



## Life history as valuable narratives from the past EGV Conference May 23rd, 2016

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VELUX FONDEN



*Literature is the equipment for living*

Kenneth Burke 1941

*In fact history does not belong to us; we belong to it. Long before we understand ourselves through the process of self-examination, we understand ourselves in a self-evident way in the family, society, and state in which we live. The self-awareness of the individual is only a flickering in the closed circuits of historical life.*

Hans-Georg Gadamer 1993 (Orig) 1960, p. 276



Preparing for immediate publication, in 2 vols. small 8vo.

**T**HE FOLK-LORE of ENGLAND. By WILLIAM J. THOMS, F. S. A., Secretary of the Camden Society, Editor of "Early Prose Romances," "Lays and Legends of all Nations," &c. One object of the present work is to furnish new contributions to the History of our National Folk-Lore; and especially some of the more striking Illustrations of the subject to Grimm and other Continental

Legends, Notices of remarkable  
es, Rhyming Charms, &c. are  
ankfully acknowledged by the  
to the care of Mr. BELL, Office  
et Street.



"If you would fain know more  
Of him whose photo here is—  
He coined the word Folk-lore,  
And started *Notes & Queries*."

THE LATE WILLIAM J. THOMS IN HIS LIBRARY.



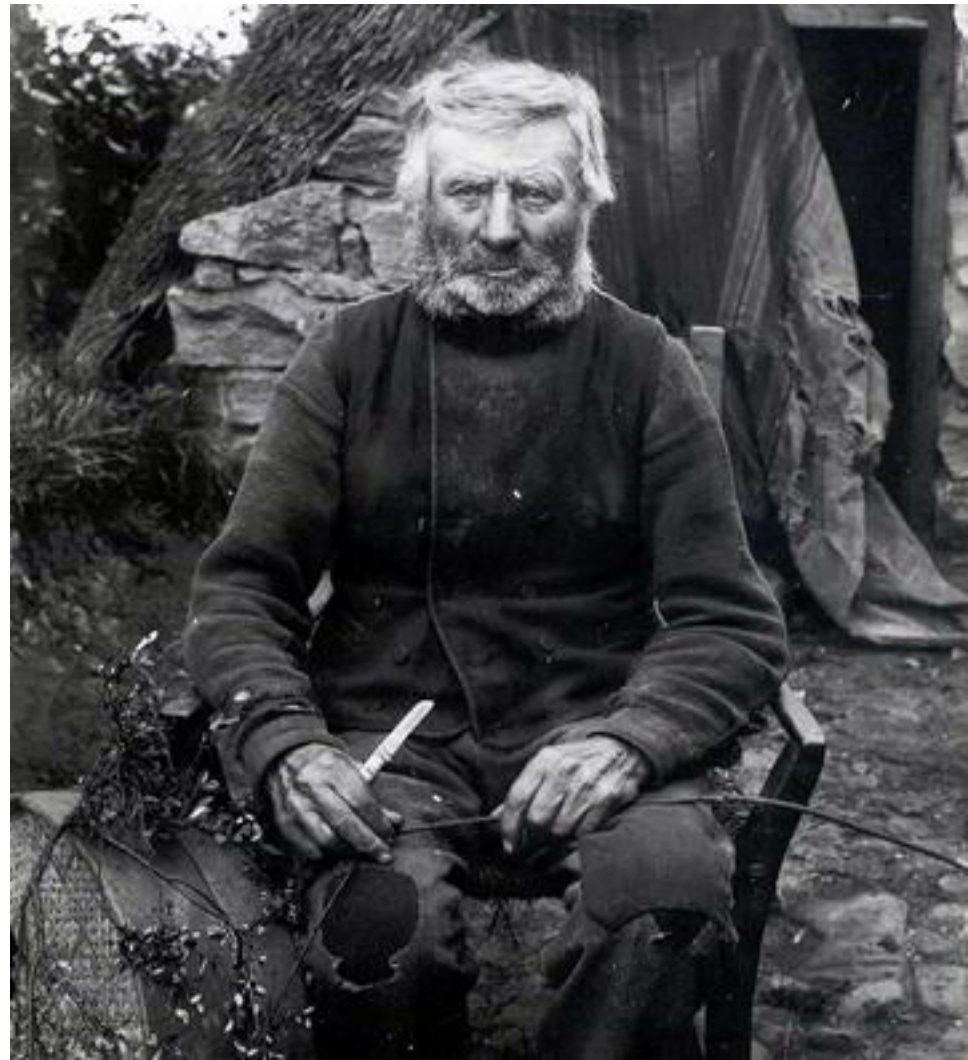


Evald Tang  
Kristensen  
1843-1929



Johanne Marie Kristensdatter,  
Søheden

Sted og dato  
Dias 5



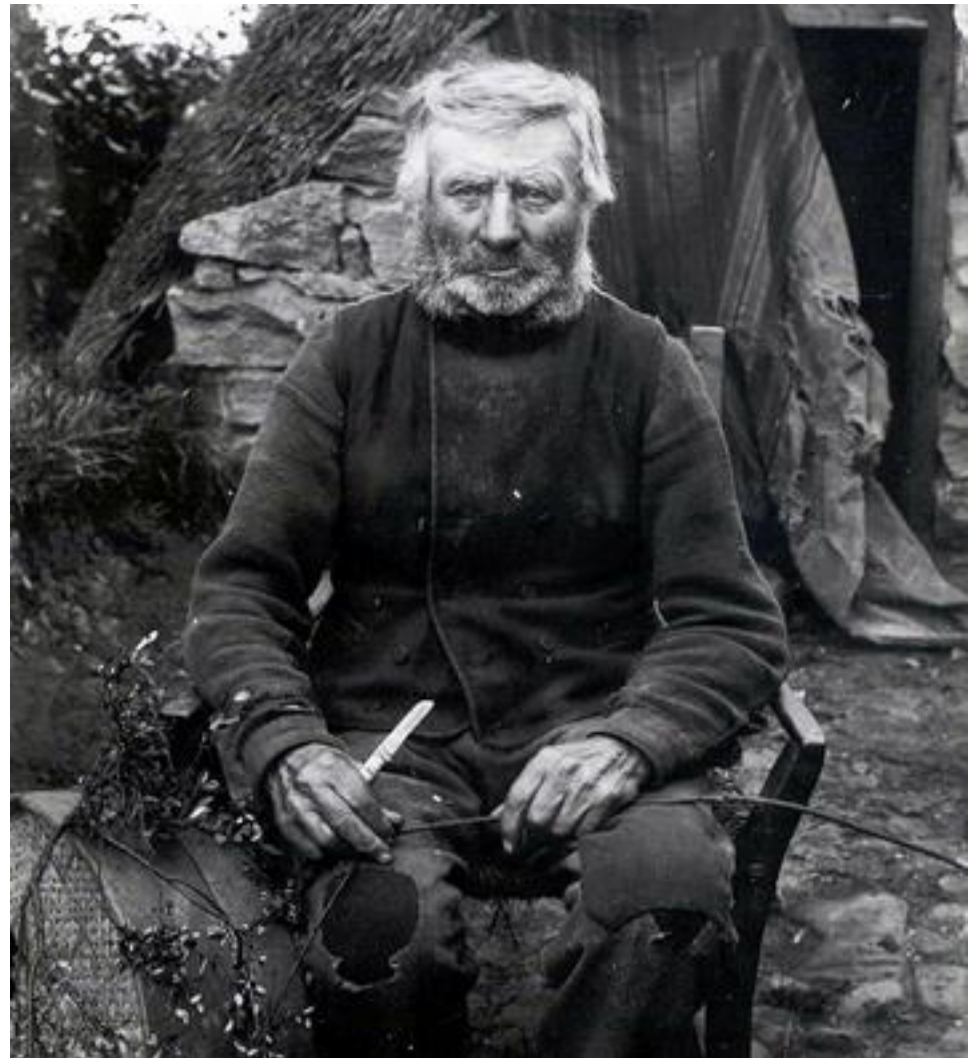
Ole Nielsen, b. 1812

## Peripheral & Powerless People

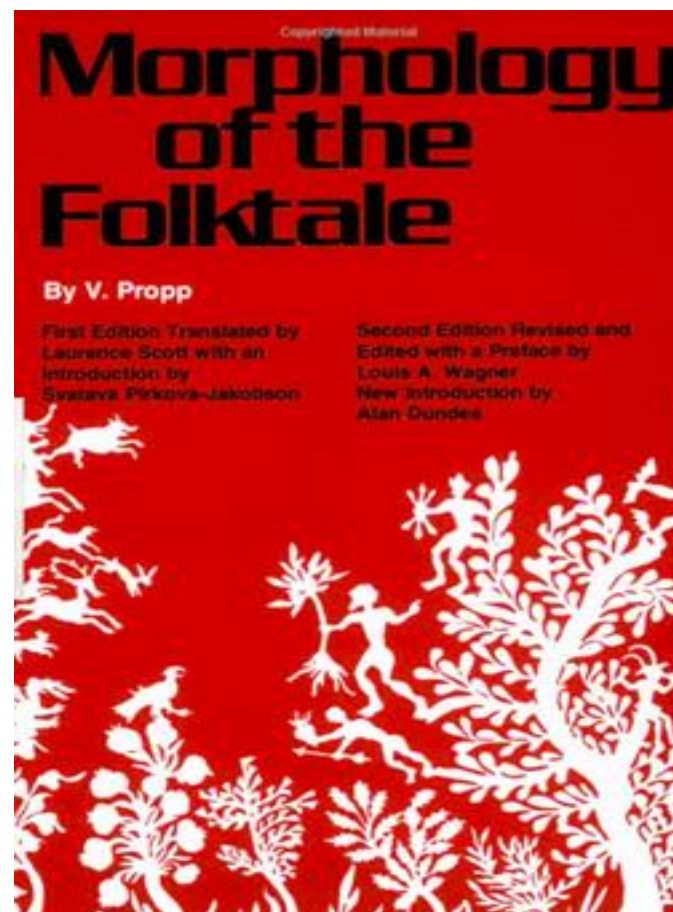
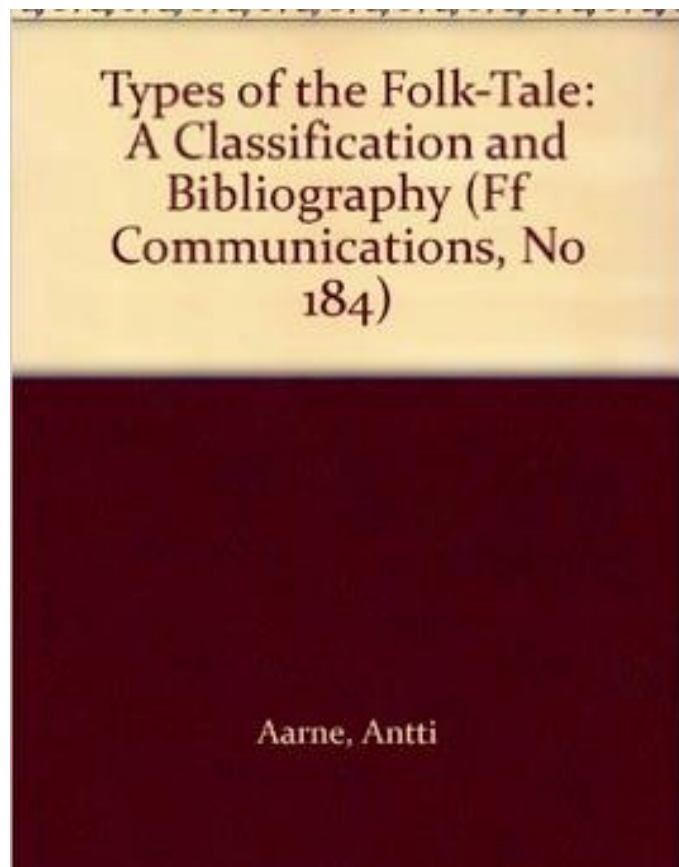


