

# FOAFTALE NEWS

## NEWSLETTER OF THE INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY FOR CONTEMPORARY LEGEND RESEARCH

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### IN THIS ISSUE

International Society for  
Contemporary Legend Research  
25<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference  
May 23-27, 2007  
Utah State University  
Logan, Utah

Miscellany

### Programme

#### WEDNESDAY, MAY 23:

**7:00-9:00 p.m: Registration**  
(University Inn, 5<sup>th</sup> floor lobby)

#### THURSDAY, MAY 24

**8:15-10:00 (Session I): "Legend and Landscape"** (Moderator: Yvonne Milspaw)

Lisa Gabbert, "Tripping into Myth: Supernatural Landscapes in Contemporary Legends"

Robin Parent, "Serendipitous Ostension: The Tourist Experience"

**10:00-10:30: Break**

**10:30-1:00 (Session II): "Legend and Notoriety"** (Moderator: Jan Brunvand)

Jodi McDavid, "The Fiddle-Burning Priest of Mabou"

Morgan Bowen, "Becoming a Living Legend: A Practical Guide to Becoming a Legend in Your Own Time, or At Least Your Own Mind"

Bodil Nildin-Wall, "The Death-Ray: From Literary Cliché to Newspaper Legends and Inventions"

**1:00- 2:30: Lunch**

**2:30-4:30 (Session III): "Ghost Stories"** (Moderator: Diane Goldstein)

Sylvia Grider, "The Literary Commodification of Texas Ghost Stories"

Elizabeth Tucker, "Indian Boarding School Ghost Stories"

**5:00-7:00 Reception and folklore archive tour**

#### FRIDAY, MAY 25:

**8:00: Fife Folklore Archives open**

**10-12:30 (Session IV): "Material Culture"** (Moderator: Lynne McNeill)

Cathy Preston, "Panty Trees, Shoe Trees, and Legend"

Diane Goldstein, "Aunt Clara's Creepy Doll: Narrative Commodification and the eBay Haunted Object Frenzy"

Erica Obey, "Stop Oppressive Gardening! An EcoCritical Examination of Garden Gnomes"

**12:30-2:00: Lunch**

**2:00-4:30 (Session V): "Case Studies"** (Moderator: Mike Preston)

Jan Brunvand, "Zipper Stories"

John Lee, "Private Actions in Public Spaces: SARS and Paradigm Violations"

Steve Siporin, "The Chocolate Egg and the Diamond Ring: A Contemporary Legend from Perugia, Italy"

**5:00: Business Meeting**

**6:30: Legend trip** (meet at the Weeping Woman, Logan Cemetery)

**SATURDAY, MAY 26:**

**8:00-10:00 (Session VI): "History of Scholarship"** (Moderator: Elizabeth Tucker)

Bill Ellis, "The 'Sheffield Approach' to Contemporary Legend: A Quarter-Century Retrospective"  
Linda Dégh, "Legend Scholarship"

**10:00-10:30: Break**

**10:30-1:00 (Session VII): "Genre"** (Moderator: Sylvia Grider)

Elliott Oring, "Legendry and the Rhetoric of Truth"  
Yvonne Milspaw, "Vampires, Interactive Narrative, and the Creation of Legend-like Narratives"  
Aurore Van de Winkel, "Communication, Belief, and the Construction of Identities: The Case of Urban Legends"

**1:00-2:30: Lunch**

**2:30-5:00 (Session VIII): "Legends in Other Genres"** (Moderator: Cathy Preston)

Ian Brodie, "Stand-up Comedy and/as Legend-Telling"  
Paul Megna, "Lyrical Legend(s): The Societal Construction of 'Hip-hop-cracy'"  
Jennifer Attebery, "Narratives as Embedded Genres in Immigrant Letters"

**6:00-9:00:** Informal evening barbecue at Lynne and Steve's

**SUNDAY, MAY 27:**

**10:00: Straggler's brunch at Siporins'**

**Abstracts**

*Editor's note: these abstracts have not been edited and are presented in*

*alphabetical order of authors' surnames.*

*Also note: at the time of going to press abstracts of papers by Linda Dégh and Bodil Nildin-Wall were not available*

**Jennifer Eastman Attebery, "Narratives as Embedded Genres in Immigrant Letters"**

As has been pointed out by David A. Gerber (*Authors of Their Lives*) and others, the immigrant letter presents an early form of transatlantic communication with parallels in contemporary e-mail. From a folklorist's point of view we can add that the immigrant letter, like e-mail and other computer-mediated communication (CMC), can be seen as a vernacular form within which writers establish a shared code for communication that includes formulaic discourse: catchphrases, proverbial expressions, and longer embedded genres such as personal experience narratives.

Some Swedish immigrant letter writers located in the Rocky Mountain West during the 1890s and 1900s were especially given to narrating experience. These epistolary raconteurs often depicted their Western surroundings as exotic and dangerous. However, while many of these raconteurs used their stories to claim their part in a metanarrative about the Wild West, others set themselves apart from the region, condemnatory of the West and its people.

