

FOAFTale News

Newsletter of the International Society for Contemporary Legend Research

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CALL FOR PAPERS

Perspectives on Contemporary Legend: International Society for Contemporary Legend Research Thirty-First International Conference Lexington, KY

Tuesday, May 28—Sunday, June 2, 2013

The International Society for Contemporary Legend Research is pleased to announce that ISCLR 2013 will be held May 28 to June 2 in Lexington, Kentucky, the Horse Capital of the World, situated in the lovely Bluegrass region of the state. Generous support for ISCLR is being provided by the University of Kentucky College of Arts and Sciences and by the Department of Modern and Classical Languages, Literatures and Cultures (home of the UK Folklore and Mythology program).

As usual, the meeting will be organized as a series of seminars at which the majority of attendants will present papers. Concurrent sessions will be avoided so that all attendants can hear all papers. Proposals for special panels, discussion sessions and other related events are encouraged. All presentations will be limited to 20 minutes with an additional 10 minutes for discussion.

Proposals for papers on all aspects of "contemporary," "urban," or "modern" legend research are invited as are those on any legend or legend-like tradition circulating actively or which have circulated in

an earlier historical period. To submit a proposal, please forward a title and abstract (250-300 words) by February 1, 2013 to:

Jeanmarie Rouhier-Willoughby
 Dept. of Modern and Classical Languages,
 Literatures and Cultures
 1055 Patterson Office Tower
 University of Kentucky
 Lexington, KY 40506
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We are organizing a fantastic program that includes a presentation by Doug Boyd, director of the Louis B. Nunn Center for Oral History at the University of Kentucky (libraries.uky.edu/nunncenter) and a tour of the University of Kentucky Special Collections by Gordon Hogg, the UK Special Collections Librarian (most likely on Tuesday, May 28 after the opening reception at a historic home on the University of Kentucky campus) and a demonstration by the ghost hunter Patti Starr on Wednesday, May 29 (www.ghosthunter.com/). The conference dinner will take place on Friday, May 31 at the fabulous Holly Hill Inn in Midway (www.hollyhillinn.com/). A performance on the lawn of the Inn by the roots musicians the Reel World String Band (www.reelworldstringband.com) will follow the conference dinner.

Lexington has its own airport, Bluegrass Field. Taxis are available for transport to the hotel (approximately \$20); the Hyatt and Hilton also offer free shuttles. Some may find it better to fly into the Cincinnati/Northern Kentucky or Louisville airports, roughly 1.5 hours by car from Lexington. Ground transportation to and from those airports is available at a cost of approximately \$190 each way for a sedan with driver (www.goldshieldcars.com/) or via rental car.

The conference hotel (where all the sessions will take place) will be the historic (and reputedly haunted) Gratz Park Inn (www.gratzparkinn.com/). We have reserved 14 rooms with a queen bed, 7 rooms with 2 queen beds, and 11 rooms with a king bed for the

discounted rate of \$99 per night. You can also reserve one of three Jr. King Suites for the discounted rate of \$169 per night. The hotel tax in Lexington is 13.42%. To reserve a room, you must call the Gratz Park Inn 800-752-4166 (toll free) or (859) 231-1777; reservations for the discounted rate may not be made online. Refer to the code ISCLR or International Society of Contemporary Legend Research. To receive these rates, reservations must be made by **April 27, 2013**.

Other hotels within walking distance (20-30 minutes) of the Gratz Park include:

- Hyatt: <http://lexington.hyatt.com/hyatt/hotels-lexington/index.jsp?null>
- Hilton: <http://www.lexingtondowntownhotel.com/>
- University Inn: <http://www.uinn.biz/>

The conference fees (including the conference dinner, transportation to the Holly Hill, the musical performance and the ghost hunting demonstration) are as follows:

- ISCLR member (\$105 USD, \$105 CAD, £65, 80€)
- Non-ISCLR member (\$145 USD, \$145 CAD, £90, 112€)
- Student non-ISCLR member (\$130 USD, \$130 CAD, £80, 100€)
- Companion (attending reception, banquet) (\$90 USD, \$90 CAD, £55, 70€)

Registration forms, with more details, will be available in February 2013. At that time, you will be able to pay for registration, the optional excursion (see below), and your very own Legend shirt (see below) all in one payment (by check or by credit card through PayPal). In the meantime, if you have any questions about dues, registration or payments, please contact:

Dr Elissa R Henken
ehenken@uga.edu

Excursion

We are planning an optional day-long excursion for Thursday, May 30 featuring a trip to the Keeneland racetrack for breakfast at the track kitchen and a tour of the library and archives there, (www.keeneland.com), to Woodford Reserve bourbon distillery (www.woodfordreserve.com) and to the center of Kentucky crafts in Berea (www.berea.com). Berea College (www.berea.edu) is home to a noted folklore archive and Boone Tavern, our likely lunch destination (www.boonetavernhotel.com/default.asp). Tour costs will follow at a later date.

Other sightseeing possibilities for free time include:

- taking in a Lexington Legend minor-league baseball game (we can order shirts in advance (www.milb.com/index.jsp?sid=t495);
- a tour of thoroughbred horse farms (www.bluegrasstours.com/tours/daily-tours);
- or trips outside of Lexington to Shaker Village of Pleasant Hill (www.shakervillageky.org/); Old Fort Harrod (www.oldfortharrod.org/) and the Red River Gorge (www.redrivergorge.com/), to name but a few options.

More information on the area is available at

- www.visitlex.com
- www.kentuckytourism.com/explore/regions/bluegrass_region.aspx

ISCLR CONFERENCE – SOME QUICK IMPRESSIONS

So you want to know about the feelings of a first-timer, huh?

