FOAFTALE NEWS

NEWSLETTER
OF
THE INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY FOR CONTEMPORARY LEGEND RESEARCH

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IN THIS ISSUE

From the Editor

As spring begins, I'm excited about our upcoming annual meeting in Harrisburg. Many legend scholars will be there, including some who have not come to ISCLR for a while. Warm thanks to Yvonne Milspaw for all of her good work in organizing this excellent conference!

Wishes for a wonderful spring and summer,

Elizabeth (Libby) Tucker

Perspectives on Contemporary Legend: 29th International Conference Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, May 24-27, 2011

The International Society for Contemporary Legend Research is pleased to announce that the 2011 Perspectives on Contemporary Legend Twenty-ninth International Conference is to be held at the Hilton Harrisburg, in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania.

The 2011 meeting will be organized as a series of seminars at which the majority of those who attend will present papers and/or contribute to discussion sessions. Concurrent sessions will be avoided so that all participants can hear all the papers. The organizer of the conference is:

Dr. Yvonne J Milspaw
Department of Communications, Humanities and the Arts
Harrisburg Area Community College
1 HACC Drive
Harrisburg, PA 17036
yjmilspa@hacc.edu
Office phone 1-717-780-2555
Fax 1-717-780-3281

Registration forms, payments and any questions about dues or registration fees should be sent to:

Dr Elissa R Henken
Department of English
Park Hall
University of Georgia
Athens, GA 30605 USA
ehenken@uga.edu

Registration fees

for ISCLR members
$90 USD, $92 CAD, £55, 65€
for non-ISCLR members
$130 USD, $135 CAD, £75, 95€
Student non-ISCLR members
$115 USD, $117 CAD, £67.50, 83.50€

Registration forms and other conference information will be available at:
www.contemporarylegend.org

Hotel, Conference Location and Travel

The conference will be held in the Hilton Harrisburg Hotel, One North Second Street, Harrisburg PA 17101. Reservations for the hotel can be made through the website www.harrisburg.hilton.com or by telephone at (717) 233-6000. The room rate is $124 per night, and be sure to mention that you are with the ISCLR group. Meeting rooms are in the hotel and will be provided to us free if enough people stay at the hotel. The hotel is only three blocks from the Harrisburg train and bus station (with easy access from Washington DC and New York City via Philadelphia on Amtrak trains or bus), and is a 15 minute $20 taxi ride from the Harrisburg International Airport. Harrisburg is a small beautiful city, and the hotel is only a very short walk from a lovely riverside park, a dozen fine restaurants, eleven local legends, ten haunted sites, nine baseball players, eight art galleries, seven swans a swimming, six decent pubs, five glorious days, four nice libraries, three dangerous bookstores, two micro-breweries (I know you are interested in local culture), and one huge ghost ridden battlefield (Gettysburg—30 minute drive).

Preliminary Program

Tuesday May 24, 2011

Registration and Welcome 8:30
Registration will remain open during the first day

First Session 9:00 - 10:30
Hero Stories

"Sort of a Hero: Patterns in Strongman Legends Based on the Jack Fasig Narratives"
Simon J Bronner, Pennsylvania State University

"The Barefoot Bandit, Outlaw Legend, and Modern American Folk Heroism"
Casey R Schmitt, University of Wisconsin-Madison

"Celebrity Culture and Contemporary Legends: Emergent Narratives on Athletes Behaving Badly"
Trevor Blank, Pennsylvania State University

Second Session 11:00 – 12:30
Legends and the Modern World

"Organisation and Contemporary legend: When Narrative Causes Misunderstanding"
Aurore Van de Winkel, Catholic University of Louvain

Understanding Unusual Medical Information (or what happens when your nursing students believe there's a link between MMR and autism, but think "penis fish" are a legend)"
Andrea Kitt, East Carolina University

Third Session 2:00 – 4:00
Strange Hero Stories

"The Contemporary Wendigo"
Gail de Vos, Storyteller, University of Calgary

"Shamanic Influences Upon the Pied Piper Legend"
Jim Kline, Northern Marianas College

"Dangerous Alternatives: Boy Scout Disaster Stories and Legends Imagining the Natural World"
Spencer Green, Pennsylvania State University

Evening: Welcome Barbecue hosted by Simon and Sally Bronner
1432 Round Hill Road, Harrisburg PA 17110

Weather permitting, a campfire will be available for legend-telling and marshmallow roast. Nature walk optional for those who want to "venture into the dark, dark woods" with child guides. And for the active set, there is a trampoline and Bronner's children ready to show you Wizard 101 and Cityville on the computer when they're not playing folk games. We also have musical instruments. Adult food and beverages also provided.

Wednesday, May 25, 2011

First Session 9:00 – 10:30
Local Legend

"Hex Hollow: The Rehmeyer Witch Legend of Southern York County"
Charlotte M Albert, Pennsylvania State University

"Tracking the Dynamics of a Contemporary Legend: The Shag-Band Menace"
Joel Best, University of Delaware
Kathleen Bogle, LaSalle University

"Third Bridge: Local Legend in Aurora Colorado"
Cathy Preston, University of Colorado at Boulder

Second Session 11:00 – 12 noon
Special Session

"Is There Such a Thing as the Contemporary Legend?"
Linda Dégh, Indiana University
Facilitator: Elizabeth Tucker, Binghamton University

Third Session 2:00 – 4:00
Mutants and Monsters

"Getting Maryland's Goat: The Goatman Legend in Prince George's County"
David J Puglia, Pennsylvania State University

"Michigan Mutations"
Daniel Compora, University of Toledo

"A Fairy? How Lame is That?: *True Blood* as Folk Narrative"
Mikel J Koven, University of Worcester

4:30 ISCLR Business Meeting

Evening Events
under Construction: possible legend trip to Rehmeyer's Hollow, site of a famous hex murder
Film Hex and/or presentation on Powwowing by Ken Thigpen, Pennsylvania State University

Thursday, May 26, 2011

First Session 9:00 – 10:30
Virtual Ghosts, Trips and Legends

"Crying Babies, Tiny Handprints and Terror on the Web: Virtual legend Tripping
Diane Goldstein, Indiana University

"Legends of Lily Dale"
Elizabeth Tucker, Binghamton University

"They all see dead people—but we don't (do) want to tell you about it": On Legend Gathering in Real and Cyberspace"
Janet Langlois, Wayne State University

Second Session 11:00 – 12:00
Legend and Proverb

"The Dog in the Manger: The Rise and Decline in Popularity of a Proverbial Fable Remnant"
Wolfgang Mieder, University of Vermont
Discussant: Dan Ben-Amos, University of Pennsylvania

