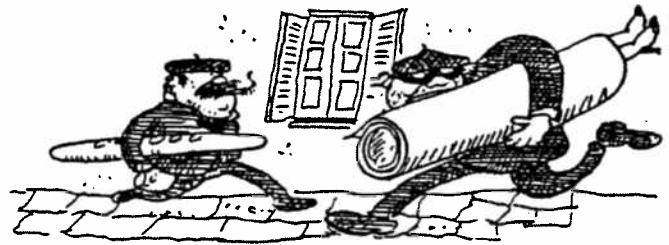


FOAFTALE NEWS

No.1 (September 1985)



AN OCCASIONAL NEWS SHEET ON CONTEMPORARY LEGEND RESEARCH

WELCOME TO FOAFTALE NEWS

Since the first Perspectives on Contemporary Legend seminar back in 1982, it has been at the back of my mind to try and put together an informal news sheet aimed at providing a vehicle for communication amongst researchers working in the area of contemporary legend. This needed doing for two reasons; firstly, currently there is no quick and easy way of circulating information to people working on any aspect of folk narrative and, secondly, participants in the seminars always spend a large part of their time catching up on what others have been doing all year. Foaftale News, then is an attempt to speed this process. However, its continuation relies on your participation. So do send us your news and air your views. If you don't do it today there may never be another number produced.

For those of you who have still not worked out that the news sheet title is not a typing error, I must take this opportunity to acknowledge and thank Rodney Dale for inventing FOAF - A friend of a friend. If you missed it the first time round look out for his book, The Tumour in the Whale: A Collection of Modern Myths (London: Duckworth, 1978).

RECENT BOOKS OF RELEVANCE TO CONTEMPORARY LEGEND RESEARCH

Jan Harold Brunvand, The Choking Doberman and other "New" Urban Legends (New York: W. W. Norton, 1984).

Rodney Dale, It's True, It Happened to a Friend: A Collection of Urban Legends (London: Duckworth & Co. Ltd., 1984).

Pål Dickson and Joseph C. Goulden, There are Alligators in our Sewers and other American Credos (New York: Dell Publishing Co., 1983).

Murray Forster, All the News that's Nuts (Vancouver: Raincoat Books, 1985).

Michael Goss, The Evidence for Phantom Hitch-Hikers (Wellingborough: The Aquarian Press, 1984).

James Kirkup, Modern American Myths: The Folktales of the Young Today in America (Tokyo: New Current International Co. Ltd., 1985).

Hal Morgan and Kerry Tucker, Rumor! (New York: Penguin Books, 1984).

Ethel Portnoy, The Monkey Sandwich (London: Allen and Unwin, 1985).

Mary Stewart Relfe, When Your Money Fails: The "666 System" is Here (Montgomery, Alabama: Ministries Inc., 1981).

Paul Smith, The Book of Nasty Legends (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1983).

Paul Smith, (ed.), Perspectives on Contemporary Legend: Proceedings of the Conference on Contemporary Legend, Sheffield, July 1982 (Sheffield: CECTAL Publications, 1984).

INCARCERATED IN TREES

From a friend in South Shields, I received the interesting report that local people, when they see a hollow or damaged tree repaired with cement, believe that someone's abortion or a dead baby has been immured in it. Sometimes it is not a dead foetus, but a cat or a dog. I wonder if anyone has come across this form of urban legend? It is said that a certain obstetrician on Tyneside has a number of such cemented trees in his gardens at home and round his clinic.

James Kirkup, Tenjin Haitsu S-502, 1-13 Hachijogaoka, Nagaokakyo-SHI, Kyoto-FU617, Japan.

PERSPECTIVES ON CONTEMPORARY LEGEND - VOLUME II

A second volume of papers from the 1983 and 1984 Perspectives on Contemporary Legend seminars is currently being prepared by Gillian Bennett and Paul Smith. To be published by The Centre for English Cultural Tradition and Language, it will contain the following contributions:

Shirley L. Arora, "Memorate as Metaphor: Some Mexican Treasure Narratives and their Narrators"

Gillian Bennett, "Problems in Collecting and Classifying Urban Legends: A Personal Experience"

Marion Bowman, "Contemporary Legend and Practical Joke"

Bill Ellis, "Why are Verbatim Transcripts of Legends Necessary?"

Mark Glazer, "The Cultural Adaption of a Rumour Legend: 'The Boyfriend's Death' in South Texas"

Sandy Hobbs, "The Social Psychology of a 'Good' Story"

Gordon McCulloch, "Suicidal Sculptors: Scottish Versions of a Migratory Legend"

W. F. H. Nicolaisen, "The Linguistic Structure of Legends"

Stephen Sayers, "The Psychological Significance of Genealogy"

Sigrid Schmidt, "Contemporary Legends of Europeans in Namibia"

Paul Smith, "Contemporary Legend and the Photocopy Revolution"

PERSPECTIVES ON CONTEMPORARY LEGEND 86

THE FOURTH INTERNATIONAL SEMINAR

14th - 18th July 1986

Centre for English Cultural Tradition
and Language, Sheffield, England.



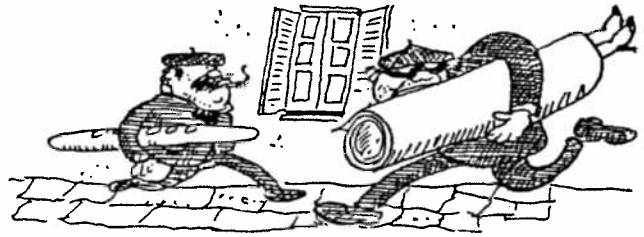
FOAFTALE NEWS: AN OCCASIONAL NEWS SHEET ON CONTEMPORARY LEGEND RESEARCH

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(0742-78555 Ext. 6296)

FOAFTALE NEWS

No.2 (June 1986)



AN OCCASIONAL NEWS SHEET ON CONTEMPORARY LEGEND RESEARCH

PERSPECTIVES ON CONTEMPORARY LEGEND: A PANEL HELD AT THE ANNUAL AMERICAN FOLKLORE SOCIETY MEETING, CINCINNATI, OCTOBER 16-20, 1985

Back in 1983 Bill Nicolaisen attempted to organise a North American gathering of individuals interested in contemporary legend. The original intention was to "export" the Sheffield conference and hold an additional meeting at the 1984 Annual Meeting of the American Folklore Society in San Diego. Unfortunately, because of administrative problems, this was not to be. Instead a meeting was finally scheduled for the Annual Meeting held in October 1985 in Cincinnati.

The careful planning by Bill Nicolaisen and the quality of the papers presented ensured that the panel was both interesting and well attended.

In retrospect we reproduce the conference brochure synopsis, programme and abstracts for the individual papers. It is hoped that a panel on the same topic will be part of the programme for the next Annual Meeting of the American Folklore Society. This will be held in Baltimore (22-26 October, 1986). For further details of this contact Mark Glazer, Department of Behavioural Science, Pan American University, Edinburg, Texas 78539, U.S.A.

PERSPECTIVES ON CONTEMPORARY LEGEND

This is the first panel organised by the newly formed A.F.S. Section on Folk-Narrative. It will concentrate on various aspects of the modern or contemporary legend, especially as a reflection of the international symposia on that topic, held at the University of Sheffield, England, in the last four years. All the panelists have participated in at least one of those symposia, and their various subjects closely approximate the kinds of arguments and discussions that have characterised the Sheffield meetings. The panel is to build a bridge to the A.F.S.