I feel ...

like I'm going to use the Göttingen conference as a measuring stick for all my future conferences, meetings, symposia, and congresses; calm and confident, knowing that there are people out there who are genuinely interested in what I do; responsible to previously faceless names that I now call colleagues; lucky and privileged for having met Linda Dégh; grateful to the ISCLR for granting me the Buchan award; grateful to the organizing committee, especially to Christine Shojaei-Kawan; bad for those who could not be there.

I felt ...

accepted, despite being young; comfortable enough to ask, debate, agree and disagree, challenge, and laugh out loud. surprised by the lack of theoretical papers; even more surprised by the general lack of scholarly/academic disagreement; general conformity to the idea that everything of theoretical significance has already happened some time ago; overwhelmed at times with the sheer amount of examples some people used in their presentations; kind of spoilt with all the recreational activities and food.

I will feel ...

all of this all over again in Lexington, Kentucky, next year;

rather disappointed if “Kentucky fried legends” will not be part of the program in any way; (so bad if I will not be able to come to this next meeting).

Ambrož Kvartič

A RESEARCH QUESTION FROM SIMON J. BRONNER

The White Lady of Perion is an anonymously created “NPC” (non-player-character) in the “RPG” (role-playing game) video game Maple Story produced by the commercial entertainment company Nexon. The figure apparently borrows from narratives of the ghostly white lady that haunts lovers’ lanes and torments couples. According to a representative post on users’ forums for Maple Story reported between September 2010 and January 2012, the White Lady is an “NPC, which can disconnect you, ban your account and even give you a virus. The story tells that this NPC was created when an ex-Nexon employee had died while monitoring the game. The employee named Muriel, was fired for unknown reasons and was working her last day. To take revenge on the company that had fired her, she wanted to eternalize herself in the game by making her character an NPC. Something went wrong and she was found dead in front of her computer, without being logged off. They say the White Lady is no longer in the game, as she was removed in the Big Bang patch.” You can read a conspiracy theory as well as worker’s revenge themes in the text. There are a host of variations in narratives posted about Muriel or the White Lady and my question is whether readers are aware of similar user-created NPCs based upon legendary figures that “hack” into commercial video games. I am considering this story as a basis for a presentation at a future ISCLR meeting and I appreciate your answers to sbronner@psu.edu.

Simon J. Bronner

The Pennsylvania State University, Harrisburg

THE JOKE OF WELLINGTON: A PUBLIC STATUE CUSTOM IN GLASGOW, SCOTLAND AND ITS LEGENDS

They called him the Iron Duke. His armies defeated Napoleon and saved Europe from tyranny. So how did Glasgow reward the Duke of Wellington? They put a traffic bollard on his statue’s head. [Leask 2005]

In the city centre of Glasgow – Scotland’s largest city – stands the Gallery of Modern Art (GOMA) in Royal Exchange Square. The gallery is housed in a classical styled “Tobacco Laird’s” mansion, dating from 1778

(with later additions) [Bowers 2005: 11]. The gallery and square form the western edge of the “Merchant City”; an area which developed eastwards from the medieval centre of the city during the period of Glasgow’s trading heyday of 1700 – 1830 (built upon the “triangular trade” of fancy goods, tobacco and slaves between Europe, the Americas and Africa) [“History of the Merchant City”: 3].

In front of GOMA stands a fine bronze equestrian statue of the Duke of Wellington by Carlo Marochetti. Dating from 1840-1844, it is one of four of Marochetti’s bronze statues in Glasgow [Nisbet]. Though Glasgow has a number of impressive statues, as befitting the “Second City of the Empire”, Marochetti’s Wellington has gained a greater fame in recent years as being the statue with the road cone hat.

The Duke is rarely seen without a standard orange traffic cone placed upon his head by “pranksters” (or in some tales, by the city authorities themselves). Occasionally his horse is similarly adorned and, more rarely, other objects are placed on the statue (though none have the longevity, or are as aesthetic pleasing, as the single road cone chapeau). The hat is now firmly part of the Glasgow landscape and features prominently in official publications, as well as art works of the city. The route to official acceptance has, however, been reached only after a long period of official condemnation of the “coning”.

History of the cone

Though reports are unclear, some attribute the custom of placing the cone on Wellington’s head to date as early as the 1980s [Leask 2005]. Certainly it has been in existence for at least 15 years, as I cannot remember a time in my adult life when cones were not, at least infrequently, placed on the statue. Public and official condemnation of the custom can be traced at least to 2000 when Greater Glasgow & Clyde Valley Tourist Board were said to have removed “the cone off the statue because we felt it would clutter up the shots” being taken for promotion material [“Conae No Dae That” 2000]. By the time the Tourist Board’s actions hit the press the “comical headgear” had however “been restored to its original (sic) resting place, on the duke’s head” [“Hat’s not on...” 2000]. This led to a battle of soundbites between the then Lord Provost of Glasgow (a position somewhat equivalent to mayor), Alex Mosson who said:

The statue of Wellington has become famous for the cone on its head. The image typifies the unique mixture of culture and humour Glasgow

has to offer. After all, the humour of the Glasgow people is the city's greatest selling point [*ibid*]. A previous Lord Provost, Pat Lally, however disagreed as he held "Glaswegians are sick of the site of cones... It seems to me that, it may do something for the manufacturer of cones, but I'm not sure that it does a lot for the people of Glasgow" [*ibid*].

Between Lord Provost Mosson's appeal that we see Glasgow's perceived 'cheeky chappy' character as a tourist draw (presumably to counter a historic view of a dark and dirty violent city left over from bleaker days in the 1950s and 1960s) and former Provost Lally's backhanded comments about road works, the tourist board's website was thoroughly advertised...