In this paper I analyze the narratives embedded in the letters of Victor A. Hallquist, who wrote from Denver during the period 1897-1904. Hallquist's stories of Western crime and vigilante justice constitute a rejection of what he found around him. In 1900, Hallquist wrote from Denver to his brother Johan in Sweden that "this is not a nice place." He followed up on this judgment of his Western

environs with a story of brutal violence, the rape and murder of a girl and the lynching of the alleged criminal, an African-American boy. Hallquist's story undoubtedly was inspired by newspaper accounts of the death of Louise Frost in Limon, Colorado, and the subsequent lynching of John Preston Porter, Jr., by a large crowd that voted, in Porter's hearing, over how to kill him. The incident was widely decried in the English-language American press (although not apparently in the Swedish-American newspapers), and Hallquist's retelling reflects drawings of Porter that depicted him as a Christ-like sacrifice. Yet Hallquist also uses storytelling strategies from oral narrative. He develops the story, as he does others in his repertoire, using a two-part connotative structure that invites his brother to consider the original crime of rape and murder as parallel to the lynching, and therefore to see both the girl and the boy as victims of Western violence. Hallquist's storytelling reflects little of the recursiveness we might expect of written materials.

**Morgan Bowen, "Becoming a Living Legend: A Practical Guide to Becoming a Legend in Your Own Time, or At Least Your Own Mind."**

This paper examines the use of legend as a vehicle for individuals to achieve notoriety. Several case studies will be cited to illustrate how people make use of legend in creating their own personal mythology, thus projecting themselves into new realms of human endeavor. Individual examples include Rodger McAfee's use of the legend of Joaquin Murrietta as a framework to describe his own life experience. Bill Mollison, founder of the Permaculture movement, has become a living legend through his countless followers. Bishop John D. Koyle and his Dream mine story have created a sustainable legend that lives on in numerous mutated forms.

Legends are not only a means to bring understanding to personal endeavor but they become a path to expanding personal vision to an ever increasing and broader audience.

**Ian Brodie,, "Stand-up Comedy and/ as Legend-Telling"**

This paper has its basis in my current dissertation work on the relationship between stand-up comedy and vernacular forms of talk. The parallels of narrative-jokes and legends have been much discussed (Ellis 2004; Henken 2006, inter alia), with particular emphasis on how the same narrative elements can switch back and forth between the two genres.

Ellis has proposed that a definitional characteristic of legend is it being a narrative that does not contain its own resolution: it thus occasions a dialogue between teller and listener that simultaneously negotiates a position on both the "facts" of the narrative and the "truthfulness" of the underlying belief propositions or worldview which give potential credibility to those facts. One way of looking at the joke is that it works similarly, inasmuch as it is a narrative lacking a resolution: the narrative is deliberately framed by the teller using both performance and linguistic conventions to cue a laughter response as the resolution of preference. The performance is also framed as play, so that the issue of the narrative's facts is (largely) moot, and the acceptance of the worldview is a conceit of participation in the telling event which can be dropped when the play frame terminates.

Lastly, legends tend to be interpersonal, collaborative creations emerging from dialogue whereas the legend-texts, as exegetes have access to them, are largely legend reports, abstracted from their natural contexts. Stand-up comedy in its current dominant mode has the trait of intermingling its narrative and non-

narrative elements in a longer flow of discourse from which the joke qua narrative can only be abstracted with much difficulty: "naturalness" is its preferred stylistic feature. Through this longer flow of performance (and through extra-performance techniques such as reputation cultivation), the performer collaborates with the audience to create or invoke the worldview within which the individual units arise and thus within which they are meant to be interpreted. This paper will articulate the position of stand-up as a dialogic form through the parallels with current legend performance research.

### **Jan Brunvand, "Zipper Stories "**

In his definitive history of the zipper and its social and cultural significance, Robert Friedel writes, "The best evidence of the zipper's place in the mechanical demonology of the twentieth century comes not from literature but from folklore." As examples, Friedel describes the two well-known urban legends "The Unzipped Fly" and "The Unzipped Plumber or Mechanic." Other zipper anecdotes, jokes, and legends tend to follow the same themes of an embarrassingly open fly or of the comic results of a stuck zipper. A surprising number of these folkloric items are presented in first-person as personal experience stories. Others have entered popular culture as cartoons, skits, and in other forms. In his book *Embarrassment in Everyday Life*, sociologist Edward Gross cites several such "true" zipper stories, but must admit that the best of them came to him from unverified sources and are likely apocryphal. True or not (it doesn't matter), in many classic zipper stories, as Friedel also writes, "The ancient comic elements of mistaken identity, sex, and slapstick are all thrown together, with a readily available zipper in the middle

### **Bill Ellis, "The 'Sheffield Approach' to Contemporary Legend: A Quarter-Century Retrospective"**

This meeting marks the twenty-fifth meeting of the organization that has grown out of the "Perspectives on Contemporary Legend" seminar organized by the University of Sheffield's Centre for English Cultural Tradition and held in July 1982. It was intended as an opportunity for international scholars interested in the legends variously termed "urban" or "modern" legends (or sometimes, myths). There was a sense of discovery, and a conviction that this seminar, and the four that followed, were a time of valuable insights and reconsiderations of issues that had previously hampered free study of important forms of folklore.

