# "ATU jokes": old and abandoned

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## 1. Some words on folktale registers in general

The aim of this paper is not to discuss the general historiography and structure, advantages and disadvantages, etc. of folktale indices of the "Aarne-Thompson pedigree". Nevertheless, two facts seem to be absolutely clear about them.
1. They suffer from various shortcomings (decreasing from generation to generation, but not absent even in the last edition by Hans-Jörg Uther) which are perhaps best summarized by Alan Dundes (1997):
(1) The concepts of *motif* and *type* as analytical units of folk narratives are inaccurately defined and often tend to be confused.
(2) The scope of the material is europocentric (read: too narrow), though at the same time, not consistently europocentric.
(3) In Aarne's original classification the criterion ~ level of type (i.e. plot) is regularly subordinated to the criterion ~ level of *dramatis personae*, and as a consequence plots with different characters (e.g. animals, ogres, numsculls) are sometimes scattered between different superordinate classes of the system.
(4) The censorship imposed on many typological entries with obscene content. The synopses of such plots are watered down and uninformative or altogether absent.
(5) The so-called "ghost entries", i.e. references to (of crossreferences between) the non-existent type numbers, as well as omissions and other technical errors and misprints. (A somewhat longer list of reproaches can also be found in the Introduction to Uther's register (2004: 7–8).
2. Despite all of that, Aarne's initial folktale system has proven to be good enough to create a rapid increase in the number of regional and national descendants that were, in turn, incorporated into subsequent versions of general registers by Thompson and Uther, and as Uther's recent register is admittedly also far from exhaustive, numerous new versions of it can be predicted to evolve. Briefly, during the last century, Aarne's system became so profoundly entrenched in folkloristic textological practice that it will most likely never be replaced by a new and completely different one.[1]

## 2. Schwank *versus* joke

Problems begin from the very title of this category of tales. Aarne, whose registers are in German, calls them *Schwänke*. Thompson's English heading is *Jokes and Anecdotes*, while Uther's is *Anecdotes and Jokes*. Neither of these English terms adequately reflects the content of the chapter of humorous folktales, as *anecdotes* in their "regular" sense mean funny (fictitious of real) stories about famous people, and *jokes* usually mean short, n e c e s s a r i l y  p u n c h l i n e d  humorous (tacitly contemporary) items in the form of a narrative, riddle, advertisement, pun or other formula, etc. Of the languages that I know, only German and Finnish have clearcut terms to distinguish the "Aarne-Thompson" and other older (as a rule, non-punchlined) humorous folktales from the contemporary punchlined items of "canned", folkloric jokes – *der Schwank / der Witz* and *kasku / vitsi* correspondingly. In Russian, Andreev's tale register has captured the range 1200 ff. as *Анекдоты*, and until now the whole area of (punchlined or not) humorous folk narratives is covered by the loose general term *анекдот*; to denote funny stories about famous people, the term *исторический анекдот* (historical anecdote) is used.[2]

Anyone who has had some contact with folk narratives inevitably evolves an intuitive perception of the specificity and differences in that constitute the area 1200 ff. in Aarne-based folktale registers, and those that constitute the repertoire of punchlined jokes. Many outstanding, mainly German, folklorists, have made attempts to explain in what way the genre of *Witz* differs from the genre of *Schwank* – see, e.g., Bausinger 1958 and 1967; Neumann 1967; Röhrich 1977; Neumann 1986. Nevertheless, the Schwank has received almost no attention from contemporary leading humour scholars, Elliott Oring (1989 and 1992) being one of a few lucky exceptions in the literature that is available to me. Oring (1992: 81–82), also using the loose term *tale* (due to absence of more specific English counterpart) for *Schwank*, refers to the distinctive features between *Schwank* and *Witz* set forth by German folklorists:

★ a tale (read: Schwank) is on average longer than a joke;
★ the world of the tale is normal, typical and rational, whereas the world of the joke is abnormal, bizarre and nonsensical;
★ tales tend to be explicitly didactic, whereas jokes avoid overt moralization;
★ jokes tend to be told in the present tense, tales in the past;
★ tales "live" by deeds and events, jokes by possibilities offered by language and speech;
★ tales are typically multiepisodic and end with a narrative resolution, whereas jokes typically consist of one single episode, and end abruptly with a punchline.

Oring considers most of the listed differences to be relative, or concomitant, if not irrelevant, and continues: "The only distinction that seems critical in distinguishing the joke from the humorous tale is the presence or absence of what is colloquially referred to as a *punchline*. A joke without a punchline is not a joke. [- - -] In other words, it is the punchline that conditions the other conspicuous features of the joke." (1992: 82)

Having stated that the punchline is the element that makes a joke a joke, Oring proceeds to specify the conditions for a punchline:

★ it must be located at the absolute end of the joke text, without any moralizing comments to follow;
★ the text must retain an optimal balance of informativeness / redundancy, as too overt pre-priming of the listener or reader will inevitably destroy the punchline effect;
★ the resolution as the actually narrated "post-climax" final part of the tale and the resolution, as the output of the listener's or reader's "post-punchline" mental efforts are mutually exclusive: "...the most generally inappropriate response that one can make to a joke is to ask, "And then what happened?" (1992: 86);
★ though the borderline between punchlined and non-punchlined narratives is not absolute, certain variants of one and the same plot can look punchlined, and the others non-punchlined;
and so on.

Having stated that the punchline is the necessary precondition to elicit the feeling of funniness and create a humorous experience, Oring, however, leaves unanswered the question of what permitted a Schwank without a punchline to remain funny and qualify as humorous? to what did punchline-less Schwanks owe their existence, popularity and longevity?

