrator and his attitudes.

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¹ It has been primarily philosophers of history (e.g., White 1980; Ricoeur 1980, 1991, 1994; Mink 1970) who have drawn attention to narrative as a means for ordering and ideating the knowledge and experiences acquired in society. Hayden White describes how reality acquires a meaning through narrative, in the following words: "The historical narrative/. . ./ reveals to us a world that is putatively "finished," done with, over, and yet not dissolved, not falling apart. In this world, reality wears the mask of meaning, the completeness and fullness of which we can only imagine, never experience." (1987: 21)

² The psychologist Jerome Bruner discusses narrative as a means for maintaining a person's identity: "To be in a viable culture is to be bound in a set of connecting stories, connecting even though the stories may not represent a consensus." (1995: 96). Since the structuring of history and man's self-conception within a particular culture are closely bound up (Geertz 1993: 389), students of the narrativity of historical discourse and of biographical discourse may exercise fruitful influence on each other.

Narrativity plays a significant role not only in our culture but is something profoundly characteristic of humankind as such. There has never been a society without narratives (Barthes 1988: 79). Hayden White has called narrative a meta-code, a human universal that enables us to transmit transcultural messages about the nature of a shared reality (1980: 6). Narrativity is directly connected to the human power of thinking about temporality (on the close link between narrativity and temporality see e.g. Ricoeur 1980). The ability to perceive one's duration in time and to think about time is universally characteristic of humans, regardless of what culture they happen to belong to. Probably Endel Tulving is right in his conjecture that the perception of temporality – that is, *chronesthesia*³ – belongs among the most significant motivating forces in human culture (Tulving 2002: 279). We cannot speak about *chronesthesia* in animals or, to put it differently – animals lack episodic memory⁴.

Narratives circulating among the people in oral form have traditionally been the realm of folklorists. Folkloristics got its start when stories founded on a worldview different from that of the researchers came to be evaluated. And even though today we no longer cherish the romantic notions about the “soul of the people” (*die Volksseele*) deducible through such stories which characterised the early days of folkloristics, interest for them has survived among folklorists to this day. The more the narrator's mental world differs from our own, the more pleasure and food for thought we derive from his stories.

On February 17, 2001, my colleague Risto Järv and I paid our first visit to the Setu⁵ woman Ksenya Mürsepp⁶ who was then 90 years old. Seven years earlier Ksenya had moved from Petchory (Petseri)⁷ to Tartu; before settling in Petchory, ³ *Chronesthesia* is a neuro-cognitive ability expressed by an individual's awareness of his own and the others' existence as duration in time, enabling subjective cogitation about time (Tulving 2002: 264).

⁴ “Episodic memory does exactly what other forms of memory do not and cannot do – it enables an individual to re-experience a past experience” (Tulving 2002: 235). On episodic memory see also Tulving 2002: 37; 230-236.

⁵ The Setu are an Orthodox ethnic group in Southeast Estonia, while the rest of Estonia has traditionally been Lutheran.

⁶ I want cordially to thank Ksenya Mürsepp and her grandchild Tatyana Kodas, through whom we learned to know Ksenya. It is rare luck to meet a narrator who not only knows perfectly her own culture and its different representations, but is also able to translate from one culture into another.

⁷ Petchory is a town with about 15, 000 inhabitants, which before and after the two World Wars belonged to Russia, but in the inter-war period formed part of Estonia. A monastery founded in 1473 is still acting in Petchory, at present (EE 7: 281-282).

till the 1950-s, she had lived in the village of Kuurakõste, 3 km from Pankjavitsa (at present under the administration of Russia, about 1 km from the Pskov-Riga highway⁸), with a mixed Setu and Russian population. In Tartu, Ksenya lives with the family of her granddaughter in an apartment in the Soviet-era residential area Annelinn. Ksenya has a wonderful memory and good command of the tradition and she masters the rules of narrative creation. She has told us a number of fairy tales, jokes, legends, religious legends, memorates, anecdotes, and personal experience narratives, described customs and given us riddles; in addition to that, the few songs she has sung to us reveal that she also has good knowledge of the Estonian folk song *regilaul*⁹. In conversation Ksenya is very obliging and tries to give a thorough answer to every question; if she does not know the answer she, however, makes no attempt to conceal her ignorance (on such occasions she may say, for instance, “I don’t know this, but it should be in the holy books” or “I haven’t heard about that”). Yet the most common answer is lengthy and often in the form of narrative, even if the interviewer(s) have not expected it. Between Feb. 17, 2001 and June 20, 2002, we paid six visits to Ksenya¹⁰ and on all these occasions she was very eager to tell us stories. Most of all she appreciates fictional stories – called “*jutusõq*” (fairy tales and longer jokes)¹¹ in the Setu language – which she narrates in a very fluent and expressive style. It has happened repeatedly that when we have finished the interview and are preparing to leave, Ksenya – although tired of story-telling – offers to tell us still another “*jutus*”, either to demonstrate how obliging she is or to keep us from leaving.

In the present paper I do not intend to discuss the fluently narrated stories belonging to Ksenya’s active repertoire, but will focus on the religious legend of St. George which she has narrated five times in response to our direct requests.¹²

⁸ At the beginning of the 20th century, a great stone road ran at the place of the modern highway.

⁹ This also includes the ability to improvise or create a new song out of elements pre-existent in the tradition. Because of her poor health she is no longer able to sing, but in her youth she has been precentor and the best singer in her village.

¹⁰ I have visited her five times, with different companions (Risto Järv, Mari Sarv, Kristina Veidenbaum, and Andreas Kalkun).

¹¹ In the Setu folk genre system narratives are broadly divided into two categories: fictional narratives and narratives of things that have really happened. Truth value seems to be the most universal criterion for distinguishing narratives, being, according to William Bascom (1984: 19), characteristic of numerous societies.

¹² The legend texts will be presented in the Appendix. The fifth text version is missing, since the quality of the recording on minidisk was very poor due to technical shortcomings. In order to give a better overview, I have divided the texts into parts and numbered the parts according to their succession.

Ksenya never told the legend on her own initiative and extensively varied the text on each telling. These facts allow us to presume that our request created for the first time in Ksenya's life the situation where she had to tell this story which she had known for many years and heard on many occasions. Concerning most of her stories we asked Ksenya who she had heard them from. In case of fairy tales and jokes Ksenya is usually able to answer¹³; concerning the religious legend of St. George, however, she answered that she had not heard it from any one source, but it was told by many people (see App., II 4¹⁴). Accordingly, the knowledge of how St. George killed the dragon forms part of Ksenya's semantic knowledge, which she obviously had not yet had reason to put into words¹⁵.

To show how Ksenya succeeded in telling the legend, I shall next present the text of the legend recorded on our first visit on February 17, 2001. Since I am interested in the reasons for variation and in the role the legend plays in Ksenya's mental universe, I shall after the text briefly describe the textual surroundings of the legend. I shall also present an overview of the context of the legend on the second, third, and fourth telling.

The Religious Legend of St. George and Its Textual Surroundings

Risto: Is there also some fairy tale about a young fellow killing a big serpent or snake?

Ksenya: Ah, that one, that's not a fairy tale, that's a real thing that happened many hundred years ago.

Risto: So how did it happen?

Ksenya: That's in the monastery, at Petchory, there was a large carriage there. And there was a big snake. A big snake made underneath that carriage. And a queen in the carriage. She was... sure, now, she was not alive, was like... but the carriage was wooden, all right, and.

¹³ The most frequent reference on those occasions was to the name of Vassili from the neighbouring village – a man about 100 years old to whom Ksenya in her childhood used to go together with other children to listen to his stories. Ksenya is proud to have been the only child who remembered the stories. She remembered not only the fictional stories, the formulas for creating a folk song *regilaul*, and the riddles, but also all the stories supposed to have “really happened”. Ksenya has recalled how her relatives used to crack jokes, saying that there was no need for newspapers when Ksenya came to visit.

¹⁴ Here and in the following, the Roman and Arabic numbers indicate the version of the legend (the Roman numbers) and its components (Arabic numbers) in the Appendix.

¹⁵ The people's appreciation of fictional stories accounts for the fact that fairy tales and jokes are heavily over-represented in the Setu materials kept in the Eesti Rahvaluule Arhiiv (Estonian Folklore Archive), whereas legends and religious legends are under-represented (concerning this, see also Metsvahi 2001).

