

# Course Outline

## FOLK 325 – Issues in Folklore Theory

Ian Brodie  
Jan. 6 – Apr. 6, 2010  
T & Th, 4:00-5:15

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office hours: M & W, 10:00-12:00, or by appointment

### Calendar description

*Keywords are critical within folklore studies: terms such as 'tradition,' 'culture,' 'heritage,' 'community,' 'performance,' and 'art.' Appeals to each tend to suggest an ontological, quantifiable, and verifiable thing, something that exists outside of our recognition of it. This course examines the application of these terms both by folklorists and by 'the folk' themselves, and how the discipline of folklore has developed over time to incorporate critical theory.*

### Evaluation

Märchen Analysis Assignment	25%
Paper Proposal	10%
'Legendary Figure' Assignment	25%
Final Paper	40%

### The Concepts of "Tradition" and "Folk Literature"

- January 12 Glassie, Henry. 1995. "Tradition." *Journal of American Folklore* 108.430: 395-412.
- January 14 Bascom, William. 1965. "The Forms of Folklore: Prose Narratives." *Journal of American Folklore* 78.307: 3-20.
- January 19 Ben-Amos, Dan. 1976. "Analytical Categories and Ethnic Genres." *Folklore Genres*, ed. Ben-Amos. Austin: U of Texas P: 215-42.

### Märchen: History and Structure

- January 21 Zipes, Jack. 2003. "Once There Were Two Brothers Named Grimm." Introduction to *The Complete Fairy Tales of the Brothers Grimm*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. New York: Bantam. xxiii-xxxvi.
- and (read some Märchen from a random source)
- January 26 (Discussion of Tale-Types and Motifs, Propp, and Olrik) readings to come
- January 28 Darnton, Robert. 1984. "Peasants Tell Tales: The Meaning of Mother Goose." *The Great cat Massacre and Other Episodes in French Cultural History*. New York: Basic Books. 9-72.
- February 2 Holbek, Bengt. 1989. "The Language of Fairy Tales." *Nordic Folklore: Recent Studies*. Ed. Reimund Kvideland and Henning K. Sehmsdorf. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana UP. 40-62.
- February 4 Meider, Wolfgang. 1987. "Grim Variations: From Fairy Tales to Modern Anti-Fairy Tales." *Tradition and Innovation in Folk Literature*. Hanover and London: University Press of New England. 1-44.
- February 9 [Märchen Analysis Assignment Due and Discussed]

## Legend: Historical to Contemporary

- February 11 Georges, Robert A. 1971. "The General Concept of Legend: Some Assumptions to be Reexamined and Reassessed." *American Folk Legend: A Symposium*. Ed. Wayland Hand. 1-19. Berkeley: U of California P.
- February 16 Dégh, Linda. 1971. "The 'Belief Legend' in Modern Society: Form, Function, and Relationship to Other Genres." *American Folk Legend: A Symposium*. Ed. Wayland Hand. 55-68. Berkeley: U of California P.
- February 18 Mullen, Patrick B. 1972. "Modern Legend and Rumor Theory." *Journal of the Folklore Institute* 9.2-3: 95-109.
- March 2 Simpson, Jacqueline. 1983. "Beyond Etiology: Interpreting Local Legends." *Fabula* 24.3-4: 223-232.
- [Paper proposal due]
- March 4 & 9 Ellis, Bill. 2001. "What is a Legend?" and "When is a Legend?" *Aliens, Ghosts and Cults: Legends We Live*. 5-25; 58-74. Jackson: UP of Mississippi.

## First-Person Narratives: Tall Tales, Anecdotes, Testimonies

- March 11 ['Legendary Figure' Assignment Due and Presented]
- March 16 Stahl, Sandra K.D. 1977. "The Personal Narrative as Folklore." *Journal of the Folklore Institute* 14.1-2: 9-30.
- March 18 Brodie, Ian. "Einstein's Pants and Dr. X's Comps: Straddling the Line Between Gossip and Legend." *Culture & Tradition* 26 (2004): 11-25.
- March 23 Blache, Martha 1999. "The Anecdote as a Symbolic Expression of the Social and Cultural Milieu of Journalists." *Folklore* 110: 49-55.
- March 25 Wachs, Eleanor. "The Traditional Components of the Crime Victim Narrative." *Crime-Victim Stories: New York City's Urban Folklore*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana UP, 1988: 124-27.
- March 30 Marander-Eklund, Lena. "The Actors in Young Women's Childbirth Narratives." *Narrating, Doing, Experiencing: Nordic Folkloristic Perspectives*. Ed. Annikki Kaivola-Bregenhøj, Barbro Klein, and Ulf Palmfelt. *Studia Fennica Folkloristica* 16. Helsinki: Finnish Literature Society, 2006: 140-157.
- April 1 Lawless, Elaine J. 2000. "Transformative re-membering: de-scribing the unspeakable in battered women's narratives." *Southern Folklore* 57.1: 65-79.