## 3. The main "axiologic categories" of folktales in general and Schwanks in particular

The "Aarne-Thompson folktales" are by and large an axiologically-oriented material. That is, roughly speaking:
1) there is a certain "motivating power" that determines the kind of conflict, course of events and final resolution of the plot;
2) the principal characters of the tale embody a certain axiologically marked feature, due to which they will be punished or rewarded in the final resolution of the story.

Accordingly to the nature of these two constituents, the subgenres of AT-tales can divided to two generic classes:

1. The class that includes tales of magic and religious tales where the motivating force is of a supernatural kind (supernatural beings and objects occur, supernatural events happen, etc.), and 'good' means some moral virtue (kindness, compassion, mercy, hospitality, etc.), thanks to which the character earns supernatural advisers and helpers and enjoys victory in the end.

2. The class that includes the "fable-like" bulk of animal tales, most subcategories of romantic or realistic tales (Novelle), practically all tales of the stupid ogre, and the main subcategories of Schwanks. Here the course of events and the final result of the tale is caused by (human or non-human) natural factors and reasons, as well as zoo- and demonomorphic characters being understood allegorically. The axiological distinctor is of intellectual type, the 'good' meaning reason, cleverness, wit, craftiness, skill to successfully lie and deceive, etc., and the 'bad' stupidity, dumbness, dullness, simple-mindedness, etc.[3]

The total number of Schwank types in Uther's register is ca 990. If one also considers the high percentage of deception plots in animal tales and tales of the stupid ogre, we can override and deconstruct some of Aarne's character-based subcategories of Schwanks, thus obtaining the following four generic categories, two of them productive and the other two not. The approximate structure of their frequency turned out to be the following:

    1) tales about clever acts, deception, skilled theft, witty repartees etc. – ca 400 (40%);
    2) tales about numskulls and another fools and stupid acts – ca 270 (27%);
    3) those Thompson calls *Tales of Lying* and Uther calls *Tall Tales* – ca 90 (9%);
    4) tales of lucky accidents – ca 30 (3%).

The four kinds of Schwanks thus constitute about 4/5 of the plots in Uther's register.

## 4. Schwanks about clever acts and deception

Lying, cheating, deception, cunning etc. are universal forms of human communicative behaviour.[4] They are among the most fundamental thematic props of any oral or written products of human verbal culture. In Schwanks the scope of manifestations of cleverness, craftiness, deceit etc. is also very diverse.[5] The motives for clever acts ~ the outputs of these acts can represent all four axiological variants of "optative strategies": they can

    1) result in receiving some hitherto lacking benefit;
    2) eliminate some previously existing bad thing;
    3) avoid some hitherto absent but possible bad;
    4) retain some existing but vulnerable benefit.

The causes of the chain of events and the number of moves and twists in the plot can also be quite varied. The initial motif usually arises from someone's action, course of behaviour, character trait, etc. that the antagonist experiences as bad and has to fight against:

★ ongoing adultery must be hidden, and supposed adultery discovered and punished (see several plots in the intervals ATU 1355–1362, 1380; 1419–1423);

★ laziness, hidden theft or gluttony of the wife must be discovered and cured (e.g. ATU 1370B*; 1373; 1373A);

★ eventually dangerous statements by a talkative wife must be discredited, or her unwanted curiosity discovered (ATU 1381 and its subtypes; 1416);

★ the husband who thinks his wife's life is easier than his own must be re-educated (ATU 1408);

★ the advances of an unpleasant man (a lecherous clergyman or other) must be thwarted and/or punished (ATU 1440–1441B*; 1725; 1730);

★ physical, psychological or moral vices of a potential bride must be hidden by herself and her family / discovered by the suitor through various tests and proofs (many plots in the interval ATU 1450–1470);

★ grotesque attempts by old maids to get married must be satirized (most plots in the interval ATU 1475–1488);

★ just verdicts must be "reckoned" and unjust ones avoided or annulled (ATU 1534 and subtypes);

★ the servant ~ farmhand must have an unjust master (who is stingy with food, burdens him with too much work, has unusual habits) ~ the farmer granted better conditions as a result of various demonstrative tricks played against him or ironic statements by the farmhand (several plots in the interval ATU 1560–1572; 1575*);

★ a parson who is avaricious and seeks bribes must be tamed, verbally parried or ridiculed (several plots in the interval ATU 1734*–1741*), etc.

Alongside tales with such realistically motivated counterstrokes, the Schwank registers have a number of plots in which clever acts are ascribed to Eulenspiegel-like "professional" swindlers (tricksters, thieves, etc.), and the conflict is initiated by them – either on a bet or agreement, or simply out of a lust for gambling:

★ the core of the cycle of swindler tales is the huge supertype *The Master Thief* (ATU 1525), which has numerous subtypes, with large international notoriety and abundant literary sources, followed by a number of other classical swindler tales, such as *Holding down the Hat* (ATU 1528), *Cleverness and Gullibility* (ATU 1539), *The Student from Paradise* (*Paris*) (ATU 1540), etc.;

★ the daughters ~ wife of a rich man (king ~ master ~ clergyman) are seduced using various tricks and pretences (a number of obscene plots in the interval ATU 1542*1547*; 1563; 1731);

★ blind men are duped into fighting (ATU 1577);

★ various tricks are played to refuse from returning a debt or some borrowed item (types in the interval ATU 1591–1594);

★ ATU 1635*, *Eulenspiegel's tricks*, is provided for miscellaneous diverse local jokelore about Eulenspiegel;

★ the parson is duped and ridiculed in various ways, often by the sexton or confirmand boys: taken in a sack "to Heaven" (ATU 1737, 1740); they promise to teach his hen or donkey to speak, or to educate his dog (ATU 1750 and subtypes); he is tricked into humiliating situations, enraged or provoked to say something unsuitable during the sermon (ATU 1775, 1785B–1786, 1825C).

