FOAFTALE NEWS

NEWSLETTER
OF
THE INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY FOR CONTEMPORARY LEGEND RESEARCH

No. 63 **December 2005**
ISSN 1026-1002

IN THIS ISSUE

On the Term "Urban Legend"

Charles Clay Doyle and Lara Renee Knight

From time to time, most recently at the May 2005 convention of ISCLR in Athens, Georgia, the origination of the term "urban legend" has been attributed to Jan Brunvand (not always approvingly). The purpose of this note is to add a little to Brunvand's discussion of the term (and its belated, sporadic, and inconsistent appearance in dictionaries beginning at the end of the 1990s) in his recent article "The Vanishing 'Urban Legend'" (Midwestern Folklore 30 [2004]:5-20) and his brief report, in *FoafTale News* (no. 62 [August 2005]), of an early use of the phrase.

To straighten the record once again: Brunvand did not coin the term "urban legend," and he has never claimed credit for doing so. He did not even use the term in the first two editions of his influential textbook *The Study of American Folklore*, 1968 and 1978; in those editions, contemporary legends are called "urban belief tales." Only with the third edition of the textbook, 1986, does the term "urban legend" join the curriculum. By that time, the first two of Brunvand's annotated collections had appeared, *The Vanishing Hitchhiker: American Urban Legends and Their Meanings* (1981) and *The Choking Doberman and Other "New" Urban Legends* (1984), which popularized and firmly canonized the term to designate the narrative genre that was receiving such prolific notice on several continents.

Brunvand had used the term in print as early 1979 (in a book review appearing in the *Journal of American Folklore* 92:362). However, even at that time folklorists and others had been writing about "urban legends" for a good while. As Brunvand's article notes, the online version of the *Oxford English Dictionary*, which purports to be supplemented and updated constantly, now does enter the phrase "urban legend" but with no definition other than a cross-reference to the dictionary's entry for "urban myth." The OED's earliest citation for "urban legend" is Richard Dorson's 1968 essay "Legends and Tall Tales" (in *Our Living Traditions*, edited by Tristram P. Coffin, 154-69); there Dorson referred to some "ubiquitous urban legends." However, it is incorrect to assert, as the online newsletter alt.folklore.urban does, that "Jan Brunvand credits the noted folklorist Richard Dorson with coining the term 'urban legend'" (tafkac.org/afu.faq/intro.html). Brunvand merely reported the OED entry, and (a point not always remembered) the earliest citation given by the OED is just a terminus ante quem for a given lexeme—not its terminus a quo. In fact, Linda Dégh, one of those who sometimes attribute the coinage to Brunvand, herself was using the term at least as early as 1968, when, in the old JAF feature "Work in Progress," she announced a project of hers that she called "Life history of a modern urban legend" (JAF 81 Supplement [annual report of AFS]: 30).

Incidentally: The word urban in "urban legend" often puzzles folklore students. Of course, it can be explained as designating the "urbanized" societies (as distinguished from bucolic ones) in which the genre seems to have flourished in modern times. Perhaps, though, Dorson himself adopted the term partly because he had earlier

discussed such legends (including his famous tracing of the origin of "The Death Car") in a sub-chapter entitled "Folktales and Legends of the Big City" in his book *American Folklore* ([1959], 245-54). Back in 1952, J. Russell Reaver entitled an article "'Embalmed Alive': A Developing Urban Ghost Tale," in which he remarked, "Tales from city folk form a valuable but rather neglected part of folk-literature" (*New York Folklore Quarterly* 8: 217-20).

As its second-oldest citation, the OED gives Daniel Barnes's 1971 reference (in *American Literature* 43:119) to a paper by Patrick Mullen, "Urban Legend and Rumor Theory"; the paper itself was published in 1972, now with the title "Modern Legend and Rumor Theory" (*Journal of the Folklore Institute* 9:95-109). Mullen observed, "Although the terms urban legend and urban belief tale are widely used today, they are somewhat misleading" (95). Note the assertion that (in 1972) the term "urban legend" was already being "widely used." A 1972 column by Bill Gold in the *Washington Post* (an installment of his regular feature "The District Line") had the title "Origins of Urban Legends Baffle Experts" (19 May; B22).

As for the cross-referenced cognate term "urban myth," misnomer though it is: The OED gives an earlier instance than its earliest for "urban legend." In 1960, W. H. Friedland entitled a paper "Some Urban Myths in East Africa" (in the collection *Myth in Modern Africa*, edited by Allie Dubb [Lusaka Northern Rhodesia (now Zambia)], 83-97). There, however, the phrase "urban myths" does not refer specifically to contemporary legends but rather, broadly, to rumors, superstitions, stereotypes, customs, and other lore that Friedland found in African cities. The OED's second-oldest citation is from 1986 (in the Toronto Star), a whole quarter-century later.

