

**PRESERVING OUR NATIONAL HERITAGE  
THROUGH THE TEACHING OF FOLKLORE  
IN THE ENGLISH CLASSES**

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To the Graduate Council:

We are submitting herewith a thesis written by Mrs. Charlie C. Ledford entitled "Preserving Our National Heritage Through the Teaching of Folklore in the English Classes." We recommend that it be accepted for six quarter hours' credit in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts with a major in education and minor in English.

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PRESERVING OUR NATIONAL HERITAGE THROUGH THE TEACHING  
OF  
FOLKLORE IN THE ENGLISH CLASSES

A Thesis  
Presented to  
The Graduate Council  
of Austin Peay State College

In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree of  
MASTER OF ARTS

by  
(Mrs.) Charlie C. Ledford

August 1957

B. S., Austin Peay State College, 1955



### ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The writer wishes to express her appreciation to Dr. Clinton O. McKee, major adviser, to Dr. George W. Boswell, minor adviser, Dr. George C. Grise, member of Committee, and to Dean Felix G. Woodward, Director of Graduate Division, for the motivation and guidance in the preparation of this thesis.

An expression of thanks goes to Miss Lucy Howard, Librarian, for the courtesy and patience shown in securing books and materials needed in thesis writing.



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## CHAPTER I

### STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Since it is the responsibility and opportunity of teachers of English to transmit to the student his literary heritage, an appreciation for and an understanding of the values of American culture which is a part of the culture of the Western world as these values have been expressed through literature, it is imperative that he be given every phase of this culture and not merely be given half-truths. It is our duty and our privilege to tell him the best that has been thought, and that best is to be found in the literary heritage of Western culture.

The small amount and often the complete absence of folk literature in the English classes of the senior high school create a serious problem in vitalizing to students their national heritage and culture. In order to have a complete, well-rounded representation of material for the teaching of literature, it is recognized that no part should be omitted from the whole.

In a changing society which is becoming more complex all the time, it is essential that this conspicuous omission of folk literature from the English courses be rectified in order to make pertinent to the student the values of past cultures which his heritage contains. Since there is a more genuine awareness at this time toward the necessity for curriculum changes to meet the



changing society, it seems that the time is ripe to correct this problem through the inclusion of more folk literature in the English courses.

## I. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

It is assumed that if students of the senior high school are to become efficient members of a democratic society in this highly inter-related world and be well-grounded in their cultural heritage, a more complete and adequate course of literature should be given to them.

The purpose of the study is (1) to show the value of folk literature as an additional avenue in which to transmit the cultural heritage; (2) to assemble some of the vast amount of folklore material which is available; (3) to arrange and organize this material with methods suggested for its application in the English courses of literature; and (4) to make it available for teaching purposes.

## II. ASSUMPTIONS

The transmitting or passing on the culture of a generation to the succeeding one is a custom as old as the human race; it demands even more emphasis when society is progressing at a rapid pace. With this emphasis comes a challenge to seek and find the best to promote and expedite the principles involved.

The assumptions then are (1) that a need exists to transmit

better the cultural heritage; (2) that this need cannot be met with any part of the whole missing from literature; (3) that folk literature is one of the parts missing from literature; (4) that folk literature has a peculiar fitness to the transmitting of the cultural heritage; (5) that folk literature is available in unlimited amounts; (6) that the absence of its use in the past had led to the present need; (7) that folklore is a means of adding significance to the immediate environment of the student, of interpreting the national and local cultures, and of setting forth language in its living growth among the students themselves; (8) that education is influenced by the dominant institutions and beliefs of a culture, and that education in turns affects that culture; (9) that the textbooks for senior high school literature courses should be revised to meet a changing, complex society; and (10) that the curriculum should include revised texts in which folk literature is prominently employed.

### III. DEFINITIONS OF TERMS

In order to make for clearness and complete understanding in this study, significant terms are defined as follows:

Folklore. There are many different definitions which have been given to this word, but in the end they all fairly well agree. Folklore includes all the customs, beliefs, stories, traditions, proverbs, songs, folkways and institutions, and magical practices which mankind has practiced during the ages. Today we can read

about what these people of long ago believed and about the stories they told their children. People explained in their folklore everything they saw around them.

Myths. Myths are one of the earliest kinds of folk literature. They explain things like the origin of life, death, and the great forces of nature and endless time. The heroes and heroines of myth are usually gods and goddesses who are much like people. Closely allied to myths are fables, which were invented to teach people how they should live.

Legends. The legend also teaches, but it is closer to the life we know and is sometimes partly true. It may tell about people who really lived and things that really happened. In many legends human beings and supernatural creatures live together in the same world.

Ballads. A short poem, the ballad tells a story of some heroic deed, romance, or event in history or legend which appealed to the common people. Originally, ballads were meant to be sung; they often contain a chorus or repeat certain lines of a refrain. Under ballads will be treated the ballad song, the song ballad, and the traditional ballad.

Fairy Tales. Most fairy tales were invented to teach as well as to amuse, as good is often rewarded and evil is punished. Magic and enchantment make the fairy tale alluring to all children



of all lands.<sup>1</sup>

Folk Epics. With reason it may be said that the national folk epic of a country is not only formed by the country, it is the country and its people and provides the best possible understanding of them. The folk epic captures in every facet the geography—controlled folkways of an entire people. The epic, as Bowra says, "is essentially narrative and is nearly always remarkable for its objective character."<sup>2</sup>

Folk Drama. There are two kinds of what has been called with justification "folk drama"—that which is anonymous, having been set in motion by someone long ago but added to traditionally so that it is a folk production in the same sense as is a tale or song; and the plays using folk material, typified by those included in Carolina Folk-Plays. Both types will be found in this study.<sup>3</sup>

Folk Song. This term covers such a wide variety of material that it will be hard to define clearly. The word "song" according to Webster's Dictionary means, "a musical composition, a lyrical poem or ballad, any poetical strain, poem, notes of birds, etc."

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<sup>1</sup>"Folklore," The World Book Encyclopedia (1949 ed.), VI, 2649-2650.

<sup>2</sup>C. M. Bowra, Heroic Poetry (London: Macmillan and Company, Ltd, 1952), p. 4.

<sup>3</sup>George Boswell and J. Russell Reaver, "Fundamentals of Folk Literature" (unpublished book), p. 49.

As it will be used in this study, it will include the love song, spiritual song, laments, race songs, children's songs, tall tales in song, work songs, chanteys, railroad, cowboy and other frontier songs. In fact, any song found in folk material will be used.

Miscellaneous. Included under this heading will be such materials as proverbs, riddles, superstitions, cures or remedies, folk naming, dialects, folk verse, tales, and beliefs.

Culture. E. B. Taylor (1832-1917), an English anthropologist, defined culture as "that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society." In psychological words, culture consists of commonly accepted and expected ideas, attitudes, values, and habits of individuals which they learned in connection with social living.<sup>4</sup>

Cultural Heritage. This term embraces all that the human race has achieved during its long stay on the earth. It includes knowledge, tools, institutions, customs, ideals, and other things which affect all human beings and their ways of living. Many scientists have pointed out that matter and men remain the same,

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<sup>4</sup>E. B. Taylor, Primitive Culture, as stated in Kimbal Young, Sociology: A Study of Society and Culture (New York: American Book Company, 1949), p. 31.



so that it is cultural heritage which is the changing factor, the dynamic factor, in progress.<sup>5</sup>

#### IV. SURVEY OF RELATED MATERIALS

Vital to any study in the field of research is the survey of materials which relate to the study. This study not only reveals what has been done, but further guides the way as to what needs to be done.

That little had been done in the field of folk literature for the use in the high school was evidenced by letters which are in the possession of the writer. In response to a letter to the National Council of the Teachers of English, a reply came from the Executive Secretary, J. N. Hook, which said:

The National Council has a Committee on the Study of Folklore in the senior high school. It is probable that the Chairman of that Committee can be of some assistance to you in your study. He is Dean Hector Lee, Chico State College, Chico, California. Another person, who is not a member of that Committee, but who can probably supply you with useful information, is Mrs. Elizabeth Pilant, Ball State Teachers College, Muncie, Indiana.

Both of these people were communicated with and from Mrs. Pilant was received a substantial amount of material, but little was of use for senior high school as most of it was grade material.

The letter from Dean Lee was full and gave in detail the work of the Committee up to the time it was written, February 20,

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<sup>5</sup>Joseph Irvin Arnold, Challenges to American Youth (New York: Row, Peterson and Company, 1949), pp. 72-73.



1956. In part the letter said:

The NCTE Committee on the Use of Folklore in the Schools hasn't progressed far enough to have very specific or helpful material to put in your hands at this time. I am enclosing an outline of the work of the Committee up to this point, and we are now receiving helpful responses from the consultants all over the country. Their contributions have not yet been compiled, but if you will keep in touch with me, I shall be glad to forward all the information we get as it develops.

Others have seen the need for folk literature in use for the high school. Dr. George Boswell of Austin Peay State College, Clarksville, Tennessee, wrote in his unpublished book on folk literature for college students this:

There is no subject in high school, not even science, in which folklore can never be profitably used; but the fields to which it apparently can make the greatest contributions are English and history. Teachers in most fields, notably the humanities, ignore a very useful teaching device when they fail to enrich their subject-matter instruction by employment of related folklore materials.<sup>6</sup>

The Encyclopedia of Educational Research<sup>7</sup> does not mention even the words "folklore" or "folk literature" or indicate in any way that any study has been done in this field.

#### V. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

There are limitations in all fields of endeavor, and this holds true in research as well as in any other work. Such limitations provide the researcher with a tool or brake to help

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<sup>6</sup>Op. cit., p. 129.

<sup>7</sup>Walter S. Monroe, Encyclopedia of Educational Research (New York: Macmillan Company, 1950).

him keep within the area of the study set out to do.

This study is limited in scope (1) to materials to be used in the tenth, eleventh, and twelfth grades of the senior high school; (2) to the endeavor of relating the material primarily to the English courses; and (3) in a secondary manner of relating the materials to history and other subjects.

## VI. IMPORTANCE OF THE STUDY

As a means for building an understanding of the cultural heritage of America in terms of the contributions and backgrounds of her people, folk literature, properly defined and selected for the purpose, would seem to deserve a central place in the curriculum. Only a conception of literature as including everything effectively written--without regard to time or place of origin--that has real meaning for present-day life, is likely to be broad enough to have the range of appeal and adaptability that is indispensable in serving students of widely different backgrounds, abilities, and maturity levels in reading.

To take the vast amount of folk literature that is available and carefully to arrange it into organized, purposeful methods suitable for teaching purposes in the English courses will mean an enrichment of literature to further the transmitting of the cultural heritage of not only the native culture of the student but that of all western culture of which American culture is a part. Besides transmitting the cultural heritage, folk literature



would provide enjoyment, life-like experiences and understandings of the ambitions and desires of other races, and tend to bring the student into a closer relationship with all the peoples of the world.

What person, child or adult, does not enjoy a fairy story or a tall tale or thrill to the adventures of a legend or epic which relates the events and deeds of the brave? Many reading experiences, like other experiences, are for social use and enjoyment. Literature is valuable for social use and enjoyment. Literature is valuable only as it is a part of life with others. Literature is written experience, and through reading it the experiences of people who have lived in all parts of the world for thousands of years can be shared by the reader and his inheritance can be from what they have learned. In view of the importance of these facts it becomes urgent that folk literature contribute its share to the vicarious reading experiences of the student in the senior high school.

The need for enriching the curriculum of the English courses with folk literature, providing the student with a larger and fuller reading matter, not only for more knowledge but for pleasure as well, transmitting the cultural heritage in a more meaningful manner, and vitalizing all other courses in the senior high school with added materials recommends the importance of this study.



## VII. METHODS OF PROCEDURES

After the overall problem has been determined, the methods of gathering and handling the data are considered. Since little or no research has been done in this field, the only available method to follow is the general procedures set forth for research workers.

Careful reading was done in books on research as to the gathering of data and proper procedures of its use. Letters were written to the various chairmen who had been chosen by the National Council of Teachers of English to investigate the compiling of folk literature and making it available to the teachers of English in the senior high school. And many theses were read which were on file in the library of Austin Peay State College.

Further preparation for this study was the enrolling in courses of Educational Research and Curriculum Laboratory in the Education department, and courses in world and folk literature in the English department of Austin Peay State College. To add to this preparation was the experience of twenty years of continual teaching of literature in the senior high school, which has led to the problem in the first place.

After the collection of data of folk material, then many textbooks of literature and courses of study for the teaching of literature in high school were examined to determine where the

material could best be inserted and how it might be utilized.

Materials were obtained through the reading of books in folk literature in the library of Austin Peay State College, from the writer's own personal library, from the journal of the American Folklore Society, and from a few writers who have done research in this general field.

A tentative outline was obtained from Hector Lee, Chairman of the National Council of Teachers of English Committee on the study of Folklore in the high schools, and a study made of its unpublished recommendations as to procedures and aims.

After this preparation it was determined that the organization of the material could best be facilitated through the divisions into sections and come under the heads of (1) a chapter in World literature; (2) a chapter in American literature; and (3) a chapter in English literature.

#### VIII. ORGANIZATION OF THE STUDY

Experience and knowledge of the psychology of thinking show that it is a very valuable thing and strictly in accord with the way the normal mind insists upon working to write just at this point what the big centers of discussion will be in the final report.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>Frederick Lamson Whitney, The Elements of Research (New York: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1950), p. 126.

The study is divided into five chapters. Chapters II, III, and IV contain the source of the data, the organization of the data, and the application of the data to the study. Conclusions and recommendations as to the revision of textbooks and curriculum in the English courses of the senior high school are in Chapter V. Following this chapter is the bibliography.



## CHAPTER II

### WORLD LITERATURE RELIVES WITH FOLKLORE

One educator has said that world literature is essential for "world survival." If that be true those responsible for courses in the secondary school curriculum had better be made aware, for many secondary schools have no provision whatsoever for the presentation of world literature as a course. Since the need for understanding peoples and cultures other than one's own is recognized, it is plain that the neglect of world literature in the majority of high schools is a matter for genuine concern. Examination of courses of study in English reveal that literature beyond the elementary and intermediate grades is limited very largely to that of England.

#### I. WORLD LITERATURE DEFINED

Albert Guerard defines it in these terms in his book

Preface to World Literature. He says:

World Literature begins, not in the graduate school, but in the nursery. Our children are told immemorial tales, the fairy lore of all ages and climes. They do not object to the Grimm Brothers because they were Germans, to Charles Perrault because he was French, to Hans Christian Anderson because he was a Dane. The same blissful openness of heart and mind still prevails when they graduate from nursery. The Swiss Family Robinson, Heidi, Pinocchio, are great favorites, although they were not born under the Stars and Stripes. Adolescent America finds delight in The Three Musketeers and Monte Cristo, by that lusty dark giant among storytellers, Alexander Dumas; and youngsters still enjoy



Jules Verne, even though many of his anticipations are now back numbers.

The common man retains this freedom from prejudice until he is taught better--I mean until he is taught worse. Adults are quite unconscious of national frontiers in the literary field. If there be but one book in the lone cabin, it will be the Book, the Bible, with its hoard of strange beauty as well as divine wisdom, a whole library of incomparable range within the covers of a single volume; and that book came to us down the ages through men who spoke alien tongues and lived under alien skies.

As our knowledge of literature expands, we realize more clearly that the best which has been thought and said in the world is not limited to our own bewildered generation, and to our terse and colorful American language. We become aware, not only of the best sellers of today, but of those perennial good-sellers which are called the classics. Some day Homer swims into our ken; and Dante's Divine Comedy, and Goethe's Faust, and Tolstoy's War and Peace. Ignore these summits of human achievement, or grant them grudgingly a subordinate place, and you will stunt and warp the growth of your mind.

From these plain facts, a plain conclusion must be drawn. Literature should be taught as Literature in English, not as English Literature. A selection there must be; but the basis of our selection should be excellence. It is far more important for us to know world masterpieces than to clutter up our minds with the names of local mediocrities. In the self-education which should continue throughout adult life, it would be wise to be guided by the same rule: let us read and enjoy the best, wherever the best may be found.<sup>1</sup>

Since world literature is a "must" for secondary students, so another requisite is the inclusion of folklore in the world literature courses. That folklore can enliven, inform, and make the course more meaningful is shown by what follows.

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<sup>1</sup>Albert Guerard, Preface to World Literature (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1940), pp. 4-5.

## II. MYTHOLOGY AND FOLKLORE

Plato wanted the future citizens of his ideal republic to begin their literary education with the telling of myths rather than with mere facts or rational teachings. This plan of the great philosopher of education mirrors the life of Greece as it then was, for there too the education of man began with the telling of myths, just as later; in the medieval Christian era, Bible stories and legends of the saints were the basis of all education.

Thus the entire humanistic education of the Greeks was welded into unity through the majesty and spiritual force which myths exerted on all stages of the inner development of the individual. The fact that the Greek people were destined to be the nation of philosophers and the creators of western culture was certainly connected with their wealth of heroic legends and the overwhelming amount of their mythical speculation about the world, gods, and men. Realizing this fact, we want to reveal this world not only to the enraptured eyes of children but also to the more deeply searching vision of the young student, who is driven to probe for the universal significance of these tales beneath their poetic beauty.

More about the Greek myths. Plato called the mythical period of Greek poetry the flowering time of his people. In a certain sense this strength has never left the Greeks. "You



Greeks are always children; there is no such thing as an old Greek," said an Egyptian priest, the representative of an age-old civilization, to Solon, the sage of Athens, who came to Egypt by ship to see the wonders of the land of the Nile. These words of Plato's are quoted from the Timaeus, the work of his old age, and Plato himself bears surpassing witness to the inexhaustible impulse of the Greeks to create myths in an era (the fourth century B. C.) in which the mythical tradition seemed to be dying off everywhere else. In his dialogues he invented a new kind of myth which blends old mythical elements of symbolic force with new philosophical ideas. Even Aristotle, Plato's greatest pupil, the master of pure reason, once said: "The friend of wisdom ("philosophos") is also a friend of the myth ("philomythas")." That is how the most profound spirits among the Greeks thought at the zenith of their civilization. In a letter to an intimate friend this same Aristotle made a more personal confession. He wrote: "The lonelier I am, the more of a recluse I become, the greater is my love for myths."<sup>2</sup>

The publishers, Thomas Y. Crowell Company, of Bulfinch's Mythology place it along with some of the world's great classics, such as Pilgrim's Progress, Gulliver's Travels, The Arabian Nights, Robinson Crusoe, and five or six other productions of world-wide renown. They say that it is a work with which everyone must claim

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<sup>2</sup>Gustav Schwab, Gods and Heroes (New York: Pantheon Book Inc., 1946), p. 27.

some acquaintance before his education can be called really complete. Many readers of the present day will probably recall coming in contact with the work as a child, yet to the majority of this great circle of readers and students the writer Bulfinch has no significance. This is due, of course, to the fact that the curricula have not included folklore of which mythology is a part in the present day. Another fact which is worthy of mention is the absence of foreign language by today's students, and here again students have been missing some of the old-world background which is rich in their national heritage. Bulfinch says in the Preface of his book that Mythology is the handmaid of literature and literature is one of the best allies of virtue and promoters of happiness. He continues:

Without a knowledge of mythology much of the elegant literature of our own language cannot be understood and appreciated. When Byron calls Rome "the Niobe of Nations," or says of Venice, "She looks a Sea-Cybele fresh from the ocean," he calls up to the mind of one familiar with our subject, illustrations more vivid and striking than the pencil could furnish, but which are lost to the reader ignorant of mythology. Milton abounds in similar allusions. The short poem "Comus" contains more than thirty such, and the ode "On the Morning of the Nativity" half as many. Through "Paradise Lost" they are scattered profusely. This is one reason why we often hear persons by no means illiterate say that they cannot enjoy Milton. But were these persons to add to their more solid acquirements the easy learning of mythology, much of the poetry of Milton which has appeared to them "harsh and crabbed" would be found "musical as Apollo's lute." Take the citations of any twenty-five poets and they will show how general has been the practice of borrowing illustrations from mythology.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>Thomas Bulfinch, Bulfinch's Mythology (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1947), p. v.



Mythology the answer to students' questions. Why is a strong man called a "Hercules"? Why should a handsome young man be called an "Apollo," or a beautiful woman a "Venus"? What is a "titanic" struggle, "martial" music, a "jovial" mood? Why was quicksilver called "mercury"? How did a "volcano" come to acquire its name? Why do we call certain grains "cereals"? Why is "Cupid" on Valentine cards? How did the ancients believe that the world began? How did people live and what did they believe about life? These questions and many more puzzle students, and they truly cannot find the answers satisfactorily in their contemporary reading.

Another big question, you, the reader, might ask is how does mythology, which answers these questions, fit into this present-day world? Mythology was bound up with gods and goddesses which were very real to believers. For us today they live in the everyday words that we have derived from their names, in the many allusions to them and their exploits found in our own literature, and in paintings and other works of art for which they were models.<sup>4</sup>

Mythology and religion. Boswell and Reaver in their book bring out this interesting point:

What is not so generally recognized is that mythology

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<sup>4</sup>Henry I. Christ, Myths and Folklore (New York: Oxford Book Company, 1952), p. 2.

was the religion of the Greeks, a nonethical religion to be sure, in which the immortal gods anthropomorphized themselves like licentious men. It was to fill the ethical gap in Greek religion that Socratic philosophy was developed. Indeed there can be no mythology where religion is not involved. Stories of origins apart from religion are not myths but ordinary folktales.<sup>5</sup>

Mythology and nature in the sky. "Much of the knowledge and thought of the earliest astronomers was told not in the language of science but of mythology," writes Peter Lum in his book which treats of the stars and the myths concerning them. It was because the legend of the stars, the star lore and the old beliefs of mankind about the stars--beliefs odd to us but very real to our predecessors, and often extremely apt, imaginative and well thought out--are so little known that he wrote the book. He had this to say:

The stars that move across the sky night after night mean little to us now, for we no longer date our year, plant our crops and observe our festivals in accordance with the rising of certain stars as was the custom of our ancestors. Astronomical figures of distances and light years and proper motions are so great that the mind can scarcely understand them. There is no sense of nearness and of the stars' direct participation in human life such as there once was. We cannot think, as did the ancient Chinese astronomers, that it was the rising of Arcturus which brought springtime or, believe with the Egyptians of long ago that the power of Sirius caused the Nile to overflow.

Yet the star lore accumulated by those earlier stargazers does help to bring the stars to life. It can carry us for a moment back across the centuries to a day when mankind was

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<sup>5</sup>George W. Boswell and J. Russell Reaver, "Fundamentals of Folk Literature" (unpublished book), pp. 58-59.



still young. It can make the constellations into real figures, and the stars into patterns full of meaning. The apparently senseless jumble of bright stars can become a picture book in which to read the stories of long ago.

When we find the stars described as fragments of the dead sun, it is intended not so much as poetic imagery but as a simple statement of the fact that the sun must set before the less brilliant lights of the stars appear. When we are told that the moon has twenty-eight wives among the constellations and only spends one night with each of these in turn, we know that they are none other than the twenty-eight constellations through which our satellite travels in the space of a month and in each of which it remains a single night.

From the stories of the stars it is thus possible to learn much of the thoughts and the myths and the religion of early man. But the charm of the stories lies in themselves. It adds enormously to the interest of the stars if one knows something of these star myths of long ago, of what men of early civilization thought when they looked at the strange and shining heavens, and how they interpreted what they saw.<sup>6</sup>

One has only to read the tale of "Phaethon and Apollo" to know how the ancients interpreted nature as to the mountains, deserts, and intense heat within the earth, and the tale of "Proserpine and Pluto" to understand their meaning of the seasons. To discover how the many ills that beset mankind came about according to mythology, one can read "Pandora and Her Treasure Chest" which explains all.

The Norsemen who lived in an entirely different climate from the Greeks and Romans had their own interpretation of nature, and because of their environment, it is not surprising

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<sup>6</sup>Peter Lum, The Stars in Our Heaven (New York: Pantheon Books Inc., 1948), pp. 10-11.

that their mythology is filled with references to "mist," "cold," and "ice." The Norsemen, like the other races, had their own gods, too, and it is from their names come the English words, "Tuesday," "Wednesday," "Thursday," and "Friday."

Asgard is the name of the abode of the Norse gods and access to it is gained only by crossing the bridge Bifrost (the rainbow). The description of the palaces there would certainly delight any student as well as to inform him of the ways and customs of this great race of people to the far north of him. Oden is frequently called Alfadur (All-father), but this name is sometimes used in a way that shows the Scandinavians had an idea of a deity superior to Oden, uncreated and eternal.

Myths of other races and climes. Turning from the myths of the peoples of Europe, one finds that the Egyptians' deities and oracles are equally as interesting and entertaining. The teachings of Pythagoras, who, though not an Egyptian, spent much time in Egypt and was instructed by the priests in all their learning, are the basis for our numbers. Pythagoras considered numbers as the essence and principles of all things, and attributed to them a real and distinct existence. The "Monad" or "unit" he regarded as the source of all numbers.

As the numbers proceed from the Monad, so Pythagoras regarded the pure and simple essence of the Deity as the source of all the forms of nature. Gods, demons, and heroes are emanations of the Supreme, and there is a fourth emanation, the



human soul. This is immortal, and when freed from the fetters of the body passes to the habitation of the dead, where it remains till it returns to the world, to dwell in some other human or animal body, and at last, when sufficiently purified, it returns to the source from which it proceeded. This doctrine of the transmigration of souls (Metempsychosis), which was originally Egyptian and connected with the doctrine of reward and punishment of human actions, was the chief cause why the Pythagoreans killed no animals.

Shakespeare, in the "Merchant of Venice," makes Gratiano allude to the Metempsychosis, when he says to Shylock:

Thou almost mak'st me waver in my faith,  
To hold opinion with Pythagoras,  
That Souls of animals infuse themselves  
Into the trunks of men; thy currish spirit  
Governed a wolf; who hanged for human slaughter  
Infused his soul in thee; for thy desires  
Are wolfish, bloody, starved and ravenous.

The relation of the notes of the musical scale to numbers, whereby harmony results from vibrations in equal times, and discord from the reverse, led Pythagoras to apply the word "harmony" to the visible creation, meaning by it the just adaptation of parts to each other. This is the idea which Dryden expresses in the beginning of his "Song for St. Cecilia's Day":

From harmony, from heavenly harmony  
This everlasting frame began;  
From harmony to harmony  
Through all the compass of the notes it ran,  
The Diapason closing full in Man.

In the centre of the Universe (he taught) there was a central fire, the principle of life. The central fire was surrounded by the earth, the moon, the sun, and the five planets. The distances of the various heavenly bodies from one another were conceived to correspond to the proportions of the musical scale. The heavenly bodies, with the gods who inhabited them, were supposed to perform a choral dance round the central fire, "not without song." It is this doctrine which Shakespeare alludes to when he makes Lorenzo teach astronomy to Jessica in this fashion:

Look, Jessica, see how the floor of heaven  
Is thick inlaid with patines of bright gold!  
There's not the smallest orb that thou behold'st  
But in his motion like an angel sings,  
Still quiring to the young-eyed cherubim;  
Such harmony is in immortal souls!  
But whilst this muddy vesture of decay  
Doth grossly close it in we cannot hear it.

—Merchant of Venice

The spheres were conceived to be crystalline or glossy fabrics arranged over one another like a nest of bowls reversed. In the substance of each sphere one or more of the heavenly bodies was supposed to be fixed, so as to move with it. As the spheres are transparent we look through them and see the heavenly bodies which they contain and carry round with them. But as these spheres cannot move on one another without friction, a sound is thereby produced which is of exquisite harmony, too fine for mortal ears to recognize.



Milton, in his "Hymn on the Nativity," thus alludes to the music of the spheres:

Ring out, ye crystal spheres!  
 Once bless our human ears  
 (If ye have power to charm our senses so);  
 And let your silver chime  
 Move in melodious time,  
 And let the base of Heaven's deep organ blow;  
 And with your ninefold harmony  
 Make up full concert with the angelic symphony.

Pythagoras is said to have invented the lyre. Our own poet Longfellow, in "Verses to a Child," thus relates the story:

As great Pythagoras of yore,  
 Standing beside the blacksmith's door,  
 And hearing the hammers as they smote  
 The anvils with a different note,  
 Stole from the varying tones that hung  
 Vibrant on every iron tongue,  
 The secret of the sounding wire,  
 And formed the seven-chorded lyre.

The amount of space just devoted to Pythagoras and the quotes from various writers who had allusions to him in their writing was done for an illustration to show how essential it is that a student be taught mythology in order to understand the literature which is a part of his work. Without knowledge of Pythagoras, the allusions used in the quotes would be meaningless.

Returning now to Egyptian mythology, one can find further interest in the myth of "Sybaris and Crotona," of "Asiris and Isis," and the many oracles. The "Oracle of Trophonius," "Oracle of Aesculapius," and the "Oracle of Apis" are a few to be mentioned.

In Eastern mythology, our knowledge of the Persians is principally derived from Zendavesta, or sacred books of that people.

Zoroaster was the founder of their religion, or rather the reformer of the religion which preceded him. The time when he lived is doubtful, but it is certain that his system became the dominant religion of Western Asia from the time of Cyrus (550 B. C.) to the conquest of Persia by Alexander the Great.

The religion of the Hindus is professedly founded on the Vedas. To these books of their scripture they attach the greatest sanctity, and state that Brahma himself composed them at the creation. But the present arrangement of the Vedas is attributed to the sage, Vyasa, about five thousand years ago. Vishnu occupies the second place in the triad of the Hindus, and is the personification of the preserving principle. Siva is the third person of the Hindu triad. He is the personification of the destroying principle.

The division of the Hindus into classes or castes, with fixed occupations, existed from the earliest times. Modern geographies tell of the castes of the people of the Orient but never has the writer noted that there was an explanation for such. Buddha, whom the Vedas represent as a delusive incarnation of Vishnu, is said by his followers to have been a mortal sage, whose name was Gautama, called also by the complimentary epithets of Sakyasinha, the Lion, and Buddha, the Sage.