## 5. Schwanks about numskulls and other fools

Deception tales inevitably include a pair of main characters – the deceiver and the deceived, that is the clever winner and the stupid loser. Deception tales are not, however, automatically tales about stupidity. The victim of the clever character needs not be outrageously stupid, but just stupid enough to be outplayed, his/her "relative" stupidity needs a helper to become evident. He/she is actually punished for other vices – for being cruel, stingy, lazy, lecherous etc, but very often just for being a representative of a hated higher class, i.e. beings from outside the zone of validity of natural moral rules.

In real Schwanks of stupidity there is no clever "litmus paper", i.e. stupidity reveals itself spontaneously, on two obviously different levels of intensity, as noticed also e.g. in Jason (1972: 9, 25–26) and elsewhere.

The examples of a "classical", extreme level of stupidity are gathered by Aarne and his successors in the special first subchapter of Schwanks, which Aarne has termed *Schildbürgerschwänke*, Thompson *Numskull Stories* and Uther *Stories about a Fool.*[6] As is also largely noted in the literature, the terms denoting numskulls have often been derived from toponyms of a surprisingly "too local" sub-ethnic level, like Abderites in Old Greek, Gothamites in English, *Schildbürger* in German, *пошехонцы* in Russian, *hölmöläiset* in Finnish etc.

Jason (1972: 9–10) writes: "The actions of the numskulls can be divided into two groups: (a) actions which imply lack of knowledge in basic attributes of objects and in basic technology, and (b) actions which reveal that the performer lacks the ability of application of non-deductive rules of inference." And indeed: numskulls do not know even the most elementary laws of nature, usual everyday commodities, how to do their jobs, the basic rules of human communication, and goals of human activity. They sow salt (ATU 1200), harvest using guns (ATU 1202), milk hens (ATU 2004**), take cows to the roof to graze (ATU 1210), try to hatch chickens from eggs (ATU 1218), saw off branches they are sitting on (ATU 1240), try to stretch beams (ATU 1244), carry sunlight in

sacks into windowless houses (ATU 1245), boil porridge in ice holes (ATU 1260), learn to swim on dry ground (ATU 1293*), and do not know what dungbeetles (ATU 1316), watches (ATU 1319A*), the moon (ATU 1334), sausages (ATU 133A) are, etc. etc. These and other absurdities originate from a lot of different (often ancient) Western and Eastern sources, and many of them have long ago become proverbial.

The "more normal" occurrences of stupidity are divided between the various categories and subcategories of Schwanks: the stupid woman fertilizes cabbages with meat (ATU 1386); the farmer and his wife decide to send their favourite ox or another domestic animal to school (ATU 1675, often formulated as a tale of deception); the Gypsy ~ farmer ~ ... tries to teach his horse to live without eating (ATU 1682); the Eulenspiegel-Schwank *"What Should I Have Said (Done)?"* (ATU 1696) with an enjoyable chain structure where the stupid son or daughter mechanically applies instructions and corrections received after his previous misadventures to the next, unsuitable case, and thus runs into a domino cycle.

## 6. "Tall tales"

Uther was right to rename the closing chapter of Schwanks from *Tales of Lying* to *Tall Tales*, because this kind of tales truly does not have anything in common with lying as a form of deception (though it does also frequently occur as a form of deception). The "tall tales" have more in common with numskull tales, both of them being by and large collections of absurdities. Oral and literary traditions have worked out a great number of prodigies of nonsensical, sometimes oxymoronical, motifs – non-existent things, impossible actions, hyper-hyperboles etc, that can circulate in various kinds of narratives, but also as autonomous proverbs or other "fixed expressions", occur in riddles etc.:

★ the root of a stone; bird's milk; a twig of water; a pig's horns; crab's wool; milking a billy-goat; shoeing a flea; castrating a frog; rope made of sand or husk; ax soup; bailing water with a sieve; sowing salt; butter mountains and milk rivers; crossing an abyss in two leaps, etc. etc.[7]

"Tall tales" also seem to have some salient typological and etymological foci.

Firstly, "tall tales" are sometimes structured as two-layered frame stories where the lying narrative is embedded in a plot of deception: the lying contest is going on, and the listener is forbidden to interrupt the narration with objections "You are lying!" or the like (see especially ATU 1920 and its subtypes). On the basic "lying" level, though, there is no normally structured plot with the conventional components exposition, disposition, climax and resolution, but just a "Brownian motion" between logically unrelated events and elements, or a fuzzy chain of hyperbolic images, an array of negated affirmations and affirmed negations, etc.

The second cluster consists of Münchhausen tales (ATU 1889 and subtypes A–L), followed by other similar hunter tales.

The Münchhausen cycle intersects with plots that describe various kinds of wonderlands: for instance *Submarine World* (ATU 1889H); as well as *Schlaraffenland* (ATU 1930) and Topsy Turvy Land (ATU 1935).