To pencil in the gap a bit: In 1961 the *New York Times* quoted a local official who referred to an "anti-urban myth," the assumption that city schools must be inferior to suburban ones. In somewhat the same vein, Robert Walker, in "The Poet and the Rise of the City," wrote of the "urban myth" perpetrated by "the city's critics" with their "negative reaction" to things urban (*Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 49 [1962]:99). In 1963 Parker Tyler, in "An American Theater Motif: The Psychodrama," referred to one "urban myth" (presumably among others), the flawed-but-heroic movie lawman (*American Quarterly* 15:148). In 1971 Richard Macksey, in a review of Nathan Scott's Negative Capability, referred to James Joyce's "cosmic urban myth" (MLN 86:608). Commenting on a 1972 book that "calls into question some fundamental notions of African Studies," which had "long been dominated by an 'urban' bias," Joseph Smaldone declared, "The 'urban myth' has been exploded" ("Socioeconomic Study of the Hausa," *African Studies Review* 16 [1973]:150-51). In a 1975 book review, C. Nicholas Lee wrote that E. C. Barksdale "proceeds to discuss the urban myth as used by Gogol and Dostoevskij" (*Slavic and East European Journal* 19:334)—"the urban myth" in contrast to "the pastoral myth." In 1976 George W. Carey referred to "the Jeffersonian anti-urban myth" ("Land Tenure, Speculation, and the State of the Aging Metropolis," *Geographical Review* 66:253). In 1980 Sharon Zukin wondered whether, "after the demystification of urbanization and urbanism, there is still an urban culture or an urban myth which is not merely determined by either capital or technology" ("A Decade of the New Urban Sociology," *Theory and Society* 9:598).

In none of those early instances is the term "urban myth" being used in a way that's really synonymous with "urban legend"; the references are simply to anything the word myth or mythology can designate, in relation to cities. So the OED's definition of "urban myth"—viz. "a sensational but apocryphal story which through repetition in varying versions has acquired the status of folklore, esp. one lent plausibility by its contemporary setting, or by the purported involvement of someone known to the teller"—is problematical, prior to the 1980s, at least. Therefore, the dictionary's cross reference from "urban legend" is not appropriate, since "urban legend" clearly antedates "urban myth" in the defined sense. Of course, sometimes a collocation will become familiar, then "fixed" as a phrase—then only later take on a certain idiomatic sense.

In any case, we recently discovered a very early occurrence of the phrase "urban legend"—not used in the folkloristic sense but the same collocation nonetheless. From an unsigned column in the *New York Times* for 6 December 1925, "Europe's Population Growth" (E12): "Around the

subject of population there has been a growth of popular legend hard to remove. Great Britain illustrates the urban legend."

The "urban legend" (so designated) maintains that life in urbanized societies, plagued by slums and squalor, must be nasty and short. In fact, though, "Great Britain with a population of 78 per cent. urban shows an incomparably higher level of health than France with an urban population of only 46 per cent." The depopulation experienced by some European countries resulted not from a low birth-rate (as was generally supposed by demographers at the time) but from a high death-rate: "In Great Britain there were in 1924, for every 100 births, 65 deaths; in Germany, 68 deaths; in France, 87 deaths."

As with all the early examples of the term "urban myth," the 1925 instance of "urban legend" refers not to what folklorists nowadays would call a "contemporary legend" but rather, simply, to a recurring belief or assumption about urban life, urban affairs, urbanization. But the phrase was now in the language, ready to take on other meanings—waiting for Jan Brunvand.

University of Georgia

The Superglue Revenge

Recently a postgraduate at the Delargy Centre for Irish Folklore and National Folklore Collection, University College Dublin handed me a clipping from the Irish Times *which he had spotted that day. I then consulted Brian Chapman's database of contemporary legends and found no fewer than 15 other versions. Brian later forwarded me 4 more that he had recently noted, and which proved to be further reports of the same case.*

I had not seen this particular legend since Mark Glazer's essay on 22 versions from the Rio Grande Folklore Archive, printed in Monsters with Iron Teeth: Perspectives on Contemporary Legend III *(Sheffield, 1988). For readers' delight and edification, I print below the article from the* Irish Times *and a selection of Brian Chapman's versions. Editor.*

MAN SUES EX-GIRLFRIEND FOR SUPER-GLUING GENITALS

A man is suing his ex-girlfriend for more than $16,000 (13,500) for super-gluing his genitals to his stomach.

