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## National Mythology: Past and Present

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The issues of nation and nationhood are nowadays largely perceived as a social, economical and political topic — the cultural side of the question is usually left aside. For nation is not something natural and primordial — instead, the birth of a nation is related to specific historical moments and depends on socio-economic conditions. As Miroslav Hroch puts it: “The basic precondition of all national movements — yesterday and today — is a deep crisis of the old order, with the breakdown of its legitimacy, and the values and sentiments that sustained it.” (Hroch 1996: 96). Historical transformation, political emancipation, modern liberalism, state-building — these are the standard key words of a nation.

Similarly late nationalism, which is often associated with our times, is related to the socio-economic criteria: the socio-economic system of a cosmopolitan world, the political situation of which was described by Habermas in terms of ‘world domestic politics’, has effaced the functions of a nation state. Eric Hobsbawm has argued, for example: “... in post-communist societies ethnic or national identity is above all a device for defining the community of the innocent and identifying the guilty who are responsible for ‘our’ predicament” (1992: 174). There is nothing positive in the ‘Kleinstaaterei’, as Hobsbawm calls it, of our days — the nation states just serve as a means of separating ours and others, leaving one part of the human beings without the right of being a citizen — that’s the pathos of Hobsbawm. In a similar vein, though in a more objective tone, Gérard Noiriel describes immigration politics in France in his careful study “Le creuset français: Histoire de l’immigration XIXe – XXe siècles” (1988).

The idea of lateness, is, of course, a peculiarity of our times on a larger level: post-modernism, late capitalism, post-industrialism, late nationalism — postisms have become the denominators of the world. We can hear a feeling of loss and remoteness, separation from something which may have been important, unattainability, regret, nostalgia for the past in these postisms — and the suspicion that the best times are already past. However, this nostalgia is not a special feature of contemporary Europe and North America, and for a nation its lateness can be pushed back at least to the 19th century. My interest here dwells in the development and changes in the role of nostalgia for a nation. National nostalgia and desire to return to ‘good old times’ find its expression in national mythology, or, to put it the other way round, national mythology is based on national nostalgia. In what follows I will try to investigate the nature of national mythology and outline the similarities and differences between national mythology in our times and earlier times, focusing particularly on the Estonian situation. I suggest that parallelly with socio-economic features of the society a nation is shaped through its desires.

### **I. The Creation. The Emperor’s New Clothes**

The formation of a national narrative begins with a period that is called the ‘national movement’ — in the case of Estonia it started in the middle of the 19th century. As it is often noted, a national movement may begin as an intellectual activity of a bunch of educated people who, so to say, decide to invent a nation. Geoffrey Eley and Ronald Suny explain it in the case of smaller nations: “... the smaller nationalities of central and eastern Europe and Transcaucasia were more obviously an invention of enterprising intellectuals — of intellectuals, moreover, who aspired to emulate the histories they observed in the West, especially in France” (1996: 8–9). The intellectuals start their nation-building from creating the national past: they construct an ideal picture of an ancient flourishing culture. Friedrich Reinhold Kreutzwald writes the national epic *Kalevipoeg*, Jakob Hurt urges people to collect folklore, Lydia Koidula writes poetry and dramas in the national

spirit. Carl Robert Jakobson delivered his speeches for the fatherland: *Kolm isamaa kõnet* ('Three Speeches of Fatherland'), in 1868 and 1870. Published in 1870, they became, according to Rudolf Põldmäe, 'the most stimulating fighting book of the national movement' (1985: 71). Jakobson was one of the educated Estonians who created the positive historical narrative of Estonia; in his speeches he claimed that before the German invasion Estonia had been a more civilised country than Germany. "It [the pagan religion of the Estonians — E.A.] shows us the Estonian nation in such a high spiritual state that we can find only with the most educated ancient nations"<sup>1</sup> (Jakobson 1991: 16), was Jakobson's estimation of the past of Estonia. Jakobson designed an idealistic picture of a flourishing ancient Estonia and described the crusades as endeavours to enlarge territories, not as a benevolent attempt to bring light to a country in darkness. This was basically the tenor of the emerging Estonian national movement. Nationally-oriented intellectuals strove to idealize past times in order to create the possibility of a national future based on the ideal past. Their joint intellectual efforts established the mythical space of a nation, a lost period of perfection in the past.