The official line did remain mostly anti-coning. In 2005 the local authority, Glasgow City Council, "issued a reminder that the placing of the cone constitutes a 'criminal act'" and "an act of vandalism" and were said to "now [be] believed to be taking a tougher stance on the unsanctioned decoration". The reason given was "not only because of the damage that could be caused to the statue itself, but of the harm that could come to someone if they fell off". At the same time, the local police gave a weak warning that anyone caught climbing on the statue (whether in the act of coning or, presumably, otherwise) "could face prosecution" but that "each individual incident would have to be treated on its own merits". It was said that the statue had already lost spurs and half of the sword "as a result of pranksters trying to scale the structure" ["Council in road cone statue plea" 2005]. This policy was apparently reversed within the year by the new City Council leader, the "youthful" (though now disgraced after a drugs scandal) Steven Purcell, who was said to "still see... the funny side of the prank" [Leask 2005].

As the statue is rarely (if ever) now seen without at least one cone, and there is clear evidence that further adorning is occurring and somehow being left (or even maintained by the local authorities), it would seem that the tougher stance of 2005 has indeed been reversed, though one blogger reported in 2007 that the local authorities still used a high pressure hose to knock the cone off and clear it away [Matthews 2007].

In recent years, with little official comment against coning even from heritage organisations, the writer of the website *Glasgow Sculpture* is left as a lone Jeremiah proclaiming against the "vandalism" and "hypocrisy" arising from the public adoption of the image, which he named the "Joke of Wellington" [Nisbet].

That the cone actually serves as a tourist attraction may be attested to by one website contributor who bemoaned that:

I have actually once or twice seen the Duke without the traffic-stopping glow atop his head, and unfortunately both times I was escorting some friends who were new to Glasgow. What dreadful luck! [Yelp, "Nicola B" 2009].

One can also view the mock disappointment of finding an unconed Duke in a short – and somewhat obscure – film by Scottish comedian Limmy where, adopting an exaggerated east-coast Scottish accent, he films the (unconed) statue while narrating that he had come all the way to Glasgow to see the cone but "there's nae bloody cone on the heid, aeh... I just cannae believe it" ["Cone" 2007].

September 2011 saw the ultimate of modern adoptions of the tradition, however; a mobile phone 'app' called "Glasgow Cone Challenge" issued by the Glasgow City Marketing Bureau as part of its "Glasgow with Style" campaign. The app – a simple game where one has to flick cones into the statue's head – was said to have a soundtrack including "genuine city sounds" including local newspaper "vendors shouting to attract customers" [Swain 2011]. The app was promoted on iTunes with the tag line: "Don't put a real cone on the Duke's head, play the game instead!" [Glasgow City Marketing Bureau 2011].

The cone in popular culture, art and discourse

As stated, Wellington's cone is now firmly part of the Glasgow (and thus Scottish) tourist literature. Not all such uses are "public" uses by the city council and tourist boards, however, and – along with comment by local comedians such as Limmy - it is a popular image on postcards and art works by many local artists (for instance, commercially available prints such as Stephen O'Neil's *Traffic Cone*, Allan Topen's photograph *Wellington and Hat* and Colin Ruffell's *Glasgow Wellington*). One enterprising local lawyer even attempted to copyright the idea of a "Glasgow hat" in the shape of a traffic cone for sale in local gift shops [Rennie 2007].

The pastime of placing a cone on the Duke, though far from mainstream, has inspired some to apply more than the 'standard' traffic cone on the statue. After Royal Mail took to painting a postbox gold in the home town of each of Team GB's 2012 Olympic gold medalists (for instance, tennis medallist Andy Murray's home town of Dunblane ["Andy Murray's Olympic..." 2012] and two for cyclist Chris Hoy in Edinburgh ["Chris Hoy's

second..." 2012]), local radio DJs Romeo and Shebahn Littlejohn from Clyde 1 "asked listeners how they would celebrate Scotland's success in Team GB" and "thousands opted to paint" the "iconic cone" in gold. Someone, allegedly the DJs themselves, "sneaked into Royal Exchange Square... to put the gilded cone on the Iron Duke" the following day ["Olympic Gold for Iron Duke" 2012]. (Also sport related, a "maroon-and-white Heart's scarf" (that is, a football scarf for Edinburgh's Heart of Midlothian FC soccer club) was seen draped around the Duke's neck in 2006 around the time of cup match in the city by the team. In response, the diarist of the local newspaper *The Herald*, bemoaned it (satirically) as "further evidence that Edinburgh's influence is pervading the rest of Scotland" [Smith 2006].)

Further in 2012, a pseudonymous art blogger proposed his or her own competition to augment the statue's decoration. Heading the post as *The Mysterious Dukearoo*, "Slinkers" stated that:

I have heard of a secret, underground movement deep in the bowels of Glasgow... For two days only, I have heard that the cone shall be accompanied by a new range of clothing items... the style of which shall be decided by the people of the internet. [Slinkers 2012]

Options given included "Intellectual Duke" (clipboard, top hat, spectacles) and "Triathlete Duke" ("funky trainers... a brightly coloured towel... some acid green goggles and some mismatching socks"). His horse was proposed to be either "battle hardened" (with bandages) or "heroic" (with a "medal of honour" pendant). Relatively few comments were however but, undeterred, the blogger posted photos of the Duke complete with tie, clipboard and pirate flag a few days later. His horse now sported a unicorn's horn and the promised medal ["Dukearoo" 2012].