And the snake was also made of wood. With teeth and all, and the mouth wide open and. And that was of glass. The underside was of wood, like that, and a roof built over it. But this... these walls were of glass so you could see through them. Nobody was let in there, the door was closed. But no one was let in there. There...

That's what once has been. It's been many hundreds of years ago. I no longer remember. When I was told this, then I knew how many hundreds of years. In the old days, when I was young. But now I no longer remember. And it was so that each year they had to give a girl to that snake. It gobbled her down, that snake did. For the snake to swallow. And if it gets no girl, it beats all the water out of the sea and floods the town. But that town was someplace on the seashore there. Near the sea it was. And it came to pass... now how was it that it came to pass? It came to pass one king had to give up his own daughter. But how could a king want to give up his own daughter? And there in that picture, well, now, there on that carriage there was the girl, very beautiful, a princess and all. And then St. George took and... He trusted very much in God, a young man he was. And he always went around on a white horse. And he said that "Will you let me go and give battle to that snake!" But the king said that "I let thee, indeed, but so far... till now no-one has been able to beat that snake! So canst thou... hast thou the power? Perhaps it will first kill thee?" "That's no care of yours. If it kills, it kills... But I..."

And then he went and mounted his white horse and took a long sword, like that. So long, taller than him, an iron sword and a heavy one. And there came that snake or dragon out of the sea, the king's daughter to... And the king's daughter also was brought near there in the carriage. But he began to do battle. And down under that carriage it went. So it could just take the king's daughter from that carriage and gobble her up. But that St. George, he took and into its mouth with that sword! (For some reason, the verb in this sentence is missing.) And hit its mouth agape with that sword, and it could do nothing. And with that other sword, he hit it over the head. And with great trouble he hewed its head off. And that St. George, he beat that snake. And now that St. George is a holy icon in the church. In every church he is, his pictures. Like... he surely is not God, nothing like, but he's been made into a picture. A picture, an icon, a holy image. We said pühäne (holy image, icon), but the Russians said ikoona, that's how they said about it. So.

And in Värška, there's a church of St. George. And there that St. George, St. George, he's really big and beautiful there. And then, on St. George's Day... -- now when is it, St. George's Day -- on St. George's Day they hold a great service in Värška. Then they took that St. George, that great icon... It's so big, like that door there [...]

After asserting that there is an icon of St. George in every church, Ksenya goes on to speak about the church at Värška and about its icons of St. George, about St. George's Day and the procession. She also includes in that talk a descrip-

tion of St. George, resembling the short descriptions she gave when telling the legend, since here, too, she mentions the basic attributes of St. George: the white horse and the sword. The description is presented in the context of the procession, although actually the icon carried in the procession depicts St. George standing, not riding¹⁶: “Then they took that St. George. That large icon... That icon is as large as that door there, like that door... Such big, and with his white horse, and a sword like this, and so beautifully yellow all of them there... But such a smaller icon. And then those banners were taken, and then like a procession it went around the church at Värskä.”

Then follows the sentence, “I’ve been there a couple of times,” with which the narrator explicitly confirms what could indirectly be deduced from the previous talk: if somebody is able to describe the size and colours of objects with such precision, the listeners will inevitably conclude that she has seen them with her own eyes. Conjuring up visual images in one’s mind’s eye helps both the narrator and the listeners to establish emotional contact with the narrative, since it produces experiential resources in the same way as perception of the surrounding world¹⁷. As the conversation goes on, Ksenya feels a need to explain why she has

¹⁶ Vladimir Propp (1973) has distinguished two basic types of the icon of St. George according to whether St. George is depicted as standing or as sitting on a horse. The former type is static, the latter dynamic. Within the second type, Propp distinguishes three sub-types. The first sub-type depicts St. George on a horse, riding slowly. In front of him walks Yelizaveta, leading a tamed dragon on a tether. They are approaching a tower, on the higher reaches of which we can see Yelizaveta’s parents either on their own or accompanied by other people. This sub-type is inspired by a religious song according to which St. George did not kill the dragon at once but first tamed it in order to kill it after Yelizaveta’s parents had adopted Christianity. The second sub-type features neither buildings nor Yelizaveta’s parents, showing only St. George and the battle with the snake: St. George on a galloping horse thrusts the spear into the dragon’s gaping jaws. In the pictures of the third sub-type, St. George is sitting on a horse and hitting the snake with a spear, whereas Yelizaveta is holding the snake on a tether. Yelizaveta’s parents watch the scene from a tower. This sub-type is the product of a merging of the two first sub-types. The second principal type expresses the tastes of the common people, not of the aristocracy, and therefore the cult of this type of icons was even forbidden in Russia for some time; therefore, too, St. George slaying the dragon is not depicted on a single icon in any of the churches of the Kremlin, in Moscow. This prohibition also helps to explain why some icons of St. George (commissioned by the state) have a frame depicting St. George’s passion. Another attempt to make the popular images of the riding St. George more acceptable to the authorities consisted in adding an angel or a blessing hand into one of the upper corners. Neither a hand or an angel of that type are depicted on any icons of any other saint. Ksenya was certainly familiar with icons both of the first principal type and of the second sub-type of the second principal type. We cannot say with certainty whether she had also seen icons depicting the Tsar’s daughter. Perhaps we may warily conjecture that the said gathering of the princess’s relatives before they take her to the sea-side to be sacrificed to the dragon (in the 3rd text) may imply that Ksenya had also seen an icon depicting Yelizaveta’s parents standing in the tower. There is no icon of that type in the church at Värskä.

¹⁷ E.g. Braid (1996: 20) and McDowell (1982: 122) have pointed out that the narrator is capable of producing, in the mind of the listeners, new experiential resources similar to those we experience in going through the events of our personal lives. See also Metsvahi 2002: 124-125, and Metsvahi 2000: 54-57.

been to Värška on St. George's Day only a couple of times. It appears that it was too far from her home village and about 14 km from her later home in Petchory. In the course of our further conversation she explains how St. George may intervene in the affairs of this world and have an influence on Ksenya's own life. To start with, a general explanation of the icon's beneficent effect on the needy is offered: "Whoever was ill, they all went there. And then, well, who prayed and had faith and wanted to recover, then – well, if they could not quite lift the holy image, at least they tried to lay a hand on it for a little while and just go and pray [...] Each person prayed in his own way, depending on what the trouble was and what he needed." Then follows the sentence, "And I, too, have done it," and the recent explanation is now opened up from a still more personal perspective. Ksenya tells us about how she, too, was ill and went to Värška on St. George's Day in order to benefit from the icon's healing effect. The distance between the world of the narrative and the world of narrating is diminished by images efficiently producing experiential resources in the listeners ("Now there's a real crowd there! So many people... and all thronging to touch that holy image."). Yet Ksenya does not this time retell the story of her illness and recovery in full but passes from her own experience of icon-lifting straight to another subject connected with St. George's Day: "And then they baptise the water of St. George's Day. There are tubs like this set out and the water is baptised... with a cross." Next, there follows an explanation of the occasions when the baptised water is used. The most important use seems to be purification from the effects of an "evil eye" practised "even in our days". So far, the whole topic of St. George has unfolded without a single question from our part. Now I put a question as to whether there still are people who have an evil eye, to which Ksenya promptly answers "Yes," proving the statement by a long story based on personal reminiscence. Our further conversation is of no interest for the issue of St. George.

On our second visit (March 11, 2001), after the legend of St. George and the issues immediately connected to it in Ksenya's mind have been exhausted, the conversation continues along the lines set by Risto Järv's question, "Were those legends of the saints still told, then?" In response, Ksenya tells us about "Mikul" (St. Nicholas)¹⁸, a great sufferer and miracle-worker, who was very wise and helped

¹⁸ Migul was one of the most popular saints among the Setu. According to Oskar Loorits, Migul (Nikolai, St. Nicholas) was far more popular among the Russian-speaking population of Estonia and Setumaa (that is, the Russians of Setumaa and the Old Believers) than St. George (Loorits 1955: 4–5). Loorits finds this fact surprising, since through the lives of the saints, calendars and other written and oral sources the legend of St. George spread very widely (1955: 12).

the people in many ways. Characterising Migul, Ksenya points out that instead of riding a horse, Migul went on foot with a staff in hand, establishing through this opposition a connection between the descriptions of St. George and St. Nicholas. In connection with Migul, Ksenya also narrates the story of the founding of St. Petersburg and mentions that in Pankjavitsa there was a church of Migul that was big and very beautiful both inside and outside. There also used to be a great congregation in Pankjavitsa in earlier times. Then Ksenya continues on the fate of churches. The topic of the Germans is introduced by the statement that they had taken away many icons; Ksenya follows it up with three personal experience narratives about young German soldiers who, during World War II, had been sent to their village for a couple of weeks of leave.

