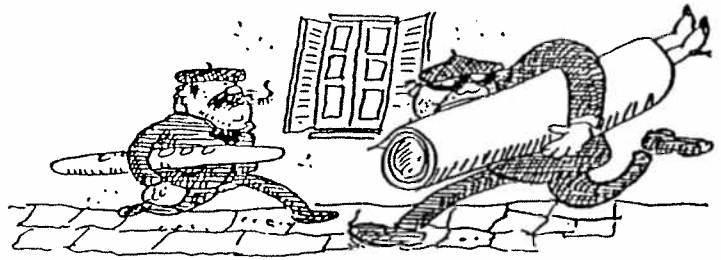


FOAFTALE NEWS

No. 11 (October 1988)



AN OCCASIONAL NEWS SHEET ON CONTEMPORARY LEGEND RESEARCH

INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY FOR CONTEMPORARY LEGEND RESEARCH

The International Society for Contemporary Legend Research (ISCLR) was founded at a meeting held in July 1988, at the University of Sheffield, England, during the Sixth International Seminar on Perspectives on Contemporary Legend. This seminar was the latest in a series which have been held annually in Sheffield since 1982. Participants have increasingly felt a need for an ongoing organization that will take responsibility for organizing the seminars and associated publications, and also encourage stronger links with contemporary legend scholars unable to attend the seminars.

The following officers were elected at the inaugural meeting:

President: Paul Smith

Vice-President: Mark Glazer

Treasurer: Sandy Hobbs

Membership Secretary: W.F.H. Nicolaisen

Correspondence Secretary: Keith Cunningham

Publications Secretary: Gillian Bennett.

Other council members are Bill Ellis, Editor of FOAFTALE NEWS, and Thomas A. Green and Sylvia Grider, organizers of the next International Seminar. The annual subscription has been set at £10.

The constitution of ISCLR states that the society's goal shall be to "encourage and support the scholarly study of contemporary legend, in its broadest sense, and related phenomena." The founders of the society are aware that no consensus exists as to the definition of contemporary legend. Furthermore, many researchers disagree about the most appropriate name for the genre. "Contemporary legend" has several rivals, notably "modern legend", "modern myth", "urban legend" and "rumour legend". In order to make the society open to all interested scholars, the term "contemporary legend" has been defined as broadly as possible to refer "not only to so-called 'modern urban legends' but also to any legend in active circulation in a given community." Furthermore, the constitution explicitly states that the society shall not exclude anyone from membership solely on the grounds of conscientiously held and expressed opinions on the nature of contemporary legend.

Those founding ISCLR have been scholars associated with the Sheffield seminars, but it is their firm hope and belief that the society will attract the support of all contemporary legend scholars. The council of ISCLR invites all scholars presently working in the field to join. Subsequently, membership in ISCLR will be open to anyone interested in contemporary legends whose application is supported by nominations from two existing members of the society.

ISCLR will start with limited but realistic goals, to which more substantial activities may be added in the future:

- * Organization of the Perspectives on Contemporary Legend International Seminars. Note that 1989 seminar will not be held in Sheffield: Texas A&M University will host the 7th annual seminar, tentatively scheduled for March 30-April 1, 1989. Definite dates and locations will be announced.
- * Editing and publication of associated papers. The proceedings of previous Sheffield seminars are either already published or are in press. Negotiations are being undertaken with Sheffield Academic Press concerning the format that ISCLR's publications will take in the future.
- * FOAFTALE NEWS was founded by Paul Smith in 1985 as an occasional newsletter on contemporary legend. He has agreed that control of the newsletter should pass to ISCLR, and Bill Ellis is presently its editor. As before, FOAFTALE NEWS will communicate news of future seminars, print or reprint short articles dealing with contemporary legends, and alert members to both scholarly and popular handlings of legends. All future correspondence and submissions should be addressed to Bill Ellis, Penn State University, Hazleton Campus, Hazleton, PA 18201, USA.

Members of ISCLR will receive FOAFTALE NEWS free. We expect that members will be able to attend seminars at preferential rates and that the society's publications will also be available at reduced rates, subject to negotiation with the publishers.

CONSTITUTION

- 1 NAME
 - 1.1 The name of the society shall be the International Society for Contemporary Legend Research.
- 2 AIMS
 - 2.1 The society shall encourage and support the scholarly study of contemporary legend, in its broadest sense, and related phenomena. 'Contemporary' refers not only to so-called 'modern urban legends' but also to any legend in active circulation in a given community.
 - 2.2 It being understood that debate is a normal and necessary part of scholarly enquiry, the society shall not exclude anyone from membership solely on the grounds of conscientiously held and expressed opinions on the nature of contemporary legend.
 - 2.3 The pursuit of the society's aims shall be achieved by such means as may be decided by the members. These may include, but not exclusively,
 - (a) the holding of meetings and seminars,
 - (b) the editing and issuing of individual and serial publications.
 - 2.4 In pursuit of its aim, the society may act independently or in collaboration with other bodies.
- 3 MEMBERSHIP
 - 3.1 Membership of the society shall be open to all persons who can demonstrate an interest in furthering research into contemporary legends and who are willing to abide by the rules of the society.
 - 3.2 Membership of the society shall be granted by the society's council to any applicant whose qualification for membership is confirmed in writing by two existing members of the society or who can otherwise demonstrate qualification for membership.

