

Favourite Children and Stepchildren: Elite and Vernacular Views of Estonian Folk Song Styles¹

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Abstract

Estonian song tradition could be divided into an older and a newer layer – *regilaul*, which is part of the common Baltic-Finnic oral tradition, and the newer, end-rhymed stanzaic folk song. The newer song style with two main substyles – local situational song and sentimental song – developed on the example of the poetry of the European peoples and became the dominant song style in Estonia in the second half of the 19th century, the period of Europeanisation, rapid modernisation of the agrarian society, and the emergence of the Estonian intelligentsia and the national movement. The views of the Estonian cultural elite with regard to the two song styles are compared with “vernacular” views, using as the source manuscripts that Marie Sepp (1862–1943), a singer from Kolga-Jaani parish in Central Estonia, sent to the archives.

In the discourse of the Estonian elite, *regilaul* acquired the meaning of the more valuable genre. Owing to national, aesthetic, gender-ideological and disciplinary reasons, newer songs, and particularly sentimental songs, occupied a lower position on their value scale. In the material recorded in written form by Marie Sepp, the sentimental repertoire plays a central role as an important part of nineteenth-century youth culture, offering opportunities for versatile creative self-expression, the development of youth’s agency, adaptation to the model of romantic love, and the discussion of other contemporary topics related to modernisation. Nevertheless, the preferences of the elite and “vernacular” groups reveal reciprocal influences and points of convergence, as well as a divergence of the views within the groups.

“On our way back [from the recording session], the women complained that they had been urged to sing only the old dronings [songs of older style], but these have no melody or anything. Beautiful long ballads such as *Bored in the monastery*, etc. were not sung at all. To please Charlotte and Anna, we sang these sorrowful and heart-warming ballads during our car drive to pass time.” (From the 1957 fieldwork diary of folklorist Otilie Kõiva.)²

“While songs of the older style are like the favourite children for Estonian (and Finnish) folklore researchers, the newer style folk songs are seen as stepchildren. Folklore collectors, as a rule, record them only if they have no songs of older style or other interesting folklore available; a manuscript collection of songs of mainly newer style is frowned upon ...” (Anderson 1932: 2).

Two major layers can be distinguished in the Estonian oral song tradition. The earlier oral song culture, *regilaul* or runosong, is characterised by alliteration, parallelism and special meter (the Estonian version of Kalevala meter, see Sarv 2015). Estonian *regilaul* is part of the common oral song tradition of the Baltic-Finnic peoples. In terms of music, the older tradition is characterised by linear, monophonic thinking.³ The repeated narrow-range melody of *regilaul* is comprised of one or two phrases, the rhythm depends directly on the poetic text: each of the 8 rhythmic units in a phrase corresponds to a syllable (Lippus 1995; Ross, Lehiste 2001; examples: ERmA). The newer end-rhymed and stanzaic song tradition evolved during the 17th–18th centuries following European examples, and by the second half of the 19th century this had replaced *regilaul* in most parts of

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² RKM (Riiklik Kirjandusmuuseum / State Literary Museum) II 63, 103.

³ A unique multipart singing style is common in the Seto region in south-eastern Estonia.

Estonia. As was characteristic of the folk culture of modernity, the newer folk song was partly a written tradition, as it was disseminated in manuscript and printed form. The newer tradition is based on functional-harmonic thinking; the melody has a broader range and is built on stanzas, and many melodies have been borrowed from other cultures (see, for example, Korb 2014). The transition process from one song tradition to another, which has been compared to the transition of the Germanic peoples to end-rhymed song in the 10th to 14th century (Anderson 1932: 2; Rüütel 1969: 102; Sarv 2009) took place in parallel with the rapid modernisation of peasant society, Europeanisation, and the emergence of the Estonian intelligentsia and national identity.

Ever since the wider dissemination of the newer song tradition, these inherently different song styles, as well as the subcategories of both styles, have been viewed in hierarchical terms. The evaluations, which are by no means uniform across society, depend on the socio-cultural context and ideologies of the period. In the following pages I will give a brief outline of the position and significance of traditional singing styles in modernising/modernised Estonian society and explore the reasons behind the views of different social groups. First I will touch upon some of the ideological and socio-cultural contexts of the academic and authoritative knowledge about folk song produced by the cultural elite during different periods of time, from the nation-building processes in the second half of the 19th century to the present day. In contrast, the non-elitist view “from below” was gleaned from the texts written and sent to the archives between 1930 and 1940 by Marie Sepp (1862–1943), a peasant woman from central Estonia.⁴

The analysis of the texts produced by the cultural elite with regard to the newer song style could be categorised as textualist meta-anthropology, which studies the discursive aspects of cultural representation. The Estonian scholar of cultural studies Kristin Kuutma has defined this approach as reflexive cultural critique.⁵ The definition emphasises the need of a historical academic discipline for self-reflection, the wish to understand the ideas and textualisation practices that have influenced the construction of cultural knowledge – the “politics and poetics” of the era (Kuutma 2006, 2009, 2014; Kalkun 2015; Västriik 2007). In this article I will primarily focus on the “politics”, although due to the limited scope of the article, the approach inevitably remains superficial and selective.

The dialogue with the elite is discussed within the representation of the newer song style by Marie Sepp. The nearly 500-page corpus of texts by Marie Sepp consists of song lyrics and other genres of folklore, notes and recollections on their performance, autobiography, biographical information, etc. Although she wrote down the texts and sent them to the archives in the 1930s, the material represents mainly the period of active singing practices in her life, the late 19th century – the peak of the spread of the newer song style. Relying on the texts written down by Marie Sepp, I attempted to construct a possible ‘vernacular folk song theory’⁶ which would comprise views on different song styles, the meanings and role of the songs in the life of a peasant woman and her community.

Marie Sepp’s texts do not entail lengthier contemplations on the song culture. She mentions song and singing, describing different events in the village community and cultural changes re-

⁴ Marie Sepp lived in Kolga-Jaani parish. In her childhood and during her marriage she was part of the relatively poorer, minimal landowning class of peasantry; she worked as a maid, helped with fieldwork and did handicraft work at home. A recognised singer in her community, from 1906 onwards she was repeatedly asked by folklore collectors to perform folk songs for them. In 1937, her performing of *regilaul* was recorded at the national broadcasting studio in Tallinn. In the 1930s, she started to make a written record of the local folklore. The majority of her material was written down after the *regilaul* recording in Tallinn and was addressed to August Pulst at the Tallinn Theatre and Music Museum, who was one of the organisers of the recording session (see also Oras 2017).