Kenneth Slaby, of Pittsburgh, is suing Gail O'Toole, with whom he broke up in 1999 after dating for 10 months.

Mr Slaby then began dating someone else but, according to the lawsuit, Ms O'Toole invited him over to her home on May 7th, 2000, where he fell asleep.

When he woke up, Mr Slaby found Ms O'Toole had used super glue to stick his genitals to his abdomen, had glued his buttocks together and had spelled out a profanity on his back in nail polish. Ms O'Toole allegedly told him it was a payback for their break-up, and he had to walk a mile to a petrol station to call for help.

"This was not just some petty domestic quarrel," said Mr Slaby's lawyer, Grey Pratt.

Ms O'Toole had pleaded guilty to misdemeanour assault and served six months' probation, but Mr Slaby is now suing for damages.

Ms O'Toole's lawyer, Chuck Evans, said it was a consensual act and Mr Slaby was not permanently damaged. "This is a case that should have been left in the bedroom," he said. _ (AP).

The Irish Times*, World News (5 November, 2005). Courtesy Peter McGuire.*

2.
Extracts from two further reports from Pittsburg. Courtesy Brian Chapman.

Glue Suit Day 2: Scorned Lover, Glue, Naked Man And Elvis? Westmoreland County, Pa.

Late Thursday, the woman accused of using glue as a tool for revenge against an ex-lover told her side of the story in court. Her side involved a story of a wedding proposal, a night of love and plans for Las Vegas nuptials. That was a very different story from the tale of stalking, torture and abuse the man who's suing her told the court.

After their 10-month relationship came to an end, according to Gail O'Toole, she and Ken Slaby attempted to

rekindle the flame. They went to an oldies dance, followed by a night of lovemaking, O'Toole said.

The next day, O'Toole said Slaby proposed, inviting her to the Elvis Chapel of Love in Las Vegas. She claimed Slaby even bid on a ring. There was just one problem, according to O'Toole -- Slaby already promised the trip and the ring to another woman.

The jury is weighing whether that revelation could have thrown O'Toole into a fit of rage so outrageous that she drugged Slaby, waited until he fell asleep, then glued his penis to his stomach, his testicles to his leg and his buttocks together.

O'Toole said it was part of a sex game -- so was the nail polish, which she said she used to paint sideburns on him in honor of Elvis.

http://www.thepittsburghchannel.com/news/5242347/detail.html
ThePittsburghChannel.com | 3 November 2005.

It's Just Another Tacky Story In Super Glue Inventor's Book

By Dennis B. Roddy, Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

To Harry Coover, the story was nothing new: someone coming a bit unstuck, and super-gluing body parts to other body parts. The story, until five years ago, existed largely as urban legend. It would have an angry wife or jilted girlfriend applying the miracle adhesive to the wandering spouse's nether regions, and the philandering guy seeking medical help. "Yes, I heard some of those stories. We had a small group that was collecting all these stories from papers and publications and all that," Dr. Coover said. He had a reason to wonder if these legends could be true.

Harry Coover, Ph.D., invented super glue. [...]

As companies sold Super Glue and Krazy Glue during the 1970s, legends began to surface about angry women and some very surprised men who awoke from naps to find they'd become stuck on themselves. "What we did," he said, "was check out several of them to confirm that they were real and the consequence of that was we changed the wording on safety use of super glues -- things that you should not do." Things like what Gail O'Toole admitted doing to Kenneth Slaby, who yesterday won $46,200 in damages for his super-gluing five years ago. "That could be very dangerous, of course," Dr. Coover said. "There's even cases in college where they put it on toilet seats and they had to take the toilet seat off and take the guy to the hospital and had to provide some advice on how to remove it." Just in case, from the inventor, here's a tip: warm water, a great deal of it, as quickly as possible. Acetates, like nail polish remover, also help, but they're a bit toxic. The best advice might be to leave super gluing to the experts.

http://www.post-gazette.com/pg/05309/601174.stm
Pittsburgh Post-Gazette | 5 November 2005

Brian's database features stories from 1995 to 2005. Not only are genitals superglued but eye-lids and lips are glued together as well. In one story a woman's face is glued to her pillow while she sleeps. Here are two of the grizzliest, one from the British press and one via internet newsgroups.

*Daily Telegrap*h 22 June 2001

Smuggled Migrant's Lips Sealed With Glue

By Stewart Payne

A TEENAGE illegal immigrant has been found with his lips glued together to prevent him from informing on his smugglers.

The 17-year-old Iraqi is believed to have been bundled off a ship in Southampton within the past week. He was given medical attention after being found slumped in a doorway at nearby Eastleigh on Monday and is being questioned at an immigrant detention centre.