One of the most impressive and miraculous things in the corpus of ATU-humour is, to my mind, the cycle of big things (ATU 1960 with a multitude of subtypes; 1961) near the absolute end of the chapter of Schwanks in folktale registers. What makes these jokes particularly enjoyable is the incontinent play with the dimensions of the world, embedding them into each other, making constant abrupt leaps from the lilliput scale to the scale of giants, and so on. Here are two summaries of fragments from some Estonian texts:

> **[ATU 1960A: The Great Ox]**
> There is a great ox on which three brothers are seated – one on the horns, the second on its back, and the third on its hind end. They take the ox to water – it drinks enormous quantities. A large hawk swoops down and tears off one of the ox's haunches. The brothers fall off the ox for three days. One of them gets a speck in his eye, and it turns out that that was the ox's torn-off haunch. A fox begins to eat the haunch;

the fox is killed, but turns out to be too large to skin. An old woman cuts off half of the skin, adds another hundred skins and makes a child's hat made from it, etc. etc.

**[ATU 1961: The Big Wedding]**
15 litres of malt were set to ferment for wedding beer, and 2 types of beer were made from it: 15 vats of 'virvomm' and 3 vats of strong 'karamomm'. 6 long tables were set end to end for the wedding guests, so that one end reached the door, and a seventh for uninvited wedding guests extended out into the yard. On every table there was room for a whole loaf of bread, and there was even room at the corners. For the wedding meal, two six-week-old hogs were fattened for seven days in a row. After the wedding, all that was left of them was four legs and two sides (the master had already set aside the heads for Christmas). The bride had such a dowry that it took two of the strongest muscle-men to lift the chest onto a sledge. The first of these muscle-men was famous because his brother had once held the tail of a seven-day-old pig-bull on ice that was still around on Midsummer's Day. The other was even stronger: he had held a three-day old boar rooster and not let go until the 'boar rooster' itself pulled its tail free.

## 7. Lucky accidents

This is a small and exceptional group (3% of the sum total) of Schwanks that Aarne seems to have founded, so to say, for logical reasons: whereas the deception Schwanks are tales about deserved success (and failure), and the Schwanks of stupidity are tales about deserved failure, the Schwanks about lucky accidents are tales about undeserved success. The group consists of some tales about pseudo-warriors, -physicians and -scholars (ATU 1940–1941 and the subtypes therein), some tales about lucky treasure finds (ATU 1643–1646), about riches obtained by selling unknown animals or products (ATU 1651 and subtypes), about accidentally frightened robbers (ATU 1653–1654), etc. Accidentality does not, in general, belong to the motivating powers of Schwanks, as its proper home is in realistic or romantic tales. Hence two interrelated questions arise:
　1) are there also Schwanks about **un**lucky accidents?
　2) are there Schwanks about **un**deserved mishaps and failures?
Even a superficial glance at Uther's register shows that the scale of social specification of as if undeservedly lucky personages tends to correspond to the scale of the winners in deception tales, or in other words, lucky accidents very rarely befall the representatives of socially higher classes, the usual losers in the tales of deception. Take, for example, the following Uther's synopsis of type ATU 1838:

**The Hog in Church.** A sexton accidentally locks a hog in the church. He hears a noise and alerts the clergyman, who puts on his vestments, takes the Bible, and asks the sexton to open the church door. The hog runs between the clergyman's legs and hurries away with him riding on his back. The clergyman thinks he is being taken away by the devil.

Hardly any imaginable "ordinary audience" could take this accidental mishap as undeserved and follow the grotesque show without malicious delight.
This takes us directly to the next problem.

## 8. Targets without sources

In contemporary cognitive psychology and linguistics, as in the terminology of many other branches of scientific knowledge, the word "target" is almost automatically paired and associated with the word "source". Theories based on punchlined jokes (be they ethnic, linguistic or other) can confine themselves to identifying only one kind of joke characters – the target ~ butt ~ object, etc. In the works of different writers the meaning (read: axiological marking) of this term tacitly fluctuates from overtly "laughable at" (mockable, criticizable) persons to persons met with total cynical indifference in black humour to persons saying funny witticisms that are not addressed directly against somebody "on the same scene". More often, however, such witticisms do function as repartees parrying the antagonist's previous move. Take, for example, the notorious Freudian favourite:

A wife is like an umbrella. Sooner or later one takes a cab.
(Quoted from Attardo et al. 2002: 13; for an analysis of the joke in a postmodern feministic spirit see Rose (1989); for an analysis in the system-theoretical spirit "suited to creative processing in general", see Veale (2006))

This one-liner definitely has no narrative structure (and thus also no dramatis personae), but it is certainly a punchlined item in which the seemingly cryptic simile in the setup is followed by a sexually loaded resolution. But who or what can be assigned the role of the "target" here? The female gender as such in general? I was unable to ascertain the author of the witticism, but suppose that some anonymous jester Mr. X has, in the course of discussing topics of adultery in some male company, just a moment ago invented this aphoristic unit and imparts it to his fellowmen – could he then be qualified as a "source" of the joke? Could any known author automatically be qualified as a source? Or any narrator of jokes, in the case of "canned" folkloric material?

Emperor Charles the Bald: What separates an Irishman from a fool?
Irish philosopher John Scotus: Just this table.
(Quoted from Veale et al. 2006: 318; see therein also about the structure of so-called trumping humour in general)

In this case we have a pair of characters opposed to each other, a configuration that is also very customary for the non-punchlined tales of deception with characters of human, animal, or devilish origin. Charles the Bald is evidently the target of the verbal punch he gets from John Scotus. But how should one describe the role left for Scotus himself? Our intuitive knowledge of "joke grammar" would suggest to us that the punchline is usually said by the target ~ butt ~ object of the joke, but that is not the case. How should one describe the role of the clever winner in whichever non-punchlined tale of deception? Are they "sources" of humour, or if not, then what are they?