⁵ This term is based on the theory of critical anthropology see, e.g., Clifford, Marcus 1986; Marcus, Fischer 1986; Clifford 1988; Geertz 1988.

⁶ The various aspects of the vernacular theory are studied on the basis of a wide variety of very different texts by people representing non-elite or vernacular (sub)cultures (Baker 1984; McLaughlin 1996; Kikas 2015; Valk 2014). Contemporary cultural research views vernacular theory as a method of interpretation and knowledge construction equal to academic theory. The variety of theoretical perspectives enriches the ways of interpreting cultural practices (e.g. McLaughlin 1996: 6, 165).

lated to modernisation. Some information can be found dispersed in the comments added to the song texts and in her letters to the archives. I have attempted to fuse these metatextual fragments and combine them with an impression gained from the contents, style and recontextualisation principles of the song texts. I prefer to call this subjective construction not so much Marie Sepp's theory but rather a researcher's vision of her 'folk song theory'. Referring to the concept of 'vernacular theory', in my opinion, is justified by its empowering ideological meaning – the aspiration to highlight the epistemological significance of singers' views next to the sophisticated theory of the elite.

The Estonian cultural elite's views on folk song styles

As an introduction to my analysis of the conceptualisation and assessment of the folk song by the educated elite I would like to list the main social processes in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Estonian society. In the process of modernisation throughout the 19th century, when Estonia was part of the Russian Empire, Estonians, who had previously been serfs of the Baltic German nobility, were transformed into a free, land-owning, socially stratified peasantry and a quite considerable clerisy of Estonian background. In the latter half of the century, Estonians adopted the ideas of nationalism and European cultural models, and towards the end of the century Estonian-language high culture began to emerge. All this took place in the context of the economic, political and cultural domination of the minority of Baltic German landowners and clerisy and of the Czarist Russification policy. In the 20th century, political independence was achieved after the First World War in 1918. The period of the national state ended with the Soviet annexation in 1940. The Soviet occupation of Estonia, which lasted from the Second World War until 1991, was followed by the restoration of the independent republic and multi-level integration into Europe.

The attitudes of the cultural elite to the transforming folk song reveal the hierarchical approach

to the song tradition.⁷ A hierarchical approach to the artistic creation of the lower classes, proceeding from the Herderian ideas of folk and folk poetry, is by no means a feature characteristic only of Estonia. In the context of the Estonian singing tradition, two main song styles have been compared. However, the subcategories or substyles of both the older and the newer song style have also been valued differently. The evaluations are associated with the prevailing ideology of the time, and according to the historical conceptualisation of folklore the central binary oppositions are 'old' and 'new', 'own' and 'borrowed'. These adjectival pairs are particularly closely related because of the historical development of the Estonian singing tradition – the newer style spread at such a late time that the element of borrowing both in the style itself and in the repertoire in this style were self-explanatory, common facts. Among the other contrasting features, I will briefly discuss the partly overlapping binary oppositions 'active' versus 'passive', 'masculine' versus 'feminine', 'sentimental' versus 'realistic'.

'Old', 'own' – 'new', 'borrowed'

The general background to the evaluations was first and foremost the ideas of nationalism. These were obviously central in the period of shaping the nation and national culture, but they remained important also throughout the entire 20th century, both in the context of constructing Estonian-language high culture and the nation state, and during the occupation that followed (see, for example, Annus 2016; Jansen 2004; Vunder 2001). The conscious emphasis on contrasting the 'old', 'own' and 'new', 'borrowed' emerged in Estonia in the second half of the 19th century, during the development of national awareness. Until that time, both Baltic German and the first Estonian intellectuals, influenced by the Herderian folk song ideology, had above all viewed *regilaul* as the manifestation of the people's "pure, authentic, wholesome spirit".⁸ At the same time, every song in the Estonian language could also be approached as a valuable Estonian folk song – the label of folk song could be attached to anything

⁷ Ideological views are also a determining factor in what is considered Estonian folk song (e.g., Särg 2002; Sarv 2001).

⁸ Amongst other things, the formation of assessments of Estonian folk singing was influenced by the fact that in his second volume of *Volkslieder*, Johann Gottfried Herder had published Estonian *regilaul* lyrics sent to him by August Wilhelm Hupel, who served as a pastor in Estonia (Lukas 2011; Undusk 1995).

in which the audience recognised their musical identity (Dahlhaus 1974, 1989; Sarv 2001, 2002; Särg 2002). The repertoire of songbooks or sheet music, however, was translated from, adapted from or inspired by German sources. The printed publications were in conflation with the oral tradition, as the texts migrated from printed sources to oral dissemination and vice versa and inspired local song creation. A conflict of ideological and aesthetic values could be seen here: the texts and, more particularly, the music of the *regilaul*, which represented pre-modernity, were aesthetically much more difficult to accept not only for the increasingly modernising peasantry but also for the educated elite.⁹

The increasingly active national movement labelled the repertoire of German origin negatively. According to Carl Robert Jakobson, activist of the national movement, who commissioned “own” songs from the first Estonian composers, these “foreign ornaments”, “witch’s ladders braided in foreign spirit and to foreign melodies”, should be replaced by songs created by Estonians under the guidance of “the old Estonian spiritual power” (Jakobson 1869: 7–8). Composers did, in fact, start to employ the Estonian and Finnish oral tradition, although they preferred melodies that remained within the limits of aesthetically acceptable music from the relatively newer (borrowed) tradition. Although inspiration was found in the neo-romanticist *Liedertafel*, and the compositional principles and the creations of Estonian composers do not differ greatly from the German neo-romanticist repertoire, such music fulfilled the role of national music in the final decades of the 19th century (Lippus 2002a: 62–68; Sarv 2002).

The academic approach to folklore, which emerged in the 19th century, drew a very clear line between *regilaul* and the newer song style (Bendix 1997: 45 ff.; Viidalepp 1959: 157; Tedre 2003 [1955]:

215; Valk 2004, 2014). Jakob Hurt, organiser of country-wide folklore collecting in Estonia, in his appeal and public feedback to folklore collectors steadfastly resisted archiving the newer folk song among the collections of national “old treasure” (*vanavara*). Not only did he argue that the rhymed songs popular among the general public were by no means ‘old’;¹⁰ Pastor Hurt also perceived one substyle of the newer song, the local situational or village song, as essentially distasteful because of its entertaining content and overly bold, sometimes even obscene, style (Laugaste 1963: 376; Roll 1989). The extent to how unpalatable the local village song was to a nineteenth-century educated taste shaped by bourgeois self-restraint¹¹ is shown by the reaction of newspapers to the texts in the style of village songs by Martin Sohberg, which he published at his personal expense: newspapers called the texts “smutty”, “stinking manure slurry”, “filth”, and advised that Sohberg’s books should be burnt (Tedre 1999: 11–12).