On our third visit (April 11, 2001) the conversation reaches the topic of St. George in a way different from the previous occasions. Before coming to the legend of St. George, we talk about monasteries – especially the Petchory monastery – and the life of monks in a monastery. Among other reasons for entering a monastery Ksenya mentions the possibility that the groom (or the bride) had been jilted. This is followed by an explanation of the premarital relations of young people in those days, which greatly differed from the modern situation. Among other things, the change of times is demonstrated by the fact that immediately before Ksenya moved away from Petchory, every monk actually had a woman friend. “Now it’s no longer a monastery, now you can’t even tell what it is,” Ksenya says, laughing. Since Ksenya lived right next to the monastery, she had good knowledge of the monks’ life and doings. To illustrate the fact that only when a monastery inmate was preparing to become priest did he have the right to marry, and that he was actually required to be married before he could be sent as priest to some village church, Ksenya tells us a personal recollection of a monk who wished to marry and become priest. She paints an easily imaginable picture of the comic episode: a monk, his long black habit flying in the wind, rushes off from the monastery towards the town in pursuit of a girl. Although on that particular occasion the girl escaped him and got back home, they were nevertheless wedded a couple of months later, and the St. Barbara church was crowded with people. After that, Ksenya tells us that the church had been full of big and beautiful icons, but the Germans had taken many of them, as well as a lot of gold. The description of the church’s gilded domes and spires is followed by my question about the image of the princess, which I shall discuss later on.

Below, I shall present in Ksenya's own words the story that was related after the legend on April 11:

Well, I was taken ill, too. At that time, I was already in Petchory, I lived there. I was ill. And I, too, went to Värška. But the crowds there are so vast. . . Everybody pushing towards that holy image. . . some want to lift it, others just to touch. So I could but lay my hand on it for a while and walk a little way, holding it. But I got better. I found a doctor who understood what illness I had. Yeah, and then. . . Earlier I didn't know. Just felt it was hard to breathe and hard to breathe – but I had no idea what it was. Then that doctor, he found it out. That really was a wise doctor. Then he told me: "When is it that you find it hard to breathe, is it when you go uphill or when you go down?" I told him: "It is hard when I go up, easier when I go down." Then he told me it was cardiac asthma, that I must take care or it may affect the lungs, too, and then I would find it even more difficult to breathe. Then I had this – little case of white pills, about this long, very small pills, like. . . When I felt bad I put one under my tongue. And with these pills I got well. And now I live. You see how long. I wouldn't have believed I could live so long. And this life now, it's no longer good or fun to live. But, well, you have life in you, what can you do. I can't. . . You may put a heap of money in front of me and I shall starve upon that heap. I can't go shopping any more, to buy me food or do anything. Only if they bring it to me, then (she laughs) then I can. But I'm no good for anything. What's the use of such a person? (Merili laughs: Well, I can see what use there is. . .) You have breath, you have eyes, you have life (laughs). So. That's the way it is.

But nowadays. . . It's there nowadays, too. It's there on Good Friday. The image of Christ is brought from the monastery and put in the centre of the church, a chest like this, with Him inside – His image, of course. And flowers are put there and all, and people come like this to worship Him, believers do. And on Saturday they are in the church all night, too [. . .]

To begin with, Ksenya here tells the story of her illness and recovery, briefly mentioned already during the first visit, as a personal experience narrative. Although the doctor and the pills have a role in her recovery, Ksenya connects all this with her visit to Värška. Secondly, the recovery is connected with the state of her health at the moment of narrating the story. Making use of apposite expressive phrases she assesses her present phase of life which in no way qualifies as full-blooded. But no matter how things stand with personal well-being, the annual repetition of calendar feasts will go on: the third part of the legend's follow-up consists of seasonable recollections which allow us to conclude that the resources found in Ksenya's mind help her to render meaning even to her present existence, limited as it is to an apartment in town.

On our visit of May 11, 2002, the subject of feasts is brought up by my question as to what feasts were the most important. The answer, “Christmas, Easter and Whitsuntide,” is soon followed by Ksenya’s recollection of how Easter was celebrated in her youth, closing with the words that all this happened in the old days, nowadays there is a new priest in Pankjavitsa and Easter is celebrated in a different way. The comment comparing the old times to the present motivates Manni¹⁹ (who so far has been basically in the role of a listener) to speak about the celebration of feasts in Setumaa, in our days, and she briefly describes the celebration of St. George’s Day in Värška church, where she had been just a week ago. Due to her poor hearing, Ksenya cannot hear Manni’s talk and when I (sitting much closer to Ksenya than Manni) sum it up to her in a few words she says that she, too, has twice been to Värška church on St. George’s Day. Then she reveals to us something that she hasn’t mentioned before – that once when she was ill an old man visited her in her dream, telling her to pray to St. George. That was why she went to St. George church in Värška on St. George’s Day. Next she describes the great multitude that had gathered at Värška on that day and mentions that most of the people had come from the Estonian side of the border. After that, she tells us about the Setu in Estonia and in Russia, about their comings and goings across the border, about the geographic location of the border and the barbed wire marking it. Wishing Ksenya to return to the topic of St. George, I tell her: “But will you again tell the story of St. George, of what happened to St. George?” To this request, she responds with the legend and then spontaneously, on her own initiative, relates about other saints (St. Nicholas, St. Barbara).

The Extent and Backgrounds of Variation

As we can see from the table in the Appendix²⁰, the variation is very extensive on the levels both of texture and of the structure of narrative. The only episodes included in each version are the ones that have determinative importance from the point of view of the action:

¹⁹ Manni is Ksenya’s daughter, who together with her husband moved from Petseri to Tartu only a few years ago. Manni does not share flat with Ksenya, but she attended the recording séance on the second, fourth and fifth times.

²⁰ Obviously, the division of the narratives into components as presented in the Appendix is not the best possible one. I have not followed the principle that each cell should contain one episode or one cognitive unit, but have primarily attempted to achieve a presentation enabling easier comparison of the text versions. NB! The components presented in the table should be read in the order indicated by the Arabic numbers in order for the parts to follow each other in the right succession.

1. Every year a girl had to be given up to the snake/ dragon (I 5; II 7; III 5; IV 3);
2. There came the time when the king had to give up his daughter (I 9; II 8; III 6; IV 6);
3. St. George went/ began to fight with the dragon (I 17; II 13, 17; III 13; IV 11);
4. St. George thrust his sword/spear/club into the dragon's mouth and hewed with (another) sword its head off (I 19; II 20; III 20; IV 15).

Viewing the text of these episodes, we find no word-for-word repetitions, and even the repetitions of single words are rare (in case of the first recurring episode, for instance, all four texts share only "had to" and "each year", and in case of the second episode, only "it came", "the/that king", and "his [own] daughter"). We do, however, find such recurring expressions and words as are not connected to any particular episode but may turn up at different points in the story. An obligatory detail, for example, is the mentioning of a white horse in connection with St. George, either in St. George's own direct speech ("just give me first a white horse" in text II) or as a part of the action ("and then he mounted his white horse" in text I). Two levels are discernible in these texts, which we may call either the narrative type of text, describing events in time, and the descriptive type of text, describing phenomena in space (Siikala 1990: 23); or the chronological and non-chronological levels (cf. Ricoeur 1980: 178). Commonly, the descriptive type of text is used at the beginning and end of the legend to provide a bridge or an intermediate link²¹ enabling to pass smoothly from Storyrealm to Taleworld²² and back. But frequently descriptive parts are simply wedged in between the parts narrating the events.

