"The scholar may hesitate," wrote the hagiographer Hippolyte Delehaye in his study of the saint's legend, "but the legend knows nothing of hesitation." The same may be said of what has come to be called the modern urban legend. Indeed, here we meet with the same dispatch, accelerated, however, by the modern mass media. The urban legend is rife in modern American life, and Brunvand has cultivated a flair for tracking it down, wherever its path, whatever its disguise. In his new book in the series that began with The Vanishing Hitchhiker (1981) and continued with The Choking Doberman (1984), he again picks up the scent of legend and uncovers, as the subtitle advertizes, "new" urban legends and some old favorites.

The metaphor of the hunt or of the sleuth implied in the phrase "scent of legend rather than truth" (used in The Choking Doberman) is informative, especially as Brunvand treads territory familiar to the popular journalist, for we still lack a definition for the genre. One distinguishing feature, and one that Brunvand repeatedly emphasizes, thereby setting himself apart from the objectives of the journalist, is that the legend need not be true or verifiable, despite what is often claimed of it or believed; rather, it need only be "plausible" (Brunvand's judgement, accounting for a range of belief, or disbelief, in a legend's veracity), and the conclusion to The Mexican Pet asserts such: "Rule 1: The truth never stands in the way of a good
story" (p. 205). The truth neither helps nor hinders; it is irrelevant. It's the story that counts.

The term and concept of the "modern urban legend," with emphasis on one or more of the terms in the formula, has in fact received much attention in recent years: annual seminars at the University of Sheffield (England), numerous conference panels, scholarly publications (e.g., articles by sociologist Gary Alan Fine, to single out just one productive American scholar), and Brunvand's three somewhat popularized volumes. Whatever one may think of this new generation of legend scholarship and its varied theoretical bearings, Brunvand has displayed consistent and patient progress with a modicum of scholarly conservatism, thoughtfully choosing appropriate forums in popular books and scholarly articles for his findings. For Brunvand's part among this new generation, he defers in this new volume to the material, continuing the tradition of gathering the evidence, text variants. "When will it all end?" prefaces The Mexican Pet, sounding a note of mock exasperation with the flourish of activity concerning at least the phenomenon if not its study:

But why should it end? Folklore - the "oral tradition" - never stands still for stuffing and mounting by the experts. No sooner do we folklorists track down, record, and publish a story, a song, or a saying than it pops up again in a different disguise (p. 10).

The Mexican pet, to be sure, is mainly a collection, but many of the texts "are quoted from the news media and other sources in 'popular' culture rather than purely 'folk' circulation" (p.11). The promise of "more 'new' urban legends and some old favorites" will, whether folk or popular, appeal to those interested in folklore - the material.

Nonetheless, folklore - the study - is present in this volume to the extent that typographic marks - one representing a hitchhiker's
outstretched thumb, the other a black doberman - refer the reader back to the two earlier volumes when the author wishes to point out a thematic or metonymic link between legends treated in different places, or analyses and interpretations of a particular legend. Analysis and interpretation have thus been streamlined in The Mexican Pet, reduced to brief commentary or the typographic reference to the earlier volumes in which the legends are analyzed and interpreted in terms of modern American culture. This choice makes place for "texts rather than analyses of recent urban rumors and legends in the foreground" (p. 11). The Mexican Pet thus achieves a sort of compromise between, on the one hand, the traditional imperative to observe and collect the phenomena (including the need to recognize, or as Brunvand puts it, to appreciate, the influence of the media in the rapid proliferation and dissemination of traditional materials) and on the other hand, the need to analyze, define, and interpret that material.

In other ways than reference, moreover, the burden of folkloristic analysis rests upon the earlier works. The selection and arrangement of the texts in The Mexican Pet relies upon the pattern established in The Vanishing Hitchhiker and employed in The Choking Doberman. Here the title stories served as methodological and analytical models, and subsequent chapters gathered texts around a common topic relevant in a larger American cultural context. Following the same classification, The Mexican Pet maintains the continuity that permits Brunvand to assemble a reader of the familiar "new" and old favorites: animal stories, automobiles, horrors, contaminations, sex and scandal, crime, products, professions, and personalities.

