

FOAFTALE NEWS

NEWSLETTER OF THE INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY FOR CONTEMPORARY LEGEND RESEARCH

No. 62
ISSN 1026-1002

August 2005

IN THIS ISSUE

Urban Legend from 1925
(Jan Harold Brunvand)

Chinese Restaurant Legend
Still Alive as a Rumour
(David Main and Sandy Hobbs)

Recently In The British Press
(Jill Clayton)

Alan Dundes (1934-2005)
(Gillian Bennett)

Publications News

"misinformation." The third paragraph of the article begins: "Around the subject of population there has been a growth of popular legend hard to remove. Great Britain illustrates the urban legend."

Later in the article the term "legend" occurs once more: "France has furnished the most widely disseminated legend about population increase." It seems that we may have here a possible argument for using "urban legend" rather than "modern legend" or "contemporary legend" for our subject area: "urban legend" has been around a lot longer than we ever suspected.

Chinese Restaurant Legend Still Alive as a Rumour

David Main and Sandy Hobbs,
University of Paisley

"Urban Legend" from 1925

Jan Harold Brunvand University of
Utah (retired)

Charles C. Doyle of the University of Georgia, USA, recently discovered the earliest usage of the term "urban legend" that has so far been found. This reference, which he forwarded to me, deserves to be more widely known. An unsigned editorial published in the *New York Times* for December 6, 1925 (page E12), titled "Europe's Population Growth," begins: "The contrast between an under-populated United States and a Europe over-populated has just been drawn by a distinguished visitor to this country."

The article goes on to suggest that these population trends, if they continue, are not due to "a reckless birth rate," but rather to "the death rate that is being cut down." The mistaken notion of the causes of these population trends are dubbed "legends," evidently using the term in the sense of

At the first international seminar on contemporary legends, Paul Smith presented a paper dealing with what he termed "when legend becomes rumour" (Smith, 1984). The legend in question was the widespread one involving food contamination, known variously as the Kentucky Fried Rat (Fine, 1980) or The Chinese Restaurant (see Note 1). Paul Smith described a situation that occurred in 1981 in which a fast food outlet suffered as a result of the "legend" becoming a "rumour" attached specifically to that shop.

We have recently come across two cases where once again, over twenty years later, the legend has become a rumour to the annoyance and possible disadvantage of the restaurants concerned.

Scotland

Under the headline "Dog meat rumours frighten off diners", the *Edinburgh Evening News*, Thursday 25th September 2003, reported that "customers are deserting" two of

the city's most popular Chinese restaurants. China China and Chinois. The reason given is that stories are circulating that "carcasses of cats and dogs had been seen in the fridges at China China in Antigua Street and Chinois in the Omni centre". It is suggested that the stories have been spread largely by e-mail.

Restaurateur Toby Tang was quoted as saying that on the previous Monday the Chinois had had only about 125 customers compared with the normal figure of 250. He also asked people to imagine how many cats and dogs would be needed to match the vast quantity of chicken meat his restaurant actually used every week"

A city environmental health spokesman was quoted as saying "This is an urban myth". However, Mr Tang expressed the view that a rival restaurateur was spreading the story in order to sabotage his successful business.

Namibia

An internet search led us to discover that an item headed "Dog days for Chinese restaurants" in *The Namibian*, Wednesday 15th October 2003. The story is similar but not identical. Two Chinese restaurants were again involved. The managers of one of them, the Yang Tze, complained that a press story about another restaurant, the China Grand, was causing them difficulties.

The press story referred to a dead dog being found at the China Grand. This had led Yang Tze customers to ask questions about the menu. The Yang Tze managers seemed to leave open the possibility that their rival restaurant did serve dog by saying "Whether they've done it or not, it's not our problem". However, the manager of the China Grand was "adamant" that no dog was found on her premises and denied that her restaurant served dog.

The City of Windhoek Health Division had apparently inspected the restaurant and found it complied with health regulations. It was the case, however, that a dead dog had been found on the restaurant porch. This may have been sufficient to give renewed vigour to the Chinese Restaurant legend.