What did this newly created mythical space look like? It was a homogeneous world with the simultaneity-along-time, 'a simultaneity of past and future in an instantaneous present' (Anderson 1991: 24), it was a world with "a conception of temporality in which cosmology and history were indistinguishable, the origins of the world and of men essentially identical" (ib. 36). It was a closed and 'ready-made world', clearly outlined. Everything was significant there, every detail was in correspondence with the whole. It was a transcendental home, a homogeneous<sup>2</sup> world, a perpetual present, where people belonged naturally to the unity of the world.

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<sup>1</sup> All translations from Estonian into English are mine. In Estonian the text is the following: "Ta näitab meile Eesti-rahvast ühes nii kõrges vaimu olekus, nagu meie seda üksi kõige rohkem haritud vana-aegse rahva juures leiame."

<sup>2</sup> Please note that I'm not using 'homogeneous' along Walter Benjamin's lines, Benjamin's thoughts on the homogeneous, empty time move in a somewhat different direction.

Georg Lukács in his study *Die Theorie des Romans* offers one of the most alluring visions of the past ‘blessed times’, employing a full arsenal of graceful nostalgia. He delineates the era of the epic in Greek literature as the period when the world was large and still a home, the world was round and full, for a soul there was no distinction between the outside and the inside. Lukács adds a few pages later, though, that the homogeneity of the world was so strong that the tensions between the humans and the world could not destroy it: “Es ist eine homogene Welt, und auch die Trennung von Mensch und Welt, von Ich und Du vermag ihre Einstoffigkeit nicht zu stören.” (Lukács 1994: 24) — this, however, implies a distinction between the inside and the outside. But his point is that in these times a human being was not the centre of the universe, but one link in the chain of totality, “... seine Beziehungen zu den anderen und die Gebilde, die daraus entstehen, sind geradezu substanzvoll, wie er selbst,” (ib. 25).

Totality as a constructive principle of the world implies the fullness, felicity, beauty and virtue of all its parts:

Denn Totalität als formendes Prius jeder Einzeler-scheinung bedeutet, daß etwas Geschlossenes vollendet sein kann; vollendet, weil alles in ihm vorkommt, nichts ausgeschlossen wird und nichts auf ein höheres Außen hinweist; vollendet, weil alles in ihm zur eigenen Vollkommenheit reift und sich erreichend sich der Bindung fügt. Totalität des Seins ist nur möglich, wo alles schon homogen ist, bevor es von den Formen umfaßt wird; wo die Formen kein Zwang sind, sondern nur das Bewußtwerden [---]; wo das Wissen die Tugend ist und die Tugend das Glück, wo die Schönheit den Weltsinn Sichtbar macht. (Ib. 26).

Lukács succeeds in gathering everything desirable into one total image of (lost) perfection, and as an illustration of his main thesis his text is full of small alluring metaphors that repeat the same total image (e.g the fire in the soul used to be of the same origin as the light of the stars)<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> However, Lukács admits that ‘we’ couldn’t breathe in this closed world (ib.).

Also a myth of a paradise, a world before the Original Sin, captures rigorously this world with a 'spontaneous totality of being'. Jüri Ehvest, a young Estonian writer, describes it as follows: "... a sin for which Adam with his wife was expelled from paradise wasn't the fact of eating an apple in itself, but the separation of a part, or an apple, from the Tree or the God-given. God's creation is a perfect, homogeneous whole, whereas the world of the people, the sinful, is divided into pieces."<sup>4</sup> (Ehvest 1996: 101). If paradise means unity, then the mythical world corresponds to paradise. Linear time hasn't as yet gained the supremacy over the world there.

National mythology did not create anything new: it was based on the mythology of a pre-national community, while making a whimsical substitution: the explanatory power of the myth, destined originally for the entire world, was transferred to a nation instead. According to Alan Dundes, "A myth is a sacred narrative explaining how the world and man came to be in their present form" (Dundes 1984: 1). A nationalist myth is a sacred narrative explaining how the world and man *of a nation* came to be in their present form, what the origins of a nation are. Lauri Honko stresses the functional value of the myth as a defence of a world order: the myth preserves the community's values and norms. A nation needs a story of its origins to preserve its values, but the problematic aspect of a nation as an exploiter of religious mythology lies in the static aspect of the mythology: the mythical world is based on unchangeability, myths always are meaningful for a religious person (the person who lives in a mythical world), therefore its patterns can be imitated. Honko explains the true validity of mythical events:

The ritual acting out of myth implies the defense of the world order; by imitating sacred exemplars the world is prevented from being brought to chaos. The reenactment of a creative event, for example, the healing wrought by a god in the beginning of time, is the common aim of myth and ritual. In this way the