Johanne Marie Kristensdatter,  
Søheden

Sted og dato  
Dias 6



Ole Nielsen, b. 1812



## 20th Century, first half

Pjotr Bogatyrev & Roman Jakobson 1919: Folklore as a special kind of creation

V. Propp

Europe -

USA: Antropology and linguistics



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Peripheral & Powerless People



## 20th Century, first half

Europe – Philology; narratives as products of history and literature/art

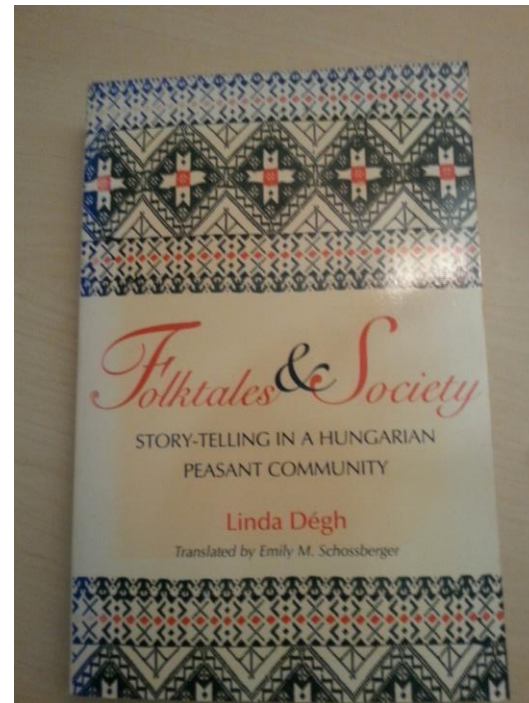
USA: Antropology and linguistics: narratives as products of culture and language

ISFNR =

International Society for Folk Narrative Research  
1959, Copenhagen & Kiel

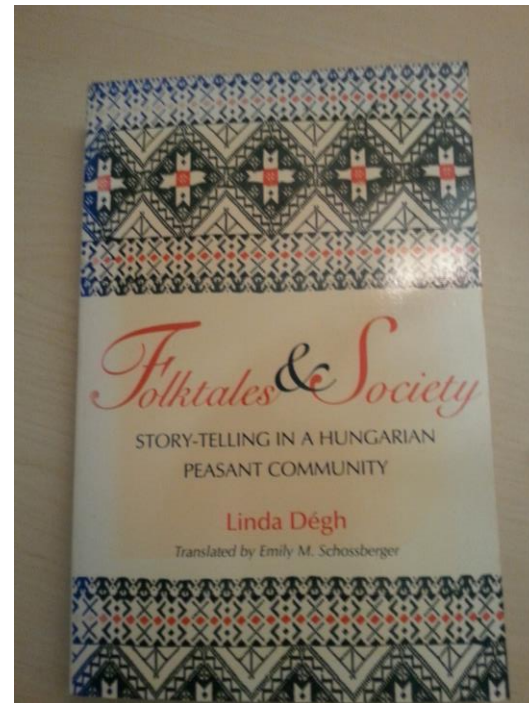
Novel interaction between Europe and US-perspectives