In order to better understand the variation we must first keep in mind that there is no readymade story in the mind of the narrator, but only a structure and the techniques or rules for constructing a narrative upon the structure. We have identified the structure by finding out which episodes recur in the different versions; as for the rules and techniques for building up the narrative, I shall discuss them in the next subchapter under the name of narrating strategies. If we consider a good narrator's basic ability to be command of the rules of narrative construction, we can certainly say that Ksenya is a very good narrator. If we consider the narrator's important ability to be the power of taking into account the context and the specific interests of the audience, we can again say that Ksenya is a marvellous narrator. The extent of the variation is associated with both of Ksenya's above-men-

²¹ Katharine Young has used the term "frame" in the same meaning.

²² Here I am employing the terms Storyrealm and Taleworld, borrowed from Katharine Young (1987). Storyrealm is the world in which the narrative is told. Taleworld is the world in which the events described in the narrative take place.

tioned abilities. Thanks to her masterful control of narrating strategies she has great freedom of variation within them. Thanks to her flexible mind and willingness to keep in mind the listeners' interests, the legend versions narrated by her provide a brilliant illustration of how the particular narrating situation and the surrounding utterances determine the content and texture of a particular narrative.

Comparing and analysing the different legend variants we can first of all conclude that a very important role is played by the way we – the interviewers – approach the topic. On the first occasion, the question that leads up to the narrating of the legend sounds as follows: “Is there also some fairy tale about a young fellow killing a big snake or serpent?” And Ksenya starts her narrative with the words: “Ah, that one, that’s not a fairy tale, that’s a real thing that happened many hundred years ago.” Thus the question makes Ksenya feel the need to specify, before telling the story, its ontological status by pointing out the opposition inherent in the folk genre system: a fairy tale tells about fictional things, a legend about things that have really happened.²³ The ontological status is further confirmed through the description of the images displayed in the Petchory monastery (I 3) and Ksenya’s need to give reasons for her inability of locating in time the events of the legend (I 4). Only after that does Ksenya come to narrating the events; analysing the literation we notice that the question has also influenced the texture level. Since the question included the words “snake” and “serpent,” Ksenya recurrently uses precisely those two terms in her narrative (twice she says “big snake” exactly as the question put it); once she also uses the word “dragon” but accompanies it with the word “snake” (I 15: “That snake or dragon”).

On the second telling (March 11, 2001) the question leading to the narrating of the legend sounds, “Do you remember this story, how the young fellow went to kill the dragon?” (the Appendix also lists the second part of the question which, however, is of no significance here since it was uttered in a low voice and remained unheard). The word “d... dragon?” uttered during the pause of recalling indicates that this time, Ksenya picked up the word “dragon” from the question and used that as a retrieval cue. Success in recalling the tale is announced by the words “I probably told you about St. George?” – a question which simultaneously also implies that the most efficient word to help recall the particular tale would have been

²³ A fairy tale and a religious legend are discerned not only by the criterion of truth value but are also situated at the opposite extremes of the profane—sacral scale. Religious legends tell about the lives and miraculous works of the saints and as to their genre, they are close to etiological legends and myths. A fairy tale is opposed to those genres because the world of a fairy tale stands apart from reality.

“St. George”. But since, nevertheless, the word we used was “dragon,” Ksenya employs the traditional wording techniques in her command so that the dragon appears in the foreground more than in any other version. This can be concluded first by analysis of mere frequency of word use: if in text version I, the words “dragon”, “snake” or “serpent” have been used on 9 occasions, in version III on 12 and in version IV on 10 occasions, version II employs these words on 16 occasions (15 times “dragon” and once “snake”). Secondly, dramatic present is used in the dragon’s speech (II 9; II 16 – the dialogue between the dragon and St. George occurs only in this variant). Thirdly, Ksenya has added to the obligatory episodes several ones that emphasise the terrifying nature of the dragon: component II 17 implies the possibility of total destruction – if the dragon destroys all the “young folks” on the earth and new generations are no longer born, there is no chance for life to continue; II 21 constitutes a conclusive statement that from then on, the dragon never again came in search of the girls.

On the third telling (April 11, 2001) the request for the legend is made differently from the previous times. Since on our earlier visits Ksenya has given so colourful descriptions of the images displayed at the monastery of Petchory, she has produced through them new experiential resources in my mind which drive me to ask: “What was that big image? ... That big image of the king’s daughter or what was it that was kept in Petchory?” If on the first and second telling Ksenya described a carriage/ coach, the coach house with a glass wall, and the wooden image of the snake under the coach, mentioning the image of the queen²⁴ or the princess rather briefly, she now, on the third time, departs from my two questions about the image of the princess and describes it at greater length, this time also making mention of the white horse harnessed to the coach. A coach really is on display at Petchory monastery, standing in a small coach house with one wall made of glass²⁵, and once there has also been (separately from the coach and for quite different reasons) the wooden image of a serpent²⁶; but there never have been im-

²⁴ Apparently on the first telling, there still existed in some corner of Ksenya’s memory a trace of the coach’s connection with the Empress of Russia (see note 25) which was later erased by new associations.

²⁵ According to historical sources this is the coach that Empress Anna gave to Ignatius, appointed Archimandrite of Petseri by her ukase of June 11, 1732 (Tolstoi 1861: 110). The tourist booklet “Mööda Petserimaad” retells the version that Empress Anna used that coach herself to travel from Petseri to Kurland and later on gave the coach to the monastery (Laigna 1967: 16). Another version wide-spread among the people claims that the coach belonged to Empress Katharina II who travelled in it to Petseri, but since it began to snow while she stayed there, she changed onto a sledge and left the coach behind.

²⁶ Oral communication from Heiki Valk, of April 2001.

ages of a queen or a horse. The fact that on the third telling, Ksenya's description of the princess's image has become rather detailed, can be explained by quite a normal process of memory which Tulving calls "ecphory" and which consists in combining the (episodic) information of an engram with the semantic information of the retrieval cues (2002: 136). On this particular occasion, the retrieval cue is provided by my question posed because I had taken Ksenya's descriptions on the previous occasions for the literal truth and had not been able to see in them a means for producing an ostensive relationship²⁷.

Another significant detail we notice in the analysis of the third legend version is the introduction of the subject of marriage. Unlike the previous versions, here the king offers his daughter to St. George in marriage. But St. George does not accept: "He said that "I need no wife! I don't..." He doesn't accept. And that St. George, he was not a married man. He was a bachelor." (III 22). How should we explain the introduction of that new subject into the legend text? The first possibility is to treat it as a good example to prove that the way a particular fairy tale actualises in a given situation is determined by its textual surroundings. On the same day Ksenya had told us that whereas cases of adultery were known among the Russians already before the war, it remained quite alien to the Setu at that time. As we saw earlier, in the description of the contextual surroundings of the legend version told on April 11, 2001, the issue of premarital behaviour between the sexes was also raised in connection with the monastery and the monks. Thus we can conclude that the subject of marriage came up in the legend text because unwittingly, Ksenya connected the utterances that preceded the legend telling with the unfolding of the events of the legend itself.

Secondly, it is also possible to connect the changes in the story with the fact that with each telling, a legend moves closer and closer to fairy tale in the folk genre system. This is proved by Ksenya's introduction on the fifth telling (June 20, 2002), before she goes on to the events of the legend: "But this was told as follows. This is like a fairy tale or, you know, a folktale." Compared to the first and second telling, a significant change has taken place. On the first telling it was us who requested a fairy tale²⁸ and Ksenya asserted that the tale is no fairy tale at all. On

²⁷ Producing new experiential resources in the listeners' mind primarily works through an ostensive relationship to the narrative, creating the impression among the audience that they are in the midst of the events of the Taleworld. The opposite of an ostensive relationship is a distanced relationship or perspective (see, e.g., McDowell 1982: 134).