Third Session 2:00 – 4:00
Media and Legend

"The News Abused: What Fake News Stories and Photographs have in Common with Contemporary Legends"
Russell Frank, Pennsylvania State University

"U.S. Television News media, Cultural Hegemony and the Specter of 'Conspiracy Theory'"
Brent Augustus, Memorial University of Newfoundland

"Looming 'Looterers' and Needy Newsmen: Perceptions of Credibility and the Impact on Hurricane Response"
Virginia Fugarino, Memorial University of Newfoundland

Evening: Banquet of Pennsylvania Foods
Bricco, Harrisburg, PA

Friday, May 27, 2011

First Session 9:00 -- 10:30
Urban Legends

"Stories from the Frontlines: Contemporary Legends Among Canadian Immigration Foreign Service Officers"
Ian Brodie, Cape Breton University

"Killer in the Backseat: Revisited "
David A Samper, Independent Scholar, El Sobrante, CA

"American Creation Myths: Little House on the Prairie vs. a Tenement on the Lower East-Side"
Jeffrey Victor, Jamestown (NY) Community College

Second Session 11:00 – 12:00
Special Session

"And Then There Was a Hook…or Maybe There Wasn't! Unusual and Incompetent Variants and What They Tell Us About Legendry"
Bill Ellis, Pennsylvania State University

Closing Ceremonies
Group lunch at Passage to India

Evening Activities:
Harrisburg Senators Baseball game (Class AA, Washington Nationals farm team)
(Good local food and brews)

Abstracts

Albert, Charlotte M. (Penn State Harrisburg)
"Hex Hollow: The Rehmeyer Witch Legend of Southern York County"

On Thanksgiving night in 1928, a man and two youths committed York County, Pennsylvania's most notorious and to many locals, the most embarrassing, criminal act in the county's history. It is believed by some locals that the three assailants killed Nelson Rehmeyer in cold blood because he had placed a "hex" on them. Others believe that it was a simple case of a robbery gone wrong. Either way the story is told, a legend has revolved around the true story of the murder in Rehmeyer's Hollow that is passed on to this day from generation to generation. The story of the murder is usually told in the teen years with a legend trip to the hollow intensifying the fear or curiosity of adolescents. In this essay, I have gathered stories from adults who went on legend trips as teens, one elderly woman who was a young girl when the incident occurred in 1928, and from a few books written by outsiders to the county who offer interpretations of the story. Historical background regarding the murder and trial will be given along with a theory as to why this legend still exists today and continues to be

passed down through generations of southern York County residents. In conclusion, I will also explain how the trial, legend, mass marketed books, and legend trips to the hollow have affected believers of powwow and witchcraft in the York County region.

Augustus, **Brent C.** (Memorial University of Newfoundland)
"U.S. Television News Media, Cultural Hegemony and the Specter of "Conspiracy Theory"

As a young child I knew that the news was the news, seemingly trustworthy and objective. There seemed to be little slant in the way the news was presented. Those days are gone. Now, only a handful of television news personalities grace our screens everyday; seeking not only to inform, but to influence. It is easy to say that this shift away from objectivity is purely for profit, but there is a problem with diminishing this issue to such a base motivation. In a world where media is, for the most part, owned by large corporations that have their own agendas it stands to reason that manipulating the message, and thus the voters, allows corporations to create favorable legislative situations. In recent years the term "conspiracy theory" has grown in popularity and can be heard routinely thrown about on the television news; whether conservative or progressive programming. Seeking to delegitimize certain news stories, the label of "conspiracy theory" is thrown on any story that the news networks deem unworthy of consideration. Labeling proponents of these particular viewpoints as "kooks" or "wackos" the networks succeed in sidelining stories that perhaps should be aired in public discourse. Basing this exploration in Althusser's delineation of the Ideological State Apparatuses and Gramsci's views on cultural hegemony, this paper first discusses who could be considered the ruling class of America and their relation to the news. From here, I explore how the label "conspiracy theory" has been used to delegitimize such stories as the rise of the Tea Party, the 9/11 "Truthers", and the "Birthers". Finally, it will examine how the use such labels allow these news networks, and thus the ruling class behind them, to control what is and is not considered "news worthy"; manipulating the people through manipulation of the message.

Best, Joel (University of Delaware) and **Kathleen A Bogle** (La Salle University)
"1Tracking the Dynamics of a Contemporary Legend: The Shag-Band Menace"

Unlike many contemporary legends that have obscure origins, claims that children use sex bracelets (a.k.a. shag bands, jelly bracelets) as a form of sexual play emerged after the Internet was mature. The tale states that the colorful bracelets–cheap O-rings of gel plastic–are color-coded, and that a boy who breaks a girl's bracelet can demand the sexual favor associated with that color. We have collected a sample of nearly 2,000 claims regarding sex bracelets–newspaper articles, television programs, websites, posts to discussion threads, and so on. In most cases, we can identify the dates when these claims were made; in many cases, we can also specify a geographic location. The oldest claims in our sample appeared in September, 2003–well after the internet had become sufficiently ubiquitous to effectively trace the story's spread. The data reveal a clear pattern: intense attention in the U.S. in the fall of 2003 and in late spring of 2004; a period of abeyance, followed by revived concern in the U.S., Australia, and the U.K in the fall of 2009, spreading to Ireland in the summer of 2010. It is also possible to trace the spread of variant versions that assign different meanings to particular colors. This analysis suggests that internet research may allow analysts to devise more detailed accounts of legend dynamics.

Blank, Trevor J. (Pennsylvania State University, Harrisburg)
*"*Celebrity Culture and Contemporary Legends: Emergent Narratives on Athletes Behaving Badly"

In contemporary society, celebrities are our "intimate strangers." Due to the onslaught of gossip columns, magazines, tabloids, television programs (both satirical and genuine), Web-

based news dissemination, and now even more ubiquitously through amateur and professional blogging, every detail of celebrity culture is filtered, scrutinized, and presented through a vast web of opinion, manipulation, and perpetual exchange. From gossip magazines to TMZ.com, narratives of celebrities "gone wild" abound in numerous forms of popular media, often glamorizing their seemingly deliberate social deviance. Entertainment magazines publish pictures of celebrities without make-up or display shots of them doing "normal" things in order to prove that they really "are just like us." Such exposure embeds within the public an inordinate amount of knowledge about many celebrities whom they do not actually know personally. But what happens when our perception of these stars become redefined in the wake of a media event? And more importantly, what happens when a revered celebrity's actions are deemed not only out of character, but morally reprehensible?
Celebrities have flooded our cultural inventories; as a result, contemporary legends about their personal exploits have begun to surface in response to the inescapable, mass-media saturation that surrounds their lives. This paper will particularly examine the contemporary legend cycles and humorous narratives that have emerged in the wake of infidelity accusations against pro golfer Tiger Woods and rape charges against Steelers quarterback Ben Roethlisberger. In doing so, this presentation will offer interpretations of the meaning and function of this current folklore as a reflexive means of redefining and reinforcing communal expectations of proper public discourse. Moreover, I will discuss how the Internet and other mass media outlets facilitate the transmission of emergent contemporary legends.