PROGRAMME

Chair: W. F. H. Nicolaisen

Gillian Bennett, "Modern Legend as Media Narratorm"

Bill Ellis, "How Verbatim Need Verbatim Be?"

Mark Glazer, "The Super Glue Revenge"

Sylvia Grider, "Razor Blades in the Apples: The Proto-Legend that is Changing Halloween in America"

Paul Smith, "Contemporary Legend: A Framework for Analysis"

ABSTRACTS

Modern Legend as Media Narratorm, Gillian Bennett (University of Sheffield, England)

This paper examines the form and functions of the storytelling of a homogeneous and social group at Leicester University. The group has an extensive repertoire of macabre modern legends many of which appear to have been first encountered through the medium of horror films and then renegotiated/reexperienced through frequent oral retelling. The paper examines social and performative aspects of such renditions through an analysis of their version of "The Babysitter and the Man Upstairs".

How Verbatim Need Verbatim Be? Bill Ellis (Pennsylvania State University, Hazleton)

The private nature of legend-telling presents distinctive problems for establishing "verbatim" folklore texts. Trained observers with sophisticated equipment may disrupt such events, while untrained students with primitive sound recorders may record more authentic performances. The unavoidable loss of communicative detail means that transcription must involve compromise. This paper suggests ways of determining how much detail legend transcriptions should include in order to support performance analysis.

The Super Glue Revenge, Mark Glazer (Pan American University, Edinburg, Texas)

One of the numerous urban belief tales currently told in the Lower Rio Grande Valley of Texas is a story involving marital infidelity on the part of the husband and the wife's use of super glue, in most of the versions collected, to avenge herself. This is one of the newer stories in the repertory of legends in South Texas and possibly in other areas. The paper reviews the contents of the tale, analyses the informants' demographic backgrounds and attempts an interpretation of the narrative.

Razor Blades in the Apples: The Proto-Legend that is Changing Halloween in America, Sylvia Grider (Texas A & M University, College Station, Texas)

Trick-or-treat at Halloween is less common in the U.S. than it was a decade ago. This decline can be attributed, at least in part, to the infamous "Candyman" murder of a child with cyanide-laced candy in a Houston, Texas, suburb on Halloween night, 1973. The media coverage of this murder and the widespread belief that evil and anonymous people hide razor blades in apples in order to maim or injure innocent children has resulted in many parents refusing to let their children go trick-or-treating at Halloween.

Contemporary Legend: A Framework for Analysis, Paul Smith (University of Sheffield, England)

Whilst scholars accept that contemporary legends are communicated using different oral/media forms, they frequently consider the resulting texts as having an equality of function, and other form, which in reality they do not have. This paper develops and examines a model that demonstrates the relationships among the variety of methods of transmission and presentational forms used for the communication of contemporary legends. In an analysis of variation of structural and functional aspects of such narratives the model highlights that, when we are comparing "mixed media" contemporary legends, a media status source evaluation should be incorporated into the research.

PERSPECTIVES ON CONTEMPORARY LEGEND 86

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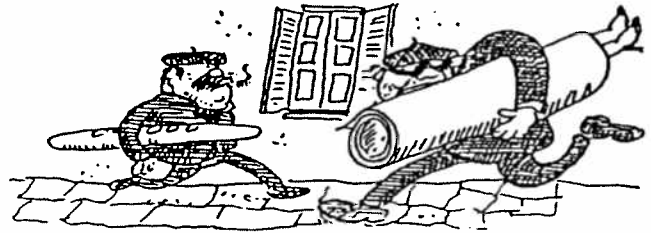
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FOAFTALE NEWS

NO.3 (AUGUST 1986)



AN OCCASIONAL NEWS SHEET ON CONTEMPORARY LEGEND RESEARCH

PERSPECTIVES ON CONTEMPORARY LEGEND PANEL: TO BE HELD AT THE AMERICAN FOLKLORE SOCIETY ANNUAL MEETING, BALTIMORE, 22-26 OCTOBER, 1986

Mark Glazer, Panel Organiser

The past five years has seen a steady increase of research in the area of contemporary legend. Although much of this work has originated in North America, the focus for the exchange of ideas has been the Annual Contemporary Legend Conference hosted by the Centre for English Cultural Tradition and Language in England. This has meant that researchers from North America have not always been able to participate in the ongoing debate. To redress the balance this panel provides an opportunity for American scholars to present their current research and argue to their hearts content. If you do make it to the meeting, please come along and see us.

PARTICIPANTS

Dan Barnes (Chairperson and Discussant)

Frances Cattermore-Tally, "Premature Reports of Death"

Mark Glazer, "Legend, Rumour and Behaviour: The Chicano Versions of Gravity Hill"

Edgar Slotkin, "Legend Rhythm and Marchen Rhythm"

Paul Smith, "Biographical Profiles presented in Contemporary Legends"

Bill Ellis (Discussant)

ABSTRACTS

Premature Reports of Death, Frances Cattermore-Tally (University of California at Los Angeles)

The recent death of L. Ron Hubbard, writer and founder of scientology, reactivated stories that he had died two years earlier. These legends are strikingly similar to tales surrounding other popular figures such as Howard Hughes and Paul McCartney, who were also prematurely reported as being dead. This paper is an investigation into the meaning of such stories which contrast strongly with the classic legends of heroes continuing to live after death.

Legend, Rumour and Behaviour: The Chicano Versions of Gravity Hill, Mark Glazer (Pan American University)

This legend demonstrates the existing relationship between rumour and contemporary legend through actual behaviour. This folklore event has four parts: 1. the legend, 2. the rumour that a car will be pushed over the tracks by ghosts of children, 3. the decision of the narrator, or one of his friends, to try and see if this is true and 4. the person and his car are actually pushed over the railroad tracks. This paper will analyse the interrelationships between legend, belief and behaviour.

Legend Rhythm and Marchen Rhythm, Edgar Slotkin (University of Cincinnati)

Whether or not there are distinguishing formal features to legends or legend subgenres is a question which continues to be debated. This paper will consider features of narrative prosody, especially rhythm, comparing both marchen performances and legend performances from an Irish and a Scottish storyteller in turn. Keeping in mind some of Dell Hymes's ideas about measured verse and the sort of metrical analysis of stress-timed languages developed by Derek Attridge, I shall offer an hypothesis about distinctive legend form, at least for Goidelic language narratives.

Contemporary legends present supposedly truthful accounts of people, places and events in the world around us. To date, research has focussed on the "event" aspect of these narratives, with only minor attention being given to "location" and none to the "people" described. To combat this deficiency, an analysis is presented of the biographical profiles found in a survey of several hundred contemporary legends. Examination of the results indicates this form of analysis may provide a basis for the development of a classification of contemporary legends.

IN THE NEWS

Gillian Bennett has passed on the following newspaper cutting which appeared in The Guardian (Sat. Feb. 1, 1986) p.2.

On the twisting trail of a fox folk tale

By John Ezard

A plague of foxes in the Berwyn mountains has a sinister explanation, the Welsh Farmers' Union believes.

It is convinced of the truth in stories that the most ignorant sentimental type of urban animal-lover is rounding up foxes in towns and driving them out to mid-Wales in vans to free them in the wild — where they fall ferociously on every lamb and pheasant chick in sight.

But a hunt along the spoor of anecdote suggested by last night that the story could be no more than a folk tale.

The union yesterday demanded police and RSPCA action. The president, Mr Huw Hughes, called the practice "extremely irresponsible."