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<sup>4</sup> In Estonian: "... patt, mille eest Aadam oma naisega Aiast välja kihutati, polnud mitte õuna söömine kui selline, vaid Puust ehk Jumalikust antusest osa ehk õuna eraldamine. Jumala loodu on täiuslikult tervik, ühtne, inimeste, patuste maailm aga tükkideks jagatud."

event is transferred to the present and its result, i.e. the healing of a sick person, can be achieved once more here and now. In this way, too, the world order, which was created in the primeval era and which is reflected in myths, preserves its value as an exemplar and model for the people of today. The events recounted in myths have true validity for a religious person. (Honko 1984: 49).

Now the idea of a nation is based on progress, on change — how can these two different ways of thinking converge? A nation is formed in this tension between two radically different ways of thinking: an ideal, a story of origins, and a separation and split from it. A nation uses mythological pathos, while moving in an opposite direction.

Benedict Anderson describes a nation through its desire towards a perfect future, the most important tense category for a nation being the 'Future Perfect'. A nation is tied to the idea of human progress, and for the ideal future the present sacrifices are accepted. I would add that a nation is a seesaw which moves between two tenses, the Past Perfect and the Future Perfect. The idea of nation-building consists of creating two ideal spaces — the past and the future — and a nation (not yet a nation-state) is perceived as a joining link for fastening these two spaces into a **Present Perfect** with the restored happiness and unity of the mythological era. The mythological Past Perfect is employed as a guarantee of a possible Present Perfect in the future. The mythological past has vanished (destroyed by the enemies of the nation, as nationalists claim), and this loss has to be overcome with the help of a harmonious future; the desire towards a perfect state of affairs gets transferred from the past to the future, which is regarded as a future reflection of the Past Perfect. The nation is presented as a restoration of lost perfection.

Thus a nation is coined through its lateness, is created as being already late in its onset. While based on a pre-national community and forming the national identity on its basis, the nation-formation supersedes it at the same time; the pre-national mythical era is declared lost and unattainable, the present times are regarded as its pale imitation. The development of print-capitalism, the serial

space created by newspapers and censuses which lay down the conditions of a self-reflexive discourse and an outside view of the community, attaches the pre-national community to the larger discourse of nations<sup>5</sup>, but at the same time destroys the pre-national social order. Destruction and celebration move hand in hand, the more the pre-national gets dismantled, the more it is desired. At the moment when the pre-national community is vanishing, it becomes fixed in the form of the national narrative as the vanishing point of the nation's desires. Myths, the national epic, brave pre-national heroes are used as a nostalgic basis of pedagogically narrating the nation, of supporting national identity in the periods when the nation is already 'ready-to-wear'.

Hence the late creates its beginnings in order to regret its lateness by means of these 'beginnings'. To overcome the lack of a mythical unity, the status of the nation is presented as a solution, which through connecting the Past Perfect with the Future Perfect could create the Present Perfect. The national ideology is established through a mistaken logic: the lateness is created in order to overcome the same newly formed lateness. The original is constructed from the void, from the desire towards something unattainable which does not exist, something seemingly important which has been lost a long time ago. The desire for the original constructs the original, but at the same time it also destroys the object of its construction.

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<sup>5</sup> B. Anderson, while describing this process in his *Imagined Communities* (1983, 2. ed. 1991) and *Spectre of Comparisons* (1998), also stresses the importance of an outsider's point of view in nation-formation: living in exile, identifying the differences and similarities between one's homeland and other places enables one to gather a cluster of specific features under the main constituent: the name of a nation. Long-distance nationalism, as Anderson calls it, creates a perspective needed to estimate a situation in the homeland, and the spectre of comparisons, even if offered through a distorted mirror (for Anderson an illuminating experience had been the speech of the Indonesian president, glorifying Hitler) clarifies the field of vision. Thus paradoxically nationalism's purities emerge from the hybridity, they are modelled according to the experiences of other nations.