Brodie, Ian (Cape Breton University)
"Stories from the Frontlines: Contemporary Legends Among Canadian Immigration Foreign Service Officers"

Recent studies in trauma narrative and the political asylum process have focused on the negotiation of identity through the substantiation of claims to refugee status through narrative (Bohmer and Shuman 2004; 2008). This paper, based on an oral history collection project of the Canadian Immigration Foreign Service (1945-1981), considers the role of narrative from the perspective of Immigration officers, both in their professional capacity as audience to potential immigrants and in their occupational folklife. Storytelling takes a central role in the ludic life of officers, with much of its narrative core being the negotiation of what makes both 'good' candidates and officers. With particular respect to places of political uncertainty – the former Eastern Bloc, South-East Asia in the 1970s – officers engaged in processes of legendry as they negotiated their position as the self-professed "front-line," separate not only from the applicants and refugees in their day-to-day operations but also from the bureaucracy back home and – by proxy – from the Canadian people. In addition to their lives of processing immigration applications, much discourse surrounds day to day realities of living overseas: dealing with local customs and foodways; issues of housing; the un-Canadian practice of dealing with a household of servants; and others.

Bronner, Simon J. (Pennsylvania State University)
"Sort of a Hero": Patterns in Strongman Legends Based on the Jack Fasig Narratives"

Asking about the conditions that give rise to legends, Horace Beck in *American Folk Legends: A Symposium* (1972) observed an under-analyzed, but ubiquitous, narrative theme involving feats of strength by bulky men. Giving the contemporary examples of Barney Beal in Maine, the Doan Brothers in Pennsylvania, Joshua Thomas along the Chesapeake Bay, and others, he noticed that they all were known for their size, courage, violent tempers, endurance, and especially their strength. They were all credited with lifting weights—a dory, a wagonload of sand, an anvil. They often come to a tragic end by overexercise. He noted that more so than other types of contemporary legend, they are "narrowly known" or localized. Herbert Halpert in the same symposium averred that strongman legends were a major

American type and blamed the organization of the motif-index for causing scholars to miss them as a separate narrative genre worthy of analysis. He complained that “In at least one area, that of strong man stories, it does not have motifs for the most frequent American patterns” (p. 50). He hypothesized that they fit a niche between supernatural scary tale and humorous tall tale. “In the strong man legends, these extraordinary limits are pushed…but well beyond easy plausibility. What is most significant is that when these are told in oral tradition, they are regarded as true—and told with complete seriousness” (p. 51).

In the forty years since the exchange, folklorists did not take the cue from the symposium to focus on strongman legends and take up questions of their Americanness, their localization, their alternative hero plot and characterization, their symbolic meaning, and their context or performance, although evidence remains of a lively strongman narrative tradition. To renew the query, I will examine continuing legend-telling about the real-life Jack Fasig (1896-1951), who was a resident of Manheim, Pennsylvania. As with the other figures mentioned by Beck, he was large—reaching almost seven feet—and known for remarkable feats of functional strength—carrying huge feedbags and lifting cars. Unlike some of the characters that Beck, Dorson, and others implied were beloved, if rough-hewn, characters, Fasig had a dark side that received ample commentary in legend. He could be described as “Lancaster County’s Gentle Giant” and also “the Monster of Manheim.” In Manheim’s Bicentennial Book, furthermore, he was described as “a sort of hero” in the sense that he was both admired and feared. With a number of Fasig legends about his exploits and ambivalence toward him, I test Halpert’s hypothesis about the betwixt and between state of the legends and Beck’s puzzlement about the masculinization, localization, and tragedy of the legend type. My thesis is that legends arose to express this ambivalence and thematize his country hypermasculinity in the local conditions of a rural area changing into a more open, massified region. Based on this analysis, I re-examine the common examples of strongman legends to locate psychological possibilities for the appeal and localization of strongman legends. I also test their presumption that the type was uniquely American and speculate about possible relationships of the strongman narrative trope to popular strongman contests today.

Compora, Daniel (University of Toledo)
“Michigan Mutations”

Michigan is home to a number of hybridized, humanoid creatures. In the southeastern corner of the Great Lakes State, Monroe, Michigan is home to a very unique creature: the Dog Lady. This dog-like woman is said to inhabit a small island just off Lake Erie. This island is affectionately referred to by locals as "Dog Lady Island," and legends of her attack on young teenagers date back to the 1960's. Dog Lady briefly shared company with the Monroe Monster, a Bigfoot-type creature spotted in 1965 on Mentel Road, near the Detroit Beach area. After making the national news, the Monroe Monster was proven to be a hoax when hair samples found at the scene of an attack were discovered to have come from a paintbrush. Southeastern Michigan is not the only home to a hybridized creature. In the north east corner of Michigan's Lower Peninsula, the Michigan Dog Man is rumored to roam the woods. Also determined to be a hoax, perpetrated by a deejay at a local radio station, the legend of the dog man has persisted, and even has been recorded as a song. Returning to, southern Monroe County, a family afflicted with the disease hydrocephalus allegedly resided at one time in the small rural community of Whiteford. Inappropriately but alliteratively referred to as "The Waterheads of Whiteford," searches for this home has proven fruitless, but rumors of it still exist. It is impossible to ignore the pattern of hybridized creatures occupying Michigan, particularly in Monroe County. Ironically, Monroe is notable for an entity powerfully linked to mutations: the Enrico Fermi II Nuclear Power Plant. Monroe is also home to that factory's predecessor, the Fermi I Power plant which suffered a partial meltdown in 1966, suggesting that Michigan's mutation legends may be an outgrowth of

anxiety due to the presence of the nuclear power plant.

