

## FOLKLORE IN THE MASS MEDIA: TELEVISION

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Introduction

Folklorists are just beginning to recognize that an item of folklore is not synonymous with a verbal text. Rather, the folklore item when considered as a message transmitted by a sender (performer) is a fusion of traditional cognitive codes (texts) and traditional paralinguistic and non-verbal codes (loosely referred to as performance style), the whole process of which is both delineated by a traditional physical and social situation and complicated by the continual feedback of the traditional audience. When aspects of performance, setting and audience are understood as part of the folklore item itself along with the traditional text, it is no longer possible, except for analytical purposes, to consider text, performance, situation and audience as separate entities. Context, a concept which folklorists use to denote all aspects of the item apart from the text (i.e., performance, situation and audience), cannot legitimately be separated from the text. This is true not so much because context is important to understanding the text but because the context is an integral part of the folklore item itself. The task of the folklorist is not so simple as to find and identify traditional texts. He must also determine whether the performance, situation and audience dimensions of the item are traditional. From this point of view a "true" folklore item consists of 1) a traditional text (whether composed of verbal, non-verbal or mixed components), 2) a traditional performance of that text in 3) a traditional (customary) situation in response to or in conjunction with 4) a traditional audience.

When the folklore item is conceived in the foregoing manner, it is no longer possible to approach the problem of folklore in the mass media, or in literature, for that matter, from the naive perspective of a text hunter. How "true" a folklore item, for instance, is an Andy Williams rendition of the traditional song "The Maid Freed From the Gallows" (Child, No. 95) delivered in a pop performance style before a large television studio audience in New York? The text is traditional! Obviously it is necessary to approach the subject of folklore in the mass media with some means whereby the investigator can distinguish tradition at more than merely the textual level. The four factor concept of folklore presented above is an attempt to provide such a mechanism. Using that scheme, the appearance of a folkloric item in the mass media can be evaluated for its traditionality according to each of the four factors and placed in a continuum as more or less "true" folklore.

The present paper is an attempt to assess 1) the kind and amount of traditional material found in the television media, 2) the extent to which the material is "true" folklore according to the four above mentioned criteria, 3) the distribution of the material in the programming of the media and 4) the use to which the material is put. Data for the paper was collected according to the following design: One full day (5/15/69) of television

programming was viewed with the audio portion continuously recorded on tape. When traditional material was thought to be involved, notes were taken on the video portion of the message. The programs watched and recorded were selected from their brief descriptions in the TV Guide magazine with the intent of choosing those programs which seemed to be most likely to contain traditional material. Once a program was chosen, it was viewed in its entirety without attempting to switch channels. The channel was switched only at the conclusion of a program. In the course of the day programs from the three major networks (ABC, NBC, CBS) and the NET public network, as well as from the one independent station in the area (WTTV-TV) were viewed. In all, programs on each of the seven channels received on the investigator's set were viewed (channels 2, 4, 6, 8, 10, 13, 30). Four of the stations utilizing these channels originate in Indianapolis, Indiana (4, 6, 8, 13), two originate in Terre Haute, Indiana (2, 10) and one, the NET station, is located in Bloomington, Indiana, at Indiana University.

### Results

The nineteen hour television vigil from 6:15 a.m. Thursday, May 15, 1969, to 1:30 a.m. Friday, May 16, 1969, disclosed 101 traditional items or themes. These items are considered by genre in the body of the paper which follows.