Paul Smith and Gillian Bennett, in particular, made important strides to synthesize the work done during these first five meetings, publishing most of the papers in a series of conference proceedings, as well as a detailed index, giving abstracts for all the papers given and a detailed bibliography made up of the sources cited by participants. Shortly afterwards, they published two volumes with Garland Press, one an anthology of key readings on contemporary legend, the other an expanded bibliography.

Despite this crucial work, it remains difficult to find explicit statements of what "the Sheffield approach" is and how it differed from earlier approaches, exemplified on the one hand by the prolific Jan Harold Brunvand and on the other by the immensely learned Linda Degh. Both these scholars have participated in ISCLR meetings on a regular basis and have published comments on their reactions to the research done in the early meetings. But references to the key Sheffield insights, whatever they were, remain uncommon in discussions of legend theory, even to

the folklore textbooks and publications of the early 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Part of this may be due to the extraordinary bad luck of Smith and Bennett's synthetic publications: the Sheffield proceedings were remaindered by their press early on, as were the Garland Press volumes, and even the early volumes of the journal *Contemporary Legend* (1991+) remain difficult to find due to difficulties with the publisher. Still, many of the key participants have continued to publish inside and outside of the ISCLR camp, and in this way an implicit sense of "the Sheffield approach," whatever that is, has gained respect and influence.

This paper will return to the under-the-radar publications of the first five years, the hard-to-find Smith/Bennett syntheses, and their early reception by Brunvand and Degh, to try to pinpoint more clearly what ideas motivated the early Sheffield seminars, and why they were both compelling and difficult for established folklorists to accept. Then it will look more broadly at the influence of these ideas on legend research more generally, particularly that done by younger folklorists influenced by Sheffield-era publications, to see if we can make a clear statement of the theoretical approaches that emerged.

### **Lisa Gabbert, "Tripping into Myth: Supernatural Landscapes in Contemporary Legends"**

With the exception of Max Lüthi (1982), scholars have paid little attention to the role of landscape in legends, perhaps because folklorists have primarily defined legend as a species of narrative, conceived of as a kind of story with characters, a climax, and plot, despite the fact that few legends actually adhere to such formal definitions of story (Georges 1971). This attribution may also be due to the popularity of urban legends, which,

although localized by narrators, don't actually adhere to a specific locale. In contrast, this paper postulates that supernatural or mythic landscapes are an essential component of legends that have been sorely neglected. More specifically, legends depend on the existence of these landscapes for their efficacy.

In order to illustrate this point, I examine the practice of legend tripping as well as other place legends that are not the site of specific visits. Drawing on the notion of legend trips as ritual (Ellis 1991; Bird 1994; Meley 1991; Summers 2000), I first outline how trips to legendary sites transform visitors from ordinary people into story characters. In visiting the site, participants ritually enter a mythic realm. When they act ostensibly, that is perform the narrative, it is in essence because they have become characters in an ongoing, landscaped story.

Other kinds of place legends can be conceptualized within this framework as well. In my own research on lake monster legends, participants do not actively seek out the legend, but rather legendary experience imposes itself upon them in unexpected and often frightening ways. In other words, the mythic landscape impinges itself momentarily upon ordinary reality when it is least expected (or induced through the use of alcohol or drugs) and in doing so forces people to become story characters, whether they are willing or no. In both cases, people tell stories about their experiences afterwards. Narrators now tell of their own personal experience of both the legend and the site, but place themselves at the heart of the narrative—the result, technically, is a memorate, a personal variant of the legend. In this way legends connect individuals to mythic and supernatural landscapes, offering a means of melding self and tradition in previously unacknowledged ways.

*References:*

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**Diane Goldstein, "Aunt Clara's Creepy Doll: Narrative Commodification and the eBay Haunted Object Frenzy"**

On any given day, millions of collectibles, electronics, home furnishings, vehicles and other miscellaneous items are listed, bought and sold on eBay -- an on-line auction and shopping website where individuals and businesses can buy and sell goods and services with access to over 200 million customers worldwide. Since its founding in 1995, eBay's incredible success has become fertile ground for legend and legend-like narratives. Infused with legend themes such as you can't get

something for nothing and its counter theme, people will buy and sell anything, eBay legends abound about the sale of body parts (limbs, kidneys), contaminated items (containing spiders, drugs, diseases), invisible or disposable items (air guitars, the contents of a trash can, water from a glass Elvis once drank from, a single cornflake), actual people and places (the sale of an unplanned second child, New Zealand, the German language) and items linked to revenge motifs (the sale by an angry wife of her unfaithful husband's car for fifty British pence). Not necessarily full legends on their own, these stories link to legendary classics such as the death car or kidney theft narratives, suggesting narrative connections recognized by legend scholars and by the viewing, listening public.