Dégh, Linda (Indiana University)
"Is there such a thing as the contemporary legend? "

My life has run parallel to the International Society for Folk Narrative. In 1959 I was out of Hungary for the first time, traveling with two colleagues to Kiel for the first meeting. This is where I met its founders, including Stith Thompson and others. I will talk about those great men and about what folk narrative research really is, and about how the world has changed.

de Vos, Gail (Independent Scholar)
"The Contemporary Wendigo"

The reworkings of traditional folk motifs, characters and archetypes in popular culture continues to meld, blend and homogenize them for new audience. How much of the traditional remains in these new forms? Is it important to identify the traditional and authentic elements of these contemporary retellings for its new audience? And, what happens when the folklore is taken from another culture and presented as a frightful monster without sufficient background knowledge by either the writer or the reader/viewer? There has been a revitalization of the legend of the Wendigo (Windigo, Weethtigo) in popular culture in the last decade. The traditional Wendigo, believed be a malevolent, cannibalistic supernatural spirit being of great power in various Algonquian-speaking First Nations communities in Canada and the north eastern United States, is associated with the north, winter, coldness and famine. Now, not only has this mythic character appeared as a dangerous enemy in numerous comic book titles, it has been the subject of numerous short stories, novels and films intended for, mostly, non-First Nations audiences. This paper explores this recent explosion of the use of this character, its function in these various media forms and the adaptations and adoptions made to traditional Wendigos by contemporary "creators," both First Nations and non-First Nations, in order for it to be immediately recognizable and accessible for their intended audiences.

Ellis, Bill (Penn State University)
"And There Was a Hook ... or Maybe There Wasn't! Unusual and Incompetent Variants, and What They Tell Us about Legendry"

In papers given at the 1982, 1994, and 1999 ISCLR meetings, I explored theoretical issues with the help of the familiar legend, "The Hook in the Door." This adolescent scare-story became notorious when Alan Dundes subjected it and its tellers to psychoanalysis: the legend's bogey was the lecherous boyfriend and the hook, his erect penis.

My 1982 paper suggested that the multivocal nature of small groups performances made such blanket interpretations impossible. And in 1994, I looked at Dundes's own archive and found the texts variable on nearly every point of the story. In 1999, I returned to the Berkeley corpus and suggested patterns in the variability. Legend narrators, I argued, were not passive vehicles for stories, but practitioners of a narrative craft. The stories they told were not infinite in their variability, but responded to implicit aesthetic norms.

Now, twelve years later, I intend to return to this quest, with a new batch of variants from Utah State. Conclusions reached in 1999 will be checked, but my focus this time will be "rule-breaking" performances. Some variants introduce unique narrative content that "bends" the story to the limits of its implicit norms – and perhaps beyond.

The ways in which these variants push the outer limits of the legend's possibilities let us observe storytelling choices normally implicit in the genre. In some cases, the odd versions exploit ways of developing the story in a interesting and creative way. In other cases, the result is an incoherent mess, but one that allows us to see more clearly why the usual versions are put together as they are. Together, looking at the edges of the tradition

helps us define more clearly the aesthetic and social norms with which they try to tamper.

Frank, Russell (Pennsylvania State University)
"The News, Abused: What Fake News Stories and Photographs Have in Common with Contemporary Legends"

From such television programs as "That Was the Week That Was," "Monty Python's Flying Circus," and "Rowan and Martin's Laugh-in" in the 1960s and '70s and "The Daily Show," "The Colbert Report," "Saturday Night Live" and "The Onion News Network" today, to digitally altered photographs and bogus news stories on the Internet, we are awash in words and images that look and sound like real news, but are not. In this presentation I will link the world of fake news to the world of contemporary legends by showing how creators of fake news stories employ the rhetorical trappings of true accounts to burnish their credibility, much as tellers of contemporary legends do. Thus fake photographs may be falsely credited to legitimate news organizations such as the Associated Press; fake news stories may come packaged with fake headlines, datelines and bylines and the body copy may be written in "correct" journalistic style; and fake video news reports may feature an attractive anchorperson or news reader sitting at a desk on an attractive newsroom set, with graphics displayed over his or her shoulder. I will present examples from each genre – newspaper story, television report and news photo – to show how the trappings of legitimate journalism are used to lend verisimilitude to the fake. I will also summarize the efforts of the indefatigable debunkers at snopes.com and urbanlegends.com to track the various distortions to their sources. Finally, I will consider this curious paradox: that the credibility of false stories and photos rests on the credibility of the mainstream news media, even as they contribute to the undermining of the credibility of the mainstream news media: When readers or viewers learn that a supposedly true story is false, they naturally have reason to doubt the veracity of all news stories.

Fugarino, Virginia (Memorial University of Newfoundland)
"Looming "Looterers" and Needy Newsmen: Perceptions of Credibility and the Impact on Hurricane Response"

Issues surrounding belief are not new to legend studies and have factored into various discussions in the discipline (for example, Dégh and Vázsonyi 1976, Boyes 1996, Oring 1996, Dégh 2001). Belief can determine what legendary material is passed on and what impact it may have on the people hearing and sharing it. Legends and rumors about stories covered in the media (and about the media itself), by extension, can impact actions taken by the audience. In the case of a hurricane, these responses can take form in a variety of ways, including attitudes expressed regarding the severity of the storm threat and the steps taken (or not taken) to prepare for the storm.

For example, media stories about looting in New Orleans ran frequently after Hurricane Katrina in 2005, stories which were surrounded by debate over the accuracy and bias in the reports. A month later, the city of Houston was threatened by Hurricane Rita, compelling thousands of residents to evacuate and others to prepare to ride out the storm. For some individuals, the stories of looting and chaos became relevant to their Rita experience and shaped their preparation and response, marking a recontextualization of media information to a different storm and a different place. As one former Houston resident mentioned, "I grabbed my gun because after Katrina I didn't know what to expect." Conversely, perceptions of the lack of credibility in the media also had impact on storm attitudes and responses. This paper will examine some examples of legendary material communicated by and about the media and the impacts that these examples had on perceptions of media credibility and on individual storm responses.

Boyes, Georgina. 1996. Belief and disbelief: An examination of reactions to the presentation of rumour legends. In *Contemporary legend: A reader*, eds. Gillian Bennett and Paul Smith, 41-54. New York: Garland Publishing.
Dégh, Linda. 2001. *Legend and Belief:*

Dialectics of a Folklore Genre. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
Dégh, Linda, and Andrew Vázsonyi. 1976. Legend and Belief. In *Folklore Genres,* ed. Dan Ben-Amos, 93-123. Austin: University of Texas Press.
Oring, Elliott. 1996. Legend, Truth, and News. In *Contemporary Legend: A Reader,* ed. Gillian Bennett and Paul Smith, 325-339. New York: Garland Publishing.