As Christie Davies claims, most joke-telling nations or ethnoses tend, as a rule, to have two opposite types of ethnic butts – the "stupid" and the "canny". For someone accustomed to the simple dualistic "black-and-white" axiology governing the "Aarne-Thompson" narratives, the status of the "canny" butts can feel in a sense weird and asymmetrical:
1) the portraits of stupid ethnic figures tend to be supported by several other also negative traits (filthiness, laziness, broken or dialectal language), whereas canniness (craftiness) is typically complemented (or rather, as if counterbalanced) by one single feature – stinginess;
2) in Davies's "Who laughs at whom" tables (e.g. 1982: 385; 1990: 11–12; 1998: 2–3; 2002: 9), the lists of stupid ethnic groups display a variegated multitude from country to country, whereas the slots reserved for canny-stingy groups are filled prevalently by Jews and Scots.
Davies himself (1990: 15) has commented upon this apparent internal contradiction of canny-stingy personages, writing:

In the world of jokes the opposite of stupid is canny, rather than clever. The canny person has to have cleverness, but canniness also requires a crafty, calculating, thrifty, measuring disposition. Canniness implies cleverness and rationality, but it is a shrewd cleverness, and a calculating rationality applied in the pursuit of personal advantage
[- - -]
The comically canny hero of ethnic jokes is represented as "too clever," "too clever by half," "too clever for his own good—or anyone else's, come to that."

Christie Davies asserts that ethnic jokes are not direct expressions of ethnic, national hostility, but always hide deeper social and economical causes motivating the choice of ethnic labels the joke characters are marked with. Thus the phenomen of axiologically ambivalent characters is not restricted to ethnic jokes alone. Something analogous appears to hold true for several (at least "technically") punchlined jokes whose occurrence in folktale registers is scanty, but not non-existent. First of all, it holds for "axiologic portrayals" of parsons and other clergymen in Schwanks. It is common knowledge that clergymen in Schwanks are far not completely negative (deceivable, dupable, mockable) heroes, but have developed conspicuous features of folkloric jesters ~ tricksters ~ "wise fools". They often poke fun at their professional duties and religious rituals; they are greedy

and stingy and therefore have to justify their wishes and refusals; they are lazy drunkards, philanderers and cardplayers, for which reason they get into embarrassing situations and must invent verbal devices to explain their vices and find ways out of embarrassment. From the viewpoint of "canniness", funniness, humorousness, wit etc., the "psychological outputs" of these defensive measures vary on a very great scale – from classical witticisms to foolish, but funny cases to clumsy and/or injust ones. Many examples of this kind of behaviour can be found in the interval ATU 1800–1849.

This would perhaps be a suitable point to introduce the theme of Hodja Nasreddin.

## 9. The comical amplitudes of Hodja Nasreddin

1. The following is perhaps the most widely known story about Nasreddin with a classical tripartite structure, and it bears number one in Wesselski's (1911 I: 5) classical collection. Here Nasreddin acts as a perfect deceiver. True, the story has a punchlined conclusion that is exceptional for Schwanks of deception: it is interesting to know how the congregation reacted to Nasreddin's third proposal:

> [ATU 1826] The story goes, one of the stories of a hundred, that Cogia Nasr Eddin Efendi one day ascending into the pulpit to preach, said, 'O believers, do ye not know what I am going to say to you?' The congregation answered, 'Dear Cogia Efendi, we do not know.' Then said the Cogia, 'What shall I say to you until you do know?' One day the Cogia ascending again into the pulpit, said, 'O Mussulmen, do ye not know what I am going to say to you?' 'We do know,' they replied. Then said the Cogia, 'Some of ye do know already, what should I have to say to you?' Then descending from the chair he went out. The assembly separated quite astonished, and, when they were out, continued to say, 'Which are those of us who know? Which are those who do not know?' The Cogia one day again mounting the chair in the same manner, said, 'O brothers, when I said to ye, "Do you know what I shall say?" there were some who said, "We know," others said, "We do not." It were now well that those among ye who knew what the Cogia said should teach those that did not.' (Borrow (transl.) 1884: 253)

2. In the second example Nasreddin seems to behave like an optimal "wise fool", like a clergyman waxing ironic about his professional religious matters, which he is expected to take dead seriously:

> [ATU 1832N*] One day they said to the Cogia, 'Pray what may be your horoscope?' Said the Cogia, 'I was born under the sign of the He-goat.' 'O Cogia,' said they, 'there is no such sign as the He-goat.' Said the Cogia, 'When I was a child my mother had my horoscope taken, and at that time the Kid was in the ascension.' 'O Cogia,' said they, 'that's all right; but a kid is one thing and a he-goat is another.' Said the Cogia, 'O you simpletons! Forty or fifty years have passed since then. Must not the kid have become an old goat?' (Borrow (transl.) 1884: 295)

3. Our third example deserves special attention.
There is a widely known contemporary joke about a drunkard looking for his keys which occurs in printed and internet sources in many languages and is frequently told or referred to in scholarly and scientific contexts as a paragon of wrong reasoning, wrong (or creative) methodology, or the like. For example:

> A drunk man lost his keys one night, and was observed to be peering at the ground under a street lamp to find them. When asked why he was looking for them there, when he had lost them in the dark bushes some distance away, the drunkard replied, "I know, but it's easier to look for them here."
> This anecdote was told to me in 1983 by Carol Prutting in order to illustrate that because some clinical issues are difficult to tackle, the clinician may be dissuaded from seeking relevant routes of understanding a problem and choose instead a standard and well-worn approach to the problem – easy but not necessarily effective. Such, Protting maintained was the resistance of many clinicians to adopting the paradigm of clinical pragmatics – an observation I believe is as true today as it was then.
> (Penn 2000: 107)