²⁸ After all, the same story is also known in Setumaa as the fairy tale of the Dragon-Slayer (AT 300).

the second telling, the interviewer did not specify the genre in his question, but regardless of that Ksenya felt it necessary to emphasise that it was a true narrative, not a fictional one. On the fifth telling most of the questions are put by Andreas Kalkun, himself a native of Värška, who interviews Ksenya in the Setu language. His question implies a legend rather than a fairy tale ("But how did that tale of St. George go? (This first question apparently remained unheard by Ksenya) What happened to St. George? How was it he killed that snake²⁹?"), but now Ksenya herself states that it is a fairy tale³⁰. The subject of marriage that crops up on the third, fourth and fifth telling also brings the narrative told by Ksenya closer to a fairy tale, yet does not quite allow to treat it as such. If it is not possible to identify the genre on the grounds of the narrative's truth value for the narrator, then we must turn to the story itself and see whether it tells about deeds undertaken with the aim of obtaining individual benefits or about some venture the outcome of which has collective significance³¹ (cf. Meletinski 1982: 183, discussing the relationship between myth and fairy tale; however, the same criterion can be extended to cover legend). On the fifth telling Ksenya does, indeed, define the genre as fairy tale, but winds up the story as follows: "(the episode begins with St. George's answer to the king who after the dragon is slain, offers him his daughter in marriage) "I will not marry. I did not come to fight in order to gain a wife, I came to save the people." So. And so, too, she was not wed to St. George, and so he was called and is still called St. George." Thus, the tale of St. George has moved in the genre system to a position somewhere between a saint legend and a fairy tale, but since St. George still remains closely connected to icons, Värška church and a deed beneficial to the whole community, Ksenya is not able to regard the tale about him as mere fiction and it will probably never acquire the status of "jutus" for her.

The version of the legend told on the fourth telling differs greatly from all other variants. The events of the legend are preceded by descriptions neither of the icons nor of the image of the princess, and the story reaches its culmination much faster than on the previous occasions. One of the reasons for this may be that more

²⁹ This time, Ksenya does not use in her narrative the word "snake" which was used in the question, but employs the word "dragon" throughout the legend.

³⁰ It is also noteworthy that Ksenya does not use the Setu genre name "jutus" but employs instead the term "fairy tale" adopted from the literary language, regardless of the fact that the interviewer speaks with her in the Setu language. Apparently it is still impossible for her to think of a saint legend as a "jutus" or a fictional story and she makes use of the literary word "muinasjutt" (fairy tale) in order to signify something between a religious legend and a fairy tale.

³¹ In Meletinski's view, the opposition of individual versus collective is a more significant criterion for distinguishing myth from fairy tale than the opposition of sacred versus profane (1982: 183).

than a year has passed since the earlier tellings. But the shift of the tale on the genre scale must certainly be taken into account, too. Ksenya no longer describes the image of the princess nor feels the need to persuade the listeners that it is a true story as she did on the first and second telling. The components attempting to settle the time and space of the events and to determine the ontological status of the tale have been replaced by a characterisation of St. George (IV 20), who is described as a poor, exceedingly wise and deeply religious man fighting against evil (forces) and claiming a white horse as his only treasure. This change in the story allows us to presume that the narrator herself has begun to suspect the truth value of the tale, feeling it her duty now to assert that St. George did and does exist, that he did good works for the community and was faithful and pious. A certain role in the shift of genre is apparently also played by a remark from Ksenya's daughter Manni (who before the legend-telling said that she did not know the tale), made at the moment Ksenya is coming to IV 14 with her tale. "A snake with three heads..." she says. Ksenya hears Manni say something, pauses with her narrative and asks: "What?" Manni replies: "It was a snake with three heads that fought with St. George, wasn't it?" Manni's remark is followed by episode IV 15. Ksenya herself has never made mention of a snake with three heads; Manni's remark adds further flavour of fairy-tale to the story.

Narrating Strategies and Mnemonic Processes

In order for a schematic knowledge of episodes obligatory from the point of view of a certain story to take the shape of a fully wrought-out fairy tale, certain narrating strategies must be used in the narrating situation. Two kinds of narrating strategies can be distinguished: those characteristic of traditional tale-telling in general, and those specific to a certain genre. The general strategies of traditional tale-telling are followed spontaneously. The same can be said about the possibilities offered by genre-specific rules – within their limits, too, the narrator moves unconsciously³².

Several narrating strategies serve the purpose of dissolving the borderline between the Storyrealm and the Taleworld³³ or, to put it in other words – attempt

³² From the point of view of the tradition-bearer, genre-consciousness is generally of secondary importance (Honko 1989: 15). In her presentation, Ksenya employed the genre terms (borrowed from literary language) only because they enabled her to define the ontological status of her narrative.

³³ According to Taisto Raudalainen, such techniques are characteristic of traditional tale-telling in general (Raudalainen 2001b: 215-16).

to produce in the listeners an ostensive relation towards the narrative. One of these strategies, which Ksenya employs recurrently both in case of the legend of St. George and in other genres of folk narrative, is the use of direct speech³⁴. This device has also been called “dramatic present” and a significant mnemotechnical role has been attributed to it (Raudalainen 2001a: 69—73).

A strategy that Ksenya makes more use of in telling the legend of St. George than in other folktales of her repertoire, is the frequent use of the descriptive type of text. Two different uses of the descriptive text type can be distinguished in the legends of St. George as told by Ksenya: longer descriptions of objects not connected to the events (e.g. I 3, II 3, III 1), and short descriptive passages forming part of the action (e.g. I 14, II 20, III 12, III 20). As I pointed out above, the descriptions of objects placed before and after the story itself can be treated as intermediate links enabling smooth passing from Storyrealm to the events of Taleworld. At the same time, these portions of text have a role in defining the ontological status of the events. The closer to fairy tale the story moves on the genre scale, the fewer should such descriptions become, since the association of the events with the icons or the image at Petchory monastery should get looser or disappear altogether. This is, in fact, to be noticed. On the first and second telling, when Ksenya starts by asserting that this is a true story and only then goes on to the events of the legend, she also offers descriptions of the relevant objects at the beginning of her story. On the fourth and fifth telling, however, there is no persuading the listeners in the truthfulness of the story, and the legend is told without any descriptive introduction.

However, the fifth variant retains the short descriptions within the story, which obviously have no tendency to disappear as the genre of the story changes. One of the reasons for this would probably be that Ksenya recalls the details of the story by means of her visual imagination, fed by the engram left by information she had encoded on viewing the icons of St. George. This statement can be proved by the fact that whereas in the fully developed legends of St. George and in variants of the fairy tale of the Dragon Slayer, kept in the Estonian Folklore Archive, the motive of decapitating the dragon with a sword is more widely spread, Ksenya in all her variants uses the motive of thrusting a spear/ sword/ club into the dragon's

³⁴ See, for example, the dialogue between the King and St. George, I 13. Direct dialogue at a crucial point in the story indeed seems to be an efficient means for stimulating the listeners to use their empathetic powers, all the more so because, in the interests of credibility, different registers of speech are used: the King addresses St. George by the singular form “thou”, whereas St. George turns to the King using the plural “you”.

throat, instead³⁵ (it's true in some variants she adds the decapitating motive to it, but it always occurs only after the hit into the throat). During the Tsarist period, icons depicting St. George on a white horse, thrusting his spear into the dragon's throat, were very popular in Setumaa³⁶ (Loorits 1959: 5).

It appears that the legend of St. George has not survived in Ksenya's memory only through a schematic knowledge, but a very significant role has been played also by visual images. Psychologists have pointed out that visual imagination has through all times played an important part as a mnemotechnical device (Baddeley 1990: 186). But in what relationship do visual images and the schematic knowledge of a narrative's structure stand to each other? The classic student of memory and founder of the scheme theory, Frederic C. Bartlett, holds that images are details picked out of the 'scheme' on the grounds of affectivity (as a factor stimulating recollection) (Bartlett 1995: 303). Thus, the narrative structure is like a guide leading us from one emotionally charged image to another. Or is it perhaps the images which first crop up in the mind and form the grounds for a new derivation of the structure?