Other internet sources suggest that the eating of cats and dogs continues to exercise the popular imagination. Some examples follow:

www.messybeast.com/urbancat.htm

"Moggy on the menu" deals with "frequent myths" about "British ethnic restaurants". Despite the title both dogs and cat stories are discussed.

www.localstudent.org.uk/10issue/news/general/news.htm

It is "unlikely" that cat carcasses found at Royal Holloway College were intended for human consumption.

www.capital.net/com/phuston/cateating.html

"Chinese cat eating, private vice or public menace", an article originally appearing in the newsletter of the Inquiring Skeptics of Upper New York. According to this paper, the Chinese do eat cats but it is "a very rare practice".

http://edmonton.cbc.ca/regional/servlet/View?filename=ed_canine2003331222

No charges are to be brought against a Chinese restaurant where four coyote carcasses were discovered in a freezer.

Yet another sign that the legend is alive and well is to be found in a volume of autobiography, where it is given a slightly unusual twist:

"When I lived in Dublin, food inspectors closed down the local Chinese takeaway after finding half a butchered Alsatian in the kitchen. It re-opened soon after, the owners having argued they would never waste perfectly good dog on the Irish, but reserved it for the family." (Baxter, 2002, p 217)

Note 1

The story was covered in several items appearing in the journal *Lore and Language* in the 1970s. In the first, No. 6, January 1972, Paul and Georgina Smith asked for information on a tale "which is usually told of a local restaurant – often Chinese". In No. 7, July 1972, the tale, still unnamed, is referred to as "usually told of a local Chinese restaurant". Versions from 13 different locations had been submitted. Graham Shorrocks contributed a further version of the still unlabelled tale in No. 8, January 1973. When E. E. Cawte contributed a further version to No. 9, July 1973, it appeared under the heading "Chinese Restaurant Story". That name was employed in Bennett and Smith's *Contemporary Legend: A Folklore Bibliography* (1993) where the earliest publication cited is a British magazine article of 1965.

References

- Baxter, John (2002) *A pound of paper: Confessions of a book addict*. London: Doubleday.
- Bennett, Gillian and Smith, Paul (eds.) (1993) *Contemporary legend: A folklore bibliography*. New York: Garland.
- Fine, Gary Alan (1980) The Kentucky Fried Rat: Legends and modern society, *Journal of the Folklore Institute*, 17, 222-243.
- Smith, Paul (1984) On the receiving end: When legend becomes rumour, pp197—215 in P. Smith (ed.) *Perspectives on contemporary: Proceedings of the conference on contemporary legend, Sheffield, July 1982*. Sheffield: CECTAL.

Recently in the British Press

Jill Clayton

British readers could recently have read several articles of contemporary legend interest. Here's a sample ...

The Independent of Saturday 26 March carried a two-page spread, "A field guide to the mystery beasts of the British Isles", subtitled, "An 'attack' in Sydenham is just the latest sighting of an alien Big Cat on these shores". Sieveking lists The Benbecula Mermaid (Scotland 1830), The Loch Ness Monster (Scotland 1933 to presentday), The Sdobhar-Chu (Ireland 1722), Winged Snakes (Wales 1909), The Black Dog of Bungay (England 1577 onwards), The Owlman (England 1976), The Beast of Brassknocker Hill (England 1979), The Beast of Sydenham (England 2005), The Beast of Bodmin (England 1992), and the Surrey Puma (England 1963). Read all about it pp 24-25. Illustrated in colour by Kate Charlesworth. Useful text by Paul Sieveking gives information on these sightings and other similar ones.

The Guardian of Saturday 25 June (p. 7) carried an article with the title "How the media whipped up a witch-hunt" and the subtitle "Despite the lurid headlines, police dismiss claims of child sacrifice". Drawing attention to headlines such as "Witch kids abused in the name of God" and "Children sacrificed in London churches," journalists Ian Cobain and Vikram Dodd looked into claims that the Metropolitan Police had investigated the ritual abuse of African children and found that significant numbers had endured violent exorcisms or had been brought to Britain for the purposes of being sacrificed in bizarre rituals.