Early twentieth-century researchers embraced Jakob Hurt’s determined preference of *regilaul* – all were convinced by the special value of *regilaul* as a foundation of national culture and of the need to give it priority in folklore collecting.¹² Nevertheless, the newer folk song had also been introduced among collectible material already at the beginning of the century by Oskar Kallas, initiator of the large-scale collecting of folk music (Kallas 1921). Head of the Estonian Folklore Archives Oskar Loorits recognised the newer song style as a reflector of Estonians’ way of thinking and living (Loorits 1932: 88–89). The study of newer song was initiated by Walter Anderson, a German-born professor of folklore at the University of Tartu, who valued the ‘new’ and ‘borrowed’ song style as research material of international interest (Anderson 1932, see the opening quotation; Seljamaa 2005; Tedre 1996).

⁹ The main source for the feelings of alienation was the uniqueness of the musical thinking and performativity of *regilaul*. But also the published *regilaul* texts were adapted to the contemporary taste (Jaago 2005a; Laugaste 1963: 178, 363; Leichter 1997: 481; Lukas 2011: 678; Saarlo 2008; Tobias 1913).

¹⁰ For example, as he polemises over assigning the concept of ‘folk poetry’ (*rahvaluule*) to folklore, Hurt writes: “I consider ‘folk poetry’ a far too general name for our old treasure for the reason that the people, the folk, have poetry of more recent times, for example songs that most definitely must be called ‘folk poetry’, but which, however, do not belong among the ‘old treasure.’” (Hurt 1893).

¹¹ The realism, occasional sentimentality, vulgarity or obscenity characteristic of village song did not comply with the norms of bourgeois control, moderation and self-discipline adopted in the course of modernisation (Vunder 2008: 463–464; Frykman, Löfgren 2003).

¹² Oskar Loorits, for example, called *regilaul* “the real Estonian folk song” (“das echte estnische Volkslied”, Loorits 1932: 86).

The younger, early twentieth-century generation of intellectuals aimed to develop a national high culture of international significance, adopting the slogan “Let us be Estonians but let us also become Europeans”.¹³ The Romantic creation of earlier Estonian authors with strong German influences fell under harsh criticism. In his essay “On Literary Style” (“Kirjanduslik stiil”, 1912), novelist Friedebert Tuglas, one of the ideologists of the Young Estonia movement, criticised not only Romantic literature and newer sentimental folk songs but also *regilaul*. He regards the local situational song, on the other hand, in the most positive terms, calling it “a dynamic, rhythmic and colourful chronicle of the modern age” and even compares it against *regilaul* which, with its dated form and “childish contents”, is like “open stagnant water”. Another feature characteristic of the period was that Tuglas expressed his preference for the more archaic Seto *regilaul*, claiming that in Seto songs he sensed “the earthy scent of soil, Nordic poetry, and traditions based on race”, and that “a stylish culture” can only be “based on race” and is not “patriotic”.¹⁴

Drawing such a clear line between the more archaic and less archaic *regilaul* conforms well with the attitudes to folk melodies among the musical circles of the time. In the first decades of the 20th century, the existence of the oldest layer of folk tunes as a highly exotic one compared to Western music came to be acknowledged. It was believed that the use of the oldest melodies – or better still an intuitive reliance on their modes of expression (without direct citations) – would lead Estonian composers to create a nationally unique music, comparable to that created by Nordic composers. This “national” creation, free of citations, and the exclusion of “patriotism” represents the aversion of those aspiring towards high culture to

what was called the “peasant shoe culture”, i.e., the unprofessional and “outdated” use of folklore by late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century authors and contemporary amateur performers (Lippus 2002b; Leichter 1997: 397–404).

In the Soviet period, the most ideologically acceptable and, owing to the political pressure on academic activities, even compulsory research topic was social conflict (see, for example, Saarlo 2017). *Regilaul*, but even more so the local situational song, spoke about the social situation in different eras – the problems of the peasantry and their struggles against German manor owners, the conflicts stemming from the social stratification of the rural population, and the proletarian movement of the early 20th century. In the overview of folklore published in 1959, folklorist Ülo Tedre has established a clear hierarchy between the two main substyles of the newer song: “No doubt, the local situational songs and, among them, especially those reflecting social protest, constitute the more valuable part of rhymed folk song [compared to sentimental songs on exotic topics].” (Tedre 1959b: 310).¹⁵

In the 1950s–1970s, extensive studies of end-rhymed folk song were carried out by the leading researchers in the field Ingrid Rüütel and Ülo Tedre, and these constitute the basic knowledge about the newer song style today.¹⁶ The picture that emerges is comprehensive and balanced, although the evaluations and the selection of topics for study reveal a certain leaning towards giving preference to local situational songs. However, this is not done by contrasting the ‘own’ and the ‘borrowed’, but rather in the folkloristic context of focusing on orality as a characteristic of traditional communication (see, for example, Anttonen 2005: 64). When speaking about songs adopted in the oral tradition from printed

¹³ Suits 1905: 17. Estonian historian Jüri Kivimäe has discussed particularly the period between 1905 and 1917 as the “cultural turn” as a result of which “the mostly oral agrarian society was replaced by the modern written society” (Kivimäe 2015: 65; see also Karjahärm 1994; Raun 2009). Urve Lippus (2002a, b) and Taive Särg (2012; see also Sarv 2001, 2002) have studied the early twentieth-century ideology related to folk and popular music more thoroughly.

¹⁴ Setomaa, or the Seto region, is a Christian Orthodox territory in southeastern Estonia, which differs considerably from the rest of Estonia. According to the evolutionary worldview at the time, the Seto culture, which has retained archaic features, was described as being “a 100–200 years behind the Estonian” (e.g. Kalkun 2017).

¹⁵ In fact, a similar preference for social and political topics rather than purely entertaining ones can be seen in the works of earlier authors. For example, Oskar Loorits referred to songs that spread in oral and manuscript form in the 19th century as a form of social resistance unaffected by the Czarist censorship, and also emphasised the repertoire sung during the War of Independence that was fought for the nation state (Loorits 1932: 88–89).