Hampshire police said a couple who found him thought at first that he was drunk because he could only mumble. The youth scribbled on a piece of paper to indicate where he came from.

Later it became clear that three men had used glue to seal his lips before he was smuggled off the ship. The couple

said the youth was lying in the doorway of a sports pavilion.

The woman, who asked not to be named, said: "My husband and I thought he was asleep, drunk or drugged. He seemed to be foaming at the mouth, then we realised it was super-glue. He wrote down that he was an Iraqi and to call the police. He also wrote that Saddam [Hussein] was a bad man."

The woman said his feet were covered in blisters after walking for several miles without shoes. The Immigration Service said that no decision had been made on the youth's future.

http://www.telegraph.co.uk/et?ac=002633285515118&rtmo=rQrr2Q9X&atmo=llllll

Newport, Tenn., Aug. 9 (UPI)

A grand jury in Tennessee has been asked to consider a sticky situation involving a man who glued shut his wife's private parts.

Franklin James was scheduled to appear at a preliminary hearing Friday, but he waived that right and his case was bound over to the grand jury. James is charged with gluing his wife's vagina shut while she was sleeping.

Police Detective Robert Caldwell says James told investigators he put Super Glue on his wife because she "was cheating on him and he wanted to teach her a lesson."

Teresa James says the incident occurred June 10 after she had taken two pain pills for a headache before going to sleep. She says she discovered what had happened the next morning.

Teresa James obtained a restraining order against her husband, but a lawyer said Friday that the couple is living together again. Public Defender Susan Thomas says the Jameses are planning to move to North Carolina.

Newsgroups: clari.local.tennessee,clari.news.crime.sex, clari.news.crime.assaults,clari.news.crime.general

Subject: Man accused of gluing wife
From: C-upi@clari.net (UPI)
Date: Sat, 9 Aug 1997 6:10:29 PDT

END

In Memoriam:
Daniel Riche (1949-2005)

Daniel Riche, who played an important role in French science fiction, died on Sunday 21 August after a long illness. He was 56 years old. For several years he had been the chief editor of *Fiction*, the principal journal of the genre.

Subsequently he founded the ambitious review *Science and Fiction* (éditions Denoël), which had notably devoted numerous special issues to Philip K. Dick and J.G. Ballard, then the journal *Orbites* (éditions Néo).

A talented anthologist, he had put together several "Livres d'or de la science-fiction" for Presses Pocket devoted to Richard Mattheson (1981), Clifford D. Simak (1985), Damon Knight (1987), and had conceived the first anthology about "steampunk,' *Futurs Antérieurs* (Fleuve noir, 1999). He oversaw a collection of works about criminal cases in the French provinces with the Presses de la Renaissance, in which series he was himself responsible for *Histoires criminelles de Paris, Île-de-France*, and *Histoires criminelles du Lyonnais*. He also published *Grands procès et affaires criminelles du Lyonnais* (1982). For Fleuve noir, he created and directed the controversial collection "Gore," then the compilation "Aventures et Mystères." Translator, author of a work on chemical and bacteriological warfare (Belfond 1982), and a study entitled "La Bande Dessinée de Science-fiction Américaine" with Albin Michel (1976), during his last years Daniel Riche had distanced himself from publishing and had embarked on a career as a television script-writer. He worked in particular on the series "Brigade spéciale" for TF1, and "Nestor Burma" for France 2.

First published in Le Monde *(28 August 2005). Translation, G. Bennett. Sent by Véronique Campion-Vincent, who adds*:

Daniel Riche authored in 1981 (with Jean-Luc Formental) a pioneer article, "Les légendes urbaines," in the magazine *Métal Hurlan*t (68-75). It was a panorama of the urban legends of the 1960s and 1970s and contained inspired illustrations by Di Marco, a specialist in horrible fait-divers.

A Newfoundland Ghost Story

This happened in a little town in Newfoundland, and even though it sounds like an Alfred Hitchcock tale, it's absolutely true.

A guy was on the side of the road hitch hiking on a very dark night in the middle of a terrible rainstorm; no cars were on the road. The storm was so strong, the guy could hardly see a few feet ahead of him. Suddenly, he saw a car come toward him and stop. The guy, without thinking about it, got in the car and closed the door and only then did he realize there was nobody behind the wheel!

The car started to move very slowly. The guy looked at the road and saw a curve coming his way. Petrified, he started to pray, begging for his life. He had not come out of shock when, just before the car hit the curve, a hand suddenly appeared through the window and moved the steering wheel. The guy, now paralyzed in terror, watched how the hand appeared every time the car was approaching a curve. Finally, although terrified, the guy managed to open the door and jump out of the spooky car. Without looking back, the guy ran through the storm all the way to the nearest town.