In addition to stories about eBay, narratives play a central role in the merchandizing process. Exchange on eBay is often negotiated through elaborate narrative histories of merchandise used to contextualize the object's past, reasons for sale and claims of authenticity. Sharon Zukin observes, when one buys on eBay, one also buys the seller's story about the object (2004:245-246). Narrative exchange is made more complex when considering items invested with metaphysical or supernatural meaning, such as the now famous 2004 sale of a grilled cheese sandwich purportedly etched with the face of the Virgin Mary, which sold to an Internet casino for \$28,000. Following the sale of the sandwich, eBay sellers began listing other reputedly cursed, haunted, metaphysical and magical items, all commodified in part, by the narratives that accompanied their listing. Using Igor Kopytoff's notion of the "cultural biography of things" (1986) and Patrick Geary's concept of "sacred commodities" (1986), this paper will discuss the narrative commodification of paranormal and metaphysical items on eBay, exploring the implications of narrative

merchandizing for concepts such as ostention, legend tripping, belief context, emergence and authenticity.

### **Sylvia Grider, "The Literary Commodification of Texas Ghost Stories"**

All things Texan find a ready market, not only with tourists but with local Texans as well. Texas kitsch has become a standard commodity in venues ranging from mail-order catalogs to local crafts fairs and famous tourist sites such as the Alamo. Sellers of Texas rare books, prints, and maps supply an ever-hungry market from a finite supply of artifacts. An offshoot of the Texana book market is a seemingly endless array of popular and self-published books on every Texas-related topic imaginable.

One special category of these popular Texas-themed books are collections of ghost stories. Texas is not the only state or United States region which is the subject of popular ghost story collections, but Texas may have the largest number of separate collections. The popular term, "ghost story," basically refers to legends about supernatural encounters. Generally we think of these legends as oral performances most at home around the campfire or at adolescent camps or sleepovers. Savvy marketers, however, have recognized that there is a market for printed redactions and synopses of these legends, aimed especially at children. These popular published collections, intended for both profit and entertainment, are what I have termed the literary commodification of the oral tradition.

For this presentation, I surveyed the contents of twenty-two popular Texas ghost story collections, with publication dates ranging from 1917 to 2004. Only two of these collections—both by professional storytellers Tom Tingle and Doc Moore, are published

by a university press. The other collections are published by either small regional popular and/or vanity presses or are privately published and the audience is not always clear. The authors (they do not regard themselves as editors) borrow freely from one another and appear to be oblivious to the existence of academic folklore. In fact, many non-academic Texans consistently confront professors and Ph.D.s with J. Frank Dobie's famous anti-intellectual dictum that footnotes and other scholarly apparatus are nothing more than moving bones from one grave to another.

The surveyed collections of Texas ghost stories epitomize the plangent assessment of the late Alan Dundes, who warned in his 2004 AFS invited presidential address that one threat to the study of folklore is the proliferation of untrained hobbyists and amateurs (Dundes, 2005). Literary tradition of Texas ghost stories are currently so popular that they may be changing the repertoire of stories which remain in oral tradition to conform to these printed sources. In many ways the status of the oral ghost story in Texas parallels the weakened oral tradition of the contemporary legend, which is generally attributed to their widespread transmission on the internet (Brunvand, 2004).

#### *Works Cited*

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### **John Lee, "Private Actions in Public Spaces: SARS and Paradigm Violations"**

According to Linda C. Garro, "to understand the impact of illness...on a person's life, it is necessary to develop

an understanding of the narrative context" (133). In other words, any true study of the actions undertaken by a group suffering from an illness must take into account "the meaning that they place on these actions" (Calnan 8). In the SARS epidemic of 2003, public transportation became anathema, with airports in Toronto, Singapore, Australia, and numerous other countries showing marked decreases in passengers. Many narratives expressed fear and concern over long-distance and intercontinental travel. Plane, train, and bus-related services suffered as a result.

However, the flow of information between countries, due largely to the internet and media sources, increased greatly. This led to a curious situation in which, though informational globalization waxed prolific, cultural globalization was stilted: the widespread diffusion of technology that enabled public knowledge of foreign affairs only served to make people wary of other cultures at best. At its worst, this technology made possible the circulation of narratives that proved entirely counterproductive to cultural globalization through the rapid diffusion of inaccurate ethnic information. Many of these erroneous narratives ultimately dealt with the concept of private actions performed in public spaces as sources of endangerment, and these narratives will be the focus of this study. The ultimate goal of this essay is to demonstrate that the anti-globalization narratives present in SARS were intricately and inseparably linked with incorrect cultural stereotypes, and these were ultimately the result of widespread incompetence on both sides in determining the meanings other ethnicities placed on actions.

**Jodi McDavid, "The Fiddle-Burning Priest of Mabou"**

This paper is an examination of the role of the priest in the legends of Atlantic Canada, with focus on the

legend of Father Kenneth MacDonald, the fiddle-burning priest of Mabou. The Priest as a character features prominently in legend, although for the most part these narratives tend to be historical legends or morality tales with a similar complex of motifs and themes. This paper relates to work conducted for my PhD thesis on the role of the priest as illustrated in the folklore of Atlantic Canada, for which I have looked at personal experience narratives, archival holdings, and popular vernacular fiction in order to collect a variety of samples in a variety of communicative genres.

