Real Places and Countries in the Fairy Tale World

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In one of the most canonical genres of folklore, the fairy tale (wondertale, ATU 2004: 300–749[1]), the transition of the hero who starts off in realistic circumstances into an unreal world is a common element. The Swiss fairy tale specialist Max Lüthi says the fairy tale hero is a *traveller* (Lüthi 1987: 141). The movement of a fairy tale hero can be compared to the progress of a train from one station to another, connecting the isolated separate places and characters met along the way. From the vantage point of our present topic, it is important that the 'stations' usually have no names; as a rule the concrete names of the villages, cities or countries are not mentioned. The space of the hero's movement is nameless in the onomastic sense, and topographic concepts are only hinted at during the journey (Nicolaisen 1999: 1158); the space of fairy tales has been called a 'fundamentally acartographical space' (Nicolaisen 1991; 2002: 5). Thus it is quite typical that, in a fairy tale, the hero will leave home and reach 'another' or 'different kingdom' (Propp 2003: 50, function XV) – a nameless land, where he will undertake a task important from the tale's point of view.

In her work *Ethnopoetry* (1977) Heda Jason has constructed a world model for folklore (or, as she calls it, an ethno-poetic work's world model) (see Fig. 1). The centre of this model is the place where the storyteller dwells, 'our settlement' area (1). From then on zones follow according to the distance from the centre: 'our district' (2), 'our country' (3), 'this world' (4), the in between space (5) – in the middle of which the *fairy tale country* can be found like an island (7) – and the afterworld (6). According to Jason, 'each genre has areas in this scheme in which events are staged'; in a fairy tale the hero enters the action from 'this world' (4), which has no specified characteristics, and from there he travels to the fairy tale country (7) through the in between space (5) (Jason 1977: 186, 199). Jason sug-

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[1] Folktale types referred to in the Aarne-Thompson-Uther index (ATU 2004).

gests that when a really existing country is occasionally mentioned in fairy tales, it usually appears as a symbol of a faraway, undefined country and the narrating community 'has heard about this country, but has no further knowledge about its nature or location' (Jason 1977: 199).[2]
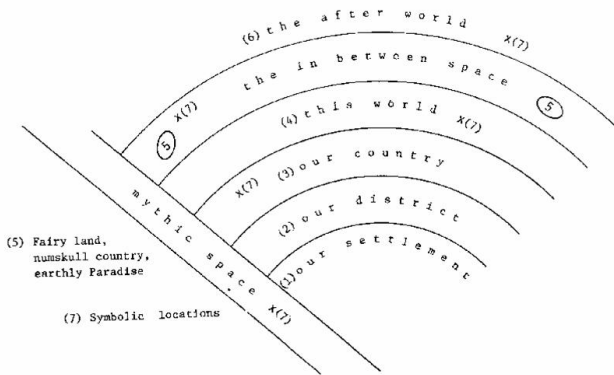

Fig.1] The spatial model by Heda Jason (1977).

Localisation serves the end of credibility as a reality reference (Marzolph 1996: 1173). It could be stated that one of the several opposite characteristics of the two main genres in folktale – the fairy tale and the legend – is the use of proper names. If, in the case of the legend, accurate references to place and/or characters and the time of the action often constitute a nearly essential characteristic (cf. definitions in Petzoldt 2002: 43–60), in fairy tales neither characters nor locations are usually named (Lüthi 1996: 28). Finnish scholar Satu Apo states that the handling of temporal and local dimension in folktales is – unlike in literature – so simple that they 'do not require any separate analysis' (Apo 1995: 21).

We can learn about the scarcity and insignificance of place names in fairy tales from surveys of text corpora of different nations. Among studies of recent fairy tale recordings, Maarten Kossmann's discussion of Moroccan fairy tales attests that, with but one exception, 'no place names or landmarks are named, no specific country is referred to' (Kossmann 2000: 34).

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[2] Madis Arukask who has analysed the concept of place in Estonian (to be more exact, Setu) folk songs has similarly noticed that various place names denote only the area of human habitation that remains 'outside the familiar close range' with no reference to real geography and where different areas referred to by proper names are freely interchangeable within the song (Arukask 2003: 117).

