

Ērika Sausverde and her Scandinavian Rings

Odin laid on the pyre that gold ring which is called Draupnir; this quality attended it, that every ninth night there dropped from it eight gold rings of equal weight.

Snorri Sturluson, “Gylfaginning”

This quest may be attempted by the weak with as much hope as the strong. Yet such is oft the course of deeds that move the wheels of the world: small hands do them because they must, while the eyes of the great are elsewhere.

J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring*

This volume of essays is a symbolic reflection of the present contacts between Lithuanian Scandinavianists and their fellow scholars around the globe. The scope and content of the book can, of course, only capture a small part of these cultural and academic collaborations, but the incentive behind it was to foreground a core element in cross-cultural relations, the importance of which cannot be overestimated: it often requires a dedicated individual to start and shape a fellowship, which can then grow and multiply its rings. It was our wish to show how far a single individual’s good will and effort can take us, and what an impact it may have.

The present book is a tribute to Ērika Sausverde on her 60th birthday. The anniversary gives her students, colleagues and close associates a joyous opportunity to celebrate the founder of Scandinavian Studies in Lithuania. For many people in this country Scandinavian Studies are synonymous with Ērika’s name.

Ērika Sausverde was born in Rīga on the 18th of June, 1959. She completed her MA in Swedish Philology in 1981 at the University of

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Leningrad (now St. Petersburg), and then received her PhD in 1987 from the Institute of Linguistics of the Russian Academy of Sciences (Leningrad Division) with the thesis “Seaside landscape vocabulary in Germanic languages”. She began teaching at Vilnius University in late 1986, first at the Department of Classical Philology and later at the Department of Baltic Studies. Right after Lithuania regained its independence, Ērika founded the Department of Scandinavian Studies (now the Centre for Scandinavian Studies), drawing on her incredible enthusiasm, charisma and professional contacts. Although there had been some Scandinavian courses taught before, for the first time in the history of Vilnius University a systematic and comprehensive study programme in the field was offered. Here is how Ērika herself described her feelings, when she, just 27 years old, was setting the ground for what was to become the Centre for Scandinavian Studies:

I came to Vilnius and put small Swedish flags on the desks in various departments, thus announcing a course in the Swedish language. On arrival my ‘baggage’ was far from heavy – just one Russian textbook on Swedish, coupled with a doctorate from St. Petersburg (then Leningrad) and topped by a desire to change the world. [...] But things went on smoothly; the world changed too, and in 1991 the Department of Scandinavian Studies was established.¹

Right from the start Ērika took the direction towards close and intense collaboration with Scandinavianist institutions and scholars worldwide which by now has developed into numerous networks and projects in most diverse areas of Scandinavian studies. Already back then, during the exiting but also somewhat chaotic times of political and social transition, she took great care that her students should receive instruction of the highest quality. Ērika managed to organise classes and courses on old and modern Scandinavian literature, runology, the grammar, lexicon and history of Scandinavian languages and much more – all read by well-known experts in these subjects from various countries. In Ērika’s own words:

¹ “20 years of Scandinavian studies at Vilnius University – feast, play and puzzles.” In Ērika Sausverde & Ieva Steponavičiūtė (Eds). *Fun and Puzzles in Modern Scandinavian Studies*, Vilnius: Vilnius University (*Scandinavistica Vilnensis*, 9), 2014, 9; republished in *Taikomoji kalbotyra*, 2015, 7, retrieved from <https://taikomojikalbotyra.lt/ojs/index.php/taikomoji-kalbotyra/article/view/72/65>.

The lack of local academic staff turned out to be an academic luxury for the first students of the Scandinavian Department. [...] One can claim that the seeds sowed by these [...] extraordinary specialists have yielded a remarkable harvest. The first international conference of teachers and students *Scandinavistica Vilnensis*, which was held in 1994 and brought together students and professors from Estonia, Finland, Denmark, Germany, Iceland, Latvia, Norway, Russia, Poland and Sweden, became an important milestone in the life of the young department. It was here that a number of Lithuanian students (some of them now teaching at Vilnius University) presented their research papers to an international audience for the first time.²

Scandinavian studies rapidly became (and remain still) one of the most popular programmes at Vilnius University. The Scandinavian environment and international networks that Ērika Sausverde has created in Vilnius, and the new ways of teaching and learning that came with them, have been decisive in shaping the lives and careers of many young people (including some of the authors in this book who are no longer young). The institution is now firmly established in the country as the centre of expertise in Scandinavian languages and culture, where field studies co-exist with comparative linguistic, literary and socio-cultural investigations. It is thanks to the Scandinavian centre that Lithuanian readers can enjoy Scandinavian literature, old and modern, in direct translation.