In other words, here was the latest in a long series of claims of ritual child-killings leading to the blood libel legend and beyond.

Unsurprisingly, Cobain and Dodd found that no such investigation had been conducted by the police, there was scant evidence for the abuse of African children, and the police had come across only one case of probable child sacrifice. "However," Cobain and Dodd wrote, "media fascination with the 'exorcism scandal' continued ... reaching an almost hysterical pitch and leaving one police officer feeling he was 'in the middle of a medieval witch-hunt'. Others wondered whether they were edging towards 'another Orkneys'—an alleged child abuse scandal ... that never was." The paranoia, it seems, had resulted from the misunderstanding of a report into the beliefs of ethnic minorities in east London. The evidence really only related to what people believed had happened or might happen, or to what other

people might believe happened, but that wasn't how some sections of the press preferred to understand it.

Anyway, a team of detectives got to work investigating recent child abuse cases to try to assess whether any of them did indeed bear evidence of ritualistic violence, and have come to the conclusion that such cases are very rare indeed. As an example, Cobain and Dodd quote figures from one London borough, Haringey. In the past two years social workers have reported 6 thousand instances of children at risk or in need. Among this 6,000 there have 650 children in high need of protection, many of whom had suffered serious physical or sexual abuse. However, only two of these cases could indicate ritual abuse.

The newspaper report concludes with an observation from an African pastor in London. It isn't gullible people who are to blame, he says, "but a gullible press".

The third article comes from **the Guardian of 28 May** On page 3 journalists Justin McCurry and John Aglioni, reported the case of two "Japanese men, both in their 80s, who say they have been in hiding since the second world war". Under the headline "60 years after the war ends, two soldiers emerge from the jungle", the reporters tell how the old men: "Said they had been hiding on the island of Mindanao, which is 600 miles from Manila, since before the end of the second world war.

The Kyodo news agency identified them as Yoshio Yamakawa, 87, and Tsuzuki Nakauchi, 85, and said they were former members of a division whose ranks were devastated in fierce battles with US forces towards the end of the war.

The soldiers had remained in the jungles and mountains since then, possibly unaware that the war had ended 60 years ago, and afraid that they would be court-martialled if they showed their faces again" ...

The story had begun a little earlier when a Japanese mediator for a veterans' group who was on Mindanao searching for the remains of former soldiers told the Japanese embassy in Manila that he had been contacted by the men. Apparently negotiators and former soldiers regularly travel to the Philippines to investigate such reports. Needless to say, Yoshio and Tsuzuki failed to show up. The reporters speculate that they might have been scared off by the media attention, but a representative of the Japanese consulate on Mindanao was less gullible. "We always have rumours about war veterans turning up alive in remote parts of the Philippines," he said, "But this time the story seemed more credible. We had someone who promised us concrete information, a meeting on a certain day. So we took it more seriously".

And finally, just a snippet from the "In brief" column **Guardian of 15 April** (p 17), "New bugs form the axis of weevil" I really hope this is for real!: "Three of several newly discovered

species of the genus *Agathidium* (Slime mould beetle) now carry the names *A. bushi*, *A. cheneyi* and *A. rumsfeldi* after prominent US politicians."

Alan Dundes (1935-2005)

Gillian Bennett

Alan Dundes's many admirers will be saddened by his sudden death on 30 March of this year.