Thus, although in Estonia in the late 19th century, when the bulk of Estonian tales were recorded, the mental world map of the storytellers certainly contained numerous countries and nations of the world, the poetics of the genre did not favour the use of toponyms. The fictitiousness characteristic of fairy tales requires that the characters hardly ever be named, and the immediate surroundings of the narrator, as well as further geographical locations, remain unspecified; the fairy tale world is 'recognizable, but not knowable' (Nicolaisen 1980: 15). In his study Alfred Messerli claims about the popular fairy tales of Europe that these use only such spatial indicators 'that are absolutely necessary for understanding the story' (Messerli 2005: 276).

Nevertheless, names are not entirely missing from fairy tales. The following will focus on the texts by those Estonian storytellers or recorders who have gone beyond the ordinary poetics of fairy tales. Thus, I have decided to observe the cases which mention a country or a town by its name. Among other things, the small number of name references enable us to observe the storytellers' attitudes towards other countries and their mentalities. It is true that mentality is not directly reflected in folklore; rather, it is refracted through a poetic prism, and this happens differently in different genres – thus such reflections can be found more in legends than in fairy tales. However, fairy tales also contain intimations of the relationship with other nations.

The present analysis is based on the 5,550 texts stored in the text corpus of Estonian fairy tales at the Estonian Folklore Archives, which constitute about 90% of the Estonian fairy tales stored at the Archives. I have used the same text corpus and search methods to study character names in fairy tales (for a survey of the method, see the Estonian-language article Järv 2005: 447–448). I have previously written on toponyms that can be found in fairy tales, concentrating on the names of Estonian islands (Järv 2003). In observing the names of the islands in the seaside country of Estonia, it appeared that such names often indicated original creations, literary borrowings or the legend-like nature of texts included in the fairy tale corpus (Järv 2003: 62).

What is worth mentioning first is the fact that toponyms are considerably less frequent in fairy tales than personal names. While 2,135 different personal names were found in 1,328 texts (Järv 2005: 448), there were 271 place names in 388 texts.

This analysis leaves aside the three first spheres of Jason's model: i.e. place-names in Estonia.[3] Names of places located outside Estonia were found in 174 texts, which makes up approximately half of the total number. The number of times a particular country is mentioned and the number of cities mentioned in that country have both been counted. It seems reasonable to present the two figures together, for in the storytellers' minds they apparently must have been conflated – a particular country is often known, first and foremost, by a certain city with which there are contacts. In fact, it can be claimed that, in principle, fairy tales are characterised by a desire for the city, although the city is usually not specified. The storytellers provide their characters with a faraway city or a king's castle as a destination to strive for; a fairy tale can be seen as a flight of the people of bygone times from the country to a city or a fortress, moving toward the royal castle. I shall also observe the distant cities present in the Estonian text corpus.

As expected, it is names of neighbouring countries, in addition to our own country, that are most popular among the country names mentioned in Estonian fairy tales. These are the countries with which there have been most cultural contacts, those that are impossible to do without. The countries mentioned on more than five occasions include Russia (referred to in 64 different texts, of which 38 refer to the country in general and 26 to particular cities), Finland (20), Latvia (14; 2+12) Germany (10; 7+3), Turkey (9), Sweden (8), England (7), and France (7).

The country mentioned most often, by far, is Russia, to which Estonia belonged when the recording of Estonian fairy tales was started in the 19th century. Also, it is worth noting that references to cities are close in number to references to the country in general and that, on many occasions, fairly real dimensions are evoked in the case of Russia: for instance, there are several references to serving