Soaking wet, exhausted and in a state of utter shock, the pale visibly shaken guy walked into a nearby bar and asked for two shots of Screech. Then, still trembling with fright, he started telling everybody in the bar about the horrible experience he just went through with a spooky car with no driver and the mysterious hand that kept appearing. Everyone in the bar listened in silence and became frightened, listening to this eerie story, hairs stood on end when they realized the guy was telling the truth because he was crying and he definitely was not drunk!

About half an hour later, two guys walked into the same bar and one said to the other, "Look, me son, there's the arse hole who got into the car while we were pushing it!"

From : Paul Smith <fpsmith@mun.ca>
Sent via email 16 November, 2005

Recently in the British Press

Jill Clayton

The *Guardian* *(8 October 2005, p. 7)* under the headline “Cracked? Addict Squirrels Alert,” Patrick Barkham wrote:

If they are not launching themselves at you in drug-fuelled desperation, their bloodshot eyes are searching for their next fix, pink paws scrabbling in the ground ...

Squirrels in south London could have become addicted to crack cocaine, say residents of Brixton, who suggest the rodents have dug up drugs buried by dealers or nibbled residues of crack on pipes and vials discarded by addicts.

According to internet legend, crack squirrels have terrorised residents in New York and Washington. But is the Brixton crack squirrel real or an urban myth? .... “They used to hang out in the little park in front of the Ritzy, twitching ... dancing to music only they could hear and generally creating a malevolent ambience,” Londoner Rik Abel wrote in his blog. Ritzy regulars were less sure, “I’ve never seen one,” said a staff member. “But there might be crack foxes around.” [...]

But Brixton crack squirrels need not worry about the police yet. “I’ve no knowledge of that at all, “said a Scotland Yard spokesman, firmly.

The *Guardian* (26 October 2005, p 4) carried an article by Ian Sample, “When Sleep’s an Alien Experience.”

Strange encounters of the alien kind have more to do with sleep disorders than little green men with a penchant for kidnapping, according to a study. A survey of people who believed they had had contact with aliens showed they were much more likely to experience sleep paralysis, a state where people are temporarily stuck between sleep and wakefulness and unable to move ... often people will see bright lights and menacing figures and given the choice between truth and madness, many decide the experience was real..

Sleep paralysis itself was not enough to explain beliefs of alien encounters on its own, according to the survey. Most “experiencers” already had an interest in the paranormal ... They also had “dissociative tendencies”, meaning they could be almost oblivious to their actions for periods of time. [...] “It makes them feel special. These aliens have travelled across half the cosmos for them. It’s just a shame they’re not more careful with their probes.”

ISCLR Conference 2006
Copenhagen, Denmark,
May 29 – June 1, 2006

The International Society for Contemporary Legend Research is pleased to announce that the 2006 Perspectives on Contemporary Legend Twenty-fourth International Conference is to be held in the 'Blixen Room' in the 'Black Diamond' building of the Royal Library in Copenhagen, Denmark. (http://www.kb.dk/kultur/diamant/index-en.htm). Also, in connection with the conference there will be a reception and tour of the collections and facilities at the nearby *Dansk Folkemindesamling* (http://www.dafos.dk/index.htm).

Copenhagen quite often *is* wonderful at this particular time of the year, and the conference will take place in the very centre of the city, within comfortable walking distance of sights, shopping and suitable settings for socializing.

Proposals for papers on all aspects of "contemporary," "urban," or "modern" legend research are sought, as are those on any legend or legend-like tradition that circulate actively at present or have circulated at an earlier historical period. Previous discussions have ranged in focus from the ancient to the modern (including Internet-lore) and have covered diverse cultures worldwide (including our own academic world).

The 2006 meeting will be organized as a series of seminars at which the majority of those who attend will present papers and/or contribute to discussion sessions. Concurrent sessions will be avoided so that all participants can hear all the papers. Proposals for special panels of papers, discussion sessions, and other related events are encouraged.

Travel

Kastrup Airport is located about 15 kilometers from the centre of Copenhagen. The easiest (and often the quickest) way to reach the city centre is to take a train from the airport to *Hovedbanegaarden*, the central station. However, the hotel is located about a kilometre from the main station, so depending on how much luggage you have, you may need a cab from there. During the day, the train runs every ten minutes from the airport station. See: http://www.cph.dk/CPH/UK/MAIN/Getting+Here/ Renting a car is possible, but expensive and not recommended for a stay in Copenhagen. Taking a taxi from Kastrup Airport to the Cab Inn City hotel will cost approximately 150-200 Danish Kroner, but will get you there directly.

