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## Charles Fletcher Lummis: The Man Who Lived the Life

W. K. M c N E I L

Most writers dealing with the history of American folklore scholarship have taken one of three stances. Either they have argued that there is no American folklore story of value before the twentieth century, or they have concerned themselves solely with the major figures such as Newell, Boas, and Child, or they have devoted themselves to the study of the major folklore organizations and movements.<sup>1</sup> While all three approaches have much to commend them, they all also somewhat miss the point, for they leave out much of the story of American folklore scholarship. There were personalities whose connection with the various folklore societies was tenuous, who were active prior to the twentieth century, and who made significant, albeit perhaps not major, contributions to the field. For example, there is the case of a Harvard dropout who became renowned as an expert on the Southwest. Charles Fletcher Lummis (1859-1928) became known later in life as a man perhaps too serious and too preoccupied with intellectual concerns, but in his college years he was primarily interested in athletics and having fun, an attitude that led to his premature exit from Harvard. This failure must have been shocking to all those who knew the young Lynn, Massachusetts, native who had mastered Latin, Greek, and Hebrew before he was a teenager and who later memorized an entire German dictionary in four days to pass his college entrance examination. This unexpected setback did not greatly concern Lummis, whose enthusiasm for the university life had always been mild. Calmly and somewhat philosophically he reflected late in life on his schooldays:

I had no violent personal ambition for college. I went because Father had gone, because he had trained me with years of personal concentration. And because it was the cultural convention of New England—to which I acceded as I did in most things. Up until Harvard. . . . I studied reasonably for my classes but for a restrained encircled son of a Methodist minister there were so many other things than lessons to study. My escapades certainly brought me no credits—but I am not sure they were not the most important part of my college courses and of the most lasting benefit. From my cloistered life I had come to the Tree of the Forbidden Fruit. I climbed that tree to the top. . . . What I needed, you see, was not so much to learn books as to Find Myself.<sup>2</sup>

Soon after his expulsion from Harvard, Lummis gained fame as great, if not as lasting, as that of any of his former classmates, but not for any intellectual activity. Instead his initial entry into the public eye came as a result of a flamboyant adventure of the type that Lummis's life seemed to be filled with. After leaving school he moved to Chillicothe, Ohio, to manage his father-in-law's farm and, liking the area, remained for three years. Possibly he would have stayed longer had he not come down with a severe illness that spurred him to perform the deed that catapulted him to sudden fame. In his autobiographical reminiscences, "As I Remember," Lummis describes how he arrived at the decision:

It never occurred to me that I could slow down to the Chillicothe gait. But one night without warning the Old Familiar of the region made me an unexpected call—old Fever-'n'-Ager. I burned and tossed and leaked at every pore. In the morning I was pounds lighter and weak as a drowned rat. The bed was as though I had turned a hose on it.

I am not abrupt nor impetuous, but that one night's lesson that even I was mortal, was enough for me. I was fond of Chillicothe and its courtly people, but before night I decided that I was going to move, that I was going to move a long way, that if I could arrange it, I would make it to California. And I was going to walk there.<sup>3</sup>

In these days of rapid transportation it is not easy to visualize either the difficulties of crossing the country on foot in 1884 or the great appeal such a feat would have for the newspaper readers of that day. During his five month trek which began in Cincinnati and ended in Los Angeles, Lummis braved desolate plains where food was scarce, Indian attacks, freezing winds on the mountaintops, blistering heat on the desert floors, sleeping on the ground in rain and blizzards. One day near the top of the Continental Divide he fell through the ice of a shallow pool and had to walk eight miles to shelter with his clothing frozen to his body. Despite all of these problems Lummis never failed to write every day about his journey, for prior to departure he had contracted to produce a weekly letter dealing with his adventures for



the *Los Angeles Times* and the *Chillicothe Leader*. These articles soon began to be reprinted by other papers and before he had progressed very far on the cross-country trek Lummis was already widely known and his trip a *cause celebre*. When he passed through Seymour, Indiana, he "just tore up the burg. Six hundred or more people witnessed his entrance into the town, and since his departure he has been the leading topic of conversation" wrote a local reporter. One editor puzzled over Lummis's sudden fame noting that "the articles have a strange, indescribable interest and people have got to talking about Lum all over the country. He is the most noted man in the West just now and carries in his shoes a pretty fair-sized circus" (Fisk and Lummis 1975:16-17).

This cross-country trek was also important in Lummis's career, aside from the publicity it provided him, for it was on this trip that he first saw the Southwest, the region he eventually came to be most closely associated with. Despite certain prejudices he previously held, Lummis almost immediately thought of the area as his own special province:

... once I had reached Spanish America and the hearts of its people, I realized that this was where I belonged.

Though my conscience was Puritan, my whole imagination and sympathy and feeling were Latin. That is, essentially Spanish. Apparently they always had been, for now that I had gotten away from the repressive influence of my birthplace I began to see that the generous and bubbling boyish impulses which had been considerably frosted in New England were, after all, my birthright.<sup>4</sup>

In January, 1885, the walk ended in Los Angeles and Lummis never again lived outside the Southwest. He got a job as first city editor of the *Los Angeles Times* and began the first of his writings advocating his newly adopted home region. Initially this activity was carried on only in newspaper articles, but in 1891 the first of many subsequent books about the Southwest appeared. This work, *A New Mexico David and Other Stories of the Southwest*, was successful enough to encourage Lummis a year later, in 1892, to pull together the letters from his 1884-1885 cross-country trek, which appeared as *A Tramp Across the Continent*. Thereafter folklore and non-folklore books were about equally divided in his literary output.

Although Lummis found his niche in the Southwest he was still an adventurous person ready to set off on any journey that promised to be exciting. In 1886 he spent several months with General George Crook's troops in Arizona after the outbreak of Indian wars in that state, performing so well that Crook offered him the position of chief of scouts (Fisk and Lummis 1975:37-38). Moving to New Mexico in

1888, Lummis was determined to take photographs of the flagellation ceremonies of the secretive Herman de la Luz cult. His friends, believing the Penitentes would kill anyone who tried to get such pictures, warned him against going through with this plan, but the danger inherent in the task was one of the prime reasons it appealed to Lummis. Earlier he explained his love of taking risks, noting that nothing was:

... more dreamily delicious than to tease a rattler with some object just long enough to keep those grim fangs from one's own flesh. I have stood thus, thoughtless of discomfort, carried away by the indescribable charm of that grisly presence. Perhaps the consciousness of playing with death and as his master contributes something of that spell. . . . No one who has ever played with a rattlesnake can disbelieve the superstition that it fascinates its prey. I have felt it . . . a sweet dreaminess which has tempted me to drop that stick and reach out my arms to that beautiful death. [Lummis 1892b:22-23]

Anyone with such a love for accomplishing dangerous feats was bound to succeed or die, and so it was that Lummis eventually obtained the desired pictures of the Penitente ceremonies and later used them in several of his books.

Lummis's love of exploration soon brought him into contact with a like-minded scholar, Adolph Bandelier, and the two traveled together on many trips throughout the Southwest and on the Villard Expedition to Peru in 1892. In 1911, when he was fifty-two, Lummis headed a field trip to Guatemala sponsored by the School of American Research. Later, in 1926, despite the onset of blindness, he joined a "dig" in New Mexico sponsored by the Southwest Museum. On these numerous rambles, Don Carlos (a nickname given by Lummis's friends) rarely missed an opportunity to gather lore from those he met. While in New Mexico recovering from the paralyzing effects of a stroke, he collected songs from local shepherders. In his unpublished autobiography, "As I Remember," he describes his methodology in some detail:

For months I hung by night around the sheep camps of Don Amado, squatting with the quiet Mexican herders in the little semi-circular brush shelter by a crackling fire of juniper. March and spring nights are chill up there at 7,000 or 8,000 feet on the north shoulder of Mt. San Mateo.

There were no musical instruments, save now and then a mouth organ and more frequently the "bejuela"—a stick maybe a foot long, strung like a little bow with a piece of linen thread and played at the mouth precisely like a jew's harp. There were few good voices but all had what is much more important than a good voice, the will to sing and express their emotion. And beyond that, an invariable sense of time and rhythm which only our best musicians can match. And they were such human, friendly folk! Glad to sing a song over and over until I had it note-perfect

and then to repeat the words while I wrote them down. They were greatly pleased when I could sing their songs back at them.

So we sang and talked and smoked cigarettes under the infinite stars of a New Mexican sky or the even more numerous flakes of a mountain snowstorm.

Folksongs of Spanish origin had a special appeal for Lummis who found in them "a peculiar fascination, a naivete, and yet a vividness and life, a richness of melody with a certain resilience and willfulness which give it a preeminent appeal. It has more music in it, more Rhythm, more Grace (sic). It is more simpatica. It not only joys my hearing and tickles my pulses but cuddles my heart more happily than the songs of any of the score of other nationalities to which I have given friendly ear."<sup>5</sup> He soon came to the belief that the songs of the pastores were the musical record of a vanishing way of life in the Southwest, an idea that spurred him on to record these numbers before they were lost. So for a reason common in the history of folklore collecting, Lummis gathered in the forty years from 1888 to 1928 nearly 600 songs. A sampling of fourteen pieces appeared in his *Spanish Songs of Old California* (1923).

In his various explorations, Lummis was constantly running across interesting personalities, and an encounter with one such "character" in New Mexico led to a minor controversy. In the 1890s he met Martin Valle, a Pueblo statesman who was seven times governor of the cliff republic of Acoma, who told him about Katzimo, the Enchanted Mesa, an extremely steep and rocky cliff where according to tradition the Pueblos once lived. Valle said that the Indians would have remained on Katzimo except for an unfortunate occurrence:

One summer in the time of the harvest all came down from the rock to gather their corn and beans, men, women and children, with buckskin bags to bring the harvest home. All but three women who stayed behind because one was sick. And while they were all away at their fields, down in the Long Valley, there came such storms as no one ever saw; and the rains did not stop; and floods ran down the cliffs of the Valley of Acoma and the waters ran against the foot of Katzimo and ate away the sands and rocks that grew there and burrowed under the great rock that was their ladder. And it fell out into the plain shaking the earth. When the storm ended the people crawled out from under the ledges where they had taken refuge and came home. But their ladder rock was gone and from the top of the sand hill to the cleft was higher than a tall pine. So they could never get up there any more. Neither could the three women on top come down. And there they died after a long time—except one who threw herself off the cliff. And then the people came to this Acoma that is today and built it, a town like the one they lost.

When Lummis published the story it caught the attention of a Princeton professor, William Libbey, who felt it his duty to debunk this Indian "fairy story," and after scaling the Enchanted Mesa during

a storm and finding no evidence that any human had ever set foot on the mountain concluded that Lummis's tale was nonsense. But the argument was ended in 1897 when Frederick Webb Hodge of the Bureau of American Ethnology led a small party to the mesa top and found numerous artifacts caught in the rocks in such a way that they had not been washed off the cliff despite centuries of violent storms. This was indisputable evidence that the mesa had been inhabited. Savoring his victory, Lummis chided Libbey, calling him a "tenderfoot" (Fisk and Lummis 1975:59-60). This handling of the Princeton professor was typical, for Lummis was never one to be gracious, and correctly noted that he did not have the ability to say things softly (ibid:103). This trait was particularly true when anyone ventured to comment about things within Lummis's areas of knowledge. He regarded the Southwest as his own, and he was quick to criticize others who dared to deal with the subject. George Wharton James, a clergyman turned western authority, described the effect of Lummis's acid pen:

. . . Mr. Lummis took upon himself the task of being the censor of everything dealing with the Southwest. When it came to matters dealing with this subject, his virile pen became an instrument of torture to all those who were dealing in an incompetent and incapable manner with subjects connected with this region. It became the standard question, not only in California and the Southwest but even in the libraries and magazines in the East, "Who will Lummis pillory next?" Many a man who deemed himself almost above criticism found himself stripped naked, as it were, shot through with arrows and even scalped because he had presumed carelessly to handle subjects that were within the domain of Mr. Lummis' interests. [James 1923:10]

Not even friends were exempt from Lummis's caustic commentary, as Mary Austin found out. When she was starting out as a writer, Miss Austin had been aided both by Don Carlos and his wife, but this did not prevent him from criticizing her in the most acerbic manner. Concluding a review of her writing he remarked: "She has the most oracular impudence of anyone that ever wrote about the Southwest. . . . A brilliant lady but without conscience and without sense of humor; above all, she has the misfortune of Doubling for the Almighty. She never would study anything for it all comes to her by divine revelation but she, naturally, with her oracular way and her incalculable nerve, imposes on a lot of people to believe her a wonder of wisdom."

While he was quick to find fault, Lummis was just as rapid with praise when he felt a work merited commendation, for he believed that "the privilege to criticize severely or even savagely carried with it the

obligation to praise as heartily when it was called for (quoted in Fisk and Lummis 1975:106). In discussing John Muir's *Our National Parks* he wrote enthusiastically:

A man who writes only because he has something to say on subjects it is worthwhile to say something about and who says it in a medium as unanilined as the Word, is nowadays one of the rarest bipeds without feathers. It would be a little of an impertinence to "review" John Muir's "Our National Parks." It doesn't need it. There are only a few people alive competent (by equal parts of knowledge of the theme and an equivalent literary gift) to appraise it. But all that have the Breath of Life in them are competent to read it and grow by it; nor will any of them find it hard reading . . . And it is one of the books everyone should read who cares for beauty either in nature or in letters. [Lummis 1902:313]

Another feature of Lummis's personality was that he loved to found societies. Among the numerous groups he started was the first of many Landmarks Clubs in the United States. In the early 1890s he had become concerned about the condition of the unoccupied Franciscan missions of southern California, which he regarded as cultural treasures ultimately of more value to the State than all her gold mines. His plan to preserve these monuments found opposition from several quarters, much of it arising from the American Protective Association and its anti-Catholic propaganda. To this kind of thinking he angrily replied: "Those mighty piles belong not to the Catholic church but to you and to me, and to our children and the world. They are monuments and beacons of Heroism and Faith and Zeal and Art. Let us save them—not for the Church but for Humanity" (Fisk and Lummis 1975:88). In 1894, Lummis was able to realize his dream with the founding of the Landmarks Club that took as its goal the preservation of the Missions and other historic monuments of California. Eight years later, in 1902, Lummis organized and christened the Sequoya League which was devoted to the welfare of the American Indian. This organization was designed "To make better Indians by treating them better" and included noted scholars such as Frederick Webb Hodge, John Wesley Powell, Washington Matthews, and Alice Cunningham Fletcher. Lummis's determination that Los Angeles should have a museum led to the formation of the Southwest Society in 1903, and his eagerness to improve the city library and its personnel inspired the establishment in 1906 of the Bibliosmiles, a group he referred to as "the best joke of my ulterior decade." This organization started when Lummis went east to attend the 1906 convention of the American Library Association. He noticed a number of bored members of the audience and gathered a dozen of them at his table, where he pointed out that the ALA was far too

serious. Therefore he proposed as a remedy an association of "Librarians Who Are Nevertheless Human," an idea that was readily accepted, and thus the Bibliosmiles were formed "to keep the dust off our own top shelves." The group convened at the annual meetings of the American Library Association and had special signs of membership including a seal, badge, grip, high sign, password, anthem, and, in lieu of dues, a "dew," apricot brandy being selected. The Bibliosmiles and the Los Angeles chapter met yearly until 1920 and was always something of an embarrassment to the American Library Association. Yet even that august organization noted that the Bibliosmiles and their founder made some important contributions (Fisk and Lummis 1975:129).

As the library association he founded demonstrates, Lummis was a character, a fact he recognized and relished. Proudly he boasted about his love of the unconventional:

. . . for 40 years my easy and invariable corduroys and sombrero have reflected independence without rebellion and the conclusion that the clothes and English were made for me and not I for either. I know Academic English and several other Dead Languages—and respect them all too deeply to be their parrot and reverently enough to insist that all my liberties with their crystallization shall be true to type and not pyrites instead of gold.

Certainly no one ever accused Lummis of being a "parrot," for he was truly a unique personality. In dress, as in most other matters, he did exactly as he pleased. At one of his frequent parties, or "noises" as he called them, he usually dressed up in his "charro" suit, a skin-tight riding costume of soft suede worn by the caballeros of Mexico, and at the most formal meetings he would appear in his sombrero and corduroy suit. Such individualism invited criticism, and throughout Lummis's career numerous writers published sneering remarks about his "unusual" dress. Referring to a talk before a ladies club in February of 1904, a reporter for the *Los Angeles Graphic* became irate: "Never before was a body of refined ladies so insulted with his cowboy hat and dirty corduroy suit . . . with the unspeakable odor of perspiration. . . . Perhaps Lummis is so filled with Indian lore that he is acquiring their antipathy for water" (Fisk and Lummis 1975:93-94). A journalist for the *New York Evening Post* dismissed Lummis as "an apparition simply seeking publicity and trading on an outworn tradition." A *Washington Post* writer was kinder in noting that the Californian "is famed not only as a scholar, traveler and writer but as a wearer of clothes so picturesque as to astonish folks . . . last night his raiment was toned down a bit, yet it could be distinctly heard as

far as Baltimore. . . . Mr. Lummis' peculiar dress is his own affair and does not mitigate against his reception in the most cultured homes in the nation. . . he has a fine command of language . . . profound information . . . regarded by competent critics as without peer" (ibid:95).

Eventually Lummis produced a number of folklore books of which the most important now is the slender volume *Spanish Songs of Old California* (1923), a work that has never gone out of print and is still selling more than sixty years after its first publication. This small sample of his vast folksong collection is the only one of Lummis's publications that is not extensively reworked, and also one of the few that does not contain a sermon lecturing readers to "See America First." In one of his first books, *Some Strange Corners of Our Country*, he set the tone for the message he would preach throughout his life:

Other civilized nations take pride in knowing their points of natural and historic interest but when we have pointed to our marvelous growth in population and wealth, we are very largely done and hasten abroad in quest of sights not a tenth part so wonderful as a thousand wonders we have at home and never dream of. . . There is a part of America—even of the United States—of which Americans know as little as they do of inner Africa. [1892a:1-2]

Thereafter in all his publications the thesis never changed and in some cases overshadowed the other purposes of the book, a point that reviewers did not miss. When *The Land of Poco Tiempo* appeared in 1893, various critics overlooked its folklore content to comment on the author's "enchanted descriptions" of New Mexico. Some focussed on Lummis's "curious" linguistic ability, noting that his "language . . . is not our own" and adding that "familiarity has not endeared it to our minds." They found such adjectives as "the roily pulse of the river" and "devoluted donkey" particularly puzzling (Fisk and Lummis 1975:120).

Lummis's folklore interests and publications dealt with what he considered the strange and the oppressed. New Mexico, the "enchanted" land he "discovered" as a young man, which he believed to be a little known and understood part of the United States figured in *A New Mexico David* (1891), *The Land of Poco Tiempo* (1893), *The King of the Broncos* (1897), *The Enchanted Burro* (a book that caused the author some consternation when the jacket appeared with the caption: *The Enchanted Burro Charles F. Lummis*) (1897), and *A Bronco Pegasus* (1929). His second great passion, the American Indian, was considered folklorically in *The Man Who Married the Moon and Other Pueblo Indian Folk-Stories* (1894), a book reprinted sixteen years later

in 1910 as *Pueblo Indian Folk-Stories*, and *The Enchanted Burro*. All of these volumes consist of attempts to convert oral traditions into literary art. Lummis was aware that not all would approve of such "improving" but he offered in defense the argument that "Our notions are far more influenced, in the aggregate, by the local color of fiction than by the cold lines of monographs" (1972:prefatory note).