D. A. McDonald who has interviewed good connoisseurs of the Gaelic tradition (1981) has emphasised the importance of visual imagination in folk tale narrating. He recalls asking one of his informants, "And now, yourself, when you were listening to a story like that, were you – in your mind – were you, as it were, seeing a picture of the thing or...?" The answer is quoted as follows: "/.../ It was just as if I saw how the thing was going on... Just as if I were drawing it on the wall there... You've got to see it as a picture in front of you or you can't remember it properly..." (McDonald 1981: 118). The quote does speak about the importance of imagination in narrating, yet it does not allow us to draw direct conclusions as to the role of visuality in mnemonic processes. Dealing with processes of mind that we are unable to make conscious, we as researchers should not take our lead from folk conceptions of those processes. Otherwise the mere fact that we can imagine the same things as we can see, may lead astray not only the narrator but also the researchers.³⁷ In fact, there is neither unchangeable matter nor ready, elaborated and

³⁵ The motif of a spear thrust into the throat is also common in the shorter legend texts and reports explaining the significance of St. George's Day, kept in the Estonian Folklore Archive (Hiimäe 1984: 19–20). The influence of visual media on the events of the legend has been emphasised by Hermann Bausinger (1980: 206). Mihály Hoppál (2000) has written about the survival of a very ancient Siberian motif in Hungarian heroic epics thanks to its visual presentation.

³⁶ A similar image of St. George, in the shape of the coat of arms of the Russian Empire, can also be found on old coins (Loorits 1959: 3) which form part of the Setu women's necklaces even nowadays. On coins and coats of arms displaying St. George, see also Braunfels-Esche (1976: 95; 103).

³⁷ Zenon Pylyshyn is one of the many researchers who consider the idea that memory exploits the visual system to be highly debatable (1973: 9).

detailed images in the contents of our memory which we might “see in our mind’s eye” in the same way as we see the objects of the surrounding world. That the content of the images always results from an interpretation process, is also proved by how Ksenya constructs her image of the princess’s statue by means of her own imagination and the engram left by her seeing the coach displayed at the Petchory monastery, and according to her purposes in a specific situation.

The fact that we are dealing with something different from a purely visual mnemonic system is also proved by the use of (meta)narrative strategies producing experiential resources that are not necessarily visualizable. In addition to the epithets “big” and “long”³⁸, Ksenya, in her description of St. George’s sword, also uses the epithets “heavy” and “iron” which make no reference to visuality in order to be brought into mind. On one occasion (II 11), Ksenya has even attempted to determine the exact weight of the sword (but in the end, she dared not do it).

The use of aesthetic and positive attributes ascribed to the legend protagonists can be viewed as a separate narrative strategy. In addition to encouraging the listeners to approach the narrative from an ostensive perspective, such attributes and epithets have a special significance for the Orthodox. According to the Orthodox confession, divine truth is “in mystic communion with beauty and goodness” (Pitirim, the Metropolitan, 1988: 63). On the first and third telling, Ksenya makes use of the aesthetic epithet (“(very) beautiful”) in her characterisation of the king’s daughter; on the fourth and fifth telling it occurs in the episode postulating that each year, “the best and most beautiful maiden” / “the richest and most beautiful daughter” had to be given up to the dragon. While on the last two tellings, the king’s daughter is not characterised, the number of positive characteristics attributed to St. George grows with each telling. The reasons for this were briefly pointed out above and will be discussed in greater detail below.

On the Position of the Saint Legend and of St. George in Ksenya’s Mental Universe

The comparison of the five versions of the legend of St. George is enlightening not only in the sense that it casts light on the reasons of such variation as has its roots in the external circumstances and mnemonic processes, but also in the sense that it allows us to get some idea of the internal processes going on in the

³⁸ On the second telling, Ksenya brings her hands to help to give us an idea of the spear’s size (II 3: “And then there was, well, such sword or what, like this... something like this in his hand, a spear. Leaning on the ground, and taller than him, that he killed the dragon with.”).

narrator's mind and bringing about a shift of the narrative's position in her mental universe. For a researcher, such change of meaning signifies the narrative's shifting on the genre scale. The possibility to follow variation caused by genre shift offers a quite rare³⁹ but superb chance to discuss topics relevant for a folklorist.

On the first and second telling, as we saw above, Ksenya expressed in various ways her conviction that the legend of St. George describes events that have really happened. First, she asserted that it was not a fairy tale. Secondly, she added descriptive parts to the legend on her own initiative: when we requested the legend of St. George, she found it necessary first to describe the objects of the real world which were connected to St. George or to the events of the legend, and only then went on to the legend itself. Thirdly, she attempted to localise the events of Taleworld in space and time. Fourthly, on the second telling she made mention of holy books supposed to include the names both of the king and of his daughter.

In the narrative presented on the third telling, we can observe some changes.⁴⁰ Since my question itself postulates the existence of the coach and the princess's statue supposedly displayed at the monastery in Petchory, and I only ask Ksenya for the legend after the description of the coach and the statue have been given, we cannot be sure whether the description would have been offered spontaneously, too, before the story itself was told. Thus, we must rather draw conclusions concerning the narrative's shift of meaning through a comparison of the spontaneous utterances following the telling of the story. On the first telling, after reaching the solution (St. George's victory over the snake), Ksenya stated that now St. George was a saint in church, in every church, he was not God but images had been made of him. After that, she continued on her own initiative to describe the celebration of St. George's Day in Värška church. On the second telling, the story is followed by a short description of the carriage displayed at the Petchory monastery and by the statement that there is an icon of St. George in every Orthodox church. On the third telling, however, the solution of the story is followed by the King's proposal to wed his daughter to St. George (which was missing in the first and second version), after which there follows a characterisation of St. George: he was helper to many men, he helped [them]. It is noteworthy that on the previous tellings, Ksenya made no reference to St. George's role (except through the icon)

³⁹ So far the studies discussing narratives presented on several different occasions have concluded that the narrator's attitude towards the contents of the narrative remains unaltered through the years (Siikala 1990: 88—89).

⁴⁰ Among other things, the third variant lacks reference to the holy books, the statement that it is not a fairy tale, and the attempt to localise the events in time.

and offered no characterisation of him outside the story of dragon slaying. Further, Ksenya very briefly mentions the coach in Petchory monastery (which she had described, upon my request, before coming to the story itself), associating it this time (and for the first time) with the King and St. George. With some stretching of our good will, this, too, may be regarded as a sign of St. George's emergence to the foreground.

On the fourth telling, St. George definitely emerges to the foreground. The fourth and fifth tellings lack any descriptions of the coach or of the statue of the king's daughter; neither are other means serving to confirm the truthfulness of the story employed. The new focus of interest on St. George's person finds expression both story-internally and –externally. On the fourth telling, only St. George's speech is rendered in the dramatic present; on the fifth occasion it is reserved mostly for St. George (once the King also has his say). At the same time, the need to characterise St. George outside the story (as first observed on the third telling) has grown. The number of epithets given to St. George in the fourth version has grown, as compared to the third telling. The emphasis laid on St. George's significance outside the story's framework, the abbreviation of the story,⁴¹ and the introductory observation (made on the fifth telling) that the legend of St. George is a "fairy tale" or a "folktale", demonstrate that the ontological status of the dragon slaying story has changed in Ksenya's mind. What are the causes for this change?

On the first and second tellings, before coming to the religious legend of St. George, Ksenya had told us fairy tales. Under such circumstances, it was particularly topical to make the opposition between a fairy tale and a true story before coming to the legend text. But Ksenya's semantic knowledge of the legend of St. George – unlike that of the fairy tales – had obviously never before been framed into words. Now – particularly after she had already told it more than once – it began more and more to remind her of a fairy tale. Of course the legend followed the typical scheme of a "tale of magic" from the very start (a mishap and its undoing); and in narrating it, Ksenya made use of wording techniques similar to those used in fairy tale telling, but at the beginning, the connection with the icons of St. George and the statue of the King's daughter helped render the story believable. Suspicions as to the reality of the events could arise from the interviewers' questioning: "Is there some fairy tale...?" and from a later analysis of their curiosity concerning the place where the events happened. When Ksenya noticed and tried

⁴¹ If the narrator's attitude to the narrative remains unchanged, it is logical to expect the narrative to grow longer on each consecutive telling (see Kaivola-Bregenhøj 1996: 187)

to make sense of the fact that the legend of St. George greatly differed from other (religious) legends known to her, the suspicions would have grown. The inclusion of the marriage motif into the story and Manni's mentioning the dragon's three heads further added to the story's semblance to a fairy tale, being as it were the last drops in the cup of credibility, which made the cup flow over and Ksenya could no longer be sure that the legend was telling about real events.