With a small, yet clearly active, band of coners, the Duke is rarely without something on him or the horse. Accordingly, he now stands as metaphor for permanence, as can be noted from *The Guardian's* report on the 2012 local government elections:

In days gone by there were some certainties about Glasgow life. The Duke of Wellington statue always had a traffic cone on its head, Rangers Football Club was comfortably solvent, and Labour ran the magnificent 19th-century city chambers on George Square. [Crawford 2012]

(As it happens, though Rangers FC has indeed collapsed into insolvency, Labour's results in the local government elections were quite reasonable and they

remain the ruling party of Glasgow City Council.) Such is the quotidian certainty of the Duke's cone, one blogger lists - among his collection of "interesting facts I have gathered on my travels [which] ... may or may not be true" (comprising of some rumours, local legends, 'fakelore' and humorous comments) -:

Should the traffic cone ever be knocked off the Duke of Wellington statue... Glasgow shall fail (sic). [Craig 2010]

Clearly the cone is viewed, even if jokingly, as the Glaswegian equivalent of the Tower of London's ravens. (Somewhat like the Duke, the ravens are also used by a tourist organisation to sell merchandise, such as a raven mug you can purchase through the *Historic Royal Palaces'* website.)

A cone on the head of the Iron Duke is accepted in a way that other interference with Glasgow's statuary is not. In 2002, after the 'father' of the modern Scottish Parliament, the late Donald Dewar, was honoured with a statue at the top of Buchanan Street in Glasgow (about 10 minutes walk from Wellington's statue) the likeness was quickly subjected to people climbing upon it. A cone was reported as having been placed on his head, to the irritation of the sculptor Kenny Mackay who commented: "I knew it would happen and I am a bit disappointed the same old gag has been dragged out again" [Brown 2002].

Mackay's annoyance was, however, understated compared to the editorialist in local newspaper, *The Herald*, the following year:

It started with a jape. Shortly after the statue of the late Donald Dewar had been unveiled... a packet of Polo Mints was placed in his hands, clasped behind his back. It was a funny, slightly irreverent, yet well-meaning gesture in keeping with the humour of the citizens of Mr Dewar's native city. Whose Monday morning has not been brightened by the sight of a traffic cone atop the equestrian statue of the Duke of Wellington...? Since then, however, matters have taken a turn for the worse in the way some Glaswegians... interact with the memorial to Mr Dewar. The spectacles have been damaged and replaced several times. Graffiti, including gang slogans, has started to appear on the torso. The most recent, and prominent, is of the CND symbol on each jacket lapel and "no war" on the tie.... What must visitors think when they stare up at it and see damage and defacement? It demeans Mr Dewar's reputation and that of his city. ["Defacement of Dewar..." 2003]

The official response was to place Dewar's statue on a higher, and smoother, pedestal, though the difference in attitude between the ridicule of a warrior (Wellington) and the politicisation of a politician (such as the CND symbols on Dewar) brings up the question as to whether it is merely the relatively recent death of Mr Dewar that affords him greater respect.

Legends of the cone

Though a local chef claimed to one blogger that "sometimes after a couple of drinks on my way home I put [the cone] back up" [Matthews 2007], the search for the source of the local custom and its originators would seem somewhat ill-fated. In 2005, a college student Michael Izzi was reported as seeking to "find the people who 'cone' the statue" for a student documentary film, though the local newspaper suggested he was specifically looking for the original coner. Izzi gave his vague theory on the culprits as:

I think it is mostly young people who cone the statue. But I am sure there is still an older generation that gets involved too. [Leask 2005]

(My attempts to trace such a film on the Internet or contact Izzi have been unsuccessful.)

I recall a rumour around 10 years ago that the 'first student' to plant the cone had come forward to complain that he held copyright in the idea and wanted his share of the many, many uses of the image that were now prevalent. No print reference exists to back up such a claimant (and, in fact, I can find no print or Internet reference to the rumour either).

The Internet does feature one main legend of the cone, however. It is that the local authority themselves place the cone on the statue's head "and that famous image of the drunk clambering astride the horse to 'crown' the Duke is merely a myth" [Yelp, "Gareth V" 2009] (at least nowadays), given the tourist appeal of the image. A detailed version of this legend comes from "Montag" in 2011:

One morning, when I was having a coffee and a smoke at Costa in the square, looking at the statue, I saw a council works van with a crane on it pull up, blocking half the traffic down Queen Street. A pair of council workers in hi-vis jackets got up in the crane next to the (at that point unconed) duke, plonked a fresh traffic cone atop his head, took a promotional photo of it for the council to demonstrate what a fun and happening place Glasgow was, then yanked it off, got in the van and left, leaving a rather amused-

looking crowd. Which is a pretty neat summary of Glasgow council's sense of humour.

The same blogger reports a detailed version of a further, rarer, legend:

I used to know a guy who swore blind that there was a whole network of tunnels under the square, and that the traffic cone was a secret Illuminati signal marking the existence of a giant secret bunker underneath it. Thus, every time you saw a traffic cone somewhere it wasn't supposed to be, it indicated conspiratorial activity.

Little comment is needed on such tales of the Illuminati and secret meetings being commonplace in conspiracy theory, though this legend seems to owe as much to the Dan Brown *et al* school of literature. (One could also note that given the fact the cone is normally up there, there must be a whole lot of conspiratorial activity afoot in Glasgow...) Having lived in Glasgow almost all of my life, I have never heard tales of underground tunnels in the city centre, though there are many such tunnels in the Old Town of Edinburgh, due to the nature of the city's construction and growth [Henderson 1999: 65-76]. One wonders whether the 'tunnels under a Scottish city' element of this legend are general in origin or borrowed from Edinburgh.

(One should note that Edinburgh appears to have borrowed the traffic cone custom itself, as Carl Lindahl reports seeing cones on statues on North Bridge during his visits to the city. It would seem this custom post-dates Glasgow's and, on my frequent visits to Edinburgh, I confess I have failed to notice any such cones so it would not seem as commonplace.)

Also migratory, both in location and artwork, is Hobbs' report of a legend that the statue's sculptor, Marochetti, committed suicide "when he noticed that he had forgotten to include the spurs on his equestrian statue of the Duke of Wellington", noting, as features in some of the press reports about coning, that the spurs "were originally in place, but were broken off in a later act of vandalism" [Hobbs 2009].