Although much of Lummis's work consists of touched up materials this is not to deny that there is some wheat among the chaff. In *The Land of Poco Tiempo* he published the first collection of New Mexican folksongs, one that was not surpassed for more than sixty years. As usual, Lummis had some strong opinions regarding both the songs and singers he encountered. Most people were without any "real" understanding of music. In contrast to Californians, New Mexican folksingers came off a dismal second. There were few people with "beautiful" voices and Lummis definitely didn't care for the style of the husky-voiced paisano vocalizers. "He slurs his notes oddly, and is prone to reduplicate them. He sings always *con espresione*, but to him expression has but two devices. The more he is inspired, the higher he clambers after his pitch in falsetto and the more conscientiously nasal he becomes" (1952:166-67). Yet, despite all the marks against them, Lummis confessed that "there is something far from contemptible in the humblest singing of these humble songs of the soil." Moreover, the worst singer always had one saving grace, for "the Mexican is invariably a master of time. His technique may fail at other points, but the tempo is faultless" (ibid:170).

Lummis found love the favorite motive of New Mexican folksongs, which was no surprise to him as it also lay at the bottom of most songs. He also surmised that the total lack of pieces about sheepherding, the life led by most men in New Mexico, could be predicted, for there, as elsewhere, singers like to dwell on subjects more exotic than the harsh realities of everyday life. That there were no indigenous songs dealing with the saddle, the guitar, the dance, and the cigarette was not inexplicable to Lummis since all of these items were commonplace in the territory. Lummis admitted that one song lauding the soothing cigarro did exist in the repertoires of some natives but admitted that he had written it himself in 1889 "to please my paisano friends in return for their patience in teaching me real songs of the soil" (1952:190).

Despite presenting a considerable body of songs and discussing singers in generalities, Lummis spends remarkably little ink discussing specific informants. Those who provided the texts are described only in passing references. From a "tuneful Mexican" who shared a lonely



stage drive of eighty miles in western Arizona he acquired the song "Angel De Amor" (Angel of Love) (1952:168), while a "tattered sixteen-year-old shepherd of San Mateo" contributed "Suzanita" (171). One of the best ballads in his collection came from "two bird-voiced little girls" in the remote village of Cerros Cuates (186). These few glimpses of New Mexican singers entice the reader who wishes more information, but the desire is unfulfilled.

The failure to go beyond generalities in discussing his informants and subjects characterizes the rest of the book. In an essay titled "The City in the Sky" he speaks of the "quaint people" of Acoma although no actual cliff dweller appears in detail; the subject of discussion is merely a typical composite. Only in a consideration of "The Penitent Brothers" is the reader introduced to a real person rather than a hypothetical one. Lummis vividly describes the torture several of the Penitentes inflict upon themselves. He is particularly fascinated by one man, Antonito Montano, a short, stocky man who seemed to take a special delight in self-castigation. During the course of one day this brother absorbed more than two thousand blows of a whip and lay for some time on a bed of thorns. Although young, he was an awesome looking and unforgettable figure. His face had been caved in by a mule and his skull smashed by a soldier in a drunken quarrel but, amazingly, "he is still keen to enjoy such tortures as the most brutal prizefighter never dreamed of" (1952:78).

In a subsequent book, *The Enchanted Burro*, Lummis presented fourteen stories, most about South America but a few about New Mexico. Proudly he skewered library scholars by noting that it was impossible to really know a people or a country without living with the average family, and then added the point that most of the material here came from "episodes I was some part of" for he had gone among these "strange" people and become one of them (1972:preface). Despite this boast, the title story was a legend kept alive by the Pueblos and rewritten by Lummis. The specific source of this narrative is not revealed, but in some portions of the book he gives considerable detail about the context in which he collected stories. He deftly describes the situation when he first heard his friend Don Jose, a hunter from Rio Arriba, tell the legend of "The Witch Deer." He also recalls several encounters with a conjurer he refers to as "The Great Magician" but, generally, his remarks about informants are minimal. This is hardly surprising, for to Lummis the tale, not the teller, was important.

The hero who triumphs against great odds is one of the two major themes that run throughout Lummis's works. In the title story of *A*

*New Mexico David* he recalls the life of Lucario Montoya, who as a youth in 1840 avenged the death of his family by slaying the gigantic Ute Indian who had killed them. This book also recounts the career of Manuel Chaves, a veteran of more than one hundred Indian battles. *The King of the Broncos* deals with several heroic types that Lummis admired and contains very little folklore. These people include a man who survived the bite of the deadly Pichu-cuate by chopping off his hand, and a friend who triumphed over illness and tragedy to become an example for others. Only a legend about "Poh-Hlaik, The Cave Boy", set five hundred years in the past, and an account of a youth known as Baby Bones could make any claim to be folklore.

Magic is the second theme that occurs throughout Lummis's volumes. In *A New Mexican David* he relates a Pueblo legend of "The Enchanted Mesa," a story set in fifteenth-century New Mexico. Repeatedly he returns to the topic of enchantment and witchcraft. The same volume contains an account of Lummis's meeting with "Three Live Witches." *The Enchanted Burro* includes a Pueblo fairy tale rewritten as "Pablo's Deer Hunt," the story of "The Great Magician," and the tale of "The Witch Deer." *The Land of Poco Tiempo* contains no chapters devoted entirely to witchcraft and the like, but Lummis does spend several pages discussing the "irrational" belief of New Mexicans in witches.<sup>6</sup> This preoccupation with enchantment is merely an expression of Lummis's love of the odd and unusual. Nothing could be more strange and unique to him than the blind acceptance of belief in fairies and other supernatural creatures.

Today the bulk of Lummis's work seems dated, but it is noteworthy for reaching readers that otherwise might never have looked at a folklore book. This public was really the only audience he wanted, for he was not so much the scholar as the illuminator of misunderstood things and people; he saw all of his writings "as a fingerboard along the path to comprehension" (Fisk and Lummis 1975:121). His success as an interpreter of the Southwest is due to the fact that he had "lived the life," for none of the people discussed in his publications were known only at second hand. Lummis realized the value of fieldwork and insisted on becoming "one of the family" of any group in which he became interested. If he had any fault in this regard it was that he got too involved with his informants, for he was not content merely to study the Indian, the New Mexican shepherd, or the "charro"—he also had to live their lives. While these experiences certainly gave his books the stamp of authenticity, they also worked against the author, for Lummis the adventurer became far more interesting than any of

his writings, to such an extent that now his own career and personality overshadows all of his publications.

## NOTES

- 1 At a meeting of the American Folklore Society in Austin, Texas, in November, 1972, Richard M. Dorson responded to a question from the audience on why he had not written a history of nineteenth-century American folklore scholarship by saying that "There weren't any American folklorists at that time." Some representative articles and books that illustrate my contention in the sentences above include Bell (1973), Wilgus (1959), Vance (1893), and Dwyer-Shick (1979). Of course, many other works could be cited, but these are sufficient to prove the point.
- 2 See "As I Remember," the handwritten autobiography of Lummis which is on file at the University of Arizona, Tucson, and at the Southwest Museum, Los Angeles. Also quoted in Fisk and Lummis (1975:7).
- 3 See "As I Remember," and Fisk and Lummis (1975:16).
- 4 See "As I Remember," and Fisk and Lummis (1975:20-21).
- 5 See "As I Remember," and Fisk and Lummis (1975:45-46).
- 6 See the first chapter in Lummis (1952).

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# Some Overlooked Aspects of Propp's *Morphology of the Folktale*: A Characterization and a Critique

R O B E R T A. G E O R G E S

Following its translation into English thirty years after its initial publication in Russian, Vladimir Propp's *Morphology of the Folktale* (1958, 2nd ed. 1968) created a noticeable stir in scholarly circles. It stimulated Claude Lévi-Strauss to pursue a multi-decade inquiry into the nature of myth structure (see, e.g., Lévi-Strauss 1964, 1966, 1967), provided Alan Dundes with a model for his doctoral dissertation on North American Indian folktales (Dundes 1964b), and motivated individuals such as Claude Bremond to determine its applicability to analyses of non-Russian *Märchen* (Bremond 1977) and researchers such as Daniel Barnes to explore its relevance for studies of selected literary works (Barnes 1970). In an astonishingly short period of time, folklorists accorded Propp's *Morphology* the status of a classic; and it quickly became one of a small number of works on a folklore form to attract the attention of non-folklorists as well. What was it that made the English translation of Propp's book an "instant hit," and why did it become one of the all-time best-sellers on the American Folklore Society's publication list?

Although one could no doubt advance several hypotheses to account for the immediate success of the English translation of Propp's book, two stand out as being particularly defensible and important. First, the translation of *Morphology of the Folktale* appeared during what W. Nelson Francis has called the "revolution in grammar" (Francis 1954). In the 1950s and '60s, increasing numbers of scholars

joined the ranks of critics of historical and prescriptive approaches to language, arguing instead for a synchronic and descriptive perspective grounded in the systematic analysis of language structure. The growing interest in, and popularity of, structuralism did, indeed, revolutionize language study, resulting in the creation of linguistics as a discipline readily distinguishable from philology, both conceptually and methodologically. Furthermore, as it evolved, linguistics provided a stimulus and model for those in other fields, suggesting by example that intangible phenomena other than language could also be conceptualized and analyzed structurally. Thus, the English translation of Propp's work found a ready audience, for it appeared when structuralism was emerging as a promising analytical mode, not only in investigations of language, but also in the study of other behavioral and cultural phenomena (see, e.g., Piaget 1970 and the essays in Ehrmann 1966 and Laine 1970).

A second—and related—reason for the instant popularity of the *Morphology*, one can posit, is Propp's explicit and incisive critical stance. He begins the book by taking students of *Märchen* to task for their failure to advance inquiry. He scoffs at the prevailing views that collecting must take priority and that generalizations must await the establishment of a more extensive data-base. "It is impossible . . . to say that 'the material already collected is still insufficient,'" he states, adding, "What matters is not the amount of material, but the methods of investigation" (p. 4).<sup>1</sup> Propp accuses researchers of proceeding "according to instinct" (p. 6) and asserts that the preoccupation with trying to classify fairy tales "according to theme leads to total chaos" (p. 7). He admits that Antti Aarne's *Verzeichnis der Märchentypen* (1910) "is important as a *practical reference*" (p. 11, Propp's emphasis), but adds that it is also "dangerous" because it "suggests notions which are essentially incorrect" (p. 11). He asserts that "the problem of classification of the tale finds itself in a somewhat sorry state" and that classification studies "are still in their 'pre-Linnaen' stage" (p. 11). As these characterizations and quotations reveal, Propp does not mince words. By the time his *Morphology* appeared in English translation, enough folklorists had come to share his misgivings about the state of folktale research to bring the book and its author the immediate attention and acclaim both received.

Although Lévi-Strauss' work has replaced Propp's as the principal model and inspiration for an avid, but steadily waning, group of structuralist-oriented researchers, *Morphology of the Folktale* retains its classic status and maintains a place on most folklorists' required reading lists. Propp's discernment and characterization of the

patterning phenomenon in fairy tales and his demonstration that structure is more stable and predictable than content and style continue to ring true and to be borne out by structural studies of narratives and other folklore forms (see, e.g., Dundes 1961, 1962, 1964a, 1964b, 1975, 1976, and Georges and Dundes 1963). Yet despite its obvious historical importance, Propp's book is filled with seldom-noticed and rarely-noted statements that warrant scrutiny and discussion.<sup>2</sup> My purposes in this essay are (1) to characterize selected aspects of Propp's *Morphology* that folklorists either have overlooked or have been reluctant to discuss, and (2) to consider some of their implications.

As is well known, Propp discerns and describes a recurrent structural pattern in *Märchen* consisting of a maximum of thirty-one functions, or acts of the *dramatis personae*. Some of these functions, he indicates, are obligatory, in that they are always present, while others are optional, meaning that they may or may not occur. Because many functions configure into sets, the presence of the first in a set of optional functions makes the other members of the set obligatory. Interdiction, for example, is an optional function in Propp's scheme; but when there is an interdiction—whether it is explicitly stated or implied—it is invariably violated, since, according to Propp, function II ("AN INTERDICTION IS ADDRESSED TO THE HERO," p. 26) and function III ("THE INTERDICTION IS VIOLATED," p. 27) "form a *paired* element" (p. 27, Propp's emphasis). Similarly, if optional function XII, "THE HERO IS TESTED, INTERROGATED, ATTACKED, ETC., WHICH PREPARES THE WAY FOR HIS RECEIVING EITHER A MAGICAL AGENT OR HELPER" (p. 39), is present, then the two functions with which it configures into a set will necessarily follow—that is, function XIII, "THE HERO REACTS TO THE ACTIONS OF THE FUTURE DONOR" (p. 42), and function XIV, "THE HERO ACQUIRES THE USE OF A MAGICAL AGENT" (p. 45).

Propp's distinguishing between obligatory and optional functions and his illustrating how optional functions become obligatory when they configure into sets and when the first member of a set is present are intended to enable one to understand better the readily-apparent conventionality and predictability in fairy tale plots. But the seeming elegance, simplicity, and significance of the patterning Propp describes are considerably lessened when he notes that of the maximum total number of thirty-one functions, only a single pair is really always obligatory—*either* function VIII, "THE VILLAIN CAUSES HARM OR INJURY TO A MEMBER OF A FAMILY," *or* function VIIIa.,

"ONE MEMBER OF A FAMILY EITHER LACKS SOMETHING OR DESIRES TO HAVE SOMETHING," and function XIX, "THE INITIAL MISFORTUNE OR LACK IS LIQUIDATED." If, in fact, a story needs to have inherent in it only a single pair of functions in order for it to be identifiable as a *Märchen*, then Propp's scheme cannot be regarded as one that defines the fairy tale and distinguishes it from all other phenomena, which is what he indicates he has accomplished. As Dundes has illustrated, for example, narratives other than *Märchen*, and even such non-narrative phenomena as superstitions, can be shown to be built on a lack/liquidated pattern, demonstrating that that pair of functions is not unique to fairy tales, as Propp implies (see, e.g., Dundes 1963, 1964b).

The waters are muddied further when Propp finally presents his structural definition of the *Märchen*: "Morphologically," he writes, "a tale (*skázka*) may be termed any development proceeding from villainy (A) or a lack (a), through intermediary functions to marriage (W\*), or to other functions employed as a *dénouement*" (p. 92). Noticeably missing from this definition is any mention of the need for liquidation, a function that Propp earlier states is always paired with villainy or lack. One might infer that Propp does not mention the second member of the obligatory pair because he assumes it is implied by mention of the first member of the set. But it is difficult to be certain of this, particularly since Propp later states, "A (villainy) or a (lack) are the only . . . obligatory elements" (p. 102, my emphasis). Moreover, if all functions other than lack or villainy—or the pair villainy or lack and liquidation of the initial misfortune or lack—are optional, then what are the "intermediary functions" and "other functions" that Propp mentions in his definition? He specifies neither number nor kind, leading a reader to infer that for a tale to be identified as a *Märchen*, it need have only a lack or a villainy and some other functions; and such a definition is obviously neither very specific nor very satisfying.

Late in the *Morphology*, Propp offers a second definition of the fairy tale, which further clouds the matter about the obligatoriness of functions in *Märchen*: "The stability of construction of fairy tales," he writes, "permits a hypothetical *definition* of them which may be stated in the following way: a fairy tale is a story built upon the proper alternation of the above-cited functions [i.e., his list of all thirty-one functions] in various forms, with some of them absent from each story and with others repeated" (p. 99, Propp's emphasis). No mention is made here of the necessity for the presence of a villainy or a lack, either by itself or in combination with what Propp elsewhere describes as its "paired element," liquidation. Furthermore, this second



definition of the fairy tale is even more vague and imprecise than the first, as such word groups as "*proper* alternation," "in *various* forms," "with *some* of them absent," and "with *others* repeated" clearly reveal. While the first definition indicates that at least one of two functions—villainy or lack—is always obligatory, the second one reveals that no *specific* functions need be present in *Märchen* at all!

Propp is also inconsistent in his discussion of function sequencing. Early in the *Morphology* he states, "The sequence of functions is always identical," noting that "by no means do all tales give evidence of all functions," but insisting that the "absence of certain functions does not change the order of the rest" (p. 22). Propp reveals his surprise at having discovered, early on in his research, this fixity in the sequencing of functions ("This is, of course, a completely unexpected result," p. 22); and he repeatedly reiterates its inviolability and importance:

What conclusions does this scheme present? In the first place, it affirms our general thesis regarding the total uniformity in the construction of fairy tales.

This most important general conclusion at first does not coincide with our conception of the richness and variety of tales.

As has already been indicated, this conclusion appeared quite unexpectedly. It was an unexpected one for the author of this work as well. This phenomenon is so unusual and strange that one somehow feels a desire to dwell upon it, prior to going on to more particular, formal conclusions. Naturally, it is not our business to interpret this phenomenon; our job is only to state the fact itself. Yet one still feels inclined to pose this question: if all fairy tales are so similar in form, does this not mean that they all originate from a single source? The morphologist does not have the right to answer this question. At this point he hands over his conclusions to a historian or should himself become a historian. [pp. 105-06]

Despite this repeated emphasis on structural "uniformity," it soon becomes apparent that the sequence of functions is not so fixed and inviolable as Propp asserts, for he illustrates that sets of functions can be—and frequently are—transposed. "In comparing a large number of tales," he writes at one point, "it becomes apparent . . . that the elements peculiar to the *middle* of the tale are sometimes *transferred to the beginning* . . ." (p. 36, Propp's emphasis). Elsewhere, he states, "The assertion concerning absolute stability would seem to be unconfirmed by the fact that the sequence of functions is not always the same as that shown in the total scheme. A careful examination of the schemes will show certain deviations" (p. 107). Propp admits to the occasional presence of such "transpositions" or "transformations," as he alternately calls them; but he also tends to dismiss them, as the following quotation reveals:

All of these deviations do not alter the deduction concerning the typological unity and morphological kinship of fairy tales. These are only fluctuations and not a new compositional system or new axes. There are certain cases, as well, of direct violations. In isolated tales the violations are rather significant . . . , but a closer examination will reveal these to be humorous tales. A transposition of this kind, accompanying the transformation of a poem into a farce, must be recognized as the result of dissolution. [p. 108]

The sequencing of functions that Propp initially insists is fixed and inviolable in fairy tales, then, turns out to be ideal rather than real, even insofar as the selected *Märchen* he presents and analyzes structurally in the *Morphology* are concerned.

One could, of course, excuse these inconsistencies and contradictions by attributing them to Propp's careless rhetoric or to the translator's imprecision. One could, as well, dismiss them as being relatively insignificant, arguing that the real contribution of *Morphology of the Folktale* is that Propp succeeds in describing a pattern of actions that not only recurs in *Märchen*, but that also defines the form and differentiates fairy tales from all other phenomena. Yet while he is explicitly self-congratulatory about his success in defining the *Märchen* as a distinctive category of phenomena and in doing so "scientifically" rather than intuitively as he judges others to have tried unsuccessfully to do, Propp makes assertions which indicate that the structure he characterizes throughout the bulk of his book as being unique to *Märchen* is actually not really found only in fairy tales at all, but that it is also discernible in other kinds of narratives as well. At one point, for example, he states that "non-fairy tales may also be constructed according to the scheme cited," adding, "Quite a large number of legends, individual tales about animals, and isolated novellas display the same structure" (p. 99). At another point he states, "If tales of this class [i.e., *Märchen*] are defined from a historical point of view, they then merit the antique, now discarded, name of mythical tales" (p. 100). Moreover, Propp's structural connection between myth and fairy tale is made even more explicit when he notes:

From the historical point of view, this signifies that the fairy tale in its morphological bases represents a myth. We fully realize that, from the point of view of contemporary scholarship, we are expressing a totally heretical idea. This idea has been considerably discredited by adherents of the mythological school. On the other hand, this idea has such strong supporters as Wundt, and now we are coming to it by way of morphological analysis. [p. 90]

Myth comes up again later in the *Morphology*; and Propp's words are worth quoting in full:

It might also be pointed out that a similar construction is displayed by a number of very archaic myths, some of which present this structure in an amazingly pure form. Evidently this is the realm back to which the tale may be traced. On the other hand, the very same structure is exhibited, for example, by certain novels of chivalry. This is very likely a realm which itself may be traced back to the tale. [p. 100]

By noting that the structure inherent in fairy tales is also discernible in such other kinds of narratives as legends, novellas, "novels of chivalry," and myths, Propp seems to discredit the very thesis he sets out to develop and prove: that *Märchen* constitute a distinctive kind or category of narrative and that their distinctiveness is demonstrable on the basis of the uniqueness of their structure.