In the several Lamas of Tibet, China, and other countries where Buddhism prevails, these individuals have gradually assumed the character of reappearances of Buddha himself. Folklore is rich



in tales of the Lamas, their works and beliefs. Prester John, supposedly a Lama or spiritual chief among the Tartars, was the occasion of several unsuccessful missions in search of him, but the small communities of Nestorian Christians, which they did find, served to keep up the belief in Europe that such a personage did exist somewhere in the East. At last in the fifteenth century, a Portuguese traveller, Pedro Cavilham, happening to hear that there was a Christian prince in the country of the Abessines (Abyssinia), not far from the Red Sea, concluded that this must be the true Prester John. He accordingly went there, and penetrated to the court of the king, whom he calls Negus. Milton alludes to him in "Paradise Lost," Book XI, where describing Adam's vision of his descendants in their various nations and cities, scattered over the face of the earth, he says:

...Nor did his eyes not ken  
Th' empire of Negus, to his utmost part,  
Ercoco, and the less maritime kings,  
Mombaza, and Quilva and Melind.

There are myths from the people who inhabit the islands in the Pacific, and the myths of the people of South America, Mexico, and our own North America and her earliest inhabitants, the Indians. One finds myths concerning the gods, nymphs, monsters of the seas, animals of the land and of the heavens. Even in the Bible one finds a wealth of folklore, especially in the Old Testament. One of the best sources of Bible folklore is a book by Sir James George Frazer, Folklore of the Old Testament. In our

own age myths are still being formed, though often one is unconscious of it. When a little boy ran out to play, shouting,

Sun a-calling, wind a-calling;  
Coming, Wind! Coming Sun!

the little, happy boy was simply responding to the primitive, perennial instinct that moved him to song! This is what the learned called animism, but it was really myth in its genesis.

Norton and Rushton in their book on myths explain why this popular body of literature existed for so many thousands of years and then came to be read no longer. They say:

Myths, by the very vitality of their inherent truth and beauty survived and became the best of the read lore. Then the mystery that inspired and clothed the old tales evaporated under the literal sunlight of science, and in the pride of our new knowledge we discarded them as mere superstitions and super cargo. What part, we ask, can they take in the pursuit of science, theatrical or applied, in economics, or in the currently fashionable "social" studies?

Oddly enough, this question is not new. It has been asked in one form or another for hundreds of years. And the answer is always the same, for there is only one. The old myth, even the Nature myth, is primarily concerned with human life—with those eternal aspects of it that will elude scientific scrutiny for ever and baffle us with their mystery. Further, it is concerned with human life in a competent way. The perennial issue between youth and age, between radical and conservative, with all its confusion of folly and wisdom, of suffering and defect, of wrong and right on both sides is grandly intrinsic in the story of Prometheus.

In Ulysses Tennyson reads the unquenchable and tragic thirst of the human soul for knowledge, and in Prometheus Shelley sees the agony of genius confined in a conventional world, he sees in fact, his own agony. This habit or instinct of a man steeped in ancient myths to identify his own plight or career with a mythical instance is not uncommon. Milton, composing in his blindness, in one of his grandest passages sees in his own fate the common fate



of ancient poets, blind Homer and others more mythical; and in this sense of community with them he is raised to highest utterance:

Nor sometimes forget  
Those other two equalled with me in fate,  
So were I equalled with them in renown,  
Blind Thamyras and blind Maeonides,  
And Teresias and Phineus, prophets old.  
Then feed on thoughts that voluntary move  
Harmonious numbers.

A story that embodies the composite telling by thousands from generation to generation must gather unto itself a heavy freight of truth refined from the many minds that it has touched. The fiction thus becomes not individual, but communal to a group, to a nation, to the entire world; and though it may vary--must vary--in its meaning to various poets and listeners, it contains an essential and constant soul of truth that is common to all who hear or repeat it.<sup>7</sup>

The folklore found in the myths would truly enrich a course in world literature and it would through answering the questions of students help to explain the many allusions found in their reading and open up to the students an entire body of literature yet unknown to them. Of course, not all worthwhile that has been written in the past could be included in one book, but a unit on myths well taught would inspire them to read more on their own and the knowledge acquired would form a background of understanding of their national heritage.

Since myths were the oldest form of folklore and the least known by present-day students because of no provision in the curriculum for its presentation, this lengthy material was

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<sup>7</sup>Dan S. Norton and Peter Rushton, Classical Myths in English Literature (New York: Rinehart and Company, 1952), pp. 5-6.

presented. Suggestions for the teaching of myths and references of material will be found in Chapter V.

### III. LEGENDS DIFFER FROM MYTHS

Originally, the legend meant something to be read at religious services or at meals, usually a saint or martyr's life--thus the Golden Legend of Jacobus de Varagine, a collection of saints' lives. Legend has since come to be used for a narrative supposedly based on fact, with an intermixture of traditional materials, told about a person, place or incident. The line between myth and legend is often vague; the myth has its principal actors the gods, and as its purpose explanation. Thus the Hercules stories may be considered to some extent myth (he is semidivine, he made the Pillars of Hercules) or as legend (Hercules was a lord living at Tiryns). The legend is told as true; the myth's veracity is based on the belief of its hearers in the gods who are its characters.<sup>8</sup>

Legends and traditions may be grouped under the following headings: place legends, miracle stories, buried treasure legends, stories of natural wonders or extraordinary places, migration legends, stories of ghosts, witches, devils, vampires, ogres, and

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<sup>8</sup>Maria Leach (ed.), Dictionary of Folklore, Mythology, and Legend (New York: Funk and Wagnalls Company, 1949), I, 612.



haunted houses, accounts of transformation and supernatural appearances, and accounts of mythical animals.<sup>9</sup>

Legends are very numerous, and are to be found in the literature of many peoples. Since the literature which is read in the courses of the modern school contains many allusions to these many legends, it seems essential that the student be familiar with them. Too, the legends handed down to us through generations contain much folklore and prove delightful and entertaining reading for the student. These legends are part and parcel of all the culture of the world and through their reading the student incorporates this culture into his own.

Perhaps one of the best known of all the ancient legends is The Thousand and One Nights or The Arabian Nights' Entertainment. It was more than two hundred years ago that Galland, the French Orientalist, first discovered these legends and presented to the Western World this enchanting collection of Eastern tales. Since then it has been accepted as one of the most fascinating examples of the story-telling art. The familiar phrase "like a page from The Arabian Nights" has come to be the ultimate in praise of romance and adventure fiction.

Edward William Lane gives the following account of these stories:

Of the origin of the Arabian Nights we know little. Its

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<sup>9</sup>Levette J. Davidson, A Guide to American Folklore (Denver: The University of Denver Press, 1951), p. 15.

stories were for hundreds of years handed down orally from generation to generation by the story-tellers of the Arabs, the Egyptians, the Persians, and other Mohammedan peoples. The nucleus of the collection probably represents medieval Cairo in the days of its Memook Sultans and the golden age of the Khaleefehs of Baghdad from the eighth to the tenth centuries A. D. Gradually the collection was increased and systematized until it found its framework—the story of the jealous King Shahriyar who marries a new wife each evening and puts her to death in the morning, until the lovely Shahrazad wins a reprieve for a thousand and one nights by fascinating the King with her stories.<sup>10</sup>

#### IV. MYTH OR LEGEND

In the autumn of 1952, Donald Boyd, Chief Assistant in the Talks Department of the British Broadcasting Company, had the idea of a series of talks in which various speakers were to examine well-known stories like that of the Golden Bough (which was used by Sir James Frazer as the title of his great anthropological work), or Minos and the Mintaur, or King Arthur, and were to decide, in the light of modern historical and archaeological knowledge, whether there was any truth in them.

The theme of the twelve talks is the theme set out by Donald Boyd, and the series began in these words:

It makes a good story but—is it true? For anyone who wants a good story and an answer to that tiresome little question which threatens to spoil the whole effect...this ...is exactly the right prescription.... The difference between myth and legend, between invention and fancy on

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<sup>10</sup>Edward William Lane, The Arabian Nights Entertainments or The Thousand and One Nights (New York: Tudor Publishing Company, 1927), p. v.



one hand and some kind of history on the other, is the theme of this new series of talks.<sup>11</sup>

The first talk in the series, on "Lyonesse," attempted to explain the difference between myth and legend, as the terms are used by historians, archaeologists and students of folk-tale. The myth is an invented story, the legend, on the other hand, has a basis of history, however confused and obscured by later additions. The writers and speakers of these talks were throughout asking themselves these questions about the place or subject given to them as a topic: Is it true? Is it false? in a word, myth or legend?

Some of the other themes besides the ones already mentioned were "Tara," "The Flood," "The City of Troy," "Tristan and Isolt," "The Druids and Stonehenge," "The 'Lost Continent' of Atlantis," and "Nemi and the Golden Bough." Any one or all of these would provide interesting research for high school students in a unit on folklore and the inclusion of such material would enrich courses in world literature.

The conclusion at the end of the series ran like this:

So, not for the first time, fiction has led us to fact, and fact to wide general conclusions concerning man, his ways of life and his beliefs. These in turn desire and have received critical scrutiny; Frazer's conclusions and his methods alike have been closely examined and in parts rejected by later researchers. But the mass of authenticated facts remains, and no one who examines them aright can well

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<sup>11</sup>G. E. Daniel and others, Myth or Legend (The Macmillan Company, 1956), pp. 5-6.

fail to make his way to some clearer and truer ideas than he had before regarding the intellectual, social and religious history of his kind.<sup>12</sup>

## V. LEGENDS OF INTEREST

Legends of the Middle Ages. Legends from this period may owe more than is apparent at first sight to the classical writings of the palmy days of Greece and Rome; these legends are very characteristic of the people who told them, and they are the best exponents of the customs, manners, and beliefs of the time to which they belong. They have been repeated in poetry and prose with endless variations, and some of our greatest modern writers have deemed them worthy of a new dress, as is seen in Tennyson's "Idylls of the King," Goethe's "Reineke Fuchs," Tegner's "Frithof Saga," Willand's "Aberon," and many shorter works by these and lesser writers.

These medieval legends form a sort of literary quarry, from which, consciously or unconsciously, each writer takes some stones wherewith to build his own story. Many allusions in the literature of our own day lose much of their force simply because these legends are not available to the general reader.

The wealth and imagination displayed in these legends tend to prove that the epoch to which they belong has been greatly maligned by the term "dark ages," often applied to it. Such was

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<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 124.



the favor which the legendary style of composition enjoyed with our ancestors that several of the poems were among the first books printed for general circulation in Europe.

Previous to the invention of printing, however, they were familiar to rich and poor, thanks to the scalds, bards, troubadours, minstrels, and minnesingers, who like the rhapsodists of Greece spent their lives in wandering from place to place, relating or reciting these tales to all they met in castle, cottage, and inn.

Among these interesting legends were "Beowulf," "Gurden," "The Amelings," Charlemagne and his Paladins, "The Sons of Aymon," "Merlin," and "The Round Table."<sup>13</sup>

Legends and Stories of Christmas. There is no more often treated celebration of Christmas in our schools today than searching out and presenting the many ways that Christmas is celebrated in other lands. This phase of treating Christmas offers an opportunity to program sponsors to explore the many legends concerning this occasion. There is a wealth of material available if it were only in all school libraries and then put to use.

"The Shepherd Who Couldn't See the Light" is a good example of a Christmas play in two acts based on a Scandinavian legend and a folk-carol of the Netherlands. Other legends and stories of

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<sup>13</sup>H. A. Guerber, Legends of the Middle Ages (New York: American Book Company, 1924), pp. 5-6

Christmas are "Babushka: A Russian Legend" by Edith M. Thomas, "The Legend of the Christmas Rose" by Selma Lagerlof, "Legend of St. Christopher" by Elva S. Smith, "Christmas Eve in Ireland" by Katharine T. Hinkson, "Legends of the Flight into Egypt" by Vera E. Walker, "The Christmas Rose: A Legend in Dramatic Form" by Susanna Myers, and many others.<sup>14</sup>

In the book "Fundamentals of Folk Literature" by Drs. George Boswell and J. Russell Reaver are other legends of this nature. They give us this:

Many of the oldest legends now at all current, derive from the post-Biblical books called the Rejected Books of the New Testament. A good example in the realm of balladry is "The Cherry-Tree Carol," Child ballad no. 54, from the Pseudo-Matthew Gospel. In it, while Mary was carrying Jesus her request for cherries was answered roughly by Joseph.

O then bespoke the babe,  
Within his Mother's womb:  
"Bow down then the tallest tree,  
For my mother to have some."

The oldest ballad in English, Child 23, "Judas," had some such origin. In it Iscariot is provided with a sister more wicked than he who incites him to his wrong doings:

"Judas, thou were wrthe me stende the Wid  
ston,  
For the false prophete that thou bilevest  
upon."

And fanciful accounts of details in the journey of the Magi are legendary in origin. In fact, the whole question of the Bible in Folk imagination makes a fascinating study. Joseph Gaer in The Lore of the Old Testament and The Lore

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<sup>14</sup>Elva S. Smith and Alice I. Hazeltine, The Christmas Book of Legends and Stories (New York: J. J. Little and Ives Company, 1944), pp. v-x.



of the New Testament had furnished modern students with much valuable material. From early days of Jewish persecution, for instance, the teachers used many anecdotes, parables, and stories to interpret the law to their captive people. Much lore among the illiterate folk continued to grow under the influence of new environments while their lore also spread among many other peoples. The tale of "The Rod in Jethro's Garden," in which only Moses could lift the rod out of the soil because he was the one chosen to free the Children of Israel from slavery to Egypt, has numerous parallels. This story known two centuries before Christ, reappears in Norse folklore when only Sigmund can pull the sword from the oak and in British legend when only Arthur can remove the sword from the stone before a church door.<sup>15</sup>

The best known legends of British and American folklore will be treated in the next chapters which deal with such material under individual headings. There are many legends of other lands, peoples, and culture which contribute interesting study, and teachers in the various subjects of science, history, and geography as well as English will add to the enrichment of their teaching to ferret out other such legends and include them as they apply.

Legends in the classroom. The field of folklore is so broad and all-inclusive that no subject in our broad curricula of today's schools will fail to find ample supplies to use as supplementary material. The treatment of legends and similar stories of folklore lends itself to excellent opportunities to the teachers of English in the forms of projects as dramatization, pantomime, storytelling, collection of local legends, and term papers or reports. Students in creative writing classes could be

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<sup>15</sup>George W. Boswell and J. Russell Reaver, "Fundamentals of Folk Literature" (unpublished book), pp. 64-65.

challenged to write a legend of some local situation or one well known in their country. These legends then could be used in school assemblies, radio broadcasts and class discussion.

## VI. EPICS--"FOLK" AND "ARTIST" TYPES

An epic is a long narrative poem written in a noble, dignified style and telling of heroic exploits performed by great heroes. It differs from other narrative poems by the fact that it has greater dignity and sweep and presents characters who are interesting aside from the story. A true epic needs a dignified subject developed in an orderly manner without emotional stress, except in the statements of the characters. Since epics are usually representative of a nation and give background of the people, customs, beliefs, and characteristics of the time in which they transpired, it is essentially important that they become a part of the knowledge of the student as a part of his national heritage.

The "folk" epic. Epics which are based on heroic legends are usually called "folk" epics. The two great Greek epic poems by Homer, the Iliad and the Odyssey, belong to this class. Other epics of Western culture which were produced in medieval times and celebrated some great event in the history of the nation are the Old-French epic called the Song of Roland which told of how Roland, one of Charlemagne's Twelve Peers, died while fighting bravely against overwhelming odds, the ancient German epic, the



Nibelungenlied, the national epic of Finland, the Kalevala, the Cid of Spain, the epic of the Irish hero, Cuhulain, the Slovo o Polku Igoreve of Russia, the epic of the Anglo-Saxons, Beowulf, and the Volsungasaga of Scandinavia. The national epic of Finland, the Kalevala, served as a model for The Song of Hiawatha by Longfellow, who undertook to shape the legends of the Algonquin Indians into an artificial folk epic. Two great epics, the Ramayana and Mahabharata of India, are products of Eastern culture.

"Artist" type epics. Epics sometimes tell of imaginary events not principally based on legends. These are often called "literary," or "art" epics. The Aeneid of Virgil is a masterpiece of this type. Others are the Divine Comedy by Dante, Paradise Lost and Paradise Regained by Milton, Tasso's Jerusalem Delivered, Lucan's Pharsalia, Ariosto's Orlando Furioso, The Dynasts, by Hardy, Stephen Benet's John Brown's Body, and many others.<sup>16</sup>

Aristotle's view of epic. Epic poetry holds a very high place in literature, as it is one of the oldest forms and thought by many people to be one of the best forms of literature. Aristotle in his Poetics, Chapters XXIV, XXV, and XXVI, discusses the merits of both tragedy and epic poetry, and though his preference was slightly for tragedy he had this to say of the epic:

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<sup>16</sup>"Epic," The World Book Encyclopedia (Chicago: Field Enterprises, Inc., 1949), V, 2366-2367.

Epic poetry has, however, a great--a special--capacity for enlarging its dimensions, and we can see the reason. In Tragedy we cannot imitate several lines of actions carried on at one and the same time; we must confine ourselves to the action on the stage and the part taken by the players. But in Epic poetry, owing to the narrative form, many events simultaneously transacted can be presented; and these, if revelant to the subject, add mass and dignity to the poem. The Epic has here an advantage, and one that conduces to grandeur of effect, to diverting the mind of the hearer, and relieving the story with varying episodes.

As for the metre, the heroic measure has proved its fitness by the test of experience....For of all measures the heroic is the stateliest and the most massive; and hence it most readily admits rare words and metaphors, which is another point in which the narrative form of imitation stands alone.<sup>17</sup>

Composers of epics. Drs. Boswell and Reaver in their unpublished book on folklore had this explanation of the composition of the epic:

The folk epics seem to have been put together in pre-literate times by encyclopedic-minded minstrels, or scops, or troubadours, or whatever you wish to call them. Most probably the separate parts had existed for generations as episodic lays, or something we can conceive of as heroic ballads, about incidents in the career of a renowned hero or some situations that might be attached to his career; then at some unknown moment a bard arose who had the power of remembering them all, of organizing them by transition and inter-reference into a single story of great length and uniformity, and of infusing into the entire production the unity of his genius. Conceivably the resulting epic continued to exist more or less without significant change for another generation, when finally someone saw fit to write it down from the recitation of the creator or some disciple of his, or from his own memory. Of course, this first scribe might have been the compiler of the disparate

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<sup>17</sup>Walter Jackson Bate (ed.), Criticism: The Major Texts (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1952), pp. 35-39.



folk parts, or even the author of the whole epic. In the latter case it would be less folk but nonetheless folk, for where did he get his materials but from the cultural matrix of his surroundings? And after all the finished product must please the illiterate chieftains, warriors, and common people to whom he and his followers would sing it. Thus, though the final form of the epic was achieved by individual probably oral perhaps written authorship; even this noblest of literary forms was in a number of ways controlled by the people.<sup>18</sup>

The Homeric poems--folk-type. The poems attributed to Homer are not only the earliest literary monuments of Greece, but in many respects stand at the zenith of Greek literary production. They belong to epic or narrative poetry, for which they established the essential form and the technical devices which have prevailed ever since.

The Iliad and the Odyssey live because of their quality as supreme poetry. In them are dignity and finished eloquence combined with a freshness and simplicity free from both the crudity of a primitive ballad and the artificiality of the literary epic. Skillful delineation of events and characters imparts reality. Homer is a convincing interpreter of human nature. In passages of rare beauty he shows how high a value was placed in an age of brutal passions and ruthless warfare upon social and domestic virtues and nobility of soul. Man is subject to the will of Zeus or Fate, but yet possesses the power of free choice of action for which he is responsible. In spite of digression, the narrative moves with sustained interest and dramatic intensity. It is adorned with a wealth of similes rich in imaginative quality, yet true to fact. In the pictures of life and descriptions of nature keenness of observation is combined with clarity and accuracy of portrayal. Through the poem runs the expression of a poignant yet healthy philosophy of life.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup>George W. Boswell and J. Russell Reaver, "Fundamentals of Folk Literature" (Unpublished book, 1956), p. 53.

<sup>19</sup>Edward H. Weatherly, and others, The Heritage of European Literature (New York: Ginn and Company, 1948), pp. 11-12.

Value of epic study to students. Through the teaching of this national epic to students, much information would be gleaned. Aside from the enjoyment of reading the best in literature, the student would learn the geography, history, habits, beliefs, and customs of a nation which has given to him some of his best culture. What this epic would contribute to the students, other epics would also. It has been the experience of the researcher to see many students of the secondary school graduate and finish their formal education without ever even having the opportunity to know that such material was to be had. Have we not been cheating our students by denying them this privilege?

The Indian epics a "must." The two great national epics of India should certainly be included in the curriculum also, for the Asian literature is even more neglected than that of Europe. The Ramayana is partly historical and partly legendary and mythical. It tells the thrilling story of Rama, the king's son and heir. Rama is banished from his home through the trickery of his stepmother. The brave and honorable hero spends fourteen years of wandering and adventure. His wife, Sita, is the Hindu ideal of pure devotion to duty, husband, and family. With the help of an army of apes, Rama rescued her from a wicked magician who had kidnaped her.

Equally interesting is the other Indian epic, the Mahabharata, which is the longest poem in the world. It describes events which took place in Northern India about 1200 B. C. The



heroes are sometimes historical, and sometimes personifications of human ideals or divine beings.

The Mahabharata is a thrilling adventure tale. But it is also a great religious drama and has been used for over two thousand years to educate Hindu youth. It has been sung by poet-storytellers and explained by Brahman priests. The magnificent dialogue between Krishna and Prince Arjuna, called the "Bhagavad-Gita" (Song of the "Blessed One"), was inserted into this epic, perhaps in the first century A. D.

Other "folk" epics. The Song of Roland is of the literary type called the "Chanson de geste," that is, a song of history or of heroic deeds. It is the best example of this type, and it is the first great work of French literature. One of a cycle of heroic poems sung about the deeds of Charlemagne and his vassals, it is a picture of idealized feudalism in vivid action.

Of the origin of The Song of Roland the authors of The Masterworks of World Literature give this account:

The origins of this epic, like the origins of Homer, are obscure. Its motivations are strongly religious, and some scholars believe that its author's purpose was primarily propagandist, that he composed the poem to arouse Christian Europe against the Moslems, not only in Spain but in the Holy Land, and to encourage enthusiasm for the crusades.

The author of The Song of Roland, a man of considerable literary skill, was concerned with the characters and the tragedies of men....In one regard the poem is perhaps unique among the "Chanson de geste": the part played in it by woman is practically negligible. Except for its implications of joyous salvation for the faithful, the epic is essentially tragic, and its tragic consequences spring

from the weaknesses of mankind, from jealousy and hatred and from stubbornness and pride.

The Song of Roland is only one of a number of versions of the story of Roland; but perhaps more than any other version this poem inspired imitations and adaptations and influenced other works among the medieval poets. Dante was familiar with Roland's fame, and poets retold the story in Latin, Provencal, Spanish, and Italian. In Germany in the twelfth century appeared Conrad's Rolandslied, and in Iceland the story of Roland became a part of the Karlamagnus Saga. The last great use of the legend was in the year 1516, when the Italian poet Ariosto published his Orlando Furioso.

Roland and his fame have survived the centuries. Today, in Italian puppet theaters, Christian and Saracen contend upon the stage in puppet plays that run almost interminably. And in the French Cathedral of Chartres, shining in stained glass, Count Roland, surrounded by heaps of the dead, blows his ivory horn and strikes with his sword Durendal upon the rock.<sup>20</sup>

What is being done in Italy by people to keep alive stories of this kind could be done in the schools. Students would welcome activities of this nature, and while working up such productions, the creativity of the student would be challenged in making puppets, costumes, scenery, etc. Here, art, music, acting, and costuming would be combined with literature. The possibilities of folklore in a world literature course in the hands of a creative teacher would enhance and enrich the lives of students to an inestimable degree.

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<sup>20</sup>E. M. Everett, C. S. Brown, and J. D. Wade, Masterworks of World Literature (New York: The Dryden Press, 1947), pp. 469-471.



The Nibelungenlied. The origins of this epic are obscured in the mist of folklore and myth. The composition as it is known today has been traced to a time about the year 1200, roughly a hundred years after The Song of Roland. It is written in the Austrian dialect of what is called Middle High German. Nothing is known about its author. The story follows:

The Nibelungenlied tells of the deeds of the German hero Siegfried, of his death through the betrayal by his friends, and of the awful vengeance of his wife upon his betrayers. The story seems to have originated in the low country of the Rhine, for the geography of the tale and its few historical references prescribe this view. But the story somehow made its way, perhaps as early as the sixth century, into Scandinavia, subsequently even as far away as Iceland; and in these places it became a part of the varied literary traditions of the North. It is found in the Elder Edda of Iceland, the earliest parts of which go back as far as the ninth century; in the Volsungasaga, a prose version of Elder Edda, perhaps of the twelfth century; and somewhat later in the Prose Edda, a book of instructions for poets. In the middle of the thirteenth century the story appeared in a Norwegian account of the hero Dietrich of Bern, the Thidreksaga, whose author says that he got the tale from Germany.

The Nibelungenlied is a tale of heroic loyalties of vassal to lord, as of Hagen to his king; and of wife to husband, as in the vengeance of Kriemhild for the death of her lord Siegfried. The poem is a fusion of refinement and barbarism, and of the chivalry of the best medieval times and the brutality of the so-called Dark Ages. Like the Anglo-Saxon Beowulf, the Nibelungenlied is a pagan legend upon which its author has imposed a veneer of Christianity. Unlike The Song of Roland, it is Christian by accident and by afterthought. Its hero is an idealization of freshness and generosity, a champion of the light against darkness. Its greatest character is Hagen of Troneg, dark and unscrupulous in his feudal loyalty, and courageous beyond mortality in fronting foreseen disaster.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup>Ibid., pp. 497-498.



Connected with this inspiring old folk epic is the music of one of the old masters, Richard Wagner. Though his music-drama of the Nibelungen Ring bears some resemblance to the ancient German epic, it is a wholly independent composition and was derived from various old songs and sagas, which the dramatist wove into one great harmonious story. The principal source was the Volsungasaga, while lesser parts were taken from the Elder Edda and the Younger Edda, and others from the Nibelungen Lied, the Ecklenlied, and other Teutonic folklore. According to Thomas Bulfinch, Wagner's story of the Ring may be summarized as follows:

A hoard of gold exists in the depths of the Rhine, guarded by the innocent Rhine-maidens. Alberich, the dwarf, forswears love to gain this gold. He makes it into a magic ring. It gives him all power, and he gathers by it a vast amount of treasures.

Meanwhile Wotan, chief of the gods, has engaged the giants to build for him a noble castle, Valhalla, from whence to rule the world, promising in payment Freya, goddess of youth and love. But the gods find they cannot spare Freya, as they are dependent on her for their immortal youth. Loki, called upon to provide a substitute, tells of Alberich's magic ring and other treasure. Wotan goes with Loki, and they steal the ring and the golden hoard from Alberich, who curses the ring and lays the curse on all who shall henceforth possess it. The gods give the ring and the treasure to the giants as a substitute for Freya. The curse at once begins. One giant, Fafner, kills his brother to get all, and transforms himself into a dragon to guard his wealth. The gods enter Valhalla over the rainbow bridge. This ends the first part of the drama, called the Rhine-Gold.<sup>22</sup>

The second part which followed is too long to include but it showed how Wagner used the material to a fine advantage.

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<sup>22</sup>Thomas Bulfinch, Bulfinch's Mythology (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1947) p. 35.



Those who wish to study the differences in the legends of the Nibelungen Lied and the Nibelungen Ring, and the way in which Wagner used his ancient material are referred to the following references according to Bulfinch:

Professor W. C. Sawyer's book on "Teutonic Legends in the Nebelungen Lied and the Nibelungen Ring," where the matter is treated in full detail. For a very thorough and clear analysis of the Ring as Wagner gives it, with a study of the musical motifs, probably nothing is better for general readers than the volume "The Epic of Sounds," by Freda Winworth. The more scholarly work of Professor Lavignac is indispensable for the student of Wagner's dramas. There is much illuminating comment on the sources and materials in "Legends of the Wagner Drama" by J. L. Weston.<sup>23</sup>

There are many possibilities in teaching this epic with a tie up between the English department and the music and drama departments of the school. That this epic abounds in folklore is very evident and offers many varieties of interest.

The old Anglo-Saxon epic, Beowulf, will be treated in full in the unit of English literature.

## VII. FOLKLORE IN FAIRY TALES

When the writer in English attempts to translate the German "Märchen" or the Swedish "saga," he has usually resorted to the term "fairytale." In many ways this is an unfortunate word since not more than a small number of such stories have to do with fairies; as a matter of fact, most tales about fairies are actually

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<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 357.

traditions and relate real beliefs. Nevertheless, the term is well established and widely accepted.

A considerable number of the tales in Grimm's collection are fairytales of this kind. Such stories as "Snow White," "Cinderella," "Cupid and Psyche," and the "Black and White Bride" illustrate their characteristic qualities. These stories are usually located in a never-never land where all kinds of supernatural events occur. The characters are usually not named, but are referred to as certain "king and queen" and "the youngest daughter." The fairy tale is full of commonplace expressions and motifs which tend to be used in other tales and to be a part of the general style of the story-teller.

Just where and how this peculiar fairy-tale style developed has never been determined. Something of it has been found as far back as the Egyptian collection which came to us from the thirteenth century before Christ, and reflections of this style are found in such literary reworkings of fairy tales as the Apocryphal Book of Tobit and the Cupid and Psyche of Apuleius. It has been suggested that this style is a part of the Indo-European heritage, but it is found in the tales of many non-European peoples, so that such a position is hard to establish.

Tales in many ways analogous to the European and Asiatic fairy tales are found among primitive peoples, and many of the



Western fairy tales have been borrowed by other parts of the world.<sup>24</sup>

Regardless of the source and the type of the fairy tale, both old and young will always enjoy the "Once upon a time" and "They lived happily ever after" which are characteristic beginnings and endings of fairy tales. Fairy tales are often assigned to children to read--and rightly so. Any child worth his salt has the kind of imagination that feeds upon tales of the wonderful. Any child who has never heard the story of "Hansel and Gretel," or "Rumpelstiltsken," or "The Emperor's New Clothes" has missed a rare experience. But fairy tales are not merely for children; many parents have discovered when reading aloud these wonderful tales to their children that they themselves become very much concerned and interested. Adults may forget for a while their desire for imaginative writing, but it never altogether leaves them. It crops out in other forms. The great popularity in recent years of adult stories of fantasy, science fiction, and ghosts is traceable to the same impulses at work. The great popularity of Walt Disney's Cinderella and Snow White is not altogether the result of children's interest.