Reasons for the custom and legends

The general consensus would appear to be that the cone illustrates "a piece of classic Glaswegian humour" [Yelp, "Liz K" 2009] as well as the local tendency "not to take authority too seriously" and to "challenge authority figures all the time" [Matthews 2007 and comment by "Kenneth Pratt" thereon]. Certainly Glasgow is not short of those who regard themselves as both being challengers of authority and possessors of a

good sense of humour. It may be, however, that the origin of the custom lies more firmly in the city's bad habits of binge drinking and excessive weekend carousing.

As illustrated by the more political dressing of the statue of Donald Dewar (until the plinth was made too high and general opprobrium grew too great), the applying of items to city statues is not unique to Glasgow. The grass Mohawk given to Winston Churchill during London's 2000 "May Day Riots" was perhaps whimsical ["Churchill Graffiti man jailed" 2000] but defacement of statues for political statement proceeds through to the post-invasion images of Saddam Hussain's statue being pulled down and beaten with shoes. One on-line comment noted that, prior to GOMA's inception (when the building was solely a library), the "Iron Duke used to look down on a kind of 'speaker's corner' where Christian Evangelists would struggle to be heard above the Socialist Party... or the CP or protestors against the war in Vietnam or Korea" [Yelp, "Andrew M" 2010]. It may thus not be a stretch to see a connection between the politics of the statue, the former political use of the site and the subsequent coning and dressing of the Duke's statue. Examining the custom from a non-political stance, further consideration may be worthwhile as to whether one may see it as a secularised development from dressing of wells or religious statuary, both in decline in the United Kingdom (though, at least, the former is still present in modern Scotland [Bord 2009]).

The custom would, at present, seem self-sustaining. Whether or not the local council are now ensuring that the cone is kept on the statue so as to avoid disappointing tourists or whether the city merely has too many drunk daredevils and too many road cones, it would now seem that the "Joke of Wellington" is going to be around for some time. At least until they fix all the potholes...

Joel Conn
Glasgow

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THREE CONTEMPORARY LEGENDS AMONG CANADIAN IMMIGRATION FOREIGN SERVICE OFFICERS

When the Canadian Immigration Foreign Service was absorbed into the Department of External Affairs in 1981, my father, Bernard Brodie, thought it a good project to collect their stories to create a record of one of the key eras in Canadian immigration history. The result was *When Do I Get My Visa?*, a privately-published anecdotal history of the Canadian Immigration Foreign Service. It is a collection I am in the process of re-analysing as an occupational folklife study, problematised through an auto-ethnographic approach.

I wish to ground this expressly in Robert McCarl’s work on occupational folklife and the canon of work technique, which is easily extended from his perhaps blue-collar focus to the office place and white-collar work.

What is important in this technique is not its inherent danger, technical complexity, or traditional nature, but the way in which it is influenced and interpreted by others in the work group. Technique reflects the “working knowledge” (what you need to know to do the work) of any work group, and as it is passed from one worker to another through imitation and instruction, it begins to reveal a pattern of interactions that is unique to that particular group and almost invisible to the outside observer. (1978: 147-148)

The life of the Foreign Service officer involves more than the processing of immigrants, as it is an extended time spent away from the normative environment of Canada. Much like the anecdotes shared by Mormon missionaries about adapting to life overseas, especially when they have a discernible identity and are marked as other by locals (cf. Wilson 1983; Rudy 2003), Foreign Service officers discuss strategies of adaptation. While there are discussion of the mundane, and of course of extreme irruptive occurrences, narratives tend to cluster around the “middle point” of out of the ordinary (i.e. narrative-worthy) circumstances.

For a consideration of legend, I begin with a simple example: something that falls squarely within the Brunvandian urban legend canon. It is a fairly standard variation on “The Bug Under the Rug.”

M/ Once upon a time, two technicians from External Affairs were sent to Warsaw for reasons that need not concern us. They had heard a great deal about the rooms of visitors being bugged, especially in the notorious Hotel Orbis where they were staying. They decided to find these bugs, and spent many fruitless hours examining air vents, bedside lights, ceiling fixtures and so on. Eventually their zeal was rewarded. Under the carpet they found a metal plate held down with four screws. They fell on this with joyous whoops, and very carefully started unscrewing the screws one by one so they could get at the bugging device they were sure was beneath. After several minutes, with a feeling of great satisfaction, they removed the fourth and final screw and lifted the plate.

And at that moment the chandelier in the room below, which the plate had been holding in place, smashed to the floor and broke into a thousand pieces.

We can quickly infer to the “Once upon a time” beginning that this is told very much as a “story,” and the teller is not making any claim to its truth one way or the other. It is a nicely polished telling, a finished narrative in Ellis’ terms. One of the distinctive features, however, is the identification of the protagonists as technicians from External Affairs, the larger diplomatic ministry against which the tough and scrappy Immigration Officers contrasted themselves. And locating the incident at the Hotel Orbis in Warsaw (and not the generic Moscow location of many of the variants) invokes metonymically a different narrative-cycle, a personal experience narrative:

When you came into Warsaw, if you were attached to a foreign embassy, you moved into the Hotel Orbis and were automatically given a room or suite on the 21st floor. There was no 22nd floor. Oh, the elevators had a button marked 22 and the floor existed physically, but the elevator wouldn’t stop there. That was where they kept all the microphones and things of that kind. I remember when we first moved there I was aware of this, but I’d come into the room and see Brenda scurrying around behind the curtains, looking behind the bed, checking out the t.v. and I’d say, “What are you doing?” and she’d say, “I’m looking for the microphones” and I’d say, “They’re not going to leave them out so you can pluck them like flowers, but they’re obviously there.” Since she couldn’t see any, I don’t think

she really believed me. Until one day, when we’d been there a few days, she was complaining to me about something. I think it was that the hotel iron wasn’t working. By noon we had a new iron in the room. Sometimes literally within minutes of saying something like that you’d have somebody knocking at the door saying, “Could we help?” This happened in all the hotels.