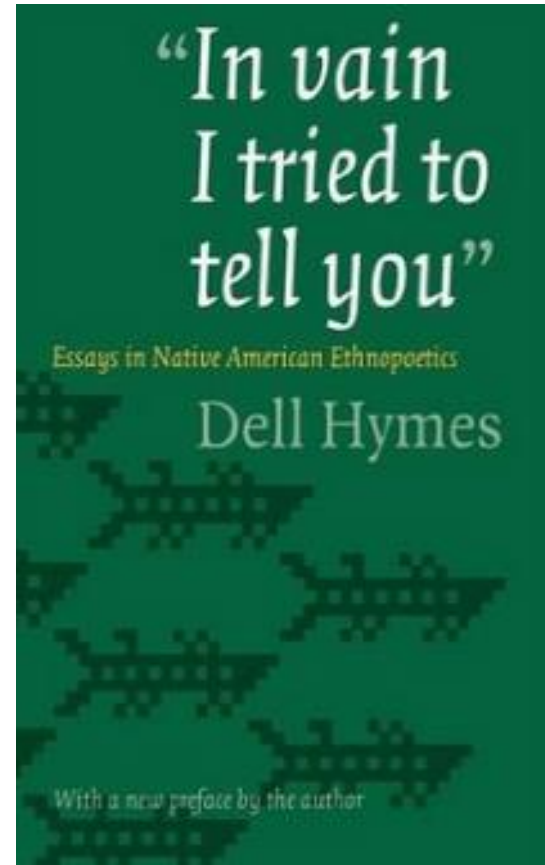
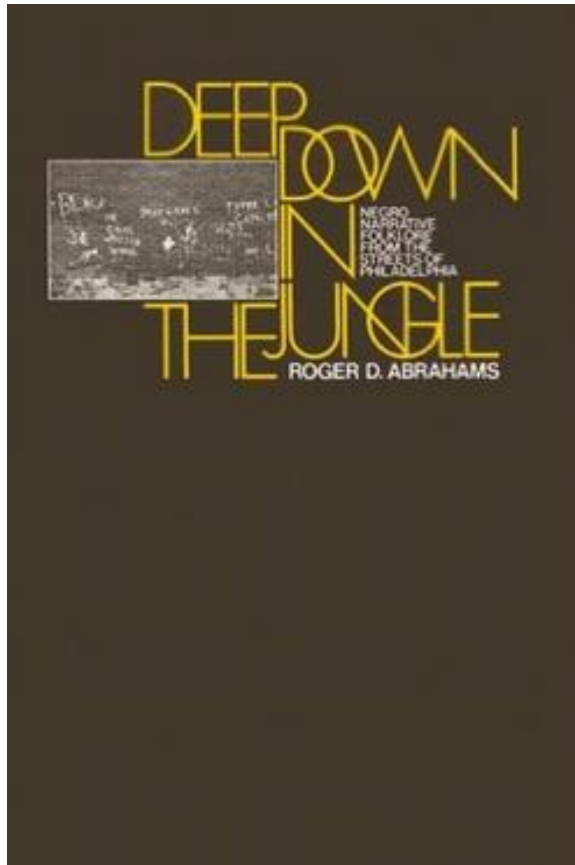
Linda Dégh 1962: *Märchen, Erzähler und Erzählgemeinschaft dargestellt an der ungarischer Volküberlieferung.*



Linda Dégh 1962: *Märchen, Erzähler und Erzählgemeinschaft dargestellt an der ungarischer Volküberlieferung.*

Narration, narrators,  
Performance & culture  
Significance for narrative production  
- and vice versa





Common interests in 1960s and 1970s:

Peripheral and powerless people:

Ethnic minorities, children, youth women and workers

## ISFNR 1984, Bergen

(International Society for Folk Narrative Research)

Three themes:

- 1) Folk Narrative: The Quest for Meaning
- 2) Theory and Personal Narrative
- 3) Folk Narrative and the Question of Identity

Interest in The Old (history) via the old (people)

Interest in current cultures and identity formation

Both: (collected among and represented by  
primarily old persons)



## Standpoint epistemology

"obtaining a unique stance and knowledge by understanding and seeing the world through an oppressed group." (de Medeiros 2014:32)