There are numerous other examples of inconsistency and self-contradiction in Propp's *Morphology* (some of which are discussed in such works as Taylor 1964:121-27 and Nathhorst 1969:16-29). Let me mention just two more related matters. First, despite his criticisms of other folktale scholars and his self-proclaimed effort to make the study of *Märchen* more "scientific"—and hence, from his point of view, more objective and respectable—Propp is actually more indebted to, and dependent on, works and views he criticizes or dismisses than he is willing to admit. He is critical of Aarne's type-index, for instance, because of its thematic bases. "Clear-cut division into types does not actually exist," he states, adding that "very often it is a fiction. If types do exist," he continues, "they exist not on the level indicated by Aarne, but on the level of the structural features of similar tales . . ." (p. 11). Yet when he describes his method and material, Propp states, "The existence of fairy tales as a special class is assumed as an essential working hypothesis. By 'fairy tales' are meant at present those tales classified by Aarne under numbers 300 to 749" (p. 19, my emphasis). Thus, despite his insistence that "the division [of *Märchen*] according to theme leads to total chaos" and that "the division of fairy tales according to themes is, in general, impossible" (p. 7), Propp uses Aarne's theme-based index to define his data corpus and to determine what kinds of tales to analyze structurally. In addition, his rejection of theme-based tale types does not deter him from noting, at several points, that the fairy tale which comes closest to embodying the overall structure he discerns and describes is, in fact, the first story that Aarne includes in the subdivision of his index of which Propp makes use—that is, Type 300, *The Dragon Slayer*. Writes Propp:

Were we able to unfold the picture of transformations, it would be possible to satisfy ourselves that all the tales given can be morphologically deduced from the tales about the kidnapping of a princess by a dragon—from that form which we are inclined to consider as basic. [p. 114]

A theme-based tale type, then, becomes the proto-narrative structurally for all fairy tales, despite Propp's dislike both of tale types based on themes and of Aarne's index of such tale types.

While Propp criticizes theme-based types and Aarne's index of them, he does not reject the tale-type *concept*, as attested by his repeated utilization of the word *type* throughout the *Morphology*. But he is neither clear nor consistent in his use of the term. At times, Propp seems to equate type with genre, as is the case, for instance, when he states, "All fairy tales are of one type in regard to their structure" (p. 25). Implicit in this assertion are the notions that the only defensible conclusions one can draw about *Märchen*, based on the nature of their structure, is that they are all *Märchen* and that further subdivision by type is impossible, at least on structural grounds. At another point, however, Propp takes a different stance when he states:

Tales with *identical functions* can be considered as belonging to one type. On this foundation, an *index of types* can then be created, *based* not upon theme features, which are somewhat vague and diffuse, but *upon exact structural features*. If we further compare structural *types* among themselves, we are led to the following completely unexpected phenomenon: functions cannot be distributed around mutually exclusive axes. [p. 22, my emphasis]

Later in the *Morphology*, Propp adds to the confusion concerning his conception of type when he discusses tales containing two pairs of functions: (1) XVI, "THE HERO AND THE VILLAIN JOIN IN DIRECT COMBAT," and XVIII, "THE VILLAIN IS DEFEATED," and (2) XXV, "A DIFFICULT TASK IS PROPOSED TO THE HERO," and XXVI, "THE TASK IS RESOLVED." Since *Märchen* can contain either, both, or neither of these sets of paired functions, Propp notes, their absence or their presence singly or together reveal the existence of "four types of tales" (p. 103). "Does this not contradict our assertion concerning the complete uniformity of all fairy tales?" asks Propp (p. 103). He states that it does not, noting that each of these pairs of functions is found in only one move of multi-move tales and that when both are present, the fight and its paired function always occur in the first, and the task and its paired function appear only in the second, move. Hence, what seem like four types structurally are really only two types, according to Propp. "It is quite possible," he speculates, "that two types existed historically, that each has its own history, and that in some remote epoch the two traditions met and merged into one formation" (p. 103). He adds, "But in speaking about Russian fairy tales we are compelled to say that today this is one tale, to which all tales of our class are traced" (pp. 103-4).

It is obviously confusing, if not actually ambiguous or even contradictory, to characterize *Märchen* as all being "of one type in regard to their structure" while at the same time asserting that only "tales with identical functions" can belong to "one type" and that an index of multiple fairy tale types can be created, since fairy tales can differ in type because different sets of tales are distinguishable from each other on the basis of the combinations of the specific functions they exhibit.

Given the nature and number of ambiguities, inconsistencies, and contradictions in Propp's book, one is understandably motivated to ask whether *Morphology of the Folktale* is as important or significant a work as many judge it to be. Does it deserve to be accorded the status of a "classic," and should the book be included on folklorists' required reading lists?

The answers to such questions will necessarily vary, depending on the interests and biases of the respondents and the evaluative criteria they judge to be most important. From those who place greater value on effort than on achievement, the *Morphology* will undoubtedly receive high marks. Propp attempts to make the study of fairy tales multidimensional and more analytic by demonstrating the possibility and value of distinguishing conceptually among structure, content, and style and by illustrating that it would seem to be structure that accounts for the fairy tale's "striking uniformity" and "repetition," while content and style are responsible for its "amazing multiformity, picturesqueness, and color . . ." (p. 21). For those who value achievement over effort, on the other hand, the *Morphology* will, understandably, not fare well. Propp does not carry out the objectives that he sets for himself and that he repeatedly states he has achieved. He neither provides an "exact description" (p. 15) of the *Märchen* that he feels a structural analysis makes possible, nor does he demonstrate that "fairy tales possess a *quite particular* structure which is immediately felt and which determines their category" (p. 6, my emphasis). He purports to depart conceptually and analytically in his pursuits from the paths taken by his predecessors and contemporaries, who, he claims "have proceeded according to instinct" and whose "words do not correspond to what they have actually sensed" (p. 6). But he is dependent on the fruits of the labors of those he criticizes (particularly Aarne's) to advance his own position; and he shares many of the same assumptions and concepts—e.g., that myth preceded *Märchen* in time, with fairy tales being modeled after, or derived from, myths; that *Märchen* have deteriorated with the passage of time and their movement through space; that fairy tales contain "very little pertaining to [modern-day] everyday life" (p. 106).<sup>3</sup>

*Morphology of the Folktale* has inspired many, and will no doubt stimulate others in years to come, principally because of Propp's aspirations and his critical stance. It seems unlikely, however, that the work will be able to retain its status as a classic and maintain its position on required reading lists once folklorists study and analyze it more systematically and critically, and once they come to realize that the book's ambiguities, inconsistencies, and contradictions—selected ones of which I have characterized and discussed in this brief essay—are too numerous and significant to excuse or dismiss.

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> This and all subsequent page references provided parenthetically throughout the essay are to the second (1968) edition of the English translation of Propp's work.
- <sup>2</sup> While an overwhelming majority of folklorists who mention or discuss Propp's *Morphology* are positive and often even reverential in their remarks, some have also been critical. See, for instance, Lévi-Strauss 1960, Fischer 1963:288-89, Taylor 1964:121-27, and Nathhorst 1969:16-29.
- <sup>3</sup> For further discussion and exemplification of the pervasiveness of early folktale scholars' concepts and assumptions in the work of their successors, see Georges 1986.

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## Antti Aarne's Tales with Magic Objects

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Stith Thompson's book *The Folktale* has for forty years been the principal English-language source of American folklorists' and literary historians' knowledge of oral tales. Thompson accepted the ideas of Kaarle Krohn, who developed the historic-geographic method for the study of folktales. Krohn put other people to work (including both Thompson and Antti Aarne) testing *his* predecessors' sweeping statements concerning the place of origin of many or all folktales. Impressive amounts of data were gathered to determine whether a certain tale could be shown to have originated in any particular region, and what its paths of dissemination had been. For some tales, where all the evidence points in the same direction, these conclusions are convincing even today. For others, the authors may try to reach back into a hoary antiquity beyond the available evidence, and I for one become skeptical. It was the intellectual fashion at that time to search for and to accept *origins* as being the ultimate (perhaps I should say primary) explanation of phenomena. The historic-geographic conclusions as to the original form and place of origin always are a heuristic device that simplifies a lot of complicated data, "so," as Thompson says, "one can secure a comprehensive view of the whole tradition" of a tale (1946:440). Intellectual fashion now prefers ahistorical, dynamic, process-oriented explanations. Fortunately, the tale studies' presentation of their considerable data is also useful for this kind of analysis. One has to sift carefully through the material and pick out the relevant details.

In *The Folktale*, Thompson generally provides a plot summary of each tale type, and answers when possible the questions of when? and



where? He presents only a couple of studies in more detail (24-32, 432-433). He tells very little about any of Aarne's studies. In part this is justified by their naiveté: they do present overly simplistic notions about the relationship of variants to an Ur-form, and are careless in reporting the composition of each individual variant. Nevertheless, Aarne's studies, as they describe and analyze many variants, are full of information relevant to the folklorist's perpetual interest, stability and variation in tradition. Aarne was a hard worker, who set himself a project, worked on it, finished it, and went on to the next project. He created the original index of tale types (*Verzeichnis der Märchentypen* 1910). His *Übersicht der Märchenliteratur* (1914) proves that he was a careful bibliographer (Krohn 1926). I think he completed thorough studies of more tales than anyone else ever has. Working as he did on the formation of the concept of the tale type, Aarne was a pioneer in a field where Thompson became an adherent. Many of Aarne's discoveries have been overlooked in the intervening years. Space limitation here restricts me to only a few of his studies. I chose "tales with magic objects" because these complex tales have enough variables to show both how such tales can change, and how they can remain fixed.

In *The Folktale* (440-443), Thompson discusses some then-recent objections to the historic-geographic method. The gist of his reply is that "things are better now," more or less allowing that earlier the objections would or might have been valid. Walter Anderson's *Kaiser und Abt* is singled out as an example of a tale study that properly takes into account many old literary variants of the tale. Though he does not find so many as Anderson did, Aarne gives old examples that are given full weight. Two sources that appear repeatedly in the studies discussed below are the Mongolian *Siddi-Kür* with its suggestion of Indian origin (Cosquin 1913:1-11) and Basile's *Pentamerone*. The *Pentamerone* (1634-1636; Penzer 1932) establishes a *terminus ante quem* for the genre of the European magic tale, but, often surprisingly, not necessarily for the tale types as they exist in recent oral tradition.<sup>1</sup> Thompson credits C. W. von Sydow and his students with the idea of studying groups of related tales. Aarne did this too: he displayed pairs or sets of tale types that follow a similar outline and share a significant idea or episode. Within each pair, one tale may be distinctly European and the other tale (which may be found in Europe, too) be Asiatic. The European form will have an apparent center of dissemination in that region, and will have stylistic traits later described by Max Lüthi as characteristic of European folktales. Thompson's praise of the living did an injustice to the dead. While specific additions or

emendations are always appropriate, Aarne's tale studies need no general apology.

AT 563, *The Table, the Ass, and the Stick*

AT 564, *The Magic Providing Purse and Out, Boy, of the Sack*

(Aarne 1911)

Although it comes from sixth-century China, the oldest version of AT 564 is typical of modern versions which are found in Europe, Asia, and Africa. A poor man gives offerings to a religious man, and receives from him a jar that will produce anything he wants—but he must not tell the king. He grows rich and invites the king to be his guest. The king takes the jar. The hero goes back to the religious man who gives him a vase that produces attacking sticks and stones, which he is to give to the king. The contents kill the king's men, and the king returns the jar. The hero becomes rich and does good deeds (Chavannes 1962).<sup>2</sup> The frame here is moralistic, and there are two contrasting episodes within it.

*The Table, the Ass, and the Stick* (AT 563) is a more popular tale, found throughout the same Old World region. The strong contrasts in AT 564—the rich and poor men (who in oral tradition are often brothers), the similar containers with opposite contents—are weakened. The motifs in their place are more like those characteristic of wonder tales: the adventures take place away from home (at an inn); the magic gifts are trebled rather than doubled; the self-laying cloth and the gold-dropping donkey are more precise than the all-providing jar. Although in Asia AT 563 has neighbors instead of an innkeeper, the inn and the trebled objects are the crucial distinctions between the two tales. They bring *The Table, the Ass, and the Stick* completely out of the realm of supernatural legend and into that of humorous fantasy. The two tales are oikotypes, cousins which have been subjected to changes in different generic directions.

Because they are so similar and are known throughout a common region, AT 563 and AT 564 share introductory episodes. A poor man asks his rich brother for meat and is given some, and told to "go to the devil"—which he does, and the devil gives the jar in payment for the meat. Or the poor man's crops are spoiled by the weather and he goes directly to Frost or to the Wind to complain. These introductions are regional, and occur in both tales. They are markedly humorous, in that the poor man takes one or another figure of speech literally and profits from this foolishness. Aarne was frustrated that the episode of going to the devil does not seem to occur as a separate tale (80-82). It is, however, an ancient motif. In Aristophanes' come-

dy *The Birds* (lines 27-29) two con men "go to the crows," where the phrase means "get lost," and find those birds quite helpful. Like the man in the folktale, they take a figure of speech literally and profit therefrom. The humor in the episode as it appears in AT 563-4 is of a piece with the slapstick humor in the rich brother's (or innkeeper's) beating.

In the Mongolian *Siddi-Kür*, a poor man takes a magic-providing sack from forest spirits in a cave. His rich brother copies him, and the spirits, thinking it was he who stole the sack, tie knots in his nose. The rich man has to use a hammer to remove the knots (Jülg 1973:139-47, no.14). The misunderstanding is that found in *Ali Baba* (AT 676); the knotted nose reminds us of the hump back in *The Gifts of the Little People* (AT 503). There are elements of AT 564 here, but the differences are also significant. In the *Pentamerone*, a tale with two brothers and two gifts (chest and flail) would seem to be AT 564, but the action takes place at an inn, the location usually associated with AT 563 (day 5, tale 2). Aarne remarked that when the rich brother begs the pardon of the poor brother, that is Basile's touch. There is also a typical version of AT 563 in the *Pentamerone* (day 1, tale 1).

Along with these tales, Aarne investigated a tale from northern Europe, *The Magic Mill* (AT 565). All three tales share a common structure: the hero obtains a magic object, the villain steals it (or uses it improperly), and the object or its double punishes the villain. These tales discuss poverty and abundance, and the magic-producing objects tie the episodes together into a coherent entity. Some of the changes from the sixth-century Chinese version make the tale more economical: the two brothers instead of a man and a king; riches as its own reward instead of as a means to do good. Others make it more fanciful: the comical source of the gifts; the tablecloth and donkey in place of the pot. In the introductory episodes with the bacon or the spoiled crops, the poor man's poverty, in the specific form of a lack of food, is made apparent. All these variations testify to a desire to make the story more interesting. Aarne thought that the form with the three objects was perhaps the original (77). If this be the case (which I doubt), then, in the change from three to two magic objects, greater symmetry and simplicity were achieved. Alterations are experiments at making a good tale better, but the meaning of "better" is certainly regional.

AT 560 *The Magic Ring*AT 561 *Aladdin* (Aarne 1908:1-82)

A man buys a cat and a dog who would have been killed. He saves a snake or its son from fire, or from a dangerous opponent, or pays their debts. In return for this help, the snake gives him a magic ring (or stone or lamp). (In Finland and Russia, the role of the snake may go to a frog, a dead man, or a devil.) With the ring he obtains a castle and marries a king's daughter. In Europe, she steals the magic ring and castle and disappears; in Asia a villain steals the wife, the ring, and the castle. The cat and dog, with the help of a mouse and the hindrance of a fish, retrieve the ring for the hero. The cat causes a mouse to steal the ring from the thief as he sleeps. On their return, the cat rides on the back of the dog as he swims. The cat opens his mouth and the ring, falling out, is swallowed by a fish. The cat again recovers the ring and delivers it to its owner. The hero uses the ring to recover his wife and castle. If there is a separate villain, he is punished; if the wife is the villain, she may either be forgiven or be put to death.

The nature of the connection of the helpful animals with the magic ring tale is central to an understanding of this tale type. The variant in the *Siddi-Kür* has both parts (Aarne 1908:72-74). Aarne decided on an Asiatic origin for this Helpful Animals plus Magic Ring tale (AT 560), which is seldom complete in western Europe. *Aladdin* (AT 561), with the famous lamp in place of the ring, has no helpful animals (61-71). A late addition to the Arabian Nights, that tale has only a handful of oral variants (Ranke 1977); of those, many (in Aarne's study, ten of 17) are mixed with AT 560. In the *Pentamerone* there are two relevant tales, one of AT 560 with the magic ring and a helpful mouse (but no dog or cat) (day 4 tale 1), and the other with the dog, cat, and mouse, but no magic ring (day 3 tale 5). The helpful dog and cat are found in three-quarters (108 out of 144) of Aarne's variants. An important question not yet answered is, to what extent are these two independent tales (as they are in the *Pentamerone*) that have formed a stable combination in the East? Does the *Magic Ring* tale have two forms, a short one without the animals and a long one with them? Is there a separate Helpful Animals tale or episode?

The Magic Ring part alone discusses sexuality: adultery, infidelity, or rape. The helpful animals divert the interest, focusing the suspense on the mechanics of the recovery of the ring. In the combined tale, the Magic Ring episodes provide the motivation for the loss and recovery of the ring. But even so, other tales or episodes could have been employed to serve this purpose. The Magic Ring and the

Helpful Animals share a hero who is kind to animals, and who is helped in return. Basile's tales suggest that they may also share the helpful mouse. There is also repeated regurgitation of the ring (by the thief, who hides it in his mouth, the cat, who carries it in his, and the fish). These are the points of contact that give the episodes such affinity. Complex tales can derive stability from episodes that reiterate ideas.

AT 567, *The Magic Bird Heart* (Aarne 1908:143-200)

A man buys a magic hen that lays golden eggs, and grows rich by selling them. When he is away, a clerk learns that whoever eats the bird's head will become a lord and whoever eats her heart (or entrails) will find a piece of gold under his pillow every day. The clerk induces the owner's wife to order the bird killed, but instead of the clerk the owner's two sons eat the head and heart. Knowing that eating the sons will restore the magic properties to himself, the clerk tries to kill them but fails. (Sometimes an animal is killed in their place.) The son who ate the head becomes a lord. The other, with the golden coins, meets a girl and marries her. (Now for the second part). Helped by an old woman, the girl causes him to vomit the heart. He obtains magic grass (or fruit) that turns her into an ass (or makes horns grow on her head). She returns the heart and he restores her to human form. The clerk and the mother may be punished.

Aarne pursued a number of details in search of their original forms. At the outset, he thought, the buying of the bird was suggested by the sale of the eggs. Often the clerk learns about the bird's magic properties from a note hidden under its wing; Aarne thought that this was a later addition not originally in the tale. In about a fifth of the variants, dogs are killed in place of the sons. These precise details, not really necessary to the plot, are quite common. Their presence makes Aarne's goal of determining the details of the original form of the tale seem almost feasible. Extraneous, deceitful women can appear in both parts: the clerk acts in collusion with the treacherous wife of the bird's owner, and a scheming old woman often assists the wife of the second son. Eating the bird's head or heart enhances the lives of the sons; eating the magic grass disrupts the plan of the second son's wife. Other details are regional: in the Slavic countries and in Finland, the second son spits out the gold pieces, analogous to his having swallowed the heart and later vomiting it. (The substitution of the bird's entrails for its heart also reflects the vomiting.) The plot to kill the sons (a motif that repeats the killing of the bird) is absent in Mediterranean Europe.

