

Introduction to Folklore II: Folk Genres and Analysis

2010-02-16 Oring's "Folk Narratives" and Allen's "Personal Experience Narratives"

FOLK AND FINA 113

VERSION AND TYPE

- ✘ A set of descriptors, a set of expectations for a particular item
 - + Thanksgiving dinner: a type
 - ✘ Turkey, potatoes, stuffing, carrots
 - ✘ Table decoration, family assembled, autumnal celebration
 - + Your thanksgiving 2010: a version
 - ✘ Particular guests, particular turkey, your crazy grandma's gravy, etc.
- ✘ The general vs. the specific

NARRATIVE:

- ✘ Something verbal (typically)
- ✘ An account of some event or events
- ✘ Certain things have to happen
 - + Initial situation → complicating action → resolution
- ✘ Told in a certain order
 - ✘ Some idea of a logical sequence
- ✘ Includes characters who experience / undertake those actions

TRUE OR FALSE?

- ✗ Does it matter?
- ✗ “Just entertainment”?
 - + Educational / pedagogy
 - + What about sacred narratives?

NARRATIVES DISTINGUISHED BY “TRUTH”

- ✘ Myth: sacred narratives – understood as true, absolutely so, within their performance context
- ✘ Tale: a story that is not told as true (not meant to be a record of objective, ontological events)
- ✘ Legend: opportunities for the negotiation of a truth claim

NARRATIVES DISTINGUISHED BY “TELLER”

- ✘ Myth: reserved for specialised, typically sacred practitioners
 - + Priesthood, elders, etc.
 - + Often preserved in writing, but reading similarly reserved
- ✘ Tale: (typically) reserved for recognised practitioners, those who have a local reputation for fluency
 - + Grasp of local aesthetics
 - + Command of a repertoire
- ✘ Legend: a private, interpersonal genre

NARRATIVES DISTINGUISHED BY “AUDIENCE”

- ✘ Myth: told in public, group contexts at special/sacred times
 - + The narrative informs the sense of “groupness” and its history
- ✘ Tale: (often) told in public, group contexts at times of leisure
 - + The narrative informs the sense of “groupness” through a shared fluency in the fantastic
- ✘ Legend: told in private between intimates
 - + The narrative tests the worldview and puts it into question

MYTH

- ✘ Existential narratives that inform the worldview and collective self-understanding of the group
- ✘ Episodes from the narrative are often re-enacted in ritual (rites of passage or intensification)
 - + Baptism, the Eucharist, Stations of the Cross
 - + Mid-Autumn Festival 八月十五殺韃子
- ✘ These ritual performances transcend the distance in space and time between the participants and the original actors

TALE

- ✘ Primarily a medium of entertainment (with many overtones of pedagogy, establishment / reaffirmation of worldview, etc.)
- ✘ More cross-cultural: transferable between contexts
 - + In part because of the accepted disjuncture between the storyworld and any claims to historical reality
- ✘ Much effort made at tale collection to try and establish “original”

TALE (CONT.)

- ✘ Tale-type Index
- ✘ Motif Index
- ✘ Structural analysis / morphology
- ✘ Finally, a re-examination of the tales in particular contexts
 - + Tales are told for a specific purpose, and adapted to make things new

LEGEND

- ✘ Contestable truth claims
- ✘ Made in private
- ✘ More formless than other genres
 - + Lacking a clear distinction between teller and audience
 - + Lacking a clear cut beginning middle end
 - + Left unresolved – resolution left to the performance participants
- ✘ Often simply metonymic

FIRST-PERSON NARRATIVES

- ✘ Can not (almost by definition) be “traditional”
 - + Save for when a narrator takes a narrative and puts it into the first person
- ✘ Nevertheless, use the collective grammar of storytelling, the understanding of the context and group aesthetics, and for the same purpose as “traditional” narratives
- ✘ Communication of experience

ALLEN'S "PERSONAL EXPERIENCE NARRATIVES"

- ✗ PENs are
 - + Carefully shaped and precisely positioned for rhetorical effect in their conversational settings
 - + The meaning of and PEN derives in large part from its use in a particular interactional matrix
- ✗ "Strategies for the encompassing of situations"
- ✗ Often "Second stories"
 - + One's which follow up on and in response to other stories
- ✗ Telling the "right" story expresses an understanding of the social situation

PEN (CONT.)

- ✘ Teller selects from a continuum of experience one occurrence that seems characterizable in narrative form
- ✘ Selects an experience that is appropriate to the conversation
- ✘ Correlates the role s/he plays in story according to a desire to express solidarity with, or opposition to, other speakers
- ✘ Omits and emphasises details to highlight the story's pertinence and appropriateness

PEN (CONT.)

- ✘ Shapes the story so that the meaning of the experience for the teller is clear to the audience
- ✘ Emphasis on new stories (to fixed audience groups)
- ✘ However, shared stories become the repertoire of the group
- ✘ “Kernel narratives”

GO AWAY FROM THIS PLACE

- ✘ Have a big, messy, reading-filled Reading Week
- ✘ Read “Ballads and Folksongs” by Toelken, from the *Introduction*