But if the legend's ontological status is no longer what it should be, it threatens to devalue St. George, too. In order to spare St. George from the devaluation, Ksenya begins more and more to emphasise that St. George was and is a real person (at the end of the fifth telling: "/.../ thus he was and is even nowadays called St. George"); to speak about his positive characteristics (see IV 20); and to draw the listeners' attention straightforwardly to St. George's ability to intervene in human life and help human beings (on the fourth telling, the tale of her dream; on the fifth telling, the observation, "If you are in trouble and pain, pray to St. George. Thus our people have been told.") Because regardless of whether the dragon was actually fought in the way people tell about it, St. George certainly was a holy man "with faith in God" who fought against all evil and who will give help if he is prayed to. Ksenya has no doubt that St. George has really existed. After all, everyone can see St. George's icon in the church.

Here we have cause to say that in Orthodox culture, visuality has played a much more significant role than in Protestant culture. Andreas Kalkun has analysed the prayer texts of the great Setu chanter Anne Vabarna and has found that "Orthodoxy has not come to Anne through Christian narratives but rather through emotions, perceptions and pictures" (Kalkun 2001: 62). The same goes for Ksenya: the questionable status of one narrative is quite unable to call into question St. George's position in the eyes of an Orthodox believer. St. George still remains a great helper of people who has been "made into an icon", who is inseparable from his white horse and who fights with a huge iron sword.⁴²

Thus, it is not the semantic knowledge of the story of St. George's dragon slaying that has determinative importance for Ksenya, but visual images founded on information recorded in her episodic memory. Whereas a narrative's precondition is change and a narrative's basic axis is the axis of time (Annus 2002: 17), a

⁴² Concerning Virgin Mary as she occurs in Anne Vabarna's prayer texts, Kalkun says: "The figure of Holy Mary as she has been heard of in narratives, is indeed overshadowed in Orthodox prayers by the visually seen Holy Mary whom Anne has encountered as three-handed in Petseri (on a certain icon at the monastery); as an old woman in Troitsa; and as a beautiful woman in Ilisaarje" (Kalkun 2001: 62)

picture attempts to capture the moment and to fix it. A narrative may tell about funny incidents from real life, fascinating fictional events and the imperfection of our world, but it is not a particularly efficient means for communicating divine truth. The unchanging and eternal divine truth is better communicated by icons depicting scenes that (in a certain sense) are perfect. If Ksenya had seen the meaning of St. George primarily in the narrative of dragon slaying, she would have cultivated it to greater perfection with each telling. Actually, however, we see the exact opposite: a remarkable extent of variation and nothing remotely resembling a fixation of narrative form.⁴³ As suspicions in the reality of the events deepened, traditional narrating strategies began to lose their importance and the story reached its solution quite quickly. It was no longer the aim to draw the listener into the Taleworld and to prolong his anticipation of the solution, but to give him the right idea about who St. George was.

It is St. George and not the story of dragon slaying that has a role to play in rendering sense to Ksenya's personal life. The narrative about Ksenya going to Värška on St. George's Day and her subsequent recovery tells us of St. George's intervention in Ksenya's life. This narrative, too, tells about overcoming a mishap or solving a problem, but what we have here is not an abstract crisis heard of from the others, but communicates the events of Ksenya's personal life. Thanks to semantic religious knowledge, the mnemonic images grounded in episodic memory have become connectable, meaningful and communicable through the narrative. In the community that Ksenya used to be part of, the telling of such personal experience narratives seems to have been very common. These helped to confirm again and anew that if you were in trouble, St. George would help you. This semantic background knowledge, in its turn, enabled to render sense and significance to each particular occasion of encountering St. George through his image on the icon. Thus, there is a close connection between knowledge grounded in episodic and in semantic memory: without the emotionally charged moments associated with St. George, there would be no personal experience narratives; and without personal experience narratives, there would be no contacts with St. George charged with the feelings of gratitude and marvelling. The narrative can exist and manifest human(e)ness only thanks to the existence of values external to it.

Translated by Triinu Pakk-Allmann

⁴³ Fixed phrases or components of permanent verbalisation which help to remember and derive the story (Siikala 1997: 47; Kaivola-Bregenhøj 1996: 196) are practically non-existent in Ksenya's legend versions. It may be that Ksenya made an unconscious attempt to avoid the formal fixation of the narrative because this helped her seemingly to avoid the assimilation of St. George's legend with a fairy tale (which generally does not vary to such an extent).

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17.02.2001	11.03.2001	11.04.2001	11.05.2002
R: Is there also some fairy tale about a young fellow killing a big serpent or snake?	R: Do you remember this story, how the young fellow went to kill the dragon? Or George (in Estonian Jüri) or who it was?	M: But what was that large image? That large image of the princess that used to be in Petchory, or what image was it?	M: But tell us again that story of George, of St. George, the tale of what happened to him?
1. Ah, that one,	1. Ah, wait. Ah I probably told about George ? (R: Yeah)		1. Ah, now St. George, he...
2. This is not a fairy tale, that's a real thing that happened many hundred years ago.	2. That is not a fairy-tale. That's a real thing that happened long ago. I do not know, how many years ago it was. But it has been. It has been said that...		
4. That's what once has been. It's been many hundreds of years ago. I no longer remember. When I was told this, then I knew how many hundreds of years. In the old days, when I was young. But now I no longer remember.			
	4. It... the old people told that. Not only one told... There was many who told that.		
	5. That St. George... he was a king.		2. Well, they thought that St. George had been a man of great power, a strongman, too... He beat...

<p>3. (Risto: So how did it happen?) That's in the monastery, at Petchory, there was a large carriage there. And there was a big snake. A big snake made underneath that carriage. And a queen in the carriage. She was... sure, now, she was not alive, was like ... but the carriage was wooden, all right, and. And the snake was also made of wood. With teeth and all, and the mouth wide open and. The underside was of wood, like that, and a roof built over it. But this... these walls were of glass so you could see through them. Nobody was let in there, the door was closed. But no-one, was let in there. There...</p>	<p>22. And at the monastery there was, at the monastery of Petchory, there was a carriage built and a kind of house, of glass. But is it there now, Manni, or what? (Manni: yes) And there is the carriage then, and the princess (literally "the king's daughter") in the carriage. And that dragon, kind of big snake or what was it, under it. Of course that was made of wood. So: for looking. And that is at the monastery, at the monastery of Petchory.</p>	<p>1. Aaahh. But it's there now, too. There was a time when it was lost. That was the princess's image all right, it was. It was like... made of wood or what it was made of, I don't know that, either. Nobody was let in there. It was about so big now, or may-be bigger. About this wide, but taller perhaps. And there were those carriages there. And she sat in the carriage, and a white horse, a horse harnessed to it, and that dragon underneath the carriage, its head sticking out. Its tail coiled up like that, but the head was sticking out, the jaws agape, and the large teeth. Like this... and all painted, nice to look at.</p>	
		<p>24. Thus it is also shown there, near the king's carriage, that dragon with its jaws agape.</p>	
		<p>2. Then for a time it was lost. Those... communists, they took it away. But then... may-be it was someone from the monastery, but they blamed it on the foreign country, that they robbed it thus... yes, they were robbing. But now my daughter tells me that it's back there again... That house too, it was torn down! But now the house has been made again and painted and. And the carriage and all are back again.</p>	

		3. (M: But was it the size of a human being? How big is it? Like a living woman?) A good-sized woman. Not a small one, a tall woman. Beautiful, too, that maiden.	
		4. (M: But tell us the story again.) What? (M: Tell us that story too, the story about that.) (coughing) Aah, that went like that.	
	6. But that dragon came across the water, was it a river or a sea, what was it. From there the dragon came.		
5. And it was so that each year they had to give a girl to that snake.	7. And that king always had to give away a girl, a maiden each year to that dragon.	5. To that dragon they had to give up one girl. But that dragon...	3. There was a rule like that. What was it like – they said “that dragon” but who knows? Each year they had to take the best and most beautiful maiden there to the seaside. For that dragon, they did.
6. It gobbled her down, that snake did. For the snake to swallow.		9. That the dragon... that it swallowed her or took her away to its own place, nobody could tell where that dragon took those girls that were given to it.	4. The dragon... they said it swallowed them.
			5. And till that time they always took them there.
7. And if it gets no girl, it beats all the water out of the sea and floods the town.	9. But otherwise, the dragon said, “I will beat all the water out of the sea, will flood the country..., this house or state or kingdom” or how was it.	7. Otherwise that dragon said, “I will beat all the water out of the sea, I will drown the people!”	
8. But that town was someplace on the seashore there. Near the sea it was.			
9. And it came to pass... now how was it that it came to pass? It came to pass one king had to give up his own daughter. But how could a king want to give up his own daughter?	8. And then one year it came to pass so that the king had to give his own daughter. But how? The king did not want to give his daughter away! And well, had to...	6. And then it came the king's... or was it a rich man... the rich man's daughter's turn it came, somehow. But how come, a king does not want to give up his own daughter, but give he must!	6. Then that great man or that king or... his daughter – it came his daughter's turn to be taken away.