There are two parts to this tale, the clerk's intrigue and the adventures of the gold-sleeper. The first part has next to no hero, only a villain and his victims. Aarne (182) and Krohn (1931:45-47) discussed whether the second part might be a later addition to the tale. The variant in the *Siddi-Kur* has both parts. The second part has been influenced by the similar tale of *The Three Magic Objects and the Wonderful Fruits* (AT 566), which makes its "original form" difficult to discover. Original or not, the second part sticks to the first because it repeats both the treachery against the owner of the magic bird (heart), and the magic effects that eating something can have on one's person.

AT 566, *The Three Magic Objects and the Wonderful Fruits*

Three men each receive a magic object: a travelling cape, a gold-producing purse, and a horn that can send forth an army. A princess or dragon steals the objects. One of the men obtains an apple that causes horns to grow and another that removes them. He tricks the princess into eating the apple, and she has to return the three magic objects so that he will remove her horns.

In western Europe, three enchanted girls give the magic objects, and the villain is able to steal them because the hero showed them off. In Finland and in Russia, the devil gives the objects and the hero loses them in a card game. In southern Europe and in Egypt, dates, figs, or grapes replace the apples. Many of the motifs are oriental, but the tale as a whole is definitely European, with its best form in western Europe (see also Uther 1987). In *The Folkale* (1946:74) Thompson complains that the tale is poorly motivated, and that the enchanted girls and the extra two comrades are left dangling.

Occurrences in this tale correspond directly to those in *The Magic Bird Heart*. The girl who steals the magic objects is the strongest point of similarity. Most of the other details differ, even as if the gory *Bird Heart* tale had been consciously rewritten into a typical European magic tale. The introductory domestic melodrama with the clerk is replaced by soldiers and lovely girls, trebled. The mistaken eating of the bird becomes three gifts. The blood and guts are replaced by three discrete objects. Vomiting the heart becomes a clean theft. In both tales the shape of the girl's punishment comes out of earlier motifs. In *The Magic Bird Heart*, her donkey form corresponds to the animal form of the hen; her horns (in *The Three Magic Objects*) correspond to the magic horn that contains the army. The donkey ears on the one girl match the horns on the other. *The Three Magic*

*Objects* is a string of clichés from the genre of the European magic tale. Max Lüthi (1984) has pointed out the artistic device of tripling and the qualities of typical magic objects that appear in European wonder tales; Vladimir Propp's *Morphology* documents many typical villainies and "donors." The tale of *The Three Magic Objects* hardly ever occurs in less than its full form (18 of 143 variants). It is sometimes mixed with *The Magic Bird Heart* (33 variants), and the horns and apples are found in the second part of both tales. This proves that the narrators of the tales recognized their similarity.

AT 313, *The Girl as Helper in the Hero's Flight*

AT 314, *The Youth Transformed into a Horse* (Aarne 1930)

Most tale studies demonstrate the existence of a tale type, and prove that the tale exists (in its repeated variants) independently of other tales. This does not mean that it never mixes with other tales, either in isolated examples or in traditional combinations, nor that it never borrows details from other sources. But it does mean that it is easy to understand the tale as a discrete entity. Many tale types are easily described as a group of subtypes that all relate to a common (perhaps hypothetical) archetype. Most of Aarne's studies confirmed this idea of the tale type as a simplifying display of many variants. This concept was developed by Krohn and his successors as a tool for studying folktales. Studies in the historic-geographic tradition amply demonstrate its usefulness. But even in tale study, a single tool is not appropriate for all jobs, and in *The Magic Flight* Aarne encountered tales that, if they can be said to belong to tale types at all, demand a different idea of the tale type. In the course of this paper I have been moving away from an origin-oriented tale type, into one bound together by internal forces. This latter position brings a change in perspective that gives a clearer view of *The Magic Flight* in European tradition.

Aarne, Krohn, and Thompson all agreed that in Europe there are primarily two tales, with a lot of extra material annexed from other tales. The two tales have also borrowed from each other, back at least as far as the eleventh century. I think it significant that Aarne's study of *The Magic Flight* was published posthumously. Perhaps he was not really finished with it. He cannot have failed to see that this study is less satisfactory than his earlier ones. Actually the *study* is not so bad (although it lacks careful coding of variants): it is the *material* that shows no respect for order.

The outline of the Magic Flight in *The Types of the Folktale* follows Aarne's monograph:

Transformation Fight: The hero, in the ogre's power, is helped by the ogre's daughter. As they flee together, she transforms them into a garden and tree, church and priest, water and duck, etc. They escape.

Obstacle Fight: The hero, in the ogre's service, is helped by a horse. As they flee, they throw small objects that change into obstacles (mountain, forest, sea). They escape.

On the side of stability, it must be allowed that these sketches fit most of Aarne's material. He found 289 variants of the Transformation Fight, plus more from Finland and Estonia (p. 103). Of the Obstacle Fight, he found 69 variants, 13 (with more from Finland and Estonia) with animals other than a horse as helper, and 49 more with a girl as helper, and 46 more with the hero alone (50-52).<sup>3</sup>

Aarne pointed out that the girl as helper is appropriate with the transformation sequence, where both the characters and the magic objects into which they are transformed, come in pairs (45). The simultaneous transformations of the fugitives also demonstrate the girl's closeness to the hero. The horse that is so swift is appropriate to the obstacles that obstruct the villain's pursuit. Aarne decided that the Obstacle Fight was the original form, and that the Transformation Fight was a variant of that. He thought furthermore that all helpers were late additions, that originally the tale had only the hero, the villain, and the obstacles. This shifting of units from episode to tale is disconcerting. The situation with regard to whole tales is very complicated.

AT 314, *The Youth Transformed into a Horse*. Other episodes and tales that are important to AT 314 include the Service to the Devil (How is it motivated?); the Enchanted Horse (who helps the hero); Goldenhair (the hero breaks a prohibition and his hair turns to gold, which later causes a princess to fall in love with him); and Winning the Princess through Tests. Aarne's investigations into these other episodes yielded only negative results, making this part of the tale study rather unsatisfying. He was interested only in whether any of these motifs were original to the Magic Flight tale, and the answer is always No. They all belong to tales of helpful horses, AT 502 *The Wild Man* (Grimms' "The Iron Man") and AT 530-533. Aarne analyzed only those variants with the Magic Flight episode, which is insufficient for a good description of the Helpful Horse tales. His repeated assessment that all these episodes—the Helpful Horse, Goldenhair, Winning the Princess—and also the other episode (Service to the Devil) that is associated with other tales besides the Helpful Horse tales, are "later additions," is annoying, but it makes sense in terms of his attempt to find the original form of *The Magic Flight*.



Put correctly, the Obstacle Flight episode has associated itself with the Helpful Horse tales, where it demonstrates the horse's abilities, his cleverness, his power, and his speed.

AT 313, *The Girl as Helper in the Hero's Flight*. Aarne found several times as many variants of this tale as he did of AT 314. Boy Meets Girl is evidently more popular than Boy Meets Horse. Of 289 variants, most (229) have, in addition to the Transformation Flight, an episode of Son-in-Law Tasks, in which the ogre sets impossible tasks for the hero and the ogre's daughter helps him accomplish them. This rendering of help occurs in both the Tasks and the Flight episodes; it gives the girl's character consistency and is undoubtedly important to the continuing association of these episodes. A variant with these tasks from eleventh-century India, part of Somadeva's *Ocean of Story* (book 7 chapter 39), is exactly like modern tales—except that it has both versions of the Magic Flight, the Obstacle Flight as well as the Transformation Flight (book 7 chapter 39, Penzer 1924, III:222-239). Several of the most common Son-in-Law Tasks use images from the Magic Flight: chopping down a forest recalls the forest that grows magically, and taming a wild horse brings in the horse from AT 314. Plowing, sowing, and reaping all come out of cutting down the forest. Sorting grain and choosing the bride from among her sisters echo each other and play upon the fleeing couple whom the villain does not recognize when they are transformed. The less common tasks of building a church or a garden, or drinking the sea, repeat images from the Transformation Flight. The variations found in the specifics of the tasks imply that oral-formulaic principles are at work: the tale requires tasks, so a narrator chooses a few from a repertoire. But yet it is striking that the very tasks in Somadeva's tale are so common in oral European tales.

Another episode that frequently appears with the Son-in-Law Tasks and the Magic Flight is the Swanmaidens. This is a floating introduction that attaches itself to several tales. It provides a supernatural pedigree for the girl in AT 313. Her swan form foreshadows the transformation of the hero and heroine into a duck and water, during the Transformation Flight. Sometimes the couple flee in the form of birds, a detail which Aarne (48-49) thought came out of the Swan-maiden motif.

Several alternative introductions account for why the hero is in the ogre's service. He or his father often has made a bargain with the ogre. One, from eastern Europe, more complicated than most, says that "after war of birds and quadrupeds (Type 222) a wounded eagle is cared for by a man. Eagle gives man box not to be opened until he

arrives at home. Man disobeys and castle appears. Man must get help of ogre to close box and must promise ogre his unborn son (Type 537)" (Thompson 1964 Type 313 I d, cf. 313B). This introduction foreshadows the Magic Flight. The castle that comes from a box is like the mountain that grows from a stone, or the church that is really a fugitive. The ogre who closes the box parallels the sweetheart who helps the hero accomplish impossible tasks. Other introductions are simpler: the ogre grabs a man's beard as he drinks (magic water as in the Magic Flight), and will not let go until the man promises his son (this is mainly Slavic); or the service may settle a gambling debt. Even more so than the tasks, the reason for the ogre's power over the hero is very much a pick-and-choose proposition, with a strong regional influence.

During the Transformation Flight itself, throughout Europe, there is often a formulaic conversation. The villain asks the person into whom the hero or heroine has been transformed, whether he has seen anyone running past, and the reply is always misleading. This is repeated for each transformation (75-79, 85). The villain often finds himself talking to a deaf bystander, which slows down the pursuit even more, and can add some "comic relief." Formulaic speech like this paces the story and adds to the suspense and excitement. It contributes to the stability of a tale by making it more memorable.

Preceding the Transformation Flight, there is an optional episode in which the heroine arranges a doll, drops of blood, or some such magic object, so that it will reply to the villain and lead him to believe that the fugitives are still at home (109-110). Aarne, in all his familiarity with tales, was not aware of this episode in any other tale (116). It comes out of the formulaic conversation in the Flight episode. It increases the suspense by making the Flight more complicated, and anticipates the formulaic conversation as a verbal delaying tactic. Folktale artistry works in two media: one is the sequence of images which, as tales with the Magic Flight repeatedly show, selects out images that anticipate or recall others in the tale. The other is purely verbal: to use verbal delaying tactics in the most exciting part of this tale shows consummate artistry. It proves the power that speech has, both over the characters in the tale and over the spellbound audience.

Of course the couple finally escapes, and generally the villain is killed or contained behind an insurmountable obstacle (65-74). When the final obstacle is a body of water, he may burst trying to drink it or be drowned in it. He may fall off the mountain or be burned in the fire, when these are the last obstacles. There is indeed variety but

his fate often comes out of the final motif in the Magic Flight. Characteristically, Aarne declared that the destruction of the villain was a later addition—meaning that no conclusion about any original form is possible.

The tale can end here, or can move into "The Forgotten Fiancée" (mots. D2003, D2006.1). This episode has not been dignified with its own tale type number, but occurs as a conclusion to several tales including Swanmaiden tales and AT 425, *Cupid and Psyche*. Thompson tentatively gave the designation AT 313C to Magic Flight tales that have this extension. Aarne did not examine it in detail because it is so clearly "of an independent nature." In only a few Magic Flight tales does the villain actually cause the forgetting, in revenge against the fleeing couple (117). Why is this extension so common in the Transformation Flight tale? It reinforces the resourcefulness of the girl and may provide yet another opportunity for her to perform magic. It demonstrates how truly she loves the hero. A few of the particular details of this conclusion reiterate images that appeared earlier in the tale. When the hero overhears a conversation between the girl and animals or objects, it recalls the formulaic question and answer between the villain and the transformed fugitives. Talking birds, and a reflecting well, recall the magic transformation into a duck and a pool of water.

Basile's *Pentamerone* contains four tales that Aarne thought relevant (11-14). One has the episode of the Forgotten Fiancée following a flight (but not a magic one), and nothing else from the Magic Flight tales (day 3 tale 9; it has a parallel in Bello's *Mambrino*). In the second tale are the Son-in-Law Tasks and the Forgotten Fiancée (remembered because of a dove; day 2 tale 7). In the third, a wild man wins a wife by solving the riddle of the louse hide (AT 621), and carries her off into the forest. She escapes by means of an Obstacle Flight (day 1 tale 5). The fourth is a variant of AT 310, *Rapunzel*, in which the witch pursues the lovers who throw apples that change into wild animals (day 2 tale 1). In 1698 the Countess d'Aulnoy gave a well-developed version of the Transformation Flight in a tale with no other traces of AT 313-314 (Aarne 1930:14-15). I must take exception to Thompson's statement (1946:90) that the tales of Bello and Basile testify to the existence of the oral tales AT 313-314. Only one of these examples has even two episodes from these tales, and it has no Magic Flight. We know only that the separate *episodes* were known in Europe at that time. As is sometimes the case with Basile's tales, they fit the genre of the modern magic tale to perfection, but the actual combination of episodes are at

variance with the bulk of the oral versions. This suggests that some of the tale types in the forms that we know them have solidified only during the last few hundred years. In Basile's time the episodes may have joined and rejoined more freely into different configurations.

Aarne turned up a number of occasional examples of the Magic Flight in other tales. *Rapunzel*<sup>4</sup> and *The Louse Skin* (after Basile) each have a couple of oral variants (120). *The Bird, the Horse, and the Princess* and *The Sons on a Quest for a Wonderful Remedy for their Father* (AT 550-551) have a Magic Flight in four variants that incorporate the Helpful Horse (119, 121). *Hansel and Gretel* (AT 327A) provides a rationale for the Service to the Ogre, and has a place for pursuit as the children escape. *The Dwarf and the Giant (Tom Thumb)*, AT 327B, also has a place where the ogre pursues the hero; eight examples from Slavic countries show that this combination has become traditional (18,105,115,118-9). The *flight* part of the Magic Flight is predominant in all these combinations.

The *magical* aspect is prominent in the combination with AT 325, *The Magician and his Pupil*. A boy is apprenticed to a magician, who intends to prevent his returning to his family (the rationale for the Service to the Ogre). The boy asks his father to help him escape, and the magician's daughter may help him also. In a final contest, the magician and the boy transform themselves into a series of animals that fight or flee from each other. Aarne found about twenty examples of AT 325 with a Magic Flight episode (84-85,119). AT 325 shares with AT 313-314 the ogre and his daughter, and magic transformations that allow the hero to escape.

Aarne concluded that the Magic Flight episode predated both AT 313 and AT 314. Thompson (1946:88-90) carefully separated these two (perhaps rather recent) European tales from world wide analogues that can not be said to have the same source. In the case of AT 314, the Magic Flight episode has been annexed to tales about a hero with a helpful horse. In AT 313, it has been attached to an episode of difficult tasks assigned by an ogre, and had developed a small dependent episode of speaking objects. This combination has accepted a variety of introductions and, sporadically, the conclusion of the *Forgotten Fiancé*. Thompson questions whether the version in the eleventh-century *Ocean of Story* (book 7 chapter 39, Penzer 1924 III:222-239) is actually a form of the European tale, or just coincidentally like it. It contains several of the more popular Son-in-Law Tasks and is incredibly similar to modern AT 313's. If he is suggesting an independent origin for this example, he opens up all sorts of possibilities of polygenesis for more of the modern material, destroying

the concept of a tale type as variants that are "genetically" related. Happily we do not need to go that far. I only want to question the idea that tale types must be basically fixed patterns that are handed down in stable forms. For some tales, variants may be held together by internal tensions rather than in a rote sequence.

The occasional combinations, not only of the Magic Flight tales but of all folktales, however trivial to the histories of the tales involved, illustrate points of contact that lead to stable combinations of tales or episodes. Affinities can work through nouns like the repeated bird forms in the Swanmaidens, the Transformation Flight and the Forgotten Fiancée. They can work through verbs, like the swallowing and regurgitation in AT 560 and in AT 567 discussed above. Particular characters can link tales, like the helpful horse, the ogre's daughter, the man who is kind to animals (in AT 560), or the scheming old woman (in AT 567). General compatibility of character roles in the tales to be joined is often crucial: the couple fleeing the ogre can be his daughter and son-in-law, Rapunzel and her lover, Hansel and Gretel, or the (magician's) pupil and his father. Affinities like these, only stronger, are at the bottom of the more important combinations of the Magic Flight with the Son-in-Law Tasks and the Helpful Horse tales.<sup>6</sup>

Working out of oral rather than archival tradition, a contemporary of Aarne's, Cecil Sharp, introduced the concepts of *continuity*, *variation*, and *selection*, to account for evolution in folk tradition (1907:16-31, chapter 3, "Evolution"). As Aarne's concepts were patterned after those of Linneaus, Sharp's followed Darwin's. Both approaches are valuable: without Linneaus' system of species there would have been no basis for the Darwinian theory of evolution. Gyula Ortutay (1959) found Sharp's concepts particularly useful for analyzing Hungarian folklore, where tales are still obviously evolving and the tale types are not always congruent with those in western Europe.

Some folk tales have been refined almost completely, so that any alterations are more likely to mar the tale than to improve it. These tales make the most satisfactory subjects for tale studies. Other tales are still in a period of experimentation, where variations may more likely improve them (cf. Lüthi 1967; 1984:183 note 202). It is exciting that the Magic Flight tales were caught while still in this stage of development. Interestingly, the tales that they most mingle with (Goldenhair and the Helpful Horse tales, the Swanmaidens, and the Forgotten Fiancée conclusion) are also in various states of flux. These tales make for unwieldy studies, but because of that they reveal more

of the forces that attract episodes to each other, than do tales that have already become solidified.

Aarne's tale studies demonstrate that each tale is unique. Saying that tales follow "laws" or "principles" of composition or dissemination is only a figure of speech, an expression of amazement that, yes, there *are* some regularities in this bewildering mass of data. There are also plenty of surprises. Professor Warren Roberts' study of *The Tale of the Kind and the Unkind Girls* is part of a scholarly tradition that respects the vicissitudes and fluctuations of folktales, a tradition that is exceptionally adept at relating and analyzing a great number of variants with clarity and economy. Their careful analyses have made permanent contributions to folklore studies, helping to provide "a comprehensive view of the whole tradition."

## NOTES

- 1 Schenda (1977) gives a list of tale type numbers for the *Pentamerone*.
- 2 Thompson (1946:72) calls this example AT 563, but with only two objects and no inn it is much more similar to modern AT 564.
- 3 Aarne himself did not itemize like this, out of respect for the fact that the collection of folktales can never be considered complete. Here and elsewhere in this paper I have counted the variants to impress the fact that the tale type descriptions definitely are a convenient shorthand to represent many variants. Tales collected since the studies make the numbers even greater.
- 4 AT 310 with the Obstacle Flight is a tale type traditional in Mediterranean Europe (Lüthi 1970:117-119; 1984:116).
- 5 Gerould (1908:116-118,168-171) used this phrase to explain combinations of tales.
- 6 See Ortutay (1959) and other references in Voigt (1977), on the concept of Affinity. In some cases the term clearly refers to a mixing of tale types, or a tale type and an extraneous motif ("contamination"). In my discussion here, it refers to a combination of motifs or episodes that may or may not be firmly fixed into tale types.