Goldstein, Diane E.
"Crying Babies, Tiny Handprints and Terror on the Web: Virtual Legend Tripping"

Legend tripping is an activity in which individuals make an excursion to a place where uncanny events are believed to have occurred in the interest of testing a local legend (Ellis 1996:439). Such legend quests constitute an improvised drama in which the players, visiting the site of a haunting or the scene of a crime, recreate the storied events and simultaneously expand the tale by adding their own experiences to the core narrative (Lindahl 2005, 165). This paper explores the parallels between geographical on-site legend tripping and those occurring in digital environments.

Virtual legend tripping shares the recurring landscape found in real world legend tripping, including visits to abandoned buildings, remote bridges, tunnels, caves, woods, rivers and cemeteries, and focuses on popular contemporary legend themes such as cry baby bridges and bloody Mary in the mirror. Virtual legend tripping also exploits the possibilities of the internet not only to re-imagine the numinous but to directly experience it, from a distance. This paper explores the way Internet technology creates a venue for virtual legend tripping using interactive visual-auditory media for sharing in legend telling, legendary experience and legend communities. The analysis will discuss the relationship between the characteristics of real world legend trips and virtual trips, exploring the creation of a legendscape, the rituals of participation, the narrative act, the narrative second life, and the experiences of the liminal, communitas and the numinous.

Ellis, Bill. 1996. Legend Trip. In *American Folklore: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Jan Harold Brunvand. New York: Garland, pp. 439-40.
Lindahl, Carl 2005. Ostensive Healing: Pilgrimage to the San Antonio Ghost Tracks. *Journal of American Folklore* 118(468):164–85.

Green, Spencer (Pennsylvania State University Harrisburg)
"Disastrous Alternatives: Boy Scout Disaster Stories and Legends and Imagining the Natural World"

From death by roasting hot dogs on oleander or green sticks to flash floods taking out entire troops, the Boy Scouts have long had a rich folk tradition particularly in connection with camping. What can these macabre legends of disaster and warning tell us about how these adolescents relate to nature and how what the psychological exchange of that relationship entails? This paper will seek answers to that question by examining various scouting legends, their performance and context, and the psychological needs these legends of the land serve.

Hiking the Narrows in Zion National Park, young scouts recount tales of the flash flood that killed an entire scout troop. The veracity of the tale is little challenged with the details of place and supposed newspaper coverage. Another trip, a scout has cut a branch to roast a hot dog while another scout comments that green branches have poisons that will seep into the hotdog if used as a roaster. The scout abandons his green branch to find one less likely to kill him.

Scouting legends such as these do more than exert social control on scouts liable to damage local trees; they express deeply felt fears and values in how humans relate to the outdoors, the scene and subject of many of these fearsome tales. Jay Mechling suggests that campfire legends and lore meet the psychic needs of those who share them with their thematic obsession with death. These stories and legends deal with death and injury, and an obsession with sex and death in children and

adolescent folklore is well documented. These are the taboos against which children's folklore poke and prod, looking for a way to handle these serious issues. These stories then intensify the drama and experience of the outdoors both by imitating the legends of pioneers and the frontier, but also playing on a physically immediate reality to these stories in terms of the setting.

The purpose and focus of these dramatic narratives goes beyond fear and obsessions with death. Victor Turner speaks of liminal monsters that are not intended to terrorize initiates but to startle them "into thinking about objects, persons, relationships, and features of their environment they have hitherto taken for granted." Seen in this way, stories of death and injury in the outdoors can foster a ritualistic experience with nature that encourages and allows adolescents to change their relationship with the land. Being betwixt and between, they are no longer city dwellers, nor are they woods people, but they but on the dressings of that, and imaginatively play out various possible consequences and dangers of life in their wilderness setting.

This kind of play with danger is distinct from legend trips and what Bill Ellis terms, "mock ordeals" in that the legends and stories are evoked by the place rather than the other way around as in legend trips; further the ordeal is real only there is a heightened sense of potential danger while experiencing the more mundane discomforts of camping life. And here is where playing with masculinities and adulthood enter into the stories and their appeal: the adult world, as well as the natural world, are largely unknown and as such can be a source of anxiety and fear for adolescents. Imagining the dramatic danger transforms the discomforts of camping life into more exciting, manly adventures; gives them a handle on perceived, real, but unrealized fears; and serves as an outlet for the fears and anxieties of camping, manhood, and adulthood.

Ellis, Bill. "The Camp Mock-Ordeal Theater as Life." *The Journal of American Folklore*. 94 (1981): 486-505.

Mechling, Jay. "The Magic of the Boy Scout Campfire." *Journal of American Folklore* 93 (1980):35-56.

Turner, Victor. "Betwixt and Between: The Liminal Period in *Rites de Passage*." *Proceedings of the American Ethnological Society*, ed. J. Helms. Seattle (1964): 14.

Kitta, Andrea (East Carolina University)

"Understanding Unusual Medical Information (or What happens when your nursing students believe there's a link between MMR and autism, but think "penis fish" are a legend)"

Recent research and media coverage has demonstrated that the anti-vaccination message is becoming more prevalent, available, and understandable than the pro-vaccination message (Halperin 2010; Kata 2010; Kitta 2009; Ritvo et al. 2003; Wolfe et al. 2002; Andre 2003; Baker et al. 2003; Ernst 2002; Poland and Jacobson 2001; Spier 2001). However, the medical focus thus far has been on lay public's understanding of health information that is incorrect, with the spotlight on information found on the Internet. Lay readers of Internet health materials are not, however, simply passive receptors of the information they contain (Goldstein 2000; Goldstein 2004).Instead the public interacts with this information, which opens the possibility of the public dismissing medically approved information because it does not fit into the worldview of the individual, which has been largely overlooked in vaccination discourse. Additionally, televisions shows such as *Grey's Anatomy* and *House* have presented both medical information and contemporary legends in similar ways, further blurring the lines between truth and legend. In an era when the lay public has access to a variety of information, the notion of "expert" is fluid and the public is cautious to report belief in anything that sounds too outlandish. Past research has demonstrated that legends certainly influence medical decision making (Goldstein 2008); however, little has been written on the effect of the lay public (and medical professionals) assuming this knowledge is a legend instead of approved medical information. This paper hopes to explore the consequences of medical

information which is perceived as legend as demonstrated in vaccine and other medical narratives.