Narrative Gerontology: Aged persons

Folkloristics: peripheral and powerless groups and individuals

# Passing the Time in Ballymenone

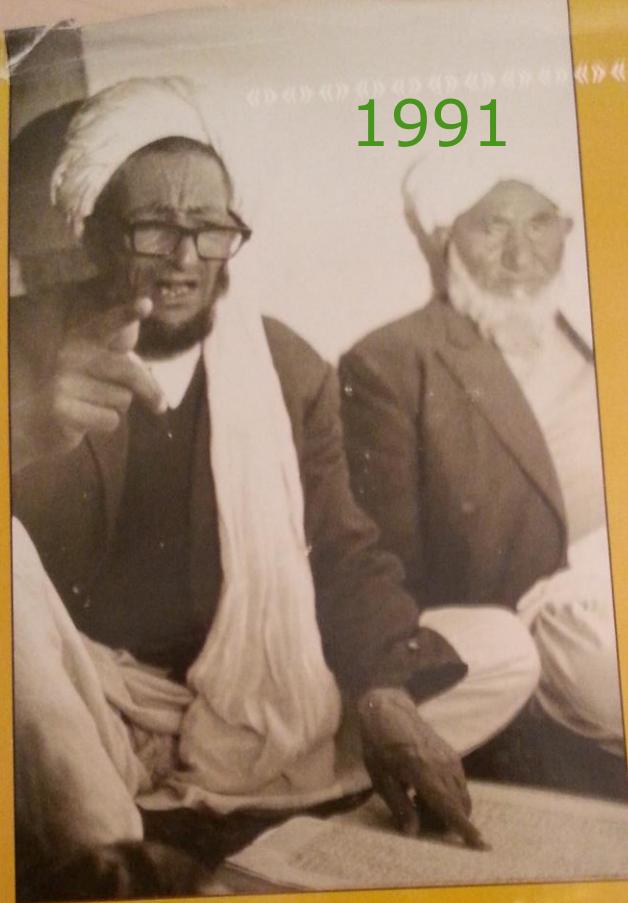
Henry Glassie

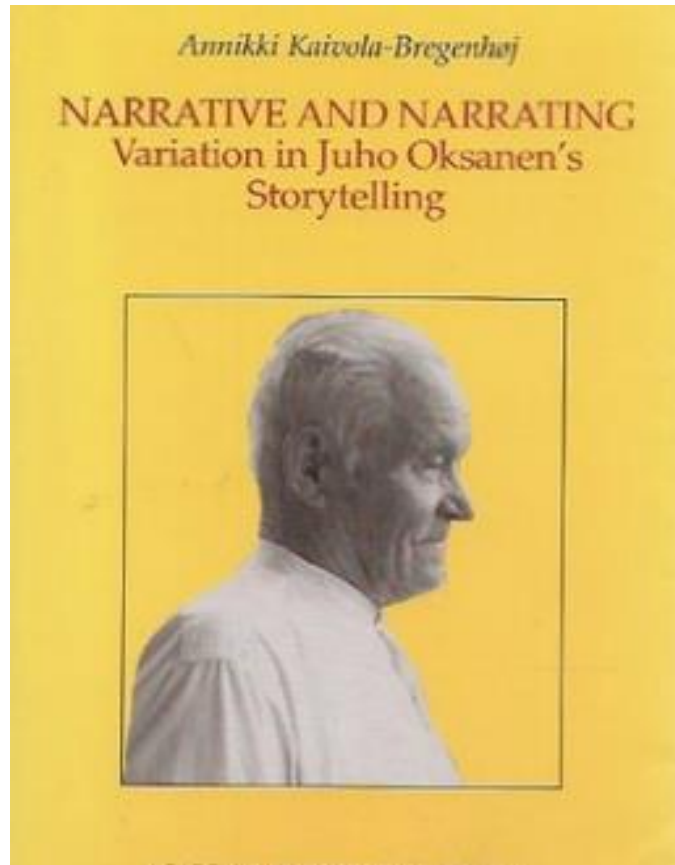
1982

# Rhetorics and Politics in Afghan Traditional Storytelling

MARGARET A. MILLS

1991





Old people, but  
not interest in old  
age per se

No narrative  
Gerontological  
standpoint  
epistemology

1996

Sted og dato  
Dias 19

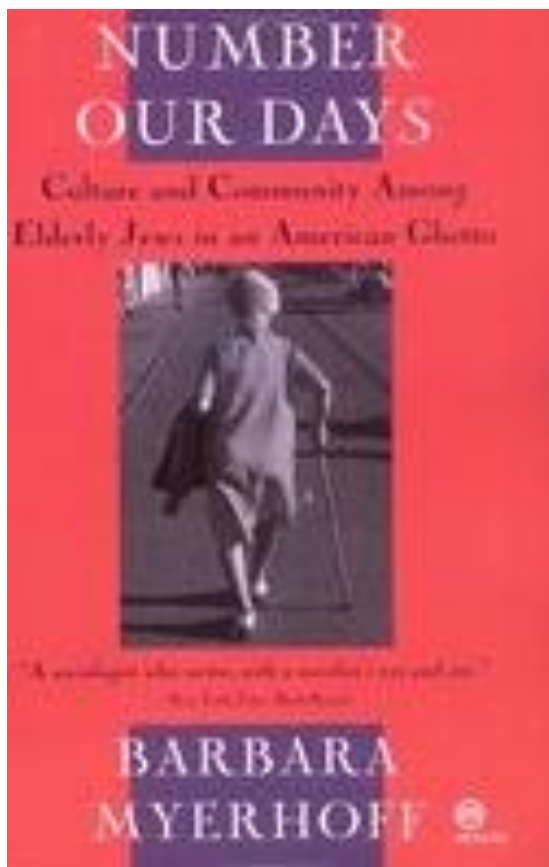




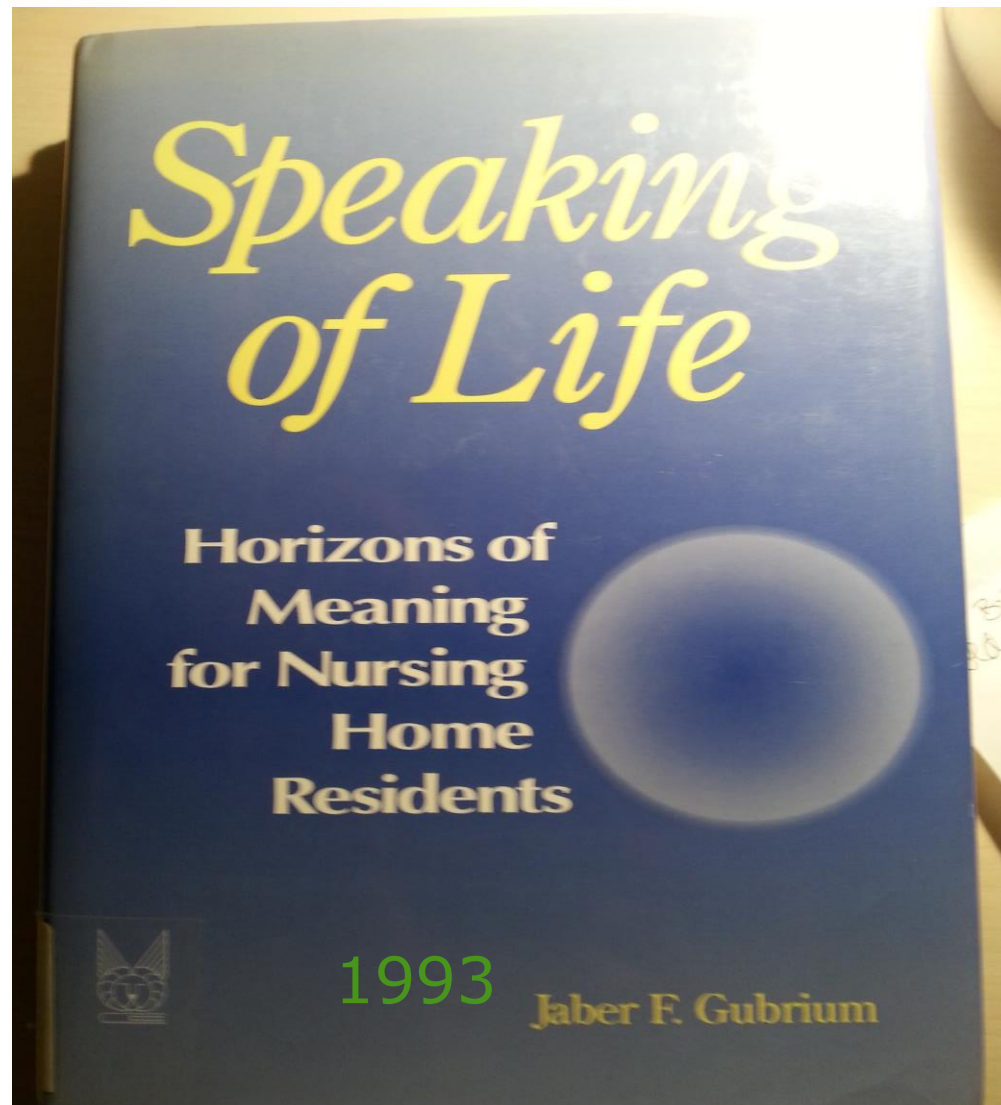
## Birgitte Rørbye, Danish folklørist

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Dias 20