A text of "The Mexican Pet" opens the first chapter on Animal Stories, and the chapter concludes with a variant of "The Choking Doberman" and a stemmata diagram or genealogy of this leg-
end as hypothesized and discussed at some length in *The Choking Doberman*. Despite the suggestiveness and authority of the family tree, Brunvand reminds us that the genealogy of "The Choking Doberman" is still an hypothesis.

In *The Choking Doberman*, Brunvand employed a simplified version of the historic-geographic method to sketch a plausible history of and probable influences on this legend by other legends. Brunvand's argument concerned, it seems to me, the way in which a stable motif or narrative kernel could generate not only new variants of a legend but also what might be distinguished as new versions—that is, stories rather different in content but sharing a common motif or narrative function. The example Brunvand treated here linked the motif of the severed fingers discovered in the doberman's throat to a motif in earlier witch stories from British sources in which identity of the witch is determined by a burn or laceration, sometimes on the fingers. In each of these cases the injury was seen to be functionally equivalent and provided a key pivot for the narrative.

This point of similarity, as a possible explanation of genetic relation, is interesting, but it does not account why the author previously had cited an early Welsh story (1800), a story more closely related in plot and theme to "The Choking Doberman," as, not the hypothetical prototype, but an early ancestor of an allegedly true and purportedly thoroughly modern story. The similarity was evident, and the citation served to deflate the claims of uniqueness for the contemporary version and transformed journalists' territory into that for which the folklorist was best equipped. Initially, I wondered why the author did not consider or discuss the type of the "devil in dog form," if, as he claims, the doberman has this sinister image problem? While the doberman in the legend here betrays no trace of malice, except as a protec-
tor against would-be assailants (as the faithful hound in the Welsh story), its popular image as sinister does merit consideration, for this attitude engages suspense and creates a misleading expectation that pivots ironically. Similarly, the Welsh version pivots on irony, but the false expectations are created differently and appeal to somewhat different attitudes and values.

Could the story, then, be related to the thirteenth century legend of the holy greyhound Guinefort, a legend concurrently brought to light by the cultural historian Jean-Claude Schmitt in a recent book reviewed in Western Folklore? Lacking thorough and consistent type indexes for the legend, and all that this would entail, as well as other tools, the question remains moot. Searching out evidence for a genetic, historic-geographic continuity in the spread of early forms or prefigurements to "The Choking Doberman" before it made its modern debut complicates the question, going beyond the scope of this or the other volumes. For the problem with the historic-geographic method in legend scholarship has revolved around, among other things, and mainly as regards the possibility of a type index, the instability of the form and content of the legend. It is worth mentioning the problem with the method if only because any use of the method at least implies the assumption of a genetic relationship among tales explained by historic and geographic contact. Similarity between texts can be explained in terms ranging from directly genetic to coincidental, diffusion or polygenesis.

The stemma in The Mexican Pet seems to make clear that at least two relational principles seem to be operative in a probable developmental sequence of this story (i.e. "The Choking Doberman"): one, a kind of serial reproduction, to use Bartlett's term, of the same basic story; and two, a kind of metonymic or metaphoric
substitution or regeneration. While historic-geographic scholars could account for the merging of otherwise discernible tale types and single motif narratives into new combinations - a means of regeneration - the problem, as mentioned, remains with the less stable genres and an accommodating theory of types. Whatever the assumptions and implications of Brunvand's method, the stemma for "The Choking Doberman" in *The Mexican Pet* is intended, among other things, to suggest at least how a legend has a history, if not a genealogy (or, Brunvand's term, ancestors).

More to Brunvand's point, a legend's history can show how a legend can appear to be new and old at the same time; hence, Brunvand's use of quotation marks around "new" in the book's subtitle. It was also in the previous volume that Brunvand went to some lengths to explain this phenomenon in terms of his coinage FOAF (friend of a friend); that is, a sort of personal disclaimer shifting the burden of proof of a legend's veracity to someone else. Brunvand pointed out that despite the claims of a specific person in a specific place, the legend could be assigned elsewhere with similar claims to its veracity, and it could also be shown to have served, in varied forms, other times and other places (e.g., Wales or Great Britain as well as North America).