The vice-president, Mr Gwilym Jones, who farms at Llanrhaedr, near Oswestry, spoke of "evidence that a person saw a van letting foxes out on an unfenced mountain road near Bala."

Mr Jones added: "There is reason to believe they are breaking the Wildlife and Countryside Act by moving creatures from one habitat to another. We have enough foxes already without more being dumped here."

Mr Jones had not seen the van, but had heard others speak of it. The reports were backed by circumstantial evidence: for the first time, mid-Wales foxes had been seen coming near houses to scavenge in dustbins. "A couple I know went out in their car and there it was — a fox in their yard."

Mr Jones thought that a neighbour, Mr Morris, might know more. Mr Morris said: "It wasn't me who saw the van but I'm convinced the story is true. I heard a chauffeur who drives for a shoot at Llanarmon Dyffryn-Cellog has been talking about it."

In the West Arms public house at Llanarmon Dyffryn-Cellog, Mr Mick Matthews Jr, an estate gamekeeper, said: "I have not seen anyone myself. But I have heard a lot of rumours about it. I think there must be some truth in it. There certainly are a lot more foxes around."

Mr Matthews produced a new twist in the trail. He had heard that a van full of foxes had refuelled at the Brynteg Garage, Glyndyfrdwy, and been noticed by the owner.

At the Brynteg Garage, Mr Ian Rodgers answered the phone: "You're calling about foxes, aren't you?" he said. "I had a bloke from what I think he said was the British Field Sports Society asking the same question earlier."

"No, it's not true. Nobody like that stopped here. My wife or I are on all the time, so we'd know."

Neither Bala nor Lanfyllin police, nor the RSPCA, had heard reports of van sightings or fox smuggling. "But there are a lot of foxes around," Bala police added.

Mr Jones said: "I shall go back down the trail myself."

FOAFTALE NEWS: AN OCCASIONAL NEWS SHEET ON CONTEMPORARY LEGEND RESEARCH

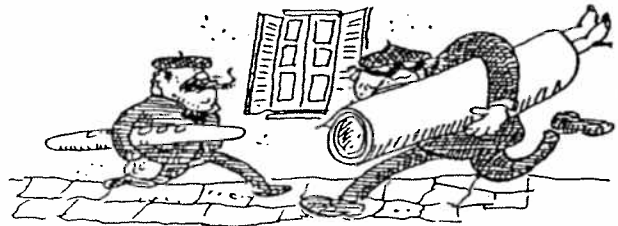
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FOAFTALE NEWS

No.4 (December 1986)



AN OCCASIONAL NEWS SHEET ON CONTEMPORARY LEGEND RESEARCH

PERSPECTIVES ON CONTEMPORARY LEGEND - JULY 1986

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Sigrid Schmidt	Wildefüer Str 28, D-3200 Hildesheim, Germany.

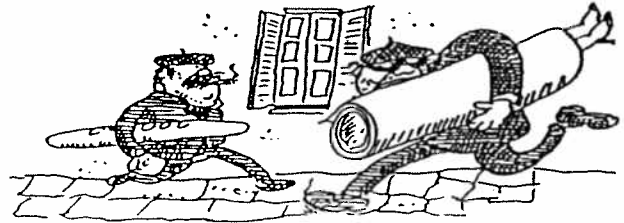
Paul Smith	The Centre for English Cultural Tradition and Language, University of Sheffield, Sheffield, England. S10 2TN
Ingvalise Solberg	Telemark Distrikts Høeskole, 3800 BO i Telemark, Norway
Olav Solberg	Telemark Distrikts Høeskole, 3800 BO i Telemark, Norway
J. D. A. Widdowson	The Centre for English Cultural Tradition and Language, University of Sheffield, Sheffield, England. S10 2TN
Jean Ure	English Studies (Foreign Students), University of Edinburgh, 25 Buccleugh Place, Edinburgh, Scotland. EH 8 9LN

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Marion Bowman,	Flat G, 45 Linden Gardens, London W2.
Mark Bray	Kirklees Sound Archive, Central Library, Princess Alexandra Walk, Huddersfield, West Yorkshire, England. HD1 2SU
J. L. Brodu	128 Rue de la Tombe Issoire, 75014 Paris, France.
Dr. Collier,	5 Whitfield Road, Sheffield, England. S10 2GT
Hallfredor Orn Eiriksson	Stonfnun Arna Magnussonar, Arnagardi - Sudurgotu, Reykjavik, Iceland.
Guy Fielding	Department of Communication Studies, Sheffield City Polytechnic, Totley Hall Lane Site, Sheffield 17, England.
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Frances Tally	Center for the Study of Comparative Folklore and Mythology, Kinsey Hall, University College of Los Angeles, Los Angeles, CA 90024, U.S.A.
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FOAFTALE NEWS

No.5 (January 1987)



AN OCCASIONAL NEWS SHEET ON CONTEMPORARY LEGEND RESEARCH

PUBLICATION NEWS

Jean-Louis Brodu and Michel Meurger, Les Felins-Mystere (Paris: Pogonip, 1984). Available from Pogonip, BP 195 75665, Paris Cedex 14, France.

Jan Harold Brunvand, The Mexican Pet: More "New" Urban Legends and some Old Favorites (New York: W. W. Norton, 1986).

Tim Dale, Harrods: The Store and the Legend (London: Pan Books, 1981). Obtainable direct from Harrods, Knightsbridge, London. SW1X 7XL.

Bengt af Klintberg, Rättan i Pizzan: Folksfger i vår tid (Stockholm: Norstedts, 1986).

Donald M. McKale, Hitler: The Survival Myth (New York: Stein and Day, 1981).

Sue Samuelsson, "The Man Upstairs: An Analysis of a Babysitting Legend" Mid-America Folklore XII:3 (1984) 1-9.

W. N. Scott, The Long and the Short and the Tall (Sydney: Western Plains Publishers, 1985).

Paul Smith, The Book of Nastier Legends (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1986).

Patricia Meyer Spacks, Gossip (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986).

FABULA 26:3/4 (1985)

The major part of this issue of Fabula was given over to papers on contemporary legend.

Wilhelm F. H. Nicolaisen, "Perspectives on Contemporary Legend" p.213-218.

Gillian Bennett, "What's 'Modern' about the Modern Legend?" p.219-229.

Volker Knierim, "Auto, Fremde, Tod. Automobile und Reisen in zeitgenössischen deutschsprachigen Sensationserzählungen" p.230-244.

Aliza Shenhar, "Israelische Fassungen des Verschwundenen Anhalters (Mot. E 332.3.3.1: The Vanishing Hitchhiker)" p.245-253.

Michael Meurger, "Zur Diskussion des Begriffs, 'Modern Legend' am Beispiel der 'Airships' von 1896-97" p.254-273.

Bengt af Klintberg, "Legends and Rumours about Spiders and Snakes" p.274-287.

Mark Glazer, "Traditonalization of the Contemporary Legend: The Mexican American Example" p.288-297.

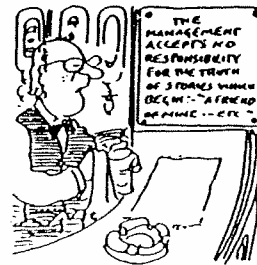
Sigrid Schmidt, "Europäische Sagen bei den Nama und Dama in Südwestafrika/Namibia" p.298-316.

PERSPECTIVES ON CONTEMPORARY LEGEND

THE FIFTH INTERNATIONAL SEMINAR

20th - 24th July 1987

Centre for English Cultural Tradition
and Language, Sheffield, England.