Accommodation

Rooms are reserved at the CAB INN City hotel, a short walk from 'the Black Diamond.'
Standard rooms: 525,- Dkr., single; 645,- Dkr., double. ('Commodore class' and Captain's class' rooms also available at rates up to 845,- Dkr. for a Captain's Class double room). All rooms have shower/ bathrooms, TV, and kettles + free coffee & tea, but breakfast is not included. Instead the hotel has a 'morning café.' Parking is available at 120 Dkr. per day.
For more information and booking see:
http://www.capinn.com/UK/index.htm
The Cab Inn City hotel is located across the street from Copenhagen's main police station, very close to *Tivoli* and the *Glyptoteket* museum (classical Greek, Roman, and Egyptian art) and less than a kilometre from the main square/ city hall (*Rådhuspladsen*) and *Strøget*.

CAB INN City
Mitchellsgade 14
DK-1568 København C.
Tel. (+45) 33461616
Fax: (+45) 33461717
E-mail: city@cabinn.com
When making reservations, please include the ISCLR booking reservation number:
33305

To participate in the conference, please forward a title and abstract, along with the appropriate conference fee, to Henrik Lassen by February 1, 2006.

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Also, updated information can be found on the *Dansk Folkemindesamling* site, http://www.dafos.dk, as information becomes available

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

Rumor Mills: The Social Impact of Rumor and Legend, ed. Gary Alan Fine, Véronique Campion-Vincent and Chip Heath. New Brunswick and London: Aldine Transaction, 2005. 268pp. Pbk. US $28.95, £20.50, Can $35.95. ISBN 0-202-30747-6.

In Spring 2003 I attended a select conference on "The Social Impact of Rumour and Legend" called by Gary Alan Fine, Véronique Campion-Vincent and Chip Heath at Bellagio on the shores of Lake Como. The names of the other participants read like a list of the great and the good in rumour and legend studies: the 19 invitees included, in no particular order, Joel Best, Bill Ellis, Galit Hasan-Rokem, Luise White, Sandy Hobbs, and Patricia Turner. It was an exceptionally hard-working gathering. We met from 9 or 10 in the morning till 5 or 6 in the evening; everyone attended all the sessions; we were supposed to have read all the papers in advance and to have prepared 10-minute summaries to present for discussion. Meetings were held in the very grand, exclusive and repressive atmosphere of the Rockefeller's centre, Villa Serbelloni (like a girls' boarding school with wall-hangings). I was exhausted. The organisers moved swiftly to put a set of conference proceedings together for publication, the result of which is the present volume.

I am able to comment on the book because I decided not to let my paper go forward for publication; it has appeared since as a two-part article in *Folklore* (vol 116, numbers 2 and 3). Two other participants, Bengt af Klintberg and Patricia Turner, also did not contribute their papers (though Patricia Turner provides the introduction to one of the book's 3 sections). Apart from that, the book is a very fair representation of the meeting; the papers seem to have been altered very little from their oral versions, and the final chapter is a useful summary of the closing session chaired by Gary Fine.

Under the circumstances, this review will be quite a personal one. I shall pick out and comment on the essays in each section I found, and still find, particularly interesting.

In section 1, "The social production of conflict and prejudice," I'd like to draw attention to two historical essays. Jody Enders' "Dramatic Rumors and Truthful Appearances: The Medieval Myth of Ritual Murder by Proxy" discusses the anonymous 15th-century French drama "Mistere de la Sainte Hostie" (The Mystery of the Sacred Host), a drama re-enacting one version of the persistent (and incredible) calumny that Jews and evil Christians tortured and killed Jesus as incarnated in the Host of the Catholic mass. Among other interesting observations, she compares this accusation to the controversial medico-psychological concept of Munchausen syndrome by proxy. I also enjoyed Galit Hasan Rokem's long and learned essay about Jewish folk tradition, "Rumors in War and Times of Cataclysm: A Historical Perspective." The central discussion looks at traditions about the Roman Emperor Titus, and what particularly fascinated me were stories which closely echoed contemporary legends about bosom serpents, spider-infested boils, and other invasions of the body. In one version, for example, "God sent a mosquito to him [ie. Titus] that entered his nose and started to eat its way until it reached his brain, and started to pick at his brain" (p. 34).

In section 2, "The Spread of Rumors," I would like to pick out the essay by Pamela Feldman-Savelsberg, Flavien T. Ndonko and Song Yang. Their contribution, "How Rumor Begets Rumor: Collective Memory, Ethnic Conflict and Reproductive Rumors in Cameroon," looks at the spread of AIDS rumors that are hampering health-education and disease prevention. The subject matter is, of course, fascinating in itself, but of equal interest is the authors' contention that classic theories of rumor that claim that rumors become increasingly fragmented and impoverished over time are based on a misconception arising out of conventional laboratory tests, and that if a rumor is allowed to grow naturally and interact with other rumors and methods of communication it actually becomes more

elaborated, more vigorous and more likely to influence behaviour.