Dundes was a formative figure in the study of contemporary legend. One of his most influential contributions to folkloristics was his championship of psychoanalytical approaches to the materials of folklore, and in his paper for Wayland Hand's 1971 compilation, *American Folk Legend: A Symposium*, he applied this approach to contemporary legend. Throwing down the gauntlet in typically blunt fashion, he argued that: "It is difficult to think of any area of folklore research which has continued to be as sterile and unrewarding as the study of legend ... folklorists have failed to convince anyone, including themselves, of the significance and relevance of legend with respect to the ultimate goal of understanding the nature of man" (1971, 22). Using well-known stories, he set about legend scholars who had in his opinion given inadequate interpretations of both the genre and individual stories. Linda Dégh, in particular, came in for some severe criticism for her handling of the teenage horror story "The Hook" in her 1968 article, especially for her suggestion that its function is to provide thrills for tellers and hearers. For Dundes it is obviously a girls' story revealing fear of sex; he sees the hook of the title as a phallic symbol and the ripping off of the hook in the car door as a symbolic castration by the fearful female (1971, 29-30).

Interestingly, in her contribution to the same volume Dégh used the same legend as an illustration for her psycho-social approach to the study of legend, arguing that "The Hook" is a boys' story, designed to scare a girlfriend so she "will draw closer, seeking protection from the 'fearless' male" (1971, 66). Overall, subsequent events have shown that a broadly Déghian approach has triumphed in modern contemporary legend research, but Dundes stuck to his guns and continued to produce closely reasoned psychoanalytic interpretations of folklore and legend. The paper on "The Hook" was reprinted as a chapter in his 1975 edited compilation *Analytic Essays in Folklore*, and in a chapter of his 1980 *Interpreting Folklore* he used the same paradigm to examine three other familiar contemporary legends, "The Stolen Corpse", "The Cadaver Arm" and "The Castrated Boy".

He returned to the attack more recently in his analysis of the teenage story-cum-rite,

"Bloody Mary in the Mirror," in his 2002 book of the same name. Once again he lambasted not only those who "churn out anthology after anthology of 'texts only' without attention to context or possible meanings" but academic folklorists "who despite pretentious debates ... or exaggerated claims do little more than report folkloristic texts totally devoid of the slightest hint of thoughtful commentary" (2002 76). Examining ten texts collected in California he argued that it was "abundantly clear that this girls' ritual has something to do with the onset of the first menses," thus emphasising the blood angle of the story rather than the ghost angle. This analysis was extended to discuss the more familiar legend of the "Vanishing Hitchhiker" (87-89) and Dundes argued that this, too, "might possibly have something to do with the transition from girlhood to womanhood." "If we see the legend in metaphorical terms," he writes, "then we can appreciate it as a symbolic morality narrative, a cautionary tale. A girl who hitch-hikes, that is, allows herself to be 'picked up' by a perfect (male) stranger, runs the risk of losing her virtue (signaled by the wet blood spot in the car's backseat, a well-known locus of teen-age and even pre-teen necking and petting)" (89).

His most controversial example of the application of psychoanalytic concepts to legend is his essay on the Blood Libel, "The Ritual Murder or Blood Libel Legend: A Study of Anti-Semitic Victimization through Projective Inversion," published first in *Temenos* in 1989 then reprinted in his 1991 casebook on the legend. His theory is that the cause of the Blood Libel Legend is "the Christian need for a scapegoat" to transfer religious guilt for central beliefs and practices such as the Eucharist. "Although Jews did not kill Jesus (. . . the Romans did) Christian folklore insists that the Jews were Christ-killers," he asserts. "In this context the blood libel is simply another example of the same kind of Christian folklore. Christians blame Jews for something the Christians needed to have happened." Thus it can be understood through the psychoanalytical concept of "projective inversion," the accuser's trick of displacing his/her own fears and desires onto the accused (1989, 18).

Lacking the psychoanalytical structure but drawing attention to the multiplicity of media that contemporary legend can be found in, one should not forget the collections of photocopied joke-sheets that he compiled with Carl Pagter between 1975 and 1996. Contemporary legend students and researchers may find joke versions of, among others, the "Surpriser Surprised" and legends about toothed vaginas.