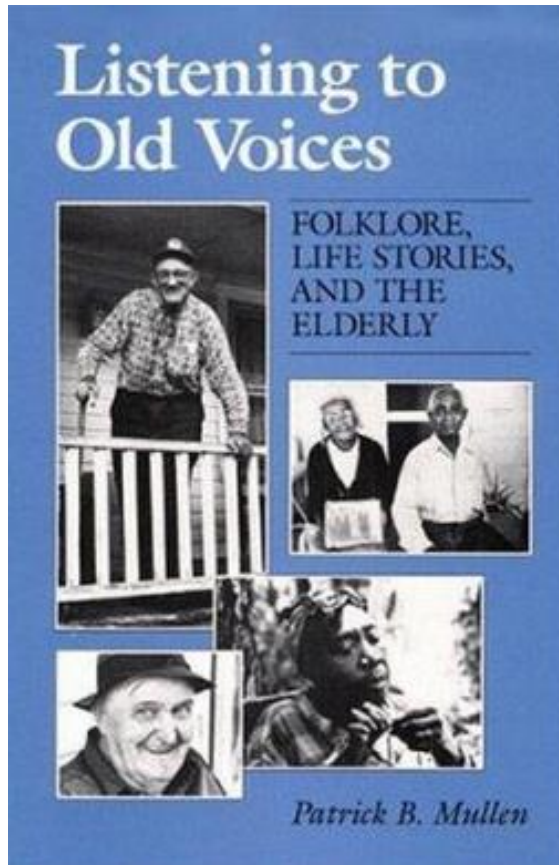


1978

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Dias 21

1993

Jaber F. Gubrium





Images of Ageing 1991

Cultural Gerontology/  
'Life-Historical Gerontology'  
1996



## Images of Ageing 1991

## Cultural Gerontology/ 'Life-Historical Gerontology' 1996

P. 88: "...categories are practical, because they sharpen our attention for similarities and differences, but they are worrying if they assume control of our ability to go behind (our prejudices) and go beyond what we expect to find. In this regard, qualitative and narrative analyses are particular potential.