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[3] It must be admitted that historically the geographical division is somewhat anachronistic, proceeding from the countries we know today, while a great deal of Estonian archived texts proceed from different, historical premises. The contemporary Estonian territory, which had come under the control of Czarist Russia after the Great Northern War in the early 18th century, was divided between two different administrative units up to the year 1918: the Province of Estonia and the Province of Livonia. This discussion considers both the governing state of Russia, as well as Latvia, whose capital Riga was the centre of the province of Livonia, which was also comprised of contemporary southern Estonia, as foreign lands, and, of course, strict proceeding from administrative logic would also make the Province of Estonia and its capital Tallinn foreign territories for Livonia and vice versa. Also, this discussion includes in 'our country' the orthodox region of Setumaa, which was joined to Estonia only in 1918, but is responsible for a major part (nearly a third) of fairy tale texts stored at the fairy tale text corpus.

in the army in Russia, where such service actually took place. Also, goods are brought from Russia and Russia appears in the tales as a travel destination.

The same can be said of Russian cities that are situated close to Estonia – on several occasions going to the market in Pskov (Pihkva) is mentioned, which also could occur in real life. It is understandable that references to Siberia (five in number) are connected to the notion of being imprisoned, which also indicates a real life background.

The neighbouring country of Finland serves as the site of more numerous mythical relationships, a number of the references concern going to a wise man to ask for advice (traditional motif in Estonian folk belief, cf. Loorits 1951: 471–476), or else healers from Finland would cure people. For instance, when a king's daughter is ailing: 'There have been Finnish sorcerers and Turjamaa Norwegian/Lappish wise men, but the illness will not go away.'[4] The renowned Finnish smith tends to be visited even more often. Also, in connection with contemporary Finland, there are also references to Lapland (5), both to the Finnish/Lappish wise man or just journeys to the country.

As regards today's Latvia, it is mostly Riga, the capital of the Province of Livonia (12 references), which is mentioned. The concept of 'Latvia' itself occurs only in two relatively new texts, which both hint at the tradition of wizards coming from Latvia, a belief that still existed in the border regions even in the 19th century (cf. Loorits 1951: 466–467). In one of them, the man 'went to the Latvian wise man as well', with Latvian spelt with a lower-case 'l' in the Estonian text, so that it is a common adjective rather than a proper name; the other text says, 'A Latvian witch had turned the wife of a poor man into a werewolf'[5].

What is relatively surprising is the popularity of Turkey, which is also mentioned in relation to different exchange goods – either Turkish goods or salt[6] turn out to be necessary. The majority of references to other countries are purely 'fairy tale' ones; for instance, trips to Sweden are undertaken in order to get gold (on some occasions also a wife) from across the sea. The same applies to Germany, from where 'fairy tale' gold is fetched in addition to some suggestions of exchanging goods, as well as England, from where goods can be obtained, or which

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[4] ERA II 150, 466/75 (122) < Räpina parish, Kahkva v. – D. Lepson < Juuli Lepson, 66 year old (1937).

[5] S 15493/504 (10) < Setumaa, Mäe m., Võõpsu v. – N. Sõrmus < Marie Kütte (1929); H I 6, 248/(1) < Vastseliina parish – Jaan Sandra (1894).

[6] H II 47, 501/7 (l) < Tõstamaa parish, Pootsi m. – Otto Schantz (1893).

may be the destination of travel, wooing, or curing a king's daughter. In particular, the above can be claimed about more distant countries, to which there are only a couple, and rather unlikely, references. For instance, the hero goes to marry the daughter of the emperor of Rome; in two texts the hand of the daughter of the emperor of China is asked for. In one tale, a young man hears from an old woman that 'In Bagdad there lived a young and beautiful king's daughter. But she was difficult to get, for each young man who went there was obliged to make the princess either cry or laugh.'[7]

On some occasions references to places are used simply as set phrases or well-known images. Thus, cranes fly 'towards the South to the land of Egypt', making plaintive sounds which is a reference to a well-known song; or in a city that was lacking water a man is said to have broken the rock 'and water came gushing forth as if from the rock in Horeb'[8] (cf. Exodus, 17: 6).