One of the dissertation's case studies centers on Mabou, Cape Breton, Nova Scotia, Canada. Although a small rural town, Mabou is one of cultural importance in Cape Breton. It is considered the heart of Cape Breton traditional music, which, especially since the decline of industry on the east of the island, has become increasingly commodified. Of central iconic importance in both the folk and popular manifestations of this music is the fiddle. Mabou is seen as a pastoral utopia, providing the perfect example of rural Scots-Gaelic Cape Breton, and a sharp contrast to industrial Cape Breton. Historically, this area is the birthplace and the stomping ground of many a "fine fiddler."

Father Kenneth MacDonald was the priest of Mabou from 1865-1894. Written accounts detail him as a strict disciplinarian, and social advocate: he was against the consumption of alcohol; he disliked picnics; he would withhold individuals' religious services until their accounts were paid to him in full; and he told his parishioners how to vote. But the written word seems to leave out the one event that locals still discuss: how he went door to door and burnt their fiddles.

**Paul Megna, "Lyrical Legend(s): The Societal Construction of "Hip-hop-crazy"**



*Hip-hop is an urban musical tree that has spawned branches from graffiti to gangsta' rap and is still growing. –*

Lonzo Williams

*[H]ip-hop is an urban cultural reaction of the experience of being overtly and covertly marginalized by a fully enfranchised white American majority.*

–Carol Cooper

The sentiments of both Cooper and Williams are indicative of the fact that the evolution of the generic form “hip-hop”, not unlike that of many modern urban legends, is best conceptualized as an organic, cultural dissemination; a causal reaction to the ever-grinding, socio-cultural tensions intrinsic to the contemporary metropole. This presentation begins by illustrating a structural-functional analogy between the global phenomenon that is hip-hop lyricism and various legendary forms of the past and present, ranging from the medieval hagiography to the contemporary urban legend. In so doing, it will demonstrate that, like the hagiography, a given corpus of hip-hop lyricism indubitably constructs a legendary persona; not quite a historical figure, but one both lauded and despised as such within the general public’s conception.

In his essay *Art as Technique*, Victor Shklovsky explains the concept of “defamiliarization,” contending that “[t]he purpose of art is to impart the sensation of things as they are perceived and not as they are known” (Shklovsky 12). Although hip-hop culture has frequently come under fire for “desensitizing” American youth to stigmatized issues such as sex, drug use, and violence, perhaps this is due to failure on the part of analysts in understanding the genre within a legendary context. In doing just that, it will become clear that hip-hop also does the opposite; functioning to awaken the “white American majority” to the problematic issues festering within urban communities. When considered in terms of legendary form,

hip-hop’s reductive reception might be expanded and the glaring hypocrisies at the core of this counter-culture may be considered functional byproducts of an urban youth caught between the desire to conform to, and escape from, the vices within the decaying, ethical foundations of the societal superstructure in which they exist.

Through an application of a number of critical scopes (Formalist, Jungian and Generic analyses) to a diverse selection of legendary figures located throughout the hip-hop movement, our overall aim will be first to expose the ideological dichotomy at the root of this “urban musical tree”, and then examine its causal relationship with the cultural “soil” from which it grows. After a survey of the pseudo-autobiographical, lyrical legends created by artists ranging from Eazy E to Kool Keith to Aesop Rock, it will become clear that, while, stylistically, individual hip-hop artists diverge massively from one another, it is possible to isolate a Proppian, functional skeleton, the backbone of which we’ll call “hip-hop-crazy”, supporting the movement as a whole. Ultimately, we will come to realize that what is created over the course of this hyper-allusive movement is an ever-changing, archetypal mother-legend; an ultra-violent, “rags to riches” story, not structurally dissimilar to folkloric Cinderella narratives. Hopefully, all will walk away with a revised understanding of hip-hop as an organic, inter-textual web; a semi-fictional cultural conversation, constantly negotiating, and re-negotiating, its own underlying ethical position.

#### *Works Cited*

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2007. <<http://www-personal.umich.edu/~rtanner/CAAS/Homepage/hiphop.htm>>

**Yvonne J Milspaw, "Vampires, Interactive Narrative and the Creation of Legend-Like Narratives"**

Live Action Role Playing (LARP) games provide an opportunity to watch the creation of narratives through an interactive, collaborative process of storytelling. Beginning with a supernatural scenario—the players in the LARP I am examining are vampires and werewolves living in an inverted version of our world—stories are built through a complex matrix of character and player abilities, an overarching meta-narrative, twisted directions from non-player storytellers (game masters) and of player “combat”. These latter two are confrontations between characters, interactions built mostly on chance (typically the outcome of “Rock, Scissors, Paper”) which can send a narrative spiraling out along unimagined forking paths. LARP is a combination of improvisational theatre and living hypertext which in the end sometimes produces what the players call “satisfying” narratives. In fact, the “satisfying” narrative looks and sound like a legend. An analysis of the narrative produced by such interaction has the structure, the subject matter and the feel of a legend, something like a memorate told by a vampire or werewolf. However, the “satisfying” narrative is also clearly structured like a traditional tale. Using both traditional subject-based and formalist analysis, I propose to examine the process of narrative formation, and to make some generalizations about creation and shape of the “satisfying” story.