Most of our famous fairy tales have been circulating in one form or another for centuries. "Cinderella," for example, is

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<sup>24</sup>Maria Leach (ed.), Dictionary of Folklore Mythology and Legend (New York: Funk and Wagnalls Company, 1949), I, 365-366.

so ancient that its origin cannot be traced. The earliest known version is Chinese, but there are more than 500 versions in Europe alone. Although Charles Perrault wrote the tale down and added the fairy godmother, he was merely refining a tale already known to most people of his day.

In collecting folk tales for publication the Grimm Brothers were fulfilling a lifetime interest in folk stories and folkways. One of the brothers, Jakob Grimm, achieved world fame as a student of languages as well. As they listened to old wives telling the stories that had been circulating for generations, the brothers wrote them down and thus preserved them for posterity. Today the tales are known all over the world, in many tongues and many editions.

Hans Christian Anderson, another popular author of fairy stories, has something different about his stories. They seem to reflect, more than most tales of this type, the world of reality. One is more concerned over the fate of his characters and sympathizes with them almost as if they were real people. Alice's Adventures in Wonderland and Through the Looking Glass are two fantasies that are considered classics for both children and adults. They were written by Lewis Carroll (pen name) who as Charles Lutwidge Dodgson was a lecturer in mathematics at Oxford College. Fantastic adventures and fantastic characters make up the books. "Grinning like a Cheshire Cat" is a famous expression known the world over as well as the odd song that the Ugly Duchess sings to



her little boy:

Speak roughly to your little boy,  
And beat him when he sneezes:  
He only does it to annoy,  
Because he knows it teases.

#### VIII. FABLES AROUND IN FOLKLORE

Fables are animal tales with a moral; short tales in which animals appear as characters, talking and acting like human beings, though usually keeping their animal traits, and having as their purpose the pointing of a moral. The fable consequently has two parts: the narrative which exemplifies the moral, and the statement of the moral often appended in the form of a proverb. The fable is a development of the animal tale, one of the earliest forms of the folktale. The fable uses the animal tale not to explain animal characteristics, or behavior, but to inculcate a moral lesson for human beings, or to satirize the conduct of human beings.

The oldest fables that have survived in any number are those of Greece and India; at present the best belief is that neither originated the type, but that it was Semitic in origin, spreading from the Semites east to India and west to Greece and Rome. The oldest collections existing today are those connected with the name of Aesop. Aesop was a slave in Ionia, perhaps of Semitic ancestry. His fables from the beginning probably circulated orally, for there is no evidence of a written version before the fourth century. From this time many collections have

been made with constant shift in the content as new fables have been added, especially from Oriental sources, and others discarded. The oldest Oriental collections are the Panchatantra. A portion of the Panchatantra in the Middle Ages became the Fables of Bedpai, which from Persian through Arabic came to Latin and thence to the vernacular languages of Europe. In the Middle Ages the fable stories became a part of floating tradition, widely used in sermon stories and in the exempla books. The fable has its place in modern literature. In English Chaucer, Henryson, Lydgate, Dryden and Gay have all successfully told the old stories. France has the greatest of all modern writers of fable in La Fontaine; Lessing, in Germany, is the author of an excellent collection of fables and also of a valuable monograph on the history and literary value of the fable.

Some of the most famous fables are: The Country Mouse and the City Mouse; Wren Elected as King of the Birds; Crane Pulls Bone from Wolf's Throat; Fox and the Grapes; Chanticleer and the Fox; Mouse Frees Lion by Gnawing the Net.

The fable owes more to the animal tale than form and content. Its compression, pithiness, and dramatic nature must likewise be a carry-over from the earlier type. Characterization and character types in the fables are also frequently directly derived from the animal tale. For example, the animal tale had



already established the fox as sly, the wolf as greedy, the lion as courageous and dignified.<sup>25</sup>

One of the best collections of fables that the researcher found was in the book The Great Fables of all Nations selected by Manuel Komroff. This collection included fables by Aesop, Arabian Biblical Times by Lokman, Fables from the Talmud, Phaedrus of Greece, first century, Pilpay of India, fourth century, fables from the Gesta Romanorum of fourteenth century, fables from the Hitopadesha, Sanskrit, fifteenth century and Laurentius Abstemius and Lorenzo Pignotti with fables of Italy. Writers of fables from Germany were Lessing, Lightwer, and Gellert; of France were La Fontaine, Florian and Anatole France; of Russia were Bedny, Kriloff, and Tolstoi; of Ireland, Jonathan Swift; of Spain, Tomas De Yriarte; of England, Dr. John Aiken, Birch, Stevenson, Wilde, Dodsley, and John Gay; and of America, Bierce, Franklin and Emerson. This book was representative of many authors from many countries of many races, and covered many centuries.<sup>26</sup>

Fabulous beasts in the fable. Along with the fables go the stories of fabulous beasts which mention one finds in the Bible. In Isaiah 13:19, 21-22, he says, "And Babylon, the glory of kings...wild beasts of the desert shall lie there; and their

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<sup>25</sup>Ibid., p. 361.

<sup>26</sup>Manuel Komroff, The Great Fables of All Nations (New York: Tudor Publishing Company, 1928), pp. vii-viii.

houses shall be full of doleful creatures; and owls shall dwell there, and satyrs shall dance there. And the wild beasts of the islands shall cry in their desolate houses, and dragons in their pleasant palaces." Thomas Mauffet, Doctor of Physick, 1658, wrote in the Theatre of Insects, or Lesser Living Creatures this quote, "The reason of all this He can only tell, who hath hanged the earth in the air without a foundation."

In Milton's "Comus" comes this reference to fabulous beasts:

... 'Tis not vain or fabulous,  
 (Though esteemed by shallow ignorance)  
 What the sage poets taught by the heavenly Muse,  
 Storied of old in high immortal verse  
 Of dire Chimeras and enchanted Isles,  
 And rifted rocks whose entrance leads to hell,  
 For such there be, but unbelief is blind.

The animal world seems to the mind of primitive man to be only a very short step from the human. Peter Lum in his book Fabulous Beasts had this to say:

It was natural for primitive man to credit animals with powers far beyond his own. Most of them undoubtedly seemed to him in his first halting efforts to understand his surroundings to be at least demigods. Their speech, inarticulate though it might be, was near enough to man's own primitive language to leave him convinced that, could he only understand, the wail of the jackal and the chatter of the birds had a message for him. (One of the most persistent European myths is that of the hero who tastes a drop of dragon's blood, or its flesh, or is licked by a dragon, and thereupon understands the talk of the birds.) The elusiveness of the wild beast gave it mystery; the startled eyes of the stag, barely seen among the trees before it disappears, the snake that casts off its old skin and by this simple fact of nature persuades mankind to hope that it and he alike are basically immortal, the bird that seems at home in an element where sun and moon



and stars alone live--it was not surprising if man ranked these creatures among the earliest of his gods. (The fact that at the same time he hunted a number of the same animals for food did not necessarily lessen the awe in which man held them; before killing his prey, the savage will often sacrifice to it as to a god, in the hope that thus its spirit will be appeased.

Even in somewhat later times, when man was on familiar terms with many animals and when cow and dog at least had been domesticated, belief in animal gods remained strong. There were many reasons for this. For one thing, even when the natural anthropomorphic tendency of mankind to visualize god in his own image had given birth to "human" gods, it was still thought that these gods took on animal form whenever they descended to earth. Echoes of this are found in the avatars or incarnations ascribed to the god Vishnu, where he assumed the forms of various animals, the fish, the tortoise, the boar and others, for his appearances among men, and probably also in the "Birth Stories" which tell of the animal incarnations of the Buddha before his final birth as Buddha. Jupiter, of course, took animal form in the pursuit of some of his many love affairs, and one classical story tells how all the gods once fled away into Egypt to escape from Typhon, each one disguising himself as a different animal. The Egyptian gods almost all appeared in animal guise at one time or another. And in European and Far Eastern folklore tales of how demigods or spirits assume the feathers of a bird or the skin of a seal in order to visit the earth are common.

Animals were also much used to symbolize the natural phenomena, and it is here that we find the first clue to certain fabulous beasts. The phoenix is beyond doubt the sun, and all its attributes, its rising from the tallest palm tree in the east, rising from the ashes of its former self, its scarlet wings, can be equally well applied to the sun. The Chinese dragon, although not so simple a creature, is basically a symbol of water, guardian of the fancied treasures of the sea, a rain bringer whose sudden inexplicable rages provoke storms but who is both necessary and generally friendly to man.

This attention to detail, natural in a world where all was strange and the smallest natural fact might be filled with incalculable magic, suggests another reason why animals have been held in awe and carefully observed as well as worshiped. Their natural markings, the pattern on the

back of the tortoise, the number of tines on the stag's antler, the webbed foot of the bird, might provide mankind either with knowledge or with omens.

In China the legendary Fu Hsi is said to have invented the first Chinese script after studying the markings on the back of a tortoise which climbed out of the Yellow River and stopped at his feet. A similar idea underlies the taking of omens from the liver or other organs of animals sacrificed to the Gods, as in Roman times, or prophesying by the cracks that appear on a sheep's shoulder blade when thrown into the fire, as is still done in Mongolia.<sup>27</sup>

This book contains folklore of man in his most primitive state, and in much of the literature read by the high school student are allusions to these fabulous beasts and the beliefs of early man concerning them. Aside from interesting reading, materials of this kind would give to the student insight into the past which is little known to him.

#### IX. PROVERBS--THE COMPANIONS OF FABLES AND FOLKLORE

That the proverbs of a nation reveal the characteristics of its people has long been a commonplace, and it has been recognized that proverbs have their origin for the greater part in race experience, in folk psychology, or in superstition. Observation of cause and effect (or more often a grotesque misinterpretation of what are assumed to be cause and effect) gives rise to certain fixed beliefs in the minds of primitive or ignorant folk. These beliefs are usually concerned with the

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<sup>27</sup>Peter Lum, Fabulous Beasts (New York: Pantheon Books Inc., 1951), pp. 12-22.



weather, with an effort to interpret natural phenomena, and with human conduct. Others deal with health and disease, or with agriculture and other human activities, or are frankly survivals of ancient animistic practices and folk magic.

It is not enough that a proverb be "the fruit of the longest experience in the fewest words," or, as Cervantes phrased it, "a short sentence founded on long experience." Other characteristics are necessary for its acceptance and survival. It must embody the experience of the people among whom it originated, must express the real group consciousness, and must have the sanction of long usage by the multitude. Furthermore, a proverb, in order to survive, must possess such a vigorous principle of life that it can hold its place through the centuries of a people's existence; and it must have the capacity of detaching itself from particular occasions, be capable of various applications, and have a fitness for permanent use.

Such popular sayings as have survived the vicissitudes of the sayings have an important place in the folklore of a people and to a large degree an index of its mind and inner life. In addition, they are for the linguist an invaluable record of the vocabulary and language of the common folk, as distinguished from the literary language. With the aid of proverbs we can, with limitations, reconstruct the manners, customs, characteristics, and outlook on the world of the social group which uses them.

Proverbs tend to develop most abundantly and to persist longest in agricultural or isolated communities, where books and educated men are few. In such communities the elders of the village are the repositories of wisdom and the lore of heaven and earth. Continually, observations about the weather, the crops, health, and moral conduct of the community are hoarded in the minds of men. Finally they become crystallized into precepts and counsel for instruction and admonition. Every proverb must necessarily have had an author, but usually he has been simply one who has clothed in terse epigrammatic form what has been vaguely felt and crudely uttered innumerable times before he recast it into the form in which we find it.

This origin of non-literary proverbs has predetermined their form. They are often rough, unpolished, and devoid of style. They have been called "the people's voice," and they often embody not only the speech of the common people but also the paradox, the pun, the alliteration, the concrete illustration, the pungency, and the stark realism so natural and so dear to the folk mind. The wisdom embodied in proverbs is not that of the scholar and the philosopher, but belongs rather to the street, the farm, and the cottage. If we find them crude, it is because the folk who produced them were crude. Confucius himself declared that "fine words as an insinuating appearance are seldom associated with true virtue." Proverbs—"the tears of humanity," as they have been called—have all too often been born of the bitter sufferings of



the sons of men at the hands of their fellows.

The folk philosophy reflected in proverbs is often surprising in its breadth of experience and vision, in its charitableness of outlook on life, in its ability to escape the rigor and inflexibility of the philosophy of the scholar and the textbook. This folk philosophy may be called "common sense" morality--in the words of Coleridge, "common sense in an uncommon degree"--as distinguished from the finespun theories and intricate systems of the schools.

It may be noted in passing that proverbs are not only "condensed philosophy" but are often "condensed history" as well, as in the aphorism ascribed to Napoleon--"Scratch a Russian and you find a Tartar."

Proverbs, like other products of the human mind and hand, have traveled far and wide through the ages. From the earliest stages of man's life on earth he has been a wanderer. Merchants and travelers have carried with them not only physical commodities but also ideas, songs, and proverbs, and have brought others back to their homelands in exchange. Thus proverbs, many of them the germs of folk tales, circulated even during the early, misty years of man's history and found currency far from the ancestral home in which each was coined.

Many of the commonest proverbs of today are thousands of years old. St. Jerome advised us not to "look a gift horse in the mouth," and warned that "liars should have good memories." The

ancient Greek admonished his son that "a rolling stone gathers no moss." This wandering of the proverb has made it impossible to ascertain with finality the origin of many a proverb not bearing on its face the indisputable mark of its origin. Moreover, human nature, being the same in different places, causes men in similar situations to give voice to similar reactions. The forms may differ according to the social, political, or economic conditions under which the various groups live, but the basic oneness of certain fundamental characteristics of mankind and of certain elemental phases of human existence gives rise to similar proverbs in human groups far removed in time or space.

Since the proverb gives counsel, offers arguments which have weight and authority of customs and traditions, and, as the Arabic has it, "is to speech what salt is to food," it is good proof that proverbs should become a part of the cultural heritage of the student. Of Hebrew writings, both the Old Testament and the New contain numerous proverbs, and Shakespeare has woven great numbers of folk sayings into the fabric of his plays. The very titles of some of them, such as "All's Well That Ends Well," "Much Ado About Nothing," and "Measure for Measure," are proverbs.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>28</sup>Henry H. Hart (trans.), Seven Hundred Chinese Proverbs (California: Stanford University Press, 1937) pp. xx-xxv.



## X. RIDDLE

The very clever introduction to the chapter on "Riddle" in Boswell and Reaver's book "Fundamentals of Folk Literature" defines the riddle thus:

Like the proverb and the ant, the riddle is a small form, but it is easy to understand its antiquity and influence or at any rate legendary history. Proverbs and riddles have more in common than might at first appear; both are metaphors....It may be that the riddle represents one step further than the proverb along the ladder of literary complexity, for the proverb is declarative and obvious, whereas the riddle is enigmatic, esoteric, appealing to the mental acuity and agility of the guesser, and at least implicitly interrogative. Metaphor, the basis of thought in both proverb and riddle, is primitive, the result of primary mental processes to observe likenesses and differences, the achievement on the part of some folk-savant of investing a thought with some intellectual beauty and memorability. Both proverb and riddle represent, then, some of our earliest instances of products of the associative imagination, which underlies much of folklore.<sup>29</sup>

Riddles have always been popular. They are a type of folklore and are collected by students of language. The earliest riddles were presented by ancient oracles and bards, and were of a serious nature. They were genuine enigmas and sometimes called "sense riddles," as defined in World Book Encyclopedia. Modern riddles are less serious and may be described as conundrum puns. A "conundrum" is a kind of riddle based upon some imagined likeness between things that are quite unlike. The answer to the puzzling

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<sup>29</sup>George W. Boswell and J. Russell Reaver, "Fundamentals of Folk Literature" (Unpublished book, 1956), p. 14.

question often involves a pun, or play upon words.<sup>30</sup>

The Bible contains riddles. A good one is found in the story of Samson in Judges 14:8. Samson returned to a young lion he had killed. In the carcass he found honey and a swarm of bees. He offered the following riddle to the young men at his wedding feast:

Out of the eater came forth meat  
And out of the strong came forth sweetness!

The young men secretly wormed the answer out of Samson's bride. When they replied, "What is sweeter than honey, and what is stronger than a lion?" Samson knew they had cheated, and he took a terrible revenge.

The ancients made riddles about the sun, the moon, the rainbow, and especially the wind. "What flies forever and rests never?" was a riddle referring to the wind. In Greek mythology we find the famous riddle asked by the Sphinx, "What animal goes on four legs in the morning, on two legs at noon, and on three legs in the evening?" Oedipus guessed the answer, "Man," who crawls on all fours when a baby, then learns to stand erect, and in old age walks with a cane. The tale goes on to say that the Sphinx was so grieved to have anyone guess her riddle that she killed herself.

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<sup>30</sup>"Riddle," World Book Encyclopedia (Chicago: Field Enterprises, Inc., 1949), xiv, 6950.



The early peoples took their riddles seriously. Homer, the great Greek poet, is said to have died of humiliation because he could not answer a riddle. Ancient Norse mythology mentions a riddle contest between the god Odin and a giant. It is said that Lycerus, king of Babylon, and Nectanebo, king of Egypt, waged a war of riddles. Lycerus is supposed to have won, through the aid of Aesop.

By the Middle Ages riddling became a popular pastime. The following is a riddle of this period:

What is it that never was and never will be?  
(A mouse's nest in a cat's ear.)

Not quite so old, perhaps, is the familiar riddle of one's childhood:

When is a door not a door?  
(When it is ajar.)

Children on both sides of the Atlantic are familiar with the famous egg riddle, "Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall." The English also like the following riddle:

Round as an apple, and flat as a pan;  
The shape of a woman, and the shape of a man!

The answer is "A penny." The English penny has on one side the female figure of Britannia, and on the other the head of the reigning king.

Most of the riddles of today are conundrums. Following are a few examples:

Black and white and red all over! (a newspaper.)  
 What kind of fruit does the electric plant grow? (currents.)  
 Which side of the cat has the most fur? (The outside.)<sup>31</sup>

## XI. SUPERSTITIONS

Perhaps no realm of folklore will bring more delight and amusement to all students than the collection and interpretation of superstitions. The times which the researcher has used this type of folklore in her classes of English have always brought spontaneous interest and results. The use of studying and collecting superstitions offers a challenging beginning to a course or unit in the study of folklore.

To one who is unskilled in the study of superstitions, it will come as a surprise to discover the widespread diffusion of superstitious beliefs still obtaining at this day in every aspect of social life among both the civilized and the savage. They raise a topic of peculiar and fascinating interest as superstitions are world-wide, inherent in all peoples of the world in some form of fear, avoidance or remedial measure.<sup>32</sup>

In spite of present-day science which believes that everything in nature has a natural cause and that a knowledge of nature's laws helps to explain every cause and effect, many superstitious nations and customs persist. Some of these are odd

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<sup>31</sup>Ibid., p. 6950.

<sup>32</sup>E. and M. A. Radford, Encyclopedia of Superstitions (New York: The Philosophical Library, 1949), p. 5.



and amusing, and many of them are harmless.

Forms of superstitions. Many superstitious customs come from ancient times. A common source of superstitions arises from a real or fancied resemblance between objects, persons, or events. The resemblance suggests a relationship between things which are similar. One is believed to influence the other. The apparent increase in the size of the moon, from new moon to full moon, is believed to influence favorably the growth of plants. Such superstitions are called "sympathetic" magic. (See below.)

Many superstitions utilize charms and spells, call on good or evil spirits, foretell the future, or give magic powers to certain forces or objects.

Sympathetic magic. There is a wide-spread conviction that nature affects human conduct in mystic ways, in addition to the obvious physical effects of heat, cold, storm, and other conditions and forces. The belief that occupational or ceremonial movements must correspond to movements in nature is wide-spread. For example, circular religious processions follow the direction of the sun, from east to south, west, and north, in a clockwise direction. In rural districts of North Europe, batter is stirred in this direction. If the direction is reversed, bad luck will follow, or the batter will be spoiled, according to superstition. The reversal of the usual procedure is supposed to bring bad luck.

The left-side. The use of the right hand is normal for most persons. For this reason, the substitution of the left hand is forbidden, because it offsets the good. A reference to the left shoulder is supposed to reverse the meaning or the results of a falsehood. The literal meaning of the word "sinister" is "left." The later and present meaning of threatening or evil is due to untoward associations with the left hand.

The "untowardness" of the left gives it a magic quality. The left hind foot of a rabbit becomes a charm. One must see the new moon for the first time over the left shoulder, and turn the silver in one's pocket to have good luck. Often a superstition spreads out in many directions.

Astrology. Men observe the changes and the courses of sun, moon, stars, and planets. Their positions are believed to influence human life. The knowledge gained by studying the heavens developed into an elaborate system of foretelling the future, a pseudo, or false science known as "astrology." Babylonians gave the planets the names of gods and goddesses. A person born under the planet Mars would have a violent disposition like that of Mars, the god of War.

Astrology became a very complex form of superstition. But the careful study of the heavens which it fostered led to the true science of "astronomy."



Evil Magic. Magic is commonly used for working evil, casting spells, or bewitching. An evildoer makes an image of the victim in wax or clay. Then he burns, buries, or pierces it with thorns or pins. Thus he and others believe that he injures the victim and causes his death. This is a common belief of the followers of the voodoo magic of Africa.

Protection by Charms. Misfortunes were commonly believed to be the result of evil influences. Objects credited with power to protect one against these harmful forces or beings are called "charms." A charm may be a formula, a piece of metal, a stone, or some other object which is believed to bring luck. Charms are common to this day, especially among those who are in constant danger. Belief in their protective power is not limited to persons who have little or no education.

"The evil eye." Belief that evil can be transmitted by the eyes of certain people is an ancient and now wide-spread superstition. It exists in Italy, and throughout the Moslem world. Many kinds of charms are used to counteract the effect of the evil eye. Moslems believe that the five fingers of the hand, or any design or phrase associated with the number five, will protect against it. Another powerful charm is an image or design of an eye, which is supposed to throw back the evil to its source.

"Evil spirits." Some charms keep away evil spirits. A horseshoe nailed over a door has this virtue. The horseshoe is

now a symbol of good luck and many superstitions have gathered about it. In some places, one who finds a horseshoe must return at once to his house, without speaking to anyone, and hang it over the door, prongs up. If hung prongs down, the luck will fall out. It must be fastened with three nails, each driven in by three blows of the hammer. Belief in the mystic power of three probably comes from the Trinity of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost. The origin of the superstitions regarding the horseshoe is not known. They appear to have started in comparatively recent times.

Names and words. Primitive peoples regard the name as an intimate part of the person. One's actual name is sometimes kept secret, since by means of it another person might bewitch the owner. In some tribes a child may not be given the name of a living relative, for fear the relative would die. There are holy names, particularly the name of the deity, which may not be spoken. Magic words when uttered summon spirits, protect against dangers, or give power to medicine or to ceremonies. "Abracadabra" was at first uttered to ward off disease. But now it is a synonym for silly, empty, or meaningless words. "Open Sesame" were the magic words which opened the door to the den of the thieves in the Arabian Nights' tale of "Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves."

The belief that the mention of misfortune or evil will bring misfortune on one is another form of belief in the power of



words. This idea is found in the common superstition of touching wood after making a statement. Some scholars believe this is a substitution of making a sign of the cross. For example, a traveler states that he has never been in a railway accident. To prevent this misfortune in the future, he touches wood. Under similar circumstances Germans say "unberufen" ("uncalled for"), and Moslems, "Besmillah" ("in the name of God").

Belief in spirits. In all parts of the world men believe in spirits. Some, especially fairies, elves, and sprites, are helpful to human beings. Gnomes and goblins are full of mischief. For example, they cause milk to sour.

Spirits dwell in trees, rocks, springs, caves, rivers, or underground. Belief in spirits or spiritual existence is called "animism." Evil spirits cause disease, and the spread of disease is often credited to spirits.

Sneezing is almost everywhere an omen. Some believe that in a sneeze a spirit leaves the body. Italians, to turn it into a good omen, say, "Felicita" ("blessing, or good luck"). Germans say, "Gesundheit" ("your health"). Sometimes English-speaking people say, "God bless you," when someone sneezes.

Dreams are regarded as an experience in which the soul of the sleeper leaves the body. For this reason, one should not waken a sleeper suddenly. His soul might not find its way back to the body. There is also belief in the return of the spirit, or ghost, of the dead to its former haunts. The idea has played

a large part in superstition. It has led to trying to please dead ancestors, to the belief that the spirit of an ancestor returns in a newborn child, and to some modern cults, for example, spiritualism.

Salt is widely regarded as possessing magic qualities. Its power to check decay may be partly responsible for the superstitions connected with it. It is believed to ward off many kinds of spirits including "jinn." Moslems believe in spirits called "jinn," who, they believe, were created before man.

The European custom of throwing a pinch of salt over the shoulder is a means of keeping the devil at a distance. If salt is spilled, this signifies that there will be a quarrel. Offering salt to a guest indicates a spirit of friendly hospitality.

Medical superstitions. Many folk treatments are based on a likeness between the thing prescribed as medicine and the afflicted part of the body. For example, walnuts are supposed to be good for the diseases of the brain. The kernel has the form of the brain, and the shell resembles a skull. The Chinese physician administers the tops, middle portions, and roots of plants for disease of the head, chest, and legs, respectively.

Sometimes the weapon which inflicts a wound is treated. The wound is healed by applying salve to the weapon. The phrase "to take a hair of the dog that bit you" reflects the same notion that one can cure the bite by means of a hair from the biter.



The fact that a magnet attracts particles of iron has led to the belief that it will also draw rheumatism out of the body. Magnets were once very rare, and were believed to possess magic powers. European peasants carried them to avoid or cure disease. Many people wear about the neck or carry a bag of the bad-smelling plant substance called "asafetida," to ward off disease. This custom was even rather common during the 1918 influenza epidemic in the United States.

Belief that unusual objects have powerful medical effects led to the practice of brewing repulsive mixtures as medicines. An example is the witches' brew described in Shakespeare's Macbeth.

Astrology was early associated with medicine and the theory of disease. An example is the belief that the moon causes insanity. The term "lunatic," which comes from "luna," the Latin word for moon, comes from this notion. Each part of the body was associated with certain heavenly bodies and medical treatment was given only when the associated heavenly bodies were in favorable position.

Present-day superstitious ideas and practices. The tendency to cling to superstitious beliefs is strong among both the educated and uneducated people of today. All may not believe fully in their superstitions, but they conform with them because of a feeling that possibly it is safer to do so. Many common superstitions which in themselves are fairly innocent interfere

little with otherwise reasonable thought or behavior. But they sometimes influence conduct.

Hotel rooms, steamship cabins, city houses, and even classrooms in the school (this is true in the author's school) sometimes skip the number thirteen, because many persons believe it is unlucky. Friday is also thought to be rather unlucky, and a Friday which falls on the thirteenth day of the month is especially unlucky.

Bubbles in a teacup, or an itching skin, is supposed to foretell visitors.

A blister on the tongue means that one has told a lie, and if four people cross one another's hands when they shake hands, there will be a wedding. If your ears burn, someone is talking about you. Cold shivers indicate that someone is walking over the spot that will be your grave. If you step on a crack, you will fail in your lessons, and the gift of a knife cuts friendship. Bad luck follows if one breaks a mirror, walks under a ladder, postpones a wedding, or opens an umbrella indoors. It is unlucky to turn back from a journey, to stub the toe, to wear clothes inside out, to break a peacock feather, to meet a black cat or a funeral procession, to leave a house through a window, or to sit on a table. Good luck is betokened if one finds a four-leaved clover or a horseshoe, picks up a pin, or returns money in payment of a debt.



Foretelling the future. Belief in fortunetellers is very old. The ancient Romans and Greeks had their oracles and augurs. The French believed in the prophecies of Nostradamus, and the English followed Mother Shipton. Fortunetelling, to many persons, is merely a form of entertainment, and they place no faith in it. Many businessmen, however, as well as men and women in all walks of life, consult fortunetellers for advice regarding business, love affairs, and various contemplated enterprises.

Some fortunetellers claim to possess special powers which enable them to foretell the future. Some rely on various systems of divination which are supposed to reveal a person's characteristics or proclaim his fate. Fortunetelling by cards is an example of this method. The lines in the palm of the hand are supposed to indicate personal characteristics, abilities or fate. This method of divining is called "palmistry." Tea-leaf reading, crystal gazing, astrology, and taking omens from dreams are other forms of these pseudo sciences.

Superstition always has existed, and probably will exist as long as human beings inhabit the earth.<sup>33</sup>

Using this phase of folklore in the classroom offers to the student many interesting hours of collecting and reporting. It further would tend to link all races represented in the class, as each student could report on superstitions peculiar to his

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<sup>33</sup>"Superstitions," The World Book Encyclopedia (Chicago: Field Enterprises, Inc., 1949), XV, 7810-7811.

background. Further it will help to link the home and community with the school, for once the study is begun the interest will spread to both old and young alike. Besides entertainment, the student's understanding of all culture, traditions, and beliefs would become clearer and appreciation for his national heritage would be deepened. Enrichment through folklore to all students would be made available through the inclusion of folklore in world literature courses.



CHAPTER III

AMERICAN FOLKLORE PRECEDES AMERICAN LITERATURE

Breathes there the man with soul so dead  
Who never to himself hath said,  
This is my own, my native land;<sup>1</sup>

This old familiar quotation from Scott's Lay of the Last Minstrel always comes to the mind of the writer when she thinks, teaches, or writes of America, her native land.

When the writing of this study was first conceived, the writer planned this chapter in her mind first and "impatience" had to be held by a strong leash while writing the other necessary chapters, for it was in American folklore she felt so deeply.

The writers of textbooks for the American school children as well as the teachers who have used these textbooks as guides for teaching have done a splendid job of portraying the history of America and inculcating within youth a deep and abiding appreciation of the ideals of democracy and the truths of freedom upon which the country was founded and developed. This was essential to the development of citizenship for future Americans and an effort worthy of commendation, but how about literature? Have the teachers carefully presented the cultural heritage of

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<sup>1</sup>John Bartlett, Familiar Quotations (tenth ed.; New York: Halcyon House, 1919), p. 487.