Each summer since 1982 the Centre for English Cultural Tradition and Language has hosted a seminar for scholars working in the area of contemporary legend. The encouraging response to these meetings has prompted us to host a further seminar to be held in the summer of 1987. This, it is hoped, will enable those interested in contemporary legend to keep in touch with current research and also provide a forum for the exchange of ideas.

The meeting, scheduled to extend over a five day period, will function as a series of seminars in that the majority of those attending will be expected to present papers and/or contribute to the discussion sessions. If you wish to participate in the seminar, abstracts of papers (up to 400 words and typed in double spacing) should reach the convenor at the address below by 1st March, 1987. Similarly if you would like to propose any special discussion sessions, please do not hesitate to get in touch.

For further information regarding the conference, please contact:

Perspectives on Contemporary Legend, The Centre for English Cultural Tradition and Language,
University of Sheffield, Sheffield, England. S10 2TN (Tel: 0742-768555, Ext. 6296)

WIZARD OF ID

The Denver Post/Friday, April 11, 1986



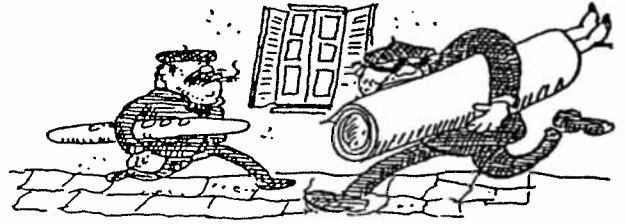
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FOAFTALE NEWS

No.6 (July 1987)



AN OCCASIONAL NEWS SHEET ON CONTEMPORARY LEGEND RESEARCH

VOMITING FROGS

Paul Smith

Stories about vomiting frogs, snakes and other animals abound in both historical and contemporary folklore. The focus of many of these tales, either explicitly or implicitly, is simple - beware of contaminated water. Consequently, the stories are related about regions which are considered to have dubious water supplies - the current favourite for the British being Spain.

Historically, such tales were associated with many parts of Britain and one document, which has recently been transcribed, is a letter and deposition describing how in 1780 Archdale Wilson Taylor vomited a toad after eating watercress in Matlock, Derbyshire.* Perhaps readers may know of other similar depositions.

Dear Sir,

Having seen a Paragraph in the News Paper giving an account of the Discharge of a living Toad from the Stomach of a young Man, I could hardly persuade myself that it deserved more credit, than many other articles of Intelligence, communicated thro' that Channel. However, having a convenient opportunity of learning further particulars of what appeared to me so very extraordinary, I took ye liberty of applying to ye present worthy Mayor of Lyme Regis in Norfolk, who has very obligingly communicated to me ye inclosed Affestation of the young man upon Oath, after which, I no longer think myself at liberty to withhold my Belief of what still appears to me a very wonderful Phenomenon.

I can as soon almost believe the astonishing accounts of Toads being taken alive out of the midst of a Block of Marble, in which it must be supposed. to have lain concealed for Ages without Air, and without Nutriment of any kind, as I could, without such irrefragable Evidence, imagine, that this Animal could have been received into ye Human Stomach in Embryo, amongst Water Cresses, or any other Food, and there have grown to ye size here mentioned. It is a subject which deserves ye Investigation of the curious; because I suppose such occurrences are not likely to come frequently before them.

I foresee one consequence which may ensue from this strange Narration; viz. that the use of that excellent Antiscorbutic Water Cresses will be less frequent; if it be admitted that these are ye Vehicles through which this

odious Animal was conveyed into ye Stomach; which, after all is asserted, as ye most probable means of accounting for it, but not absolutely¹ proved.

If you think it worth the while to produce this Deposition on Thursday next, it is very much at your service - It may at least afford you a Topic for some learned & curious observations, which I am sorry my Health and other circumstances deprived me of the Pleasure of hearing.

Greenford

27 Nov. 1780

I have the Honour to be

with great Respect

Dr Sir

Yr. affect humble Servt.

Saml Glasse

Borough of King's

Lynn in Norfolk

Thomas Walker, late Servant

to Archdale Wilson Taylor,

of King's Lynn in the County of Norfolk Esq, maketh Oath and saith that some time in the last Spring he attended his said Master to Matlock in Derbyshire, where they continued about five Weeks and in their return to Lynn staid at Nottingham about a fortnight; and that during their^{stay} [sic] at Matlock, he in general eat Water Cresses twice a day; and for some days before he left that place he had pains in his Stomach, which pains continued with frequent inclinations to vomit until the fifteenth of October last, when, (after having complained to several Persons of having something alive within him) his Stomach swelling and his pains increasing to a violent degree, He was advised by Doctor Davison of Nottingham (at whose House he then was) to take an Emetic, which he accordingly took in the presence of the Doctors Servant, who was with him during the whole time of the Operation; and that after several strains he found something stick in his Throat, which he this Deponent, thought would have suffocated him; but on pulling the same out and throwing it into a Pail (which was placed for him to Vomit in) it proved to be a living Toad of about two inches and an half long and an inch and an half broad, which was afterwards laid upon the floor, and crawled towards the fire in the presence of the Doctor and several other Persons, and was then thrown therin by one of the Servants present

Sworn in the Borough

Thomas Walker

aforesaid the nineteenth

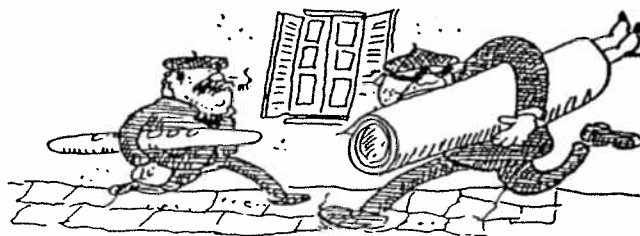
day of November 1780

Before me Samuel Brown Mayor

*Letter from Rev. Samuel Glasse - Theologian (1735-1812) to Sir Joseph Banks (Nov. 27, 1780). Dawson Turner Collection, 1. 311-313. British Museum, Department of Natural History.

FOAFTALE NEWS

No.7 (August 1987)



AN OCCASIONAL NEWS SHEET ON CONTEMPORARY LEGEND RESEARCH

FOLKLORE FRONTIERS - A REVIEW

Gillian Bennett

Folklore Frontiers, which has just completed its first year of life under the editorship of Paul Screeton, at the very modest price of £3 pa is a welcome addition to the shelves of those interested in contemporary legend, belief and rumour.

The first four issues have covered such topics as poisonous yucca plants, phantom hitchhikers, UFO and AIDS rumours, "The Crying Boy" picture and the exploding bosom of Samantha Fox. Most of the material is written by Screeton himself (of which, more later), but there are also welcome pieces by Michael Goss (The Evidence for Phantom Hitchhikers), Andy Roberts and others, newspaper-clippings and book reviews.

The issues are extremely cheaply produced on typewriter and photocopier (with a helping of scissors and Pritt stick), and stapled together. Size varies from fifteen to thirty pages. Each issue zips through a lot of heterogeneous material with a carelessness of detail that reflects its modest price. The typing is frankly bad and typos go uncorrected: in some issues part of the copy has been faint to the point of indecipherability. For presentation, Folklore Frontiers would, without doubt, collect the booby prize.