If we attempt to make a subjective division of the place references in fairy tales into real ones (or references by which the storyteller means particular places that could not be replaced in the tale) and 'fairy tale' ones (meaning any places), then the fairy tale references make up the majority in the case of all countries except Russia. As concerns other countries, the principle of a *faraway country* suggested by Jason appears to be more foregrounded – if a place-name occurs, it is quite often used as a marker of the setting. Often this is done at the beginning of the tale, to direct the listener/reader to somewhere far off; there need not be further mention of the toponym in the text later on; e.g. 'A couple of thousand years ago, a rich merchant lived in England, in the city of London' or 'Once upon a time, in the distant past, there lived a great hunter in Russia'[9]. This also applies to an example of an abstract Europe: 'The king had three daughters. The king lived in a European country, far away.'[10]

[7] RKM II 49, 496/505 (12) < Valga – A. Udras < E. Hendrikson (1956).

[8] ERA II 169, 257/66 (12) < Vändra parish, Vana-Vändra m., Aluste v. < Tori parish – A. Õunapuu < Kadri Õunapuu (1937); ERA II 77, 346/54 (13) < Hageri parish < Nissi parish, Põlli v. – R. Põldmäe < Jaagup Jäämann (1934).

[9] H R 7, 178/88 (6) < Põltsamaa – K. Moks (1878); S 119314/50 (16) < Setumaa, Vilo m., Molnika v. – V. Ruusamägi < Usta Lohk (1935).

[10] ERA II 302, 297/303 (177) < Tallinn < Valjala parish, Kogula m., Lõõne v. – P. Alvre < Liisa Tampsö, 72 year old (1942). A transitional form between 'a city' typical of the fairy tale genre, and a particular named city appears in the example in which the name of the city is abridged and thus appears as meaningless: 'Once a soldier was discharged from service in the city of P after he had honestly served out his time': H III 15, 547/69 (1) < Harju-Madise parish, Vasalemma – V. Ristmegi (1879).

On such occasions the names seem to be freely interchangeable. For instance, most of the above-mentioned references to fetching gold from different countries are related to the tale type ATU 650A, in the different versions of which the hero can go to Sweden, Germany, France or other countries: 'Then Mats took the gold, went off to France, bought the royal city and started to live there.'[11] The rest of the countries are mentioned in the text corpus in a similar manner: they only appear on a couple of occasions in the fairy tale corpus and, as a rule, seem to be the storyteller's haphazard selection, and have no connection with real life. In some cases we can speak of alliterative haze in the storyteller's selection of country names. In the tale type 480A, the clever orphan asks for clothes from the devil wooing her in the sauna, and most of the phrases alliterate – a shirt from America, a skirt from Africa, stockings from Finland, boots from Germany, a brooch from Sweden, and finally, a block of gold from the land of Kungla[12] (see also Järv 2003: 61, Tale G2).

However, if we compare references to other countries and cities to Estonian place-names, it seems that the names of places located far and near have been employed in different ways by storytellers. While the far-off places are interchangeable, the references to places located close by appear in legend-like plots that are related to particular places.

It is noticeable that certain storytellers display a love of names and employ them on numerous occasions. The beginning of a text recorded from Akulina Ruusamägi in the Setu region provides a vivid example, starting with the words 'Before the French had been to Moscow, a king called Os'b lived in Novgorod and Os'b had an only daughter called Ol'a.'[13] Very often this turns out to be a device typical of certain authors, which they tend to use excessively in their texts, giving names to numerous characters and determining the concrete settings. At times this technique even locates their texts among those whose authenticity

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[11] H II 2, 675/8 (1) < Karuse parish, Saastna v. – O. Kallas (1889).

[12] In Estonian: *hame Ameerikast, undruk Aafrikast, sukad Soomemaalt, saapad Saksamaalt, ross Rootsi-maalt, kuldpakk Kunglamaalt.* E 48189/92 (1) < Tarvastu parish – J. Müür < Aadu Kulpov (1912). A second reference to Africa is also random, signifying a faraway land. It occurs in a tale in which the storyteller uses names excessively: the main characters Petka and Katariina are named, the story starts to develop in St. Petersburg in Russia, and a child is thrown into the Neva River and found by a ship destined for Africa: ERA II 41, 359/70 (9) < Narva < Jõhvi parish, Tammiku v. – L. Room < Marie Oru (1929).

