

KUUSI, MATTI. *Proverbia Septentrionalia*. 900 Balto-Finnic Proverb Types with Russian, Baltic, German and Scandinavian Parallels. In cooperation with Marje Joalaid, Elsa Kokare, Arvo Krikmann, Kari Laukkanen, Pentti Leino, Vaina Mälk, Ingrid Sarv. FFCommunications No. 236. Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia, 1985. 451 pages. US\$40.00 ISSN 0014-5815; ISBN 951-41-0492-7.

Once again the scholarly world is in a position of standing in awe at yet another seminal paremiological work by Matti Kuusi, the doyen of international paremiology and paremiography. In over fifty major articles, several significant large collections and a number of theoretical monographs he has equalled the accomplishments of such esteemed scholars as Archer Taylor and Bartlett Jere Whiting. His untiring dedication to the international field of proverb studies has earned him the respect of paremiologists throughout the world, and together they owe many thanks to Matti Kuusi for this new volume on the proverbs of the peoples of Northern Europe. It is a true *magnum opus* which he has assembled here with the help of seven acknowledged proverb scholars, and there can be no doubt that this important collection will be the standard reference work for decades to come.

The volume under review starts with a major "Introduction" (7-28) in which Kuusi gives a clear analysis of the major multilingual proverb collections (7-8) by such earlier paremiographers as Fr. L. Čelakovský, Ida von Düringsfeld and Otto von Reinsberg-Düringsfeld, Walter Gottschalk, Karl Friedrich Wilhelm Wander, Juliu A. Zanne, Nikolaos G. Polites, N. I. Ikononov and Joseph Aquilina. But besides Kaspar Strömbäck's unpublished manuscript "Svenskt-Nordiskt Ordspråks-Lexikon" which he compiled between 1857 and 1886, the comparative study of the proverb stock of Northern Europe has very much remained at the periphery of international paremiography. The volume which Kuusi has now published fills this void in such a detailed and superb fashion that it will also serve as the required model for future comparative proverb collections.

Peoples of Northern Europe considered in this volume are first "the six Balto-Finnic peoples of Finno-Ugrian origin—the Finns, Karelians, Estonians, Votes, Vepsians and Livonians [which] form a linguistically and geographically unified group between the Scandinavians, Balts and Russians" (8). In addition to this linguistic group there are three more, viz.: "in the west are the North Germanic peoples—the Swedes, Norwegians, Danes and Icelanders—in the east the Russians [...] and in between are the last representatives of the Balt language group—the Latvians and Lithuanians" (8). Kuusi discusses the previous paremiographical works for these areas (8-10) which serve as preparatory collections for the *Proverbia septentrionalia*. A major bibliography (78-82) for these compilations both in published or manuscript form attests to the magnificent comparative work which went into this new collection.

The following pages (10-15) present a welcome introduction to the culture, history, language, society and population of the six Balto-Finnic peoples. These language areas can, of course, be differentiated "by the boundaries of dialect, religion and government which have fluctuated over the centuries" (15), and the proverbs found in these languages also reflect these similarities and divergencies. In order to clarify these complex interrelationships Matti Kuusi has included five detailed maps (17-21): Map 1 shows the distribution of the Balto-Finnic languages while the other four maps present examples of the distribution of selected Balto-Finnic proverbs.

Map, 2, for example, analyzes the distribution of proverb 121 in the present vol-

