

of paganism. In the final three chapters the author touches on dragon elements in Welsh romances and English legends, and in particular the importance of the dragon for the Christian legend of St. George.

Ingersoll's book, like the bulk of the material he worked through in its preparation, is the product of now-outdated thought and "shreds and patches" method in British historical diffusionism and its forebear, the 'solar school' of comparative mythology. Regrettably, in weaving together the strands of dragon lore scholarship in England prior to 1923 (the most recent date in the bibliography), the author fails to provide the kind of balanced consistency of argument and critical objectivity desirable in an area of research where speculative flights of fancy are commonplace. Ingersoll resorts to numerous citations yanked without critical commentary from their original context in an effort to hold together the framework of his discussion. The textual seam, as it were, is ragged and uneven, and alternates between excessive pedantry and unsubstantiated generalization. Stylistically, the discussion flounders in a mire of Victorian popular prose seemingly tortured into erudite guise. Most critical, however, is Ingersoll's over-reliance upon G. Elliott-Smith's The Evolution of the Dragon (Manchester, 1919), a work which epitomized the thinking of the short-lived, post World War I "Manchester School" of archaeology and historical anthropology. Under Elliott-Smith's leadership, the few serious proponents of the 'heliocentric' or 'sun-centered school' concluded that Egypt had been the principal source of a variety of widely-disseminated cultural phenomena. Although Ingersoll enthusiastically embraces the main ingredients of Elliott-Smith's treatise on the origin and spread of dragon lore, which he admits "have been of much use... in this connection" (p. 29), it is to the former's credit that he elects to limit his own trek to continental Asia and Europe (p. 30).

Despite major flaws in the substance and manner of this book, it is nevertheless difficult to dismiss the reasonableness of the overall implication that the 'meaning' of dragon lore in various geographical regions and temporal periods is discernable in its symbolic representation in oral, graphic, and plastic art. Ingersoll's treatment contains numerous suggestive leads for the perspective dragon sleuth well-versed in the tenets and historical relations of Indo-European religions. Still, few contemporary folklorists will want to rest their laurels solely on the basis of a skirmish with the material in this reprint.

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Beckmann, Petr. Whispered Anecdotes: Humor from behind the Iron Curtain;  
The Golem Press, Box 1342, Boulder, Colorado 80302, 1969. Pp. 143.  
\$3.25

Petr Beckmann, born in Prague in 1924, spent 1948-1963 behind the Iron Curtain at a time when you had to look around furtively to check if anyone was eavesdropping when you whispered anti-establishment jokes to your friends. The reader is warned: "Thousands of people have been jailed for telling one of these anecdotes." During these years, Beckmann, now a professor of electrical engineering at the University

of Colorado, heard the 136 jokes which he has narrated and translated for this volume. His complete repertoire is not represented here since jokes utilizing untranslatable puns, obscenity or esoteric jargon, and self-deprecatory Czech jokes ridiculing Czechs have been excluded. "The present collection is his first publication to appear in human language" (p. 143), his other works bearing such titles as The Depolarization of Electromagnetic Waves.

Although there is neither a table of contents nor an index, the collection is rounded out with a preface, conclusion and epilogue and organized into chapters: The Stalin Years, The Khrushchev Years, Jewish Jokes, The Russians, The Poops in Power, and Stranger than Fiction.

Small in format (8vo), deliciously printed on lavender paper, with a chinese red cloth cover and brilliant yellow end papers dotted with minikin dragonflies, bats and other symbols, this book as a physical object does indeed communicate the feeling which the author has about subversive jokes in print: "In dark print on light paper, they look to me like a collection of butterflies, rigidly pinned in rows and columns, dead and withered. They were not made for that. They are whispered from ear to ear, or told in the circle of trusted friends. There is nothing so sweet as a gleeful laugh at the oppressors" (p. 5). Free speech, press and radio are the anathema of the whispered anecdote. And as Beckmann emphasizes, these jokes arise in response to, and can only be truly appreciated in, the immediate social and political context of which they are part.

Many of the anecdotes, although assimilated to the period and place where Beckmann heard them, are current today in various versions in Western Europe and North America. The joke told about two chimney sweeps who fall down the chimney (pp. 68-69) is current in the United States where, rather than being an example of communist dialectics, it is told as an illustration of the intricacies of talmudic-midrashic argument. The joke about a Jew who fools a party functionary into thinking that eating the heads of salted fish makes you smart (p. 54) is an old Yiddish jest which is also current in North America today in versions where the protagonists are Blacks.

This collection, drawn from the repertoire of a man of science, peppered with his own very personal and highly emotional views about the jokes themselves and the situations which generated them, is a valuable sourcebook for the folklorist interested in documenting how ubiquitous anecdotes become localized to particular periods and places.

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