¹⁶ E.g. Rüütel 1969, 1980, 1983, 2012 [1969]; Rüütel, Kokamägi 1964; Tedre 1959a, b, 1999, 2003 [1955].

sources, the emphasis is on their rich variation in the folklorisation process (Rüütel 1980: 37; Tedre 1999: 125–126).

The stark contrasting of the borrowed with the “old and local” material did not suit the changing research paradigms well. Soviet ideology implicitly favoured the study of international proletarian songs, and any historical contacts with the Russians were seen in positive light (see, for example, Tampere 1970; Saarlo 2017). Moreover, during the second half of the 20th century the new cultural anthropological views of tradition, focusing on folklore as a process and involving “deruralization, denationalization, contemporarization and democratization” (Anttonen 2005: 63), reached Estonia.¹⁷ For example, in 1970, Ingrid Rüütel published a questionnaire entitled “Concerning singing in modern times” (“Laulmisest tänapäeval”), intended for the volunteer folklore collectors of the Estonian Folklore Archives with the aim of collecting information “about the contemporary singing tradition as a whole in its full versatility”, including also international repertoire and that in other languages, by recording any and every kind of singing situation (Rüütel 1970).¹⁸

In the course of twenty-first century globalisation and European integration, the ideas of cultural and political nationalism have become problematised (Kivimäe 2001; Viik 2012). One of the central issues in cultural research is the reciprocal influence of the global and the local. Relying on the theory of cultural transfer, the concept of hybridity in postcolonial theory or the ideas of cultural translation, Estonian literary scholars interpret cultural loans as a positive cultural phenomenon for creating new originality. In addition, the influences of the subordinated culture on the

dominant culture have been analysed (Undusk 2011, 2014; Laanes 2014; Lukas 2011). In this context, literary theorist Jaan Undusk has argued that the sentimental popular literature translated and adapted from the German language, which is closely related to sentimental songs in topics and style, was cognitively novel, had synthesising power, and represented socially advancing texts for Estonians (Undusk 2011: 569).¹⁹ In their more recent overviews, the two main researchers of the newer song style have further highlighted the significance of the sentimental song and ballad in the Estonian song tradition (Rüütel 2015; Tedre 2008). Throughout the 20th century and until the present day, *regilaul* has remained a central genre of traditional song as, according to Ülo Tedre, “undoubtedly the most genuine and admirable part of our folklore” (Tedre 2008: 425).²⁰

‘Active’ – ‘passive’, ‘masculine’ – ‘feminine’, ‘sentimental’ – ‘realistic’

In the above section, the preferences of the elite were interpreted on the basis of the Herderian ideas of ‘old’ and ‘own, local’, promoted by nationalist political ideals. On the emotional level and in terms of period-specific ideologies, one of the intriguing aspects of comparing the different song styles is the use of the binary concepts ‘active’ – ‘passive’, ‘masculine’ – ‘feminine’, and ‘sentimental’ – ‘realistic’.

On the socio-political level, the opposition ‘activity’ – ‘passivity’ is based on historical reality: for the Estonian peasantry, serfdom inevitably meant social passivity.²¹ The economic and political changes of the nineteenth century, including participation in the bourgeois economy, the abolishment of serfdom and the widening of the

¹⁷ Amongst other things, this became possible owing to personal contacts established with Finnish and East-German folklorists.

¹⁸ Independent studies on non-institutional, spontaneous singing in recent history and in contemporary times, however, emerged somewhat later (e.g. Vissel 2002, 2005; Rüütel 2003).

¹⁹ “The so-called Jenoveva stories and their kind, disparagingly called pathos literature, are, at their best, texts of synthesising power which introduce women’s issues, more candid images of sexuality and violence, a perception of life related to the physical body, and dreams as the metatext of reality. These offer us instructional Robinsonades to read, which still vaguely imply the possibility of an acmeist man, free of social restraints.”

²⁰ A good example here are the overviews of Estonian folklore from the 20th–21st century which well demonstrate the proportion given to *regilaul* and to the newer singing style: in the overview of Estonian folklore compiled by Richard Viidalepp (1959), *regilaul* is discussed on 205 pages, whereas newer folk song is discussed on 68 pages; in a university textbook compiled by Eduard Laugaste (1977) *regilaul* is covered on 99 pages (including an introduction of *regilaul* singers) and newer folk song on 7 pages; in the textbook published in 2005, the ratio is 8 pages vs. 1 page (Jaago 2005b).

²¹ Social circumstances have also been considered one of the reasons why *regilaul* as an archaic oral singing culture endured for such a long time in Estonia (Tedre 2003 [1955]: 209, 2008: 432).

communication sphere (trading, seafaring, wars), provided the peasantry with a chance to become more active. The circumstances at the time of serfdom (particularly frustrating for the men) have been considered as the reason why the *regilaul* tradition was so woman-centred and reflected a passive perception of life:

There is a good reason why Estonian folk song is generally viewed as feminine lyricism. Indeed, the dominant features here are the expression of feminine emotions and passive resistance to the hardships of life, introspection around personal experiences rather than looking to external activities or counter-attack (Loorits 1932: 100). The former active perception of life and reflection on the events of the outside world are being pushed back [during the German colonisation which started in the thirteenth century] (Tedre 1959a: 87).²²

Passive femininity and the prevalence of women protagonists in *regilaul* have also been used to explain the lack of heroic epics (see, for example, Saarlo 2008: 145–147). At the same time, the active perception of life, the fast and dynamic course of events and the inherent epic nature of the newer song style, first and foremost of local situational songs, have been persistently associated with men as its creators and main performers or with masculinity in general.