Kline, Jim (Saybrook University/ Northern Marianas College) "Shamanic Influences Upon the Pied Piper Legend"

The figure of the Pied Piper, featured in the folk tale in which he rids the German town of Hamelin of its plague of rats, then later lures the children of the town to a mysterious fate, has been considered a legend inspired by an historical event that occurred in rural Germany in the year 1284. This alleged event has served to inspire numerous variations of the folk tale, many of these legends told as if the events had occurred in various towns in Germany, Eastern Europe, and China. Michael Ripinsky-Naxon in his book on shamanism gives a contemporary variation of the legend from a Polish informant who reports the event as if it had occurred in her town during her lifetime. Rapinsky-Naxon also presents the story as if it were an example of a contemporary shaman performing in his traditional role as Master of the Animals, using music and dance to influence the behavior of animals. The shamanic dimension of the legend also seems to apply to the original Medieval reference that served to inspire other variations.

Koven, Mikel J (University of Worcester) "'A Fairy? How lame is that?': *True Blood* as Folk Narrative"

While clearly fictional narratives, and therefore (according to Bascom) folk/fairy tale-like, *True Blood*, like the "Southern Vampire Mysteries" books by Charlaine Harris the series is based on, draw upon what Bascom identifies as 'truthful' or at least 'believed' genres such as myth and legend. This paper explores the generic transformations which occur when (ostensibly) 'truthful' folk narrative genres are absorbed into a fictive narrative frame. While *True Blood* co-opts myth and legend into its folk/fairy tale diegesis, the discussion of the different folk narrative genres reflects and refracts the variety of traditional meanings associated with the various tale types and motifs drawn upon.

Langlois, Janet (Wayne State University) "They all see dead people—but we don't (do) want to tell you about it": On legend gathering in real and cyberspace"

This paper is something of a meditation on the differences between legend-gathering face-to-face and online, and on how these different modalities or methodologies might impinge on the data collected. I draw on my fieldwork in an on-going project recording mystical or paranormal narratives in situations that are health-related, often end-of-life. I will focus here on accounts of "death bed visions," in which the dying "all see dead people," a quotation from a hospice doctor who is the medical director at a Detroit-area hospice where I have conducted questionnaires and interviews with doctors and staff off and on since 2003. Early in my field research, a certified nurse assistant (CENA) leaned over my shoulder and told me that staff had witnessed or heard about these experiences, but that they didn't wish to discuss them with me. I took their reticence as a given, and allowed it to guide my research in subsequent years. I saw each interview granted as a gift given, and was not deterred by their relatively-small number.

Then one day, late in the research gathering phase of the project when I was more aware of the explosion of digital culture, I googled the subject "death bed visions." I was thunderstruck, for my initial foray into virtual ethnography yielded over 5,000 sites, most of them conducted by hospice or hospital staff, all discussing quite openly those very narrative events that had eluded me. I recognize that I am an outsider to hospice culture while the bloggers are insiders, yet their discussions are available to all online. Here, I would like to come to grips with either my failure as traditional ethnographer, or with the methodological and theoretical contexts that make traditional fieldwork a more delicate operation than "lurking" on websites and blogs

that do yield rich material. I would like to ask how to evaluate and integrate these data sets ethically to say something meaningful about dying, that "storied place" we will all come to know.

Mieder, Wolfgang (University of Vermont)
"'The Dog in the Manger': The Rise and Decline in Popularity of a Proverbial Fable Remnant"

Starting with a discussion of the interrelationship of folk narratives with proverbs, proverbial expressions, and wellerisms, a closer look will be taken at the medieval fable of "The Dog in the Manger". While its motif can be found earlier but not in Aesop, the actual German fable gained considerable European distribution, appearing in English during the 14th century. For several centuries the fable was picked up in various collections gaining considerable popularity. Not surprisingly the fable was eventually reduced to a proverbial remnant with people having no difficulty understanding what was meant by the phrase "To be (like) a dog in the manger". Yet, as interest in fables, especially in school curricula, has waned, the content of the "dog in the manger" fable has largely been forgotten during the past few decades. The proverbial remnant can still be heard or read from time to time, but is there enough cultural literacy left to assure meaningful communication? Numerous historical and contextual examples will be cited to explain the phenomenon of vanishing narratives and their proverbial remnants. Special consideration will be given to the survival of the proverbial expression in present-day American discourse, taking a close look at the survival chances (if at all) of this useful folk metaphor.

Preston, Cathy (University of Colorado at Boulder)
"Third Bridge: Local Legend in Aurora, Colorado"

On the website "strangeusa.com," the following post began a lengthy, on-line conversation about a legend site in Aurora, Colorado, known as "Third Bridge."

Travel east on Smokey Hill Rd and take a left at the stop sign when the road becomes one lane each way. Drive all the way up and down over the hills on the dirt road until you come to the third bridge. Local High School students have died there in a car accident. Drums can be heard in the distance and if people visiting the bridge are loud and obnoxious, the drums get louder and closer as though whoever playing them wants you to hear. It is said that an Indian massacre took place there in which settlers killed the men in battle and then returned and killed the wom[e]n and children of the tribe. Some have reported fog rolling in from both directions and have seen a man floating on a horse and other strange things.

Participants in the conversation repeatedly ask for directions to the site and argue about where the site actually is while those who have legend-tripped the site(s) relate personal experience stories that describe not only encounters with drums, fog, and a man on a horse, but a range of legend motifs, including but not limited to small handprints left on their cars, children laughing, and cars moving of their own volition forwards or backwards over or back down the bridge. My paper will explore the participants' on-going negotiations over where the site is in relation to statements of if and why the site is haunted as well as the range of haunting experiences reported by legend-trippers.

Puglia David J. (Pennsylvania State University, Harrisburg)
"Getting Maryland's Goat: The Goatman Legend in Prince George's County"

One hundred miles due south of this conference, a humanoid cryptid has been terrorizing the Prince George's County countryside for over half of a century. The creature resembles either Pan or Baphomet, haunts either Lottsford Road or Tucker Road, and sprung forth from either the former state tuberculosis sanitarium at Glenn Dale Hospital or a science experiment gone wrong at the Beltsville Agricultural Research Center. In addition to its long life in oral

tradition, the Goatman seems to have historical origins. Examining regional newspapers shows the Goatman panic began simultaneously with a rash of pets gone missing or found mutilated. Although the legend is locally well-known, no scholarly attempt has yet been made to assess the function and meaning of Maryland's Goatman.

The Goatman of legend lives on the fringes of Prince George's County, which is itself on the fringes of the metropolitan Washington, D.C. After fleshing out the narrative, I will argue the legend has two basic meanings in the region. Living outside the boundaries of humanity both morally and geographically, the Goatman is not unlike a stock psychopath for some. An antisocial personality who kills, vandalizes property, abuses animals, and purposefully frightens people, the creature is the locus for the projection of all the fears associated with surrounding area. On the other hand, local teenagers seem to identify with the Goatman. Personal narratives from locals recount ostensive behavior including Friday evenings spent hunting the Goatman. Like sport hunters, teenagers seem not to hunt out of hatred but out of respect. Legend tripping is a way of rebelling against the norms of society by entering the Goatman's land and joining his rebellion, if only for a brief time.