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## The Ethnography of a Folktale

L I N D A D É G H

AT 570 (The Rabbit Herd) is essentially a folktale of four episodes belonging to the large family of biographical hero-stories in which the lowly (poor, young, and simpleton) protagonist acquires a magic object in exchange for kindness to a supernatural donor, and thus succeeds in rendering impossible services to royalty and winning the hand of the princess. Within this range, the versions exhibit great episodic variety, and borrow liberally from similar content structures, causing the expansion of the narrative and the dilution of the main point it makes. Nevertheless, the most consistent four episodes that seem to be bound together by an inner logic and that make up a distinctive tale type with a very specific meaning, appear throughout its geographic distribution area:

(A) Sick king, princess seeks cure from healing fruit (fig, apple, orange, almond, peach, or other). Three sons of a poor woman try their luck by taking a basketful of magnificent fruits to the king;

(B) One by one the brothers encounter a poor old woman, a fairy, or a gray old man asking for food, assistance, or simply curious about the content of the basket. Older brothers deny help and rebut old woman by mocking answers: "potatoes," "frogs," "pig bristles," "shit," or "cuckoo's eggs;" whereby the fruits transform and the brothers are thrown out from the royal court. The fruits of the youngest (weakest, silliest) brother succeed in healing the princess; he also obtains a magic pipe (wand, bell) from the old woman for his kindness to her, or only because of his lowly condition.

(C) The king (or princess), reluctant to accept the young simpleton as marriage partner, attempts to set an additional impossible task to



him. He is to keep a herd of 900 (300, 100, 40, 25, 18, 12, or 10) rabbits (rarely roosters, sheep, goats, swans, partridges) on the pasture for three days; or he has to retrieve from the forest one, three, or twelve wild hares turned loose from a sack; or he has to tend, groom, and train one or three white pet rabbits. When the hero succeeds in bringing the animals back, the royal family tries to trick him into failure. One by one, envoys in disguise try to buy a rabbit (or the magic pipe) so that the youngster should not be able to perform the task. Sometimes a servant girl, a valet, or a royal official starts the negotiation, but usually it is the princess (occasionally three princesses), the queen and the king who tries to make a deal for a rabbit. They ask for a rabbit as a courtesy act, or promise money, even gold and silver, jewelery, a locket or a ring, as a token, but the rabbit-herd offers the rabbit only in exchange for forcing the royal family to perform an embarrassing act of self-humiliation. Besides milder, or more drastic and cruel forms of ridicule (kissing the rabbit-herd; accepting punches or whipping from him; allowing him to cut a piece of the nose or skin from the palm or strips of flesh from the back of the victim; jumping on one leg for half an hour while nose-picking; dancing to the tune of hero's flute; throwing somersaults; having a pot fastened to his ass; allowing to be branded on the rump; kneeling down and kissing the bare bottom of hero and eating his feces; kissing the donkey, the donkey's ass, or licking a dead donkey's ass; holding the dead donkey's carcass between his teeth and dragging it around; pulling a dead coyote by its tail with his teeth; kissing the horse's ass under its tail), the most prevalent bargain proposal is sexual. The rabbit-herd lies with both the princess, the queen, and sometimes the king, or forces him to commit bestiality with the mare he is riding. Despite the high prize, and precaution (placing the animal into a sack, a wooden or metal chest, an iron case, or killing and cutting it up into pieces), the rabbit returns at the sound of the pipe.

(D) Dismayed by the power of the magic pipe, the king tries to beat the hero by testing his wit. He has to fill one or three sacks, a basket, a copper chest, or a bowl with lies, or with truths, spoken or sung. Often he is to "lie truth" (*Wahrheiten lügen*; *trois sacs de verites*). The king stages the event by erecting a platform for public performance of the destruction of the hero, but soon discovers that the "lies" will turn out to be "truths." The rabbit herd tells two stories: the humiliation of the princess and the queen, but before he can complete the third the king interrupts him to avoid his public embarrassment; "the sack is full," and the rabbit-herd wins the hand of the princess.<sup>1</sup>

## 2

The earliest version of AT 570, published in 1791,<sup>2</sup> is already heavily interwoven with episodes belonging to other types. In this, the rabbit-herd incident blends with AT 554 (The Grateful Animals). The sick king promises his daughter to the brave one who heals him with figs. Aided by grateful animals (fish, a black and a white dove, ants) the youngest of the three brothers succeeds but must perform four additional tasks to win the prize. He has to retrieve a ring from the bottom of the sea, get a wreath from heaven and a flame from hell, separate the mixture of nine kinds of cereals into nine measures, and finally, herd nine hundred rabbits. Ultimately, he has to fill a bag with truths. Another early version, *Der Vogel Greif* (Grimm 165), published in 1837,<sup>3</sup> exhibits even more contamination and change of orientation, resulting also in the elimination of episode D. Although episodes A, B and C remain intact, two other tests—to build a ship that travels through water and land (AT 513 B); and to steal the feather of the Griffin Bird (AT 550), blended with elements of AT 461—brings the text close to Grimm 29, *Der Teufel mit den drei goldenen Haaren*.<sup>4</sup>

From the second half of the 19th century the Rabbit Herd tale appears in a variety of textual contexts while a clear pattern of affinal relationships emerge that limits its episodic combinations into two directions. In the one case, rabbit herding appears as one of the several domestic tasks given to the protagonist in hero tales, such as AT 300, 306, 314, 328, 425, 461, 502, 531, 550, 552, 554, 561, and 592. Despite the wide distribution of these combinations, the tone and the style of episodes C and D does not fit very well. In the other case, the Rabbit Herd tale is interlinked with trickster and cleverness test tale types—such as AT 559, 566, 571, 621, 650, 851, 852, 853, 854, and 860—and seems to be in perfect harmony with them. Here C and D does not play such a subordinate role as in hero tales. The whole story, as Kurt Ranke (1955-62:264-65) aptly remarked, is "Schwankhaft" and can either blend into or be linked up with any of the Schwänke on an equal basis.

In addition to these two kinds of content structures in which AT 570 appears, either in a subordinate or coordinate relationship with other stories, versions of the pure and uncontaminated Rabbit Herd tale type composed of episodes A-B-C-D, or B-C-D are also widely disseminated. Episode D on the other hand, tends toward greater independence to develop into a self-contained lie-contest story (AT 1920). The almost even distribution and coexistence of these formulations of type 570 indicate its existence in oral tradition prior to

literary fixation. There are, however, some questions that warrant caution in considering its age, spread, popularity, and meaning: Why was this tale not recorded prior to the end of the 18th century? Why is there still a scarcity in documentation from the large geographical area where it has been reported? How dependable are the texts available to researchers to analyze and determine its place in narrative tradition?

AT 570 is among the classic folktales in which an explicit sex act is featured as a turning point. Its topic and message is in open contradiction with the romantic concepts of 19th century folktale scholars of the purity and innocent ignorance of the folk. Therefore, the modest number of publications does not reveal much of its popularity and place among other, more covert sexual tales like Rapunzel, Snow White, or Sleeping Beauty. In the majority of published texts, episode C is radically rewritten and euphemized<sup>5</sup> and only some limited editions indicate the true nature of the tale. One of the early versions appears in a modest book of "intimate tales" by Afanas'ev (1977:88-92) who felt that these "real treasures" (which had to be left out from his Russian tale collection) must be preserved for posterity because of their uniquely authentic, unadulterated expression of the feelings of the simple folk. Afanas'ev's story makes episode C into an elaborate labor contract story (AT 650, 1000) between serf and landlord. The peasant must herd the rabbits to pay for his debt, but the master does not want him to succeed and free himself from bondage. The mistress is slept with twice in exchange for a rabbit, and the third time the master has to mount his mare. He gives in, realizing his defeat and releases his serf. Another untainted version from 1884 comes from Brittany,<sup>6</sup> with reference to Afanas'ev, although this one returns to the more Märchen-like social milieu. The text is complete with all four episodes and resembles several of the French variants (Delarue and Tenéze 1964:254-58). The shepherd boy collects the evidences of the rabbit-bargain into three handkerchiefs: a piece of skin from the palm of a gentleman; another piece from the back of the king; and thirdly, the virginity of the princess to be presented as "truths." In a complete Bosnian version, collected in 1907, the boy has sex with the daughter and the wife of a pope, and he forces the pope to submit to sodomy.<sup>7</sup>

Two versions recorded by Vance Randolph (1952:17-19) from the same raconteur in 1927 suggest that the editing of the risqué passages may not always be the work of the collector; the teller may formulate things differently for different audiences. The outspoken version published posthumously in 1976 is "for men only," while the earlier

one—alluding only to the sexual abuse of the princess, the queen, and the king—was meant for "mixed audiences" (1976:47-50, No.29). In general, however, the fact remains that the bulk of the more or less accurately recorded variants of AT 570 remained in manuscript archives, and that only more recent field recordings provided dependable texts and related information concerning the nature of the tale.

## 3

Although the tale has been reported from almost every European country and from numerous ethnic regions, most of the versions come from the German-speaking areas,<sup>8</sup> the Nordic<sup>9</sup> and Baltic countries,<sup>10</sup> and France.<sup>11</sup> The bulk of the approximately 400 noted versions are from Germany, Finland,<sup>12</sup> Norway,<sup>13</sup> and France, while texts from Ireland, Spain, Italy, Portugal, Belgium, Holland, Russia, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and Yugoslavia prove that the type has its established place within their national repertoires.<sup>14</sup> The Balkan Peninsula seems to be a checkpoint for the distribution of the tale: both Bulgarian and Greek versions are intermingled with elements and episodes borrowed from adjacent Middle Eastern-Islamic cultures.<sup>15</sup> Likewise, texts from Ireland, Scotland, England, and Iceland deemphasize the main orientation of the tale, as does the Gypsy version.<sup>16</sup>

There are further limitations in the dissemination of the type beyond Europe: it seems that it traveled with emigrants to the New World without being adapted by people on other continents. Sporadic versions appear from the Spanish Balearic Islands<sup>17</sup> and Portuguese Cape Verde Islands,<sup>18</sup> while a larger fund is known from Latin-American countries, particularly Mexico,<sup>19</sup> Brazil, and the West Indies.<sup>20</sup> The provenance of the four almost identical Anglo-American variants<sup>21</sup> would be hard to connect with a particular group, while the formulation of French-Canadian versions<sup>22</sup> indicate a direct link with France. A distribution map of the variants would suggest a possible French or Franco-German origin of the tale, not merely because of its relative frequency but also because of the currency of affinal types and motifs. These ingredients may have been pre-existent and crucial to the development of type 570 by the separation and integration of the constituent four episodes. In the practice of traditional storytellers knowledgeable of the pertinent stock of stories, consolidation of types occurs through frequent retellings, as well as spontaneous variation by the addition of stock episodes.

## 4

No oicotypes or local variants can be established, mostly because sufficient numbers of variants are not available from all regions of the distribution area. But even where there is enough material, no specific patterns emerge. Instead, the four-episode Rabbit Herd sequence usually coexists with the hero-tale and trickster-tale conglomerates throughout the distribution area, and remarkable parallel formulations can be found at places without direct contact. Even such a trivial element as the green or fresh fig as healing fruit does not seem to be tied to a particular source. It appears in French, Swiss, German, Portuguese, Polish, and Bosnian variants, and an Italian variant develops a unique feature: The princess' hunger for figs can be satisfied only by magic replenishment of the basket she speedily empties (Calvino 1959:145-47, No.47).

## 5

Because of the scarcity of contextual information, little can be said about the function AT 570 played in the social environments in which it was told through the ages. Most of the variants come from the 19th century or the first three decades of the 20th century when collectors seldom recorded even the name of a teller. Annotations accompanying the texts refer often to their scandalous nature. In 1853 Kulda, for example, mentions that "Er habe das Märchen nicht so veröffentlichen können, wie er es gehört habe—die auf der Weide gestellte Bedingungen seien so schimpflich and hässlich, das mein Ohr sich scheute, sie zu hören."<sup>23</sup> Depending on my own experience as a fieldworker in Hungarian peasant communities, the Rabbit Herd story, like other sparsely recorded magic tales with scatological implications, was reserved for the company of men. As János Nagy, a 76 year old fisherman from Sára, told me after I had recorded his version (he had two of diverse combinations), "This is one for the military. In the barracks after curfew, what else could you do in winter from eight to midnight until you really wanted to sleep? We were young kids, and needed more of this stuff than sleep. The pasture scene was interesting, he got his way and the princess had also her desires fulfilled."<sup>24</sup> Peter Pandur also had a witty version of the tale which had to remain unpublished,<sup>25</sup> and he referred to the construction workers'

quarters where the workingmen found recreation in storytelling at night (Dégh 1969:67-69).

Lacking more information on the sociocultural background of AT 570, the text itself has much to reveal. The world it features, the ideas it presents, and the motivations of actors in their action are those of the traditional European peasant. In this story, the kind and the dull, lowly hero (der Dumme Hans, Ti Jean) begins his career story like in other magic tales. He obtains the magic object because of his miserable condition, not because of some skill—he is only modest and kind to older people, as peasant upbringing requires. This in itself makes him qualified to succeed as blind executor of the actions suggested to him by the protective adult donor. But as the story reaches the point of performing the task according to instruction, the hero is transformed into a shrewd trickster, with his own initiatives and projections. He appears as a ruthless businessman, a determined bargainer who takes everything and risks nothing, and who carefully gathers evidence for a final showdown; he also emerges as a speech artist, a storyteller. His purpose is not so much the royal wedding<sup>26</sup> as it is trading places with the mighty. As Thompson (1946:155) notes, "the hero's use of blackmail is the characteristic trait" of this tale.

The pasture scene has several specifics. The story would stand as is without the bargain over money or sex; it would have been enough to hand over the rabbit to the visitor and then whistle it back without much ado to restore the number of the herd. Or, it would also seem that to accept bribery from the visitors and collect cash would have been sufficient disclosure in the concluding episode (as in MI H1024.1.1). But this would not have been enough. The humiliation and embarrassment is complete only when it includes the sexual or genital area, where social tabu makes people most vulnerable and helpless. Herding small animals (geese, turkey, sheep) is the responsibility of young people in traditional peasant society, and the pasture is the place where fantasizing, courting, and exploration of sexuality begins. The staging of episode C is set in peasant reality: the princess brings lunch to the rabbit herd, an occasion to test their sexuality. But the test in this case becomes a calculated project on both sides. Royalty takes risks at any cost to avoid the victory of the lowly boy and submits itself to the danger of utter humiliation. The boy, on the other hand, fulfills a cleverly plotted attack on authority and dominance. In most versions the king (lord, master, landlord, pope) is desperate in the losing battle of giving in: "dem Popen, wie einem Popen tat es leid, die Tochter einen gemeinen Bauern auszugeben."<sup>27</sup> It is the brutal struggle between the rich and the poor, not the

seduction of the princess. In fact, the women, or the sexuality of daughter and mother are blind tools in this power struggle. When the final showdown comes—the task he himself set for his rival, to lie truth—the king allows everyone to know of it. It is only in the revelation of his engagement in shameful and disgusting acts that he stops the rabbit herd.

Episode D seems an integral part of and logical conclusion to the tale, although it might have preceded its existence. It has also long been known as a self-contained test tale, independently or intertwined with dependent episodes of lying contest tales.<sup>28</sup> Unquestionably, this is a story of wish fulfillment for poor peasants, who are the bearers of Märchen tradition, in which the wit of the lowly hero conquers. To reveal what really took place through the act of telling a story ("a lie" in general folk-parlance) is not uncommon in folktales; unjustly accused or banished heroes or heroines often do it as, for example, in AT 407, 450, 706 and 707. In this story, however, to fill a container with lies is ambiguous and confusing in the variants. It is set by the king as an additional hard test in which a halfwit peasant boy must fail. In some versions he has to lie truth, in others he has to fill the sacks with truths, and in still others with lies. There is also a considerable discussion in some versions in which the royal family members protest, express their dismay with, or admit to the facts presented. The close affinity to lying-contest tales is obvious here. In a Sorbian version (Nedo 1956:276-80, No.61), for example, the narration is accepted and handled as trifle and believable until it becomes inadmissible: "that's a lie." In one Mexican-American version (Zunser 1935:161-64), two sacks are filled with lies and one with truths. But no matter how much episode D oscillates under the influence of lying-contest tales, anger bargains between master and servant, and the convention of village storytelling practices, the fluidity of the public show in AT 570 connects facts of peasant life with Märchen fantasy.

6

The above interpretation of AT 570 is drawn from the socio-cultural milieu, taking departure from native ethnography as much as it is discernible from the variants, and the commentaries of storytellers and attendant villagers. Alan Dundes' (1980) psychoanalytical reading of the Rabbit Herd tale draws on the subconscious (symbolic) level of making sense. Dundes' long-term concern with the symbolic-metaphor-

ic meanings of folklore led him to this particular tale. He is critical of folklorists who look only at the literal (conscious), and not at the analytically constructed symbolic content of the tale, derived according to the rules of Freudian interpretation. He argues for the research of universal psychological symbols in folktales through an approach that combines the comparative method with structural analysis. Accordingly, he proposes to use the Proppian sequence of motifs (functions), discerning allomotifs from field-collected variants that he sees fitting the motifemic slots which, he suggests, lead to the discovery of inter- and cross-cultural allomotif equivalences. Dundes hopes that his proposed approach will lead to more knowledge of oicotypification, national and local characteristics, and individual idiosyncrasies.

After constructing a plot outline of AT 570, Dundes selects a few tale traits for interpretation of their symbolic equivalents. The first example concerns a marginal trait, common to hero tales: the death threat to the hero in case of failure. The three equivalents are beheading, castration, and being thrown into a snake pit, chosen from three variants. The second example equates magic object, rabbit, and intercourse as symbolic equivalents of fertility to suggest the phallic nature of the tale. The third example is a test, marginal to the type and infrequent in the variants: the hero has to cut grass as far as the princess can urinate. This analysis, of course, raises the question of whether or not universal psychological symbols underlying artistic formulations such as folktales should be taken for granted when attempting the interpretation of the specific formulations and variations of individual tales.

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> My description follows the AT outline.
- <sup>2</sup> See *Ammenmärchen* I, p.93, no.5.
- <sup>3</sup> Obtained through Wilhelm Wackernagel from the Swiss Friedrich Schmid of Aargau. It was first published in the third edition (1837) of *Kinder-und Hausmärchen*.
- <sup>4</sup> This relationship was noted in the third volume of *Kinder-und Hausmärchen*, published in 1856, p.256.
- <sup>5</sup> The nature of rewriting to which the Rabbit Herd was subjected is well illustrated in the 17 variants published in Šmits, VIII, (1962-70:263-83).
- <sup>6</sup> See *Kryptadia* II, pp.45-53, no.13.