> Not long after he [W. James] wrote those words, most of psychology set off in quite a different direction, forcefully rejecting introspection altogether as a method of observation, and putting all its money on overt behavior. That limitation still constrains much work on the nature of the mind, and introspection still fails to be taken very seriously. Much research on the mind thus follows the pattern of the drunk who lost his keys in a dark corner, but was looking for them by a lamppost because the light was better there. The potential for understanding the mind has thus been limited to searches under the bright light of overt behavior.
> (Chafe 1998: 95–96)

This plot undoubtedly meets all conditions set for punchlined jokes in the GTVH:

it is manifested linguistically (LA); it represents a certain "genre", the actually narrated joke or the didactical reference to it (NS); it has the drunkard, one of the favourite joke personages, as the target character (TA); it has the situation (SI) where the drunkard's interlocutor with his surprised question provokes a punchlining reply; it reveals a sharp incongruity between the necessary (right place) and complementary conditions (sufficient degree of illumination), or between the rational optimum in applying utilitarian vs. hedonistic motives of behaviour and acting in general (SO); and it has them in the reversed order of importance (LM).

The thing is, however, that this joke item is probably quite old, since it also belongs to the joke plots that are largely connected with Hodja Nasressin's name. I found its Nasreddin-bound counterparts in only two academic, commented publications:

> Einmal verließ der Hodscha sein Haus und begann auf der Straße etwas zu suchen. Seine Frau sah das und fragte ihn: "Was suchst du, Hodscha?"
> Er antwortete: "Ich habe meinen Ring verlohren; jetzt suche ich ihn."
> Sie fragte weiter: "Wo hast du ihn denn verloren?"
> Der Hodscha antwortete: "Drinnen im Hause habe ich ihn fallen lassen."
> "Ja, warum suchst du dann heraußen?"
> "Drinnen ists finster und heraußen licht. Wollte nur Gott, daß ich ihn schon wieder gefunden hätte!"
> (Wesselski 1911 I: 99–100, no. 184 (< Jean Adolphe Decourdemanche, Sottisier de Nasr-Eddin-Hodja, Bruxelles, 1878, Nr. 11); cf. no. 518 in a large collection of Russian translations "Twenty Three Nasreddins" (Kharitonov 1978: 251)

The tale seems to be absent from any versions of folktale registers. I have been unable to obtain a copy of Decourdemanche's book or "I, Hoca, Nasreddin, Never Shall I die. A Thematic Analysis of Hoca Stories" by İlhan Başgöz & Pertev N. Boratav (Bloomington, Indiana, 1998), or eventual direct Eastern sources, and therefore I cannot decide of how ancient or recent origin the story could be. In any case, thanks to its remarkably high didactic "impact factor" this Nasreddin story has retained its relevance until now and (presumably mediated and amplified by popular folk-books by Idris Shah and uncountable others) has reached numerous Internet sites.[8]

The essence of the phenomenon of "wise fools", especially considering its rich and global occurrence in the empirical source materials, seems also to be one of the undeservedly ignored and abandoned topics in contemporary humour theory.

In addition, Nasreddin is not a numskull, nor is he a bearer of pure wisdom, nor even simply one of the most famous figures of "wise fools" in the cultural history of mankind. It has been tirelessly reiterated in the literature that the Nasreddin stories, however mythical their authorship may be, are outstanding examples of Sufi poetry and philosophical wisdom, and thus the deeper, Sufi-spirited levels should never be left out of interpretations of Nasreddin tales. The mode of functioning of the joke about looking for a ring or keys – both in the drunkard's and Nasreddin's version – also seems to corroborate its high cognitive and heuristic value. It has been tirelessly reiterated by Idris Shah and others that the tale (often qualified as a fable) suggests one not look for the eternal in the temporal and earthly; that the (dark) house symbolizes the internal (mental, spiritual) world of the human being and the space outside of it represents the environment that surrounds us; thus the key to resolving many difficult problems should be sought inside the dark hideouts of our soul and mind, and not in the outer space; that one must look for the God precisely where one has lost him etc.

## 10. How old is the punchline?

The tale of deception as a narrative composition pattern is evidently quite old. Uther's new register includes a total of 381 different types of animal tales, and at least 100 of them (26,2 %) are asserted to have counterparts in (and usually then also originate from) Aesopic fables. The relative share of plots of old origin (classical or medieval) is also quite high in the comments of Uther's Schwank types. In the classical cultural heritage, William Hansen (2002) has found direct or approximate counterparts to at least 60–65 ATU Schwanks.[9]

One could easily come up with the naïve theory that the birth of the punchline as the "device of jokemaking" should have taken place relatively late; perhaps it was just one of the epiphenomena of the alleged general disappearance of the cultural model of the Great Chain of Being in the last decades of the 18th century. Such a supposition could be implied from / supported by several likely weighty empirical circumstances, historical studies and theoretical postulates, for example:
★ the existing folkloric source materials seem quite clearly to reveal that in the 19th century people likely preferred to tell (and collectors to record) non-punchlined Schwanks, but in the 20th century, in contrast, mainly punchlined jokes;
★ many tales of deception are very reminiscent of certain so-called practical jokes that are considered to belong to the ancient, primitive strata of the development of humour, for example, in Rapp (1951);
★ the punchlined joke cannot be retold to the same listener twice or more times, but the non-punchlined Schwank can;
★ as asserted by the above-mentioned German folklore classics, practically all contemporary punchlined jokelore seem to descend etymologically from the older "Schwanklore", and the general developmental trend of folk humour seems to have moved regularly towards the punchline-applying mode of joking;
★ Paul McGhee (1972; 1979) attempted to correlate the stages of development of humour with the ontogenetic stages of the human personality, observing children as a seedbed to corroborate the discovery that the feeling of cognitive (including humorous) enjoyment and satisfaction can be caused not only by the novelty of the stimulus, but also by the possibility to reduce the novel stimuli to repeatedly experienced and familiar schematic patterns of mind;
★ everything in the case seemed to correspond to Yuri Lotman's (1964:172-183) influential postulate about the two historical strata of aesthetics – the earlier "aesthetics of sameness" ("эстетика тождества") and the modern "aesthetics of opposition" ("эстетика противопоставления").