Schmitt, Casey (University of Wisconsin-Madison)
"The Barefoot Bandit, Outlaw Legend, and Modern American Folk Heroism"

This paper explores the emergent legend of fugitive and airplane thief Colton Harris-Moore, the Barefoot Bandit, to locate its place within American folk legendry. In many ways, Harris-Moore exemplifies the Robin Hood, or "noble robber," type discussed by Eric Hobsbawn and Graham Seal—the same folk type embodied by Jesse James, Billy the Kid, Sam Bass, "Pretty Boy" Floyd, and others—but, in equally many ways, clearly departs from the description of "bandit" presented by Hobsbawn in his noted and oft-cited 1969 book on the subject. I argue that Colton Harris-Moore does indeed fit the bandit/folk hero model, but in a manner specifically suited to his place, society, and time. I shall explore Harris-Moore as a bandit in Hobsbawn's terms and in online folk representations, highlighting how folklorists might re-envision classifications and representations of banditry in constantly changing populations and environments, before more closely examining Harris-Moore within his specific context and recognizing the particular elements of his legend which appeal to a modern audience. Along the way, this paper will explore the interaction of generally accepted forms of "folk" transmission, emergent media and technologies, such as Facebook and YouTube, and mass media news reports, papers, and magazines to consider how all versions of a story can work together in the development of a legend. I ultimately suggest that the Barefoot Bandit represents a particular kind of outlaw hero, specific to modern American society: the anarchic and footloose wilderness rebel, rejecting suburban expectations and flying (sometimes quite literally) in the face of materialistic ideals.

Samper, David A (Independent Scholar—University of Pennsylvania)
"Killer in the Backseat: Revisited"

In his seminal essay, "The 'Pretty Languages' of Yellowman," Barre Toelken argues that by carefully examining textual elements in story-telling performances, we can understand the deep levels of cultural meaning that narratives articulate. Toelken elucidates the intricate and deeply symbolic relationship between Coyote narratives and Navajo religious worldview. What I propose to do here is a multilevel reading of Killer in the Backseat (KIBS) similar to the nuanced and complex analysis conducted by Toelken. This multilayered analysis investigates this legend on three connected levels: Literal, symbolic and ideological. At the literal level, KIBS is a cautionary tale for women about stranger danger and random violence. However, the legend and others like it do not simply reflect or express our society's fears of random violence perpetuated by malicious strangers; they actively create and propagate that fear. Urban legends therefore participate in a larger discourse that is creating and sustaining a

culture of fear. At the symbolic level, the legend maintains and perpetuates our society's patriarchal system by threatening punishment and death to women who challenge it. Ultimately, KIBS, as I will argue, is a story told by women to women. Therefore, at the level of "abstracts at the heart" of our society, or ideological level, KIBS articulates women's (and men's to be sure) continuing and persistent concern, anxiety, and ambiguity about the women's movement. In short, the legend permits us to understand one of the ways in which society culturally programs us as feminine or masculine and how society uses fear to enforce gender conformity.

Tucker, Elizabeth (Binghamton University)
"Legends of Lily Dale"

Lily Dale Assembly, a lakeside Spiritualist community in western New York, was founded in 1879. The oldest Spiritualist community in the United States, Lily Dale has inspired the telling of many legends, most of which describe visits by spirits of the dead. During the spring of 2009, I heard intriguing stories about the community from a fifteen-year-old medium who had done her training at Lily Dale. Last summer I spent some time there, listening to legends, attending message services, and conversing with mediums and innkeepers. I also had an unusual experience that fit the pattern of some of the legends I was collecting quite well, so my field trip became a legend trip. Most of my research into folklore of the supernatural has taken place on college campuses. On campuses where many students have a similar religious background, shared belief may facilitate their initiation into what Helen Gilbert calls a "community of believers" in which spirits' presence seems extremely important (1975:76). Similarly, at Lily Dale, emphasis on the Spiritualist faith intensifies community residents' and visitors' focus on narratives about their own and others' experiences. This paper will analyze Lily Dale legends that reinforce a sense of cohesiveness and explore how the sharing of these stories helps the community thrive.

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Van de Winkel, Aurore (Catholic University of Louvain)
"Organisation and Contemporary Legend: When the Narrative Causes Misunderstanding"

Currently, storytelling is frequently used by companies to present or construct their identity and so arouse the emotional adhesion of their public. These companies are also affected by narratives often of a negative nature : contemporary legends. Similar to rumours, these legends are considered as an attack against their image or their identity. They can cause profit losses in case where clients - influenced by 'we-say' – avoid their buildings, buy less of their products or services. In fact, the "company" in these narratives is just a vehicle to the construction or implementation of a surprising or harrowing plot, only intended to provide credibility and proximity to the subjects-transmitters. The company implicated is not the result of a conscious strategy aiming to compromise it.

A semio-pragmatic analysis of the legend « a child kidnapping at IKEA », the company's denials, press articles and reactions on web forums - presented the narrative as a contemporary legend or as news – allows us to understand interpretations, intentions and relations of the different diffusers of these diverse utterances and so their lack of understanding. This paper will explain how the ignorance of the narrative genre of contemporary legends can cause economical consequences and image problems for companies. The negativization of the diffusers who try to protect their family, the baseless

accusation that competitors are at the root of these legends, the disclosure of the legend by the company's public denials to those who did not know it previously, are the main reasons that the company has still not regained the full trust of all their public after ten years of diffusion.

Victor, Jeffrey S (Jamestown, NY Community College)
"American Creation Myths: Little House on the Prairie vs. a Tenement on the Lower East-side"

Creation myths, or myths of origin, are common to all peoples. The thesis of this paper is that the current conflict over health care reform and many other expressions of the culture war arise out of a clash between two different creation myths about who we Americans are as a people. These are two different visions of the moral order of American society; of right and wrong behavior. They are stories that convey the epic struggles of a people's origins; their special virtues, and the behavior necessary for their survival. The two different American creation myths are the myth of the pioneers on wilderness frontier and the more recent myth of European immigrants arriving in large Eastern cities.

A basic sociological principle is that the material and social conditions of life create the beliefs and values by which people live. Life on the wilderness frontier presented a physical environment that was harsh and dangerous. The frontier had a thinly scattered population and there was little or no law enforcement. So, they valued self-reliance and individual responsibility. They had free land and distrusted government interference in their lives.