- 7 See Antropophyteia IV, pp.393-98, no.621; another less complete version in II, pp.340-44, no.421, is so close that the collector notes that the two peasant informants learned it from each other or a third person (IV, p.393).
- 8 Bolte and Polivka 1918:268-69; Ranke, op. cit. It must be noted here that in collections, type-lists and catalogs, many texts are erroneously identified as 570. In numerous cases the identification follows the Grimm text or takes test episodes marginal to but sometimes coincident with the rabbit-herding test as equivalent. For example, out of six variants in the Berze Nagy catalog only two fit 570.
- 9 AT list 21 versions from Sweden, 29 from Denmark, and 13 from Norway.
- 10 Šmits (1962-70); Ambainis (1977); Böhm-Specht (1924); Jurkschat (1898); Viidalepp (1980).
- 11 Delarue-Tenéze (1964) has 36 variants.
- 12 AT refers to 70 Finnish variants.
- 13 B. Hodne lists 16 more Norwegian texts.
- 14 See national catalogs by Ó Súilleabháin and Christiansen (1963); Espinoza (1946-47); de Meyer (1968); Cirese and Serafini (1975); Andreev (1929); Barag et al (1979); Tille (1927-34); Berze Nagy (1957) and references in BP.
- 15 A Greek version begins with 325 and is otherwise imbedded in AT 561. Grateful horse and dog help to acquire the lamp with the servant spirit to fulfill additional tasks (Kretschmer 1919:34). In a Bulgarian story, the hero succeeds with the help of Negroes from a wonder bowl (Sbornik min.1901, vol.6, p.176).
- 16 In an Icelandic version, episode C is missing, only D (the sack to be filled with words) prevails as the disclosure what the princess, queen and the king did to get the magic objects: self-sewing needle, self-cutting scissors, and self-cutting axe (Arnason 1864:2, 482). The Scottish Gypsy version is totally without conflict. The smallest son picks the cake that is small but blessed, not big and cursed. He gets the flute from the donor, succeeds with rabbits, royal family rewards him with generous meals, he takes princess to town and they get married. Mother, donor join the royal family (Aichele 1926:289-95, no.69).
- 17 The text is a conglomerate of 304, 570, and 851. Among the tasks, one is to herd 13 roosters and fill the sack with lies—the king learns that the maid, daughter, wife slept with the herd (Amades 1950:194).
- 18 Child born with magic whistle that summons rats. Negress, princess, queen are blackmailed into having sex with the boy for not telling the king. King mounts the mare—seven sacks are filled with lies (Parsons 1923:83, Vol. I).
- 19 Robe (1973:105) has 12 variants.
- 20 See Hansen (1957).
- 21 Randolph's "polite" and "bawdy" texts and Chase's version are almost identical, and they are distinct from the European versions in two points: not a herd is hired for

service but a competition is called to find the best husband for the princess, who would be able to keep a rabbit in a place for short time. In the first two a trained pet responds to a bell; in the third, a drill in the middle of the ring is installed to make a wild hare stay for 30 minutes (Chase 1943:89-95). These are tricks of training animals rather than magic tricks. Also, the "fill bowl, fill" episode as a cante fable is unique to the Anglo-American variants (Baughman 1966:14).

22 Lemieux (Vol.2, 1974:245-54; Vol.4, 1975:227-42; Vol.7, 1976:54-67) contains three variants. The first is complete containing all four episodes, the second begins with AT 850, continues with a complete 570 and concludes with 559 which debases a prince who competes for the hand of the princess. The third begins with episode A, but then more tests—cutting down a large tree, killing a giant—are added, and finally sheep and not rabbits are to be herded. Common to all three Canadian variants is the elaborate formulation of C and D episodes, lengthy bargain of maids, sisters, preceding the royal family. The contract year here is not the usual three-day year as in magic tales but rather a real year, with intervals of weeks and months between the visits. Bargaining dialogue, intercourse with the women and drastic degradation of the king (dragging dead animal's carcass between his teeth) are detailed, as is episode D as a public retelling of the bargain.

23 Jech (1961:494) notes that from Kulda's recently discovered field notes it became evident that in this tale the price for the rabbit is commonly to sleep with the herdsman.

24 A complex narrative of J. Nagy (see Ortutay, Dégh and Kovács Vol.2, 1960:549-70, no.96) combines three affinal types; the frame story is AT 935 within which 854 and 570 are fully included. Another variant of Nagy combines 400 and 570 (MS).

25 In this combination of 756B, 854, and 570, P. Pandur's hero is a prince with a butler who is his advisor. The three princesses who undress in payment for the rabbit and run away naked when the butler knocks on the door provide for the token (a bundle of clothes) to be shown at the sack-filling contest: "I went a-hunting, I shot the rabbit, it ran away but I kept its skin" (MS).

26 In some versions the king manages to pay the boy off (Haiding 1969:no.98); he gets 500 rubles (Šmits 1967:no.9); the princess turns against her father and elopes with the rabbit herd to wed in town (Aichele op.cit.); or he marries the chambermaid he loved (Massignon 1965:67-71, no.8), an orphan instead of the princess (Šmits 1967:no.8), or there is no daughter at all as a payment for the service (Afanas'ev 1977).

27 See *Antropophyteia* 4:393.

28 Parsons (op.cit.) does not contain episode C, but only D, handling the telling lies as much a skill as in 852.

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## Historicity and the Oral Epic: The Case of Sun-Jata Keita

JOHN WILLIAM JOHNSON

Western-trained scholars have attempted to reconstruct a history of the great empire period of West Africa arguing that Sun-Jata Keita, the culture hero of one of those great empires, that of Old Mali, was an historical person.<sup>1</sup> Recent oral historians have refined their arguments concerning historicity in oral traditions, responded to criticism from anthropologists, and continue to keep their faith in oral tradition as evidence of past history. Unfortunately, they appear not to have read the work of folklorists or sociologists, who have recently contributed a great deal to theory in oral tradition and knowledge of its role in contemporary society.

The question of what Sun-Jata represents today remains easier to answer than who he may have been in the past. As the primary culture hero of the Mande peoples, Sun-Jata's memory is a part of the symbolic culture of those societies. The social role of this narrative appears to take precedence over concern for historicity and thus is an oral argument of contemporary social function and political power. This paper asks a major question of concern to scholars in several disciplines today: "How much of the actual past do traditions really reflect; and what can contemporary performance theory in folkloristics, and recent attempts by the sociologist Edward Shils and a number of other students of tradition as a concept, contribute to the understanding of historicity in oral literature?"<sup>2</sup>

I should state from the beginning that the search for history in oral lore is not and never has been one of my principal concerns as a folklorist. I can hardly be considered an expert in this respect, and to

put my limited experience with this topic up against experts such as Jan Vansina, Joseph Miller, Yves Person, and others is somewhat intimidating to me. In truth, the ability of any scholar to actually glean historicity out of an oral text has always appeared to me to be just a little bit beyond the boundaries of possibility. The nature of oral tradition as I have come to understand it simply does not allow for such analyses. In addition, a recent attempt to look more critically into the nature of tradition would, I think, argue against the possibility of finding the kind of chronological history described by Yves Person in African oral tradition.<sup>3</sup>

The more I read, however, the more convinced I became that to bring studies in folkloristics and sociology to the attention of oral historians might be of some assistance to their scholarship. I must say from the start that I admire very much indeed the efforts by historians to reconstruct Africa's past, especially because such efforts go a long way toward lessening the still prevalent racism and prejudices held in the West about the indigenous populations of Africa. In the end, however, the need to reconstruct Africa's past in the way Westerners want to do it appears to me to be of primary importance to scholarship in the West. I am not certain of what use it will be to the people of Africa, who have and will continue to reconstruct their history in their own way and for their own uses.

What I propose to do in this essay is to state my views on the topic of the search for historicity in oral tradition, based upon some recently published studies concerning the concept of tradition and on theories expressed at a conference at Indiana University, as well as in a seminar I conduct at that institution concerning tradition as an ethnic and analytic construct.<sup>4</sup> In the light of newer ways of looking at tradition and what influence it has on human behavior, perhaps I may be able to stimulate oral historians towards solving the problems of separating symbolic and social function from chronological history, if the latter pursuit ever proves possible.

In a recent public address at a prominent university in the Midwest, an individual made the following statement (words to the effect): "This institution houses some of the finest collections of music from primitive, traditional, and modern societies in the Western hemisphere." Such a statement tells us more about the speaker's own worldview than it does about the nature of holdings in the archives in question. There is no such thing in the twentieth century as a primitive society.<sup>5</sup> Additionally, all societies are both traditional and modern at the same time. Edward Shils' recent book entitled *Tradition* (1981) has had an influence beyond his discipline of sociology.

His separation of the concepts of tradition from *traditum* (the latter of which he defines as a product of tradition) helps clarify one of the current folkloristic views that tradition is a process and not merely the products of that process. As a basis for beginning our understanding of this recent research and analysis, let me offer my own working definition of tradition, "working" because I am still in the process of re-tooling my understanding of this enigmatic concept.

Tradition is a form of learned behavior. It is not information deduced from reason or logic. It is not information that one learns by oneself. And it is not a part of instinctive behavior. As Shils' puts it:

All that human beings do is done within the limits imposed by their neurophysiological properties and ecological situations, but there is much room for variation within these limits. [1981:41]

In other words, social behavior, including tradition, is very humanistic and bound by human limitations and possibilities.

So, tradition is a form of behavior, but I should state that I am not a behavioralist in the theory I adhere to. Learned behavior of this nature represents a set of socially defined constructs, not a set of predictable mannerisms resulting from given social settings. Again paraphrasing Shils, societies learn most of what they practice. Where Shils' theory seems lacking, from the point of view of folkloristics, is his neglect of the marriage between tradition and its bearers, the folk of folklore. His book concentrates mostly on the lore of folklore. Let me elaborate a bit on this idea.

I noted that tradition is learned behavior, but it does not represent all of the behavior a person learns. It is learned behavior which contributes to group identity. It draws boundaries around groups and defines them, and reflects their beliefs and worldview. If one has learned most of what one knows from members of one's group, it only stands to reason that what one has learned will reflect the concerns and worldview of that group. Many folklorists in America now recognize that any group that practices traditions together qualifies as a "folk" group, and ethnicity is only one kind of group identity. There are multiple expressions of group identity in any individual's life, but further elaboration on that topic is beyond the scope of this essay. Suffice it to say that what constitutes "tradition" in any of the groups to which an individual belongs is defined and debated by members of that group. In other words, the specific forms of behavior that group members employ as traditional constructs are argued as such by those

members; learned behavior does not become traditional just because it is learned.

We recognize that tradition is not always verbal; it is sometimes learned by observation. Indeed, an older definition of tradition expressed by many folklorists at one time—some, perhaps, still hold this view—is that tradition is a body of knowledge passed down from generation to generation by word of mouth or by imitation. This definition has recently come under fire from another set of scholars, perhaps most articulately represented by Richard Handler and Jocelyn Linnekin.<sup>6</sup> In an article in the *Journal of American Folklore*, Handler and Linnekin make the point that tradition must be understood as a set of wholly symbolic constructs, and that there is nothing "natural" about it. They make another important point with which I agree: As an interpretive construct, tradition is composed of elements of both continuity and change. This idea is not new to folklorists, nor perhaps to oral historians. But it does have important deeper implications with regard to the search for historicity.

Tradition comes to us in both a formalistic and a symbolic state, each of which undergoes change over time. Tradition may come *from* the past, but it is *of* the present. It is a contemporary set of constructs which influence the behavior of its practitioners and is used to *argue* the past, not *explain* it. The illusion that it is a flawless memory of the past is just that, an illusion. Whatever actual memory of the past it may represent, it is certainly a contextually-bound interpretation of the past for use in the present. Again, Handler and Linnekin argue that "an ongoing reconstruction of tradition is a facet of all social life, which is not natural but symbolically constituted" (1984:276).

At this point, it might be useful to give an example of what these two authors are attempting to analyze. In the twentieth century, American Indians of mixed ethnic identity practice traditions which their ancestors never heard of. In 1986, I served on the Folk Arts Board of the Indiana Arts Council, which reads grant proposals submitted by various groups in Indiana that request funding for projects of both a research-oriented and a performance-oriented nature. One such proposal last year came from an American Indian group found in both Michigan and Indiana. This group applied for a grant to expand a yearly powwow which they stage in Michigan. The previous year's advertising brochure was submitted as evidence of the potential success of the proposed powwow. In this brochure it was evident that Indians of several ethnic groups were a part of the former year's powwow, and that they had come from many parts of the



country to participate. Indeed, certain skilled performers are actually sought after because they are good at some form of dance or craft. Thus it became evident that such powwows are a modern phenomenon which bears no historical connection to the past, only a symbolic one. There was no need for them in the past, as there is in the present. They function to maintain ethnicity in the midst of a majority which is not Indian. Nothing rallies the expression of ethnicity like external threat.

Another implication of Handler and Linnekin's views that I might mention in passing is that chronological history itself is a reconstruction of the past and not a description of it. (I should stress that this view is implied in their work and not explicitly stated.) Again, this idea is not new to folklorists interested in oral history or folklife. I have heard it argued for years, but it does have serious implications for historians who have spent a disproportionate amount of time attempting to reconstruct the history of a minority of the populations they study, namely the political elite and ruling classes of humankind. Perhaps I oversimplify the process of writing history, but scholars in folklife studies, on the other hand, have attempted to reconstruct the social history of the masses.

Folklife scholars have also argued that the function of history as a discipline cannot be disconnected from other social and cultural pursuits of the society in which it exists. It is important for us as Westerners to have a view of the past in order to help place ourselves in the worldview of our present. What is important for us as human beings practicing our various specialties as members of our own society is to reconstruct our past in order to give meaning to our present, and we reconstruct that past in the context of the present. The reconstruction of Africa's past is a part of the larger framework of the Western view of history. It is possible to argue that an understanding of any society's past is always accomplished in a manner meaningful to that society. It is also possible to demonstrate that chronological history, which is a Western methodology, is not meaningful universally.

Before turning to the epic of Sun-Jata as a case study in which to argue these views of tradition and history, let me present one more set of ideas in an effort to understand how the set of constructs which we call tradition actually work. I am indebted to a colleague at Indiana University, Roger Janelli, for these ideas. In many ways, Janelli anticipated the conclusions that led Handler and Linnekin to write their later article. In a seminal piece in *Folklore Forum* in 1976, Janelli attempted to reconcile the older definition of tradition as a body of handed-down knowledge with some of the newer arguments from the

performance-centered focus of the school of folkloristics which has come to be called *contextualism*.

If tradition is not an inherited body of knowledge in the real world, Janelli asks, "how is it . . . that we can recognize textual or plot stability over centuries if each folkloric performance is unique to the immediate context in which it occurs?" (1976:61). Janelli attempts to reconcile the question with two levels of causality, which operate to produce the final *tradita*, or products of tradition. He calls these levels the macro-level and the micro-level of tradition. Let me describe these levels using my own understanding of, and additions to, Janelli's view.

If tradition is a memory of the past which is passed on to the present, what is the nature of this memory? Jan Vansina has argued that tradition involves a mnemonic code which is largely a collective memory of a group in a chain of testimony from the past, and from which historicity can be isolated in oral tradition because "collective views of the world are slow to change" (1980:273). Joseph Miller's own theories place a heavy emphasis on this collective aspect of memory (1980:11). But in the real world, groups do not have memories; only individuals can have memories. While the argument from psychologists for a theory of a mnemonic code in human memory is defensible, a mnemonic code in a collective memory is not. What actually exists is a group of memories attempting to act collectively, but in reality renegotiating memory while being under the illusion that a collective body of lore exists. It is this illusion of collective memory that Janelli calls the macro-level of tradition.

As the collective body of learned behavior practiced by a group, the macro-level of tradition is thus a fiction. Groups can only practice tradition in its actual performance. So it is at the performance level, or micro-level, where tradition is really negotiated and acted out using the individual memories of its practitioners. Macro-level tradition is often argued as a reality by members of a group, which may call such a notion "tradition," or they may use other terms for it, like "our heritage." Such a notion is thought to be a reality because the practice of traditions also occurs in groups. Each time a tradition is practiced at the micro-level the memory of how it was done before plays a role, and the memory of how it is redone gets stored in the memories of its participants, and thus becomes a part of the macro-level fiction, which will potentially influence the next micro-level performance of the tradition.

One may note in passing that Richard Schechner (1985) has argued that it is not so much in performance that tradition is renegotiated,

but in the rehearsal of performance.<sup>7</sup> But this view of performance is too narrow for many scholars who view the concept of performance in a sphere larger than the formal theatrical performance.

To return to the main point, ways of behaving in the past must be remembered by individuals, and even Vansina argues that such social interactions involving memory as courtroom testimony from separate witnesses of the same event can lead to considerable disagreement. I have observed members of my extended family interact in this very manner. Terrific arguments ensue concerning the chronology of events in their early lives during the Great Depression. Topics are forgotten, changed, sometimes agreed upon, but often argued about. It is my view that they are reinterpreted according to the needs of the present context in which the family finds itself.

To cite an example, a family member will take my grandmother to a department store where she will purchase 12 pairs of hose at a time. Her explanation is that at 86 years of age and unable to drive a car, she can't get to the store often enough. Other members of the family argue that her behavior is the result of the Depression. She buys in great numbers, they argue, because she remembers when she could not afford any at all.

To sum up, macro-level tradition is a fictive notion held by individual members of a group who think it to be the inherited body of lore which has been passed down from generation to generation by word of mouth or by imitation. Micro-level tradition is the symbolic social interaction of tradition at the performance level, in which memories of past performances of tradition are reconstructed and re-negotiated among the active bearers of tradition and their audiences. Schechner employs the term "restoration of behavior" for this act. For him, tradition may be seen as a process of restoring a remembered form of behavior to a contemporary shape, form, and meaning through the act of recreating it in a performance (or rehearsal). Working within a remembered "set of rules" or literary conventions, the individual (or group) recreates a tradition, but at the same time influences the various ways it will be remembered in the future.

With this view of tradition from folklorists and sociologists in mind, let me now turn to some of the views put forward by the oral historian Joseph Miller. Miller has argued that "the historian must approach the oral tradition as 'evidence,' whatever scholars in other disciplines choose to do with the same narratives," and he defines evidence as "something that bears witness to a vanished time because it has *survived unchanged* from then until the historian examines it" (1980:1). But according to the newer views of folkloristics, nothing

survives unchanged in human behavior. If everything is reinterpreted in each succeeding performance, let alone in each succeeding generation, to conform to new contexts and social needs, then the very premise upon which this theory is built is faulty.

In another work, Miller has defined a structural device he calls a *cliché*. The concept of cliché has been known in folkloristics as a *motif* since the heyday of its first prominent school of thought, the historic-geographic, or Finnish School (or Method), which began in the last century. While he does not argue that all clichés are the same, Miller does argue that some clichés are encapsulations of actual historical events from the past. He further states in the introduction to his edited volume *The African Past Speaks*:

It is therefore the cliché that each generation hands down to members of the next, who may remember it and use it even after it has become archaic and has lost its original meaning for those who continue to pass it on. The cliché at the center of the episode, not the detail of the narrative, is what may bear information from and about the past. [1980:10]

Such a notion concerning the nature of folklore was held in folkloristics in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries: essentially, folklore was seen as composed of mindless survivals from the past with no contemporary function. The folk, it was thought, were incapable of creative behavior; they simply carried on oral tradition by repeating motifs and tale types from one generation to another without knowing what they meant or where they had come from in the distant past. Such a theory minimizes if not eliminates any creative ability in the raconteurs of oral tradition. If we are to adopt this theory, we come close to insulting the African bard's abilities. Transcription and translation of texts I have collected in Mali indicate the opposite case. Bards are very creative, and the manipulation of motifs and larger narrative segments, as well as linguistic word play and ideophones, within the constraints of what these bards conceive of as a macro-level set of literary conventions indicate extremely creative ability. The violation of the macro-level conventions is in fact one of the ways bards act creatively, some bards being better at composition than others.

Miller argues that variation is due to the fact that bards place a positive value on individual elaboration of historical clichés. He states that the analysis of variation is a strength the historian may use to understand historicity in oral tradition. But he does not really explain the methodology of how this is to be done. Folklorists view variation as a contemporary phenomenon, based not upon the interpretation of

the past by epic bards, but the interpretation of the present. Contemporary regional relationships between clans, for example, are often described in the epic of Sun-Jata, but the variations one encounters are easily related to present-day clan relations. Different regions have different relations, which are reflected in epic performance. In my recent book, *The Epic of Son-Jara* (1986), I have called this phenomenon "Law by Parable." Let me cite an example.