3.3 Continued membership of the society shall be contingent upon payment of the annual subscription by such dates as shall be determined by the society's council.

4 BUSINESS

4.1 The activities of the society shall be determined by general meetings to which all members shall have a right to attend and participate.

4.2 The business of a general meeting shall include:

- (a) the consideration of the report of the council;
- (b) the election of the members of the council;
- (c) the setting of the annual subscription;
- (d) the consideration of any business notified in advance by the council;
- (e) the consideration of any business notified in advance by any two members of the society;
- (f) the setting of the date of the next general meeting.

4.3 When possible a general meeting shall be held in each calendar year; not more than thirty months may elapse between general meetings.

5 THE COUNCIL

5.1 The business of the society between general meetings shall be conducted by a council.

5.2 Members of the council shall be elected at a general meeting and shall hold office until the next general meeting.

5.3 The council of the society shall consist of the office bearers and such additional members as may be decided at the general meeting.

5.4 The officers of the society shall be:

- (a) President,
- (b) Vice-president,
- (c) Treasurer,
- (d) Membership Secretary,
- (e) Correspondence Secretary,
- (f) Publications Secretary.

5.5 No member shall hold more than one office at any given time except by decision at a general meeting.

6 CHANGES TO THE CONSTITUTION

6.1 Proposed amendments and additions to the society's constitution must be submitted in the first place to a general meeting.

6.2 Any proposed amendment or addition to the constitution which receives the support of a majority of those voting at a general meeting shall be communicated in writing to all members within three months of that meeting.

6.3 Any proposed amendment or addition thus approved and communicated shall be deemed adopted unless challenged in writing by at least ten of the society's members within a further three months.

6.4 Any proposed amendment or addition thus challenged shall be submitted to a postal ballot of all members within a further three months.

6.5 A postal ballot shall be decided by simple majority of those voting.

FIRST ISFCLR COUNCIL MEETING

The Council of the International Society for Contemporary Legend Research met at 4:30 P.M. 6 August at Halifax Hall, University of Sheffield, Sheffield, England. Members present were Gillian Bennett, Keith Cunningham, Mark Glazer, Sandy Hobbs, and Paul Smith.

Among other topics, it was agreed that the publication of the proceedings of the conferences will cease with the fifth volume. In the future Gillian and Paul will attempt to work with Sheffield Academic Press and publish a periodical yearbook which will include a review of contemporary legend scholarship, reports or notices of relevant meetings, bibliography of publications in the field, and book reviews of related publications. The yearbooks will include selected papers from Society meetings and/or other solicited or submitted articles as chosen by the editors. Mark Glazer accepted the position of book review editor for the new publication. Tentatively, the new publication will be called CONTEMPORARY LEGEND.

EDITOR'S COMMENT

The present issue, being mainly devoted to the ISCLR's formation and call for members, can give only part of its space to contemporary legends. For prospective members, though, I want to provide a bit of each of the types of information needed for this publication. Following in Paul Smith's tradition, I would especially like to continue to publish three types of material.

1. JUST IN! Any newspaper, magazine, or media publicity given a contemporary legend, old or new. When possible, I would like to have the actual clipping to reproduce in the newsletter, but if that is impractical, a photocopy or detailed description will do. We are also interested in historical or out-of-the-way publications, the more obscure or bizarre, the better.
2. HAVE YOU HEARD...? We will pass on any requests for variants of a contemporary legend collected in one area that you suspect may be circulating in another. Since FOAFTALE NEWS will be distributed internationally, members will be ensured quick access to far-flung versions.
3. BULLETIN BOARD. When CONTEMPORARY LEGEND is launched, that series will handle scholarly matters, but in the meantime FOAFTALE NEWS will continue to publish notices of meetings that include panels of interest to contemporary legend scholars, recent scholarly publications, and any other ongoing professional work in the field.

Please feel free to share any additional ideas for columns that you believe would be valuable to your work or would at least make the newsletter as morbidly fascinating as the genre it celebrates.

JUST IN!

TRUCKER LEGENDS ON A ROLL. American long-distance truck drivers like to tell a story that involves hauling lamb, pork, or sides of beef--a cargo known as swinging meat--into New York City. Swinging meat is hauled in refrigerated vans called reefers, and because it is a valuable load and composed of relatively portable parts it is considered attractive to thieves. To arrive at the meat-packing district in southwest Manhattan, a driver must pass through a particularly sinister intersection, the story goes. If the traffic signal is green, there's no problem. If it is red, however, the driver must ignore it and keep moving, at all costs. If he stops, bands of thieves will jump out from the roadside, armed with cans of Freon and heavy hammers. They will spray the Freon on the trailer's back-door locks, then smash the brittle, frozen metal. As the unwitting driver and his rig go one way, the swinging meat flies the other--off its hooks, out the open door, into waiting vehicles.