In the countries with a colonial past like Estonia the mistaken logic was easy to conceal: the image of the mythological past concentrated on the era before the crusades. The desired period of harmony was that of ‘independence’, which had been destroyed by external forces centuries ago. The colonial power had worked on the Estonian territory according to the same rules as everywhere else: the subordinated nation was sealed in its position by the discursive block. Whereas every nation constructs its identity by opposing itself to the Other — the positive identification of a nation involves a cluster of pleasant features attributed to the identified nation and, respectively, a number of negative counter-features attributed to the Other-nation (usually a neighbouring nation), colonialism changes the position of the negative Other from outside to inside; a (pre-national) community obtains the position of a less valuable Other. The subordinated people (future Estonians) were impelled to perceive themselves as unworthy, almost contemptible, their previous communal voice was subdued, the conquerors were depicted as unbeatable and irresistible, as the possessors of supreme intelligence and culture. Franz Fanon (1965: 170) describes this process:

Colonialism is not simply content to impose its rule upon the present and the future of a dominated country. Colonialism is not satisfied merely with holding the people in its grip and emptying the native’s brain of all form and content. By a kind of perverted logic, it turns to the past of the oppressed people, and distorts, disfigures and destroys it... the total result looked for by colonial domination was indeed to convince the natives that colonialism came to lighten their darkness.

On the basis of the faded past a new discourse of the present was formed to avoid the possible awakening of alternative voices. As Edward Said claims: “...the power to narrate, or to block other narratives from forming and emerging, is very important to culture and imperialism” (1993: xiii). The obstruction of the possible creation of positive national narratives guarantees the stability of the system.

For Estonians the opposite pole was formed by the German culture, especially by the Baltic Germans, who had enjoyed the

supremacy in Estonia for centuries. Foreign rulers regarded the natives as a lower people, as the negative pole of the identifying opposition; and the same conviction was transferred to the natives, who started to perceive themselves as Others who are always secondary, always subordinated. The national movement signified an opposition to the ideology of the Other, its destruction, the removal of the narrative block, the establishment of the national narrative. This was achieved partly by the texts of national literature, partly by political speeches, schoolbooks and newspapers, choral songs etc. These narratives had to destroy the ideology of the Other and to ratify the new narrative, which esteemed the subordinated nation. The renewed narrative relied on the imagined precolonial era of harmonious life.

## II. A Nation State. Ready-to-Wear

The second stage in the national mythology is reached with the nation state. When the aspiration of national self-determination reaches its desired ideal, the right of self-determination in the form of a state, then a nation has attained its basic goal — the nation-formation is finished, a nation seems to be ‘ready-to-wear’. The status of being a state is a stamp of success<sup>6</sup>. But it is also the moment, when the dynamics of the national narrative changes its direction, turning from the future to the past, a national seesaw sinks to the side of the Past Perfect. The ‘big’ moments of a nation are from this moment on situated in the past — this is not to say that the future is not important any more, it certainly is, but it is a future of banal nationalism that cannot raise its side of the seesaw. The basis of national identity remains anchored to the past. The formation of the state is the beginning of the decline of the nation; it is accompanied by disappointment and indifference. Freedom-

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<sup>6</sup> Of course, a nation state is never perfectly complete, it strives towards an ideal which it never achieves, and therefore one could claim that a nation never fulfils itself either. Still, the dynamics of the national narrative changes its direction.

fighters are destined to be disappointed with the attained freedom<sup>7</sup>, the received national independence loses its magical aura soon after its attainment, the fiercely desired gets transformed into the natural and normal state of affairs, to go unnoticed. “Fixity of identity is only sought in situations of instability and disruption, of conflict and change,” notices Robert Young (1994: 4). National memory becomes fixed in museums and statues, folklore moves from the natural circulation to the archives — the lateness of nationalism becomes conspicuous. Of course, this is not a fixed moment, a threshold — the process was initiated already with the very formation of the nation. However, the pedagogical nature of a nation becomes evident with its institutionalisation by the state. The lateness of nationalism can be described also as a split between the pedagogical and performative national discourses, which emerges together with national nostalgia for the lost innocence of pre-national times. In this sense the nostalgia of late nationalism is a nostalgia for an era of homogeneity that existed before the separation of the communal voice into two different directions. Nation as a narrative is a narrative with two folds: the performative discourse, which perceives members of the nation as subjects, different from each other and significant in themselves, accompanies the discourse of the national pedagogy which defines the nation in terms of historical experience and the narrative derived from it. Homi K. Bhabha (1994: 145) explains:

The people are the historical ‘objects’ of a nationalist pedagogy, giving the discourse an authority that is based on the pre-given or constituted historical origin *in the past*; the people are also the ‘subjects’ of a process of signification that must erase any prior or originary presence of the nation-people to demonstrate the prodigious, living principles of the people as contemporaneity: as that sign of the *present* through which national life is redeemed and iterated as a reproductive process.