Having said that, it must be acknowledged that the standard improves in each issue. Numbers three and four (typed in part on a word-processor, on A4 reduced and centre-stapled) look very much more professional and are much easier to read than numbers one and two (typed single-spaced on a typewriter that needed cleaning). Personally, I'm not complaining here: it is cheap, so what does it matter if it looks cheap? The contents are what Screeton would ask to be judged on, I'm sure.

What I myself find very riling, however, is the awful jokey, exclamatory style which pays little attention to clarity, sense or syntax, for instance "any gathering of ferroequinologists (train-spotters, if you must), will get steamed up about all manner of apocryphal platform end rumour. Cross-fertilization between themes is a fascinating pursuit for collectors and most categories will be found to be arbitrary". It's a great pity, therefore, that he overwrites almost everything that comes his way.

However, if you can bear with that, you will find Folklore Frontiers a mine of useful raw data, an excellent source of all that is current in legend and rumour at the crazy end of popular belief. As a substitute for a clipping-service it is invaluable, but don't expect more of it. This is not an analytical or academic magazine in any respect, just a forum for the exchange and collection of information.

The magazine can be obtained from Paul Screeton, 3 Egton Drive, Seaton Carew, Harlepool, Cleveland. TS25 2AT. You'll probably find it good value for your three quid.

MERVEILLES & CONTES

MARVELS & TALES

WUNDER & MÄRCHEN

MARAVILLAS & CUENTOS

MERAVIGLIE & RACCONTI

**AN INTERNATIONAL BULLETIN ON THE FOLK AND FAIRY TALE
BULLETIN INTERNATIONAL DU CONTE MERVEILLEUX**

CALL FOR PAPERS - DEMANDE DE CONTRIBUTIONS

Merveilles & Contes, a bulletin on the fairy tale, is scheduled to appear for its first issue in May, 1987. This bulletin is international and will publish articles in the languages used in its masthead above.

Contributions should concern the folk and fairy tale in the broadest sense and must be written in a language clear to the general reader, even though the audience may be primarily professional and university-educated. We will publish articles, book reviews, bibliographies, and news of interest to all those who are studying, or even telling, fairy tales.

NORMS

For papers: typewritten, double-spaced for the text, single spaced for notes (at the end of the paper), 26 lines per page, and no more than 20 pages including notes.

For book reviews: single-spaced, no more than 52 lines per page. Maximum length: two pages.

ADDRESS FOR SUBMITTING CONTRIBUTIONS

MERVEILLES, The Editor
Jacques Barchilon
Box 238
University of Colorado
Boulder, CO 80309/USA

or

MERVEILLES, The Editor
Francesca Sautman
Romance Languages
Hunter College/CUNY
New York, NY 10021/USA

**DEADLINE FOR THE EDITORS TO RECEIVE CONTRIBUTIONS:
March 1, 1987**

(Manuscripts not accepted for publication will be returned if stamped, addressed envelope is provided.)

DUES - COTISATIONS

By check or money order (\$15.00 - Fifteen dollars), payable to "University of Colorado" and dated *April One, 1987*, addressed to either Editor, for Volume One, Number One to be mailed to you.

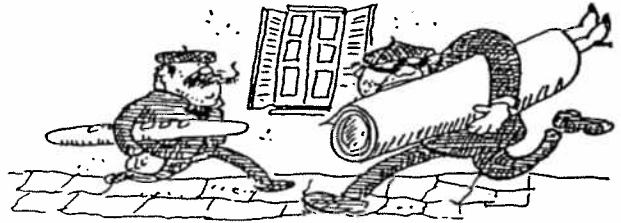
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(0742-78555 Ext. 6296)

FOAFTALE NEWS

No.8 (September 1987)



AN OCCASIONAL NEWS SHEET ON CONTEMPORARY LEGEND RESEARCH

ODENSE UNIVERSITET
ODENSE UNIVERSITY

The Centre for the Study of Vernacular
Literature in the Middle Ages



J. nr.
(bedes anført ved henvendelse om denne sag)

Ref. No.
(please state when answering)

Dato
Date September 1987
Bilag
Enclosure

Campusvej 55 - DK 5230 Odense M, Danmark - Tel. 09 - 15 86 00 - Giro 2 01 07 55

Dear Colleagues,

Our 12th international symposium will be held at Odense University on Monday the 16th and Tuesday the 17th of November, 1987, and devoted to the topic of:

THE VITALITY OF THE ARTHURIAN LEGEND

The Matter of Britain came into existence in the 6th century and is still flourishing. During the course of years, the figures of King Arthur, Guenevere, and their Knights of the Round Table have acquired the status of myth and the glow of romance from various sources, have travelled through the entire European Continent and expanded in the process, were briefly forgotten for a couple of hundred years, only to be revived in the 19th century and especially in the Victorian Age, and are now to be found more frequently than ever in 20th century fiction.

The members of the symposium and the topics of their contributions are as follows:

Dr. Graham D. Caie, University of Copenhagen
(Introduction to the Story of Arthur)

Geoffrey Ashe, author
(The Historical Origins of the Arthurian Legend)

Professor Keith Busby, Universities of Utrecht and Leiden
(Medieval French Literature: Recent Progress and Critical Trends)

Professor Phillip Boardman, University of Nevada, Reno
(To be announced, but this lecture will deal with medieval English Arthuriana)

Dr. Kurt Gamerschlag, Universität Bonn
(Arthur Coming Alive Again: 18th cent. Medievalism and the Beginnings of a Modern Myth)

Marion Zimmer Bradley, author
(My Search for Morgaine le Fay)

Richard Cavendish, author
(The Knight Errant: The Quest for Integrity)

All lectures will be given in English.

If you would like to join the symposium as an associate member please return the enclosed form with the conference fee, Danish Kr. 200,- and if you wish to attend the concluding banquet a further Kr. 175.- no later than October 19th (by cheque payable to Middelalderlaboratoriet, Odense Universitet, by transfer to bank account 6800-4001748, or to postal giro account 20 107 55). Associate members will receive the full programme for the symposium by November 1st. The symposium fee also covers lunch on Tuesday the 17th of November. Participants are requested to make their own accomodation arrangements: a list of hotels in Odense is available from Odense Turistforenings Bureau, Rådhuset, 5000 Odense C, tlf. 09.12.75.20.

On behalf of the Medieval Centre,

Flemming G. Andersen
Chairman

PERSPECTIVES ON CONTEMPORARY LEGEND 1988

THE SIXTH INTERNATIONAL SEMINAR



The man who said he had met a man who went out with a woman whose husband had a friend who had met someone with AIDS.

CENTRE FOR ENGLISH CULTURAL TRADITION AND LANGUAGE
UNIVERSITY OF SHEFFIELD

25-29 JULY 1988

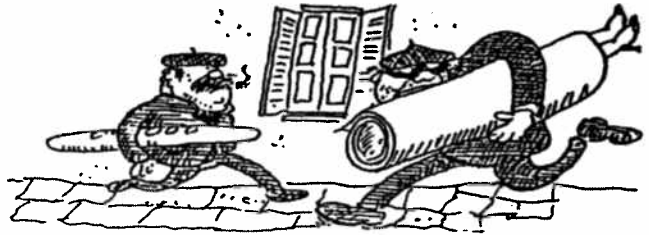
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FOAFTALE NEWS

No.9 (March 1988)



AN OCCASIONAL NEWS SHEET ON CONTEMPORARY LEGEND RESEARCH

THE ALLIGATORS ARE BACK

Paul Smith and Danielle Roemer

In March 1987 the *Tomorrow's World* programme on BBC Television ran a short item about an alligator which had been caught in the "sewers" of Orlando, Florida. This story was probably based on a news item which had appeared in the UK papers earlier in the week. However, note the English report confuses "sewer" with "storm drain" - two very different things (see below).