**Erica Obey, "Stop Oppressive Gardening! An EcoCritical Examination of Garden Gnomes"**

In this paper, I will examine the history of the garden gnome in terms of Carolyn Merchant’s arguments about the relationship between the rise of technology and the objectification of nature. I will begin by considering the garden gnome’s roots in two very different sources: the alchemical elemental that guarded the earth’s ore and traditional corn harvest dolls. Although these two sources represent two very dissimilar magical traditions, they are both examples of humans approaching nature as an organism.

I will next examine the relationship between the advent of garden gnomes in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the rise of industrial technology. In particular, I will consider how Philip Griebel’s introduction of the terra-cotta figurines depended upon the technology that made mass-producing them possible, even as the gnomes served as an emblem of pre-industrial mining in Griebel’s native Thuringia. I will then examine how Charles Isham’s introduction of the gnome to England in 1840 reflected a parallel English reinscription of folkways eradicated by industrialization as fairy tales.

I will conclude by considering the current upswing in popularity of “Gnome Liberation” and “Roamin’ Gnome” pranks and websites as a tongue-in-cheek effort to put technology in the service of restoring the gnome’s original mythopoeiac relationship to nature. I will argue that the ersatz “liberation” of the quintessential suburban lawn ornament valorizes the populist values of the middle class even as it calls these very values into question as oppressive—an epistemological move that I will argue is reflected on a literary level by the reinscription of myth and folktale into urban legend.

**Elliott Oring, "Legendry and the Rhetoric of Truth"**

Legend has been defined in terms of truth and belief. Every legend “takes a stand and calls for the expression of opinion on the question of truth and belief” (Dégh and Vázsonyi 1976:119). Not a few legend scholars have pointed to devices that legends employ to make them seem true (or false), but the discussion of these devices has been piecemeal and has tended to revolve around specific legends, legend clusters, and performance situations. The truth-enhancing techniques of legend constitute a rhetoric—a rhetoric of truth—and this paper attempts to outline this rhetoric which is organized in terms of Aristotle’s categories of *ethos*, *logos*, and *pathos*. Given a rhetoric of truth for legend, it may not be necessary to presume or ascertain the beliefs and attitudes of legend tellers and their audiences. The definition of the genre might be predicated on the performance of truth realized through in its rhetorical trope

### **Robin Parent, "Serendipitous Ostension: The Tourist Experience"**

Vacationers to Grand Teton National Park chose to visit the area for many reasons. Once they arrive, the tourists are all seeking an experience that is special, one that makes the vacation memorable. The average tourist cannot define this “experience,” but they are aware when it happens. Through my work as a river guide on the scenic stretch of the Snake River I have witnessed this moment of “realized experience.” I see it when the patron becomes a participant and not just an observer. The moment comes through serendipitous ostension.

When a family decides to take a scenic river trip it is generally because they have seen a brochure with the scenic photographs depicting blue skies and majestic mountains in the background, and a raft with a guide standing, often gesturing to some point of interest. The written hook

underneath the photos states what you will get if you embark on this experience: “Scenic Snake River Float Trips: Morning, afternoon, luncheon and supper floats all offer a unique view of the Park along with the exciting wildlife” ([www.gtfc.com](http://www.gtfc.com)). What the brochure leaves out is that while you will indeed spend the next two hours sitting on a boat with a guide who will indeed guide you through some of the most beautiful land on earth and you may see some wildlife, your experience will be made real by the narrative you hear. Your guide will talk about the area, some geological facts, history, and likely a bit about him- or herself, but what really catches your attention and makes the trip memorable are the stories and legends of the area.

Floating through Arthur’s Channel where President Arthur camped during an expedition termed by some of the press as the “trail of bottles,” you can see where tents might have been pitched. Gliding by Otter Bank you can still see descendants of the two river otters, who escaped during a Disney film that was being shot on location, playing in the water. And, we can’t forget the best legend of all, Dead Man’s Bar, where a gruesome murder occurred and is now the lunch and dinner stop for the float company. By looking at these legends, Dead Man’s Bar specifically, I will illustrate how tourists unwittingly become participants in a non-traditional legend trip; and this legend trip is often what the vacationer remembers and marks as the memorable “experience”.

### **Cathy Preston, “Panty Trees, Shoe Trees, and Legend”**

In his essay, “Performative Commemoratives, the Personal, and the Public: Spontaneous Shrines, Emergent Ritual, and the Field of Folklore” (2004), Jack Santino describes a “rag well” (a well with healing properties) that he visited in

Dungiven, County Derry, Northern Ireland, in 1995. The well, a site of pilgrimage, is surrounded “by trees and bushes on which [are] tied rags, strings, ropes, and other pieces of cloth left by previous visitors as votive offerings” (365). The rags are “of all sorts and colors of materials,” and they are “faded and in various stages of disintegration” (366). Contemplating the rag well, Santino notes,

Perhaps people leave these in the belief that, as the rags disintegrate, the illness to which they correspond will also fade.... *My friend and I each left a token of our presence—I tore my handkerchief in two, and we tied them to branches. Broadly speaking, as tokens of our having visited, the rags are at least in part, memorials*” (366; my italics).