If we contrast these two stories, we have three reactions to surveillance: the overly zealous External Affairs officers; the somewhat sceptical wife; and the Immigration Officer resigned to the realities of surveillance. They also do not exist in isolation: similar narratives exist about the Hotel Europejski, also in Warsaw, and the Hotel Gellert in Budapest. There are accounts of phone calls home from Cairo being cut off when the speaker switches to Finnish, a language not understood by the Egyptian surveillance team. Officers are followed, embassies and residences bugged, waiters at functions double as spies: surveillance is a reoccurring topic. The canon of work technique of the Foreign Service officer includes how to cope with the intrusion of privacy by the host state, and it is the seasoned officer who responds by being vigilant while recognising the futility of resistance. The “Bug Under the Rug” appears to be told far more for entertainment than as a communication of any sort of strategy or technique, yet it works as a story, certainly among officers with Iron Curtain experience, because of its illustrative powers within the real experience of being surveilled.

For a second example, I return to the task of processing immigrants and refugees.

One very nasty but true story concerning the Boat People centered on one of our refugee cases in Palawan. Palawan is a large island in the south part of the Philippines, right across the South China Sea from Vietnam. It’s the last frontier, like a sort of Filipino equivalent of Baffin Island. The Americans told the Philippine Government that they wanted some better refugee processing centre than the one they had on Tara Island, a horrible waterless sandbar with thousands of refugees on it. So a better camp was set up in Puerto Princesa, a camp of first asylum. It had huts made of split bamboo and roofed with bamboo fronds – a much better camp.

One of the first asylum refugees had been processed by Canada, a very nice chap who had every chance of succeeding in his new life in

Canada. We sent a batch of visas down to the camp, care of the United Nations people at the camp. The U.N. people announced over the camp loudspeakers the names of the various people whose Canadian visas were ready to be handed out. When this chap heard his name, he started walking over to the camp office to pick it up. He never made it. Before he got to the office, a coconut fell from fifty feet up on to his head. It killed him.

The story flows very much like the personal experience narratives told throughout the South-East Asia refugee crisis of the early to mid-1970s: there are specifics about the island, the context of interviewing, even the architecture of the place. But rather than a specific Foreign Service officer as protagonist-narrator, and with very few details provided about the applicant, the story veers towards types rather than ontological subjects. However, it is the final element – the death by coconut – that to me, at least, introduces the prospect of legendry.

In 1984 Peter Barss published an article titled “Injuries due to falling coconuts” in the *Journal of Trauma*, in which he reports on the nine trauma admissions to his hospital, the Provincial Hospital in Milne Bay, Papua New Guinea, as a result of falling coconuts over the course of four years, from a total of 355 trauma cases. He includes two anecdotes about instant deaths from falling coconuts, and provides the mathematics that a 2 kg coconut falling from a 25 metre height will reach speeds of 80 km/h and hit with a force of 1,000 kg. A more general article on palm tree-related injuries (mainly from harvesters falling from trees) co-authored by Barss (and published in the *British Medical Journal* (Barss, Dakulala and Doolan 1984) was picked up in the *New York Times* in February of 1985 (Webster 1985).

In October of 2001, Barss won an Ig Nobel prize for Improbable Research for the “Injuries due to falling coconut” article. Perhaps the attention that arose from the ceremony brought his work back to the foreground, because in 2002 the British insurer Club Direct issued a press release titled “Coconuts more dangerous than sharks, says insurer” (Club Direct 2002; cf. *ABC News Online* 2002; Chamberlin 2002; Westwood 2002), in response to a report that city councils in and around Queensland, Australia had been uprooting coconut palm trees and replacing them with date palms as a consequence of the threat of rising insurance premiums. Brett Escott, the managing director, quoted Barss’ article directly and also made the unattributed

claim that falling coconuts kill over one hundred and fifty people a year, making them ten times more lethal than sharks. Perhaps as no surprise, the insurer was not only assuring that coconut deaths were covered, but there was also a ten percent discount on Australia travel insurance for the following two months. This 150 people per year claim is the source for the contemporary belief in “coconuts are more deadly than sharks,” which is prevalent enough to auto-generate a number of variant terms when one types the unlikely-to-type “coconuts vs” into Google. Much like the “more people killed by donkey kicks than by air disasters” belief reviewed by Snopes (Mikkelson and Mikkelson, 2007), there is little support for it despite its strength.

What fuelled the fin de siècle insurance concerns? Brooke Thomas suggests that the coconut itself is an index for South Pacific life: it is an iconic object and thus the focus of the tourist gaze, and yet it is simultaneously indicative of a topophobia of these same small islands. The very otherness that is its draw needs to be denatured in order for it to be rendered safe for the tourist enterprise. I am struck, when I do research on this topic and look for images online, how the same places that housed these camps are a scant thirty years later major tourist destinations.

But does this account for Bernard’s collected tale? A folk belief that appears to have arisen in the intervening years can not account for its currency at that time, although it may be in keeping with a cycle of legends that gave rise to the belief in the first place. The narrative was collected before Barss’ publications and their broadcasting through the *New Your Times*. My reading is again on the very nature of the work itself: that there are hard cases, cases where officers break rules in favour of the applicants, heartbreaking cases where the rules can’t be broken. But there are also moments when the dual roles of the immigration Foreign Service officer – the humanitarian role of bringing a person out from horrific circumstances; the mercenary role of bringing a potentially contributing person into Canada – are met with little drama, but nevertheless come to naught. Like both Cournot’s and Spinoza’s roof tile, things fall and kill people: to undermine the impact, “shit happens,” but that does not provide comfort.