America to her youth? It is in this field that this study lies. The very absence of folklore in literature from the textbooks of American literature is one of the premises of this study. What is to follow, "folklore as folklore" in American literature, is the content of this chapter.

## I. FOLKLORE OLDER THAN AMERICAN LITERATURE

One might ask, "When did folklore begin in America?", and the answer would rightfully be, "when the first man set foot upon American soil." We know from history, though perhaps not too clearly, that the red man preceded the white man's coming to America and that it was long after the coming of the white man before America had what was recognized as purely American literature—a literature that was national in tone, content, and representative of American authors and American ways.

Writings of journals, diaries, documents, theological tracts, and materials of that nature were begun by the early settlers as soon as colonization began. However, these writers were not concerned with folklore at that time. When writers of American literature began, evidence of folklore was reflected in their writings but the average student of today who reads this material is not particularly aware of it unless it has been called to his attention. Thus the vast store of the cultural heritage of America to which folklore contributes its rightful share goes unnoticed and unknown. Through the inclusion of this



cultural material, the courses in English would be enriched and the horizon of the student broadened.

The Indian heritage. Not until the nineteenth century was well on its way did Americans begin to look upon the Indian as a cultural asset. The English colonists on the Atlantic seaboard usually felt that the best Indian was a dead Indian, and whole tribes were extinguished without any record of their inner life. If Indian traditions became known, they were romanticized and dressed up in the cultural-white literary mode.

Interest in the Indian, even on the part of Cooper, was more in the individual than in his traditions and arts. It was not until the time of Henry Rowe Schoolcraft that any adequate attempt was made to gather tales and songs of any American tribe.

Schoolcraft was a good workman, and in the 1830's he collected a large amount of authentic traditional lore from the Ojibwa tribes around Sault Ste. Marie. But he lived in a romantic age, and there seems to be little doubt, in the light of more recent collections, that he not only changed and prettified, but actually invented some of his materials. In spite of all this, however, he did a fine service in bringing to the American public some acquaintance with the interesting legends of the American Indians. It is also fortunate, of course, that Schoolcraft's work should have fallen into the hands of Longfellow at a favorable moment. For it is through "Hiawatha" that most Americans even now learn what little they know about the American Indian story. (In

the present text which the writer of this study uses for her classes in American literature, only a few verses of "Hiawatha" are given, and in the new text just adopted for use for the next five years, the poem does not appear at all.)

The remarkable group of ethnologists who worked in the last decades of the nineteenth and the first of the twentieth century achieved at last an adequate record of Indian life and lore. They set themselves at all times an ideal of verbal accuracy in reporting, and they tended increasingly to take material down in the original language. With the perfection of phonograph recording it became possible to preserve not only words and phrases but also the actual tone and emphasis of oral delivery; thus it is as oral art that American Indian songs and traditions must be considered.

No written language. There is really no such thing as a written language among the Indians of the United States. Such picture writings as appear on rocks and on birch bark or skins are nothing more than a kind of sign language, sometimes as a device for remembering the details of ceremonials. The most ambitious "literary" production of the Indians of the United States is a historical record of the Delaware Indians known as the "Walam Alum." The text apparently taken down by dictation is accompanied by illustrative pictographs. Its value is entirely linguistic and historical, not actually literary.

All traditions of artistic value among the Indians are oral.



These are handed down by word of mouth and are retained by individual and collective memory. Such expression is analogous in many of its details of form and substance to the genres familiar to students of European literatures. It serves and has served for a very long time the same needs for its unlettered folk as the literature of manuscript and printed page has served for its readers.

Familiar literary patterns. Somewhere among American aborigines examples of nearly all of the familiar literary patterns are to be found. The lyric, always as a song; the chant; the incantation; the myth; the fairy tale; the humorous anecdote; occasionally even the riddle and the proverb—all these have been widely practiced from the time when we first met the Indians shortly after the Discovery. The small amount of change observable in their traditions suggests that many of these patterns must be very old. We read tales in the Jesuit Relations of the 1630's and find them told centuries later with insignificant change. But there has also been a continual importation of the new and an adoption of material from neighboring tribes, and the far traveler has always carried alien material and transplanted it in distant regions. This folk literature of the natives of the United States is therefore a complex structure, the result of the mingling of

many influences and of centuries of ripening and refining.<sup>2</sup>

Indian myths and tales. Because of both the wealth of available collections and the wide geographical distribution which they display, myths and tales have always been given more attention than any other aspects of American Indian folklore. In most of these tales there is a poetic quality, an appreciation of nature befitting those who lived close to the land and loved it. Since Indians were mostly hunters and fishermen, their tales were woven around the earth, the sky, birds, and animals. Each tribe had its local folk tales, but many stories seem to be common to widely separated tribes.

As in other mythologies, Indian legends explain the beginnings of the universe, the origins of light and dark, day and night. In one legend about the creation of man all the animals provide suggestions for this new creature. The coyote takes the best qualities of all and creates the first man.

Many Indian myths give beautiful and poetic explanations for natural wonders. The mist in a waterfall recalls a beautiful princess who perished there. The wind in a canyon is the lament of a girl for her lover. A rocky crag on a mountainside is a huge stone canoe that carried a tribe safely through the flood. The star group, the Pleiades, is a band of children dancing in the

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<sup>2</sup>Robert E. Spiller and others, Literary History of the United States (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1948), II, 694-695.



sky. Just as the Greeks and Romans and Norsemen explained how things began, so did the Indians. The story of the origin of corn is an explanation that reminds us in some ways of the myths of other people. The myth "Mon-Daw-Min" from "The Myths of Hiawatha," by Henry Rowe Schoolcraft recounts the origin of corn. This myth, selected as one of the best, is in Myths and Folklore by Henry I. Christ.<sup>3</sup>

Legends. "The Legend of Scarface" as told by George Bird Grinnell in Blackfoot Lodge Tales is the hero story of the Blackfeet Indians who live in what is now the Dakotas. It tells of the founding of the Medicine Lodge by the young Indian who traveled from the Dakotas "west toward the abiding place of the Above Person, the Sun." In his journey to the Sun god, Scarface blazed the trail from the Dakotas to the Pacific Ocean which was followed later in our history by the explorers and fur traders. This legend is to be found in Endless Horizons by Matilda Bailey and Ullin W. Leavell.<sup>4</sup> It was interesting to note that "The Legend of Scarface" was grouped with such other widely-known legends as "The Wooden Horse" from The Aeneid, "This Hound Hath Loved Me" from the Mahabharata, "Rustem and Sohrab" from Shah Namah, "The

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<sup>3</sup>Henry I. Christ, Myths and Folklore (New York: Oxford Book Company, 1952), pp. 376-379.

<sup>4</sup>Matilda Bailey and Ullin W. Leavell, Endless Horizons (New York: American Book Company, 1956), pp. 589-594.

Forging of the Sampo" from the Kalevala, and "The Vale of Thorns" from The Song of Roland. The group was entitled "Our Heritage of World Epics."

Another legend, "The Lincoln Salt Basin Legend" by Louise Pound, tells why the city of Lincoln, Nebraska, was so named. An interesting project for a class in the study of folklore would be to find how many names in certain areas were so called because of Indian influence.

James Fenimore Cooper wrote about Indian lore in his Leatherstocking Tales. The Last of the Mohicans, The Deerslayer, and other Cooper novels tell of the life and customs of the Indians. Indians of the Americas; Historical Pageant by Edwin R. Embree includes history, description, and legends of Indians of North, Central, and South America.

Gods or spirits. The Indians of Latin America and Mexico had a set of gods much like the Greek and Roman gods. They called their gods "spirits." The North American Indians had a king-god who was called the Great Spirit. His name was "Manitou," or Power, and his presence was in all things. The Norse hero went to Valhalla after death, the Indian warrior went to the "high place." The Indian spirits brought rain and sunshine. Evil spirits caused sickness and bad luck. Good spirits brought health and happiness and plenty.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>"American Folklore," World Book Encyclopedia (Chicago: Field Enterprise, Inc., 1949), VI, 2650.



Ceremonials. Though they are not a part of literature themselves, the ceremonials of many American Indian tribes have served as a framework for several literary forms, particularly for the myth and song. Intimately connected with both is the religious dance. In many groups the ceremonial life is so important as to be the main spring of practically all artistic activity. This is especially true of the Southwestern group, which has a tendency to draw everything into the ritualistic pattern. The externals of such ritualism are clear and interesting to the observer, even to the casual traveler, but the esoteric significance of the dances and songs remains hidden, and of course unappreciated.<sup>6</sup>

Poetry and songs. Generalizations about the poetry and songs of the American Indian are difficult, for these vary considerably from tribe to tribe. It is a long way from the elaborate chanted ritualistic poems of the Southwestern peoples to the sharp and often inarticulate miscellaneous songs of the Plains. In the latter particularly, the actual words seem unimportant in comparison to the music. Frequently there is a little more than a succession of meaningless syllables, and always an excessive repetition. The musical idiom varies, but it almost never becomes pleasant to the unaccustomed ear unless profoundly modified by some professional composer. The range of subject

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<sup>6</sup>Spiller, op. cit., p. 700.

matter of the songs is considerable and it varies with their use; for particular parts of a ceremonial, for dances, for gambling, for magic incantations, for war, for children's games, for love making, for lullabies, or for other events of ordinary life.

The ritualistic chants of such peoples as the Navaho or Iroquois, though they are naturally filled with repetition, usually fourfold, and are likely to tire the listener from outside the group, often contain excellent imagery and in their proper setting are truly impressive poems.

Perhaps the best opportunity which the American Indian had for the exercise of an individual poetic gift is in the short magic song. These songs are usually alleged to have been learned in a dream, and they are undoubtedly a combination of suggestions received from poetic patterns already known with an observation or emotion of the moment. In such songs we find described a situation such as the singer wishes it to be. He expects by singing the song to bring this about. Thus in a song from the Papago of Arizona, preserved by Ruth M. Underhill, the corn is encouraged to come up:

The corn comes up;  
It comes up green;  
Here upon our fields  
White tassels unfold.

The corn comes up;  
It comes up green;  
Here upon our fields  
Green leaves blow in the breeze.

Blue evening falls,  
Blue evening falls;



Near by, in every direction,  
It sets the corn tassels trembling.

Or the rain is called down from the clouds after the long desert  
drought:

Where stands the clouds, trembling  
On Quijotoa Mountain,  
The cloud trembling.  
There lies my heart  
Trembling.

Within Quijotoa Mountain,  
There is thunder.  
I looked through it and saw  
In every direction  
Light!

Wind came, clouds came.  
I sat above them.  
Underneath, the mirage glittered.  
Rain fell,  
The mirage was gone. . . .

At the edge of the world  
It is growing light.  
The trees stand shining.  
I like it.  
It is growing light.

At the edge of the world  
It is growing light,  
Up rears the light.  
Just yonder the day dawns,  
Spreading over the night.<sup>7</sup>

American Indian stories. Of these there are many and they vary in type. Some are simple anecdotes to which explanations have been added, but it is believed by modern scholars of this kind of tale that the anecdote is more important than the explanation. In

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<sup>7</sup>Ibid., pp. 701-702.

nearly all parts of the continent a considerable portion of the native narrative repertoires deals with situations thought of as humorous by both teller and audience. These are usually known as trickster tales, since the point of the anecdote is nearly always some clever act of a half-animal, half-human being, conveniently referred to as a trickster. From region to region his name and nature vary. On the North Pacific coast he is Raven or Blue Jay or Mink, according to the location of his tribe. By far the more widely known of all tricksters is Coyote, whose cleverness and foolishness are celebrated from the Eastern Plains to the California coast. With such tribes as the Ojibwa the culture hero and the trickster are the same person. In religious contexts, at initiation ceremonies and the like, Manabozho (Longfellow's Hiawatha) is the bringer of culture and livelihood to his people. But in everyday gatherings the stories told about Manabozho are much the same as the trickster tales related farther west concerning Coyote.

These trickster incidents are humorous and many of them are distributed over half or two-thirds of the continent. They are probably known to more individual tale-tellers than any other kind of story. Their inconsistencies seem not to matter. Coyote is at one moment an animal, at the next he is obviously a person; Manabozho appears at one moment as a demigod, at the next as a buffoon; and all tricksters are uncertain mixtures of cleverness and foolishness.



As in our culture, these humorous or near-humorous anecdotes are usually short and have little narrative elaboration. At their best they are witty and pointed; at their worst, silly and stupid. The only way in which they are given any length is by the process, familiar to all story-tellers, of stringing independent incidents together into an acceptable sequence.

The Indians do, however, have a number of stories of substantial compass. Some of these take a half-hour in the telling, and they are usually recited on more formal occasions than the trickster anecdote. Of the more popular of these long stories among the American Indians there are some forty. (Milton Rugoff's A Harvest of World Folk Tales contains eight representative tales or legends. Tales of North American Indians by Stith Thompson is one of the best mature selections of Indian tales. America is West by John T. Flanagan contains several Indian legends, as well as folk tales of the frontier.)

About a dozen of these forty stories can be spoken of as "hero" tales since they recount conflicts between a hero, often weak and unpromising, and a monster or at least a frightful adversary. Some of them remind one of the European cycle in which the father-in-law puts the son-in-law through almost impossible ordeals. Another series known as Lodge-Boy and Thrown-Away, current primarily in the Plains, has resemblance to the medieval romance of Valentine and Arson. A woman is killed by a monster who takes twin boys from her body, leaves one in the lodge and

throws the other into the bushes. Eventually Lodge-Boy and Thrown-Away find each other and go together on heroic adventures.

Frequently the hero tale comes as a sequel to events which have taken place in the upper world. These other-world stories are not numerous, but they are among the most popular and best told of all the native tales. Particularly well known is "The Star Husband," which recounts how a girl goes to the star world, marries a star, is forbidden to dig, but disobeys and is overcome by longing to return home. Sometime she has borne her supernatural husband a son. In any case, she makes a rope, and on it begins a descent to the earth. In some versions she succeeds in returning, but in others it is only the son who survives. Among the Plains tribes this boy becomes the hero of an elaborate series of adventures.

A tale like "Star Husband" must be very old. It has had time to develop three different characteristic forms, each with a clear-cut geographical distribution. It is known from Alaska to Nova Scotia, from California to Alabama.<sup>8</sup>

Yet the majority of the students in the schools of today never heard of the tale. This Indian literature needs to be made available to all, for it is the oldest culture of America.

In Sidewalks of America, edited by B. A. Botkin, are several interesting Indian tales. Among them are "Mardi Gras Indians"

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<sup>8</sup>Ibid., pp. 697-699.



which is taken from Gumbo Ya-Ya, A Collection of Louisiana Folk Tales, compiled by Lyle Saxon, and "Taos Feud" taken from "The Cities of America: Taos, New Mexico," by Joe Alex Morris.

Indian riddles, proverbs, and oratory. To the person with a background of European or White American culture, the tales of the North American Indians are, for the most part, interesting and clear, even in fairly literal translations. But this is not true of some of the other literary forms. The riddle and proverb are present but are scarce, and when approached through translation they lose much of their point. One knows also that there have been many renowned Indian orators, and several of their orations have become famous. One was the remarkable oration attributed to the Mingo Chief Logan after the massacre of his family in 1774:

"There runs not a drop of my blood in the veins of any human creature. This called on me for revenge. I have sought it—I have killed many—I have glutted my vengeance. For my country I rejoice at the beams of peace; but do not harbor the thought that mine is the joy of fear. Logan never felt fear. He will not turn on his heel to save his life. Who is there to mourn for Logan? Not one."<sup>9</sup>

Yet it is extremely difficult to know just what the chief actually said, since it appears that the speech as we have it was composed only from rough notes. Something of the original in this and other orations doubtless remains, but it is natural that, in the excitement of debate, no one would think to record the orator's exact words.

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<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 700.

The oral literature of the Indians of the United States has served for those people in much the same way as the written literature has contributed to the civilization of Europe. In the contact between Indian and White, these traditions have largely remained unassimilated and even unknown by the stronger group. Even in an age of books and radio, this oral literature serves as an artistic outlet for an increasing Indian population.<sup>10</sup>

Thus through the retelling of their myths, legends, spirits or gods, ceremonials, trickster tales, longer and more serious tales, songs, and orations, a wealth of folklore can be brought to light about the Indians who occupied this land long before the coming of the white man. Through recognition of the Indian folklore, perhaps some of the injustice to the American Indian can be remedied, and the dignity and respect due him as an individual and member of a fighting race be restored. Their culture and tradition form a part of the vast amount of American folklore and further offer to the teacher a challenge and an opportunity to add interest and variety to the presentation of American literature to the classes which he teaches.

## II. BACKGROUND OF AMERICAN FOLKLORE

B. A. Botkin writes in the introduction of his book A Treasury of American Folklore that when he began to think of a

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<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 702.



book of American folklore, he thought of all the good songs and stories and all the good talk that would go into it, and of what a richly human and entertaining book it would be. He continues:

A book of American folklore, I thought should be as big as this country of ours—as American as Davy Crockett and as universal as Brer Rabbit. For when one thinks of American folklore one thinks not only of the folklore of American life—the traditions that have sprung up on American soil—but also of the literature of folklore—the migratory traditions that have found a home here.

Because folklore is so elemental and folk songs and stories such good neighbors and pleasant companions, it is hard to understand why American folklore is not more widely known and appreciated. For this the word "folklore" is partly responsible. Folklore is the scholar's word for something that is as simple and natural as singing songs and spinning yarns among the folk who know the nature and the meaning but not the name—and certainly not the scholarship—of folklore. Because the word denotes both the material and its study, and has come to stand more for the study of the thing than for the thing itself, folklore, in fact, seems to have become the possession of the few who study it rather than of the many who make or use it.<sup>11</sup>

The last statement of Mr. Botkin's is just another challenge to English teachers and to authors of books of English to bring this wealth of material to the American youth through his literature that he may realize just how much folklore is a part of his heritage and present culture. Carl Sandburg expressed folklore in one dynamic sentence when he said, "It breathes of the human diversity of these United States."<sup>12</sup> And perhaps the vastness of

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<sup>11</sup>B. A. Botkin, A Treasury of American Folklore (New York: Crown Publishers, 1944), p. v.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. vi.

American folklore can be indicated in the answer of a Kentuckian who, when once asked what he considered the boundaries of the United States, replied, "Why sir, on the north we are bounded by the Aurora Borealis, on the east we are bounded by the rising sun, on the south we are bounded by the procession of the Equinoxes, and on the west by the Day of Judgment."<sup>13</sup>

### III. FOLKLORE IN AMERICAN LIFE

Racial or linguistic groupings of the inhabitants of various parts of the Western Hemisphere provide the basis for many folklore studies. The Spanish, French, German and other foreign-language settlers in the new world brought with them much folklore, some of which survived in the new land. Foreign-language groups often continued to develop folklore of their own, as well as borrowing much from their neighbors. Attention to the folklore of various minority groups in the United States, including the Negro, should promote better inter-cultural understanding.

Regional influences are apparent in the different versions of common folk materials to be found in the different parts of the United States and of the other Western republics. New England, the Southwest, the Deep South, and the Far West have, also, peculiar kinds of folklore that reflect the history, the population, and the physical environment of each specific region. The unique

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<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 276.



aspects of regional cultures should be preserved as counterbalances to monotonous standardization.

Folklore in the United States may be studied profitably by means of other classifications than regional or linguistic differences. Groups may be based upon rural or urban localities, age levels, vocations, or social strata. Although folklore is often collected and published according to types, its place in social life becomes clearer if all of the folklore of a certain group is assembled and then compared to that of other groups.

Historians and other interpreters of American life are turning more and more to a study of American folklore in order to find the basic attitudes and ideologies that have dominated the masses of people at different periods in the national development. They are studying such popular symbols as folk heroes and such potent words and phrases as "the Western frontier," "manifest destiny," "free land," "business success," and "the common man." American literary historians now trace the evidences of folk sources and of folk materials in the works of Mark Twain, Melville, Hawthorne, and other masters.

Students of American art and music are becoming more and more aware of the rich contributions that anonymous folk artists and musicians have made; many new compositions are based upon or inspired by the creations of forgotten folk. There are countless revivals of old customs, crafts, folk arts, entertainments and festivals. Evidently the folklore derived from earlier periods

in United States history and the folk customs and arts borrowed from immigrant groups as well as from "native inhabitants" are functioning today in the attempts to understand and to perpetuate American culture.<sup>14</sup>

#### IV. BLUEBLOODS OF FOLKSONG—THE BALLAD

From the time of the Middle Ages in Europe, when there appeared a form of story-song which in English had come to be called the ballad, until the present time, the ballad has been the blueblood and the aristocrat of the folksong. Ballads held the interest of students of literature, of song, of social custom, and of history. Many ballads contain lines of incomparable poetry and give succinct reading of life. Truly they are universal and England, Scotland, and America are fortunate in their rich store of ballads.

Another fact of interest worth noting about ballads is that when the American Folk-Lore Society began in 1888, its first object of research was old ballads. The first editor of the Journal of American Folk-Lore wrote, "The prospect of obtaining much of value is not flattering." At that time Francis James Child of Harvard had been collecting the English and Scottish ballads for over thirty years, chiefly from British sources, and was in

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<sup>14</sup>Levette J. Davidson, A Guide to American Folklore (Denver: The University of Denver Press, 1951), pp. 8-9.



process of publishing his monumental work. The harvest of over fifty years of collecting in the United States has proved that the "prospect" was greatly underestimated; about 125 of the 305 ballads in Child's The English and Scottish Popular Ballads (1882-1898) have been found in oral tradition among the people of the United States.<sup>15</sup>

Can the teachers and educators who are responsible for giving to the youth in the American schools his cultural heritage afford to let this blueblood and aristocrat--ballads--literature go untaught and unsung? How much longer will it be before the American reading public becomes conscious of this material? Judging from a statement made to the writer in graduate school this year the first step is to make the English teachers aware of this literature. A teacher after just finishing a course in Folk Literature taught by Dr. George Boswell of Austin Peay State College, Clarksville, Tennessee, said, "I had always thought that knowledge of folk material belonged only to the ignorant and illiterate but after this course I now have respect for folklore as 'real' literature." However, she continued, "Now that I know and respect it, how am I to bring it to my students since it is not in the texts which I am using?"

The need then becomes two-fold--to put folklore in all teacher-training courses, and incorporate it in the English texts

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<sup>15</sup>Branford P. Millar, "The American Ballad List--1952," Southern Folklore Quarterly, XVII, No. 2 (June, 1953), 160-161.

as "folklore" literature.

Ballads defined. Returning to ballads the writer feels it wise to define ballad, its types, and characteristics. For this information one finds The Ballad Book by MacEdward Leach a reliable source. Leach says in defining ballads:

From their beginnings these story-songs had certain definite characteristics; three of which are primary characteristics in that they are always found, and two are secondary in that they frequently appear. The primary characteristics are as follows: (1) The ballad tells a story; (2) it tells its story in song, in simple melody; (3) it is "folk" story-song since it has the unmistakable qualities of treatment, of style, and of subject matter that come only from folk culture.<sup>16</sup>

In his long introduction Leach continues on other phases of the ballad. He writes that of the two common types of action in narrative, plotted and episodic, the ballad invariably uses plotted action. Or perhaps it would be better to say that the ballad maker chooses a plotted story around which to compose his ballad. The typical action is consequently twofold: the unstable situation and the solution. Hence ballad story is suspenseful and climactic.

Another conspicuous difference between modern story and ballad story is the tendency to pass quickly over the first half of the plot--the unstable situation--to come to the second--the solution. It is somewhat like beginning a play in the last act,

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<sup>16</sup> MacEdward Leach (ed.), The Ballad Book (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1955), pp. 1-2.



and it often leaves the modern reader bewildered, feeling that he has not been given enough information to know what is happening.

This tendency to concentrate on climactic action is a contribution of the folk to ballad style and form, for it develops in a given ballad as that ballad comes down in time from folk singer to folk singer. Ballads are things of growth; in their earliest forms many, but certainly not all, of the ballads probably told stories as detailed as any conventional narrative; but as they are recreated by the folk, the slow elements and the undramatic elements are dropped and only the hard core of tension remains—the moment of drama.

In one way this is the ultimate in dramatic expression, for here is the universal. Here is man in his dramatic moment. He is "a" man becoming man and facing the one moment in life that destroys all or reveals all. What matter the details that bring this moment about? They are all different and yet all the same in that they bring man to his dramatic moment. The folk are not concerned with why, for they are not introspective or analytical. Rather they are concerned with the drama of the moment and the character's reaction to it. This then, is the important difference between ballad story and sophisticated narrative with its emphasis on motivation.

Akin to the technique under discussion is the one in the ballad happily known as "leaping and lingering." This means simply that the ballad passes from scene to scene in the narrative

without filling in the gaps, leaping over time and space and lingering on these scenes that are colorful and dramatic. Almost any ballad will yield instances of this technique.

Another ballad quality. The ballads have yet another quality that puts them in objective literature and marks them essentially dramatic and not lyric, and that is their impersonality. The ballad is objective; the action is allowed to unfold of itself, without comment or expressed emotion of the author. The stage is set, the actors come on and go through their parts with no direction or comment. Moreover, the action is related throughout on the same level of tension. The most brutal or exciting detail is related in the same casual, unconcerned manner as a bit of explanation.

A ballad, then, tells a story, tells it dramatically with emphasis and focus on the climax, and treats it with complete detachment, objectively and impersonally.

Ballad folk. The fact that the ballad is "folk" song and that the folk ultimately make a ballad what it is partly accounts for the qualities of narrative mentioned, but the folk contribute much more. Who are the ballad folk? There is a general impression that they are illiterate hillbillies, wandering around barefoot and smoking corncob pipes. The evidence from numerous records as far back as the Middle Ages points rather to the middle class; small farmers, shoemakers, village school teacher, nursemaids,



tinkers, wives of small tradesmen, inn-keepers, drovers. Among these too are the itinerant singers of songs who go from village to village plying a small trade, but concerning themselves largely with singing their stores of songs. Here and there members of the gentry and of the professional and book-educated class became interested in ballads and sang them or wrote them down.

Ballad subjects. What then is the source of ballad subjects? Ballads are of the stuff that was the general concern of people living in homogeneous, semi-isolated groups: the folk of the glens and of the rural parishes. Ballads were made of the intellectual and emotional stock of lore of such people and were made because such people were interested in this stock of lore.

One of the largest groups of ballads is that embodying old oral tales, folk tales, old beliefs and superstitions. Some of the oldest ballads are to be found in this group. The belief in fairies was common among the folk through the eighteenth century; in fact, stories of fairies are still told and evidently half believed in as a good bit of this lore found its way into ballads. Along with the fairy lore found in ballads are the beliefs in the supernatural, the revenants, the dead who return, of transformation, and of the magic power of plants.

Part of folk culture was the riddle; constantly told and retold, it has come down in English from Old English times. In the later Middle Ages, stories of riddles were made into folk songs;

from these it was an easy step to riddle ballads by making answers to riddles a means of solving a plot. Some riddle ballads were perhaps simply the versifying of riddle folk tales. All this great stock of lore not only furnished the ballad maker with active ballad story but graced and motivated many other ballad stories. Such lore and such stories were part of the general knowledge of everyone in any folk community.

Ballad style. Ballads are conventional in style, as folk songs and folk stories usually are. They tend to tell the same kind of story in the same way, developing them through stereotyped incidents and expressing them in the same language. The result is often identity of line, repetition of figures of speech, use of the same story devices, and the same manner of grouping details.

One is immediately struck in reading ballads by the repetition of lines and phrases in a given ballad. This, is of course, a general characteristic of folk literary style. It is used for emotional effect, for emphasis, and for melody. Often probably it is the natural consequence of oral expression and oral presentation. Sometimes it is echoic, serving to tie lines or stanzas, or in dialogue to indicate a speaker's attitude. Many times it serves only to fill out a line. The general effect of such constant repetition is to keep the narrative running; it certainly is a factor in creating vigorous and spirited narrative. The following stanzas from three very different ballads illustrate these points.



"O Waly, Waly my gay goss-hawk  
 Gin your feathering be sheen!"  
 "O Waly, Waly my master dear  
 Gin ye look pale and lean!"

"Gae, hame, gae, hame, gae hame, brother  
 Gae hame and lie with yer wife;  
 And I wish that the first news I may hear  
 That she has taen your life."

As she sailed upon the low and the lonesome low,  
 As she sailed upon the lonesome sea.

Not only is such simple repetition commonly used in ballads, but repetition of a more complicated sort is skillfully employed. This is incremental repetition, repetition with an addition that advances the story or contributes more information. This too gives the effect of running, fast-moving action, and furthermore it ties the elements of the story into an integrated whole that counteracts the effect of disunity which the leaping and lingering technique tends to create.

"Gar saddle me the black, the black  
 Gar saddle me the brown  
 Gar saddle me the swiftest steed  
 That ever rode to town"

"Ch ye hae poisoned your ae son, mother  
 Your ae son and your heir  
 Oh ye hae poisoned your ae son, mother  
 And sons you'll n'er hae mair"

And as he rode thorow the wood  
 Where trees and hearts and all were good  
 And as he rode o'er the plain  
 There he saw a knight lay slain.  
 And as he rode still on the plain  
 He saw a lady sit in a graine.

A reading of "Child Waters" will show the overall effects of incremental repetition. "Edward," "Randall," and "The Maid

"Freed From the Gallows" admirably demonstrate the use of incremental repetition in building to a climax--the constant repetition of a familiar line of verse, with a new element coming as a mild surprise at the end of each, creating a kind of minor climax, and then the last line that releases tension and resolves all.

Detailed study of this device has shown that it is very effective and most artistically used.

Two elements found frequently as a part of folk song are the refrain and the burden or chorus. The refrain is a line repeated after each narrative line or each two narrative lines. Sometimes the refrain lines rhyme.

There is a feast in your father's house  
The broom blows bonny and so it is fair  
 It becomes you and me to e very douce  
And we'll never gang up to the broom ne mair.

There were three ladies lived in a bower,  
Eh vow bonnie  
 And they went out to pull a flower  
On the bonnie banks O Fordie.