Dundes's CV published online at <adundes.cv> gives a complete listing of his books and articles (14 pages of it). More than 250 articles are listed in such journals as *Arv*, *Journal of American Folklore*, *Asian Folklore Studies*, *Journal of Folklore Research*, *Western Folklore*, *Southern Folklore*, *Folklore*,

International Folklore Review, *Zeitschrift für Volkskunde*, *Studia Fennica*, *American Speech*, *American Imago*, *Modern Fiction Studies*, *Modern Language Notes*, *French Review*, *Germanic Review*, *American Anthropologist*, *Man*, *Natural History*, *Annals of Scholarship*, *Ethnohistory*, *Elementary English*, etc. Dundes was a contributor to the *Book of Knowledge*, *Worldbook Encyclopedia*, and the *Encyclopedia Britannica* on such subjects as folklore, American folklore, superstition, primitive mythology, and so on. His books include: *The Morphology of North American Indian Folktales* (1964); *Analytic Essays in Folklore* (1975); *Interpreting Folklore* (1980); *Parsing Through Customs* (1987); *Cracking Jokes* (1987); *Folklore Matters* (1989); *Two Tales of Crow and Sparrow: A Freudian Folkloristic Essay on Caste and Untouchability* (1997); and *Holy Writ as Oral Lit: The Bible as Folklore* (1999)

References Cited

- Dégh, Linda. "The Hook." *Indiana Folklore* 1.1 (1968): 92-100.
- Dundes, Alan. 1971. "On the Psychology of Legend." In *American Folk Legend: A Symposium*, edited by W. D. Hand. Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press.
- . 1975. *Analytic Essays in Folklore*. The Hague/Paris/New York: Mouton.
- . 1980. *Interpreting Folklore*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- . 1980. "Projection in Folklore: A Plea for Psychoanalytic Semiotics." In *Interpreting Folklore*.
- . 1989. "The Ritual Murder or Blood Libel Legend: A Study of Anti-Semitic Victimization through Projective Inversion." *Temenos* 25:7-32.
- . 1991. *The Blood Libel Legend: A Casebook in Anti-Semitic Folklore*. Madison and London: University of Wisconsin Press.
- . 2002. *Bloody Mary in the Mirror: Essays in Psychoanalytic Folkloristics*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi.
- Dundes, Alan, and Carl R. Pagter. 1975. *Urban Folklore from the Paperwork Empire*. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- . 1987. *When You're Up to Your Ass in Alligators: More Urban Folklore from the Paperwork Empire*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press.

———. 1991. *Never Try To Teach A Pig To Sing: Still More Urban Folklore from the Paperwork Empire*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press.

———. 1996. *Sometimes the Dragon Wins: Yet More Folklore from the Paperwork Empire*. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press,

Publications News

Members are invited to send in book notices, information and/or book reviews on the understanding that these will be printed only at the editor's discretion and only contemporary legend topics will be considered.

Review

*Once Upon A Virus: AIDS Legends and Vernacular Risk Perception, by Diane E. Goldstein. Logan: Utah State University Press, 2004. 200pp. 1 illus. \$ 19.95 pbk, \$39.95 hdbk. ISBN pbk 0-87421-587-0, hdbk 0-87421-586-2

The blurb for this book announces that it: "[R]epresents not only a significant contribution to folklore research in the areas of narrative, legend and belief but also a work that will add a hitherto undocumented dimension to discourse concerning AIDS," with implications for public health policy. This is no exaggeration. It is impressively well researched, scholarly, thoughtful and humane. Its dominant theme is most fully expounded in the final chapter entitled "Once upon a virus: Public health and narrative as a proactive form." Throwing down the gauntlet not only to those who think that contemporary legends are trivial but also to those who think that they are indiscriminately accepted by gullible tellers, the author roundly asserts that the stories she has presented and discussed:

[A]re not just entertaining tidbits of dinner conversation but rather the incredibly powerful narrative core of personal and collective action. This is not to say that we are slaves to the stories we hear, going out and enacting each narrative plot or including all narratives uncritically in the body of information we hold to be true. But the narratives we hear dovetail with our cultural life, becoming slotted in holes in information, explicating unresolved issues, challenging unpopular dominant constructions, asserting the importance of cultural truths in the construction of health truths, and forming the basis of crucially important health choices (157).