Ērika's style as the head of an academic unit has been quite exceptional. She has always had a focus on the Centre as a collective body; however she has never left any individual member out of sight. It speaks for itself that the first spontaneously chosen title for the present book was *Mennesket i centrum* 'the individual at the centre', one of the good old slogans of the Nordic welfare concept. The welcoming work and study environment that Ērika has created has few parallels in Lithuania or beyond. Those who have studied or worked at the Centre for Scandinavian Studies (and often also those who just visit it) instinctively develop a feeling of belonging and cherish long lasting bonds. Now this phenomenon of leadership has a ripple effect, as Ērika has been elected the Director of the recently established Institute for the Languages and Cultures of the Baltic, of which the Centre for Scandinavian Studies is now a part.

² *Ibid.*

Ērika's dedication has received a great deal of official acknowledgment. She is a recipient of both the Cross of the Knight of the Order for Merits to Lithuania and of the Norwegian Order of St. Olav. She has been awarded the prize of the Swedish Authors' Fund as well as a special prize of the Swedish Academy (twice!). The present Festschrift is a much less formal, however heartfelt sign of recognition – evidence of gratitude and esteem that students and colleagues have always felt for Ērika.

The papers in this Festschrift are written by scholars from different countries (Norway, Taiwan, USA, Russia, Latvia, Scotland, Sweden, Denmark and Lithuania) and from different fields of Scandinavian studies, or areas closely related to them. All contributors have in some way been involved with Ērika. Some are her long-term colleagues, while others have joined the Centre for Scandinavian Studies more recently. A few are her former professors, and a few have been her students. Finally, some have become her close associates through joint academic and teaching undertakings.

This book covers a broad range of topics.

Almost half of the contributions deal with Old Norse literature from various perspectives. In the first part of the book, Icelandic literary material from a later period is explored in the article by **Matthew Driscoll**, whose first encounter with Ērika was in Iceland, where he was her teacher of Icelandic at around the same time as Scandinavian Studies were being established in Vilnius. His contribution to this volume, "Herdís & Ólína: The poetry of everyday life", seeks to bring scholarly justice to the fine but largely forgotten poetry of the twin sisters Herdís Andrésdóttir and Ólína Andrésdóttir, who achieved a modicum of success in the early part of the last century.

In the paper "Problems in mythological reconstruction: Thor, Thrym, and the story of the hammer over the course of time", which in many ways results from the personal and academic friendship between the author and the Centre for Scandinavian Studies over the course of several decades, **Aurelijus Vijūnas** compares the Old Icelandic poem *Þrymskviða* with a number of later texts describing the story about the theft and retrieval of Thor's hammer. The author sets out to investigate the possibility of reconstructing an earlier, common Scandinavian version of this myth.

The same poem is discussed in the essay "Dreaming the hammer back: On the differential margin in the first Lithuanian translation of *Þrymskviða*" by **Ieva Steponavičiūtė Aleksiejūnienė**, who explicates

the allegorical message of hope she finds inscribed in the translation of this poem by Teodoras Bieliackinas (1907–1947), Lithuania's first professional Scandinavianist who was an exile in Iceland. Bieliackinas's career was very short, and he never made it back home. One may however say that Ērika's fundamental role in the creation of a comprehensive programme of Scandinavian studies in Lithuania has indirectly fulfilled his life's aspiration: to bring Lithuania and Scandinavia closer to each other.

Ugnius Mikučionis, whose interest in Old Norse philology is to a large extent due to Ērika's introductory course in Germanic philology and the invited courses organised by Ērika from his student times, deals with the Old Norse narrative about Sigurðr's killing of Fáfnir according to the Prose Edda and the Saga of the Volsungs. In his paper "The hero and his values" he compares the two versions of the narrative and relates their structural differences to the differences in the set of values that the hero figure represents.

The second part of the book is opened by one of the leading translators of modern Icelandic and Old Norse literature into Lithuanian, **Rasa Ruseckienė**. Her paper "That rune will unlock time's labyrinth..." discusses Old Norse themes and motifs in the texts of the twentieth-century Orcadian poet George Mackay Brown. The contribution is also a sign of gratitude to Ērika, with whose support Rasa went to Iceland to study as a young graduate in Germanic Linguistics. Rasa has asked us to extend her special thanks to Ērika for her "friendship, enthusiasm and wonderful achievement, and for being able – like the amazing Ring of Brodgar in Orkney – to create a perfect circle of all-Nordic fellowship".

