

The responsible folklore of AIDS does something we, as AIDS educators, do not seem to be able to do on our own—it makes it cool to be in the know, and perhaps, in the near future, it will make it cool to be safe. . . .

. . . Talk plain and talk practical. Tell stories, tell jokes, write on the walls!!! If you don't they will—and what they say and what they write may or may not be what you want to hear (pp. 132-33).

It is regrettable that it has taken so long for us to begin to document the culture of this epidemic. Sadly, in the three years since the publication of this book—indeed, in the seven years since these papers were written—there has been no indication of changes in attitude, of greater involvement of PWAs/HIV in their own care and treatment, or of progress toward ending this scourge. Goldstein and her colleagues have paved the way for us to gather information and to use our insights to effect change. Perhaps we cannot cure AIDS, but we can make the world a better place for all those affected, whether they have AIDS/HIV, know someone with the disease, or merely fear it.

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Arthur Goldstuck. *The Rabbit in the Thorn Tree: Modern Myths and Urban Legends of South Africa*. 216 pp. ISBN 0 140 148078. Penguin, 1990.

———. *The Leopard in the Luggage: Urban Legends from Southern Africa*. 309 pp. ISBN 0 140 17615 2. Penguin, 1993.

———. *Ink in the Porridge: Urban Legends of the South African Elections*. 221 pp. ISBN 0 140 24659 2. Penguin, 1994.

Like all folklore studies, the scholarly study of contemporary legend suffers—if that's the right word—from being popular. The field has obviously never been restricted to those with university training in Folklore: there have always been collectors, organizers, and analyzers of folklore who are not professional folklorists. And many non-scholars want to be part of it, too. That this is so today is shown most clearly by the huge international

popularity of alt.folklore.urban, the Usenet computer newsgroup to which four or five hundred postings are made every day on topics related to popular understandings of contemporary legends.

This Everymanism is not to be sniffed at: computer "FAQs," files of "frequently asked questions," are a resource that should be known to and used by every folklorist.

Whether the popularizers among them are to be kindly seen as collectors and archivists, or less kindly as stripminers, is up to you. As an archivist trained in Folklore, who also does a small trade in popular media, I'll reserve judgement. But there's a lot of it about, in every communication medium. In late autumn 1996, the commercial Internet provider America On-Line instituted a feature called Legs Urbano, based on a fictional hero who tracks down "Uls" (as legends, hoaxes, wrongful beliefs and scams are known to the Internet-elite) to spread breaking news about origins, truth value and variations. Archiving or stripmining? Legs is distributor, debunker, annotator and entertainer, all at once.

Arthur Goldstuck is another one. His series of books of "urban legends from Southern Africa" are best-selling Penguin paperbacks in South Africa, and beyond. The back cover of his second legend book, *Leopard*, says of him that "Arthur Goldstuck is the former News Editor of *The Weekly Mail*. He is also the author of *Making Money from Freelance Journalism in South Africa*." Legend collection and distribution is, for Goldstuck, a species of freelance journalism.

Goldstuck speaks to a popular ear, and his audience has responded by filtering back to him many stories the average folklore collector would never have occasion to hear. What Jan Brunvand became in the 1980s to Americans' ideas of what contemporary legends are, Arthur Goldstuck has become to southern Africans' ideas. An active journalist himself, many of Goldstuck's sources seem to be other journalists, giving him a network of ears-to-the-ground throughout South Africa and adjacent countries. He has built over the past couple of years a web site ("Legends From a Small Country"—URL: <http://www.legends.org.za/arthur>) that has worked to advertise not only his legendric interests and publications, but also his other journalistic and entrepreneurial endeavours.

The three Goldstuck books are not small: together they comprise 750 pages of rumours, legends, anecdotes and journalistic war-stories. This is a fine archive of folklore and, together with the web site, a research centre not easily ignored.

But for those of us trained in academic Folklore studies, with a need to ground every text in the context of its collection, Goldstuck's texts leave us unsatisfied. His is a brash, conversational style that sounds very oral but which, by its consistency, obscures the living context in which each legend

had been told. His texts are presented in re-told form, all with the performative style of a single good storyteller: Goldstuck.

In *Rabbit* (p. 214), he tells us, "None of the above [list of original tellers] is credited for individual legends in the course of the book, as many of the tales came from several sources in identical versions." Ah, collation.