Such association of women's songs with passivity and men's songs with activity could be suggestive of the dichotomy of gender categories which emerged in Europe in the 18th and 19th century in parallel with the bourgeois nuclear family and the individualist model of romantic love, as well as the separation of the public and private spheres in life.²³ According to this, the nature and life sphere of men and women form a

dichotomy – gender categories are understood as “two rigid sets of socio-psychological traits which were in all-pervasive binary opposition to each other”: “‘weak vs. strong’, ‘to escape vs. to struggle’, ‘to be vs. to do’, or ‘exalted love vs. sensuous passion’” (Löfström 1998: 249, 253). This model had an impact on the whole of Estonian society. Researchers have also pointed to the strengthening of patriarchy within nineteenth-century agrarian society, which took place as a result of the changed economic relations and the bourgeois culture (Annuk 2012; Mägi 2009; Metsvahi 2015).²⁴

The twentieth-century approaches to folklore therefore bear the seal of the gender ideology of their time – owing to the patriarchal thinking and the polarisation of gender roles, women were expected to be socially passive and their behaviour to be based on emotions; this conceptualisation of femininity was mediated by the sentimental repertoire, which conveyed the model of romantic love; and the interpreters of cultural processes (the large majority of whom were men) acquired from the culture a predisposition for viewing the song tradition through the lens of the polarity characteristic of the time. Apparently, the same patterns of thought have led theoreticians to associate with femininity several features of *regilaul* which are typical of pre-modern oral culture: additivity (and other formal features), communality and a cyclic perception of time (Tuglas 1912; Tedre 2008: 430; see also Ong 1982: 35–37; Sarv 2009). This kind of transference is quite logical considering that, in the framework of the dualist gender opposition characteristic of European culture, women in particular have been associated with pre-modernity (Ortner 1996; Keller 1985; Adkins 2004).²⁵

Alongside ‘activity’ – ‘passivity’, the influence of the same patterns of thought can be seen in

²² See also Arukask 2003: 36–41; Rüütel 2012 [1969]: 22; Tampere 1935: 10 et al. For an alternative explanation of folklore being woman-centred see Mägi 2009. The views of Oskar Loorits also entailed the opposition of the “oriental perception of life” of Estonians to the western worldview: Estonian folklore is static and noncommittal rather than active or attacking (Loorits 1953: 113–114).

²³ The model of romantic love is characterised by a worshipful and passionate love, the faithfulness of lovers, self sacrifice and ignoring the limits of social status. During the 18th–19th century, recognising love as a marital value and as a way of reaching individual wholeness became part of the model of love that had spread in Europe since the 12th century. (Giddens 1992: 38–47; Frykman, Löfgren 2003: 92–94; Roca, Enguix 2015).

²⁴ Proceeding from this idea, it might be worth tracing the independence and agency of women in *regilaul*, which represented the earlier social order. Recently, for example, Andreas Kalkun and Mari Sarv have drawn attention to the manifestations of women's sexual agency in the obscene *regilaul* lyrics (Kalkun, Sarv 2014).

²⁵ Masculinity/femininity have been associated with culture/(savage) nature, rationality/emotionality, norm/deviance, respectively, and, for example, also with high culture/mass culture (Modleski 1986).

the contrasting of 'realism' against 'emotionality, sentimentality' in twentieth-century approaches to song. However, changing artistic movements, with realism and naturalism coming to the fore, also played an important role. Changes in artistic taste are reflected in the critique of romantic sentimental literature (which was amplified by the unprofessionalism and the borrowed nature of the Romantic Estonian-language culture). The above-mentioned novelist Friedebert Tuglas, praising local situational songs, viewed the repertoire of sentimental folk songs as a decadence of the newer song style:

But under the influence of sentimental tales and robber novels, the spirit of Romanticism has been imbued also into this realistic and conventionally bulky mocking poetry... Folk songs are created, sweet and beautiful like the oil paintings of Mai Roos.²⁶ ... Newer folklore has also made its rounds: from the masculine *Realismus* and form of song back to the feminine mood and formlessness... This is a decadence of newer folklore. (Tuglas 1912: 62–63)

The realism of local situational song has been characterised by words such as 'fierce', 'naturalist', 'robust', 'daring', 'frolicky', 'optimistic', 'straightforward', 'direct', 'unpretentious', 'reserved' – mostly in combination with 'active' or 'masculine'.²⁷ Often these qualities have been used to explain or justify the "artistic imperfection" of situational songs, which is contrasted with the generally acknowledged "perfection" of *regilaul*. A fine example of this is the poetic characterisation of Ingrid Rüütel, researcher of the newer song style, in the introduction of a publication for the general public:

Creators of newer folk songs do not aspire to seem better than they are, smarter than they are, prettier than they are. But despite their rough and unchiseled nature they are not that bad, stupid or ugly. Perhaps this unpreten-

tious, genuine and honest personality helps us find in ourselves something that has been lost over time or that we are about to lose. (Rüütel 1974: 5)

Sentimentality, which is opposed to realism, is described using a rather fixed set of words: 'sweet', 'sorrowful', 'lovely', 'ostentatious', 'excessive expression of emotions'. The titles of nineteenth-century songbooks and chapbooks featured adjectival loans from the German language such as 'sweet', 'sorrowful', and 'lovely' in a positive or neutral sense. However, it seems that in Estonian the semantic field of the adjectives has slightly shifted: one reason for this, perhaps, is that in German the word 'sweet' describing the olfactory property is used more often indirectly and has a far wider semantic field than it has in Estonian (cf. Saareste 1959: 819, 845, 1246). At least in twentieth-century discourse, the word 'sweet', like all the other words used to characterise sentimental song, appears to have acquired a minimising, ironical connotation. Opposition to Romanticism was not only characteristic of the beginning of the century but also occurred in the later Soviet culture, in which romantic love and its related feelings were forced to the background and socialist realism became the normative method of creation (Kalmre 2015; Murašov, Bogdanov, Borisova 2008). At the same time, one must consider the possibility that, as a person with a Soviet upbringing and thus inevitably influenced by Soviet ideology, I am prone to see irony in the words where the authors have intended none.

Marie Sepp's singing world

Like the views of the elite, Marie Sepp's writings also reflect a somewhat hierarchical attitude towards different song styles. Like other young people in the second half of the 19th century, she preferred end-rhymed folk songs to *regilaul*. She expressed this directly only once, however, when she commented on a song learned in childhood

²⁶ A character in a sentimental popular novel *Pious Virgin Mai Roos. Guide for Young Girls. A Very Sorrowful Story Born at the Gauja River in Turaida, Latvia* (published in Estonian in 1865, 2nd edition in 1894), which was an adaptation of Latvian writer Juris Dauge's novella *The Virgin of Turaida (Turaidas jumprava, 1856)*.