These are bold claims. However, each one is justified in the preceding chapters. Excluding the brief Introduction, there are seven in all. Chapter 1, "'Tag, you've got AIDS': HIV in

folklore and legend” begins with a brief overview of jokes, legends and children’s games involving AIDS references, then at greater leisure explores the context in which the author’s material was collected (Newfoundland in the 1980s and ‘90s). Chapter 2, “Bad people and body fluids: Contemporary Legend and AIDS discourse,” opens with a thorough, authoritative and level-headed discussion of the nature of contemporary legends. The author goes on to consider ostension and health behaviour (28-30), vernacular concerns about health (30-34), emergent meanings (34-39), tainted food and contaminated space (39-45) and the deliberately infecting Other (45-49). The chapter ends with sections on “the numbers game” which discusses the way statistics are inflated the moment they become part of legend discourse, and a consideration of conspiracy theories (49-54).

Chapter 3, “Making sense: Narrative and the development of culturally appropriate health education,” considers the problems health educators face in getting the risk-reduction message across—and the mistakes which they have made and continue to make. At the heart of the author’s discussion is the belief that their knee-jerk reaction to popular health understandings is counter-productive. “It is important,” the author suggests, “if we are to understand lay health belief, that it not be interpreted a priori as a threat to health safety.” There IS something preventing the message getting across, but it isn’t necessarily popular health beliefs. Lay people may well hold inaccurate beliefs about sickness and health alongside the received medical view, but the real concern should be that this “suggests a larger health worldview that educators are not understanding” (61). Thus the responsibility for the failure of public health campaigns to some extent lies with the campaigners themselves.

It is the author’s belief that the stories people tell about sickness and health encode “cultural values, explanatory models, and social relations”. Therefore, legends about AIDS will reveal how they try to make sense “in and of” health education (76). Thus chapter 4 considers “‘What exactly did they do with that monkey anyway?’: Contemporary legend, scientific speculation, and the politics of blame in the search for AIDS origins”; Chapter 5 is entitled Welcome to the innocent world of AIDS: Cultural viability, localization and contemporary legend”; Chapter 6 is “‘Billy Ray Virus’: The folk creation and official maintenance of a public health scapegoat” and chapter 7 is “‘Banishing all the spindles from the kingdom’: Reading needle-prick narratives as resistance.”

The “monkey” of the title to chapter 4 is the African green monkey that—alongside primates of various other origins and colours (blue monkeys, red monkeys, green-eyed monkeys, chimpanzees, baboons, tree monkeys and rhesus monkeys), fleas,

mosquitoes, cockroaches, sheep and gerbils—was supposed to have initiated the AIDS epidemic (81). The chapter considers these and other origin theories. Many of these are very wild. Hence on p 86 we read that one of the author’s respondents told her:

I’ve heard many origin stories, The first one I heard was about a sailor whose ship stopped over in Africa and the sailor had intercourse with a baboon. The second story apparently happened in South America—Cuba, I think, or in Mexico. A man had intercourse with a sheep. He was a shepherd.

Other speculations centre on laboratory-experiments-gone-wrong (91-100). These include a CIA plot to reduce the population of Africa “eliminating a threat to the USA” (96), “some sick scientist [who] invented it to curb the sexual activities of the populations of the world” (96) and “one of Hitler’s mad schemes gone awry. His scientists developed a virus to attack the enemy who in his opinion were full of homosexuals. The virus would kill off the army. The plane used to transport the virus crashed in Africa” (95-96). As the author says (98), these stories highlight concerns about “medicine as warfare, purposeful disinformation, and the withholding of drugs, treatment, and knowledge by those who serve as the gatekeepers of life and death.” They “articulate considerable medical distrust.”