#### Traditional Music and Song

The greatest number of traditional items appeared in the music category, including twenty-two songs (all accompanied) and five instrumental pieces. These musical items appeared primarily on two programs, "Today in Indiana" from 6:15 a.m. to 7:00 a.m. and on "Midwestern Hayride" from 10:00 p.m. to 11:00 p.m. In both instances the music played was from the country and western tradition. A typical example of an instrumental piece is "Mockingbird," the well known trick fiddle tune.<sup>1</sup> The traditional dimension of country and western music, which is itself a hybrid resulting from a popular culture and traditional culture mix, is just now beginning to interest folklorists. D. K. Wilgus' paper on the subject for the "Symposium on the Urban Experience and Folk Tradition" in 1968 is a first step.<sup>2</sup> The indebtedness of popular country and western music to bluegrass tradition is well known, and the tune "Mockingbird" adequately illustrates the fact. Written in 1855 "Mockingbird" has remained a sure crowd pleaser for bluegrass audiences to the present day.<sup>3</sup> The "trick" aspect of the tune consists of the use of the fiddle to imitate the greatest imitator of birds, the mockingbird. While such "trick" use of the fiddle is not revered by traditional fiddlers, it is sure to draw applause from a general audience, and, thus, the trick tune finds its way with other humorous pieces into fiddlers' repertoires to be produced especially on festival occasions. Of course, it is not surprising that what draws the greatest response from the festival audience is likely to be utilized when it comes to pleasing an even more amorphous television audience. It may be in this way that the prevalence of trick and humorous as compared to "straight" instrumental pieces can be explained on country and western T.V. shows.

Besides the selective nature of the country and western draw upon bluegrass

instrumental tradition, two further modifications tend to characterize the country and western television use of bluegrass tunes. These modifications are apparent when the T.V. version of "Mockingbird" is compared to three modern bluegrass versions.<sup>4</sup> First, the instrumentation is different. Although the types of instruments used are much the same, the country and western version is "electrified." While the three bluegrass versions of the tune tend to take advantage of various types of microphones and microphone placement, the instruments themselves are not electrified. Second, the television version of "Mockingbird" is considerably shorter than any of the bluegrass versions. The number of runs through the melody are fewer, and the elaboration of the bird imitation is more restricted. It seems that not only are the number of strictly instrumental pieces fewer compared to songs on the country and western television shows, but when included these tend to be compressed in addition to being trick or humorous.

In spite of these changes wrought in the tune by the effects of the mass media, the country and western form of "Mockingbird" still qualifies as a true variant of the piece. Like the general plot of a tale, the basic elements of the tune remain constant; the melody, the bird imitation and the movement from opening slow run through the melody to a ragtime concluding run. Like a variant of a tale, the differences appear in how these constants are stated and elaborated, in this instance musically.

It is worth noting that the two shows for which country and western music was focal were strictly local products appearing very early in the morning and moderately late in the evening. The type and style of advertising on these shows (agricultural products are prevalent, regional dialect is used by announcers and a particular local car dealer may be endorsed by a Nashville singing star) indicate that they are directed to a specific, if large, subculture in contrast to most programs which are geared strictly to the mass audience. Programming on all channels from 7:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m. was strictly mass oriented; it was only at the peripheries of the program schedule that non-mass directed programs were made available. Interestingly enough, while it might have been expected that the one independent station would cater to a more specific regional audience than the network stations, neither of the two programs mentioned above was produced by that station.

When traditional music appeared outside of these two shows, it occurred in one of three forms. First, it was present on a talk show as a form that had earlier achieved high status in popular culture (Louie Cantrell and a New Orleans dixieland trio performed three pieces on the "Today Show"). Second, we find songs and tunes used as the musical component of an advertisement. An example of this is the use of the tune and part of the text of the nursery rhyme "Sing a Song of Sixpence" to sell margarine.

A group of children dressed as courtiers sing,  
 First you see the flowers sprinkled all around (we are shown  
 the margarine container)  
 Then you taste the flavor ...  
 Announcer interrupts,  
 Announcing new Soft Spread Imperial Margarine in a pretty new  
 serving dish—great flavor  
 Song continues,  
 It's got to be Imperial. It's got a pleasant taste.  
 Isn't that a tasty dish to set before a king?  
 The margarine is presented to the king by a courtier and the

courtier announces,  
New Soft Spread Imperial. You'll love it.<sup>5</sup>

A third way in which traditional song texts are used is as source material for questions on game shows. For instance the following question was asked on the show "Hollywood Squares,"

According to the song, what would you beg your money on at the Camp-town Races? Answer: A bobtail nag.<sup>6</sup>