²⁷ 'Reserved' (*karge* – literally, 'harsh', 'crisp', 'cool', 'refreshing') is a word used already in the first half of the 20th century to contrast *regilaul* with Romantic music and imply the Nordic character of the restrained expression of emotions (e.g. Lippus 2002a; Leichter 1997: 399). The use of that word in the case of *regilaul*, which has at the same time been connected with femininity and the feminine expression of sentiments, may seem paradoxical. Nevertheless, *regilaul* did not use the devices of Romantic poetics. In addition to masculinity, several of the listed are sometimes associated with the young age of the creators and performers (Tedre 1959b: 335–336).

that she considered the oldest one in her repertoire of newer folk songs: "I like the fact that already in those days there was an Estonian who knew how to beautifully create a song."²⁸

Marie Sepp's preference for the newer song style may also be reflected in the repertoire that she sent to the archives. However, one must consider the fact that she was aware of what the addressees of her manuscripts expected to receive – the "official" preference is already clearly revealed in the 21:3 proportion of *regilaul* and end-rhymed folk songs collected from the singer by professional folklore collectors (cf. Oras 2008a, b, 2012). This awareness is perhaps the main reason why the ratio of *regilaul* to songs in the newer style is 60:87 in the material that Sepp wrote down herself. At the same time, it cannot be said that Marie Sepp valued and recorded *regilaul* only because of the influence of the views of the national elite. Her positive attitude to *regilaul* also stemmed from her personal emotional experiences. Marie Sepp's accounts are evidence that she enjoyed the older song style during communal work and at weddings in her youth because the style was well-suited to such performance situations and enabled a functional improvised song dialogue (see Oras 2017).

One should not underestimate the role of *regilaul* as a tool for shaping new social relationships and ways of expression. Already during Marie Sepp's youth, the reputation of the older song style was enhanced by the publication of the older folk songs of the Kolga-Jaani parish, collected and issued under the initiative of Jakob Hurt (Hurt 1886). The singer probably learned most of her repertoire when she worked as a maid in the family of the best-known local singer Rõõt Meiel. Later in her life, her skills in singing *regilaul* won Marie Sepp a chance to participate in a major recording of early folk music in Tallinn, the country's capital, and communicate with folklore collectors. Understanding the importance of the recording and of the *regilaul* repertoire performed, she composed "as self-promotion" a poem that takes after the

Exegi monumentum lyrics, a verse of which reads as follows: "The songs by my husband's grandmother [Rõõt Meiel], /That I sang on the radio,/ These are the pillar of my memory, /They will survive for centuries."²⁹

In her texts, Marie Sepp referred to *regilaul* as "the old songs" (*vanad laulud*) and once mentions "the songs of old Estonia" (*vana Eesti laulud*), which could refer to the influence of a national approach to history as well as to associating *regilaul* with the "olden" times of serfdom – for the late nineteenth-century peasantry, *regilaul* and serfdom were directly linked (Tedre 2008: 432).³⁰ Her last selection of *regilaul*, entitled "The older songs that were not sung for the radio" dates from 1940. In these texts Marie Sepp's approach to *regilaul* is more creative than before: by combining traditional verses with her own creation she has developed new (in the sense of modern), logical epic wholes. Like others who make adaptations of *regilaul* and create in this style, she relies on the thought processes of written culture (Mirov 2002; Sarv 2008: 111 ff.; Labi 2011).³¹ The need to re-compose song texts seems to suggest that she was emotionally involved in *regilaul* as she has tried to render the texts that inspired her more familiar and understandable for the modern reader – and perhaps also for herself.

The repertoire of Marie Sepp's newer folk songs centres around circle games – only a quarter of the 115 songs in the newer style are not described as circle games. The structure of circle games, which became hugely popular in the second half of the 19th century, allowed the performance of any newer folk song. The folk song in newer style as a youth culture is characterised by the popularity of the game genre, but also by the fact that the songs focused on the themes of finding love and a partner. Marie Sepp's comments are indicative of the young people's passion for games, their interest towards new repertoire, and her own leading role as someone who knew and instigated the games:

²⁸ ERA (Eesti Rahvaluule Arhiiv / Estonian Folklore Archives) II 84, 493.

²⁹ ETMM (Eesti Teatri- ja Muusikamuuseum / Estonian Theatre and Music Museum), MO 237:1/34:9.

³⁰ The older singing style was referred to by the words derived from the root 'regi' (derived from the Low Saxon word for 'circle' or 'circle game') only in some parts of Estonia.

³¹ Marie Sepp nevertheless distinguished between adaptations of tradition and original creation. In her writing, this is attested by a couple of remarks "additional poetry" used as titles of texts in *regilaul* style, consisting, almost without exception, of self-written verses inspired by a previous (adapted traditional) song.

Boasting is usually frowned upon but I'm telling you that I was one of the better players – the games were always great when I took part.

Young maidens often visited the Purtsi [farm], where we used to play circle games and sing game songs; if someone knew a new song, we had to learn it so that we could sing it in our social circle.³²

Marie Sepp divided the written circle game texts into two parts: "The [circle] games acted out as plays" and "The circle games where people dance between each verse" ("Mängud mis said mängitud nagu näitemängud"; "Ringmängud kus iga salmi vahel tandsitakse" – which coincides with the later academic systematisation, as, for example, in Rüütel 1980). In the first group, the imitation circle games, the players acted out the subject of the song; and in circle games with intermediary dance parts, players walked in a circle while singing the verses and danced in alternating couples during the intermediary dance song. Marie Sepp's comments suggest that the tradition of imitation circle games goes further back – as is true in North Estonia. It seems that she herself found it important to specify when and where she had learned some song or game. Her careful dating may reflect the influence of professional collecting activities, but then again, the detailed references to time and place indicate that learning a new song game was an important, memorable event; for example: "In 1878, when I received my confirmation, I first saw the game played, and both girls knew their part very well, and any game is nice to see for the first time."³³

Marie Sepp found the circle games with intermediary dance more appealing because they offered participants opportunities to dance,³⁴ but apparently also because they provided more freedom for realising her singing and poetic talent, as in these games text and activity were independent of each other. In the questionnaire that Sepp answered during the recording of the songs she states that she had composed game songs herself. Her rewriting or changing of song lyrics and her use of those found in printed sources are evident in her texts and the added descriptions, explaining that she used to perform the main song solo whereas "the choir always sang during the dance, and the words of the dance song were easily memorised".³⁵ Marie Sepp's talent and creative freedom in adapting new lyrics to melodies can be also seen in her correspondence with August Pulst, who requested from her melodies of circle games so that young folk dancers in towns could perform them. Marie Sepp's reply expressed her astonishment at the little musical creativity of the youth of the time: "You have many girls and grooms,³⁶ let them play the games /.../ they will know how to create the melodies by themselves"; "I have never learned a single melody from sheet music but I've sung along to all of them with my singers, I've always known more than I needed."³⁷

The texts of Marie Sepp also contain emotional descriptions of game performance situations and allusions to how the youth in their interpretations combined the contents of the songs with the surrounding reality, their actual feelings and emotions.³⁸ The sentimental repertoire, among which ballads of international dissemination

³² ETMM, MO 237:1/34:20 and 35:157.