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		8. And so it went. Well, all their folk were invited and... you know, to take the daughter to her death!	7. Well, all their folk and kinsmen they invited then, to see her off: that daughter whom they had to send to her death.
	10. Well, they all got into the carriage and took the princess ("the king's daughter"), too, to the seashore.		
10. And there in that picture, well, now, there on that carriage there was the girl, very beautiful, a princess and all.			
11. And then St. George took and...		10. But St. George, he went to protect her.	8. And there, St. George arrived, too.
12. He trusted very much in God, a young man he was. And he always went around on a white horse.			
13. And he said that "Will you let me go and give battle to that snake!" But the king said that "I let thee, indeed, but so far... till now no-one has been able to beat that snake! So canst thou... hast thou the power? Perhaps it will first kill thee?" "That's no care of yours. If it kills, it kills... But I..."	11. But George, he said then, that "I will go to fight with the dragon. You just give me a white horse, and" – I do not know how many, they did not say "pood" [old Russian weight, about 16,38 kg] in those days, but "kild" – how many poods did that sword weigh, which...		
		11. But the king said that "whosoever has the might to protect my daughter will receive the princess's hand in wedding."	
	12. And he was given all that he had asked for.		
14. And then he went and mounted his white horse and took a long sword, like that. So long, taller than him, an iron sword and a heavy one.			

		12. Well St. George, he mounted... On the white horse he went around on. And a big spear he had – well, it's all shown in the picture, on that icon there. A huge spear in his hand, like this,	
			9. And he said (that) to the kinsmen that, "Do not come near by, none of you, you stay away, let me go and give battle to that dragon! I will go, I will not give it the daughter!" That the daughter should stay on the shore...
17. But he began to fight then.	13. And went to fight. 18. And fell on the dragon...	13. and then he went to do battle with that dragon	11. And St. George, he went to fight the dragon.
	14. And the princess (the king's daughter) was riding in that coach, and that George then was in front of her on the horse. And he went ahead of them all and the princess came in the coach after him.		
		14. And there they all said, "Now it will beat George!" That the dragon is very strong. And up...	
15. And there came that snake or dragon out of the sea, the king's daughter to...	15. And the dragon came. Out of the water the dragon came and ... and the mouth wide open, so it could just take her and gulp down. 19. And the dragon opened its jaws wide to gobble up George, first.	15. But that dragon came so that... across the water. For its prey, you know. 19. And the dragon came, its jaws wide open.	
16. And the king's daughter also was brought near there in the carriage.		17. The girl was also brought near there.	10. Well, the daughter, too, stayed on the shore, at a distance.

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		16. But that St. George, he won't let the girl.	
		18. Won't let the girl be eaten up!	
	16. But that St. George said that "We don't give her to you to swallow before you have tried your strength against me!" But the dragon said, "Who are you to think you can match me!"		
	17. But then George, he called on the Lord: "Lord God, help me fight that dragon! Or else it will slay all the young folks on the earth!"		
18. And down under that carriage it went. Like it might just take the king's daughter from that carriage and gobble her up.			
19. But that Saint George, he took and into its mouth with that sword. And hit its mouth agape with that sword, and it could do nothing. And with that other sword, he hit it over the head. And with great trouble he hewed its head off.	20. But that George with a large sword him into the mouth and with the other hand... he had another sword here on the hip, and took that and with that hewed the dragon's head off.	20. And then St. George thrust his spear into its mouth! Into its mouth, into its throat that spear! And then there was the sword, the huge sword. Well, it's in the picture, too: a big sword, that long, hanging on a belt on his hip. And with that sword he hewed the dragon's head off.	15. Yes, so it was called a dragon. And it had then... With a huge iron club he hit it in the mouth and slay that dragon, St. George, he did.
20. And that Saint George, he beat that snake.		21. And won it.	12. And he beat that dragon. 16. And he won. Saved many people.
		22. Well, now, the king had said all right that... that... to St. George, that he would give him his daughter to wed. But St. George, he said that "I don't want a wife, at all! I don't..." He wouldn't take her. And he is not a married man, that St. George. He was a bachelor.	17. Now he wanted – that rich man – him to wed his daughter, to be her husband. But St. George said that "I will not wed her! I did not come to help in order to wed her, for her to take me as her husband."

	21. And the princess was not eaten by the dragon and the dragon never again came to claim... those girls.		13. And from that time on it all stopped, the sea never again began to claim living persons, the dragon never did.
21. And now that Saint George is a holy icon in the church. In every church he is, his pictures. Like... he surely is not God, nothing like, but he's been made into a picture. A picture, an icon, a holy image. We said pühane (holy image, icon), but the Russians said ikoona, that's how they said about it. So.	23. But the holy image of St. George is in every church, in every orthodox church it is, in every church by any what name. These are Jüri church (St. George's church), Varvaara church (St. Barbara church), Sörkamootsinika church, then there's Migula (St. Nicholas) church and... and on Whitsuntide Troitska. And more often they have Russian names, may-be they were built in the Russian times, these churches, a greater part of them have Russian names. Now in Saaless'ah there is Troitska church.		18. (M: But was there no such image in Pankjavitsa? No image of St. George in Pankjavitsa?) But he is there in every church. In every church he is. He is and Nikul' is, Nicholas the Miracle-Worker. Nicholas is and Barbara is. And who were they? They were the greatest – the greatest in their faith in God, and who kept the laws of the Lord and through His laws won good victories.
		23. And he was a helper of many men, and he helped them and so it is.	20. But he was just a poor man. But very clever he was, and a holy, a believer and put his faith in God. And he had great power to win and he fought with those devils. And he beat those devils, so. That was St. George! And lo!, that George – that George, he had no riches but his white horse, on his white horse he went around.

<p>22. And in Värška, there's a church of St. George. And there that George, St. George, he's really big and beautiful there. (And then, on St. George's Day... -- now when is it, St. George's Day – on St. George's Day they hold a great service in Värška. Then they took that St. George, that great icon... It's so big, like that door there...)</p>	<p>3. That, that is in Värška... That what... Värška belongs to Estonia, that does not belong to Russia. The church in Värška is dedicated to St. George. And there is a big holy image of George there, if they haven't sold it. Foreigners very much want those holy images... We called them "pühäseq" (holy images), but the Russians called them icons. They were bought. Is that one still there or not, I don't know. But when I went to that church of St. George in Värška, then it was there. On the right side and a big one, like this. And sitting on his white horse. And then there was, well, such sword or what, like this... something like this in his hand, a spear. Leaning on the ground, and taller than himself, that he killed the dragon with. And that George was, well, set up as a holy image or an icon or, well, how do you say.</p>		<p>14. But the dragon, that was – well, in the picture it is. In a picture of St. George it must be: the dragon with its jaws wide open, but St. George with a big iron stick, and with that stick...</p> <p>19. And it must be ... Maybe in the picture too, the holy image... In Petchory they sure have St. George on his white horse on the wall. And the big iron sword in his hand, the one that he fought with.</p>
	<p>24. (R: But where did it all happen then, in Petchory or Värška or someplace else?) No, that was someplace else. There is not even sea in Petchory, not even water there. Somewhere there... I don't know where it was. Only the holy books know that. There! The common books, they don't know. The ones in the monastery, when you learn them, those books. Only those books, then, know where it was and what was the king called and what was his daughter called. Bu me... I... I don't know, the name was not said, they only said... said it was a king's daughter.</p>		