Chapter 5, “Welcome to the innocent world of AIDS,” a version of which may be found in Contemporary Legend vol 2, is a fine documentation of how and why one particular variant of the familiar AIDS legend, “Welcome to the wonderful world of AIDS” (more commonly known in Britain as “Welcome to the AIDS club”), should have succeeded in Newfoundland when its predecessor aroused little or no interest. Chapter 7, “‘Banishing all the spindles from the kingdom’” considers the legends of deliberate infection that took over when the “Welcome ...” legends began to fade. These are the stories so widely circulated on the internet warning the general public of the dangers of infected needles in cinema seats, or of mad dancers who inject others with serum in nightclubs. The author reads them as narratives of resistance to the received wisdom of the health educators. The stories assert that the danger is not in the bedroom at all, but “out there”, where we are all vulnerable but we’ll take our chances.

Good as this and other discussions are, it is perhaps Chapter 6 that most readers will find particularly interesting. Based on wholly new material, it is a fascinating study of one particular case where Newfoundlanders were confident that they had found the source of all the infection in the province—Ray Mercer, a 28-year-old man from Upper Island Cove. Mercer was tried in 1991 under the Common Nuisance section of the Criminal Code for endangering the lives, safety or health of the

public through unprotected sex while knowingly carrying the AIDS virus. He was found guilty and sentenced to two and a half years in prison, later increased on appeal to eleven years and three months (117). Goldstein had been involved in the early stages of the investigation when she had been contacted by the Senior Crown Prosecutor who was smart enough to realise that he needed a folklorist's input. She uses this position as a quasi-insider to give a detailed account of the way both the scandal and the court case developed showing how the "Welcome ..." legend was a kind of "master narrative" poised to leap into interstitial gaps in knowledge and comprehension" (116). But she also blends all this with an impressive examination of all the issues—legendary, legal, cultural and medical. In particular, a first-class discussion of the much-used concept of "ostension" (the way legends provide templates for action), puts forward a hypothesis that resolves the problems of causality, which for many of us has been the central difficulty of this otherwise useful concept.

Gillian Bennett

Forthcoming October 2005

Organ Theft Legends. By Véronique Campion-Vincent. Translated by Jacqueline Simpson. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi. 224pp. appendix. Index. Hdbk \$45. ISBN 1-57806-593-3.

In 1987 horrific tales of organ theft that had been circulating in Central and Southern America for years caught the attention of the international media. Soon reports came from all over the planet, rising to a crescendo in the late 1990s. Véronique Campion-Vincent describes these narratives in detail and classifies them as three basic types: the bay Parts Story; Eye Thieves, and Kidney heists. She then recounts the social problems that seemed to make these awful legends plausible—trade in human organs bought from the living poor; advances in modern medicine which seemed to blur the lines between life and death; the ills of poverty in the developing world and its consequences; international adoption and real human trafficking.

Religious and moral authorities, political campaigns, propagandists, and the media all exploited the legends of organ theft according to their specific agendas. Campion-Vincent reviews the explanations offered by authorities, reporters, and anthropologists and offers her own folklore analysis pointing out the similarities between organ theft stories and the perennial tale of the slaughter of the innocents. Noting the real trials of everyday life in much of the third world and documented cases of illegal trafficking in organs, corpses and children, Campion-Vincent does not dismiss these tales

as just another example of urban legends run amok. Instead she offers a nuanced analysis of the connections between traditional horror stories, modern trends, and real events to show how complicated it can be to know the truth of any particular story.

These legends still circulate, and variations remain commonplace throughout the world. Campion-Vincent notes, sadly, that the social problems that paralleled the rise or organ theft narratives persist today.

Catalogue entry, University Press of Mississippi

BODIES: Sex, Violence, Disease, and Death in Contemporary Legends. By Gillian Bennett. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi. 277pp. 1 table. Index. Hdbk. \$45, ISBN 1-57806-789-8.

An examination of six gruesome tales in the contemporary legend canon.

Because they are so often told as news, contemporary legends force us to reevaluate life as we know it. They confront us with macabre, fantastic, horrific, or hilarious characters and events that seem to come straight out of myths and folktales, but are presented as present day events. The difficulty is that it is not at all easy to decide whether these often disturbing stories should be treated as reliable or dismissed as fantasy.