THE DAILY TELEGRAPH, TUESDAY, MARCH 3, 1987, 5

Alligator snared by Florida 'Dundee'

By Martin Ivens in New York

IT IS not a myth; there are alligators in American sewers. Mr John Tanner, Florida's answer to "Crocodile Dundee", has caught one in the drainage system of Orlando.

After State trappers failed to capture the 150 pounder which tried to bite four city drainage inspectors, the authorities had to send for John Tanner.

Wearing a miner's lamp and walking barefoot through the sewers, Mr Tanner refused to take water hoses or other fancy equipment to capture the alligator. All he had was a lasso and his native wits.

Wading waist deep in dank, foetid water for over an hour, he gave a mating call to the male, or bull, 'gator in an extraordinary imitation of the female of the species.

"There was no light at all" said Mr Tanner. "I gave him the mating call, a series of raspy barks, and he swam right over.

Slipped noose

"I got about four feet away before he realised he'd been fooled and started to wheel, but it was too late. That baby was mine. I slipped a noose around his neck."

Mr Tanner then jumped on top of the alligator, wrestled with it as it struggled, and pulled electrical tape out of his shirt. The alligator desperately

tried to bite its way through the rope.

With only a second to spare the trapper wrapped the tape around the creature's gaping jaws, and dragged it to the open air after a quarter of a mile journey through the subterranean tunnel system.

Mr Tanner was magnanimous in victory. He could have earned \$400 (£240) from the sale of its meat, a local delicacy, to restaurants and its hide to a tanner's. Instead he took the creature to a remote part of the back country and let it go in the river.

Not paid

Trappers like Mr Tanner who are volunteers are not paid for their efforts, but are given captured alligators as their prize, so he did not make a cent from his bravery.

"Aw, he wasn't hurting nobody," he said.

It has long been part of the folklore of American cities that there was once a fad for keeping baby alligators and crocodiles, when the owners got tired of them they flushed them down the lavatory into the sewers where the reptiles grew into 15ft monsters, preying on city workers.

In Florida, the alligators stray from their natural habitat, and as Orlando's terrified sanitation workers can testify, they can be a bit of a nuisance.

A telephone call to Joe Mittiga in the Mayor's Office in Orlando helped clarify exactly what had happened. Apparently a new sports arena was being built and it was decided to check the storm drains that were on the site. In investigating them, the workers saw two big red alligator eyes and called a contractor to get the alligator out.

The storm drain - not a sewer (Mittiga stressed this) - is a big 108 inch diameter pipe that handles run-off rainwater. The drain channels into a small lake nearby. Mittiga said the gator probably lived in the storm drain and ventured out into the lake for food. Such an arrangement, with the drains going into small lakes, is common in the area, so alligators in the storm drains are not terribly unusual. As the Florida Sentinel paper reported the matter, the gator was 7 feet long and the contractor took it to a remote area and set it free.

Elusive gator still slithers beneath streets of Orlando

By Prakash Gandhi

OF THE SENTINEL STAFF

A trapper will make his third try today to capture an alligator navigating the dark corners of Orlando's downtown storm drainage system.

Terry Parlier spent six hours Tuesday and four hours Monday trying to catch the reptile, which city workers found in a drainage pipe south of Livingston Street.

Parlier tried to flush his quarry Tuesday with water hoses and shined flashlights down the pipe, but there was no sign of the gator.

"This one will be hard to catch," said Parlier, 28, who has been trapping gators for two years.

The gator, said to be 7 feet long, turned up Monday afternoon dur-

ing an inspection by the city's streets and drainage department, said Jack Sellers, the agency's bureau chief. Workers had started last week cleaning both the pipe and Lake Dot, where the pipe starts.

"They were not too interested in messing with it," Sellers said of the reptile. "It shocked us a little, but there have been alligators found in pipes. ... We were expecting to find something like snakes or alligators."

Workers continued cleaning the rest of the pipe and called officials from the state Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission.

Parlier, who works for the commission, tried unsuccessfully to catch the gator Monday and

Please see GATOR, D-7

From D-1

returned Tuesday with another worker.

"It was pitch black and the water was waist deep. It was pretty unpleasant," Parlier said.

He hasn't seen the gator and doesn't know where it went.

"There are so many lakes that run off this system. It could be anywhere in the whole system," he said.

Parlier plans to try again today by taking a small boat into the 7-foot-high pipe, which is about 5 feet wide. "We will get him out of there. It's just a matter of locating him."

Parlier said he has caught about 250 gators during the past two years. "Sometimes it takes me five minutes, sometimes it takes a day," he said.



At first, Mittiga seemed quietly exasperated about talking of the alligator. It seems he had already received calls from people curious to know if the story was true and here was yet someone else to set straight. As a city official, his tone was understandable. Since at least the days of Davy Crockett, and later of journalists who packaged stories of frontier life for their East Coast readership, Americans have entertained themselves with legends and tall tales of the critters that supposedly live "out there" away from "civilisation". However, the critters' alleged emergence within one's own backyard or even city administration can open the door to other kinds of disorder. Though an inland city, Orlando is about a quick 30 minutes drive to the coastal tourist areas of Cocoa Beach and Cape Canaveral. Smudges on Orlando's image could have resulted in uncertainty among potential tourists.

Interestingly, the American man on the street is not the only one interested in whatever "fantastic" America might have to offer. Apparently, the British are interested as well. They are even willing to help the legend process along with some Wild West additions. Witness the way in which the Daily Telegraph frames the story. The alligator contractor is portrayed as a cowboy loner hero armed with only a "lassoo" and his "native wits". Wrestling a 150 pound beast in "foetid water", with "only a second to spare", our hero narrowly avoids "the creature's gaping jaws". After the battle, the cowboy magnanimously turns the animal loose. Although the Daily Telegraph doesn't include it, we might not have been surprised if this "Florida 'Dundee'" had then ridden off into the sunset or even walked over the shoulders of lesser men to receive the reward of his lady-love.

As the British report suggests and Joe Mittiga's frustration attests, borrowings from American and Australian cowboy scenarios and reports of alligators in the sewers are not necessarily enjoyed only for their entertainment value. Their combination can also be used exoterically, marking the boundary between the "we" of civilisation versus the "them" out there and down under.

PERSPECTIVES ON CONTEMPORARY LEGEND - JULY 1987

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9TH CONGRESS OF THE INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY FOR FOLK-NARRATIVE RESEARCH
FOLK NARRATIVE AND CULTURAL IDENTITY Budapest, 10-17 June, 1989

The following major topics will be dealt with:

1. Forms and Social Functions of Folk Narratives in History
2. Modern Storytelling
3. The Aesthetics and Poetics of Folk Narrative
4. The Typology and Classification
5. Safeguarding of Folklore

Special topics:

- a. Folk Narrative and Classical Mythology
- b. Finno-Ugric Folk Poetries
- c. Research on Erotic Folklore
- d. Folk Narrative in Education
- e. (Still to be decided)

Topic for the ISFNR Theory Commission: Storytelling in Contemporary Society

Special lecture: Hungarian Heritage in Folk Narrative Research

For further information contact: 9th ISFNR Congress, ELTE BTK Folklore Tanszék Budapest,
Pesti Barnabás u.1, Pf.107, H-1364 Budapest, Hungary.