Refrains may be mere nonsense syllables, such as "With a High Down Downe a Downe, a." Some of these nonsense refrains become fantastic.

"Fa, fa, fa, fa, lilly  
 With my glimpy, glimpy, glimpy eedle  
 Lillun too tee a ta too A tee a ta a tally"

Such nonsense syllables often result from the distortion of actual words. "Lilly," for example, is Old English "leaflic," lovely. Many medieval lyrics had Latin refrains some of which in distorted form may have drifted to ballad. There is also the



suggestion that elements in nonsense refrains may have come from singing notes of the musical scale. The refrain, at any rate, should be looked on as a stylistic device and perhaps as a means of getting the singer's interpretation of the story and his reaction to it.

Partly stylistic and partly structural are the allied ballad devices, the climax of relations and the testament. The former is the mustering of the relatives of a character in a ballad to show their importance to him personally and to the elucidation and resolution of the story. This device is frequently combined with the testament, the latter being a dramatic way of identifying the villain in the ballad story. Both of these conventional devices are dramatic, tending to knit the story, build the suspense, and resolve it with the dramatic naming in the climax which releases the emotion and gives the information. Both devices are found widely in folk story and in other types of folk song. They are constantly used today in the Negro songs of America.

More ornamental is the "rose and brier" ending. Lovers must die, but out of the grave of one springs a rose and out of the other grave a brier which twine together in a true lover's knot. Many of the love ballads end thus and it is also common in the romances and in folk tales. In one version of the Deirdre story, for example, two trees spring up from the graves of two lovers and their branches join. The folk belief behind this is that the souls

of dead lovers pass into the trees or plants that spring from the graves and so the lovers are united after death in a kind of physical way. Note the reading of one version of "Earl Brand":

The one was buried in Mary's kirk  
The other in Mary's quire;  
The one sprung up a bonnie bush  
And the other a bonnie briar.

In ballad use this device is probably little more than a graceful and poetic means for closing a story of love tragedy, a device that mitigates the tragedy by symbolizing the reunion of the lovers after death.

To the superficial reader nothing is more distinctive about a ballad than the "quaint" expressions: lily white hand, red roan steed, wan water, yellow hair, white as milk, sewing a silken seam, and so on. This is conventional ballad diction, and it comes from a variety of sources. Some of it certainly goes back to Old English alliterative poetry. It is constantly employed as metrical and music filler, for such tags are often fitted in to piece out a line when memory fails the singer. To the folk the familiar is pleasing, and this partly accounts for the constant repetition of these commonplaces just as it does for the repetition of line and situation.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup>Ibid., pp. 3-25.



## V. BALLADRY IN AMERICA

Ballads have been sung and composed in America since the time of the first settlement. The framework and the patterns of our folklore are in the main British. The linguistic medium by which it has largely been preserved and transmitted is English. The types thus established are those closest to the experience of our people and most intimately related to our print-recorded literature. For these reasons, aside from incidental references and comparisons to the other three largest pockets--the French, the German, and the Spanish--the illustrations will be taken from folklore of British types and type modifications expressed in the English language as spoken in the United States.

Leach tells us that ballads in America fall into three groups: (1) the traditional English and Scottish popular ballads (the Child ballads), (2) the broadside or stall ballads imported largely from England and Ireland, and (3) original ballads that in style, technique, and form imitate those in the first two groups.<sup>18</sup>

Many themes. These old ballads illustrate all the major themes of ancient balladry. The favorites are romantic love stories like "Barbara Allen," "Lord Thomas and Fair Annet," "The Maid Freed from the Gallows," and "The Gypsy Laddie." Domestic

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<sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 36.

tragedies are well represented by "Edward," "Babylon," "The Two Sisters," and "Lord Randal." Riddles and wit contests are exemplified by "Riddles Wisely Expounded" and "Captain Wedderburn's Courtship." Medieval romance is echoed by "The Marriage of Sir Gawain" and "Thomas Rhymer." Saints' legends and sacred stories are recalled by "Sir Hugh, or The Jew's Daughter," and "The Cherry Tree Carol"; jest and fabliaux, by "Our Goodman" and "The Wife Wrapt in Wether's Skin"; the Robin Hood cycle, by nine pieces. The supernatural is impressively handled in "The Wife of Usher's Well" and "Sweet William's Ghost." Two superb sea ballads are "The Sweet Trinity" and "Sir Patrick Spens," the latter found of late in Virginia and Tennessee.

Spanish romances. Of the foreign ballads known to oral tradition in the United States, those most comparable to the group just discussed are Spanish romances of the Southwest. About a score of these, dating from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, have been found in New Mexico. Most of them belong to the novelesque type, treating of love, honor, fidelity and infidelity, war, legends originating in Arabic traditions, and religious emotion. They have undergone little change since they were transplanted. Among them are "Delgadina," telling the old Apollonius of Tyre story of an incestuous father; "Gerineldo," relating the love of Emma, daughter of Charlemagne, and Eginhard, the Emperor's steward; "Un Angel Triste," describing the intervention of the Virgin to save a condemned soul; and "Estabael gato



prieto," a burlesque story of a lovesick cat. The French ballads "Le Prince d' Orange" and "Le Prince Eugene" have been sung in sections contiguous with French Canada, and "Malbrough," "Montez, la Belle," and "Sept Ans sur la Mer" are known in Louisiana.

Changes in ballads. Referring to the old traditional legendary and romantic ballads, the editor of the Journal of American Folk-Lore, previously quoted, complains: "In the seventeenth century, the time for the composition of these had almost passed; and they had, in a measure, been superseded by inferior rhymes of literary origin, diffused by means of broadsides and song-books, or by popular doggerels, which may be called ballads, but possess little poetic interest."<sup>19</sup> It may have been such "foolish songs and ballads," hawked and sung in every town, that annoyed Cotton Mather. As a matter of fact, even today these pieces, of later and more plebeian rise, and other comparable types like the Irish come-all-ye's, are more current than the legendary and romantic ballads.

Not all of them, however, are distinctly inferior. Exception must be made for such as "Babes in the Woods," described by Addison as "that darling song of the English common people," and almost equally a favorite in America; "Shooting of His Dear," "The Yorkshire Bite," "The Pretty Fair Maid," "The Bugaboo,"

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<sup>19</sup>Robert E. Spiller and others, Literary History of the United States (The Macmillan Company, 1948), p. 706.

"Foggy, Foggy Dew," and nursery favorites like "Cocky Robin," and "The Three Jolly Huntsmen." More typical of the broadside are "The Butcher Boy" (an American amalgam of two or three British broadsides), "The Bramble Briar" (naively relating an analogue of Keats', "Isabella," previously treated by Boccaccio and Hans Sachs), "The Drowsy Sleeper," "The Silver Dagger," "The Sheffield Apprentice," and "The Wexford Girl"—the last three gory murder stories that established a pattern for many native ballads on that theme.

Early native American ballads. Of early native American ballads few have survived in popular tradition. "Lovewell's Flight," narrating an Indian fray of 1725, was remembered into the nineteenth century. Perhaps "Springfield Mountain" (originally a dolorous story about the death of a young New Englander from the bite of a rattlesnake, gradually burlesqued into a nursery tale) is the oldest and sole survivor from colonial times. From the period of the Revolution, "Yankee Doodle," "The Bombardment of Bristol, R. I.," and a few others, mainly of broadside origin, survived to some extent in oral tradition. It is known that there was one on Shay's Rebellion, but it has been lost. The War of 1812 produced "The Constitution and the Guerriere," "James Bird" (connected with the Battle of Lake Erie), "Andrew Jackson's Raid" (celebrating the campaign against the Creek Indians in 1813-1814), and "Ye Hunters of Kentucky" (known to a few folk singers of the present century). Regardless of their exact origins, "Springfield



Mountain," "Young Charlotte," "Little Mohee," "The Jam on Gerry's Rock," "Casey Jones," "The Buffalo Skinners," "Jesse James," the John Henry ballads, Frankie and Albert (Johnnie), and "Stagolee" are the most interesting in that they are the most original and most common in tradition.<sup>20</sup>

Negro ballads. From an artistic point of view, the finest of these are the Negro ballads. They have a spontaneity and a seriousness that the others lack. Too, they have a deep folk quality, a quality that comes from a close-knit, homogeneous folk, united by common experience and by common emotion. These are the only ballads that show the virility of luxuriant growth; over 150 versions of Frankie and Albert exist, and over fifty of John Henry.<sup>21</sup>

## VI. AMERICAN FOLK SONGS

Until a comparatively few years ago, American folk songs formed a class of music known only to "folks"—old-fashioned people—and to a very small group of musicians who appreciated their charm. Today, however, thanks to the work of Lomax, Weldon Johnson, Scarborough, Sandburg, Niles, and many others, folk songs have achieved distinction in our literature. They are loved for

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<sup>20</sup>Ibid., pp. 705-708.

<sup>21</sup>MacEdward Leach, The Ballad Book (Harper and Brothers, 1953), p. 42.

the innocence and artlessness of their music and for their simple beauty as literature, and they are beginning to be appreciated for their high educational value as direct and living reflections of the many facets of American history.

Most songs found in books are not really "collected." They have accrued almost without intention or design. They are unlooked-for dividends of a certain number of years of living, a certain number of places lived in, a certain need and habit of singing, under the "right" conditions--good company and a light heart. They are all indigenous to the United States; all were learned from people who live here. To be sure, many of the songs originated in other countries, but so did countless good Americans! They have accumulated in many ways, from many places; incomplete, fragmentary, a verse, a bar, with gaps filled in by accidents of time and place. A line of a song was first heard in a Colorado mine to the beat of a hammer and drill. Two decades later, two thousand miles away, within these same United States, the missing verses were conjured up at a party, by a mellow guitar.

A knowledge of the spontaneous songs of the "plain" people is necessary for the complete understanding of any nation. Natural peoples are impelled to express their deepest feelings in song. They sing of their joys, sorrows, and tragedies; their loves, fears, and religious aspirations. And in their songs are revealed their customs, language, their ways of living, working, and playing, as well as their deepest emotions.



Burl Ives said of folk songs:

When, as a student of singing, I discovered that there were many beautiful and exciting songs in the English language that nobody sang, that were looked down on as "folk," I chose them for my own. They became my repertoire. I did not sing them because they were folk, but because I thought them musically beautiful and their content meaningful, either dramatically, lyrically, or humorously—always expressive of a genuine human value.

Somewhere along the route, as I came upon the idea that this music was a neglected part of our cultural heritage, I began to organize the songs of our country into chronological sequence. I became aware that the songs might be important, not only musically but historically. A sense of continuity makes a family and a sense of continuity makes a nation one family. What better means is there of knowing ourselves for what we are, and our country for what it is, than devotion to the heritage of pertinent songs the entire nation can sing?

A vital people are a singing people, and a vital people have current experiences out of which musical expression must come. This musical expression will become a folk song. This is what folk songs of the past were and are. They are the great bulk of songs created before the days of radio by one or more among a group of people who shared an experience, like pioneering westward or sailing in a clipper ship. It was always a song growing out of the situation... sometimes a good song musically, sometimes not. But in every case an honest musical expression taken up by many, and therefore a folk song.

The folk songs are from the past and of the present, your heritage and mine. They are an integral part of the cultural history of the United States.<sup>22</sup>

From Mr. Ives's statement, it becomes imperative that the great body of folk songs be introduced into the study of America by the boys and girls of America now. These songs can be used in connection with both the English and history classes in the schools.

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<sup>22</sup>Burl Ives, The Burl Ives Songbook (New York: Ballantine Books, 1953), pp. 8-9.



Other values of folk songs. Satis N. Coleman and Adolph Bregman list other reasons why folk songs should be used in the schools. They are:

One of the greatest fields of usefulness for these songs is with boys and girls of high-school age. Most adolescents have grown tired of "children's songs," but they do not yet have the maturity of purpose or the patience for the drill necessary to perfect a large repertoire of songs that are usually considered "the best" in music literature. This may come to them later on--provided their love of singing is sustained through these restless years by a generous inclusion of songs that are merely "fun to sing."

The junior high school brings more problems to the music teacher than any other section of the school. These boys and girls are just entering into a real appreciation of the emotional lives of human beings. "The Golden Willow Tree," for instance strikes at the heart of the junior high school boy in a way that he cannot explain in words. The overstressed tragedy in "Blood on the Saddle" touches off his sense of the ridiculous. This and others give him the opportunity to satisfy his innate need for nonsense.

We recommend these songs to all ages. They are good for both old and young because they are fun to sing, and because they tell of the rise of America accurately, simply, and inimitably.<sup>23</sup>

Other folk songs of America. Other types of folksongs may be characterized without regard for origins or strict distinction between ballad and lyric. The arbitrarily drawn distinction between these two genres is that the ballad tends to be narrative, romantic and impersonal; the lyric (without story content), to be emotional, passionate, and personal, more often than not on an

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<sup>23</sup>Satis N. Coleman and Adolph Bregman, Songs of American Folks (New York: The John Day Company, 1942), pp. 7-8.



amatory theme. Folk singers are not conscious of the difference. A better principle of classification is the functional relationship of folk songs to the singer's interests and activities.

Collectors' field experiences. Functional classification, however, convenient as it is for exposition, to some extent distorts the facts of relationship. Practice of the folk-singing art is closely interwoven with all the actions, interests, and moods of everyday life, not merely with its ordinary avocations. A few incidents from collectors' field experiences will illustrate the point. In a Virginia cabin, Maud Karpales listened to the singing of "The Green Bed" by a mother of thirteen children, all present in the room. Then almost as though impelled by some unseen power, the children softly joined in the singing of this beautiful air, and the haunting loveliness of their young voices, subdued to an overtone so as not to disturb their mother's singing, was an unforgettable experience.<sup>24</sup>

A Mississippi informant said she had learned "Sir Hugh" as a lullaby sung by her mother. An Alabama family, father, mother, and son, sang "The Gypsy Laddie" dramatically; in character. Cecil Sharp found among the Appalachian mountaineers that aspect of an ideal society in which every child developed the inborn

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<sup>24</sup>Cecil J. Sharp (coll.), English Folk Songs from the Southern Appalachians (London: Oxford University Press, 1952), I, xvii.

capacity for song and sang the songs of his forefathers in the same natural and unself conscious way in which he now learns his mother-tongue and the elementary literature of the nation to which he belongs.<sup>25</sup> Folk singing functions spontaneously in most of the singer's relations to himself and to his fellows. All folk songs are broadly social.

Songs of American history. A large body of songs have to do with the events and movements of American history. Besides the historical ballads already mentioned, a few like "Plains of Mexico" and "Buena Vista," adaptations of earlier songs, relate incidents of the Mexican War. In Civil War days songs in the folk idiom, like "John Brown's Body," were modeled into more stately pieces, like the "Battle Hymn of the Republic," and old favorites like "We'll All Take a Ride" were adapted into such pieces as "The Union Wagon." "Grafted Into the Army" was perhaps the first of many comic treatments of conscription. "I Would Not Be Alone" is a more scornful handling from the point of view of a high-spirited Southern woman. "Come In Out of the Draft" may be the first musical pun on the word. "Tenting on the Old Camp Ground" and "Just Before the Battle, Mother" achieved wide circulation on both sides of the line, but not "Marching Through Georgia." On their side the Confederates sang "Dixie" in the folk version, not in the words of Albert Pike's "Bastard Marseillaise,"

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<sup>25</sup>Ibid., p. xxv.



revamped "Wait for the Wagon," and started "The Bonnie Blue Flag" and its tune sharer "The Homespun Dress" on careers that practically made them folksongs.

"The Southern Oath," composed perhaps by Rose Vertner Jeffrey in 1862, was still traditionally known in Missouri as late as 1906. The gaiety of Southern spirits was best expressed by "Goober Peas," "The Captain With His Whiskers," and "The Rebel Soldier" ("I'll eat when I'm hungry"). From the Spanish-American War emerged "There'll Be a Hot Time in the Old Town Tonight" and a few picturesque pieces about the girl kissing naval hero Hobson, but no songs achieved long or extensive circulation. The first World War produced several soldier songs of which "Hinkie Dinkie Parlez-vous (Mademoiselle from Armentieres)," indubitably composed communally, on the model of the British Army "Skiboo," is facile princeps.

Political songs in folksong. The stirring presidential campaigns of the forties were marked by extensive use of political songs in the folk style, published in The Harrison and Log Cabin Song Book, The Clay Minstrel, The Polk Songster, The Rough and Ready Songster, and the like. The Harrison campaign song "What Has Caused This Great Commotion?" was sung to the tune of "Little Pig's Tail." "Fremont Campaign Song" has a stanza beginning, "Old Ten-Cent Jimmy is No Go." "Henry Clay," sung to the tune of "Old Dan Tucker," survived in Mississippi as late as the 1920's—

Henry Clay came riding a jack  
 He rode on his belly to save his back;

and "Harrison Campaign Song," celebrating the farmer who left his "tidy log cabin" to drive out the occupants of the White House, and "When the Old Hat Was New," praising Harrison and Clay, were known in Missouri in 1912. These are early illustrations of an American political tradition continued in the transient popularity of such songs as "Happy Times Are Here Again" and "The Sidewalks of New York," and climaxed by the use of hillbilly music and song in state campaigns in Texas and Louisiana during the late 1930's and the early 1940's.

Reflections of the Old West. One of the most characteristically American bodies of songs, in content if not in originality of form and style, is that reflecting the Old West. Three groups of these may be illustrated.

The Gold Rush of 1849 and the conditions of life in the mining towns produced a considerable number of songs. "The Dying Californian" was modeled on an older tear-jerker, "Ocean Burial." "Joe Bowers" has a less tragic conclusion. After enduring hard work, privation and perils for his Sally, Joe received a letter from brother Ike stating that Sally had married a butcher with red hair—

And what was worse than that—  
 I almost wisht I was dead—  
 That Sally had a baby,  
 And the baby's hair was red.



The companion piece to "Joe Bowers" is "Sweet Betsy from Pike":

Oh, don't you remember sweet Betsy from Pike,  
Who crossed the big mountains with her lover Ike,  
With two yoke of oxen, a large yellow dog,  
A tall shanghai rooster and one spotted hog?

Several romantic and circumstantial accounts of the origin of "Joe Bowers" have been published, from which the most probable fact seems to be that the singing of the ballad at the old Melodian Theater in San Francisco, in 1849, by a comedian, John Woodward, member of Johnson's Minstrels, gave impetus to its currency.

Similar pieces, sung to folk and popular tunes, were broadcast among Californians by songsters, of which John A. Stone's Put's Original California Songster (1854) is an example. Among the favorite pieces with folksong antecedents are "An Honest Miner," "Days of Forty-Nine," "Sacramento Gals," "Hog Eye Man," and "What Was Your Name in the States?" Two or three of these are still traditionally known. "The Dreary Black Hills," relating to the gold strike in Wyoming in the sixties, is a pendant to these ballads of the Forty-Niners.

Cowboy songs in the West. A second major contribution of the West is the cowboy song. In John A. Lomax's and most succeeding collections, there are two types. Songs transmitted by purely oral tradition are exemplified by "The Old Chisholm Trail," "Git Along, Little Dogies," and "Old Paint." What Howard Thorp describes as "songs originally printed," clipped from a local newspaper or magazine, fitted to a familiar air, and so handed down

from one cowboy to another, becoming genuine folk-songs in the process," are exemplified in "The Glory Trail" (reshaped and sung as "High-chin Bob"), "The Cowboy's Christmas Ball," and "The Texas Cowboy."

Among the best and most memorable modeled upon older songs are "The Dying Cowboy" ("Oh, bury me not on the lone prairie"), based upon "Ocean Burial"; "The Cowboy's Dream," on "The Sweet By-and-By"; and the "Cowboy's Lament," on an Irish broadside, "The Dying Rake." Comparable Mexican pieces known in Texas are exemplified by "La Corrida de Kiansas," relating the heroic death of a vaquero. However the cowboy songs may have originated, they were adapted to the needs of the lonely men who rode night herd, drove the steers from range to range or to market, and forgathered around campfires, in the ranch houses, or at the saloons. They have a distinctively American accent, and they splash the palette of American folksong with bright colors.

Songs of the pioneer. A third group of Western songs describes pioneering. "Starving to Death on a Government Claim" and "Dakota Land" typify the usual themes. These are supplemented by a considerable number of Norwegian emigrant songs and ballads.

Sea chanteys and songs. Songs of the sea, the canals, and the rivers are variously adapted to the work, the interests, and the sentiments of men whose business has sent them upon the waters. The chanteys flourished in the glorious era of American



shipping following the War of 1812, and their heyday coincided with the supremacy of the clipper ships. Though some of them are traceable to the Elizabethan period, the first description of chantey singing on an American ship is said to be R. H. Dana's, written in 1834. Critical opinion awards equal merit to British and American sailors for developing them. The true chanteys directing the movements of sailors at work followed a definite pattern in which solo and chorus were adjusted to the practical purpose in hand.

Four types are represented in standard collection: the short-drag, exemplified by "Haul Away, Joe"; the halyard, by "Whiskey Johnny" and "Blow the Man Down"; "any song with a long 'chorus' and swing," by "Shenandoah" and "Santa Anna"; and the "Forecastle Song," by old traditional English ballads like "The Golden Vanity," and broadsides of the War of 1812 such as "The Constitution and the Guerriere." The whalers sang both the chanteys and a number of ballads and songs especially related to their experience. Among these were "Reuben Ranzo," the success story of a tailor who "shipped on board a whaler" and made up for his landlubberly deficiencies by marrying the captain's daughter; "Jack Wrack," a moralistic piece on spreeing; and "Blow, Ye Winds" and "Greenland Whale Fishery," describing the hardships and perils of whaling.

The mingling of the waters by the construction and operation of the canals resulted also in the mingling of folklores. Besides

scattering the Irish laborers and their songs and tales from Rome to Buffalo, the Erie Canal became a five-hundred-mile festival. "Paddy on the Canal" describes the digging of the ditch. Other ballads celebrate races and fights, and numerous songs issue warning about the business end of a mule, satirize the hotels, and detail the accommodations of jails. "The Raging Canal" is a rhymed tall tale on the perils of navigating a four-foot-deep ditch. "Boating on a Bull-Head," however, describes a real danger—"The bowsman he forgot to yell, 'Low bridge, ducker down!'" The classic is "Low Bridge, Everybody Down" ("I've got a mule and her name is Sal"), called by Sandburg "the Volga Boat Song of America."

Rouster and soundings songs. Of even greater variety than the songs of the sea and the canals are those sung by paddlers of canoes and bateaux, polers of keelboats, steersmen of flatboats and steamboats, pilots, roustabouts, and passengers on the river. The "rouster" and the "soundings" songs are the closest river counterparts of the sea chanteys. These and sprawling song narrative like "Katie and the Jim Lee Had a Little Race" and bits like "The Gold Dust Five," are the most distinctive river pieces. "Steamboat Round the Bend," dating from the Civil War, is known throughout the length and breadth of the land. Except for fragments about such steamboats as the Stacker Lee, the Lovin' Kate, and the City of Cairo, most of the river songs are remembered only by the river people. Like the cowboy songs, they are local and topical in content, loose and rambling in construction.



Lumberjacks in song. As the lumber industry moved westward from the Atlantic seaboard toward the end of the eighteenth century, the industrial woodsman (lumberjack, raftsmen, sawmill hand) began to appear. The invention of the circular saw and the demands of the West for building material brought on the golden age of the industry in the North Central states and produced the shantyman as an industrial and folk type. By 1900, when the industry spread to the South, most of the romance and glamour had disappeared as the Irishman, the Scotchman, and the French Canadian gave place to the native hired hands in the woods. It was during the years between 1850 and 1900 that most of the songs of the shantyboy were composed and first sung around the deacon seat.

Most popular of all was "The Jam on Gerry's Rocks." "Jim Whalen" relates a similar story of death in a log jam. "The Brown Bulls" is a delightful yarn of a pulling contest between ox teams. Paul Bunyan, the mythical hero of the lumberjacks, is celebrated in a few ballads, but these are overshadowed by the tall tales about him.

Songs in railroad construction. Railroad construction produced the Negro hero John Henry, who looms gigantic in a cycle of ballads. He is also a work-song hero. The functional aspects of the John Henry songs, setting the rhythm for hammer or pick, are complemented by a host of other work songs most fully developed by Negroes. But accidents and disasters incidental to operation

supply the most dramatic and picturesque themes. The best ballads of train wrecks have come out of the South and West. "Casey Jones," for instance, was probably composed on older models by a Negro roundhouse worker, Wallace Saunders, about John Luther Jones, engineer of the Cannon Ball Express, who died at the throttle in a collision at Vaughan, Mississippi, in 1900. The ballad owes much of its present form and wide diffusion to vaudeville rehandling of the earlier song by Saunders. "The Wreck of Old '97" is well known in Virginia and the Carolinas.

Miners and their songs. Linked to the balladry of the nation's canals, lumber camps and railroads, but dashed with a Celtic infusion, are songs growing out of the mining industry. The best of these have come from the anthracite region, where Irish and Welsh immigrants, with their old-country songs and tunes and their communal gatherings on the green, a part of every "mine patch," developed their own minstrelsy. Some of the pieces recall the troublous days of the Molly Maguires, Irish laborers who terrorized the anthracite region in the seventies; but the most characteristic treat of mine work, disasters, and strikes. "Pat Dolan" and "Thomas Duffy" are two Molly Maguire ballads; "The Shoofly" and "Down, Down, Down" deal with the fears and hopes, the hardships and mishaps, of the industry.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>26</sup>Spiller and others, op. cit., pp. 708-713.



## VII. BLACK AND WHITE SPIRITUALS

The spirituals are religious songs which have been made famous by the Negroes of the Southern part of the United States.

The spirituals have a strong rhythm and are very emotional.

Spirituals are especially moving when sung by a group. One or two lines of a spiritual are sometimes sung alone by a leader.

A chorus of voices comes in with the refrain. The rhythm is often emphasized by the clapping of hands. Spirituals have often been considered the only truly American folk songs. Almost all other types are based on the folk music of Europe.

The tunes used in spirituals are sometimes said to have come from Africa. Some of them use scales which are still used in Africa. But there are spirituals which have no relation whatever to African songs. These show a distinct relation to the results of evangelistic preaching whose activities brought on the Great Awakening that impelled the creation of the American folk hymn or "white spiritual."

George Pullen Jackson identifies three kinds of white spiritual: the ballad, the hymn, and the revival song, as stated in "Fundamentals of Folk Literature" by Boswell and Reaver. They further state that:

. . . religious ballads are designed for solo singing, like "The Romish Lady" and "The Little Family" (story of the raising of Lazarus). The second type, folk hymns, are slow, stately pieces used in worship. The words of folk hymns are not usually traditional, but the music is

folk airs harmonized perhaps crudely for part singing. Examples are "Amazing Grace," "How Firm a Foundation," and "Idumea." Third are the revival songs, simple, repetitive, which might have been composed by a singing throng on the spur of the moment. These are songs like "The Old Time Religion," "Where Are the Hebrew Children?", "I Am Bound for the Promised Land," and "Glory, Hallelujah!"<sup>27</sup>

There are no records of early spirituals and their authors. Negro songs were usually sacred, although some were sung while the Negroes worked and rested. The Negroes' love for rhythm and song led them to put their feelings and memories into their singing. Much of the cotton picking, ship loading, and plantation work was accompanied by singing.

Spirituals were little known outside the Southern States until after the Negro was freed from slavery. In 1867 William Francis Allen and Lucy McKim Garrison published a collection of Negro music called Slave Songs. These songs included "Climb Jacob's Ladder," "Give Me Jesus," and "I'll Take the Wings of the Morning."

In 1871 spirituals were introduced to other parts of the United States by a group of Negroes called the Jubilee Singers, of Fisk University, Nashville, Tennessee. Other Negro schools followed their example. The Negro quartets from Hampton Institute, Virginia, and Tuskegee Institute, Alabama, became famous.

The spirituals of the slaves were mostly based upon stories

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<sup>27</sup>George W. Boswell and Russell Reaver, "Fundamentals of Folk Literature" (unpublished), p. 104.



and characters from the Bible. The manner in which these stories are told in Negro spirituals shows a colorful imagination and a simple faith. Many slaves thought of themselves as modern children of Israel and looked for a black Moses to deliver them from their bondage. Their songs were warmly appealing and very sincere. Among the well-known spirituals are "Go Down, Moses," "Weeping Mary," "Deep River," "Nobody Knows the Trouble I've Seen," and "Swing Low Sweet Chariot."

Spirituals are now one of the best-known forms of American music. Such famous singers as Paul Robeson, Roland Hayes, and Jules Bledsoe have helped to accomplish this. Their influence can be heard in such operas as "Porgy and Bess," by George Gershwin, and "Emperor Jones," by Louis Gruenberg. Anton Dvorak, the

Bohemian composer, used some of the musical characteristics of these songs in his "New World Symphony."

The spirituals are the most characteristically American contribution to folklore.<sup>28</sup>

#### VIII. DANCE SONG

Dancing is the oldest and liveliest of the arts. In fact, it has been called the mother of the other arts. Throughout the ages, the dancing body has inspired the musician, the sculptor,

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<sup>28</sup>"Spiritual," The World Book Encyclopedia (Chicago: Field Enterprises, Inc., 1949), XIII, 7653-7654.

and the painter. The drama of most countries started in their dances, and the beginnings of music have been traced to the dance. The first music was merely a rhythm for the early dances. Perhaps it was only a chanting voice, the beat of a drum, the sound of two sticks struck together, or the clapping of hands, but it served its purpose for those who were dancing.

Primitive dance. Probably the most important activity in the life of primitive peoples and ancient civilizations is the dance. From the dim past until today, primitive man has danced. Life Magazine of February 25, 1957, has an article with elaborate pictures of the dance in a tribal ceremony in New Guinea. It is described as a violent dance to propitiate the spirits the tribe revered.<sup>29</sup>

Dance of other countries. Egypt got its dances from the peasant, or working class and as the Greeks and Romans associated their dancing with religion, all believed that their gods danced and dances were often given in their honor.