From the preceding it can be seen that the use of traditional music and song in the television programming for this day is quite varied as is the degree to which its appearance is truly traditional. In no instance do we find the music or songs produced in either a traditional context or before a traditional audience. While the texts of some of the songs on the shows "Indiana Today" and "Midwestern Hayride" are traditional in the old time folkloric sense, more often they are the legitimate interest of folklorists because, although contemporary in origin, they often show variation even in their modern versions. The performances of these songs and tunes, while polished and camera directed, are at least traditionally flavored. In the "Imperial" advertisement we find most of a traditional tune, only a hint of a traditional text, and clearly a performance context and audience which are non-traditional. The focus is hardly on the song and its performance; rather, the song is used as a framework of familiarity within which a product can be pushed. In the case of the question about the mare of "Camp-town Races" on the game show we are dealing with folklore in television at the metafolkloric level. There is no text, performance, context or audience; there is only a question about a traditional text.

### Folk Belief

The second greatest number of traditional items in the television programming for May 15, 1969 belongs to the folk belief category. Of twenty-four items, four can be said to be "true" traditional beliefs satisfying all four of the criteria for "true" folklore. Each of these "true" beliefs appeared on a talk type of program. For instance, on the "Mike Douglas Show" Mike's cohost Alejandro Rey prepared an Argentine dish called empanadas. All of the guests of the show were gathered around a table, and because Alejandro was in a hurry he cut the dough prepared for use in the dish. He said,

Alejandro: I did this myself, by the way. (Cuts dough.) Never use a knife to cut dough. Is that right?

Mike: Why? Why can't you cut dough with a knife?

Female guest: It toughens it. My mother will tell you that.<sup>7</sup>

The discussion surrounding the dough cutting seems to qualify as "true" folklore or nearly so not only because both the belief (text) and its expression (performance) are traditional, but also because in the gathering on stage we have a kind of folk group interacting (audience). What is more, because the expression of a belief is not limited to any particular performance context, the stage is as acceptable an arena for its expression as anywhere. All four of the criteria for "true" folklore in the mass

media seem to be met.

Central to the above expression of belief is belief itself. Contrast this situation to the following appearance of superstition on the show "Funny You Should Ask." Sheila MacRay had been describing herself as having learned to read at a very young age and concluded with the comment that her grandmother used to say that if a child read early, it meant the devil was looking over the child's shoulder.<sup>6</sup> The appearance of this superstition is comparable in authenticity to the preceding item, but differs in one important respect. In this case the situation suggests to the performer not his own belief but that held by another. The situation and the belief are not tied together through the performer's belief but through that of a mentioned third party.

Before considering the appearance of traditional belief in the fictional realm of television, something should be said about the appearance of folk medical beliefs in the media. Certainly it is not difficult to see the similarity between the various pain relievers as panaceas and the folk belief in sassafrass tea as a cure for about every ailment. In mass culture a pill seems to be the functional equivalent of the sassafrass root in traditional society. However, while it is possible to see similarities in claims and functions, it is more difficult to locate aspirin, as such, as an ingredient in folk medical belief.

One interesting dimension of medical belief in the television mass media is the conflict between the basically folk derived mass culture beliefs and the scientific medical "truths." For instance, on a program called "Doctor's House Call" sponsored by the Indiana State Medical Association, the subject addressed this particular day was the legitimacy of liniment as a cure for bursitis. In the course of his discussion Dr. James Rogers Fox made use of a model of the human shoulder to debunk liniment as a cure. He said,

There are instances, however, where one goes to the drug-store and picks up an ointment or liniment and rubs it into the shoulder because it is going to penetrate and help this particular problem, bursitis. Well, I want to have you look here at a picture in MacMillian's Health Guide that shows a cross section of what it is that I'm describing to you. Here is a hand rubbing liniment. These arrows depict the distance that the liniment must go in order to get into the bursa, which is here, or the joint, which is here, so .... Let's start at the bottom and point out that this is the head of the major bone, the humerus, which has a socket right here, and above that is the bursa, which is just a cushion filled with fluid that is a purposeful buffer for action. So you can see that when you try to lift your arm out, that this can get pinched, so to speak, if it's infected or swollen. Well, to go through—to reach either the bursa or the joint, one has to penetrate first the skin, which is here, secondly the fatty layer, which is here, and then we'll have muscle which will have that filmy like material which you've all noticed in meat above it—so it has to penetrate that—before it finally gets to the bursa, and from here down into the joint itself. Well, I think you can recognize, therefore, that when one is told that one can get a given liniment and rub it in and it will get right to the joint and loosen it up—this is not true. It isn't true at all. The