The legends explored in this book are some of the most bizarre, gruesome, and politically sensitive stories in the contemporary legend canon. If we believe them we must conclude that our bodies are in constant danger of destruction or defilement. At any moment our corpus may be invaded by noxious creatures, or deliberately infected with deadly disease, or raided to provide donor organs for sick foreigners. Even children's bodies are not safe from predators, and those we love most may seek to destroy us. These are "winter's tales," the stuff of nightmares. But they are potent and important.

In this book Gillian Bennett traces the cultural history of six well-known legends that have been current in Europe and America from medieval times to the present day and have appeared in broadsides, ballads, myths, ancient and modern legends, novels, plays, films, television shows, and in stories told in the oral tradition. The book shows that contemporary legends are not just silly tales which can be dismissed as trivial and "untrue." Good stories though they are and embellished with fantastic details, they demonstrate the limits of knowledge and power in the modern world.

Catalogue entry, University Press of Mississippi

Recently Published Essays and Book Chapters

- Jan Harold Brunvand. "The Vanishing 'Urban Legend.'" *Midwestern Folklore* 30.2 (2004).
- Thomas Pettitt. "The Ambivalent Beast in the Liminal Landscape: Categorical Transgression in the Contemporary Legend." *ARV: Yearbook of Folklore* 60 (2004): 29-60.
- Gillian Bennett. "Towards a Reevaluation of the Legend of 'Saint' William of Norwich and its Place in the Blood Libel Legend." *Folklore* 116 (August 2005): 119-139.
- Christine Shojaei Kawan. "Legend and Life: Examples from the Biographies of 'A'ishah Bint Abi Bakr, Mary Carleton, and Friedrich Salomo Krauss." *Folklore* 116 (August 2005): 140-154.
- Jacqueline Simpson. "The Miller's Tomb: Facts, Gossip, and Legend." *Folklore* 116 (August 2005): 189-200.
- Elizabeth Tucker. "Ghosts in Mirrors: Reflections of the Self." *Journal of American Folklore* 118 (Spring 2005): 186-203.
- Janet Langlois. "'Celebrating Arabs': Tracing Legend and Rumor Labyrinths in Post-9/11 Detroit." *Journal of American Folklore* 118 (Spring 2005): 219-236.

Next Issue

**Deadline for submissions
September 30, 2005.**

**Next issue out
October/November
2005**

Please Note

The email address for contributions remains the same despite the change of editor (foaftale-news@aber.ac.uk).

FoafTale News (FTN) is the newsletter of the International Society for Contemporary Legend Research. We study "modern" and "urban" legends, and also any legend circulating actively. To join, send a cheque made out to "ISCLR" for US\$30.00 or UK£20 to Mikel J. Koven, Department of Theatre, Film and TV, Parry-Williams Building, Penglais Campus, UWA, Aberystwyth, Ceredigion, SY23 2AJ, UK. Institutional rates available upon request. Members also receive **Contemporary Legend**, a refereed academic journal. Some back issues of **FTN** are available on-line at <http://users.aber.ac.uk/mikstaff/>, while others can be requested from the Editor. **FoafTale News** is indexed in the **MLA Bibliography**.

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

FoafTale News welcomes contributions, including those documenting legends' travels on electronic media and in the press. All research notes and articles are copyright by the individual authors who reserve all rights. For permission to reprint, contact them at the addresses given in the headnote of the article. Send queries, notices, and research reports to a maximum of 3000 words to the Editor; clippings, offprints, and citations are also encouraged.

The opinions expressed in **FoafTale News** are those of the authors and do not in any necessary way represent those of the editor, the contributing compilers, the International Society for the Study of Contemporary Legends, its Council, or its members.

Editor: Gillian Bennett

Email: foaftale-news@aber.ac.uk

FTN Web page :

<http://users.aber.ac.uk/mikstaff/>

ISCLR Web page:

www.panam.edu/faculty/mglazer/isclr/isclr.htm

ISSN 1026-1001