In ancient Greece, even the philosophers danced. Plato and Socrates greatly admired the dance and Socrates said in the Banquet of Xenophon:

Those who have accustomed themselves to long foot races have thick legs and narrow shoulders, while on the contrary,

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<sup>29</sup> Romantic Voyage of the "Varua," Life Magazine, XLIII (February 25, 1957), 68-87.



the wrestlers have broad shoulders and thin legs. Now instead of producing a result like that in the exercise of dancing, the feet, the legs, the neck and indeed the whole body are in action, and whoever would have his body supple, easy and healthful, should learn to dance.<sup>30</sup>

During the Middle Ages the growth of social dancing rose and was engaged in by the common people. Later the nobles took to the dance and dancing masters were engaged to teach them the new steps. The Renaissance brought again the refreshing influence of the common people and a new liveliness took the place of the more stately dance of the Middle Ages.

The Orient gave full importance to song and dance and dancing is often mentioned in the Bible. The Hebrews of the Old Testament danced at festivals. David in the Bible whirled and skipped before the Ark, and it is reported that the women danced when he returned after slaying Goliath. After the Jews passed through the Red Sea, Miriam and the maidens danced in chorus, with singing and beating of the timbrel.

The Arabs and the Persians had dances as well as the peoples of the Far East. China's ceremonial dances are as old as the country's history.<sup>31</sup>

This brief history of the dance was taken freely from the World Book Encyclopedia. It seemed necessary to digress at this

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<sup>30</sup>Mary Effie Shambaugh, Folk Dances for Boys and Girls (New York: A. S. Barnes and Company, 1929), p. 9.

<sup>31</sup>"Dancing," World Book Encyclopedia (Chicago: Field Enterprises, Inc., 1949), VI, 1864-1870.

point to emphasize the importance of the dance in order that we could more fully appreciate the inclusion of the dance song in American folklore.

Since all of us want to be supple, easy and graceful we therefore must dance, according to Socrates. And it is striking that most of the peoples of the world have agreed with Socrates and put themselves and their young people to dancing. So America, as every other nation, has its folk dancing and uses it as a means of joy and of socialization.

Grace L. Ryan in the preface to Dances of Our Pioneers wrote:

It has been noticeable in recent years that the folk dances have grown in popularity. One reason probably, apart from their own appeal, is the fact that the ballroom dance has tended to lose its sociability and become an aggregation of "isolated pairs." Consequently, the answer to a felt need has been found in the "mixer" aspect of the pioneer dance. It breaks down formal reserve and allows the "get acquainted spirit" to be fostered. Its appeal is nowhere more evident than in the fact that some of the latest ballroom novelties are, in reality, no more or less than some combination of tuneful music and folk cadence dressed up in modern garb. There surely is worthwhileness in activity in which everyone is made to feel so gay and friendly.<sup>32</sup>

Miss Ryan's book contains definitions of terms, complete directions, music, and illustrations for fifty dances of other days.

Another contribution to this field is the Folk Dance Library that has been compiled by Duggan, Schlottmann, and Rutledge.

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<sup>32</sup>Grace L. Ryan, Dances of Our Pioneers (New York: A. S. Barnes and Company, 1939), p. 10.



In their book Folk Dances of the United States and Mexico they give five concise reasons why the dance song should be a part of the curriculum of the schools. They say:

Fourth, to foster a vitalized feeling of nationalism in every country and to demonstrate through folklore the close cultural ties shared by the peoples of all nations, thereby promoting a broader concept of internationalism.

Fifth, to indoctrinate boys and girls and men and women everywhere with the idea that participation in the folk dances of all countries is an indispensable phase of their education, affording not only invaluable training in rhythm and basic motor skills but also the means of realizing all sorts of concomitant or associated learnings as well—folklore, legends, customs, costumes, traditions, holidays and feast days, folk songs, folk music and other related arts—to the end that folk dance may serve as an enriching, leisure-time activity for those of all ages.<sup>33</sup>

In this book are not only songs, music, directions, and illustrations, but costumes as well as an historical, sociological and geographical background of each of the songs. There is a wealth of information between the covers of the book and with its use is an opportunity to correlate the folklore of the dance song with many of the other subjects within a school curriculum.

#### IX. FOLK RHYMES, DANCES, AND GAMES

Play is an instinctive trait found in all peoples everywhere and Americans perhaps spend more time in recreation than any other people of the world. Coupled with this play instinct is the

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<sup>33</sup>Annie C. Duggan, Jeanette Schlottmann, and Abbie Rutledge, Folk Dances of the United States and Mexico (New York: A. S. Barnes and Company, 1948), p. 8.

folklore of America as evidenced in the many activities in which they engage.

Folk rhymes. Carl Carmer in the introduction of Ray Wood's book Fun In American Folk Rhymes has this to say:

When men began to find out that words, and even sounds, can be strung together in groups and uttered, one after the other, in a way that delights the ear, the first folk verses were born.

One may come from an old song and be all that is left of it because the rest of its words have long been forgotten. Another may have been made up by boys and girls who have wanted to have rhythmic verses to repeat while they were playing active games. That is how skip-rope rhymes began, and rhymes to be said to the rhythm of bouncing balls, and counting out rhymes like "eenie, meenie, minie mo," which will finally tell who is going to be "it." Many of our folk rhymes have been built out of the daily lives we live and the jobs we do, and they come from all over our great country.<sup>34</sup>

Ray Wood selected his rhymes from the many that had grown out of the usual activities of American hunters, fishers, cooks, cowboys, farmers, and housewives. These rhymes were born in such places as lumber-camps, ranch corrals, barn yards, city sidewalks, and country kitchens.

The late John Lomax, who lived nearly all his life in the American West and became a great authority on its folk songs, told of Texas evenings when as a child he played such folk games as "one-eyed cat," "town ball," "stink base," and "role-y-boley."

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<sup>34</sup>Ray Wood, Fun in American Folk Rhymes (New York: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1952), pp. v-vi.



In giving the background or origin of some of these folk rhymes, Mr. Wood says this:

"Bye, Baby Bunting," is probably the oldest and best known of all American nursery rhymes. It would probably be impossible to determine when or where it came into use or who invented it. "This little pig says, 'I'm going to steal some corn,'" used to count the baby's toes, was doubtless inspired by the Mother Goose rhyme. "This little pig went to market." Likewise, the rhyme "I had a little horse; his name was Dapple-gray," which is used to play a "ride-a-cock-horse" game with young children, may have been inspired by a similar rhyme in the classic Mother Goose.

"East side, West side, All around the town," is the chorus of a song titled, "The Sidewalks of New York," so popular sixty-five years ago, that it immediately became part of the lore of the children of that city and probably will remain so as long as the city of New York exists. It was written by Charles V. Lawlor and James W. Blake.<sup>35</sup>

"Brian O'Lin" may have originated in the old country, but the version included in this book is, for the most part, American invention, and a song very similar to this version was sung as a regular act in several well-known minstrel shows.<sup>36</sup>

Real community interest could be aroused by a collection of what the old timers remember in each school community. Closer relations between school and community would be fostered and results would be beneficial to all.

## X. FOLKTALES IN AMERICA

Americans along with all the other peoples of the world, love a story and no country, though still young, is more amply

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., pp. xvi-xvii.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid.

supplied with this material than America. Of the great store of fairy tales, beast fables, jest, legends, and tall tales, the last has the strongest claim to being an indigenous American invention. These legendary heroes which America has created represent many occupations in many sections of the country. Some, like Paul Bunyan and Pecos Bill, seem pure fiction. Others like Davy Crockett and Jesse James, were living persons turned into folk legends. The humor of exaggeration is a major ingredient of all folk heroes. Tall-storytelling is a beloved pastime among many Americans.

Davy Crockett. Many people couple the name of Crockett with the battle of the Alamo, but Davy was well known to his countrymen long before that tragic event. When he entered politics, he charmed his listeners by speaking to them in their own language with all the humorous exaggeration of the frontier. He had a reputation for a good yarn and never let his constituents down. He was elected to the State Legislature and finally to the Congress of the United States. A devoted follower of Andrew Jackson, he had many of the solid virtues of Jackson. When campaigning he would gather his audience around him and delight them with speeches. The following speech of Crockett's was taught the investigator by her father when she was a little girl:

I'm that same Davy Crockett, fresh from the backwoods, half-horse, half-alligator, a little touched with the snapping turtle; can wade the Mississippi, leap the Ohio, ride upon a streak of lightning, and slip without a scratch down a honey



locust. I can whip my weight in wildcats--and if any gentleman pleases, he may throw in a panther--hug a bear too close for comfort, and eat any man opposed to Jackson.

Another favorite tale about Crockett as told to the writer by her father was when Crockett was making a speech and listeners in the crowd kept yelling, "Louder, Crockett, louder." When this had been repeated several times, Davy paused and said, "You know when Gabriel comes down on Judgment Day and blows his horn, I'll bet some \_\_\_ fool will call out, 'Louder, Gabriel, louder.'"

Daniel Boone. Boone was one of the most famous of the pioneers of colonial times. Aside from his historical feats, many legends were woven about his life. Perhaps the best one is this:

Boone, it seemed, decided early in life his calling as one day in school he got so provoked that he tripped up the master and cried, "I need elbow room. I'm going to be a hunter."

At an early age Daniel moved into the woods, a long way from any other human beings. When his mother and father saw how much talent that Daniel had for hunting, they moved into the woods to live with him. "Hope nobody else comes," Daniel said, "I need elbow room."

Daniel Boone, we know from history, kept moving as people followed him and settled near by, and to the last of his days he was crying, "Too crowded. I want elbow room."<sup>37</sup>

Mike Fink, King of Mississippi Keelboatmen. Mike Fink was born in Pittsburgh, educated on the frontier and began early

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<sup>37</sup>Walter Blair, Tall Tale America (New York: Coward McCann, Inc., 1944), pp. 1-7.

keelboating. He fought his way to the top to become "King of the Keelboatmen."

Before taking up keelboating, Mike joined the Rangers who were scouts that went snooping into the Indian country to find out what "shenanigans" the redskins had afoot. By the time Mike was in good condition from scouting with the Rangers, people began going West. In those days everybody that got out West had to be tough. You could not go West, let alone live out in the forest and lick Indians and varmints and other hardships, unless you were tough. But some were tough, some were tougher, and some were toughest. The toughest would be the keelboatmen.<sup>38</sup>

Paul Bunyan, Last of the Frontier Demigods. The heading of this phase of a national hero is the title of a book by Daniel G. Hoffman who gives an exhaustive account of Paul in three stages of his development. Hoffman traces the growth of the Bunyan traditions in the three genres in which they have influenced American culture: as oral folktale, as popular literature, and in the work of modern poets who sought a symbol to express the spirit of the American people. He writes:

It is hardly surprising that Paul Bunyan should be seen in this light by poets as dissimilar as Robert Frost, Carl Sandburg, and W. H. Auden. The exploits of a national hero--particularly of a mythical personage--are always clues to the character of the people who celebrate him. He embodies their ideals of personal conduct, their ethical code, their goals; although superhuman, he is created in the image of human

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<sup>38</sup>Ibid.



aspirations, and his preternatural strength helps men to ward off human fears.

In the United States the age-long process by which a national mythology is formed was necessarily foreshortened into a few generations. The tribe of comic demigods are the heroes not of epics but of anecdotes; no bard or scop had time to complete an epic based on native myths before the relentless march of history overwhelmed the folk cultures of the American frontier. Among the poets who wrote of Bunyan, Mr. Sandburg comes closest to emulating the ancient bards; yet it was inevitable that his attempt to use Paul Bunyan as a paradigm of the American character would prove an anachronism. For in this hero's history, between the yarn of the folk raconteur and the shaping intellect of the sophisticated poet there is a line of development to which the lore of Beowulf or Roland or the Knights of the Round Table was never subject. When Paul Bunyan became a popular rather than merely an occupational hero, he ceased to be the product of an homogeneous folk society. In the popularization of Paul Bunyan not only were his adventures revised, but his character and the humor with which his exploits were told were altered still more. His changing lineaments reflect the changing values of American popular culture over the last half century.<sup>39</sup>

The study of Paul Bunyan by the youths in the American schools as outlined by Mr. Hoffman ties in with this study which is "Preserving Our National Heritage Through the Teaching of Folklore in the English Classes." The premise of Professor Hoffman that Paul Bunyan reflects the changing values of American popular culture over the last half of the century bears out the premise of the study that our American youth can learn of the national heritage through the study of folklore in the English classes.

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<sup>39</sup> Daniel G. Hoffman, Paul Bunyan, Last of the Frontier Demigods (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1952), pp. vii-viii.



Other heroes in the roll call. Paul Bunyan may be the most famous of American folk heroes but there were still others as the roll was called. The "wild and woolly west" is represented by names like Wild Bill Hickok, Buffalo Bill, Billy the Kid, and Jesse James. Johnny Appleseed started a whole series of legends, for in life he made it his mission to plant apple trees all over the East. Many of these trees are still growing. Other names can be mentioned, like Old Storm-along, the deep-water sailor; Bowleg Bill, the sea-going cowboy; and Febold Feboldson on whose farm popcorn was invented.

The ballad of Casey Jones pays tribute to a hero of the railroads, and tales of Tony Beaver, Sam Houston, Big-Foot Wallace, Jim Liverpool and Roy Bean add their names to the long list. Even the name of Abraham Lincoln has become enshrined in many legends.<sup>40</sup>

Pecos Bill, King of Texas Cowboys, is credited with the invention of the lariat, cowboy songs, roundups and the like. As a baby, Pecos Bill baffles Texas gallinippers, licks a pack of coyotes, and as he grows older "busts" a cyclone and tames Sweet Sue.

The remarkable birth and childhood of John Henry and the machine in West Virginia include many tall tales. His heroic deed was beating the machine and is best expressed in his favorite song:

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<sup>40</sup>Henry I. Christ, Myths and Folklore (New York: Oxford Book Company, 1952), p. 357.



Ah, my hammer, (WHAM!)  
 Hammer ring, (WHAM!)  
 While I sing, Lawd, (WHAM!)  
 Hear me sing! (WHAM!)

Ain't no hammer, (WHAM!)  
 Rings like mine, (WHAM!)  
 Rings like gold, Lawd, (WHAM!)  
 Ain't it fine? (WHAM!)

Rings like silver, (WHAM!)  
 Peal and peal, (WHAM!)  
 Into the rock Lawd, (WHAM!)  
 Drive the steel. (WHAM!)

If'n I dies, Lawd, (WHAM!)  
 I command (WHAM!)  
 Bury the hammer (WHAM!)  
 On my hand. (WHAM!)

John Henry actually won the contest with the machine but it cost him his life. They buried John Henry on the hillside—with a hammer in each hand, a rod of steel across his breast, a pick and shovel at his head and feet. And a great big black cloud came out of the southwest to cover the copper sun.<sup>41</sup>

American humor and exaggeration. Henry I. Christ writes:

All the tall tales of American heroes tell us much about our American past and display a typically American brand of humor—that of deliberate exaggeration.

Some of the tall tales make familiar reading, many a present-day radio or television comedian has gone back to these picturesque liars for inspiration. No One knows how old some of these stories are. The tall tales usually run something like this: a man is pursued by a mountain lion. At the last moment, just as the lion opens his mouth to take a bite, the man turns and reaches down the lion's throat. He grabs the tail and pulls the lion inside out. The lion then keeps running in the opposite direction, and the man is saved.

<sup>41</sup>Blair, op. cit., pp. 213-214.

This is an example of both humor and exaggeration.<sup>42</sup>

Carl Sandburg has gathered together some of the best tall stories and included them in his poem, The People, Yes.

#### THEY HAVE YARNS

They have yarns  
 Of a skyscraper so tall they had to put hinges  
 On the two top stories so to let the moon go by.  
 Of one corn crop in Missouri when the roots  
 Went so deep and drew off so much water  
 The Mississippi riverbed that year was dry,  
 Of pancakes so thin they had only one side.  
 Of "a fog so thick we shingled the barn and six feet out in  
 the fog,"  
 Of the man who drove a swarm of bees across the Rocky Mountains  
 and the Desert" and didn't lose a bee,"  
 Of a mountain curve where the engineer in his cab can touch  
 the caboose and spit in the conductor's eye,  
 Of the boy who climbed a cornstalk growing so fast he would  
 have starved to death if they hadn't shot biscuits up to  
 him,  
 Of the hen laying a square egg and cackling "Ouch!"  
 Of the sheep counter who was fast and accurate: "I just count  
 their feet and divide by four,"  
 Of the railroad trains whizzing along so fast they reach the  
 station before the whistle,  
 Of the old man's whiskers: "When the wind was with him his  
 whiskers arrived a day before he did,"  
 Of the man so tall he must climb a ladder to shave himself.  
 Of mosquitoes: one can kill a dog, two of them a man.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>42</sup>Christ, op. cit., p. 337.

<sup>43</sup>Carl Sandburg, The People, Yes as quoted in Louis  
 Untermeyer (ed.) Modern American Poetry (New York: Harcourt,  
 Brace and Company, 1942), pp. 250-252.



## XI. OLD WORLD "MARCHEN"

B. A. Botkin in A Treasury of Southern Folklore introduces these types of tales with the caption "Back Beyond" and says of them:

As stories with "enough truth in them to make good story material and to incite the imagination to try to improve on actual happenings," yarns and tall tales belong to the borderland between fact and fantasy, shifting now to one side and now to the other. With myth and folktale, however, both the story-teller and his audience cross over the dividing line into the realm of pure fantasy ("a word other than my own") where one sees only what one wants to see and believes only what one wants to believe; where erroneous perception gives way to artful deception or naive self-deception as common sense and logic abdicate their thrones.<sup>44</sup>

Maria Leach in Dictionary of Folklore, Mythology, and Legend defines "Marchen" as a German word much used by folklorists but without universal agreement as to its meaning. Leach adds:

As generally employed it is very close to the English "fairy tale" but there are also nonsense tales, cumulative stories, tales of mumskulls, and many other divergent kinds. The "Marchen" is definitely fiction.<sup>45</sup>

Robert Spiller and others explained:

Among the legends transplanted and naturalized, new legends invented, and notably the tall tale, there is exhibited a tendency toward cyclic evolution around representative

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<sup>44</sup>B. A. Botkin, A Treasury of Southern Folklore (New York: Crown Publishers, 1949), p. 469.

<sup>45</sup>Maria Leach (ed.), Standard Dictionary of Folklore, Mythology, and Legend (New York: Funk and Wagnalls Company, 1950), p. 676.

American heroes which approaches the familiar pattern of Old World cultural myth.<sup>46</sup>

The store of collected Old World "Marchen" remembered in the United States is now large. Examples in English from white people are "The Wolf and the Pigs," "Bluebeard," "How Jack Went to Seek His Fortune," "Johnny Cake," "Lazy Maria," "The Three Brothers and the Hog"; adaptations of the ancient Mak-the-sheep-stealer episode; and a whole cycle of "Jack Tales" (giant killing, dragon quelling, and the like). Congaree River Negroes in South Carolina have stories explaining why jaybirds are not to be killed and why the skin of the ox is used to whip the mule.

Gullahs on the Sea Islands tell traditional versions of Rumpelstilzchen, of "Rescue of the King's Daughter" and of the doings of Brer Rabbit, Brer Fox, Brer Wolf, and the rest of the hierarchy of the Uncle Remus stories. Independent versions of many of the last named cycle have been recovered from Mississippi and published in a delightful book, The Tree Named John. Louisiana French tales, early collected by Alcee Fortier, include Compair Lapin's exploits with animals, fairy stories and vaudevilles of song and prose story.<sup>47</sup>

Two recent books by Hewitt Leonard Ballowe are The Lawd Sayin the Same, tales of the Creole country, and Creole Folk Tales,

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<sup>46</sup>Robert Spiller and others, A Literary History of the United States (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1948), p. 717.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid., pp. 717-718.



stories of the Louisiana marsh country. Both books are delightful reading and give excellent accounts of these people who, because of isolation, still live and practice many of their old beliefs, customs, and traditions.

An extensive collection from a packet of French-speaking people in Missouri fall into somewhat similar categories; Compair Lapin is an important figure, and there is also the French Canadian hero P'tsit. Collections made in the Southwest illustrate the range of Spanish folktale. Almost every major Old World tale type, including such international examples as "The Tar Baby" and others in the Uncle Remus cycle, is exemplified in American folklore.<sup>48</sup>

The Jack Tales. These tales were told by R. M. Ward and his kindred in the Beech Mountain section of Western North Carolina and by other descendants of COUNCIL HARMON (1803-1896) elsewhere in The Southern Mountains, with three tales from Wise County, Virginia. They were set down from these sources and edited by Richard Chase with an appendix compiled by Herbert Halpert.

Chase in writing of his experiences in collecting these tales says:

One interesting phase of the enjoyment of the tales in that region is a very practical application: that of "keeping the kids on the job" for such communal tasks as stringing beans for canning, or threading them up to make the dried pods called "leather britches." Mrs. R. M. Ward tells us: "we



would all get down around a sheet full of dry beans and start in to shelling 'em. Mon-roë would tell the kids one of them tales and they'd work for life!"

This use of the tales seems to be a common custom in that neighborhood where everyone knows about "Jack" and where many others beside "Old Mon-roë" like to try their hand at telling about that boy's scrapes and adventures. It is through this natural oral process that our Appalachian giant-killer has acquired the easy-going, unpretentious rural American manners that make him so different from his English cousin, the cocksure, dashing young hero of the fairy tale.

Most notable about The Jack Tales is their cycle form: it is always through the "little feller" Jack that we participate in the dreams, desires, ambitions, and experiences of a whole people. His fantastic adventures arise often enough among the commonplaces of existence, and Jack always returns to the everyday life of these farm people of whom he is one. There is nothing fantastic about "Jack" himself, even though he is many times aided by forces as mysterious as those with which he contends. In the series of these tales he meets and conquers, in his way, all the varied, real, imaginary enemies of a highly spiritual folk, never heroic, but always ready and willing in modest, dryly gay fashion.

Folk prosody rarely has presented so well-rounded a figure as "Jack." "Reynard" is a one-sided rogue, the heroes of European collections of tales are many; other central characters are supermen or gods. "Br'er Rabbit" seems to be the only one who shows many facets of character in a connected series of stories. "Jack," however, is thoroughly human, the unassuming representative of a very large part of the American people.

One clear indication of the great age of this particular family tradition is the appearance in two of these tales of a figure much like the god Woden, in his aspect as The Wanderer, Old Graybeard, The Stranger who helps adventurers in their need. Mysterious, prescient, with a magic staff in his hands, he helps Jack as he once helped Sigurd in the ages before English was spoken here in the mountains of this new land.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Richard Chase, The Jack Tales (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1949), pp. viii-xiii.



Grandfather Tales. In addition to The Jack Tales, the writer wishes to call attention to the Grandfather Tales by the same author, Richard Chase. This book appeared one year later and is rich in such stories as "Wicked John," "Mutsmag," and "Old Roaney."

Other localized tales. Tending also to be localized are tales of witches, ghosts, devils, and phantoms. In number, popularity, and variety, they form one of the most considerable group of folktales. They also reflect some of the ancient and deep-rooted superstitions of the American people. "De Witch 'Oman an' de Spimin' Wheel" from Louisiana, "Old Skinny" from North Carolina, and "Out of Her Skin" from South Carolina Gullah Negroes illustrate the belief that witches slip out of their skins in order to do mischief. "The Ball Witch of Tennessee and Mississippi" combines the vampire and the poltergeist in a story of the supernatural persecutions visited by the "witch" of a murdered overseer upon a North Carolina family who moved to Tennessee early in the nineteenth century.

Dating from the eighteenth century and localized in New Jersey, "The Leeds Devil" relates the horrendous acts of a witch's offspring. "The Death Waltz" from the Southwest exemplifies the return of the ghost of a dead lover to interrupt the wedding of the surviving mate. Traffic with the devil motivates "Jack-O-My-Lantern," a Maryland tale of a clever Jack who outwits the Evil One. The impulse which created tales of the supernatural is still

alive. Automobile accidents on lonely roads have given rise to a widespread story of a traveler who picks up a beautiful hitchhiker, to discover in the denouement that she is the ghost of a girl killed at the spot where he was accosted.<sup>50</sup>

## XII. LEGENDS IN AMERICAN FOLKLORE

Of the other prose narratives falling within the classical folklore categories, the legend is well represented. Literary treatment of legendary material by Irving, Hawthorne, and Cooper called attention to its existence in the East. It has since found to be widespread. Stories of treasure hidden by Captain Kidd, Blackbeard, Teach and other pirates have been recovered from Money Cove, Maine, to the North Carolina Banks. On Chappaquiddick, Martha's Vineyard, have been found stories of the Phantom Ship, the Blue Rock Treasure, the Haunted Hollow, and the Little Man.

In the Bayou country of Louisiana flourish stories of Jean Lafitte, of the Acadians, and of old plantation houses. Among the people of the Middle West have sprung up countless legends like "The Lone Tree" (commemorating the birth of a baby to a pioneer Iowa couple), "Providence Hole" (relating the escape of a child from the Indians), and "Lovers' Leap" (a story, current in many versions throughout the country, of a death pact kept by tragic lovers). The most characteristic and widely diffused legends of America are those about seekers after treasure and

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<sup>50</sup>Spiller, op. cit., pp. 718-719.



wealth. The Southwest abounds in these tales of lost mines and hidden, sometimes forgotten, hoards.<sup>51</sup>

Writers of legends. Not all of America's great legends were created anonymously. Some of our finest American writers have contributed to America's legendary.

Mark Twain. Mark Twain is closely identified with the frontier, with the humor of exaggeration and tall-storytelling. His famous "Jumping Frog of Calaveras County" is the kind of tale that people like to repeat, perhaps with their own embellishments. But for bald-faced, hilarious, ripsnorting exaggeration, there's no yarn like "Journalism in Tennessee." One has to prepare himself as he meets the editor of the Morning Glory and Johnston County War-Hoop.

Washington Irving. The story of Rip Van Winkle has become an American classic, indeed the very name is often used as a descriptive term. The lovable old Rip and his twenty-year nap are legendary. Irving's more serious writings are seldom read today, but his tale of Rip Van Winkle and his "Legend of Sleepy Hollow" are read and reread wherever any one enjoys a good story.

Stephen Vincent Benet. Before his death in 1943, Benet had already risen high in the ranks of those who use native

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<sup>51</sup>Ibid.

American material for their stories. He loved America deeply, and he loved those who helped build America. He loved the Websters, the Lincolns, and all the obscure people who have labored to make America great. His stories reflect that love. Perhaps his finest story, "The Devil and Daniel Webster," might almost have been a folk legend. Its hero takes his place among the Paul Bunyans, for not even Paul ever outfaced the devil;<sup>52</sup>

B. A. Botkin. Perhaps no other writer has included between the covers of a book a richer storehouse of stories, legends, ballads, and songs of American folklore than B. A. Botkin. In his latest book, Sidewalks of America Mr. Botkin has this to say about legends and sagas:

Local legends range from apocryphal unhistorical "historical" traditions attached to historic personages and events to migratory legends which become localized in various times and places. Local sagas are biographical narratives relating and glorifying the achievements of founding fathers, builders and dreamers, industrialists, or the history of a particular institution or product.

As hidden or buried history, legends interest the historian, who may use it for indirect evidence, as in the story of Mrs. O'Leary's cow, examining and sifting conflicting testimony and heresy. As fables and inspiring examples of courage, individual ingenuity and vision, legends may also attract writers—bardic poets and storytellers like Longfellow and Irving, who recreate old wives' tales in literary ballads and legends. Thus along the path of history or literature, legends and sagas may pass from local into national tradition.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>52</sup>Henry D. Christ, Myths and Folklore (New York: Oxford Book Company, 1952), p. 380.

<sup>53</sup>B. A. Botkin (ed.), Sidewalks of America (New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1954), p. 173.



Some of the titles of legends and sagas in the Botkin book are "The Faneuil Hall Grasshopper Test," "The Sawing-Off of Manhattan Island," "The Wonderful Rabbi of Rivington Street," "Saratoga Chip," "The Wistar Party of Philadelphia," "The Gracious Ghosts of Dover, Delaware," "Legend of the Washington Cathedral," "The White House Ghosts," "The Fountain of Youth," "Mrs. O'Leary's Cow," and "Incidents of the San Francisco Earthquake and Fire."

### XIII. FOLK PLAYS

Englishmen coming to America in the colonial period brought their folk plays and continued to act them out for several generations. The old St. George Christmas Play was as familiar to Bostonians of the eighteenth century as it was to Thomas Hardy's Wessex peasants. A Mummers' Christmas Play and a Plough Monday Play were remembered by Kentucky Mountaineers as late as 1930. The most elaborate example of folk drama in the United States is Los Pastores, a dramatic representation of the birth of the Savior, enacted by the inhabitants of the Rio Grande, in Texas, as late as 1907. Native examples of folk drama are few and rudimentary. The best, perhaps, is The Arkansas Traveler, a little more than a skit. A more elaborate but less definitive example is Easter Rock, a pagan rite "clothed in Christian symbolism," of choral and dramatic nature, traditionally practiced



by Negroes in the lower Mississippi Delta.<sup>54</sup>

In legitimate American drama of the twentieth century, artistic use of other types of folklore than songs is so common that a few examples will suffice. Spiller cites these:

In Lightnin' (1918), the hero tells a tale about driving a swarm of bees across the prairie in dead winter without losing a bee, but—"got stung twice." Percy Mackaye's This Fine Pretty World (1923) presents the Kentucky Mountaineer Sprattling, the "lie-sweaver who follies the oninvisible and onbeheard-of" and runs afoul of the law into seventeen jail sentences. Ile, treating with dramatic intensity the material found in whaling folklore, and the Emperor Jones, utilizing motives like the best of the tomtom, the chorus, the silver bullet, and the "boogers" of superstitious terror, illustrate Eugene O'Neill's notable practice. Jack Kirkland's dramatization of Erskine Caldwell's Tobacco Road exhibits an intimate knowledge of folkways and folk speech of Georgia Crackers, dedicated to the purpose of shocking and spicing a jaded popular appetite. A sharp contrast in point of view is afforded by Porgy and Bess, the folk opera shaped out of Dorothy and DuBose Hayward's Porgy, a moving and sympathetic dramatization of the life of Catfish Row in old Charleston.<sup>55</sup>

More sympathetic exploitation occurs in the work of what might be called a school of folk drama. Frederick H. Koch in Carolina Folk-Plays defines folk drama as:

The term "folk," as we use it, has nothing to do with the folk play of medieval times. But rather is it concerned with folk subject matter: with the legends, superstitions, customs, environmental differences, and the vernacular of the common people. For the most part they are realistic and human; sometimes they are imaginative and poetic.