³³ ETMM, MO 237:1/35:85.

³⁴ As a young woman who readily welcomed change, she accepted the transforming of the youth culture into a more dance-centred one: "I must say that it was more fun to play [the games with intermediary dance] than it was to act out these plays. Those who were never able to dance could still come and dance in a circle game." (ETMM, MO 237:1/35:117, cf. Niiranen 2013: 233–234).

³⁵ ETMM, MO 237:1/35:117. With regard to her written sources, she mentions *Eesti laulik* (Estonian song book, Jannsen 1860), *Eestimaa ööbik* (Estonian nightingale, Brandt 1864), and the weekly supplement to the *Valgus* newspaper where the song texts were published.

³⁶ Marie Sepp here applies a common formula in newer folk songs '*neiud–peiud*' ('girls–grooms'). The formula was popular because it has perfect rhyme but at the same time it seems to convey the mentality of the newer song repertoire as well.

³⁷ ETMM, MO 237:1/35:20; 19.

³⁸ In different cultures, performing well-known songs offers a culturally acceptable opportunity to express highly personal experiences and emotions that cannot be openly and directly discussed. The audience of community members may or may not be familiar with these. Also, the performers themselves may not be aware of all the experiential connections (Abu-Lughod 1986; Narayan 1995; Oras 2008b).

were particularly popular, had an important role in shaping personal relationship models and the new culture of feelings. From these songs, young people learned about romantic love and practised the corresponding behavioural models by playing the games. The game songs focused on the themes of departures, encounters, fidelity, betrayal and death, all of which were acted out in the plays.³⁹ Evidently, expressing one's feelings was even more important than the activity. For example, it was quite common for the main male or female character to cry inside the game circle throughout several verses. For example, in a game song, a young maiden expresses her suffering and shames the young man who cheated on her during nine verses: "The groom and the maiden are inside the circle, the maiden is singing in front of the man and makes a shaming gesture. The groom is also very timid, stares down at his feet, does not dare to look up." Finally, the maiden leaves "holding a hand over her heart".⁴⁰

The expression of feelings is also associated with a new kind of eroticism, which in the circle games allowed players to pick up "lovers" from the ground and, frequently "giving hand" or "kisses on the mouth". It is no coincidence that Marie Sepp's repertoire contains altogether three game songs in which "giving a kiss" is discussed in a humorous or didactic vein. The disintegration of a kin-based society and the ambition of the young to choose a life partner based on feelings, both of which are by-products of modernisation, are reflected in a large number of game songs focusing on picking a partner and characterising a potential partner, where the choice is often made by a young woman (cf. Asplund 2002, 2006: 152 ff.; Sarmela 1974).⁴¹ In several games the choice of

the game partner is accompanied by a discussion about whether the chosen one should be rich or not. This could also be a reverberation of social issues topical at the time, as the young people's aspiration to choose a life partner based on feelings could have been hindered by family interests based on the economic stratification of peasantry (Jansen 2007: 315). Choosing a partner is also connected with motifs conveying national ideology – "an Estonian ~ peasant" is valued and preferred over a (rich) member of the "gentry ~ German man".

Through sentimental songs, Marie Sepp has also conceptualised the story of her own love and marriage. When working as a house maid, she formed a romantic relationship with a farmhand Kristjan Sepp, who worked at the same farm. Partly because of the farm people's opposition to the idea and, most certainly, partly because of the need for individualism and privacy, which is characteristic of the model of romantic love, the young people expressed their feelings only in written letters. Marie Sepp was even proposed to and given an engagement ring in a letter. On the one hand, in her recollections she has found this form of communication problematic: "I do not advise anyone to follow my example, I was bold enough to write but it took me years before I found courage to tell the man about my feelings." On the other hand, however, she implies how romantic her secret relationship was as she quotes a circle game song: "No wood nor fiery embers / will ever burn as brightly / as love so true and tender / that is kindled in secret."⁴² Picturing Marie Sepp and her husband-to-be in their daily life at the farm, it is perhaps even possible that circle games gave them a chance to secretly express their feelings to

³⁹ Marie has described the rehearsing of the circle game *Villem and Juuli* on Epiphany with the young people visiting the Purtsi farm (the text of this ballad tells of a young man's leaving the country, upon which his girl dies of sorrow; after returning and witnessing what has happened, the young man also dies, "holding his loved one in his arms", both are taken to the monastery, are clad in white, and then carried to the graveyard): "We decided to play a singing game and tried how it would play out. At this time, circle games were like plays, following the lyrics of the song. Villem and Juuli were taken to the monastery, had white linen wrapped around them and were taken through the door to the graveyard. In those days you had to rehearse playing games." Marie's explanation added to the recorded text gives additional information about their "staging": "A girl and a boy are in the middle of the circle. The boy leaves. The girl falls on the ground. The boy falls next to her. Other girls take the girl away and other boys take the boy." ETMM, MO 237:1/35:161; ERA II 96, 459/61 (23).

⁴⁰ ETMM, MO 237:1/35:98.

⁴¹ It is possible that the power of young women revealed in these games is a representation of the agency of this gender group in "their" genre (cf. Siikala 2000: 274), a reflection of the historically relatively high social position of women in Estonia (Mägi 2009), or even a parallel or reflection of women's emancipation in the 19th century (cf. Lukas 2004).

⁴² ETMM, MO 237:1/35:203.

each other and allow themselves brief erotic experiences. In the context of this relationship, the topic of wealth in circle games is also assigned a personal meaning, because the opposition of the people around them was based on the hope that one or other of the young people could improve their poor financial situation through a successful marriage.