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<sup>7</sup> Tiit Madisson, one of the prominent Estonian freedom fighters during the Soviet occupation, was also held captive in the free Estonian republic.

Through its nostalgia the mythological imagination of a nation designs the homogeneous prenatal community where the disjunction of performative and pedagogical discourses is nonexistent. Paradoxically, this split creates an idea of unity as a vantage point of its desires. Already the pathos of national awakening is pedagogical by its nature, but the special sensation of personal engagement in the historical events contrives to camouflage the object-position of the participants. The nation in the nation state is an undisguised pedagogical discipline, taught at high schools, reinforced through national rituals on Independence Day, the president's speech on the New Year's Eve etc.

However, with the accomplishment of a nation state the mythological Past Perfect has gained new territories: now the period of nation-building belongs already to the period of mythological harmony. The mythological sphere is never fixed and ready — it is always enlarging. Traditionally myths, the stories of origins, remain fixed for a religious person, the beginning of the world cannot be modified. But for national myths the situation is somewhat different: when was a nation born? The beginning of a nation is always *a* beginning, never *the* beginning. The creation of the first independent republic pertains to the stories of creation, the regaining of independence belongs there too. Everything that has passed can count as a part of a story of origins. And the more spacious the mythological past, the more convincing it appears. The augmentation of remarkable historical events leads to their stratification; mythological spheres will be permanently reordered through the patterns of mythological repetition. If myths of origins include a mythological repetition, the nation looks more natural (myths always strive to present cultural artefacts as parts of nature) and plausible. Even if a birth of a nation is followed by a decline (e.g. occupation), it has its place in the mythological inescapability together with the following rebirth. Repetition assures the reliability of a myth.

### **III. A Contemporary Nation State. Worn Out**

So far, we have claimed that a nation has been late from its beginning, that national mythology has always been carried by the nostalgia for the lost transcendental home. Is our contemporary situation somewhat different?

By now, national mythology has reached its third, self-conscious stadium.

The Estonian national mythology in the second half of the nineteenth century used romantic colours, strong images, the objects of national desires were clearly defined, the main targets being cultural and economic development — the goal was attainable, one moved towards the satisfaction of desires. The hard-working, shrewd peasant with a national consciousness and agriculturally innovative ideas could obtain a farm and a beautiful diligent girl – in such a way the national programme was accomplished in the dramas by Lydia Koidula.

In the period of realism the situation turned out to be more complicated, the desired goal may not have been attained — but it still existed, there was still hope that it could be reached, as we see, for example, in the novels by Eduard Vilde.

Later, modern thinkers realized that it is the nature of desire to remain unsatisfied. Anton Hansen Tammsaare, an important modern writer in Estonian literature, depicted life as a perpetual pursuit of goals that can never be achieved, an everlasting process both hard and painful. The modernist is conscious of the unattainability of the object of desire because of the evermoving nature of desire — and suffers because of that.

In our times, national mythology is conscious of its constructed nature. Yes, there has never been a Present Perfect, there has never been a perfect state of affairs and there will never be — but there will always be a desire for it. Postmodern authors use the national mythology, mix desire with irony, they construct mythical spaces, at the same time being conscious of their mythical, artificial nature. In that way the double discourse of national mythology is created: on the one hand, there is the nostalgic narrative, carried by a desire towards the Past Perfect, on the other hand, the questioning of the first, the conscious acknowledgement that this harmonious past is a myth, that it has never existed as a reality. Fictional texts, if they are fascinated by national thematics, still follow the national project and still maintain the desire for an original harmonious state of affairs, at the same time displaying this desire with a smile. The text in itself may even not present its desire explicitly and it may remain unnoticed by the reader of a different nationality: the

desire is located in the reader who grasps certain keywords of the text. Whatever is written of national heroes like Lydia Koidula, Kalevipoeg, Anton Hansen Tammsaare or Konstantin Päts, for the Estonian reader it has nostalgic connotations.

We might ask, is it reasonable to distinguish between these two levels, the ironical and the nostalgic, in the contemporary national narrative? Maybe it is just the changed nature of desire? Mythological fields are in the process of permanent restructuring according to the contemporary models of the perfect past. But what is the difference between reconstruction and deconstruction? To what extent mythological spheres differ from period to period? Does every era construct its mythological past according to its own understanding of felicity?

However, it is evident that national mythology is recreated and re-established continually, the past still gets turned into an ideal space. National mythology gets updated every now and then; in the era of postmodernism/ postindustrialism the initial period of the nation state gains the aura of authenticity it did not have before; new historical, cultural, economical, political facts and narratives contribute to the pedagogical discourse of the nation, occupy places on the shelves of fixed memories.