I have heard this story at truck stops as far apart as Post Falls, Idaho, and Angola, Indiana. I've heard it from truck drivers, former truck drivers, truck-stop attendants, even college students unloading trucks as grain elevators--students who have never been closer to New York City than Spokane. Its pervasiveness is very likely exceeded only by the story about a woman driver in a state of undress. Sometimes she will be naked. Sometimes she will be wearing only a blouse, or only a skirt. Sometimes she will be completely clothed but her skirt will be hiked well above her knees. Often she passes by in a hurry, allowing the driver, high up in his cab, only a glimpse, but occasionally she adjusts the speed of her car--she favors Camaros and Volkswagen bugs--so that she runs beside the truck for mile upon mile.

Last September, in the midst of southbound stop-and-go multi-lane chaos before a toll booth on Interstate 294 west of Chicago, I asked Lonnie Umphlett if he had ever heard the New York story. . . . "Sure, I've heard it," he said, moving the truck forward in third-under, a creeper gear usually reserved for loading docks or truck-stop parking lots or for starting a loaded truck up an incline. "I suppose that once, maybe, something like that happened to a hand over in the Large City. But you hear a lot of stuff out here that you can't take for gospel. You know the difference between a fairy tale and a trucker's story, don't you? A fairy tale begins 'Once upon a time' and a trucker's story begins 'Now, this ain't no shit.'" [From Bryan Di Salvatore, "A Reporter at Large (Truck Driver--Part I)", *The New Yorker* (September 12, 1988): 39.]

A FROG IN THE THROAT. The well known expression, "A Frog in the Throat," has its literal significance and dates back to the time of Doctor Mor, who instructed Doctor Ban in matters connected with second sight, and an unusual story from Ardoran is referred to by the late Dr. R. F. Maclagan in his paper on the Macbeths of Islay.

Two young girls were singing at a ceilidh one harvest evening in a croft by the side of Loch Feuchian, when one of them, who had a beautiful voice, seemed suddenly to choke and complained of a severe pain. A member of the Clan MacConnachair, who happened to be present, sent for Doctor Ban, who stated that the girl's voice was beautiful above "the top frog."

"What do you mean by that?" asked MacConnachair. "I mean," said the doctor, "that I see that there is a frog in the girl's stomach." The girl, overhearing

what the doctor had remarked, got into a dreadful state. The doctor thereupon said to her: "You must eat no meat and drink no drink till I come to you again, and make sure of that." A few hours later, the doctor returned, applied the hot lid of a pot to her stomach, took a piece of flesh and roasted it before her mouth. The girl became very sick, and the animal (beathach) came out of her mouth towards the flesh whenever it felt the smell of it. After putting up the frog, the girl became quite well. It was going to start back when the man put his hand on the girl's mouth and caught the beast, and told her that she had drunk it from the stream when she was thirsty, and when it was but small. And they took the beast away with them alive. The reciter explained that he meant a toad, being the belief that "a toad in the stomach makes the voice musical." [Ronald Macdonald Robertson, *More Highland Folktales* (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1964), pp. 111-12. Courtesy Dennis Pepper. See also FOAFTALE NEWS, No. 6 (July 1987).]

HAVE YOU HEARD...?

ANOTHER PARROT STORY? In the 1800s, railroad travellers complained that they often had to stay on trains for fifty miles and more because the conductor forgot to call the name of some stations. To solve this problem, one Dutch newspaper reported on 8 June 1861, "a couple of parrots were placed on every station between Glasgow and Edinburgh, which are momentarily taught to shout the name of the station on arrival of each new train." Any similar stories? Contact Willem de Blecourt, Hagenau 29, 1025cs Amsterdam, Netherlands.

THE MOLESTED CPR DOLL. Nurses at a Veterans' Administration hospital in Arkansas circulated a story about a person caught raping or masturbating on the face of a dummy used to teach cardio-pulmonary resuscitation (CPR). A literary version was published in "The Rescue," a short story by Montana resident Thomas McGuane, in *To Skin a Cat* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1986), pp. 90-91. Are variants known in other areas or countries? Contact Robert Cochran, Center for Arkansas and Regional Studies, The University of Arkansas, Fayetteville, AR 72701, USA.

YOUNG CHILDREN'S LINGUISTIC ERRORS. The things that young children say often make their elders laugh, and in many families these sayings become traditions, remembered and laughed over time and again, often over a very long period. Jean Ure is interested in collecting and classifying these anecdotes and asks for any known to readers and their families. She is especially interested in cases of bilingual/bidialectal children. Please contact Jean Ure, Department of Applied Linguistics, 14 Buccleugh Place, Edinburgh EH8 9LN, Scotland.

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All members of ISCLR receive this news sheet free. Others wishing to be on the mailing list should send £2.00 or the equivalent to cover postage.

All contributions, material for publication, and inquiries should be sent to Bill Ellis, Penn State--Hazleton Campus, Hazleton, PA 18201 USA.

(717-450-3026 or 788-2021)