Okay, I whine. These books by Goldstuck *are* readable books. Many of us folklorists, in this most demotic of scholarly areas, suffer from a determined ignorance, casting our gaze over the heads of those untrained folklorists working in "our" fields, avoiding their notice, or ours of them, for fear of contaminating our research methods and reputations with theirs.

And I waver. This "living context" which I said is obscured in Goldstuck, and which we pride ourselves on describing: in the late 1990s, how many of us can be sure there is such a thing? Or that there ever has been such a pristine thing, especially in clear contrast to the retelling contexts that *we* create as collectors, presenters, and analyzers?

The public has a huge capacity for listening to and retelling contemporary legends. It also has a huge appetite for knowing the *truth* about them. People like Goldstuck (or Bennett, Brunvand, Hobbs, Smith), who write accessible and intelligent things about these stories, tell the reading public about themselves, about their lives and the contexts of their lives. The best folklore (that is, the most successful popular knowledge) is folklore with the appearances of being correct: annotated, tracked, explained, and scientifically exegesized. Goldstuck does a good job of these appearances and bears a strong tendency towards debunking.

But, and this is a big but, his sources are rare. He may make good folklore, but he makes poor folklore studies. Early on, his source referencing in the text is better than typical journalist-mode: dates are usually given for publications, making it possible for the careful reader to retrace many of Goldstuck's steps. But his references do get sloppy with undated, unsourced attributions (e.g., *Ink*, 97-99). His small bibliography at the back of each book is not useful because it does not show which texts come from where.

Southern Africa is as rich an area of the world with regards to contemporary legends as any of those areas studied by other collectors. Stories that were widely reported in Britain or America some years ago are alive and well by Goldstuck's report out of Africa. The hair-dresser's mistake (accusing a man of masturbation when he is cleaning his glasses) is one such text, more developed in Goldstuck's version than others I've seen (*Rabbit*, p. 144). The house-cleaning woman dressed only in a football helmet is reported here, but on second reading I see Goldstuck is reporting the text as being known elsewhere, but without a sighting in southern Africa (*Rabbit*, pp. 151-152).

There are a lot of familiar stories in these books; one wonders how many of his texts report on the African situation for a wider audience, and how many report, for an African audience, legends which are in currency elsewhere. I do not know the answer and cannot always tell the difference. In his words, "This is no academic analysis. The prime aim of this work is to entertain" (*Leopard*, p. ix).

As you would hope, there are many regional and local types and versions reported here, as well as new stories that seem not to have been reported elsewhere. *Ink in the Porridge* gets its name from a story (pp. 26-29) used by a later-discredited politician who claimed that the food served black voters at rallies of the white-dominated National Party contained invisible ink that would show up as ultraviolet stains on the hands of potential voters, disqualifying them en masse. A cycle of stories is reported about parents who put their child in hospital with what he calls "holiday fever" so they can go on a vacation (*Leopard*, pp. 50-51). He notes the currency of a legend about a child carving a potato to look like a grenade and tossing it into an armoured vehicle, scattering the occupants and allowing the vehicle to be taken by the opposition (*Rabbit*, p. 32). I would think this legend is not widely known in urban areas throughout the world, but it is suggestive, he says, of situations in war zones like Vietnam thirty years ago or France fifty years ago.

Goldstuck is subject to rhetorical flourishes that are exaggerations, a sign of wanting to entertain, and perhaps a sign of little editorial attention. "Most urban legends about Aids fall into two categories: those that are little more than jokes, and those that are full blown conspiracy theories" (*Rabbit*, p. 153). "Rare is the urban legend which does not express some kind of prejudice against strangers or foreigners or their products" (*Rabbit*, p. 178). Expressed differently there may be some truth here, but I doubt he believes these blanket statements. So, what do we readers believe? Again, I am not sure.

There is a lot of valuable material in these books. *Ink* is a particularly fine collection of rumour and disinformation in the evolving political arena of an election campaign. It could be a textbook for a course on how folklore and electoral strategy work together. Any serious collector of publications on contemporary legend today should acquire these books. They are good archives of beliefs, rumours and legends circulating in southern Africa and may do well in courses on regional legendry. But I would not recommend any of them as a textbook for a general study of contemporary legend. The scholarly apparatus is missing; without that apparatus these books certainly are folklore, but they aren't Folklore.

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