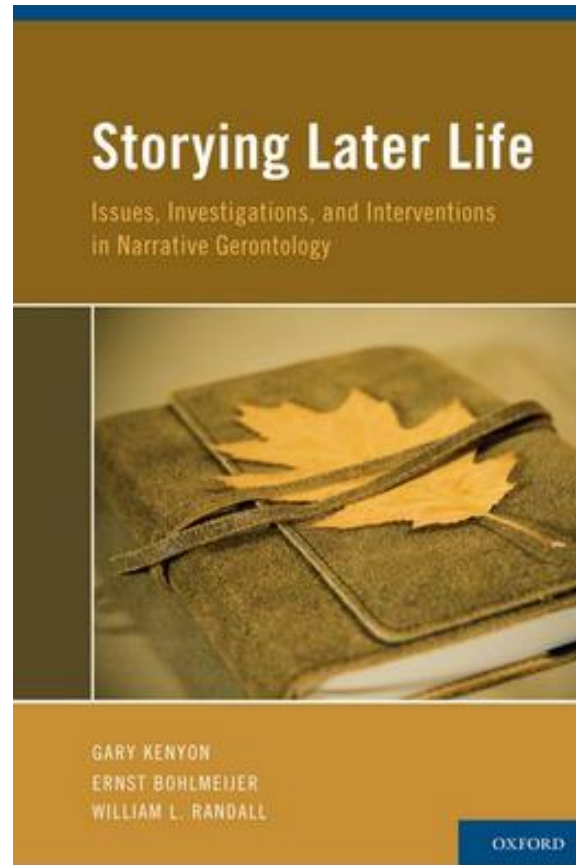
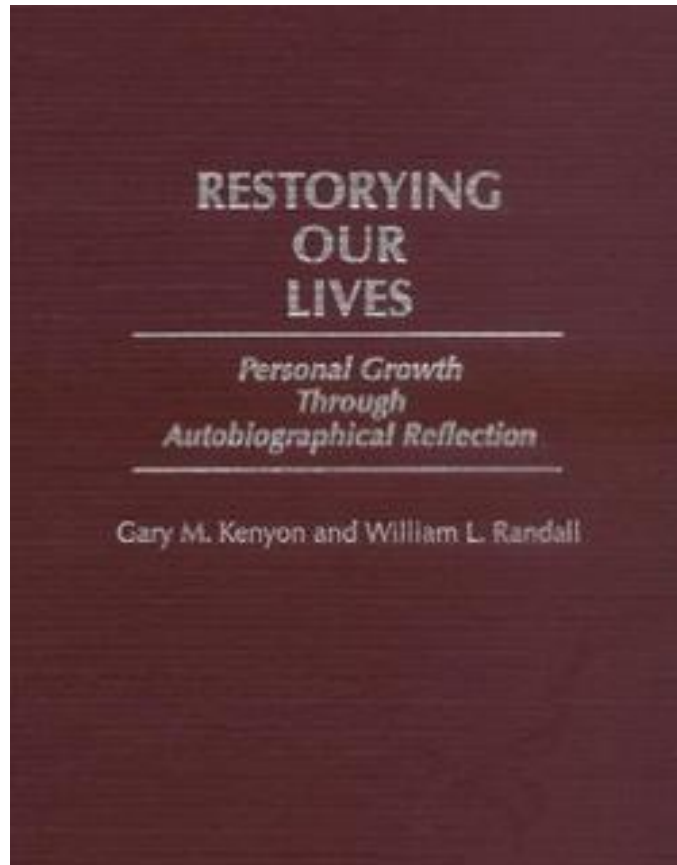
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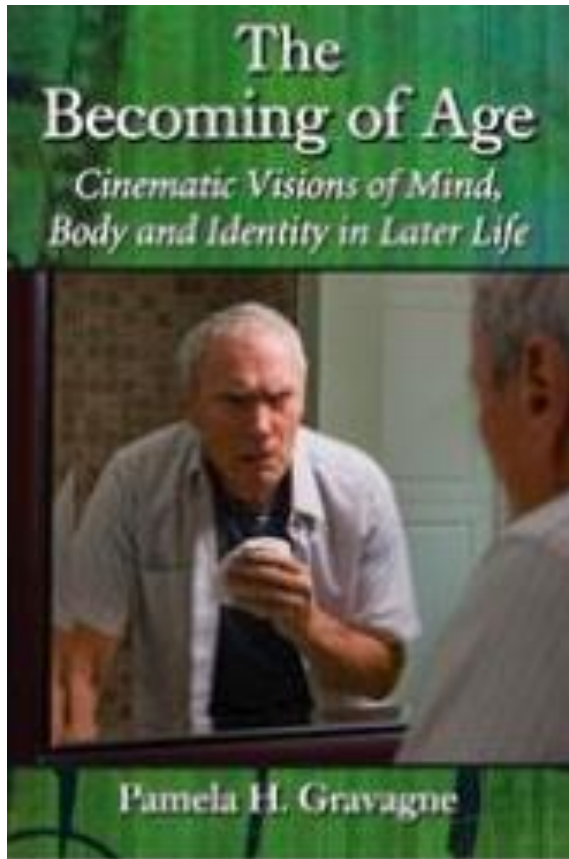


inform about the folkloristic way to, and perspectives on narrative gerontology:

- Folkloristics have a long tradition for studies of old persons, because of an interest in THE old material which is one of THE major competences of old persons due to their life experience.







Sted og dato  
Dias 28



## II: Rehabilitation of past tense and experience in narrative

Foreground the historical value of life historical narratives

Beginning- middle - end

Foreground the historical value of life historical  
narratives

Beginning- middle - end

past- present - future

Foreground the historical value of life historical narratives

Beginning- middle - end

past- present – future

these orientations in past as well as future tense are often centered around the present direction and orientation

"

"live in the present"

"carpe diem",

mindfulness: "bringing one's attention to to internal and external experiences occurring in the present moment" (Wikipedia).