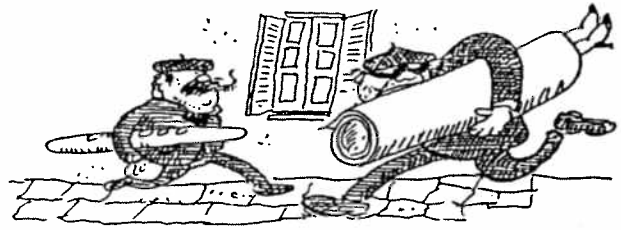
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FOAFTALE NEWS

No.10 (August 1988)



AN OCCASIONAL NEWS SHEET ON CONTEMPORARY LEGEND RESEARCH

FOLKLORE MEETS FORTEAN: STRAY THOUGHTS ON THE FIFTH PERSPECTIVES ON CONTEMPORARY LEGEND SEMINAR¹

Michael Goss

Here's a nice little newspaper report about a bleary-eyed toad rescued from inside a block of coal by a chance blow from a miner's shovel. Nothing to get excited about, really; you doubtless realize that there are hundreds of similar entombed toad accounts and if you don't ... well, if you don't, Bob Skinner has been wasting his time.

And here's another (not quite so nice) about a girl who vomitted up a small snake. ((Editor: see our THE HISSING OF SUMMER LAWNS round-up in this issue)). She'd fallen asleep on the bank of a river somewhere or other - had a bad habit of sleeping with her mouth open, this girl - snake crawled into her mouth, down her throat - she felt nauseous afterwards (not surprisingly, eh?) - someone got her to drink a saline solution to settle her stomach and WHOOMPH - up and out came the serpent. There's no shortage of THAT kind of story, either.

But ... are these REPORTS or STORIES? The newspapers' tacit insistence that they are bona fide records of actual events is not a safe guide because they are quite capable of printing a piece of fiction in the guise of fact - just as an oral narrator will corroborate that a thoroughgoing urban legend was the actual experience of a friend of a friend who never existed. The difference isn't just academic. Either these reports are all telling us that highly unlikely sounding things really and truly happen in this universe of ours despite the dictates of science on what is or isn't possible - in which case they are the province of Fortean; OR they show that untrue stories disguised as true ones recur timelessly and perhaps perversely thanks to our insatiable love of the bizarre, the extraordinary, the cautionary ... in which case they belong to all of us, but especially to the folklorists.

Questions like these surfaced during a discussion-session at this year's Perspectives on Contemporary Legend Seminar arranged by Sheffield University's Centre for English Cultural Tradition and Language: the fifth of what has become an annual and international event with irresistible charms for those who want to know what urban belief tales, rumour legends or whale tumour stories have been getting up to. Over the period July 20-24 more than a score of legend-fanciers from varying parts of the world - Britain, Europe, the U.S.A. and beyond - had a chance to contribute to the proceedings. And this year, at special recommendation of the seminar's arranger Dr Paul Smith - he of the Nasty Legends and Photocopier Lore books - Fortean were invited to air their views and to ask why folklorists don't spend a little time on pondering the possibility that what they treat as stories could have more than a mere semblance to actual events. Anomalous, maybe ... but actual nonetheless.

This report of the seminar is biased, sad to say, since the writer could only attend for one day out of five - the day on which the Folklore/Fortean session was held, needless to add. Prior and subsequent to that discussion, the perspectives had come thick and fast. They ranged from theoretical issues like Drs Gillian Bennett and Paul Smith's paper on the chronology of contemporary legend research or Jon Brickson's "Structural Properties of the Urban Legend as Genre Type" to geographical/cultural developments and example (Marion Bowman on a "malleable migration legend" from the Greek island of Kastellorizo, Heike Starke on "The Modern Legend in Germany" and Abdelmajid Zeggaff's remarks on a Moroccan hero-legend). The ever-popular Vanishing Hitch-hiker reared his or her head yet again courtesy of Mark Glazer, who looked at the effect of the informal setting in which the story is usually told; also from the U.S. came William Fox's "Roommate's Suicide" (a contemporary college legend related to the American grades system) and Eleanor Wachs' report of a gory Boston rumour about female shoppers mugged and mutilated in

dressing-rooms of suburban malls. There were urban maniacs - having the Halifax Slasher gatecrash a seminar held in the Halifax Hall of Residence was only fair, after all; there were papers on AIDS (Paul Smith), diet lore (Angelika Schmetze) and others which showed how legends reflect aspects of city life (Dan Barnes).

At this point I'm going to abandon the futile effort to summarise all that went on at Sheffield that week; you will be able to read of it in much more detail when the papers are gathered into the 1987 volume of "Perspectives on Contemporary Legend." (Keep an eye on F.F. for news of when it comes available. You can already get the first and second volumes from the 1982 and 1983/4 seminars at £8 and £8.95 respectively by writing to the Publications Secretary, Centre for English Cultural Tradition & Language, The University, Sheffield, S10 2TN).

The Folklore/Fortean discussion (formally entitled "Contemporary Legend: An Alternative View of the Belief/Truth Debate" chaired by Paul Smith) took its lead from a letter sent to Dr Smith by Bob Rickard querying whether it was advisable for folklorists to disregard the authenticity of multiple anomalies accounts - rains of fish, for example - and to treat them as "just stories." "Even a casual perusal of 'Fortean Times' or 'Folklore Frontiers' will reveal events which would be taken for foaf-tales were it not for name, place and source identification," wrote Bob, concluding with "a plea for care in dismissing many of the stories as having any origin as factual events, simply because they are preposterous." The easiest way to sum up the general mood of what followed is that several of the folklorists contributing to the debate politely declined to pursue the hints that Bob threw out. In other words, it doesn't seem likely that folklorists will start probing the background of accounts-cum-stories for signs of reality or whatever qualified for that term in the Fortean sense.

One problem is that what passes for reality-fixing details in a popular newspaper account - the names, places and so forth - may be specious: narrative devices which give a sense of additional credibility to what is essentially a folk-fabricated yarn. The only way to test that likelihood out, though, is to undertake strenuous background research: chase up the names, visit the places and in general treat the thing as if it MIGHT be real before reaching your final decision. Yet in another and numerically large class of case-material, this isn't at all possible: by their rumoured nature the stories/accounts are not capable of proving OR disproving in the accepted fashion. "I don't believe that the heads of Proctor and Gamble ARE Satanists," remarked Professor Gary Alan Fine ((Editor: see our "Sympathy for the Devil?" article in this issue)), who had presented a lively and somewhat alarming paper on rumours of large multinationals secretly run by extreme political or religious groups earlier in the day. "But I can't PROVE that they aren't." That is, a rumour-legend unlikely but not actually disproven is credible if you are prepared to take it that way ... or not.

The key word seems to be Plausibility - or, if you prefer, its antonym, IMPlausibility. Any anomaly or urban legend will contain some kind of corroborative segment, the justification for its readers or listeners to accept it as genuine; but in both instances this often resolves into a situation that we have to accept it at face value solely upon the source's assurance that the corroboration IS valid or that it exists. Without or even with it, we are frequently left with a choice of gut-responses: either we believe the narrative IS plausible or we don't, and naturally that comes down to prior training, temperament or a dozen other personal factors.