The third section contains two essays that are arguably the best in the book. These are: "Celebrating Arabs and Grateful Terrorists: Rumor and the Politics of Plausibility" by Gary Alan Fine and Irfan Khawaja; and Luise White's "Social Construction and Social Consequences: Rumors and Evidence." Like Feldman-Savelsberg and her co-authors, White's material is fascinating—the belief in some parts of Africa that firemen are vampires—and again like Feldman-Savelsberg and her co-authors, White insightfully challenges one of the "givens" of conventional rumour-theory. This time it is the definition of rumour as a type of communication not backed up by received standards of evidence. Instead she argues that the African experience shows that the concept of evidence is itself culturally derived: for Africans personal testimony arising in "everyday talk" is the litmus-test of evidential adequacy. Unlike Europeans and Americans, White's African respondents trusted hearsay above all else: "if something was not clear, if people could not say for sure that they had been chased by vampire [firemen] ... then hearsay could clarify matters, it could frame and explain what happened to them [...] The proof ... was the logic, and the integrity, of hearsay: if someone told someone that they had been told by someone that the firemen were in the area that night, then they were" (p. 250). In Africa, she says, "standards of evidence emerge from the talking itself, from the negotiations about what is true and what is not that take place in every exchange of information and opinion" (p. 250). For myself, I think that might be true for us too.

Fine and Khawaja's article begins with a startling question—"What is it like to be a terrorist?" This strange question is derived from Thomas Nagel's question "what is it like to be a bat?" "Like Nagel," the authors say, "we are interested in epistemological questions that arise from the attempt to make intelligible the actions of an otherwise unintelligible being" (p. 189). They use this philosophical construct to examine two legends which arose in the wake of the 9/11 attacks. The first involves the claim that on that dreadful day Arab-Americans were celebrating in the streets; the second is the legend of the grateful stranger of Arab appearance who returns some small kindness with a warning to stay away from the twin towers on September 11th. Their conclusion to this well-reasoned thought-experiment is that: "rumor scholars have focused on texts, leaving audiences under-theorized. Yet rumors need to be heard, approved, and spread if they are to have traction as cultural objects. With the diverse cast of characters recounted in rumor, audiences must put themselves in the stance of these Others ... Rumor depends on plausibility and upon credibility, but from where do these concepts derive? The answer is from experience as socialized through institutions, organizations, and relations. It is these processes of socialization that we must explore if we hope to understand—not what it is like to be a bat—but what it is like to think one is a bat. Or a terrorist" (p. 203).

Not everything is as good as this. There are weak articles and others that are unsatisfactorily short. Of course, one has to expect variable standards in conference papers. The contents, too, are very diverse in approach and subject matter, again one must expect this. But it is a substantial compilation, and readers can browse through it picking and choosing according to their own interests.

I am glad to have gone to this conference and pleased to see the proceedings published in such an accessible format.

Gillian Bennett

Recently Published

La Société Parano: Théories du complot, menaces et incertitudes (The Paranoid Society: Conspiracy Theories, Menaces and Uncertainties) Paris: Payot, 2005. ISBN 2-228-90013-3. (French text)

"Nothing happens by accident," "Everything is linked," "Things aren't what they seem to be": we see conspiracies everywhere—particularly "megaplots," conspiracies on a planetary scale. This phenomenon is massive, varied, and affects almost all sectors of society to some extent, exacerbating the confusion and uncertainty which characterises our age.

How can one cope? How can one distinguish a real plot from an imaginary one? What do the believers, the "conspiracy theorists" say; what do the

analysts think? If we live in a situation of generalised suspicion, have we good reason to be paranoid? The answer is in this book, the first deciphering of one of the major tendencies of contemporary society.

Véronique Campion-Vincent, who is attached to the Maison des Science de l'homme, is co-author (with Jean-Bruno Renard) of *Les Légendes Urbaines* and *De Source Sûre*, two authoritative essays on rumour.

Book cover information trans G. Bennett

"La ragazza dello Snoopy", una leggenda contemporanea dell' autostoppista fantasma; una ricérca in Valle Brembrana. (The Snoopy Girl: A contemporary legend of the Vanishing Hitchhiker; research in Valle Brembrana). By Stephania Fumagalli. Quaderni dell' archivio della cultura di base, no 35. Bergamo: Sistema Bibliotecario Urbana, 2004.