<sup>54</sup>Robert Spiller and others, Literary History of the United States (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1948), p. 782.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid., pp. 723-724.



The chief concern of the folk dramatist is man's conflict with the forces of nature and his simple pleasure in being alive. The conflict may not be apparent on the surface in the immediate action on the stage. But the ultimate cause of all dramatic action we classify as "folk," whether it be physical or spiritual, may be found in man's desperate struggle for existence and in his enjoyment of the world of nature. The term "folk" with us applies to that form of drama which is earth-rooted in the life of our common humanity.

Four native North Carolinians have contributed authentic drama of the southern scene to the contemporary theatre: Paul Green, a challenging tragedy of the Negro race, In Abraham's Bosom; Lulu Vollmer and Hatcher Hughes, dramas of the mountain people, Sun-Up and Hell Bent for Heaven; and Ann Preston Bridger's, domestic tragedy in a small town Coquette.<sup>56</sup>

Of especial interest to communal drama of American history are some of the plays of Paul Green. The Lost Colony was written in the summer of 1937 to commemorate the 350th anniversary of the first English settlement in America. It has played on Roanoke Island to tens of thousands of people in an outdoor theatre on the actual site of the landing of the first English colonists. Through this dramatization, The Lost Colony has become a permanent part of the culture of the people on Roanoke Island. As long as they live, these people will have a grander notion of their heritage than they had before this reverent drama was written.

In November 1939, Mr. Green wrote a second drama for the American people's theatre, The Highland Call, commemorating the bicentennial of Scotch settlement in the Cape Fear River valley of

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<sup>56</sup>Frederick H. Koch, Carolina Folk-Plays (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1941), pp. xiv-xv.

southeastern North Carolina, the stirring events of the Revolutionary times and the heroic leadership of Bonnie Flora Macdonald. Extending the idea of communal playmaking in The Lost Colony, The Highland Call was produced in Fayetteville by The Carolina Playmakers in collaboration with the citizens of the town.

The Founders, the third drama of his trilogy of early American history, is now in production in Williamsburg in Virginia. Mr. Green holds that America was regarded by the under-privileged classes in the old world as a "land of opportunity," and that this was the compelling motive and promise which brought all classes to our shores and which America must fulfill to validate her beginnings.<sup>57</sup>

In 1955, Wilderness Road was shown to thousands of people who saw this play produced in an open theater located at the foot of a mountain near Berea College in Kentucky. The play was repeated in 1956, and is showing again in 1957.

Another successful drama, The Common Glory, by Paul Green is in its eleventh season of production. This drama tells the story of the Nation's birth from 1775-1781. The drama is presented at Matovka Lake Amphitheater in historic Williamsburg, Virginia.

Kermit Hunter has his drama, Unto These Hills, in its eighth season at Mountainside Theater, Cherokee, North Carolina. It is a moving story of the Cherokee Indians played out against a backdrop of Eastern America's last primeval wilderness.

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid., pp. xxiii.



Horn in the West, another drama by Hunter, is playing its sixth straight season at Boone, North Carolina. The story is of Daniel Boone, and the struggling, hardy people who settled the Southern Appalachian Highlands. Chucky Jack, a historical drama produced by the Great Smoky Mountains Historical Association at Gatlinburg, Tennessee, is another drama of Hunter's.

More and more are Americans coming to realize that our country is rich in folklore and that it can yield an abundant harvest of drama, and a national theater that will serve the entire country. The development of regional plays contributes to a deeper national understanding and toward an imaginative and spiritual expression of our tradition of democracy.<sup>58</sup>

Other comparable works are Maxwell Anderson's Winterset, Thornton Wilder's Our Town, Marc Connelly's The Green Pastures, and Robert Sherwood's Abe Lincoln in Illinois, and folk drama of Mexico and Canada.

Folk drama included in American literature would not only inform students as to the ways and history of American culture, but could become an inspiration to students to try their hand at play writing. Rarely would any community be devoid of some local happening of the past from which such a drama could spring.

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<sup>58</sup>Ibid.



## XIV. PROVERBS

Of the "linguistic" types of folklore current in the United States, the proverb records human experience most pungently. It has been extensively collected from several language groups—English, German, Spanish, Yiddish, and others, but no extant collection can claim to be nationally representative. The collections we have show that most of our proverbs come from Great Britain. For example, "an apple a day. . ." is traceable to the English.

Eat an apple on going to bed  
And you'll keep the doctor from earning his bread.

Probably the best source for the study of the proverb by the American student is the voluminous book of Burton Stevenson The Home Book of Proverbs, Maxims and Familiar Phrases. Mr. Stevenson says of his book:

The attempt is made to trace back the sources of the proverb, maxims, and familiar phrases in ordinary English and American use; to show their development from the first crude expression of the idea to its streamlined modern form, and to note the variations and perversions which, year after year, have been built around the central theme. In a few instances, the trail leads back nearly six thousand years to the early Egyptian scribes, but for the most part it goes no farther than the Homeric and Hesiodic writings of about 800 B. C. and the Hebrew wisdom literature of perhaps a century later.

The most famous American source is Benjamin Franklin's Poor Richard's Almanack, which ran from 1733 to 1758. It is crammed with "pleasant and witty verses, jests, and notable sayings," as the advertisement of the first issue announced. Very few of these were original with Franklin—he himself says that they were "the wisdom of many ages and nations"—but they were



filtered through his brain" in Paul Leicester Ford's phrase, embellished with new wit and sparkle, and many of them the form in which they are now best known. Indeed, Pope is perhaps the only one who outdid Franklin as a phrase polisher. There are no other American collections of importance, and in recent years American genius has run rather to perversion than to polishing. As a perverter, no one has approached O. Henry unless it be Ogden Nash.<sup>59</sup>

In Racial Proverbs by S. G. Champion, there are listed about seventy-five proverbs ascribed to America. Champion says:

With regard to this collection under American, U. S. A., I realize that these, in the strict sense of the word, are not true proverbs, but rather "Americanisms," or colloquialisms, but in fact they are racial sayings and in common use in America. The South American proverbs were probably originally Spanish, but are and have been long current in South America.<sup>60</sup>

Niles Puckett in Folk Beliefs of the Southern Negro gives some very interesting proverbs and ascribes both Negroes and Americans as having proverb-making as part of their culture. Typical Woloff proverbs are:

"Before healing others, heal thyself."

"He who covers himself with cotton should not approach the fire."

"What goes in at one ear goes out by the other."

On the lower Niger they say, "Where there's smoke there's fire"—a saying I have often heard with the Mississippi Negroes, but since the English are also proverb-making peoples one cannot be too sure as to origins. Other illustrative Negro sayings are:

"Don't measure my quart by yo' ha'f bushel."

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<sup>59</sup>Burton Stevenson, The Home Book of Proverbs, Maxims and Familiar Phrases (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1948), pp. v-vi.

<sup>60</sup>S. G. Champion, Racial Proverbs (London: George Rutledge and Sons, Limited, 1938), p. xxi.



"A mile' roun' de road shorter dan a ha'f-mile cross de field."

"A gruntin' woman and a screechin' do' nebber wears out."

"Lewellyn (hunger) kin only be beaten out er de house by chunkin' him with braid."

"Nebber cross a bridge' fo you gits to hit."

"Ef you wants to keep yo' milk sweet leab hit in de cqw."

"Nebber 'spise a bridge dat carries you safely ober."<sup>61</sup>

#### XV. RIDDLES

Contrary to the common assumption that riddles are mere

word puzzles proposed by punsters at evening parties, riddles rank with myths, fables, folktales, and proverbs as one of the earliest and most wide-spread types of formulated thought.

Charles Francis Potter says of riddles:

A good case could probably be made for their priority to all other forms of literature or even to all other oral lore, for riddles are essentially metaphors, and metaphors are the result of the primary mental process of association, comparison, and the perception of likenesses and differences.<sup>62</sup>

Perhaps one of the best sources of riddles for American literature classes is the book of English Riddles from Oral Tradition by Archer Taylor. He writes in the preface of the book:

This collection includes, as far as I have been able to find them, the riddles taken down from oral tradition in the British Isles and in the English-speaking parts of the Western Hemisphere.<sup>63</sup>

<sup>61</sup>Newbell Niles Puckett, Folk Beliefs of the Southern Negro (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1926), p. 54.

<sup>62</sup>Charles F. Potter, "Riddles," Standard Dictionary of Folklore, Mythology, and Legend, Maria Leach (ed.) (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1950), II, 938-944.

<sup>63</sup>Archer Taylor, English Riddles from Oral Tradition (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1951), p. vii.



In the book Riddle Me This compiled by Frances Chrystie are these riddles:

If a girl fell into a well why wouldn't her brother help her out? Answer: Because how could he be a brother and assist her (a sister) too?

When does a dentist work the hardest? Answer: When he extracts several acres (achers).

How do you distinguish a thief from a church steeple? Answer: One steals from the people and the other peals from the steeple?

Why are people who write books so funny-looking? Answer: Because tales (tails) grow out of their heads.

When you lose something why do you always find it in the last place you look? Answer: Because you stop looking when you find it.

When is a man wrecked on a desert island like a woman in a department store? Answer: When he is looking for a sail.

Why do potatoes grow better than other vegetables? Answer: Because they have eyes to see what they are doing.<sup>64</sup>

"Riddles are also favorites with the Negroes, especially around the country firesides on winter evenings," writes Niles Puckett, "and, while I have located no direct African survivals, there are some built according to the very common African plan of guessing the simile used."

Mr. Puckett cites a few which he obtained from South Carolina:

Black hen set on a red hen's nest? Answer: A black pot sitting on the fire.

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<sup>64</sup>Frances Chrystie (comp.) Riddle Me This (New York: Oxford University Press, 1940), pp. 6-36.

The horse in the stable and the bridle outside? Answer:  
A potato in the bank and the vines outside.

White sends white to drive white out of white? Answer:  
A white man sends a white boy to drive a white cow out of a  
white cotton patch.

I run out my wicky wicky wackom,  
I meet Tom Tackom  
I send Tom Tackom to run broom-smackom  
Out of my wicky wackom?  
Answer: A dog to run a cow out of the cotton field.

Cob on ear but does not hear? Answer: An ear of corn.

A riddle, a riddle, as I suppose  
A hundred eyes and never a nose.  
Answer: A sifter (sieve).

Chip cherry up, chip cherry down,  
No man can climb chip cherry up chip cherry down.  
Answer: Smoke.

What goes through the woods and never touches anything?  
Answer: Your echo.

Why does a chimney smoke?  
Answer: Because it cannot chew.<sup>65</sup>

Flora L. McDowell in her book Folk Dances of Tennessee and  
Other Authentic Folk Material tells this story and riddle:

Long time ago a girl was accused of some offense for which  
she was to be punished. But the judges told her she could  
go free if she could make a riddle that no one could guess.

She put some gravel in her hair, a piece of iron in her  
shoe, killed a mare that was soon to bring a colt, tanned  
the colt's hide and made a saddle upon which she rode, and  
took the mare's skin and made a whip which she carried in  
her hand. Then she went to the judges and said:

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<sup>65</sup>Newball Niles Puckett, Folk Beliefs of the Southern Negro  
(Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1926), pp.  
52-54.



"Under gravel I go  
On cold iron I stand  
I ride the colt that never was foaled  
And tote the mother in my hand."

They couldn't unriddle that, so she was set free.<sup>66</sup>

The last line from an Anglo-Irish poem "The  
Dead" is "There be the gladness of God's great sea."  
The "gladness of God's great sea" that carried English-  
men everywhere and scattered them throughout the world, where they  
have built cities and founded great nations.

In this chapter the thoughts of these people as they have  
developed through the ages will be traced. Through their folk  
literature we will become more keenly aware of certain hopes and  
desires and aspirations which are the inheritance of  
English-speaking people everywhere. Love of home, readiness to  
endure hardships of hardship, insistence on freedom and  
justice, devotion to duty, devoted search for truth, and resistance  
to evil, and the desire for the peace and stability of the  
world are the characteristics of these folk poems of ours.

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<sup>66</sup>Flora L. McDowell, Folk Dances of Tennessee and Other  
Authentic Folk Material (Delaware: Cooperative Recreation Service,  
Inc., 1954), p. 16.

CHAPTER IV

FOLKLORE IN ENGLISH LITERATURE

What can be more fitting for the opening of this part of the study than the last line from an Anglo-Saxon poem "The Seafarer," which is "Give me the gladness of God's great sea." For it was the "gladness of God's great sea" that carried Englishmen everywhere and scattered them throughout the world, where they have built homes and founded great nations.

In this chapter the thoughts of these people as they have developed through the ages will be traced. Through their folk literature one will become more keenly aware of certain hopes and determinations and aspirations which are the inheritance of English-speaking people everywhere. Love of home, readiness to adventure, stoic endurance of hardship, insistence on freedom and justice, will to achieve, devoted search for truth, grim resistance to wrong-doing, and desire for the peace and stability of the world are some of the characteristics of these ancestors of ours.

The following tribute to the little center--so small geographically--from which such great influences have radiated comes from the pen of England's foremost literary master, Shakespeare.

This other Eden, demiparadise,  
This fortress built by Nature for herself  
Against infection and the hand of war  
This happy breed of men, this little world,



This precious stone set in the silver sea,  
Which serves it in the office of a wall,  
Or as a most defensive to a house  
Against the envy of less happier lands,  
This blessed plot, this earth, this realm, this England!

King Richard II

No literature presented to students in high school is more rich in folklore than English literature, and in the past no literature in high school has had more folklore in it than English has had. But gradually more and more of folklore has been left out as new textbooks are coming out and material of more modern writers has taken its place. For example the new book adopted and put in use for seniors in the writer's school last year omitted the national epic, Beowulf, from the text entirely. This was the first time in her experience that she had taught seniors English literature without teaching this epic.

If folklore is to be preserved and a true perspective of our national heritage from the Old World presented, the textbooks which are placed in the hands of our youth must continue to include that part of literature which is representative of the original writings of the age. All writers of English literature employed folklore because it was too prevalent to be left out.

# I. BEOWULF—ENGLAND'S NATIONAL EPIC

Old English literature reaches its height in this epic. Beowulf is undoubtedly the most ancient relic of literature of the spoken languages of modern Europe. It is supposed to have been



composed by an Anglo-Saxon in the north of England about 750. There is nothing about England in it, but it was sung on English soil in the language that eventually, with many changes and additions, became our language.

Stories about Beowulf were handed down by word of mouth from generation to generation and were later put into writing—probably by monks, for Christian references are to be found here and there in this pagan poem. Although the poem probably belongs to the fifth century, the only existing manuscript is said to date from the ninth or tenth century. It was discovered in 1705, and is now carefully preserved in the British Museum.

The epic in brief. Beowulf was written in rude alliterative verse (for rhyme was introduced in England only after the Norman Conquest) and features the Saxons' conception of Wyrd, or Fate, controlling human destiny. Its hero is Beowulf, a prince of the Jutes. Its scene is Denmark and the southern coast of Sweden.

The resume which follows is taken from Legends of the Middle Ages by H. A. Guerber:

The poem opens with a short introduction treating of Scyld, king of the Spear-Danes, who had come to them as an infant on a mysterious ship. Upon his death, after a long and successful reign, his body, clothed in armor and surrounded by treasure, was placed in a ship and sent out upon the sea whence he had come.

The real story begins with the later years of the reign of Scyld's descendant, Hrothgar, who had won great fame and rich spoils in battle and was now preparing to settle down and enjoy himself. He builds the magnificent hall, called Heorot, where he might feast his retainers and listen to the heroic lays of the scalds during the long winter evening.



On the first evening, after a sumptuous feast, and when all the guests had retired, the king's bodyguard, composed of thirty-two dauntless warriors, lay down in the hall to rest. When morning dawned the only trace of the knights who had gone to rest there in full armor was the floor and halls all stained with blood.

Gigantic, blood-stained footsteps, leading directly from the festive hall to the sluggish waters of a deep mountain lake furnished the clues. They had been made by Grendel, a descendant of the giants, whom a magician had driven out of the country, but who had evidently returned to renew his former depredations.

The wise men took counsel together, erected altars to their heathen gods, and prayed for relief from the pest, all to no avail. At last, from an unexpected source Hrothgar and his people are given new hope.

Beowulf came, slew the giant, Grendel, and also the vicious mother of Grendel.

Upon returning home, in due time, he became king and ruled for forty years. In his old age he had a fight with a fire-drake, a dragon, and though he killed the monster, Beowulf received a wound which brought on his death. After a beautiful ceremony, Beowulf was buried in a mighty mound on a projecting headland, which could be seen far out at sea, and was called by his name. The following lines close the epic.

And now,

Short while I tarry here--when I am gone,  
Bid them upon you headland's summit rear  
A lofty mound, by Rond's seagirl cliff:  
So shall my people hold to after times  
Their chieftain's memory, and the mariners  
That drive afar to sea, off as they pass,  
Shall point to Beowulf's tomb.<sup>1</sup>

This brief sketch fails to do justice to the beauty of the language and quaint expressions so frequently found in the poem. The use of compound words, alliteration and the swing of its four-accented lines are all revealed when one reads the poem in its

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<sup>1</sup>H. A. Guerber, Legends of the Middle Ages (New York: American Book Company, 1896), pp. 9-21.

original form. The outstanding traits of character shown by Beowulf and the other characters in the story acquaint one with the traits of his Anglo-Saxon ancestors. One learns much about the customs, languages and beliefs of these early people through the reading and study of the poem.

## II. METRICAL ROMANCES

The term "romance" originally came from "Roman." After the fall of the Roman Empire in the fifth century, the Latin language gradually changed in different parts of Europe, no longer held together by the strong central government. So we had the rise of the Romance languages—French, Italian, Spanish—based on Latin. During the Middle Ages, when knighthood flourished and feudalism became the established social order, there developed a long, rambling form of storytelling about the exploits of medieval knights and heroes of the ancient world. These tales were called "romans," or "romances," and were popular with the nobility throughout southern Europe.

Because these romances naively reproduce the manners, customs, and, in general, the beliefs of the Middle Ages, a few will be cited here.

The story of Brutus. As the Romans insisted that their city owed its existence to the descendants of Aeneas, so the French kings Dagobert and Charles the Bald claimed to belong to the



illustrious Trojan race. The same tradition appeared in England about the third century, and from Gildas and Nennius was adopted by Geoffrey of Monmouth. It is from this history that Wace drew the materials for the metrical tale of Brutus (Brut), the supposed founder of the British race and kingdom. This poem is twenty thousand lines long, and relates the adventures and life of Brutus, the great-grandson of Aeneas. The story follows:

At the time of Brutus' birth his parents were frightened by an oracle predicting that he would be the cause of the death of both parents, and only after long wanderings would attain the highest pitch of glory. This prophecy was duly fulfilled. Brutus' mother, a niece of Lavinia died at his birth. Fifteen years later, he accidentally slew his father and, expelled from Italy on account of this involuntary crime, he began his wanderings.

In the course of time Brutus went to Greece, where he found the descendants of Helenus, one of Priam's sons, languishing in captivity. Brutus headed the revolted Trojans, and after helping them to defeat Pandrasus, King of Greece, obtained their freedom and invited them to accompany him to some distant land, where they could find a new kingdom.

Led by Brutus, who in the meanwhile had married the daughter of Pandrasus, the Trojans sailed away, and, landing on the deserted island of Leogecia, visited the temple of Diana, and questioned her statue, which gave the following oracle:

Brutus! There lies beyond the Gallic bounds  
An island which the western sea surrounds,  
By giants once possessed; now few remain  
To bar thy entrance, or obstruct thy reign.  
To reach that happy shore thy sails employ;  
There fate decrees to raise a second Troy,  
And found an empire in thy royal line,  
Which time shall ne'er destroy, nor bounds confine.

After many wanderings and landings, Brutus landed on an island called Albion. Here he forced the giants to make way for him, and in the encounters with them Corineus covered himself with glory.

We are told that the first germ of the nursery tale of "Jack the Giant Killer" is found in this poem, for Corineus,



having chosen Corinea (Cornwall) as his own province, defeated there the giant Goemagot, who was twelve cubits high and pulled up an oak as if it were a weed. Corineus, after a famous wrestling bout, flung this Goemagot into the sea, at a place long known as Lam Goemagot, but now called Plymouth.

Brutus pursued his way, and finally came to the Thames, on whose banks he founded New Troy, a city whose name was changed in honor of Lud, one of his descendants, to London. Brutus called the newly won kingdom Britain, and his eldest sons, Lochrine and Cambria, gave their names to the provinces of Locria and Cambria when they became joint rulers of their father's kingdom, while Albanact, his third son, took possession of the northern part, which he called Albania (Scotland).

The posterity of Brutus now underwent many other vicissitudes. There was fighting at home and abroad; and after attributing the founding of all the principal cities to some ruler of this line, the historian relates the story of King Leir, the founder of Leicester. As this monarch's life has been used by Shakespeare for one of his dramas--The tragedy of "King Lear,"--and is familiar to all students, there is no need to outline Geoffrey of Monmouth's version of the tale.

The chronicler then resumes the account of Brutus' illustrious descendants, enumerating them all, and relating their adventures, till we come to the reign of Cassivellaunus and the invasion of Britain by the Romans. Shortly after, under the reign of Cymbelinus, he mentions the birth of Christ, and then resumes the thread of his fabulous history, and brings it down to the reign of Uther Pendragon, where it has been taken up in the Arthurian cycle.

This chronicle, which gave rise to many romances, was still considered reliable even in Shakespeare's time, and many poets have drawn freely from it. The medieval poets long used it as a mental quarry, and it has been further utilized by some more recent poets, among whom we must count Drayton, who makes frequent mention of these ancient names in his poem "Polyolbion," and Spenser, who immortalizes many of the old legends in his "Faerie Queen."<sup>2</sup>

Another metrical romance, "Sir Gawain and the Green Knight," of unknown authorship, is one of the best in construction of plot and vividness of detail. Its original elaborate stanza combined alliteration and a rime scheme. The color, the humor, the love

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<sup>2</sup>Ibid., pp. 307-310.



element, and the delight in mere adventure aside from any ultimate benefit mark this tale as very different from Beowulf. Another interesting factor is that this earlier picture represents Sir Gawain as a more admirable character than Tennyson's portrayal of him in the Idylls of the King.

Tristan and Iseult. This story which seems to have been current from earliest times, refers to the adventures of a knight, the contemporary of Arthur or of Cassivellaunus. The tale seems to have already been known in the sixth century, and was soon seized upon by the bards, who found it a rich theme for their metrical romances. It is quite unknown whether it was first turned into Latin, French, or Welsh verse; but an established fact is that it has been translated into every European language and was listened to with as much interest by the inhabitants of Iceland as by those of Greece.

We know that there are metrical versions, or remains of metrical versions, attributed to Thomas of Erildoune (the Rhymer), to Chrestien de Troyes, and at least four others, and that in our day it has been retold by Matthew Arnold and Swinburne, and made the subjects of an opera by Wagner. These old metrical versions, recited with manifold variations by the minstrels, were finally collected into a prose romance, like most of the medieval poems of this kind.

They are as readable today as they were ever in the past, but our young high school students have never heard of them unless,

perhaps, as an allusion in some one else's works, and then the allusion had no meaning because of no background of the original. The old romances as a permanent part of English literature would bring much of this delightful and meaningful material into their range. The Romans held Britain from the invasion of Julius Caesar

until their voluntary withdrawal from the island, A. D. 420—that is, about five hundred years. In that time there must have been

### III. THE MABINOGEON

A bit of history seems necessary here, for it has long been a belief of the writer that the history of a country ties in with its literature. That literature reflects the history of an area or period at any time is borne out in many instances.

The Britons. The earliest inhabitants of Britain are supposed to have been a branch of that great family known in history by the designation of Celts. Cambria, which is a frequent name for Wales, is thought to be derived from Cymri, the name which the Welsh traditions apply to an immigrant people who entered the island from the adjacent continent. This name is thought to be identical with those of Cimmerians and Cambri, under which the Greek and Roman historians describe a barbarous people, who spread themselves from the north of the Euxine over the whole of North-western Europe.

The origin of the names "Wales" and "Welsh" has been much canvassed. Some writers make them a derivation from Gael or Gaul, which names are said to signify "woodlanders"; others observe that



"Walsh," in the Northern languages, signifies "a stranger," and that the aboriginal Britons were so called by those who at a later era invaded the island and possessed the greater part of it, the Saxons and Angles.

The Romans held Britain from the invasion of Julius Caesar till their voluntary withdrawal from the island, A. D. 420—that is, about five hundred years. In that time there must have been a wide diffusion of their arts and institutions among the natives. The remains of roads, cities, and fortifications show that they did much to develop and improve the country, while those of their villas and castles proved that many of the settlers possessed wealth and tastes for the ornamental arts. Yet the Roman sway was sustained chiefly by force, and never extended over the entire island. The northern portion, now Scotland, remained independent, and the western portion, constituting Wales and Cornwall, was only nominally subjected.

Neither did the later invading hordes succeed in subdividing the remoter sections of the island. For ages after the arrival of the Saxons under Hengist and Horsa, A. D. 449, the whole western coast of Britain was possessed by the aboriginal inhabitants, engaged in constant warfare with the invaders.

It has, therefore, been a favorite boast of the people of Wales and Cornwall, that the original British stock flourishes in its unmixed purity only among them. We see this nation flashing out in poetry occasionally, as when Gray, in "The Bard," propheti-

cally describing Queen Elizabeth, who was of the Tudor, a Welsh race, says: "Her eye proclaims her of the Briton line"; and, contrasting the princes of the Tudor with those of the Norman race, Gray exclaims: "All hail, ye genuine kings, Britannia's issue, hail!"

The Welsh language and literature. The Welsh language is one of the oldest in Europe. It possesses poems the origin of which is referred with probability to the sixth century. The language of some of these is so antiquated that scholars differ about the interpretation of many passages; but, generally speaking, the body of poetry which the Welsh possess, from the year 1000 downwards, is intelligible to those who are acquainted with the modern language.

Till within the last half-century these compositions remained buried in the libraries of colleges or of individuals and so difficult of access that no successful attempt was made to give them to the world. This reproach was removed, after ineffectual appeals to the patriotism of the gentry of Wales, by Owen Jones, a furrier of London, who at his own expense collected and published the chief productions of Welsh literature, under the title of the *Myvyrian Archeology of Wales*.

After the cessation of Jones's exertions, the old apathy returned, and continued till within a few years. Dr. Owen, who had assisted Jones, exerted himself to obtain support for the publication of the *Mabinogion*, or Prose Tales of the Welsh, but died



without accomplishing his purpose, which has since been carried into execution by Lady Charlotte Guest.

The Welsh bards. The authors to whom the oldest Welsh poems are attributed are Aneurin, who is supposed to have lived A. D. 500 to 550 and Taliesin, Llywarch Hen, and Myrddin or Merlin, who were a few years later. The authenticity of the poems which bear their names has been assailed, and it is still an open question how many and which of them are authentic, though it is hardly to be doubted that some are so. The poem of Aneurin, entitled the "Gododin," bears very strong marks of authenticity. Aneurin was one of the Northern Britons of Strath-Clyde, who have left to that part of the district they inhabited the name of Cumberland, or Land of Cymri. In this poem he laments the defeat of his countrymen by the Saxons at the battle of Cattraeth, in consequence of having partaken too freely of the mead before joining in combat. The bard himself and two of his fellow-warriors were all who escaped from the field. A portion of this poem has been translated by Gray, of which the following is an extract:--

To Cattraeth's vale, in glittering row,  
Twice two hundred warriors go;  
Every warrior's manly neck  
Chains of regal honor deck,  
Wreathed in many a golden link;  
From the golden cup they drink  
Nectar that the bees produce,  
Or the grapes exalted juice.  
Flushed with mirth and hope they burn,  
But none to Cattraeth's vale return,  
Save Aeron brave, and Conan strong,

Bursting through the bloody throng,  
And I, the meanest of them all,  
That live to weep, and sing their fall.

The works of Taliesin are of much more questionable authenticity. There is a story of the adventures of Taliesin so strongly marked with mythical traits as to cast suspicion on the writings attributed to him.

The Triads. The Triads are a peculiar species of poetical composition, of which the Welsh bards have left numerous examples. They are enumerations of a triad of persons, events, or observations, strung together in one short sentence. This form of composition, originally invented, in all likelihood, to assist the memory, has been raised by the Welsh to a degree of elegance of which it hardly at first sight appears susceptible.

The Triads are of all ages, some of them probably as old as anything in the language. Short as they are individually, the collection in the *Myvyrian Archeology* occupies more than one hundred and seventy pages of double columns. Some specimens, beginning with personal triads, and giving the first place to one of King Arthur's own composition are:—

I have three heroes in battle;  
Mael the tall, and Llyr, with his army,  
And Carados, the pillar of Wales.

The three principal bards of the island of Britain:—  
Merlin Ambrose  
Merlin the son of Morfyn, called also Merlin the Wild,  
And Taliesin, the chief of the bards.



The three golden-tongued knights of the Court of Arthur:—  
 Gawain, son of Gwyar,  
 Drydyas, son of Tryphin,  
 And Eliwood, son of Madag, at Uther.

The three honorable feasts of the island of Britain:—  
 The feast of Caswallaun, after repelling Julius Caesar  
 from this isle;  
 The feast of Aurelius Ambrosius, after he had conquered  
 the Saxons;  
 And the feast of King Arthur, at Caerleon upon Usk.

Guenever, the daughter of Laodegan the giant,  
 Bad when little, worse when great.

Next follow some moral triads:—

Hast thou heard what Dremhidydd sung,  
 An ancient watchman on the castle walls?  
 A refusal is better than a promise unperformed.

Hast thou heard what Llenleawg sung,  
 The noble chief wearing the golden torques?  
 The grave is better than a life of want.

Hast thou heard what Garselit sung,  
 The Irishman whom it is safe to follow?  
 Sin is bad, if long pursued.

Hast thou heard what Avaon sung,  
 The son of Taliesin, of the recording verse?  
 The cheek will not conceal the anguish of the heart.

Didst thou hear what Llywarch sung,  
 The intrepid and brave old man?  
 Greet kindly, though there be no acquaintance.