I want to give one last example, of which I have very little to say, yet which, like the coconut story, is explicitly called a “story” that is also affirmed as “true.”

M/ This story was told to me by the officer who handled it. It’s true, I’m certain, and it’s rather tragic. It goes back to the 1950s, when we were

dealing with a large volume of immigrants from Italy.

This officer had a case of a couple with five children, and one of the children was retarded. They were what we now call nominated immigrants. At the interview he told the family that their application had to be refused. The one child had not been acceptable on the medical, and so the whole family had to be refused, though of course we never gave reasons. So he told the family that their application was refused, and they left the office. They were back in three days. They came in, and the Father said, "I wonder whether you would reconsider our application?" The officer said, "I really don't know why we should, the refusal was quite firm." At which the Father said, "I'd just like to tell you that a terrible accident happened on our way back to Sicily. One of our children fell off the train and was killed."

You can guess which child it was. Our officer was pretty sure the family had worked out what the trouble was. The child fell off the train and was killed. The reason for their refusal ceased to exist. They got their visas and came to Canada.

I do not want to hazard one way or another about the "truth" of this event: suffice it to say, that it is affirmed as true is sufficient to begin a discussion, and that it was in circulation, however limited, speaks to how it resonates with the group's worldview. Much of the immigration officer's work is focussed at that point where the upper blade of the abstractions of immigration policy meets the lower blade of the realities of actual immigrants trying to create a better life. That dual role of the humanitarian and the mercenary chafes when the two aspects are imbalanced, and doubly so as the determination of the "good" immigrant is so often from the perspective of the bureaucrats and citizenry at home.

Throughout my work on this collection I have been thinking of the role of Bernard as audience: in effect, they could be told to him because the teller would not be judged, but whether they would be understood is a further concern. It is not my intent to romanticise the Immigration Foreign Service officer, but to suggest that experiences of extreme existential crisis, the personal experience narratives aiming to give voice to those experiences, and a body of both legend and other genres that is buoyed by that collective experience creates a highly esoteric rhetorical community. I am

trying to understand that community, and understand Bernard's sense of his place within and without it.

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HAUNTING LEGENDS OF MR. MARCO POLO AND DR. FU MANCHU:

The Asian Mystique—Marvels and Fears of the Asian Exotica in the West

In the twenty-first century today we are living in the globalized world. In this world, thanks to various high-tech machines and devices such as supersonic airplanes and the Internet, we are literally connected to people of other cultures more firmly than at any other time in history. Thanks to the convenience of motorized vehicles, we have many opportunities to travel around once unfamiliar people in unknown areas. In fact, we can now obtain information about such once unknown areas, i.e., *Terra Incognita*, via the Internet, without ever travelling there. We are not alone in this world, technologically and electronically. So, it seems that there is no *Terra Incognita* in our world anymore and, moreover, what we once felt “exotic” now feels as familiar as our good neighbors.

However, despite such easily accessible exotic things or “exotica,” one question often irritates us: Do we understand such exotica appropriately, without any biased views that result from (positively) some sense of marvel of exotica and/or (negatively) some fear of such exotica?

For example, consider Asia. Ever since countless adventurers and merchants have started traveling from the West to the East, they returned home with fanciful images of Asia as a place of mystery. Many of these images persist, even in today’s global communities. So, we sometimes still understand Asia with such traditionally propagated biases against it. Therefore, we easily recreate and perpetuate the Asian mystique through our simple interpretations of Asia.

In the United States, for example, the most popular and easily approachable Asia or the Asian mystique is probably Chinese foods—from the quick lunch, take-out menus to the gorgeous restaurants for dinner. Even though there are “some forty thousand Chinese restaurants in the United States—more than the

number of McDonald’s, Burger Kings, and KFCs combined” (Lee, 2008: 9), they continue to play a significant role as a gateways to mysterious zones, which then ceaselessly generate Chinese Food mysteries as contemporary legends.

It is quite possible that, despite our familiarity with their savory yet exotic foods, Chinese cooks’ mysterious smiles, their secret cooking spices and ingredients help to orchestrate exotica that we directly encounter and feel in our local Chinese restaurants. Such exotica work as pillar themes of Chinese Food mysteries as contemporary legends. Moreover, perceptions of Chinese historical events (some of them infamous), incomprehensible social systems, and contemporary (and sometimes unsettled) political situations obscure our appropriate understandings of Chinese history and culture. These factors easily lead us to mystify not only Chinese foods but also current Chinese governmental activities, rather than to understand them for what they actually are.

Even though Chinese foods, Chinese restaurants, and Chinatowns are popular in the United States, people there still feel some unexplainable feeling of exotica in relation to them. So, it is the exotica, a primary birthplace of the Asian mystique, that inspire people to create thriller-adventure fictions and also contemporary legends about Chinese Food mysteries. Besides, this kind of exotica does not live far from our homes; rather, we find it often right next door. It positively augments marvels and negatively aggrandizes fears of the unknown. These fears of the unknown sometimes literally dominate our sober mindsets. They engender unwarranted illusions among us, which H. P. Lovecraft elaborately described, saying that “[t]he oldest and strongest emotion of mankind is fear, and the oldest and strongest kind of fear is fear of the unknown” (2000: 21). This fear of the unknown stirs the Asian mystique.