Reflections of cultural history in modern literature are dealt with in yet another paper, written in Swedish by **Ivars Orehovs**, "Den kultur- och litteraturhistoriska gestalten i den lettiska novellen 'Svētā Briģīta' ('Heliga Birgitta') av Jānis Ezeriņš". Ivars Orehovs examines how the intertext of the Swedish St. Birgitta, a historical and mythological person, functions in a short story by the Latvian writer Jānis Ezeriņš. Being related to Ērika not only academically but also through their first language, Ivars wishes, in Latvian, Ērika's academic spark to be long-lived: "Allaž saglabāt un droši vadīt tālāk Ērikai raksturīgo radošo akadēmisko dzirksti!"

Through her institution-building efforts, and through her enthusiasm and social skills, Ērika Sausverde has become a bridge builder contributing to new chapters also to the history of "Swedology". Scandinavian studies as a project in cultivating fellowship and exchange among nations

and regions is touched upon from a historical vantage point by the intellectual historian **David Östlund** in his paper “Peaceableness as a weapon in wars of Swedology”. It deals with the symbolic role that Sweden has played in the debates of other nations since the early 1930s. The paper shows how Sweden’s profile as a peaceful nation – both in terms of its internal developments and its role in the world – has been deployed on distant battlegrounds by Sweden’s friends and foes alike, the former claiming it to be an exemplar to follow and the latter using it as a warning example.

The second part of the book ends with another paper in Swedish, dedicated to Ērika by her longtime mentor, Professor **Jurij Kusmenko**. “Fornisländsk litteratur, genetik och historisk demografi om samisk-nordiska tidiga kontakter” is an expanded version of the talk delivered by Kusmenko at the 25 year anniversary of the Centre for Scandinavian Studies. It explores representations of the Sámi in Old Icelandic literature and combines them with the genetic evidence to promote his claim about the spreading of Sámi genes in northern and central Scandinavia and the appearance of Sámi interference features in the North Germanic languages.

Cross-linguistic and typological perspectives are developed further in the third and final part of the book, which starts with a paper by Professor **Anatoly Liberman** “An etymological *dog kennel*, or *dog eat dog*”. The author lauds serendipity which the paper explores and pays tribute to Ērika Sausverde with her talent for finding great things “accidentally” and putting them to use. The reader is then taken along to the etymological discovery of several idiomatic expressions in Icelandic and English that include Germanic *dog* –. *Doggies* have nothing to do with dogs.

The importance of being Ērika (if we may paraphrase Wilde’s *The Importance of Being E(a)rnest*) is matched only by the manifold glorious implications, for us all, of having Ērika. Drawing on this inspiration, **Axel Holvoet**, **Birutė Spraunienė** and **Asta Laugalienė** in their paper “Some implications for Ērika: Implicatives in Danish, Finnish and Lithuanian” explore the so-called implicatives in grammar – a type of verb that carry implications as to the factual status of their propositional complements. The authors take a novel, cognitively oriented, approach and compare representations as well as development of implicatives in the three languages.

In the closing paper of the book **Loreta Vaicekauskienė** tests the ideas conceived by Danish scholars on the role of subjective factors

for language development. Her paper “Driving forces behind language change: Does Danish theory hold up in Lithuania?” evidences that language awareness affects value assignment to language and that *subconsciously* held attitudes can be decisive for language use in real life. People create their social identities individually, and when their choices converge, language change happens. Cultural changes, however, can be made ‘by hand’, to quote Ērikas favourite expression. They are crafted by the greatest individuals, people with an open mind and a big heart. Much of Lithuanian sociolinguistics would not have been as it is today without the academic venues opened by Ērika – the driving force of the fellowship.

And finally, since this is a celebratory publication, we would like to end this introduction somewhat unconventionally:

Once upon a time, not such a long time ago, in the splendid Hanseatic city of Rīga, there lived a bright and beautiful girl. Ērika Sausverde was her name, and the time was to come when she would find out that this name was of Swedish origin. One day she left her home, as it befits a fairy tale heroine, driven by a great desire to see the world and to taste the fruit of knowledge. Eventually it was a wedding ring that brought her to Vilnius, through St. Petersburg, in the time of the great change. Many large and small things have happened to her since, but a tale must be allowed to keep some of its secrets. One thing, however, can be said with certainty: the heroine will be known, for generations to come, as the crafter of beautiful rings and the founder of a strong and steadily growing fellowship.

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