Santino discusses the rag wells as “folk assemblages” and in relation to what he calls “performative commemoratives.” In turn, I intend to use the phenomenon of rag wells and Santino’s discussion of them as a jumping off point to contemplate other forms of folk assemblage that similarly involve trees (and sometimes fences or overhead electrical and telephone wires), but which are covered with panties, bras, and Mardi Gras beads or with old shoes instead of rags. While panty trees and shoe trees have little to do with healing rituals, they have much to do with memorialization or commemoration.

Panty trees and shoe trees are examples of what I will refer to as unsanctioned community art objects. Such objects are the evolving product of a series of private acts (the tossing or placing of panties or shoes on a tree, fence, telephone wire) that cumulatively form an object that itself evokes the sense of an imagined community—that imagined community being the various individuals, usually anonymous, who have responded in

kind to the acts of earlier individuals and who frequently envision their responses as linking them to a group of people who, though invisible to them, are made visible by that which they have left behind. Inclusive in this definition is also a sense that, though community-based, the object is not institutionally sanctioned. Because such objects are the product of an accretion of individuals’ private or personal acts performed within a public space (whether by public space one means that owned by the public or that owned privately but which the public has access to), those objects can, as Jeannie Thomas has documented (2003), become the site of local contestation concerning the nature of public space, in particular whose aesthetic is to be in control of public space. Such sites also become the objects of story-telling: both personal narratives and legends. This paper will address panty trees and shoe trees in relation to the legends told about them.

#### *Works Cited*

- Santino, Jack. 2004. “Performative Commemoratives, the Personal, and the Public: Spontaneous Shrines, Emergent Ritual, and the Field of Folklore.” *Journal of American Folklore* 117:363-372.
- Thomas, Jeannie Banks. 2003. *Naked Barbies, Warrior Joes, & Other Forms of Visible Gender*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.

#### **Steve Siporin, "The Chocolate Egg and the Diamond Ring: A Contemporary Legend from Perugia, Italy"**

In this paper I would like to complete my discussion of a legend presented at the annual meeting of the American Folklore Society in 2005. In that paper, I described how by luck I had discovered a contemporary local legend in Perugia, Italy, in January 2005 and my attempt to find its source. In the new paper I would like

to try to account for the legend's appeal and popularity in a specific locale, Perugia.

The legend of the chocolate egg and the diamond ring is a story about how a courtship goes awry when a young man proposes marriage by having a diamond engagement ring placed inside the hollow chocolate egg he gives his sweetheart for Easter. The young woman prefers milk chocolate to the dark chocolate of the egg she has been given, and without opening the gift egg, she exchanges it at the pastry shop where it has been produced. Thus she unwittingly loses the diamond engagement ring.

The legend has a certain appeal because of its subject (courting and romance) and the ironic twists in its plot. Nevertheless, it seems to be known and believed mainly in Perugia. I will argue that the reasons for its local popularity lie in the legend's seamless combining of local, Perugian symbols with several layers of folklore, some of which is local, some of which is more generally Italian and European, and some of which has its origins in pre-contact Central America. Reflecting on these layers of folklore and how they make the legend succeed increases one's appreciation for the complexity behind and within a brief and apparently simple example of a contemporary legend.

### **Elizabeth Tucker, "Boarding School Ghost Stories"**

Since the late 1870s, when the United States government founded the first residential boarding schools for American Indians, narratives about abuse of Indian students have circulated. Letters and other documents in the National Archives in Washington, DC provide ample evidence of the harm that Indians suffered because of the federal dictum to "Kill the Indian, save the man." Forced cultural assimilation diminished

children's language fluency and separated them from the comforting customs and rituals of home. Disease and sadness contributed to the deaths of many boarding school students; no one knows exactly how many children died, but the number of children's graves in cemeteries at such institutions as Haskell Indian Nations University (formerly Haskell Institute) makes the magnitude of the losses clear.

In this context of repressive indoctrination, legends have expressed students' rebelliousness and desire to make contact with loved ones at home. My paper will examine several ghost stories collected from elders who attended residential boarding schools as children. Their stories range from poignant reunions with dead relatives and pets to exciting encounters with the ghosts of warriors who once fought on the school grounds. Some texts, such as the story of "Elbows" at Sequoyah Indian School in Oklahoma, resemble legends that have circulated among preadolescents and teenagers in mainstream American society. Others reflect patterns more specific to the needs of young Indians who attended the schools.

### **Aurore Van de Winkel, "Communication, Belief and the Construction of Identities : The Case of Urban Legends"**

Urban legends are stories continually reinvented and shared among the members of a society. They contribute to the reconstruction, definition and reaffirming of community identities and help reinforce social bonds through the elaboration of psychosocial communicational mechanisms, which spawn at their narration.

A semio-pragmatic analysis of the hundreds of written variations of particular legends has allowed us to clarify the intentions, identity, roles

and relations played by the subject/transmitters of these stories, as well as the possible effects they may have on social representations.

I've created a new typology according to the narrator's position towards the story's principal character, to the function he attributes to the receiver and to the implicit message of the story.