"live in the present"

"carpe diem",

mindfulness: "bringing one's attention to to internal and external experiences occurring in the present moment" (Wikipedia).

Is it possible that this approach involves a certain aspect of '**present-centrism**'?



From a narrative constructivist point of perspective, narrative construction is the case in any temporal narrative, present and future as well as the past



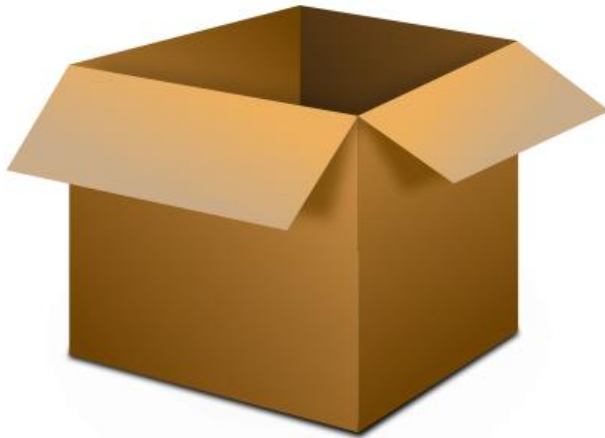
# Fluid / Liquid Modernity



Fluid / Liquid Modernity

Little interest in history and tradition

Focus: Present time and increased individualism



Metaphorical  
conceptualization:

'Modern subject'

Lakoff and Johnson  
(1980)

*...any speaker is himself a respondent to a greater or lesser degree. He is not, after all, the first speaker, the one who disturbs the eternal silence of the universe. And he presupposes not only the existence of the language system he is using, but also the existence of preceding utterances - his own and others - with which his given utterance enters into one kind of relation or another (builds on them, polemizes with them, or simply presumes that they are already known to the listener). Any utterance is a link in a very complexly organized chain of other utterances.*

(Bakhtin 1986;69)



While practicing narrative gerontology, it is important to keep in mind that stories from the past are important to us, now and here, and in the future, because they are part of ourselves as in our identities, our language and our history.



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"..the horizon of the present cannot be formed without the past." (Gadamer 1993, p. 306)



"Horizons change for a person who is moving. Thus the horizon of the past, out of which all human life lives and which exists in the form of tradition, is always in motion."

(Gadamer p. 304.)

important to pay tribute to old persons' narratives about the past, not only because they can provide us with understandings of life in old age, but also because of the valuing of narratives from the past.

Important, since such an approach per se values one of the most characteristic assets of growing old; the accumulation of memories and experiences with knowledge about the past, which, by narration, can benefit shared knowledge about the past, and hence, provide us all with greater understanding of our present.



### III: Narratives from Danish radio listeners



Interviews with 14 Danes  
aged 68 +.

Dialogical structures of  
narrative interviews  
(Tedlock 1987)

Following conventional  
perceptions of the life  
course:

Childhood - adulthood - old  
age, plus reflections about  
transitions and changes in  
technology, listening  
practices & content.



Lis: My experience with radio: I was appx. 7-8 years old, and my dad made a crystal set himself, you know, with this cobber wire around a broom stick to get these windings... [Lis is laughing], but anyway he made that, and I remember us **STANDING** around this small [laughing] apparatus, trying to listen, and then there was only a crackle, and then faaaaar away could we hear voices [laughing].

But it was improved later.

AL: Was it a big experience?

Lis: It was a **GREAT**, great experience.

Lis, born 1928



Sted og dato  
Dias 46





Lis: One gets tied to this; just pushing a button and listening... to radio, you know. Then you may say, that people like me, who live alone and do not have so many... to communicate with, miss... miss dialogue. That's it. To be able to... if you listen to an interesting programme, about something, just to be able to have a chat with somebody about... I think I miss that – a lot. But I must say, I am dependent on radio.







Deeper understanding of the cultural implications of their own practice by the help of life historical narratives by older listeners from previous generations.



"Our historical consciousness is always filled with a variety of voices in which the echo of the past is heard." (Gadamer 1993, 284)

Sted og dato  
Dias 50





Sted og dato  
Dias 51



## Narrative Gerontology

By paying more tribute to past tense, to historical knowledge and to personal narratives of experience, narrative gerontology may be able to counteract a current dominant present-centrism which might be contributing to a devaluation of old age and old persons, because their knowledge and narratives in general are not highly valued.



## Narrative Gerontology

By paying more tribute to past tense, to historical knowledge and to personal narratives of experience, narrative gerontology may be able to counteract a current dominant present-centrism which might be contributing to a devaluation of old age and old persons, because their knowledge and narratives in general are not highly valued.

This point of departure represents a standpoint epistemology taking a stance for oppression of people who may be considered peripheral and powerless, because they have aged.



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## 2016 AFS/ISFNR Joint Annual Meeting

The Society's 2016 annual meeting will be a joint meeting with the **International Society for Folk Narrative Research**, October 19-22, at the Hyatt Regency Miami, in Miami, Florida. The theme for the meeting, on which presentations are encouraged but not required, is "**Unfinished Stories: Folklife and Folk Narrative at the Gateway to the Future.**"

The deadline for submitting a proposal for the meeting has passed.

### Registration

Preregistration is available until August 31.

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5/19/2016 » 5/22/2016

The 2016 Annual Meeting of the Folklore Studies Association of Canada

Thank you for listening!