[13] S 2251/85 (18) < Setumaa, Vilo m., Molnika v. – V. Ruusamägi < Akulina Ruusamägi (1927).

is deemed questionable. To exemplify this, let's return to references to Latvia. In addition to the two texts mentioned above, the remaining two belong to the tale type ATU 613 and are exceptions to the type. One of them lacks any data concerning the time and place of recording; another text – a text resembling the former one – which comes from Viljandi, was submitted by Johan Lepa[14]. Both tales speak of a 'drunk from the town of Pärnu', who overhears three forest spirits: the spirits are on their way to Tallinn, to the Laiksaare district located south of Pärnu, and to Latvia – 'I shall enter a rich manor owner and make him stupid'.

A comparison of the two texts shows, from the very beginning, that it is fairly likely that these are either two different contributions by the same person (there are many such cases stored at the Estonian Folklore Archives) or they have been copied from a book. I should mention that several contributions by Johan Lepa have turned out to be either exact or close copies of other texts (cf. an example by Toomeos-Orglaan 2003: 186–187). Therefore, it seems rather probable that the tale at hand is a close copy.

The same can be said about two references to the city of Kiev. In one of the three texts mentioning Kiev, the hero simply travels to that city and the location is not mentioned after that; in two cases it is the plot of 'the Dragon Slayer' (ATU 300) that is connected with the city. A text recorded in Saarde parish in 1897 starts with the words 'There is said to be a mountain in Russia, near the city of Kiev, that old people would call the devil's mountain, and they say there is a big hole on top of that mountain.'[15] Another, quite similar text has been told in Russian, and was recorded in 1973 in Estonian, in a settlement of Estonians who had emigrated to the Krasnoyarsk territory in Russia. Obviously, in these cases it is just 'a distant city' that is emphasised; the last two texts mentioned may also originate from a particular source.[16]

Most of the names that appear in the text corpus have only reached the texts once or twice, thanks to storytellers who diverge from the ordinary in one way or another. Closer observation also shows that the use of place names becomes more frequent on the diachronic plane. On several occasions we are obviously dealing with narrators who have excessively used both personal and place names. In more

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[14] H R 1, 126/8 < Viljandimaa; E 22260/5 < Viljandimaa, Päri v. – J. Lepa (1896).

[15] E 34718/22 (1) < Saarde parish and m., Jäärja v. – A. Kuningas (1897).

[16] RKM II 305, 306/10 (3) < Russia, Krasnoyarsk territory, Upper-Bulan settlement – Rosalie Ottesson (1973).

recent times, a frequent use of names may have also been caused by the wish for a comic effect or the desire to move the fairy tales closer to a contemporary listener. As an example experienced in my own field work, I can mention a young-ish storyteller who, although having heard the traditional tale, would consciously use names in order to magnify the comic dimension – for instance, in type ATU 331 the action takes place in 'the capital of Finland', i.e. Helsinki, or in an animal tale (ATU 61B), in which a hen who is being taken away shouts for help, using the local topographic markers ('I am being taken down Kiksova hillside, up Kül-latüva hill, towards Petseri').[17]

In conclusion it can be claimed on the basis of the place-names occurring in Estonian fairy tales that places closer to the area where the tale is told are mentioned more often than faraway ones. The place-names from the district or county where the tale is told often refer to the legend-like nature of the text; in case of neighbouring place-names both real-life-related ties (exchange of goods, warfare, army service) as well as those mythologising the neighbours can be observed: visits are often paid to the wizards of the neighbouring country. Mentionings of more far-off lands are of a purely fairy tale nature: these appear as destinations of long journeys, places from which gold or goods are fetched or where wives are woods, or locations that will eventually be governed by the fairy tale characters etc. In most cases, these are mentioned only on one or two occasions per text, and the toponyms could easily be replaced with the names of other countries.

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[17] ERA MD, 331 (2) & ERA MD, 350 (8), Setumaa, Meremäe m., Obinitsa v. – R. Järv, K. Krondel, K. Taal < Terje Lillmaa (2004).

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