This is where Folklorists and Forteanes tend to part company; they respond in diametrically-opposed directions to the same kind of source material. Faced by an anomalous, unlikely-sounding story, one will be prepared to grant it MAY be true (because Fort has done such a good job of convincing us that strange things go on everywhere and all the time) while the other votes that it is UNLIKELY to be true (on the grounds that urban legends are by definition NOT true). You can accept an entombed toad report as improbable on all rational-scientific levels, yet hold that it is plausible in spite of all that Science has to say of its fundamental impossibility - taking comfort perhaps in the plethora of similar accounts on the same theme: that makes you a Fortean. Alternatively, you can treat it and its ilk as an implausible story implausibly told - a type of narrative within the mould of fiction-masquerading-as-fact: that makes you a folklorist.

Ideally - fine word! - there ought to be some common ground between the two poles, but it was evident that it would take more than a 45-minute seminar to lay down the rules for exploring that unknown territory. The inference was that folklorists as a whole will not be expending much time checking up on stories' credentials if they've already satisfied themselves from prior experience that the story in question is ... exactly that. There's no point in going into that time-consuming process if you have pre-decided what the outcome will be.

On their side, Forteans stand accused of too much naivety - credulity - concerning legend-like reports or even a wilful pretence that the accounts ARE valid when common sense, scientific consensus AND folklore insists they aren't and cannot be. It's down to evidence yet again, but where is the wisdom in talking about it when there exists no agreement as to what constitutes valid evidence in the first place?

Maybe there is some truth in these over-generalizations. There are folklorists who grow confused and nervous at the thought that their material may be harbouring incredible yet literally-true occurrences at its core. There are Forteans - not many of them, I believe - who place too much reliance on literal interpretations of folktype narratives. Both accuse the other of being insufficiently versed in the literature of their common subject.

Example: anomalists have been heard to complain that academic folklorists display a terrible unfamiliarity with standard Fortean texts - Fort's books, for an obvious opener, and "Fortean Times" as a seconder. ((Editor: And perhaps as a crossover journal "Folklore Frontiers")). From what I saw and heard that afternoon in Sheffield, I'd say this might well be true in many cases. But the academic folklorists reply that anomalists show an equally lamentable unfamiliarity with standard modern legend sources; having read all three of Prof. Brunvand's books and Rodney Dale's "Tumour in the Whale" is no replacement for the more solid kind of literary habits that folklorists pick up naturally, but Forteans less often. From what I know of Forteans, I might agree that this too is correct in many cases. If we're anxious to start looking for that middle ground of whose fabled existence I just spoke, maybe we'd all better reconcile ourselves to a lot more and a lot wider reading.

Notes

1. Reprinted with permission from Folklore Frontiers 6 (1987) 5-7.

EFFECT OF "COKE" ON SPERM MOTILITY

To the Editor: Various methods of vaginal contraception have been used since antiquity. The Egyptians recommended honey and sodium bicarbonate; acid fruit juices and a variety of oils have also been used throughout history.¹ Postcoital douching with household sub-

Table 1. Effects of Various Types of Coca-Cola on Sperm Motility in Vitro.

	SPERM MOTILITY AT 1 MINUTE	PH OF COKE
	% control*	
Old ("Classic") Coke	8.5	2.38
New Coke	41.6	2.37
New Coke — caffeine-free	16.6	2.25
Diet Coke	0	2.89

*Average of four measurements.

stances was a popular form of contraception at the beginning of this century, and Coca-Cola is still said to be used in developing countries for this purpose.² The efficacy of Coca-Cola as a postcoital contraceptive appears dubious since its use has been perpetuated through folklore rather than scientific evidence. We could find no study measuring the effect of Coca-Cola on sperm motility in vitro. In addition, there has recently been controversy over the attributes of old-formula ("Classic") Coke and those of "New Coke." We therefore compared the effect of various modern formulations of Coca-Cola on sperm motility.

We used semen from a healthy, fertile donor and various formulations of Coca-Cola (Table 1). The semen was liquefied at 37°C, and 0.05-ml aliquots were transferred to test tubes containing 0.25 ml of the formulations (newly opened and at room temperature). Samples were incubated at room temperature, and the percentage of sperm motility was evaluated at one minute by direct microscopical observation.

The results are summarized in Table 1. All samples of Coca-Cola markedly reduced sperm motility, whereas saline had no spermicidal effect after the one-minute interval. Diet Coke had the strongest effect, and Classic Coke was shown to have five times the spermicidal effect of New Coke.

The effectiveness of Coca-Cola as a spermicidal agent in vaginal douching has been attributed to its acidic pH.² Although the spermicidal effect varied with the different formulations of Coca-Cola, we found no significant difference in their pH values, suggesting that a component of the Coca-Cola "secret formula" may be a cofactor in the effect. Although not recommended for postcoital contraception, partly because sperm can be found in the oviducts within minutes after intercourse,³ Coca-Cola products do appear to have a spermicidal effect. Furthermore, our data indicate that at least in the area of spermicidal effect, "Classic" Coke "is it."

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It must be a tradition that whatever you say to the press they either ignore it or misquote you. The Mail on Sunday (18 January, 1987) ran the following story - but just why they bothered to call me for an interview is something of a mystery. After all, it is not really necessary for them to speak to you before they put words in your mouth. Still, apart from that, it is a "useful" example of how the press reacts to, and processes, contemporary legends.

Truth about a Jumbo tale

HEARD the one about the dog-owner who washed her pet and tried to dry it in the microwave?

Or the woman who wrecked a hire car by driving it 250 miles in second gear because she was used to an automatic.

Best of all is the sit-and-run story about the elephant that crushed a car. There are many versions but The Mail on Sunday's is a classic.

Weighty

Back in 1963 a man saved up to buy a bright yellow Messerschmitt bubble-car.

One morning he parked outside his office and eight hours later was in tears, for the car had been flattened. It was, he lamented, as though a great weight had dropped from the sky.

Twenty-five years later, having moved to Southern Spain, he met a man in a bar. They talked and an amazing string of coincidences unfolded.

They both came from the same place, went to the same school, worked on the same trading estate. One had even dated the other's sister.

But when the first man reminisced about his yellow bubble-car the other man paled as the details emerged.

For he was a part-time elephant trainer and, one day, one of his charges had broken loose. Since it trained in Bertram



LOSER: Alan Burden

car had been damaged I hesitated about owning up. Fortunately he saw the funny side.

'I did everything I could to stop the elephant but he plonked himself down, slap bang on top. And believe me, when an elephant wants to sit it sits.'

Their story could be the tale which sowed the seed of a thousand elephant jokes around the world.

Dr Paul Smith, one of Britain's leading experts in contemporary urban folklore, said: 'All of those "have you heard" stories have an element of truth.'

Elaborate

'According to my research the elephant story first started the rounds twenty years ago. In Germany the animal sits on a red VW - the theme was even used in a VW advert.'

Both men swear their version is the true one and Mr Burden's insurance company, who specialised in Messerschmitts, recall his policy on the car.

Dr Smith said: 'It's the most elaborate tale I've ever heard, and so coincidental it's got to be true. Well, I think it's got to be true.'

This could be one of those rare cases where an urban folk tale has actually been traced back to its roots.

By LINDA
DUBERLEY

Mills' circus on a yellow tub it headed for a yellow bubble-car ... and sat on it.

Hilarious but, of course, it could never happen in reality. Or could it?

The bubble-car man, former metallurgist Alan Burden, is now a painter in Mijas, Southern Spain. The other is Eddie Ling, washing machine salesman and sometime elephant groom.

Eddie said: 'When Alan went on cursing about how his lovely

'Elephant really did sit on a car'

FOAFTALE NEWS: AN OCCASIONAL NEWS SHEET ON CONTEMPORARY LEGEND RESEARCH

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