Meanwhile, however, looking for eventual help to explain the phenomenon of the polymorphism of Schwank characters and understand the relationships of humour with allegory, wit and paremic wisdom, I had, for the time being, based some of my illusions on the fables, the genre that had so far been practically outside the limits of my expertise. I read through all collections of translations of Aesop's fables available to me, including those by Townsend (1882) and Gasparov (1968) (unfortunately, I have not yet been able to obtain the seminal collection by B. E. Perry). I found them to be an immense "mass of everything" in any possible dimension: a world populated with beings from absolutely all stages of the Great Chain – gods, people, animals, plants, inanimate things and elements of nature, even abstract concepts – speaking, communicating, conflicting and fighting with each other, deceiving each other; the degree of wit and wisdom in them following, politely speaking, Zipf's rule of distribution; the paremic inferences drawn from the stories were to my mind sometimes entirely rational, sometimes entirely cryptic.

I also read and reread a certain number of works on fables and allegory, including Peter Crisp's impressive cognitive linguistical analyses of various allegorical materials (2001; 2005a; 2005b), and obtained extensive new knowledge for the examination of allegory as a kind of figurative speech – but nothing useful for processing allegory as a humorous object. I ascertained, using the Questia, that in the eloquent book on the allegory, "The Literary Mind" by Mark Turner (1996), the word

"humor" occurred three times, the words "joke" and "funny" two times, and the word "incongruity" zero times.

I read a couple of older analyses of allegory as a trope in fables and elsewhere and about different conceptualizations of allegories in the various historical strata of fables (Wadsworth 1972; Montgomery Jr. 1966; Henderson 1982); studies of the origins of particular single fable plots, or groups of plots, their adventurous journeys throughout centuries and their (sometimes incredibly complicated) intertextual relationships (McKenzie 1904; Dargan 1906; Baum 1919 and 1922); studies of the ways of portraying various animal figures in fables and folkloric bestiaries in general (Dawson 1925; Needler 1991; Irwin 1992; Amer 1997; Uther 2006), etc. etc. These readings substantially enriched my knowledge of historical (particularly animal) metaphors, and gave useful impulses to advance my forthcoming work on proverbs, but the "impact factor" of these for the theory of humour has so far remained close to zero.

I also found in Aesop, however, some items that could to my mind meet the conditions for punchlined jokes, among others the eventual forefather of the Soviet joke about how the KGB helped the Jew dig up his vegetable garden:

**THE FARMER AND HIS SONS.** A FARMER being on the point of death wished to ensure from his sons the same attention to his farm as he had himself given it. He called them to his bedside, and said, "My sons, there is a great treasure hid in one of my vineyards." The sons after his death took their spades and mattocks, and carefully dug over every portion of their land. They found no treasure, but the vines repaid their labor by an extraordinary and superabundant crop. (Townsend 1882: 82)

The phone rings at KGB headquarters, sometime in the 1960's "Hello?" "Hello, is this KGB?" "Da." "I'm calling to report my neighbor, Hershel Yankovitz is an enemy of the State. He is hiding undeclared diamonds in his firewood." "This will be noted." The next day, the KGB sends their hoodlums to Hershel's tiny house. Out back, in the shed, they violently break every piece of firewood in their search for contraband. They find nothing. Angry and cursing, they leave. Ten minutes later, the phone rings at Herchel's house. "Hello, Hersh, did the KGB show up?" "They just left." "Did they chop up your firewood?" "They certainly did." "Good. Now it's your turn to call. My vegetable patch needs plowing."
http://www.bubbygram.com/zenjewishhumor.htm

I would like to conclude with a couple of very brief comments on my impressions of the texts found in the *Philogelos* (Laughter-Lover), the allegedly oldest manuscript of old Greek jokes that has survived to our days, a collection of 265 texts supposedly written in the 10th century of our era, but based on considerably older sources.

As in the case of Nasreddin jokes and fables, the earlier discussion around the *Philogelos* has mainly touched on the historical and textological aspects of the subject, and not the specificity of its humour. Philogelos displays a number of established ethnic, social and psychotypological butts (including the notorious *scholastikos*, translated into English as "pedant," "(absent-minded) professor", "egghead" etc., the Kymeans and Abderites, deals with topics of sexual behaviour, drunkards, etc. What is particularly remarkable, however, is that the texts of the *Philogelos* are just jokes – short items in the form of a dialogue or "reverted wellerism", evidently oriented to punchlined endings, although the punchlines can often feel somewhat strange and cryptic when read in contemporary translation. They have nothing in common with the predominant narrative patterns of the ATU Schwanks of deception. They very frequently involve stupidity, but parallels with the ATU types are few and far between and, as a rule, restricted to cases in which stupidity is demonstrated, but is not punished. I quote some examples from Michael Hendry's Internet anthology "IOCI ANTIQVI: ANCIENT JOKES" (http://www.curculio.org/Ioci/ ):