The Dabò clan, which Gordon Innes (1974) describes as a *masalen*, or royal clan, in the Gambia, is a casted blacksmith clan in Kita, a city west of Bamakò, the capital of Mali. In one episode, Sun-Jata is insulted by a Dabò blacksmith, and in wrestling with him, Sun-Jata pulls the head of the Dabò clansman completely off his neck. The bard explains that "*a d'a bò*," "he pulled it off." This episode is an etiological legend explaining the origin of the name Dabò. With what tool of the oral historian are we to look for historicity in this story? Mande people are very fond of linking etiological legends to folk etymologies of proper names in their society. The variation in these legends is due to local politics and social relations, and it is not easy to prove that they are reflections of historicity.

In conclusion, I should like to return to my original thesis, the contention that what Sun-Jata represents today remains easier to answer than who he may have been in the past. Sun-Jata is a culture hero. The epic which celebrates his memory constitutes a social and political charter of Mande culture, both reflective of their cosmology and participatory in its renegotiation of the past in the present. The evidence argues that events from the real life narrative of Sun-Jata as a person are not necessarily incorporated into the stereotyped plot of the contemporary epic which celebrates his life.

In the same region, there are other epics which carry similar structural traits, including the use of many of the same motifs (clichés) with other culture heroes. A cross-cultural view of other epics in West Africa outside the Mande regions gives similar results. Scholarship on European and Middle Eastern culture heroes dating back to von Hahn's famous treatise in 1836 lends further weight to arguments supporting the use of oral tradition in contemporary social functions.<sup>8</sup> Too much similarity recurs in too many epics concerning the culture hero to lend weight to the search for historicity in oral epic. Consequently, that these themes and motifs (Miller's clichés) are chosen for their literary value in structurally symbolizing worldview, as well as in simply telling a good story, rather than for their value in recording chronological history, is still as reasonable a conclusion now

as it was some years ago when oral historians renewed their attempts to answer their critics in anthropology.

The problem the folklorist must face lies in the idea behind the phrase I used above: "events from the real life narrative of Sun-Jata as a person are not necessarily incorporated into the stereotyped plot of the contemporary epic." While arguments from performance-centered contextualist folkloristics today appear to me to be stronger than those of the research methods of the oral historian, time has a way in academics of bringing down theories in one generation of scholars that seemed so sound in another. While I remain an agnostic with regard to the search for historicity in oral tradition, I am not a heretic.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> An oral version of this essay was presented to the 29th annual meeting of the African Studies Association in Madison, Wisconsin, from 30 October to 2 November, 1986. The culture hero under discussion is Narè Magan Konatè, founder of the empire of Old Mali (the Manden) in the thirteenth century and better known by his contemporary praise-name Sun-Jata (Soundiata, Sundjata) Keita. For a complete background to this culture hero and the epic recited to his memory in modern West Africa, especially Mali, see Johnson, et al. (1986).

<sup>2</sup> Shils' general approach to the concept of *tradition* is thoroughly discussed in his book *Tradition* (1981).

<sup>3</sup> For a discussion of his approach to this subject, see Person (1973).

<sup>4</sup> The conference concerned culture, tradition, and ethnicity and was held at Indiana University in March of 1984. It was part of a binational research collaboration initiated by the American Council of Learned Societies and the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. The proceedings of this conference appeared in the *Journal of Folklore Research* 21:2/3 (1984). I should also like to thank all my students and colleagues in the Folklore Institute and in other departments at Indiana University who have participated in my seminar on "The Concept of Tradition in Folkloristics."

<sup>5</sup> For a discussion and summary of the history of the concept of primitiveness in social evolution in Western academics, see Kuper (1988).

<sup>6</sup> For their somewhat radical but stimulating views, see Handler and Linnekin (1984).

<sup>7</sup> See especially chapters two and three of Schechner (1985).

<sup>8</sup> Von Hahn (1836) was followed by several famous books on the subject of the stereotyped culture hero, namely Nutt (1881), Raglan (1936), Rank (1909), Campbell (1949), and De Vries (1963).

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## Family Settlement Stories and Personal Values

S A N D R A D O L B Y S T A H L

*It is difficult for us today to accept  
the fact that a family could consider a  
house with but a single room and a loft  
adequate to their needs.* Warren E. Roberts [1984]

In *Log Buildings of Southern Indiana*, Warren Roberts asserts that in the pre-industrial era the majority of people in the expanding Midwest lived in what he calls "The Basic Anglo-American House," a single-room dwelling of log construction with an overhead loft (Roberts 1984:179). He spends some time addressing the question of why people find that such a difficult fact to accept today. He contends that because of our contemporary taste and technical advances we project our own preference for larger, multi-roomed homes onto the early pioneers. We address their needs through a worldview tied to the present rather than the past.

This same failure to account for a contemporary perspective influencing the interpretation of folklore materials is even more apparent in studies of personal or family narratives from an earlier era. To illustrate this difference in perspective, let me present a brief overview of some work I have initiated with regard to family stories relating to settlement on the frontier. Studies of migration during America's frontier settlement period show that for every family that moved from a place of long settlement there was "an initial period in which an isolated nuclear family pioneered in a new territory" (Adams and Kasakoff 1984:35). What this suggests is that the experiences of families in settling a new territory were likely to be remembered as



adventures, as tests of character, stories that illustrate the resourcefulness, strength, and courage that allowed these early settlers to survive and succeed despite their isolation from a supportive kinship system. Scholars who determine to collect and study such stories must ask first what motive keeps such stories alive within the families, and perhaps as well what triggers their demise.

In my initial research into this topic in Huntington County, Indiana, I have found that family settlement stories are not so common as I had supposed. Mody Boatright (1958) led the way in identifying this genre of folk narrative in the American context and spurring others on to collect and analyze such stories. Many of the themes Boatright identified in Texas are indeed common in Indiana as well, but they are to be found in printed sources from the 1930's and 1940's, not in the current repertoires of families, especially not among the younger family members who must assume "ownership" of the stories if they are to be passed on to the next generation.

In part this is due to the typical context in which such stories are told. Often the primary storyteller for family narratives is an older woman, and the stories are usually told at family gatherings. In such situations, younger family members are passive bearers; they are receivers; they tacitly acknowledge the older woman's "ownership" and authority. So long as the stories function solely as "family history," chances are good that the active repertoire will remain attached to the older authority figure with few occasions in which other family members assume an active storyteller role.

There are, however, exceptions to this pattern. One exception is the use of family stories as cautionary tales. Many of the "Caddy Buffers" described by Kathryn Morgan (1980) function as fables or parables to illustrate how a significant ancestor (Grandmother Caddy) behaved in a particular situation that is perceived by the teller to be analogous to a current problematic situation. Another exception, and one I would like to focus on in this essay, is the use of family stories in the more subtle practice of characterizing the family for a current generation.

Both of these uses of family narrative are quite different from the "purely" historical use often envisioned for such narratives. In other words, while family stories do sometimes serve to inform "the family" about how and when ancestors came to live where they did—i.e., straightforward historical information—they may also serve needs beyond that of history for its own sake. They may represent a kind of "emic presentism," a "native" interest in history for the sake of

throwing light on current individual concerns, such as how to teach a sense of "family character."

Anthropological historian George Stocking (1968) is critical of contemporary historiographers who trace a discipline's history with an eye toward current concerns and especially the theoretical perspectives that happen to be in vogue. He feels such "presentism" cannot accurately account for the actual historical development of ideas but rather offer only rhetorical support for the researcher's current perspective. His criticism may be sound with regard to historians, but the effects of presentism may indeed be welcome if the "historians" are family storytellers. Such emic presentism recognizes the truth reflected in inaccurate narrative. As Kay Cothran (1972) suggests, it treats the lie as truth. Emic presentism turns historical narrative to blatantly non-historical ends.

As narratives, family settlement stories serve literary as well as historical goals. In fact, as folk narratives, such stories follow fairly predictable structural patterns even though the content of family stories is typically not indexed. Like personal narratives, local character anecdotes, and some personal legends, family stories may through their variability of content serve the storyteller's personal literary goal of "narrative value endorsement" (see Stahl 1988). That is, such stories endorse specific values by illustrating fundamental themes or character traits. And often the historical accuracy of the narrative is sacrificed for the sake of the more compelling requirement of a literary or psychological goal, a personal value asserted boldly in the face of a collectively held counter-value.

Consider for example the following story recorded from my mother, Loretta Dolby of Huntington, Indiana. Present when the story was recorded was my sister, Carol, and myself. The time period of the reported incident is approximately 1850.

Mom: My great-grandfather. Yeah, my Grandmother Henricks's father and mother. They moved from Virginia to Illinois. And they came in a Conestoga wagon. My grandmother walked most of the way behind.

Carol: Ach! Women's Lib take note!

Mom: It would be her job to keep the cow or two in line that was following this old Conestoga wagon. But her father was stricken by lightning while he was sitting on this wagon—and died.

Carol: Probably from making his wife walk behind!

Mom: And Grandma Knupp—Great-grandmother Knupp—had to take—go to where they were going in Illinois. And they buried him there. Then she raised all of her family then by herself. Never remarried. I don't know how she did it.

This story is effective as a dramatic statement about the hardness of the great-grandmother who had to bury her husband in a sparsely populated wilderness and raise a family by herself in an Old Northwest pioneer setting. The notion of being struck by lightning is both dramatic and symbolic. There is, in fact, a relevant motif in the Thompson index: A285.1 Lightning as Weapon of the Gods. Carol's joking comment that the father was struck by lightning as punishment for his mistreatment of his wife (actually it was his daughter who walked behind) is in reference to this longstanding belief that God or the gods punish mankind by sending lightning to strike them dead.

The story is effective and interesting, but it is also historically inaccurate. Great-great grandfather Knupp was indeed struck by lightning while riding on a wagon, and he did die. However, it was not while he was driving the Conestoga wagon which brought them to the Midwest. Instead he was killed some three years after they had settled in central Indiana (not Illinois; the widowed wife moved there later). While still in Indiana, Jacob Knupp (the father) loaded furniture onto a regular flatbed wagon drawn by two horses and was driving it to his newly-wed daughter's new home when he was struck by lightning. The father and one horse were killed. The chest upon which he was sitting was scarred by the lightning bolt. The chest remains in the family as a memento.

I have this more accurate account (plus supportive records) from distant relatives (my mother's cousins) who live nearer to the family homestead in Illinois and are indeed the family which has the burned chest in its possession. My mother has heard this "accurate version" of the story, but in most instances, when inspired or called upon to tell the story, she tells her own version represented by the text above. Why does she stick with this "folklorized" version? I think it is because her version more dramatically and thus more effectively serves to characterize our family ancestor as a strong and courageous woman who survived the trials of pioneering on her own, without the help of a man. There are other stories that characterize the male ancestors in the family, but this one serves to convey a strong female role model.

My sister and I are the audience for the story. My mother is eager to pass along a sense of family character, a message that women in our family are strong, they endure. She is less interested in historical accuracy. The "history" she wants us to learn is what personal values

are significant for her, and by extension, for our family, what kind of character our family has chosen to identify as its own. This is emic presentism. History is skewed to serve contemporary developmental concerns and ideas. And, it is history skewed by a particular individual, a "native" historian, the primary bearer of my family's history.

My question in this instance is, what kind of transformation has occurred? Is it a simple matter of folkloric process, the kind that has given us the great spread of naturally occurring variants? Is it, perhaps, an example of social transformation inspired by the pervasive sweep of feminism specifically in this case, or more generally, simply American individualism? Or, is it my mother's bold assertion of her own values, gained through a long and unique lifetime, and reflective of her own personal philosophy? Ultimately, of course, it is both—it is both social and personal, both collective and idiosyncratic. Social transformation cannot occur without personal transformation, and folklore cannot exist unless an individual interprets and presents it. Stories, songs, and houses change over time, but that change reflects not simply a change in collective culture but the assertion of individual values as well.

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## Jamie Tamson's Legacy

MARY ELLEN BROWN

### *"Willy Weir's Legacy"*

*Here is a true and faithfu' list,  
An' not an article is miss'd,  
O' the utensils, gudes, an' gear,  
That did belang to Willie Weir.*

*He left twa horse, baith strong an' stout,  
An' Jessy his auld mare,  
Three halters, each five ells about,  
And six gude hooks to shear.*

*An' sour-milk barrels twa or three,  
An' twa gude new milk-stoups,  
An' dishes for their drinkin' tea,  
An' chairs to ha'd their doups.*

*Some ducks and geese to gang about,  
To gather worms and snails,  
A pair o' fanners, auld but stout,  
An' three gude threshin' flails.*

*A pleugh he left, the grund to till,  
An' sythe the grass that maws,  
A kist wad ha'd four bows o' meal,  
A gun to shoot the craws.*

*An auld black-fac'd, auld-fashion'd watch,  
A coal-rake an' a paidle,  
An angle-net the trouts to catch,  
A flesh-fork an' a laidle.*

*Twa curlin' stanes he also had,  
That ran out o'er the ice,  
A leather-whip, to thresh his yad,  
A box for ha'ding spice.*

*He also had a reddin' kame,  
To redd his wither'd lock,  
A belt that buckled round his wame,  
Four gude sacks, an' a pock.*

*He also had a muckle coat,  
To had him dry when foul,  
A bag for powder an' for shot,  
An auld Kilmarnock coul.*

*A cow he left, worth guineas five,  
An' trunchers mae than twa,  
Twa gude new carts as ane cou'd drive,  
Likewise a rattan fa'.*

*He also had a rusty sword,  
Lay ay on the bed-head,  
A gude wair cage, to ha'd a bird,  
A girdle for the bread.*

*He left twa kettles an' a pat,  
A pair o' clips, a cran,  
Twa bonny kittens, an' a cat,  
And an auld master-can.*

*He also had a gude oak-stick,  
A brazen-headed cane,  
Three needles that were unco quick,  
A bodkin made o' bane.*

*He also left to them an axe,  
Twa baskets, an' a wheel,  
A pair o' tawse, to gie them paiks,  
For he cou'd use them weel.*

*A candlestick he also had,  
A lantern, an' a lamp,  
A pair o' sunks, a ridin' pad,  
An' a strong badger stamp.*

*He left a hairy purse o' shag,  
O' Highland goat-skin leather,  
Likewise a chyster-pipe an' bag,  
Made o' a grumphy's blather.*

*He left to them a colley-dog,  
That aften catch'd a hare,  
A pet-ewe, market on the lug,  
Worth ten pound Scots an' mair.*

*He left to them a routin' horn,  
A pair o' brods an' bank,  
A durk, ance by her nanesell worn,  
A table foot an' stalk.*

*Twa beds, an am'ry, an' a press,  
Made o' the best o' oak,  
And an auld crackit looking-glass,  
A bittle, an' a knock.*

*A Holland gravit for his neck,  
A grape, a fork, a hoe,  
A forpit-dish, a tatie-peck,  
A firlot, an' a row.*

*Twa cogs, a luggie, an' a cap,  
A pair o' cloutet shoon,  
A parratch-stick, a mouse's trap,  
Sax cutties, an' a spoon.*

*O' blankets he had twa'r three pair,  
 A' gayly worn wei daffin',  
 Twa tykes o' bed, sae thin an' bare,  
 They scarce wad he'd the caff in.*

*A razor for to scrape his beard,  
 A mell for knockin' bear,  
 A sturdy spade to delve the yard,  
 A bridle for his mare.*

*Three pair o' buckles, twa o' brass,  
 The third was made o' capper,  
 A 'bacco-box, that maist wad pass  
 To've been a miller's happer.*

*He also had a knife and fork,  
 Made o' the best o' steel,  
 A bottle-screw, to draw the cork,  
 (That trade he liked weel.)*

*An' last o' a', a hecklin' kame,  
 A pair o' gude tow-cards,  
 A mustard-pat I soudna name,  
 Some said it was the laird's.*

[Thomson 1819:108-14]

When I first read the poetic inventory above, I thought immediately of Warren Roberts and his infectious and abiding interest in the "old traditional way of life." And I thought as well of literature as a source of data for reconstructing the past—"Willy Weir's Legacy" being the poetic equivalent of household inventories, probate records so often mined for knowledge of lives no longer lived. The author of this and other insightful pieces was a Scottish local poet, part of a literary tradition which emerged as a widespread phenomenon after literacy had become the norm, when print had become an accessible and cheap commodity—that is, mid- to late-eighteenth century. Building on earlier and simultaneous forms of literary expression—canonical, oral and local—the content of the poetry is, at least overtly, significantly local and limited, appealing to and written for a particular audience whose values and concerns shape the poetry. Thus, the local poet is a chronicler, often a barometer, of the community's events, concerns, values; and through poetry and song plays an integral role



in the life of a locale or region. The local poet then is witness to and recorder of the round of life—hence the value of the poet and poetry to the study of folklife, as data for cultural history.

The local poet is a leisure-time poet, an artist by avocation. Often referred to as the poet of a locale such as "Methven poet" or "Paisley bard," the local poet is in some ways an unofficial poet laureate, the group's artistic voice. It follows that the local poet's work is usually conservative, adhering to the accepted and expected in form and content. James VI's interesting advice, "Ze man also bewarre with composing onything in the same manner as hes been ower oft vsit of before" (Henderson 1910:334), contradicts the implied aesthetic sensibility of the local poet and his poetic aims. The local poet suffers little if any "anxiety of influence" (Bloom 1973). Much of the poetry, whether narrative or lyric, deals with local events, places, characters, and attitudes known to and representative of the poet's loose-knit constituency.

Poet and audience share both physical and perceptual worlds: the poet and his artistry depend on the community. The poet's primary audience is local and known and the poet addresses it specifically. When removed from place and audience, the poetic voice may fail as it did for Robert Tannahill during his absence from Paisley and for William Thom, the Inverurie poet, when he went to London. While the local poet tradition is primarily a literate tradition, many songs and poems are communicated verbally and aurally rather than by silent reading, that is, they are recited from memory or read aloud from manuscript or print, performed in formal and informal groups for family or friends at home; in clubs, pubs, and bothies; at weddings and on other convivial occasions. Many works, no doubt, languish at this point; some few are picked up and widely circulated orally. Others reach print and sometimes wider audiences through magazines, newspapers, chap publications, anthologies, and editions of individual poets. The latter were often facilitated in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries by a subscription taken prior to publication from among one's friends and family, in other words the local audience. A poet's work might then circulate orally, scribally, and typographically, and today, electronically.

Although a participatory, local, ephemeral movement flourishing in the nineteenth century, the local poet tradition was not *sui generis*. Rather the local poet took themes, content, form and style and borrowed compositional and socialization techniques as well as audiences from oral tradition. Literacy enabled the local poet to know and be influenced by the written literary tradition, to adapt forms,

reflective compositional techniques, and, above all, to utilize an additional means of dissemination—print. The local poets then might be called the genuine heritors of what T. C. Smout has designated "a magnificent double heritage"—the ballad makers and the "markaris" of the court circle who gave "the Scottish tongue a literary force and sweetness" (Smout 1970:188). Taking aspects from both, the local poet tradition is a combination, perhaps a synthesis, precipitated by the age of print. Beginning in the eighteenth century, thriving in the nineteenth, the tradition continues in attenuated form today.

The author of "Willy Weir's Legacy" was a typical local poet. Once compared to Burns, James Thomson the man and poet is today—unlike The National Poet of Scotland—largely forgotten. Born 10 September 1763 (died 6 May 1832), his appeal was confined to a place and a specific time largely because of the nature of his poetic endeavors: many of his poems refer to local characters, specific events, or were written as letters to friends and acquaintances. The audience was very local. Currie Village and the surrounding area were suburbs of Edinburgh and during Thomson's life saw many changes—a move from an agricultural and cottage industry economy to a more industrialized economy with the establishment of several paper mills.<sup>1</sup> Thomson himself stayed with the old ways, a cottage industry—as weaver; his occupational preference reflects a personal conservatism which also informed his poems and no doubt accounted for at least some of their success. He was known and recognized as bard, the Kenleith Bard.