## Summing Up

- April 6 [Final Paper Due and Presented]

## Assignments

All assignments will be discussed in class on the day they are due: given the nature of the course these are not 'presentations' in any formal sense, but the student should be prepared to provide an oral report on their work.

### Märchen Analysis Assignment      February 9      25%

The purpose of this assignment is to get you to use the tools that have been employed by folklorists for the cross-cultural study of Märchen. When it is completed, hopefully you will have acquired both an appreciation for some of the methods of folklore scholarship and concerns about the adequacy of these methods for fully discussing a piece of oral narrative.

1. Select a Märchen from any source
2. Using the Motif Index and the Tale-Type Index, find the tale's AT number
3. Find three more versions of the same tale (i.e. with the same AT number) from three (other) cultures
4. Using the description in the Aarne-Thompson Tale Type Index, compare and contrast the four versions

The *Tale Type Index* (which is on three-hour reserve in the library) provides an embryonic plot and a list of common motifs. All four of your versions have been identified as being of the same type: how are they similar? Where do they diverge? What motifs are common to all, which are absent, and which are idiosyncratic?

If you come across something that strikes you as odd (which is almost the definition of motif) and which is not listed in either the *Tale Type Index* or in the notes accompanying the versions you have found, see if you can find it in Stith Thompson's six-volume *Motif Index* (a copy of which is in the reference library).

Through comparison, you should be able to see why the editors of the collections assigned the respective versions that same AT number: but you might also make a case that how they differ is equally important to how they are similar.

5. Returning to your principal text, analyse its structure using Vladimir Propp's *Morphology of the Folk Tale*.

Does the tale correspond to what Propp says? Are there particular functions performed by particular dramatis personae that occur in a particular sequence that, when drained of the specifics of motif, are shared with virtually every tale? (Remember, Propp's specific range of narratives was the fairy tale, basically AT 300-749: anything outside that range might need to be structured differently. However, one can make a general argument of both 'functions' and 'dramatis personae' for non-fairy tales.)

6. Next, analyse its composition using Axel Olrik's "Epic Laws of Folk Narrative"

This is more how the tale is told or performed, rather than how the tale is structured. The distinction is, it could be argued, a false one, but one that can be legitimately employed for purposes of analysis.

7. Now analyse its theme according to Bengt Holbek's "The Language of Fairy Tales"

Do you see evolutions in the leading character from one stratus to another?

8. In a short (2-3 pages) write-up, summarise your findings

Take your discoveries from steps 3, 4, and 5 and put them into a larger context. What were the noticeable similarities and differences between your four versions? Were there things about the texts, when compared, that you noticed but which could not be addressed by a type and motif approach? What did the tales themselves offer in a way of insight into the specific cultural contexts in which they were collected? How

could these cultural particularities be addressed? For the structural and formal analysis, how effective are they for your particular tale?

Included in the write-up should be a reflection on the process: what you found interesting, what you found tedious, what you found pointless, what you found lacking, what you think yourself unprepared for, and any questions you need to feel resolved.

**'Legendary Figure' Assignment    March 11                    25%**

The relationship between history and legend, truth and belief, all converge when we speak of legendary figures. This assignment asks you to take a figure from popular history and analyse not only how he or she is presented within this history but also how the narrative tradition has changed over the years, the efforts at debunking the stories or confirming the historical record, the symbolic role they play in the cultural self-understanding of the group(s), and so on. There is no limitation on who the student selects for their focus, although a reasonably substantial bibliography will need to be prepared. Consult with the instructor should you need clarification.

**Anticipated length: 6-8 pages, exclusive of bibliography.**

<b>Final Assignment:</b>	<b>Proposal</b>	<b>March 2</b>	<b>10%</b>
	<b>Paper</b>	<b>April 6</b>	<b>40%</b>

This is open topic: any aspect of folk literature may be discussed. Students are expected to focus on one narrative or narrative cluster (a type, a legend-cycle, etc.) and address the context in which these narratives are circulated, among whom, and for what apparent purpose. The technical vocabulary developed over the semester should be employed wherever possible; a bibliography is required, including previous efforts at analysing either the same or parallel narrative traditions.

**Anticipated length: 10-12 pages exclusive of bibliography.**

A proposal with a preliminary bibliography and a brief (1-2 page) synopsis of the thrust of the paper will be due on the **2<sup>nd</sup> of March** (the first day back after reading week), at which point the instructor will be able to offer further direction.