But, whence "The Mexican Pet"? Brunvand does not elaborate, other than to point out some similarities to other modern urban legends:

It deals with a mishap during a vacation to Mexico, just like [typographic mark] "The Runaway Grandmother"; it mentions a sewer, as in [mark] "Alligators in the ... [Sewer]"; and it describes getting up close to a rat, as in [mark] "The Kentucky Fried Rat." Grotesque problems with pets are found in several other legends in this chapter, and the speaking role of the veterinarian is a recent feature reminiscent of "The Choking Doberman" legend. (p. 230)

Citing these possible influences serves to indicate the intertextuality of otherwise identif-
iable stories, perhaps types, in multi-conduit and media-aided transmission. Can we assume, however, that these influences have had a direct impact on the development of "The Mexican Pet"? Or is it sufficient to say that the cultural contexts of contemporary concerns, anxieties, attitudes, and so on provide the source from which all these stories owe their genesis?

The question of genre, as well, remains unanswered and perplexing. Folklorists have well recognized that stories cross genres, a factor the historic-geographic method could not adequately account for, and that ethnic and analytic categories categories do not always agree. The Mexican Pet brings together not only legend, but rumors, as the author claims, and jokes, all yoked together with the melting-pot epithet "urban legend." Whatever distinguishes in a conventional, formal, or pragmatic sense the legend from the rumor or the legend from the joke is apparently not important in the modern, urban setting. Some of the texts, for instance, we might otherwise identify as jokes, if we knew more about their context of use. Brunvand's own responses to first hearing the stories that his correspondents sent to him or those he found elsewhere provide some clues. They indicate a wide range of possible contexts of use, a range that may be treated as descriptive of the modern urban legend: "wonderfully bizarre, usually funny, sometimes horrible, often weird, but always plausible" (p. 10). In his conclusion, "Why Should It Ever End?", however, he modifies his claim somewhat:

Urban legends seem to go on and on, whether new ones, old ones, or the renewed forms of old legends. In order to fill their niche in modern tradition, stories need not be true but merely believable; and they need not be that plausible, just as long as they are ironic, suspenseful, or funny. (p.205)

So while a funny legend may well be told as a joke, with or without a plausibility clause, the distinction is perhaps relevant only in context.
But the criterion that these legends be suspenseful is helpful in understanding their appeal and relevance and perhaps their coherence as narratives as well. Their irony is suggestive (e.g., given the significance of true identity in Brunvand's analysis of "The Choking Doberman" and the widespread use of mistaken identity in folktales and legends generally). The trope of irony (i.e., opposing discourse and meaning in order to reverse expectations) may be sufficient to account for the metonymic substitutions in the development of a story, whether a joke or a legend - forms which have elsewhere been treated as symbiotic. Brunvand himself claims here that irony is pervasive, suggesting that the trope is persistent and allows for seemingly endless substitutions at the level of content or discourse; hence, the rhetorical questions "When will it all end?" and "Why should it end?". The question of irony bears further investigation, especially given the resurgence of interest in rhetoric in the humanities and cultural sciences generally.

While The Mexican Pet may "hesitate" in pursuit of detailed analysis and interpretation of the legend as genre and of individual legend types, it appears to keep step with the proliferation of the material and organizes that material in a useful manner. Whether its categories are sufficiently broad to exhaust the entire range of modern urban legends as they relate to dominant themes in American life is subject to the findings of other fieldworkers and perhaps journalists as well. It has certainly proven broad enough to accommodate new variants, if not new versions, of the old favorites. Whatever the eventuality, such careful classification that Brunvand has demonstrated here is, of course, the basis for fruitful analysis and greater "appreciation" for the way the media, for instance, as a modern tradition bearer, preserves or deforms a tradition. Even if The Mexican Pet is
only a collection of texts - stories that indeed are wonderfully bizarre, funny, horrible, weird, and plausible - it contains a kind of hidden agenda, for it represents part of a program that is promising for legend scholarship, although disguised in popular form. Not only do these stories provoke curious responses, they raise for the folklorist interesting questions. And Brunvand has shown that texts themselves command attention, appreciation, and offer new clues as to how and what they might mean. We await yet more "new" urban legends.

NOTES

1. The point of similarity was suggested by Jacqueline Simpson and cited in Brunvand, "Another Modern Legend?" Letter to the Editor in Foklore 83 (1972): 339.

2. Such problems in the study of legends, and specifically the question of a type index for legends, were summarily treated by Wayland Hand in 1965, "Status of European and American Legend Study," Current Anthropology 6: 439-446.