In contrast, immigrants of the mass migration were mainly poor people from villages, who moved with their families into crowded, tiny apartments. They lived in ethnic neighborhoods in multicultural cities, and had to adjust to a diverse social environment. That environment required cooperation and mutual helping in extended families and within ethnic groups, and later, with other ethnic groups in the city. This paper will examine the realities of life in these two different social conditions, the values the different conditions created, and the way those values are expressed in contemporary politics today.

Book Review

Santa Muerte. Mexico, la Mort et ses dévots [Holy Death. Mexico City, Death and its Devotees] by Francis Mobio. Paris, Imago, 2010

The book signed by Francis Mobio ["anthropologist and video maker" University of Lausanne, Switzerland] and dedicated to the new Mexican cult to the Santa Muerte presents itself as a "photographic journey."

Most of the book consists of about a hundred photographs recently taken in Mexico. These photographs illustrate the cult and present the urban setting, very degraded by pollution, in which the cult practices.

The photographs are first presented without commentaries (9-128). Then "Field Notes" comment and situate these documents (129-150).

Two articles conclude the book. That of Silvia Mancini [University de Lausanne] *La Santa Muerte et l'histoire des religions [Santa Muerte and the History of Religions]* presents a globalizing interpretation of the cult, stressing its radical originality (153-164). Alejandro Allarcon Olvera's concluding article *La Vallée de Mexico City et la Santa Muerte [Mexico City's Valley and the Santa Muerte]* is mainly centered on the catastrophic destruction of the natural and social environment (165-171).

Scenes of daily life, portraits of devotees, altars and paraphernalia, but also implacable descriptions of a gigantic and inhuman environment, the photographs that constitute the main body of the book are impressive. An authentic poetry surges from them. The commentaries that follow are welcome and situate the difficult living conditions of this universe in crisis. In the Foreword, Francis

Mobio gives briefly his vision of this popular cult.

Its rise is a reaction to an ecological and social disaster:

> *For most of the inhabitants of this city [Mexico], living there is synonym out of violence, of precariousness, of insecurity, of illness or of death (7).*

This reaction constitutes an active elaboration, a cultural "bricolage" drawing from multiple sources that demonstrates a rejection of the processes of cultural leveling that develop in Mexico:

> *Some have found the solution to establish a dialogue with death in person. Repair techniques, made up from recycled elements drawn from cultures more or less far in time and space, are elaborated so as to negotiate with Fate. The popular cult of the Santa Muerte embodies, in Mexico, one of these techniques, at the same time as it offers an active form of "resistance" to the current process of cultural homogenization, whose main vectors are wild neoliberalism and the impressive rise of evangelical movement (7).*

The cult of the Santa Muerte is a complex phenomenon that develops a traditional presence of Death – indeed limited to the Days of the Dead of November 1st and 2nd during which the living dress up as skeletons in a festive atmosphere – that has struck all observers of Mexico. This cult also follows a tradition of folk Catholicism known since some fifty years (Ingham 1986, 1989). The cult devoted to Jesus Malverde, big-hearted bandit of the State of Sinaloa, North Mexico, just as the celebrity in Mexico City of San Juda Taddeus, an apostle of Christ reconverted into the patron saint of desperate causes, are two recent examples of these somewhat deviant devoutness.

The authors of the articles concluding the book have chosen to ignore some secondary but meaningful aspects of the phenomenon.

**The Santa Muerte cult has entailed hostile reactions of the authorities in Mexico City. Having presented themselves as defenders of the Tridentine Mass (pre Vatican 2 Council) and recognized as a religious group in 2001 under the title "Iglesia Catolica Tradicional MX-USA, Misioneros del Sagrado Corazon y San Felipe de Jesus", the founders of the first place of worship of the Santa Muerte in Mexico City lost their accreditation in 2005 because they had lied on their real aims. Charged as the active accomplice of a network of kidnapping for money, the leader of this group, David Romo Gullen, will be jailed early 2011 (A.P. 2011). Moreover, in March 2009, an organized action of the military will destroy several open air altars dedicated to the Santa Muerte, asserting that the majority of its devotees are dealers or gangsters (Tuckman 2009).

**The cult is especially widespread in jails, a documentary movie made in Mexico suggest a figure of 40% of devotees amongst long-term prisoners (Aridjis 2007). Francis Mobio's photographs detail this aspect of the cult.

**Already in 2007 the extension of the Santa Muerte cult in Mexican communities settled in the United States (New York, Houston, Los Angeles, Chicago) was mentioned (Gray 2007) just as its extension, in Mexico itself, to more respectable segments of society (Bell)

To conclude the book Silvia Mancini emphasizes that the new devotion to the Santa Muerte is deeply original. She interprets this devotion as the rebirth of a pagan divinity fulfilling a function of humanization of a hostile world felt as non human, function that characterizes a polytheist universe. Her conclusion is radical:

> *The cult of the Santa Muerte takes all its meaning in the historical situation that Mexico lives through here and now – Mexico, this frontier country whose environmental and cultural disaster started on the day Conquistadors defeated Tenochtitlan. (164)*

Alejandro Alarcon Olvera draws up an impressive fresco of the ecological and cultural disaster of Mexico City's Valley and of its inhabitants' sad fate:

> *This geographical space has become, during the last phase [that of the Liberal-National State] one of the greatest deserts ever created by the civilizing forces of Christianity and Capitalism. […] It is within*

> *this context of an ecological disaster that affects humans and non humans that the Santa Muerte cult has been born. […]Most of the population, pauperized and degraded, can only be torn between the uncertainty of life and the fear of moral and material destruction of the little that's left. (170)*

To this book's credit is the fact that it gives to its reader a direct and lively view of this new cult that has met with a huge echo congruent with the nihilistic and disenchanted climate of the contemporary world. The Santa Muerte cult's evolution is not over and will surprise.

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REMINDER

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This newsletter is called **FOAFtale News** for the jocular term current among legend scholars for over twenty years. The term "foaf" was introduced by Rodney Dale (in his 1978 book, *The Tumour in the Whale*) for an oft-attributed but anonymous source of contemporary legends: a "friend of a friend." Dale pointed out that contemporary legends always seemed to be about someone just two or three steps from the teller — a boyfriend's cousin, a co-worker's aunt, or a neighbor of the teller's mechanic. "Foaf" became a popular term at the Sheffield legend conferences in the 1980s. It was only a short step to the pun "foaftale," a step taken by a yet-anonymous wag.

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