Thomson was born in 1763 in Edinburgh but shortly thereafter was sent to Currie to live with his grandparents, who really became the only parents he ever knew. He attended the local school but a severe case of smallpox when he was seven kept him home for an extended period of time and effectively ended his formal education. His grandmother and an aunt filled the gap, teaching him what they knew. During his early years, between seven and thirteen, Thomson was responsible for herding his grandfather's cows; with him he often took a book of songs or ballads—perhaps by Allan Ramsay or Robert Burns. The other herders sought him out for a poem or song. But such pastoral pursuits ended when he was thirteen and was apprenticed to his grandfather, a weaver. He really had no choice and began at that age his intended lifetime occupation. He may well have attended school early in this period; accounts suggest, however, that if he did he was more concerned with making rhymes on his classmates than learning to spell. Some time after the conclusion of his apprenticeship, he moved to nearby Colinton, taking Elizabeth Burns as wife in 1787. When his grandfather died, he returned to Currie; it was then

that he came to the attention of Thomas Scott from the local Malleny estate. Perhaps Scott was taken, as some accounts suggest, with the poem Thomson had carved on a beam above his loom:

A simple weaver at his loom,  
Wi' duddy coat and pooches toom,  
May hae as guid and honest hert  
As ony Laird in a' the pert. [Bertram n.d:2]

and persuaded the poet to part with it. At any rate, Scott more or less became Thomson's patron and provided him with a cottage and land in return for Thomson's taking on a supervisory role on the estate—keeping a general eye on things and letting farms; this freed Thomson from the economic necessity of weaving. Thomson paid tribute to Scott's role by dedicating one edition of his poetry to him. Weaver, steward—he was also bloodletter, barber, butcher; no doubt these various roles enabled him to know in considerable detail what was being done, by whom, and why—ideal information for a successful local poet. He and Elizabeth Burns had a large family: seven daughters, one named Fergusson after the poet Robert Fergusson, and one son who was killed—at fifteen—when he fell off a horse.

As local poet Thomson took advantage of his numerous roles, official and unofficial. In his Malleny Estate job he versified the rules governing hunting or coursing on General Thomas Scott's property:

A' ye wha liberty hae got  
To course the lands o' General Scott,  
The following rules observe ilk ane,  
Or faith ye'll ne'er get leave again.  
I'm authorised, gentlemen,  
By my good laird, to let you ken.<sup>2</sup>

ending with the 7th:

Three deaths we grant, nae mair, a-day,  
These are our laws, you must obey;  
And tho' ye think them rather hard,  
Ye manna gang to blame the Bard.[ibid]

As barber, he had occasion to sharpen the local minister's razors, returning them with a verse which led Reverend James Dick to encourage Thomson to publish his work:

Your razors, man, were baugh indeed,  
 An' they o' sharpin' had great need;  
 But now, I think, they will come speed,  
 An' glegly rin,  
 Sae, redd ye, billie, tak gude heed,  
 They slipna in.<sup>3</sup>

Early supporters of Thomson made clear that he did not shirk his other duties to write poetry—he wrote after work. Nonetheless, what he wrote was often congruent with his work and with other facets of his life. Many poems were specifically written as letters or notes: in a letter "To The Rev. Mr. D—" he complains about the substitute minister who *read* his sermon. "To a Confectioner" describes his daughter and asks the confectioner's aid in finding her a job. Clearly his poems served him well, specifically and generally. Visitors from the locality flocked to his house for evenings of tunes (he played the fiddle), recitations of his poems, songs, stories, and refreshments of whiskey and oat cakes.

Thomson's poetry is markedly free of overt allusion to literary works; he mentions Gray, Aesop's Fables, the Bible, Dr. Blair, Allan Ramsay and wrote one poem "On Meeting a Gentleman at the Grave-stone of Mr. Robert Fergusson" and another "To the Memory of the Late Mr. Robert Burns." The poetic forms he employed, however, offer implicit evidence of the primary influences on his work, for the bulk of his poetry utilizes one or the other of two widely known poetic forms, Standard Habbie and the ballad stanza or modifications thereon, illustrating the dual influences of written and oral vernacular literary traditions.

Thomson's work may best be read as local history, as poetry recording aspects not only of the round of life but of the values and concerns shared by weavers and farmers/farm workers at the turn of the nineteenth century. Numerous poems are imbedded with maxims which no doubt reflect community views. In "On the Approach of Winter, Addressed to Mr. J. Comb," he says:

There's ae thing sure, that die we must,  
 All flesh is grass, and comes to dust;  
 The hardest mettle will by rust  
 Consume away;  
 The rocks are moulderin', crust by crust,  
 Into decay.[1819:39]

In another poem "Lines Addressed to a Miller, on seeing him torturing a rat," Thomson asserts:

Our neighbor's fau'ts are often shewn  
Without attending to our own,  
Which if we did wi' candid e'e,  
Far less censorious would we be.[1819:42]

In a poem of advice to a young man choosing a wife, the lines below offer time-worn advice:

Look whare ye'll light before ye loup,  
An' tyne not certainty for hope;  
For if ye do, like Aesop's colley,  
Too late ye will repent your folly.<sup>4</sup>

And in a poem urging shearers to do a good job at their work and masters to recognize that shearers are only human, he says:

The gowden rule keep i your ee,  
"What ye wad ithers to you be,  
The very same to them do ye."<sup>5</sup>

He had the knack, then, of encapsulating in verse widely accepted views. Two other poems deserve mention because of their timeless reference. In a brief epigram Thomson suggests what many believed then and now:

Ye Doctors, use your greatest care,  
Your patients' lives a while to spare;  
On this alone depends your wealth,—  
To keep alive, though not in health.<sup>6</sup>

And the lines written "On the Times, in 1799" might well have been written only yesterday:

What will poor bodies do ava,  
For ev'ry thing's grown prices twa',  
The like o' this we never saw,  
Or ever kent,  
They'll tak our very life awa'  
Or e'er they stent.[1801:23]

The appeal of his works was undoubtedly based in part on their pithy articulation of a shared worldview. Other poems were well received because they described aspects of life—some local and some widespread—in delightful specificity. Whatever his subject, overt description played a part as in "Truth Rewarded" whose central character's literal and figurative undoing was at the hands of a woman:

Undress's themselfs, to bed they jumpit,

And in a sea of pleasure plumpit,  
 Too delicate, ye'll a' allow,  
 To be describ'd in words to you;[1801:61]

but goes on, later adding a description of the couple's awakening and leave-taking:

But first he snatch'd a morsel more,  
 Then slipp'd her canny to the door.[ibid:62]

Several of his most appealing poems are catalogues, extended descriptions, as in "Willy Weir's Legacy." Thomson describes a local barmaid Marion Cunningham, now deceased. "On Raising and Selling the Dead" is virtually a journalistic account of an actual occurrence—the capture of body snatchers who had exhumed two bodies in Lanark and were on their way to Edinburgh to seek financial gain for their nocturnal activity. Other descriptions are less concrete: several poems are based on local beliefs—in witches and ghosts—and often mock those very beliefs while taking the gullible reader or hearer in by asserting the "truth" of the account as:

There's mony lies an' stories tauld  
 O' hares an' witches slee an' bauld  
 But this I'm gaun to tell to you,  
 As I'm alive, it's very true.<sup>7</sup>

In addition to the poems whose appeal lay in the maxims or truisms they contained or in their joyful descriptive play, other works no doubt appealed because of their surprise endings. "Willy Weir's Legacy" ends a descriptive catalogue of Willy's possessions by hinting that his tobacco box was really the miller's container, by alluding to Willy's love of drink, and by suggesting that the mustard pot be excluded: though among Willy's possessions, it belonged to the laird! Thomson adds a postscript to his poem lamenting the death of the barmaid Marion Cunningham, which advises against depression: a new Marion, every bit as good as the old one, has now taken her place. His short poem "To Mr. A—R R—E, A Friend of the Author" illustrates his penchant for twist conclusions:

Sir, please receive thir twa three switches,  
 They'll keep awa frae ye the witches,  
 An' ither de'ils that may ye fright,  
 Whan ye come dand'rin' hame ae night.  
 Sic things my gude-dam tauld to me,  
 How that a switch o' rowan tree,

Gars a' the de'ils and witches fyke;  
 But O I think it's befin like!  
 But should they fail in this, I say,  
 O' drivin' de'ils an' ghaists away,  
 You'll find them usefu' ay at least,  
 Apply them to a lazy beast. [1801:133]

Thomson communicated his work orally, in manuscript, and in pamphlet and book. The first and primary way was, undoubtedly, oral. George Maclaurin, the presumed author of the prefatory statement to the 1801 edition of his work, describes Thomson's compositional and socializing techniques: "As naebody could read what he wrote, he seldom was at the trouble to use the pen, but committed the effusions of his Muse to the tablets of his memory, which were never allowed to rust; for his companions, delighted with his simple strains, tired him with their importunities, and forced him to repeat them" (1801:v-vi). Later in the same piece, Maclaurin recounts Thomson's method of reciting his own works: "his pieces receive no little embellishment from the manner in which he repeats them, [as] he interests, as well as amuses, the hearer. He never refuses to rehearse his compositions when he is asked; he delivers them with that steady and unaltered voice which marks the honest simplicity of an independent mind" (ibid:ix). But Thomson was not limited to the oral means of communication. He certainly communicated in handwritten manuscripts: the letters and notes he wrote to friends, acquaintances, and business associates offer evidence. Other poems were passed from hand to hand, especially those which dealt with a timely event or described a local figure. Certain poems on topics with potential interest beyond the very immediate locality were printed in pamphlet form; two of these exist: "On Raising and Selling the Dead" and "Elegy to the Memory of the Reverend Mr. James Dick, Minister of Currie."

Publishing of books came after Thomson had established an audience and received encouragement from individuals above his own social, economic, and educational background and position. Two volumes, in 1801 and in 1819, were published by subscription; and both subscription lists, printed as per tradition in the volumes, contain names of persons from many social classes and include some of the worthies of the day. The 1801 volume contains over 600 names, the 1819 over 500.

Thomson reached his audience then orally, in manuscript, and in print: these three means of communicating enabled an expanding circle of potential audiences. The subscription lists represent the fullest extent of his audience, located in the greater Edinburgh area,

and include individuals from various class and social divisions. The closer one lived to Thomson and the nearer in social status, the greater the chance of face-to-face encounter; the farther away, the greater the likelihood of printed communication. There is evidence that Thomson had a *very* vocal, very local fan club which visited him periodically, certainly yearly on his birthday. Called the Kent Club after the Kent or shepherd's crook they each carried in imitation of Thomson, they processed to his house behind a piper. Many other individuals came as well, both to show their esteem for his work and to hear him recite. He kept a Visitor's Book, signed by 1,500 persons by 1827, five years before his death. Thomson, then, had a following, was known and visited as poet.

He was obviously aware, too, that an audience mattered—whether he communicated orally or in writing. He could and did adjust his language depending on the subject of his poem or the social position of the intended addressee or audience: the higher up the class ladder an individual was, the more likely was Thomson to use English rather than Scots. His "Elegy" for Rev. Dick is in English, befitting a piece intended to recall a deceased minister to his fellow clergymen. A more couthy Scots vernacular dominates in letters to friends, in descriptions of farms. The force of oral communication and its demand for an audience undoubtedly influenced Thomson: he needed one too. The Dedication of the 1801 volume to the Merchants of Leith recognizes the role of the audience as necessary co-participants in artistic communication:

Come, tell me, lads when you let slip  
 Frae out your port a dainty ship,  
 Dinna ye get a pilot stout,  
 To guide her right, and steer her out?  
 Sae should an author 'bout him look,  
 For patrons to protect his book.[1801:xxi]

He got them; and for a span of twenty years or so at the beginning of the nineteenth century, Jamie Tamson—as he was familiarly known—had an audience. Perhaps he and his work have not been well-remembered beyond that time and place—despite the published editions—because his real audience was a primary one, based on face-to-face oral communication, a contemporary primary audience who could share both poetry and its reflection of local life as in the poem "To a Confectioner in Edinburgh, Requesting Him to Find a Place for one of The Author's Daughters"—a real letter, albeit in verse:



I'm taul'd you can, whene'er you please,  
 Find places wi' the greatest ease,  
 For servant-maids o' ilka station,  
 Wi' the brawest gentry in the nation.  
 A friend of mine requests your aid,  
 To find a lady wants a maid,  
 To mak' her duds, an' busk her braw,  
 Or lift her scissars when they fa';  
 To deck the head, an' plait the hair,  
 And every faded charm repair;  
 Or dext'rously supply with art,  
 That bloom which Nature failed t' impart;  
 Whiles smuggle a letter from her jo',  
 An many other things you know,  
 That wad be tedious here to mention;  
 Indeed, they're past my comprehension.

Gif sic a place cannot be had,  
 Her neist resort's a chambermaid;  
 An' for the rest-eight pound's her fee,  
 An ither twa to find her tea;  
 For a' our lasses now-a-days,  
 They are bred up in siccan ways,  
 They maun hae tea, you neena doubt it,  
 Altho' their sarks be torn an' cloutit:  
 Should it be requisite for thee  
 To ken her eild, an' what she's wi'-  
 The Lassie's nearly twenty-one,  
 Nae doubt she's looking for a man;  
 Ilk maid that sees her time o' life,  
 Has ay a wish to be a wife,-  
 With Maxwell Gordon she's residing,  
 Four years wi' him she has been biding;  
 And that should help to recommend her,  
 To bodies wha hae never kend her.

Now gif in this you'll favour me,  
 Your humble debtor I shall be;  
 And gif I e'er should hae to buy  
 A berry tart or apple-pie,  
 Or at the new-year, cake o' bread,  
 That's clad wi' sweetsies on the head,  
 I'll come to you, ye needna fear,  
 I'll neither grudge nor ca' them dear;  
 But frankly put into your hand,  
 Whate'er in reason you demand:  
 But Oh! do try to serve my lasses!

Your's,

Jamie Thomson,  
 At Parnassus.[1819:50-52]

His published works, of course, survive on library shelves<sup>8</sup> as data for reconstructing the life and art of his time and place. But there is another more public and persisting record of James Thomson, Bard of Kenleith, in place names: the standard Geographic Plan of Edinburgh shows five names in Currie which recall the Kenleith (now spelled Kinleith) Bard, although few people today know their significance. The name Kenleith was undoubtedly derived from the Kinleith Burn and the two adjacent farms (Easter Kinleith and Middle Kinleith). The map shows a Thomson Crescent, a Thomson Road, a Thomson Drive; more significantly, it marks his cottage with the name he gave it, Mt. Parnassus; and the portion of the burn behind and below his house is marked, "Poet's Glen." (See Fig. 2) Today the Glen is overgrown and minimally accessible. While no fan clubs watch over the relics of the poet—his glen or cottage still inhabited *and* bearing over the main door its Thomson given name—there is a current local tradition which identifies a field enclosed with a dry stane dyke somewhat south and to the side of his cottage as the "Poet's Home," one place he went to write. Few remember his poetry because it was so tied to time and place, qualities which make the work of Thomson and other local poets ideal sources of data for folklife specialists—an artistic change of pace—Jamie Tamson's legacy to Warren and his ilk!

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> I am particularly indebted to John Tweedie, Currie, for references to Thomson and for useful historical information.

<sup>2</sup> From "Rules: To be observed by those who hunt or course on the property of General Thomas Scott of Malleny" (Thomson 1819:162-64).

<sup>3</sup> From "To the Rev. Mr. J.D-K of Currie, on the Author's being employed by him to set his Razors" (Thomson 1801:137).

<sup>4</sup> From "Advice to Young Men" (Thomson 1801:10).

<sup>5</sup> From "To the Masters" (Thomson 1801:13).

<sup>6</sup> From "Epigram" (Thomson 1801:45).

<sup>7</sup> From "The Hare" (Thomson 1819:173).

<sup>8</sup> In addition to Thomson's publications, their prefatory material, and an edition *Poems of James Thomson Weaver of Kenleith* (Langwill 1894), I have had the benefit of several other sources of information on Thomson, including Bertram Currie *Chronicle: Journal of the Currie District History Society* (March 1976); John Geddie (1896); the General

Register Office for Scotland; W.J.I. (1813); Catherine G. Peutherer (n.d.); James U. Thomson (1963, 1979); and John Tweedie and Cyril Jones (1975).

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Figure 1. James Thomson.

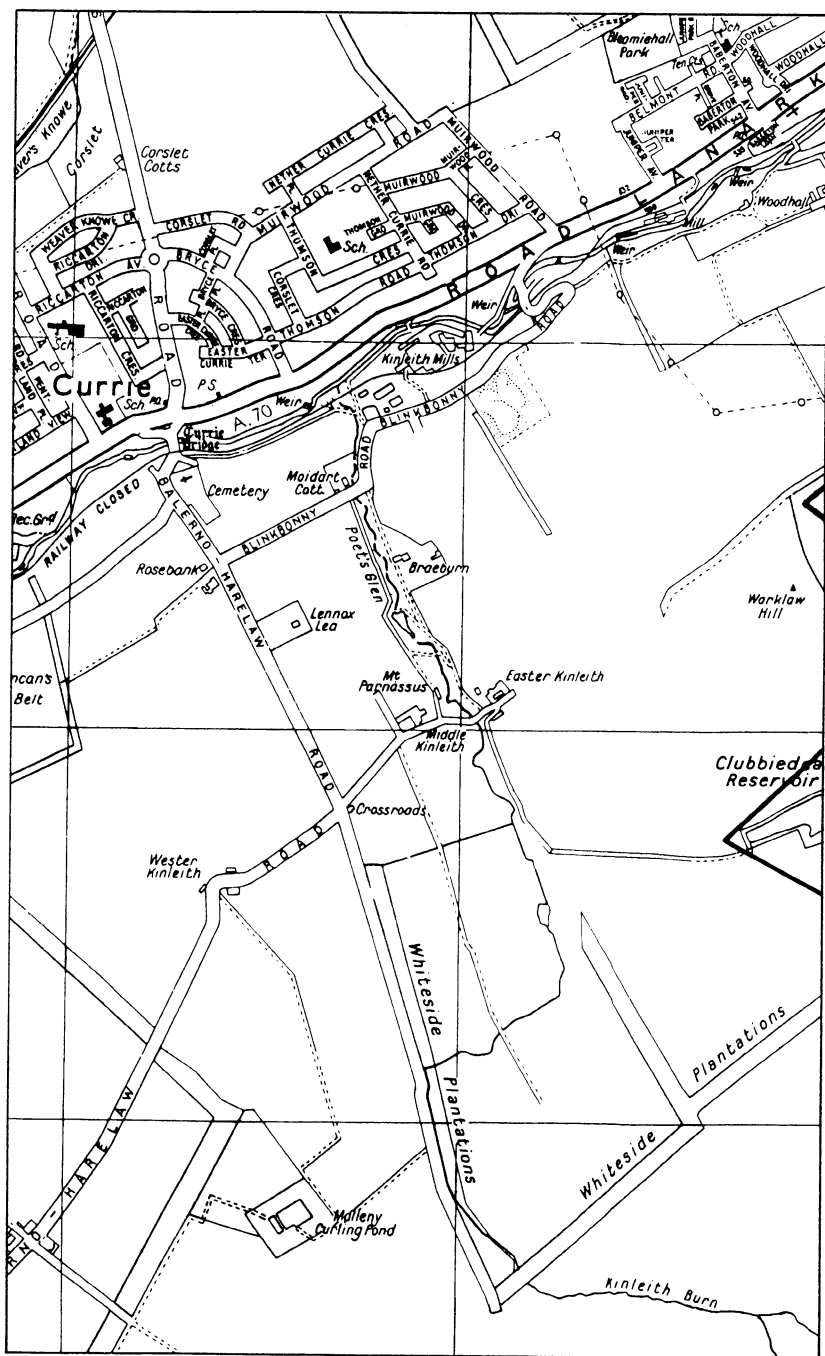


Figure 2. Thomson's home near Currie.

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