This work presents 36 versions of the well-known legend "The Vanishing Hitchhiker". They were collected and told by boys and girls from different places in Val Brembrana, northern Italy, from 1996 to 2002. According to the original version located near the "Snoopy" disco at Serina, a boy gives a lift to a girl, who leaves her bag and wallet in his car. The day after we find out that she had died long time ago.

In chapter one, the Brembrana versions of the legend are contextualised by examining the valley folk culture which is rich in signs, chapels, stones, tombstones, memorialising such things as fatal accidents and the 1630 plague. In general this culture is characterised by a religious and folk ideology which develops a dialogue between the dead and the alive and reflects on death in all its aspects.

In chapters two and three, the legend of the Vanishing Hitchhiker is compared to other examples of roadside legends which were widespread in the area round Bergamo and in other parts of the world in the 1970s. These were mainly in the form of rumours or edifying exempla about the appearance of mysterious hitchhikers who announced disasters or robbed the drivers, and of other vanishing figures from the afterlife.

In chapter four, the connections between stories of the Vanishing Hitchhiker and Marian apparitions are closely examined. The well-known sanctuary of Perello in Rigos-Sambusita is consecrated to a Marian apparition, and legends of the Devil in the Dance Hall are localised to the same area and known even to the very young.

The legend of the Vanishing Hitchhiker is usually classified as a contemporary legend, but in chapter five some hypotheses about its folk background are proposed. As a matter of fact, the legend shares themes and ideas with stories about Fearless Little John, the dead masker, and night apparitions near the cemetery at Botta di Sedrina.

In chapter six, the research continues by looking at other possible origins of the versions presented in this work. Among them, two stories of recent diffusion are stressed: the story of the Phantom at the Ball collected by Cesare Bermani in a version with a soldier from Serina as the protagonist, and nineteenth-century stories where a coach driver (in one version even body snatcher) is abducted by a mysterious woman in black.

In chapter seven, we consider the ways and means by which the legend of the Vanishing Hitchhiker was spread among the young people in Val Brembrana. We suggest an answer through the analysis of the roles of television and schools in the proliferation of the legend. For example, television familiarises viewers with stories about phantom hitchhikers in other countries: an episode of *"Misteri"* shown on 31st October 1994 presented a French case about a "woman in white at Palavas" which overlaps with a legend from the valley remembered by some children; and the summer repeats of an episode of *"Professione vacanze"* made the phantom hitchhiker well-known.

Chapter eight is entirely dedicated to storytellers and informants, and looks at the distinctive features of their stories as well as at the attitudes they take to them, their comments and their reactions to the narrated story. Particular attention is given to their, often varied, personal narrative heritage, where fragments of traditional folklore and contemporary legends and stories about real-life experiences, family memories, plots for films and novels coexist without visible break.

Finally, chapter nine contains a stylistic analysis of the collected versions,

led by both a narratological (typology, sequences) and a thematic point of view.

Translation of author's abstract. Sent in by Véronique Campion-Vincent

CAMPUS LEGENDS: A HANDBOOK by Elizabeth Tucker. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2005.

Since the earliest days of universities, students have told stories about their daily lives, often emphasizing extraordinary, surprising, and baffling events. This book examines the fascinating world of college and university legends. While it primarily looks at legends, it also gives some attention to rumors, pranks, rituals, and other forms of folklore. Included are introductory chapters on types of campus folklore, a collection of some 50 legends from a broad range of colleges and universities, an overview of scholarship, and a discussion of campus legends in movies, television, and popular culture.

Information received from the author.

Articles and Book Chapters

Elizabeth Tucker notes: "I also recently published an article, "Spectral Indians, Desecrated Burial Grounds," in *Voices: The Journal of New York Folklore* 31:1-2 (Spring-Summer 2005): 10-13.

Next Issue

Deadline for submissions
February, 2006.

Next issue out
March/April 2006

From the Editor

The present editor of *FOAFtale News* wishes it to be known that:

(1) anybody is free to send a contribution, and it will not be refereed. However, the editor has discretion to refuse an item if she considers it unsuitable for any reason.

(2) there is no house-style and there will be no editorial intervention in any text sent in. It is up to contributors to check spelling and grammar. Original spelling and punctuation (US or British English) will be retained and may therefore vary between items.

(3) authors retain their copyright, and reserve all rights.

(4) clippings from newspapers should note bylines and sources.

(5) this policy may change if a new editor is appointed.

Editor: Gillian Bennett
Email: foaftale-news@aber.ac.uk
1. Please mark your contribution clearly "Contribution" —we get a lot of spam!

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/. **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. 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.

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ISSN 1026-1001