ume: "The mother pits her breast in the (child's) mouth, but not the sense in his head." This proverb "is one of the most popular proverbs in both Estonian and Vote" (16). But with the help of such a map we really get an idea of the complexity of proverb dissemination through linguistic loan processes which itself becomes a major research project for every individual proverb. Since Kuusi has included for the first time (!) in a comparative proverb collection a frequency analysis of the source material, the question of the possible origin of each proverb is much facilitated: "Included with each proverb-type is information giving the number of authentic, totally independent variants documented at the end of the 1970's in respect to the Balto-Finnic languages" (22). Arvo Krikmann, one of the leading theoretical paremiologists from Tallinn (Estonia), has contributed a detailed statistical analysis scheme he has developed for "the connections between the Balto-Finnic and non-Balto-Finnic Materials" (29-36). It also includes a most impressive diagram (35) of the loan processes among the six Balto-Finnic languages and the influences of the German, Scandinavian, Latvian and Lithuanian, and Russian proverb stocks as well as many tables and statistics. A longer version of this highly technical analysis was published separately by Arvo Krikmann as a monograph (Krikmann 1985). These influences of outside proverbs on the Balto-Finnic texts are discussed by Kuusi (23-26) as well, and he points out that the classical and medieval Latin proverb tradition must also be considered as possible loan sources.

Following Kuusi's important introductory remarks is a clear description of the "Selection and organisation of the source materials" (26-28) which raises seven major points (here abbreviated):

1. The 900 proverb-types contained in the *Proverbia septentrionalia* collection represent those Northern European proverbs with a variant frequency in 1980 exceeding these minimal criteria in each language: Finnish 120, Karelian 20, Estonian 60, Vote, Vepsian or Livonian 5.
2. The proverb-types are first arranged on the basis of their distribution in the Balto-Finnic languages beginning with those proverbs occurring in six languages and ending with those found in only one.
3. Proverb-types in identical language combinations are classified according to their relative variant frequency.
4. The heading of the type-text is a normalised English form based almost exclusively on the primary form of the language or languages of the proverb-type.
5. Beneath each heading is one example of a possible Russian, Balt, German and Scandinavian representation of the proverb-type.
6. The most important part of the type-text is the one or more examples of variants of the proverb-type in Finnish, Karelian, Estonian, Vote, Vepsian and Livonian, if such a proverb-type exists in the language.
7. The final paragraph of the type-text begins with the source references to possible Russian, Balt, German and Scandinavian equivalents. Following a dash, the sources of the cited examples in order of language area are given. These are separated by a semi-colon from those references which refer to equivalents in the same Balto-Finnic language published elsewhere.

One would have thought that Kuusi and his excellent team would have stopped with these detailed presentations of the 900 proverb-types. Far from it, for they also include an "Analytical table" (37-77) which lists on the left pages all 900 proverb-types and on the right pages fourteen columns of statistical information for each type! Here is the breakdown of this incredible work (numbers give the column):

- 1: the number of the proverb-type

- 2: relative frequencies for all six Balto-Finnic languages
- 3: total of the individual frequencies
- 4: equivalents in Russian, Latvian-Lithuanian, German and/or Scandinavian
- 5: more distant equivalents in Lappish, Komi, East Eurasia, Africa and Oceania
- 6: references to synonyms, analogical or overlapping proverb-types or those of similar formulaic structures among the 900 in this volume
- 7: a metrical definition of the proverb-types
- 8: characteristic style pattern of the proverb-type
- 9: description of the type of rhyme
- 10: five modals of the proverb-types: normative, evaluating, generalizing, signaling, comments to comic, tragic, conflicting, contradictory situations and persons
- 11: classification of the material into 27 groups according to the basic opposition characteristic of each proverb
- 12: additional subject groupings
- 13: relation between the surface level and the semantically deep level in the proverbs
- 14: repetition of the number of the proverb-type in order to facilitate reading the figures in the columns

These forty pages are absolutely unique! Never before have we had such a detailed analysis based on the latest theoretical work by such scholars as G. L. Permjakov, Matti Kuusi and Arvo Krikmann. These columns include everything: geographical distribution, frequency, equivalents, form, style, poetics, rhyme, structure, semantics—and all of this on an international basis. It is mindboggling to think of the incredible work that went into this proverb collection which without doubt is the best comparative collection ever!