Urban legends vary according to five different types. Yet, each displays the consequences of a specific confrontation between two main characters : the first is depicted as representing or belonging to the subject/transmitter's community, the second is associated to an opposed entity considered "negative". This duality allows for an association of individuals and phenomena which are related to fear, hope, the forbidden and the unknown.

Other discursive processes tend to reinforce beliefs by decreasing the critical reflexivity of the reader, while supporting a message which might prevent from danger, condemn or prohibit a certain behaviour, illustrate the satisfaction of a socially reprehensible or justified but bold act, or simply surprise by adding an irrational element to every day life.

The assertion of the existence and cohesion of a community through the transmission of such accounts tends to diminish the anguish caused by the narrated events, since their cause is presented as exterior to the reader, recognizable and therefore, controllable.

The production and affirmation of a specific identity cannot be achieved through mere opposition; our complex and multicultural society does not allow for a social definition to refer to a single community. In this context, urban legends make possible the simplification and clarification of the groups to which we belong – religious,

ethnic, cultural – while referring existing problems to convenient scapegoats.

### Miscellany

#### From the archive of Brian Chapman

1. "Celebrating Arabs" analogue from 1991.

Compare discussion in Gary Alan Fine and Irfan Khawaja, "Celebrating Arabs and Grateful Terrorists: Rumour and the Politics of Plausibility." In *Rumor Mills: The Social Impact of Rumor and Legend*, ed Gary Alan Fine, Véronique Campion-Vincent and Chip Heath. New Brunswick" AldineTransaction, 2005, pp 189-205. GB

*The New Yorker*, 1 April 1991, p. 85.

#### REPORT FROM JERUSALEM

Amos Elon

[...] When the first missiles fell on Tel Aviv, Israeli newspapers reported that Palestinians were "dancing on the rooftops" for joy. The phrase has since become a political and journalistic commonplace. For more than a month, I have been looking for anyone who saw with his own eyes the "dancing on the rooftops." I have found no one, and have come to suspect that this may be one of those famous myths of war which capture the imagination of a people because they confirm deeply ingrained prejudices in the political culture, like the widespread stories of rape and other atrocities in Belgium during the First World War. Myth is often transformed into "history." The lights of Tel Aviv are clearly visible from many Palestinian villages in the Judaeian and Samaritan foothills, and certainly Palestinians did climb up on their roofs to watch the fireworks generated by the flying Scud and Patriot missiles. But so did thousands of Tel Aviv residents. True or false,

"dancing on the rooftops" had become a key phrase in the arguments now being used against withdrawal from the occupied territories. [...]

## 2. STD test

Compare Wayland Hand et al, eds., \*Popular Beliefs and Superstitions: A Compendium of American Folklore from the Ohio Collection of Newbell Niles Puckett\*. Boston, 1981, vol. 1, #9771. If you suspect gonorrhoea, apply earwax. If it is gonorrhoea, it will burn frightfully (Louisville, 1956); #11708. If a man is going to have intercourse with a strange woman, he can find out if she has syphilis by rubbing her private parts with wax from his ear. If she screams because the wax burns her, she has the disease (Cleveland, 1956.) BC

*Columbus Ledger-Enquirer [GA] | 22 April 2007*

## ALABAMA HEALTH WORKERS TAKE AIDS LESSONS TO YOUTH

Brett Buckner

The Anniston [AL] Star [Original headline & publication date: "With AIDS threatening a new generation, the fate of its future lies with the youth," 15 April 2007.] [...] As if to define the difference between knowledge and wisdom, Hope offers what is known as The Ear Wax Test. According to junior high school urban legend, one way a boy can know if his girlfriend has an STD is to lick his pinky finger, stick in his ear and pull out some ear wax. He then inserts that finger into his girlfriend's vagina. If she says it "burns," then he knows to wear a condom. "And these are the kind of strange and silly ideas we're up against," says [Julie Hope, director of education/outreach at Health Services Center in Hobson City], who teaches age-appropriate courses on HIV as mandated by the Alabama Coordinated Health Curriculum starting in fifth grade. [...]

## 3. The Bicycle Smuggler analogue

Compare "The Smuggler." In *Urban Legends: A Collection of International Tall Tales and Terrors*, ed Gillian Bennett and Paul Smith. Westport, Connecticut and London: Greenwood Press, 207, pp 227-228. GB

*The Times [London, UK] | 24 April 2007*

## WORKER WAS STEALING 1M [POUNDS] YACHT ONE PIECE AT A TIME

Simon de Bruxelles

In the words of Johnny Cash, he was doing it \*One Piece at a Time\*. But James Light had bigger ambitions than to build a Cadillac, as the car factory worker in the song hoped to do. He wanted his own 1m [pounds] Sunseeker motoryacht. A court was told yesterday how, over seven years, Light, 35, stole hundreds of components belonging to his employer, Sunseeker in Poole, in the hope of building a dream boat. [...]

## Next Issue

**August/September, 2007.**

**Deadline for submissions  
July 2007**

*Send contributions to  
<Foaftale-news@aber.ac.uk>  
clearly marked "Contribution."*

## 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.

**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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