Romances of The Mabinogion. The romances of this body of

Welsh literature are delightful reading, but are too long to be  
 given here. Some of the titles are "The Lady of the Fountain,"  
 "Geraint, the Son of Erbin," "Kelwish and Olwen," "King Richard

#### IV. KING ARTHUR AND HIS KNIGHTS

Since King Arthur and the exploits of his knights are so well known, it would be redundancy to dwell at length on him; hence only a short sketch of his life will be given.

Arthur. The particulars of Arthur's life as Bulfinch records them are as follows:

Arthur was a prince of the tribe of Britons called Silures, whose country was South Wales, the son of Uther, named Pendragon, a title given to an elective sovereign, paramount over the many kings of Britain. He appears to have commenced his martial career about the year 500, and was raised to the Pendragonship about ten years later. He is said to have gained twelve victories over the Saxons. The most important of them was that of Badon, by some supposed to be Bath, by others Berkshire. This was the last of his battles with the Saxons, and checked their progress so effectually that Arthur experienced no more annoyance from them, and reigned in peace until the revolt of his nephew Modred, twenty years later, which led to the fatal battle of Camlan, in Cornwall, in 542. Modred was slain, and Arthur, mortally wounded, was conveyed by sea to Glastonbury, where he died and was buried.

Tradition preserved the memory of the place of his interment within the abbey, as we are told by Giraldus Cambrensis, who was present when the grave was opened by command of Henry II, in 1150, and saw the bones and sword of the monarch, and a leaden cross let into his tombstone, with the inscription in rude Roman letters, "Here lies buried the famous King Arthur, in the island Avalonia."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>Thomas Bulfinch, The Age of Chivalry or Legends of King Arthur (revised edition; E. E. Hale (ed.), Boston: S. W. Tilton and Company, 1884), pp. 529-533.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., pp. 38-39.



This story has been elegantly versified by Warton. A popular traditional belief was long entertained among the Britains that Arthur was not dead, but had been carried off to be healed of his wounds in Fairy-land, and that he would reappear to avenge his countrymen, and reinstate them in the sovereignty of Britain. In Warton's "Ode" a bard relates to King Henry the traditional story of Arthur's death and closes with these lines:

Yet in vain a paynim foe  
Armed with fate the mighty blow;  
For when he fell, the Elfin queen,  
All in secret and unseen,  
O'er the fainting hero threw  
Her mantel of ambrosial blue,  
And bade her spirits bear him far,  
In Merlin's agate-axled car,  
To her green isles enamelled steep,  
Far in the navel of the deep.  
O'er his wounds she sprinkled dew  
From flowers that in Arabia grew.

There he reigns a mighty king,  
Thence to Britain shall return,  
If right prophetic rolls I learn,  
Borne on victory's spreading plume,  
His ancient sceptre to resume,  
His knightly table to restore,  
And brave the tournaments of yore.

After this narration another bard came forward, who recited a different story:

When Arthur bowed his haughty crest,  
No princess veiled in azure vest  
Snatched him, by Merlin's powerful spell,  
In groves of golden bliss to dwell;

But when he fell, with a winged speed,  
 His champions, on a milk-white steed,  
 From the battle's hurricane  
 Bore him to Joseph's towered fane.<sup>5</sup>  
 In the fair vale of Avalon;  
 There with chanted orison  
 And the long blaze of tapers clear,  
 The stoled fathers met the bier;  
 Through the dim aisles, in order dread  
 Of martial woe, the chief they led,  
 And deep entombed in holy ground,  
 Before the altar's solemn bound.

It must not be concealed that the very existence of Arthur has been denied by some. Milton wrote that as to Arthur, more renowned in songs and romance than in true story, who he was, and whether ever any such reigned in Britain, has been doubted heretofore, and may again, with good reason. Modern critics, however, admit that there was a prince of this name, and find proof of it in the frequent mention of him in writings of the Welsh bards.

According to Dr. Owen, the Arthur of romance was a mythological person. He believed that Arthur was the Great Bear, as the name literally implies (Arctos, Arcturus), and perhaps this constellation, being so near the pole, and visibly describing a

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<sup>5</sup>Glastonbury Abbey, said to be founded by Joseph of Arimathea, in a spot anciently called the island or valley of Avalonia.

Tennyson, in his "Palace of Art," alludes to the legend of Arthur's rescue by the Faery queen, thus:

Or mythic Uther's deeply wounded son,  
 In some fair space of sloping greens,  
 Lay dozing in the vale of Avalon,  
 And watched by weeping queens.



circle in small space, is the origin of the famous Round Table.<sup>6</sup>

Regardless of whoever Arthur was and how much is fact or fiction, the legends written of him and his knights provide readers of now, as well as readers of the past, with some of the best reading in all of literature and richly deserve their place in that great body of material termed "folklore."

#### V. MYTH OR LEGEND

So closely interwoven in the folklore of Britain are myth and legend that it is difficult to distinguish one from the other. The book Myth or Legend which was referred to earlier in the study bears out the facts when the authors discuss some of this material.

Glastonbury and the Holy Grail. Glastonbury was designed by nature to attract men, history and legend. No place in Britain has a longer history of unbroken human life, or a more involved tangle of gossamer fancy and hard fact for the story of its past than Glastonbury. It is the fairy isle of Avalon, where Arthur lies waiting his call to rescue the world once more from heathen savagery and evil men. A mile away is Pomparles, the 'Bridge Perilous' over the little River Brue, where he cast Excalibur into the water. Barely a dozen miles off stands Cadbury Castle, the 'many-towered Camelot' of the legend.

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<sup>6</sup>Bulfinch, op. cit., pp. 39-40.



Still more, it was to Glastonbury, first of all places in Britain, that the Christian faith came. When the Apostle Philip, the companion of Jesus, had converted Gaul, he sent a great company of his followers, led by Joseph of Arimathea, to evangelize Britain in the year 63. Joseph brought with him the Holy Grail, the sacred chalice of the Last Supper, in which he had collected Christ's blood at the Crucifixion. Approaching Glastonbury after many strange adventures, the disciples rested awhile on the little rise half a mile southwest of Tor.

When Joseph stopped to pray at the foot of the Tor, his staff took root and budded, a miraculous sign that he had reached his journey's end. The local king, Arveragus, though he rejected Joseph's gospel, gave him the firm land around the Tor for his settlement. 'Ynys Vitrin' the British called it--'the isle of woad'. Here Joseph built the first Christian church in Britain, and here he buried the Grail. His rooted staff became the Glastonbury Thorn, flowering every Christmas to honor Christ's birth, and the little hill where he had rested was called Wearyall Hill. The Grail became the object of the mystic quest of King Arthur's knights, thus linking together the two otherwise separate legends. How much of it is fable, how much history?<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>G. E. Daniel and others, Myth or Legend (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1956), pp. 29-30.



The authors continue with the discussion. They cite other findings from other sources and in the summary they generally conclude that it is a combination of both history and myth. For the serious reader and one involved in research the entire material is very interesting.

The Druids and Stonehenge. Of course, Stonehenge is neither a myth nor a legend, nor are the Druids. Nothing could be more substantial than the enormous stones set up on Salisbury Plain; nobody more matter-of-fact (even to dullness) than Julius Caesar, who is one of our main informants on the Druids. But legends have grown up about both, and if myth is defined as a story based on pure imagination, there has been considerable mythmaking as well.

The legend of the Druids and Stonehenge is a learned one. It is not one whose origins are lost in a vague past, and so far as it has ever been really a popular belief, it has become so because of the adoption of out-of-date views current among scholars in the past, by people attracted to the ideas by their romantic appeal. What is so interesting about the legend, in fact, is that we can see pretty well how and when it began, and how it was built up and elaborated later; this is when the myths began.

Stuart Piggott in Myth or Legend had this to say:

The general form the story takes would, I suppose, be something like this. The ancient Britons had a priesthood called the Druids; they were philosophers, poets and seers whose doctrines are known in detail and contain hints of Higher Things. They had an elaborate series of ceremonial observances and solemn ritual which took place in the open



air, in circles of standing stones. Of these Druid temples, so the story goes, the greatest and most magnificent is Stonehenge, where particularly impressive ceremonies were performed at sunrise on Midsummer Day when the rising sun first strikes the Altar Stone.

Some part of the Druid doctrine has been passed down to, or rediscovered in, the present day, and the modern Midsummer Day ceremony at Stonehenge represents a very ancient tradition. There is an idea, too, that the Druids at Stonehenge are connected with those of Welsh Eisteddfod, both being the modern representatives of an enlightened pre-Roman priesthood.

If I have given a fair idea of the current Druid legend (and I think I have, on the whole), it contains the most fascinating mixture of real fact, misunderstood fact, pure supposition and a reckless jumping to exciting conclusions. Let us examine it, bit by bit and see what we can make of it.<sup>8</sup>

Dr. Piggott next traces the Druids, their religion, ceremonies and all known facts about them and establishes the fact that no classical writer talked about any Druid temples except those which were mere clearings in the forest.

He next turns to Stonehenge and readily admits that it is a puzzling monument, but that we have got somewhere in understanding it. These are some facts which he puts forth:

Excavation has shown that Stonehenge is complex, built and altered over some centuries of time, just as almost any English Cathedral. The bank and ditch is part of the earlier monument, dating from round about 1700 to 1600 B. C. The stones (themselves representing more than one phase of construction) date from a century or two later. The date for the beginning of Stonehenge is supported by a radio-carbon reading as well as archeological evidence; the date of the reconstruction receives new support from the recognition this summer (1956) of carvings of Bronze Age tools and weapons of specific types on some of the stones.

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<sup>8</sup>Ibid., pp. 97-98.



So Stonehenge is a monument of the middle of the second millennium B. C. But the Druids are the priesthood of the Celtic peoples a little around and before the beginning of the Christian era. No ancient tradition associates the two. How then did they come to be brought together in popular legend?<sup>9</sup>

The conclusion of Dr. Piggott was that myth, fantasy, imagination or the Romantic Movement, and jumping at conclusions were responsible. Whatever were the causes, Stonehenge and the Druids are part of the national heritage and should be brought to the attention of the present youth.

St. George--The Patron Saint of England. Dragons are not only large animals, but they are also a large subject, and practically every country has its dragon story. A dragon is a kind of crocodile with something of the shape of a scorpion, or perhaps of a lizard. He is generally a fire-breather, and though sometimes he has only one head, he more usually has either three, seven or nine. The heads have the power of growing back again unless they are all cut off at once.

As with more normal zoological species, the behavior of dragons is stereotyped and predictable, but is considerably affected by environment. Consequently, it has come to be supposed--mistakenly--that there are several distinct species of dragons, such as maiden-eating dragons, treasure-guarding dragons, and royal ancestor dragons. Actually these three behavior patterns

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<sup>9</sup>Ibid.



can all be found in one and the same beast. To illustrate the point, there was a distinguished dragon called Erichthonias, who lived on the Acropolis at Athens, and guarded the treasure-house of Athena. He was also noted for having attacked his virgin attendants and driven them mad, and for being the grandfather of one of the first kings of Athens.

St. George's dragon was a typical specimen of the maiden-eating variety. E. R. Leach, Lecturer in Anthropology in the University of Cambridge, tells the story in Myth or Legend:

Near the town of Silena in Lybia there was a pond infested by a dragon which sometimes approached the walls of the town and poisoned with his breath all who dwelt near. The citizens paid tribute to the monster. Each day a man or beast had to be offered, so that at last they gave up their children, sons and daughters, and none were spared. Finally, the lot fell on the King's daughter. The monarch, horror-struck, offered in exchange for her his gold, his silver, and half his realm, but to no avail. Just then St. George, who was a military tribune in the army of the Roman Emperor Diocletian, was passing through Silena and heard of the impending tragedy. He immediately mounted his horse and, armed with his lance, rushed to encounter the dragon, whom he reached just as the monster was about to devour the royal virgin. When St. George had overthrown the dragon, the princess fastened her girdle round the beast's neck and he followed her like a dog on a leash. The inhabitants of Silena were so impressed by this remarkable sight that 20,000 of them were immediately baptized Christians, whereupon St. George struck off the head of the monster.<sup>10</sup>

But who was St. George? He seems to be almost as mythical as the monster he disposed of. The story goes that when martyred by Diocletian for refusing to abjure the Christian faith, he was

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<sup>10</sup>Ibid., pp. 79-80.



put to death seven times in succession—by ghastly means—but on each occasion, except the last, he was miraculously restored to health. It seems very doubtful whether there ever was an historical St. George. Some have tried to identify him with a certain Aryan Bishop of Alexandria who died in A. D. 362, but there exists in a church in Syria an inscription dated A. D. 346 in which St. George is already referred to as a holy martyr.

More frequently St. George has been identified as the nameless hero who, when the Emperor Diocletian issued his edicts against the Christians, rashly went round the city tearing down the notices. Historical or not St. George, as a saint, was very widely worshipped throughout the Near East from the third century onwards. His adoption as patron saint of England dates from the time of the Crusades.

The puzzle of course is this. How should an entirely fabulous saint manage to surround himself with such an extensive cult? Professor Leach answers it this way:

The most likely answer is that the cult is earlier than St. George. There is very satisfactory evidence that around the tenth century A. D. the stories told about St. George were almost identical to those told about the death of Adonis, a god belonging to an earlier era altogether. Those of you who have read Sir James Frazer's Golden Bough will know that the story of the death and resurrection of Adonis closely resembles the story of the death and resurrection of Christ. This explains why a sixteenth century Christian commentator, Hospinian, would have asserted that in 'Allegory, St. George stands for Christ, the Dragon is the devil, and the citizens of Silena are the human race redeemed by Christ.'

It is clearly "this" interpretation of the story which induced the Church to give its approval to a fable which, on the face of it, had the closest possible relationship to



such pagan dragon stories as that of Perseus and Andromeda.<sup>11</sup>

## VI. BALLADS—ENGLISH AND SCOTTISH

In all of literature there is no more fascinating chapter than that of the old English ballads. Never bound to an author or a date, coming from "out of everywhere," welcome as a summer breeze wherever they chanced to make their way, and free as a breeze to whoever chose to enjoy them, they were handed down from singer to singer, changing with the fancies of many minstrels and many generations. They are but a voice in the wilderness, and yet they are fairly throbbing with human life and with that flood tide of human feeling which makes all the centuries as one.

The ballads picture a simple people, loving the primitive virtues of endurance in the woman and valor in the man, of faithfulness in the servant and generosity in his lord. The people who lived in the ballad age had a hearty relish for humor, and a healthy love for the out of doors, qualities which have kept their descendants from many absurdities and artificialities.

Percy and His Reliques. Drs. Boswell and Reaver in

"Fundamentals of Folk Literature" wrote this:

One of the influential events of English Pre-Romanticism occurred in 1765 when Bishop Thomas Percy published his Reliques of Ancient English Poetry. It not only drew more attention to English ballads but also helped influence writers to use a more simple, natural style of intensity and

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<sup>11</sup>Ibid., pp. 81-82.



vigor. His accidental discovery of the century-old manuscript from which he drew the core of his material is as romantic as any event of those days since, while visiting friends, in Shropshire, he rescued the remains of the manuscript that a maid was using to light his fire.<sup>12</sup>

Bishop Percy dedicated the Reliques to Elizabeth, Countess of Northumberland and in the dedication tells one something of the nature of the book and its importance.

Madam,—Those writers, who solicit the protection of the noble and the great, are often exposed to censure by the impropriety of their addresses: a remark that will, perhaps, be too readily applied to him, who, having nothing better to offer than the rude songs of ancient minstrels, aspires to the patronage of the Countess of Northumberland, and hopes that the barbarous productions of unpolished ages can obtain the approbation or notice of her, who adorns courts by her presence, and diffuses elegance by her example.

But this impropriety, it is presumed, will disappear, when it is declared that these poems are presented to your Ladyship, not as labours of art, but as effusions of nature, showing the first efforts of ancient genius, and exhibiting the customs and opinions of remote ages: of ages that had been almost lost to memory, had not the gallant deeds of your illustrious ancestors preserved them from oblivion.

No active or comprehensive mind can forbear some attention to the reliques of antiquity. It is prompted by natural curiosity to survey the progress of life and manners, and to inquire by what gradations barbarity was civilized, grossness refined, and ignorance instructed.

By such bonds, Madam, as I am now introducing to your presence, was the infancy of genius nurtured and advanced, by such were the minds of unlettered warriors softened and enlarged, by such was the memory of illustrious actions preserved and propagated, by such were the heroic deeds of the Earls of Northumberland sung at festivals in the halls of Alnwick; and those songs, which the bounty of your ancestors rewarded, now return to your Ladyship by a kind of hereditary right; and I flatter myself, will find such reception as is usually shown to poets and historians, by those whose consciousness of merit

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<sup>12</sup>George Boswell and J. Russell Reaver, "Fundamentals of Folk Literature." (unpublished book, 1956), p. 79.



makes it their interest to be long remembered. - - - Thomas Percy.<sup>13</sup>

Though the book was criticized by Ritson, Dr. Johnson and others, it was well received by the public and three other editions followed the first one. Today it stands as one of the best sources of English and Scottish ballads.

Other sources of ballads of early antiquity are The Pepys Ballads (5 volumes); a collection of ballads made by Anthony Wood in the Ashmole Library at Oxford; a large treasure of ancient English poems in manuscript besides one folio volume of printed ballads in the British Museum, and several others.

Ballad literature since Percy. The impetus given to the collection of old ballads by the publication of the Reliques showed itself in the rapid succession of volumes of the same class which issued from the press. Most of these were devoted to the publication of Scottish ballads. According to the editor, Wheatley, the following were some that were published:

From 1769 through 1871 some twenty-four books came from the press on ballads. Some of them were Evan's Old Ballads, Historical and Narrative, Ritson's long series of volumes which is of such inestimable value to the literary antiquary, Sir Walter Scott's Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border, William Motherwell's Minstrelsy, Ancient and Modern, a work of the most sterling character, which contains the best account of ballad literature extant, William Chappell's valuable Collection of National English Airs, consisting of Ancient Song, Ballad and Dance Tunes which is a mine of wealth concerning

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<sup>13</sup>Thomas Percy, Reliques of Ancient English Poetry, ed. by Henry B. Wheatley (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1927), I, 1-2.



both the airs and the words of our ballad treasures, Professor Francis James Child's English and Scottish Ballads. Professor Child's work is one of our greatest authorities on Ballad lore.

The books referred to above form but a portion of the literature of the subject. So mighty has been the growth of the small seed set by Percy; that the despised outcasts which the literary leaders attempted to laugh out of existence have made good their right to a high position among the poetry of the nation, and proved that they possessed the germ of a long and vigorous life.<sup>14</sup>

H. B. W.

Minstrels—relationship to ballads. Since one knows that much of this early literature was oral and was preserved through passing it on to succeeding generations by word of mouth, the ones who were responsible for this deserve mention in this study. No better discussion of the part minstrels played in oral transportation of the ballads has been found than that of Bishop Percy in his essay "The Ancient Minstrel in England." He wrote:

The minstrels were an order of men in the Middle Ages, who subsisted by the arts of poetry and music, and sang to the harp verses composed by themselves and others. They also appear to have accompanied their songs with mimicry and action; and to have practiced such various means of diverting as were much admired in those rude times, and supplied the want of more refined entertainment. These arts rendered them extremely popular and acceptable in this and all the neighboring countries, where no high scene of festivity was esteemed complete, that was not set off with exercise of their talents; and where, so long as the spirit of chivalry subsisted, they were protected and caressed, because their songs tended to do honor to the ruling passion of the times, and to encourage and foment a martial spirit.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup>Ibid., pp. xci-xcvii.

<sup>15</sup>Thomas Percy, Reliques of Ancient English Poetry, ed. by Ernest Rhys (London: J. M. Dent and Sons, 1932), I, 9-10.



Bishop Percy had much more to say in his essay which was complimentary to the minstrels, and then proceeded to collect from history incidents as to their actions, areas of operation, support, long years of service and when minstrels began to fall into disrepute and why.

Percy traced and documented minstrels, bards, scalds, and gleemen from the invasion of Britain by the Anglo-Saxons through the Norman Conquest and well on to the sixteenth century. It seems pretty conclusive from Percy and other sources that minstrels had a close relationship to ballads.

The folklore of the ballads. Probably because many of the ballads were of ancient origin and because they were so close to the people, they are full of folklore. As the ballad tells its tale of the people one can define many characteristics of those early folk. L. C. Wimberly in Folklore in the English and Scottish Ballads divides his study of them into four parts—The Pagan Otherworld, Pagan Otherworld Beings, The Otherworld Spell, and the Christian Otherworld. Wimberly's study is very interesting and invites lingering over his findings. But since his approach is from the point of view of folklore and anthropology, it would be less suitable for the study of the young high school student than that of M. J. C. Hodgart. Professor Hodgart devotes only one chapter to folklore of the ballads in his book. He writes:



The English and Scottish ballads are peculiarly rich in one kind of folklore, that of the supernatural. The ballad universe is peopled with animals and birds that speak, with fairies and witches, and with ghosts who return from the grave. There is no clear line of demarcation between such creatures and ordinary mortals. The supernatural is treated in a matter-of-fact and unsensational way, and to the ballad singer there seems to be no question of a suspension of disbelief.

Fairies, for example, are not the minute creatures of modern whimsy, but are like human beings in size and in some of their ways of life. They wear green ("Thomas Rymer" (37)), live in forests ("Tam Lin" (39)), own fairy castles inside hills ("Hind Etin" (41)), and "The Elfin Knight sat on yon hill" (2)), or in an underworld beneath the ground ("Thomas Rymer").

They seek mortals as nurses for their children ("The Queen of the Elfan's Nourice" (40)), as lovers ("Lady Isabel and the Elf Knight" (4)) or sacrifice one of their number as a tribute to hell, and they prefer to use a mortal as a substitute. Tam Lin has been stolen away by the fairies, and he asks Janet to win him back, saying: ("Bir High" (155A).)

And pleasant is the fairyland  
But, an eerie tale to tell  
Ay at the end of seven years they're rotten  
We pay a teind to hell  
As I am fair and fu' of flesh  
I'm fear'd it be myself.<sup>16</sup> ("Bir High's Ghost" (777).)

Other examples and explanations of folklore in the ballads give fairies the same size as mortals except in "The Wee, Wee Man" (38) and in one other ballad. They differ from mortals in their greater magical powers, and in the magnificence of their horses, jewelry, and apparel:

Her skirt was of the grass-green silk,  
Her mantel of the velvet fine,  
At ilka tett of her horse's mane  
Hung fifty siller bells and nine.  
("Thomas Rymer" (37).)

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<sup>16</sup>M. J. C. Hodgart, The Ballads (Hutchinson's University Library, 1950), pp. 115-116.



Fairies in folklore generally seem to have had human characteristics until Shakespeare popularized the modern conception of them in A Midsummer Night's Dream, though in The Merry Wives of Windsor, he implies that the fairies who dance round Herne the Hunter are life-sized.

Fairies in the ballads and in other folklore are closely associated with ghosts, who are described in the same semi-human terms. They are not disembodied spirits in the accepted sense, for in most cases the "ghost" is the actual corpse:

'And at the back o Merry Lincoln (215).  
The dead corpse did her meet.'

("Sir High" (155A).)

or the lover returns without arms because

'By worms they're eaten, in mools they're rotten  
Behold, Margaret, and see.'

("Sweet William's Ghost" (77F).)

Ballad cosmology is, on the whole, surprisingly free from references to Christian beliefs. There are a few exceptions to this, like the description of paths of righteousness and wickedness in "Thomas Rymer" and the stanza in "Sweet William's Ghost." But such passages are so rare as to seem like late intrusions into ballad folklore. There is no systematic mythology or cosmology in the ballads, as is shown by the confusion between ghosts and fairies and the contradictory ideas about the otherworld. The ballads express only fragments of primitive beliefs, though they do so in a literal and convincing way.



The riddle ballads show a battle of wits between supernatural beings and mortals. The former ask riddles and set impossible tasks, the latter win by answering the riddles, or by producing equally impossible counter-tasks, wielding the magic of words by their quickness of wit and fluency. Another type of name-magic, and animals and birds that speak are found in the ballads. Not only animals but inanimate objects have the power of speech and intelligence. Bed and blankets speak to "Gil Brenton" (5), Johnie Cock addresses his bows as if they were human, and there is an intelligent ship in "Young Allen" (245).

There are many more motifs which could be mentioned and many interpretations have been expounded of them. Some seem to be genuine survivals from the past and they owe their existence to the tenacity of folk-memory. Motifs may have been genuinely based on primitive beliefs and then pass from one generation to another until they have become meaningless.

But in other cases, folklore motifs in the ballads are neither primitive nor literary. The beliefs on which they rest were actually current at the time and place of collection. Many other motifs can be paralleled by current superstitions. A large number of primitive practices and beliefs persisted through the Middle Ages and into modern times in the remote country districts of England and Scotland. There was an immense growth of folklore round the witch cult of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. It is probable that a good deal of paganism lingered among the

peasantry, and in Scotland even the upper classes were not above suspicion.

The Scottish ballad versions, which have much more of the supernatural in them than the English ones have, are at least to some extent a reflection of actual life and thought. Christianity does not appear to have modified the background of the Scottish ballad versions. Although the supernatural is so much manifest, there are almost none of the orthodox miracles or legends of the Virgin Mary and the Saints which make up such a large part of medieval literature. "Brown Robyn's Confession" (57) and "Sir Hugh, or the Jew's Daughter" (155) are the only examples. The Robin Hood ballads are more devout. Robin receives the Virgin Mary's help in the fourth Fitt of the "Gest" (177), and forces proud priests to say mass for him. There also are the few ballads, like "The Cherry Tree Carol," on religious subjects. Elsewhere, the Church has left little trace beyond a recurrent formula:

When bells were rung and mass was sung  
And men were bound for bed.<sup>17</sup>

Robin Hood Ballads. The Robin Hood ballads bring us at once into the ballad world of fact and legend, of native character and universal human nature, of ideal and earthly, weaving into the easy verse and tune that are the best results of the traditionary process a theme that has found favor for centuries.

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., pp. 120-123.



Evelyn Wells in The Ballad Tree gives much material on Robin Hood as to his identity and also as to his place in literature. She begins:

Today the greatest prize a ballad collector can secure is a Robin Hood ballad. Their stories are perennially attractive. Their hero we have always known and loved, if not in ballads as our ancestors did, then in the stories of Howard Pyle and the films of Douglas Fairbanks. We still agree with the ancient chronicler that he was the most humane and prince of robbers. Reflecting the social conditions of a definite time and place in history, the Robin Hood ballads also hint at a further past, and the inheritance of ancient folk beliefs.<sup>18</sup>

Of the forty-odd Robin Hood ballads in collection many deal with the hero's encounters with the law, the church, or the aristocracy—encounters which result in the discomfiture of the privileged and the restoration of rights of the oppressed. Others tell of more plebeian dealings with butchers, pedlars, and tanners, showing his noble behavior when bested and his method of finding good men for his band. The idyllic nature of forest life, the loyalty of the band to its master, and the nobility of the hero's character are evident.

Quoting again from Professor Wells, she says:

The texts are of varying excellence and range from those of manuscripts and early printed versions of 1450 to later printed broadsides, the last one written by Martin Parker in 1632. Besides these isolated pieces there is "A Gest of Robyn Hode" (117), a collection of tales comprising about 450 stanzas in all, divided into eight "fyttes" or incidents. This is a sort of saga of the hero, a collection of ballads,

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<sup>18</sup>Evelyn Wells, The Ballad Tree (New York: The Ronald Press Company, 1950), p. 11.



put together possibly before 1400. One early copy is from the press of Wynkyn de Worde, an apprentice of Caxton who set up shop for himself in 1509.<sup>19</sup>

The identity of a hero of such continuous popularity has long baffled literary detectives. Was he a real person? If so, when did he live? Was he a mere yeoman who attained remarkable fame considering his station, or a disguised nobleman in exile? Was he "a mere creation of the ballad muse," arising out of the conditions of the times, which called for a symbol of popular resistance to privileged oppression? Was he a folk expression of inherited belief—a medieval modernizing of some pagan woodland deity?

Much has been written to answer these questions, and the records, but everyone may find in it the strength and virtues of writer read a number of records to find the answer. The discussions are too long to enter here so only a summary of the findings will be given. According to Professor Wells's records is this:

In the Pipe Rolls of the reign of Henry III, in 1230, we read that "the sheriff of Yorkshire owes 32 shillings and sixpence in the matter of the chattels of Robin Hood, fugitive." Here is an outlaw involved with a sheriff, perhaps our man. The other Robin was born sixty years later, and we piece together his story from the Rolls of the Manor of Wakefield in Yorkshire. This Robin Hood, the son of Adam, forester of the Lord of the Manor, was born sometime between 1285 and 1295.

These references in the rolls are the only ones made to Robin Hood in his lifetime. In the following years, the earliest allusion to him is found in Langland's Piers Plowman in 1377, when Sloth, the lazy priest, says that although he does not know his paternoster and other prayers, he "can rymes of Robin Hood and Randolph erle of Chester."

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 12.



Record and ballad may be brought together, but the record itself is not in agreement, and the two Robins of 1230 and a century later cannot be reconciled into one. Robin Hood is not yet historically identified.<sup>20</sup>

The ballads were sung, as the ancient chronicler puts it, iocunde et memoriter—with pleasure and by word of mouth. Today, however, we no longer learn our ballads like Sidney from a blind fiddler, or like Goldsmith from a dairymaid, or from a sailor in port or a farmer at his plough, or even, alas from our nurses or mothers. Yet even though we no longer sing memoriter and must resort to books, we sing iocunde, for fortunately much of the pleasure abides. For the ballad is far from moribund. Anthropologists and philologists may search it to fill the gaps in their records, but everyone may find in it the strength and virtue of common things. Moreover, if it is an archaic survival, it still contains the living seed out of which art grows. "The persistence of literary creativeness in any people," says T. S. Eliot in What Is a Classic, "consists in the maintenance of an unconscious balance between tradition in the larger sense—the collective personality, so to speak, realized in the literature of the past—and the originality of the living generation." The traditional ballad has always maintained this balance, building on its past and changing with its present. The end is not yet. As long as men love a story and their senses respond to the rhythm of sound and movement, the ballad tree, rooted in the past, living today,

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., pp. 12-15.