As would be expected by now, the book ends with meticulously assembled concordances (412–425) which enable the researcher 1) to find the parallels of proverbs in Estonian, Vote and Livonian proverb publications and the parallels of Germanic and Romanic proverbs published in Reinsberg-Düringsfeld, and 2) to find the parallels of the proverb-types of this work in Lappish and in Komi, in the Bible, and in Permjakov's two major collections of proverbs of Eastern peoples. Two glossaries help to locate "Finnish-Karelian Words" (426–445) and "Vepsian Words" (445–449). The only thing missing, and this is our singular criticism of the work, is an English index of the key-words of the proverb-types so that one can find them quicker and without having to read through many of the 900 types. Such an index could easily be added in a subsequent edition.

The last two pages, finally, contain a "Postscript" (450–451) which explains that this project concerning common Northern European proverbs began at a meeting in Tallinn (Estonia) in 1963. It also indicates what work was done by Matti Kuusi and his seven collaborators and it acknowledges the superb translation into English by Nigel Bridgen and his helpers.

Matti Kuusi closes these remarks by stating that *Proverbia septentrionalia* can be taken as a preliminary work towards an international type index of proverbs" (451). It is perhaps befitting for a great scholar like Kuusi to employ the word "preliminary" out of humility in view of the fact of the tremendous amount of work that lies ahead for comparative paremiology. However, he and his research team have accomplished an almost superhuman task, and they deserve the highest praise and admiration. The publication of *Proverbia septentrionalia* is a major event in the long history of proverb studies. It summarizes the results of much previous scholarship; it goes far beyond

it; and it has set a new standard for comparative paremiology. Above all it is a crowning work for a great man and a scholar who has tilled the field of proverbs so successfully for many years. There is a well-known international proverb "The workman is known by his work" (see no. 106 of this collection) which describes Matti Kuusi perfectly. We all know him and his work to be characterized by perfection, integrity and dedication to superb scholarship.

REFERENCE CITED:

KRIKMANN, ARVO

1985 *Some statistics on Baltico-Finnic proverbs*. Tallinn: Academy of Sciences of the Estonian SSR, Division of Social Sciences.

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SMITH, PAUL, editor. *Perspectives on Contemporary Legend*. Proceedings of the Conference on Contemporary Legend, Sheffield, July 1982. CECTAL Conference Papers Series No. 4. Sheffield: University of Sheffield, 1984. XI+233 pages. Paper £8.00 ISBN 0261-314X.

The Conference picked up a very popular theme: since the sixties the legend surfaced as the most belabored genre among folklorists. At the Bergen Congress (1984), 48% of the papers¹ dealt with various aspects of legends of many sorts, among them several of the "contemporary" variety. The volume of conference papers under review contains fifteen papers and four abstracts of papers not submitted in full; these latter will not be considered here.

Usually, books should be read from the beginning towards the end. The reader of the reviewed collection of papers is, however, advised to follow R. Barthes and start his reading, on the contrary, with the last paper: N. Williams' "Problems in Defining Contemporary Legend." After considering this paper the rest of the papers will fall into place, i.e., into the proper perspective, historical and otherwise. Thus, it will be clear from the start "that what we may regard as a distinct genre is actually not distinct from traditional legend, except by virtue of our own attitudes" (228) and that the tales are "contemporary not because they were recently invented, but simply because they were recently collected" (217). Let us add our humble opinion that a text's genre classification can be easily and unequivocally determined, given proper criteria of distinction, and that many of the texts quoted in the volume belong to genres other than the legend (see below, list of texts).

Armed with these insights, the other fourteen papers can be ordered into four groups: (a) surveys of materials (L. M. Ballard: North Ireland; J. R. Reaver: Florida); (b) monographs on a single tale-type (G. Bennett, J. Brunvand, D. Buchan, M. Glazer, G. McCulloch); (c) socio-psychological case studies on the community context of a single tale, or tale-type (E. Beck, G. Boyes, S. Grifer, B. af Klintberg, P. Smith); and (d) theoretical considerations (W.F.H. Nicolaisen, S. Robe).

a) The two surveys are—unfortunately—based only on casual personal knowledge and not on systematic collection and well organized archives (oh, again these old-fashioned institutions with their dead papers!). Neither the range of the repertoire of a community (rural, urban, county, or whichever else) nor its composition can be worked