Ivan Orav, the omniscient blacksmith (created by Andrus Kivirähk, a young Estonian writer), who moves freely in our contemporary world and in the previous Estonian republic as well, unfolds the mythical nature of the previous republic with cheerful humanism:

... every night the violin sounds were to be heard from the Moon and even birches had apples [---]. This was a time when birds and animals still talked [---]. During the Estonian republic everyone could say what they had in mind. In the streets a wolf and a sheep were often seen walking and chatting happily. All were friends, every citizen knew the others by face and in the streets people were constantly shaking hands. (Kivirähk 1995: 3).

The technique of self-conscious myth-making in this case is very straightforward: one must add a bit of colour to the mythical landscape, strengthen the oppositions, attach small and fantastic details.

In this way Kivirähk stresses the mythical nature of the first republic, without destroying its mythical aura. On the contrary, he relies on the same everlasting nostalgia for the Past Perfect.

Ivan Orav also shows the Other, an image of the enemy belonging to the same sphere of mythology: Russian politics did not destroy only one social institution, no, their real and very significant crime was the destruction of the unity of the mythological world. Not only was the independent state destroyed, but birds and animals had to give up talking in a human (apparently Estonian) language: “This was a time when birds and animal still talked. Just a boot of a Russian soldier closed the mouth of these pure creatures.” (Ib.). Probably also the apple trees started to specialize in growing apples and the violin sounds from the Moon were not heard any more. Or to put it the other way round, the historical rupture imposed by Soviet imperialism enabled the Estonian Republic to be populated with speaking birds and animals and the violin sounds from the Moon.

During the last few years neither poetry nor prose fiction but drama has been the ringleader in the renewal of national mythology. One example of this kind of drama was an interactive project *Eesti mängud. Pulm* (‘Estonian Games. A Wedding’) by Peeter Jalakas, which presented the history of Estonia as a computer game. It started with choosing the place on the globe, then the time-period and the actors, and it followed the logic typical of these kinds of games. From time to time the actors stepped out of the screen and acted their roles, then stepped back into the screen of history again — a good example of a co-presentation of the pedagogical and performative sides of a nation. And on the stage, inside the interactive environment, the choir of folk singers, old women in national costumes, accompanied the computer game with their monotonous folk songs. The viewer’s pleasure of watching this spectacle derived from the double nature of the presented narrative: on the one hand, the spectators felt the extreme importance of the events they were witnessing, and on the other hand, they perceived it as a game it is possible to play. It was a mixture of the uncanny and the marvellous, it made one anxious and it was entertaining at the same time.

Has in our times the self-reflexivity of the myth replaced the dream of a perfect future? The self-reflexive myth – is it not a contradiction in itself? The myth strives to naturalise history, “it [myth — E. A.] transforms history into nature,” explains Roland Barthes (Barthes 1993: 129). If the myth lays bare its naturalisation, can it still be a myth? Maybe it is an outworn myth, the one that does not function any more? If the national myth should authenticate the vigour of a nation, then maybe the objects recognised as mythical are not convincing, do not endorse the virility of a nation any more? As Barthes says, “... the worn out state of a myth can be recognised by the arbitrariness of its signification” (ib.127). The sign in language is always arbitrary, but mythological signification needs to be in part motivated in order to have its influence — when a myth shallows to look arbitrary, it is a dead myth, it does not function any more. However, the arbitrariness does not seem to be the most important indicator of a tired myth — for in national mythology the connection between the two sides of the myth is never arbitrary. That verses of Lydia Koidula “Mu isamaa, mu õnn ja rõõm” (‘My fatherland, my felicity and joy’) indicate the value of a fatherland and the emotional tie between a country and its people, even if the myth itself may not work. The principal feature of the myth’s ‘workability’ seems to be its emotional charge — a worn-out myth does not stir the emotions of its addressees. A myth must be believed in, and beliefs rely on emotional ties, not on logical investigations.

But the expiry of the myth’s signifying power does not result in the abolition of desire. The mythological spheres expand to include the sincere belief in myths. The belief in the myth of the nation becomes a part of the mythological world.

If the Past Perfect is forced to carry its fictionality with itself, the Future Perfect gets contaminated by the same sense of fictionality. But if desire for a perfect future is accompanied by a sense of its ludicrousness, can it still offer an ideal that is capable of attracting people?

A seesaw stands still. Or is it still moving?

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