A professor nearly drowned while swimming; he swore that he would not enter the water again, before first learning how to swim well.
ATU 1293. Philogelos no. 2: http://www.curculio.org/Ioci/january.pdf

Wishing to teach his donkey not to eat, a pedant did not offer him any food. When the donkey died of hunger, he said: "I've had a great loss. Just when he had learned not to eat, he died."
ATU 1682. Philogelos no. 9: http://www.curculio.org/Ioci/december.pdf

A man from Kyme was trying to sell some honey. When someone came and tasted it and said that it was very good, the seller said: "Well, yes: if a mouse hadn't fallen in it, I wouldn't be selling it!"
ATU 1578A*. Philogelos no. 173: http://www.curculio.org/Ioci/november.pdf

I will add a couple more examples without ATU parallels:

An Abderite, seeing a eunuch conversing with a woman, asked him if she was his wife. When he answered that a eunuch could not have a wife, he replied "Then she must be your daughter."
Philogelos no. 115: http://www.curculio.org/Ioci/november.pdf

A Kymean doctor, operating on someone who was in terrible pain and crying out, switched to a blunter scalpel.
Philogelos no. 177: http://www.curculio.org/Ioci/november.pdf

Running into a poindexter, a friend said "I congratulate you on the birth of your son." To which he replied "Yes, thanks to all my friends!"
Philogelos no. 98: http://www.curculio.org/Ioci/january.pdf

One thing is certain about my present state of mind: after a diligent rereading of Uther's new folktale register, some corpuses of Nasreddin jokes and Aesop's fables, and reading a choice of texts from the *Philogelos*, I did not obtain any substantially new insights into the "history of the punchline", but I definitely completely lost my hitherto perception of what the punchline is, and my faith in its strictly bivalent nature.

**Notes**

1. For a further disccussion of the deficiencies of existing folktale registers, the theoretical and methodological issues involved in compiling of registers and catalogues of folklore, folkloric taxonomy in general, etc., see e.g. *Journal on Folklore Research*, Vol. 34, No. 3 (1997) *in toto*; Jason 2000 and 2006; Rafaeva et al. 2006.
2. Things become yet more complicated, and the semantic dispersion of terms even wider, if we also take into account the historical meanings of terms in vernacular and literary languages – see e.g. about the semantic histories of German terms *Witz* (Hill 1993) and *Pointe* (Müller 2003).
3. Actually, the subgenre of Novelle constitutes a certain heterogeneous and fuzzy "grey zone" between the two main classes, sharing some features with both. The most salient trait linking it with tales of the first class is the regular presence of some decisive "higher power" that is alienated from the protagonist, not supernatural, of course, in this case, but embodied in some other, socially higher character (king, lord, father, husband etc.). For example, wit and cleverness are typically involved in Novelle, but they do not work "on their own" as in Schwanks. Protagonists are subjected to tests of wit and cleverness, which they usually pass, and are in one way or another rewarded by the testers. Further, there are a certain number of plots in Novelle where the testable property is not of an intellectual, but moral nature (see in particular proofs of fidelity and innocence, ATU 880–899).
4. For a good general survey of the psychology of lying and deception, see e.g. the monograph by American psychiatrist Charles V. Ford (1996) and references therein. Moreover, lying, cunning and deception are older than the species *Homo sapiens* and do not presuppose any lingustic faculty – on chimpanzees' amazing skills in so-called Machiavellian behaviour, see e.g. de Waal (1982; 1988) and elsewhere.
5. Heda Jason's (1971) attempt at the classification of so-called Swindler tales, performed in the spirit of Proppian structuralism and following the canons of the linguistics of that time is, in my opinion, far not exhaustive.
6. The change made by Uther is perhaps somewhat unfounded, because the stupidity of numskulls, as already noticed by Propp (1976: 89), is of clearly collective character.
7. On absurdities in animal proverbs and proverbial expressions see e.g. Krikmann (2001). Folkloric absurdities long ago exceeded the limits of purely verbal substance, and also have a long pedigree in the visual arts – for a rich choice of examples see e.g. Jones (1989) and references therein.
The problem of metaphors and "fixed expressions" that are petrified ~ entrenched ~ have "fallen into language" ~ are "dead" etc. arose long ago (although they have so far not been solved) in the theory of figurative speech and phraseology. As far as I know, the theory of humour has not developed any definite attitude towards the analogues of such petrifications with an etymologically recognizable stronger level of incongruity.
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9. It is interesting to note that the common element between the ATU plots and the two academic collections of Nasreddin tales that are available to me appears to be quite different. In Uther's register I found a total of 126 references to Wesselski's collection (1911 I–II). In Wesselski's book, however, particularly in volume II, the percentage of materials originating from Southern Europe and other places outside Turkey and other "core areas" of such plots is quite high. In contrast, only ca 3% of the body of the Russian "Twenty Three Nasreddins" (Kharitonov 1978), embracing 1119 texts from 23 different Eastern peoples, matches the ATU plots. Kharitonov mainly used Andreev's register of Russian folktales, therefore the actual common element between the ATU and Nasreddin corpora might be somewhat higher, but definitely not much. On the other hand, ca 550 of them (49%) are indicated to occur in the oral tradition of two or more Eastern peoples. It is difficult to imagine what would happen if someone attempted to merge that huge amount of new international Eastern types into the present body of the ATU. Or rather: nothing would happen, because it is absolutely impossible to realize intentions of this kind without completely demolishing the existing system of categorization.

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