Eminent Creators of the Asian Mystique in the West:

As the eminent creators of the Asian mystique in the West, now we can spotlight two famous characters. One is late thirteenth-century Venetian merchant Marco Polo (so far we do not have any firm evidence of his historical existence, so that he himself is almost a legend). The other is a British author Sax Rohmer’s completely fictional Chinese evildoer Dr. Fu Manchu. Marco Polo’s travelogue *Il Milione* (publicized in 1298) and Sax Rohmer’s Dr. Fu Manchu stories (since 1913 until 1959) were once household names and are still widely read and popular. Many adaptations of movies,

radio dramas, TV dramas, comics, and computer games are still released and widely welcomed today.

Actually, there were several adventurers who described mysterious Asia before Marco Polo. However, because of its abundant marvelous stories, Marco Polo's travelogue most successfully helped to engender the Asian mystique in the West since the late thirteenth century. For example, Marco Polo narrates that Japanese people behave decently but are cannibalistic and, moreover, that they dwell in houses made of gold (1958, 243-44). It is this narration that historically drove Christopher Columbus to risk his life sailing for the Asia—"the golden island Japan." So, this book spread the Asian mystique throughout the West more successfully than any other and, by doing so, literally changed our history forever. Considering the many historical adventures that have taken place since Marco Polo, and their impact—despite his vague historical presence—we can say that the Marco Polo legacy still lives on today. It is a positive part of Asian exotica, i.e., the positive aspect of the Asian mystique.

Around the turn of the twentieth century, about seven hundred years after Marco Polo's renowned travelogue first appeared, cablegrams and photographs informed the West of what was happening on the other side of the globe. For example, when the Boxer Rebellion erupted in the summer of 1900 in Beijing, Christian missionaries, diplomats, soldiers, merchants, and journalists there dispatched a huge number of reports to their compatriots about the unsettled political situation there and the oppressed condition of the Chinese people.

Such information amplified weird images of a mysterious land whose people suspiciously and secretly hide unpredictably evil plans for conquering the West and dominating the entire world. The West gradually looked Asia suspiciously with this notion of Asian conspiracy against the West. This engendered the Chinese mystique, i.e., a negative part of the Asian mystique, eventually resulting in the birth of Dr. Fu Manchu stories, which represent fears of Asia among people in the West.

These fears did not loom so large when Marco Polo first narrated his marvels about Asia. While Marco Polo's travelogue narrated Asian marvels that the West had dreamed about since Roman antiquity, Fu Manchu stories emphasized Asian fears that the West gradually felt alarm of since the mid-nineteenth century. Such mixed feelings about both sets of marvels and fears eventually engendered and, moreover, decorated the Asian mystique colorfully. So, Marco Polo aroused

marvels of Asia in the late thirteenth-century in the West and, in contrast to this, that Fu Manchu aroused fears of Asia in the early twentieth century in the West.

Concluding remarks

Technologically and electronically, in the twenty-first century today, the Westerner and the Asian are well connected with each other, enough so that we feel as if we live together as part of a high-tech, globalized world. Nevertheless, we are still apt to understand other cultures in terms of what we have already positively and negatively established in our minds. Ironically, then, the Asian mystique remains alive in the West, engendering ceaselessly Chinese Food mysteries, despite the dense global interconnections of which we are a part. So, good or bad, we still enjoy them, even chuckle at them secretly, but at the same time we can hear a whisper of Sir Denis Nayland Smith, archenemy of Dr. Fu Manchu, saying to his colleague: "Is there a man who would arouse the West to a sense of the awakening of the East ... that the millions only await their leaders?" (Rohmer 2012 [1913]). This eerie feeling of the Asia mystique works well for manufacturing legends about Asia anew, without end. So, we can say that the Asian mystique never dies out among us.

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ISCLR ONLINE

For those unaware, ISCLR has a new website, at www.contemporarylegend.org. We are trying to make this a more dynamic place, and are interested in your input. Any suggestions, contributions, or complaints can be directed to Ian Brodie at ian_brodie@cbr.ca. A page revamp is currently underway.

Our email list is a going concern: subscribe at isclr@folklore.ee.

We are also on Twitter: follow us [@ISCLR](https://twitter.com/ISCLR)

We also have a very active Facebook presence, having recently switched over from a "page" to a "group." Visit www.facebook.com/groups/ISCLR to join.

PLUGS, SHAMELESS AND OTHERWISE

Simon J. Bronner's *Campus Traditions: Folklore from the Old-Time College to the Modern Mega-University* comes out this November from UP Mississippi. As the blurb informs us:

From their beginnings, campuses emerged as hotbeds of traditions and folklore. American college students inhabit a culture with its own slang, stories, humor, beliefs, rituals, and pranks. Simon J. Bronner takes a long, engaging look at American campus life and how it is shaped by students and at the same time shapes the values of all who pass through it. The archetypes of absent-minded profs, fumbling jocks, and curve-setting dweebs are the stuff of legend and humor, along with the all-nighters, tailgating parties, and initiations that mark campus tradition--and student identities. Undergraduates in their hallowed halls embrace distinctive traditions because the experience of higher education precariously spans childhood and

adulthood, parental and societal authority, home and corporation, play and work.

Bronner traces historical changes in these traditions. The predominant context has shifted from what he calls the "old-time college," small in size and strong in its sense of community, to mass society's "mega-university," a behemoth that extends beyond any campus to multiple branches and offshoots throughout a state, region, and sometimes the globe. One might assume that the mega-university has dissolved collegiate traditions and displaced the old-time college, but Bronner finds the opposite. Student needs for social belonging in large universities and a fear of losing personal control have given rise to distinctive forms of lore and a striving for retaining the pastoral "campus feel" of the old-time college. The folkloric material students spout, and sprout, in response to these needs is varied but it is tied together by its invocation of tradition and social purpose. Beneath the veil of play, students work through tough issues of their age and environment. They use legends and humor to suggest ramifications, if not resolution, of these issues for themselves and for their institutions. In the process, campus traditions are keys to the development of American culture.