

Northern Scholars Lecture by Rósa Þorsteinsdóttir

Date of lecture: 25 November 2010 at 5.15 pm

Lecture venue: Conference Room, 27 George Square, Edinburgh

Lecture title: “Old lore for a new world. Opening access to the folklore archives of the Árni Magnússon Institute for Icelandic Studies”

Abstract of Lecture

As part of the activities of the Árni Magnússon Institute, a considerable amount of Icelandic folklore has been recorded on tape. Folklore has been collected from all corners of Iceland, as well as from the Icelandic settlements in North America. This material includes all types of folk songs, along with oral compositions, both prose and verse: poetry of various genres, all sorts of folktales, and descriptions of folk customs. The material has been computer-catalogued, and it is now possible to search the collection online and listen to some of the recordings. Choice recordings from the collection have been released on CDs, and it has become clear that with easier access to the material, more people are taking an interest in it. In addition to telling the story of the collection and dissemination of the material, I will address the ethical questions that arise when opening access to the recordings to the general public.

Date of Seminar: 26 November 2010 at 1.00 pm

Seminar venue: Celtic and Scottish Studies, 27 George Square, Edinburgh

Seminar title: “Icelandic Fairy Tales and Storytellers”

Abstract of Seminar

In indexes of folk tale types, one encounters a number of tale types not found outside of Iceland, such as the fairy tales of type 556*. These uniquely Icelandic tales generally revolve around a hero who has been placed under an enchantment that involves being sent out to find specific objects or persons. Such motifs are unusually common in the Icelandic storytelling tradition. In several instances, good stepmothers even make an appearance – figures that are seemingly unknown in fairy tales from other countries. In these same stories, heroes frequently cross paths with giantesses who aid them in their quest. In the most recent international tale type index, however, these Icelandic fairy tales have been grouped together with stories of animals that help the hero as an expression of gratitude for past kindness. Tales of type 556* are examined, as is their lot in classification systems used for fairy tales. Using examples from the oral tradition, I investigate how the storytelling tradition develops, how the storyteller makes each tale his own, and how the tales adapt to a constantly evolving society and environment.