Marie Sepp has described the situational songs in the most negative light. In her manuscript, situational songs are grouped under the title *Songs of night suitors* (*Ehalkäijate laulud*) and (with a single exception) she believed them to have been created by Jüri Pärtens (1860–1922), the grandson of singer Rõõt Meiel: “He composed songs for all the young men and women and when he had completed a new one, groups of young men spread them from one farm to another until a new song came along.” The actual author of the songs was, in fact, Mart(in) Sohberg (1865, 2nd edition in 1883). These songs are the most popular and most widespread of Sohberg’s texts (Tedre 1999) and they must have reached Marie Sepp through oral transmission or as handwritten copies because there are several differences compared to the printed sources. It seems that Marie Sepp could not restrain herself from emotional comments when writing down *Songs of night suitors*: “It goes without saying that these songs were rather tiring if you had to hear one repeatedly during a single night. Some suitors came, sang the song and left, then others came and sang the same song all over.”⁴³ Her negative attitude coincides with the general opinion of the nineteenth-century public media of Sohberg’s “inappropriate” songs (see above) – the parallel is particularly striking as the rest of Marie Sepp’s song repertoire corresponds well to the literary song style which was found acceptable at the time.⁴⁴ Marie Sepp actually appears to have found the activity of night courting more disturbing than the songs themselves. She even temporarily left her position as a maid because of night suitors, and when she was asked to return, she slept with an older woman to escape the courting young men. She might have had various personal

reasons for that, but Marie Sepp’s reluctance can be viewed also in a more general social context: night courting was criticised in the written press of the second half of the 19th century, although the effect of such criticism on the youth in rural areas was fairly insignificant (Jansen 2007: 316). Even before she started working as a house maid, Marie Sepp had learned a circle game about a maiden who reprimanded a young man for “loving the old ways [of night courting]”. Moreover, Marie Sepp was very critical towards drinking and fights and therefore avoided dance parties for the young people as well as the traditional visits to the tavern on Shrove Tuesday. Martti Sarmela (1974: 106) has written about the youth culture in Finland which emerged in the 18th century, an extreme example of which were village fighting groups. Cultural changes in the second half of the 19th century brought about a divergence in the views of the rural youth, which is well exemplified by their attitudes towards the temperance movement (Jansen 2007: 342–344; Palm 2004). By opposing the aggressive group behaviour of young men, Marie Sepp represented the more “civilised” layer of the village youth which favoured the behavioural norms of the middle class.

Conclusion

Changes in song styles and music brought about by a sufficiently large proportion of the members of a society preferring a newer style are common to all cultures. However, this does not mean that all social groups necessarily share the same views. The change between two historical song styles – from the older *regilaul* to the newer end-rhymed stanzaic folk song – took place in Estonia in the context of the modernisation of the agrarian society and the shaping of the national elite mainly during the second half of the 19th century. The elite employed folklore for the purpose of constructing a national cultural heritage. As the concept of folklore has been tentative ever since it was derived, two contrasting hierarchies of song styles emerged in Estonia (as elsewhere): the older style, which represented the older oral culture and had been abandoned by “the folk”,

⁴³ This and the previous quotation: ETMM, MO 237:1/35:17.

⁴⁴ Of Marie Sepp’s songs in newer style, 35% could be considered sentimental lyrical songs or ballads, 28% humorous and/or didactic, 10% patriotic, discussing social or historical issues, 22% describe game practices, and 5% of the songs were in the local situational style.

was reinvented in terms of its status and distribution as the foundation of the national culture by the elite. For the latter, the popular folk repertoire, which was more connected to literary culture and foreign influences, occupied a lower position. A closer inspection reveals that the reality was quite nuanced and that the differences, reciprocal influence and embedding of the views could be identified both within and between these major social groups.

My analysis of the elite and vernacular approaches to folk song were based on several subjective choices. In view of the scope of the article it was possible to focus on only a few of the more important tendencies of the elite views. The “vernacular” perspective here is limited to a subjective interpretation of fragmentary information found in archival documents connected to Marie Sepp (1862–1943), who practised both song styles. Her observations and experiences inspired me to write this article, but it is important to remember that her views represent only one segment of the Estonian peasantry of her time which was more influenced by the national cultural elite. A comparison of the views of other “vernacular” groups and the changes in their views over time would yield us a more balanced picture. For example, we could imagine that the local singing practices, and particularly the tradition of situational village songs, were viewed differently by Marie Sepp’s contemporary Jüri Pärtens, a creative young man with a brilliant sense of humour, an active member of a group of young men, a night suitor and tavern entertainer, but also a participant in the circle games of the village youth and a future successful farmer, who introduced into his village the *songs of night suitors*.

The second half of the 19th century was a period when the ideas of the Enlightenment were locally adapted and different views on folk song existed side by side within the cultural elite (e.g. Kalkun 2017). The repertoire recognised as folk songs could include all the songs in the Estonian language, the songs created by Estonians (and based on folk tradition), or be limited only to the older style, *regilaul*. At the same time, the standards of the writings that shaped the national “imagined community” were based on the aesthetics and morals of Romanticism and the middle class. Apparently, Marie Sepp shared views similar to

those of the earlier Estonian intellectuals: the romantic-sentimental style was considered “beautiful”, whereas the repertoire which did not conform to the aesthetics and morals of the middle class – situational village songs with their realistic style and occasional vulgarity – was disparaged. Marie Sepp was untouched by the problem of the songs’ loan origin, which became an issue for the elite in the late 19th century. However, her views on *regilaul* were considerably influenced by its being favoured by the cultural elite (cf. Valk 2014), as well as by her own personal emotional singing experiences.

Using Marie Sepp’s corpus offered me an opportunity to juxtapose the different position and significance of the sentimental song repertoire in the musical world of Estonian peasant women with that of the cultural elite – particularly in the 20th century, when the newer song style was recognised, next to the valuable old style, as an individual object for collection and research. Of the two main substyles of the newer song, the sentimental song was reduced to a “weaker” position in consideration of the scales of ‘old-new’, ‘own-borrowed’, ‘realistic-romantic’, ‘oral-written’. The written texts of Marie Sepp indicate the central role of sentimental and other ‘borrowed’ song repertoire not only in the acquisition of literary poetic ways of thinking but also in adapting to social changes and, in particular, to the new models of romantic love and sentimentality (cf. the comment of Jaan Undusk about sentimental chapbooks above). The songs and circle games offered the young generation of the modernisation period a chance to become aware of and express their needs and problems with regard to personal relationships and to act out the possible solutions to these by means of play. For the young people, especially the young women, the circle games functioned as an important place for developing individual (relationship-related) agency and self-awareness. Overlapping with the written culture did not rule out creativity – in addition to the creative interpretation of the songs based on personal life experience, the song lyrics were rewritten and improved, new melodies were created or old ones adapted, and plays with well-devised movement and activities with props were staged.

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Collections of Estonian Theatre and Music Museum:

ETMM, MO 237 – collection of music organizations, folk musicians and traditional singers (questionnaires and documents).

Collections of Estonian Folklore Archives of Estonian Literary Museum:

ERA – manuscript collection of the Estonian Folklore Archives;

RKM – manuscript collection of the State Literary Museum.

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