one thing that can occur, however, is that in some instances a given liniment or a given product can cause the superficial bloodvessels to dilate, to spread out, therefore giving a feeling of heat which can give a feeling of comfort. So remember, it may make you more comfortable, but it is not going to cure the bursitis nor the arthritis.<sup>9</sup>

That companies catering to mass culture have adopted a folk medical product in the form of liniment as a cure for joint aches is apparent when one examines, for instance, the folk cures for rheumatism.<sup>10</sup> In a way, although the attack on liniment by the medical doctor in "Doctor's House Call" is meant to strike at mass culture beliefs, these attacks really must penetrate to folk culture to be effective, for it is here that many mass culture cures achieve their efficacy.

In the television programming for this day, supernatural folk belief elements were prevalent as fictive elements in three areas: 1) children's cartoons, 2) situation comedy, and 3) advertising. A good example of a cartoon built on folk belief elements is "Hercules," a series on the show "Kartoon Karnival."<sup>11</sup> In the episode for this particular day, Hercules is challenged by an evil witch who through her magic powers gains possession of Hercules' magic flying horse. Hercules utilizes his magic ring to break the spell and the episode ends with Hercules capturing the evil witch. This cartoon utilizes common folk belief motifs: the witch figure (G 200); the evil magic spell (G 260 "Evil Deeds of the Witch"); the magic flying horse (B 184.1 "Magic Horse"); and the magic ring (D 1076 "Magic Ring"). It is only at the level of supernatural folk belief motifs, however, that tradition is a dimension of the cartoon world. The text in which the themes appear, the animated performance and the dispersed viewing audience are all mass culture phenomena. Thus, while mass culture draws in part on folk beliefs' themes to serve an entertainment function not unlike that of the grandmother narrator in folk society mass culture renders these themes in an entirely non-traditional manner.

The use of supernatural folk belief elements in situation comedy is basically similar to its use in cartoons. The main difference lies in the fact that these elements do not function in a supernatural world as part of the conflict between good and evil. Instead, the focus is on the humorous complications created by the actions of supernaturally powerful characters in the world of everyday affairs. A good example of this use of supernatural folk belief is the episode on the "Bewitched" show for this day.<sup>12</sup> The witch, who is married with a family and whose powers are known only to her husband, possesses the power of instantaneous transport from one place to another. On a business trip with her husband half the American continent away from her home, the witch decides to return home for a moment to check how well her witch mother is getting along as a babysitter for her child. While home the witch is discovered by the wife of her husband's boss who reports to her husband that the witch did not go with her husband on the business trip as planned. In the meantime the witch has returned to her husband who is entertaining his client at a small dinner party. At the party everyone is jovial, and the husband is successful in getting his contract signed. However, when the client calls the boss to confirm the contract, and the boss expresses his regrets that his associate (the witch's husband) was unable to bring his wife on the trip as planned, the client assumes the associate has been lying about the woman accompanying him, becomes morally indignant, and cancels the contract. After various

confrontations the witch manages to extricate herself and her husband from the predicament by transforming her witch cousin into her identical twin and appearing with the twin before the boss' wife.

The folk belief motifs present in this particular "Bewitched" episode include: the witch figure (G 200), instantaneous transportation (D 2122 "Journey with Magic Speed") and transformation of identity (D 40 "Transformation to Likeness of Another Person"). As was the case with the cartoon, the presence of these traditional narrative motifs based on supernatural beliefs is the extent to which the comedy is folkloric. The screen play, the dramatic performance and the television audience are all mass, not folk, culture phenomena.

Folk belief themes are utilized extensively in advertising. At the simplest level, supernatural power is associated with a product by incorporating the general concept of that power in the name of the product. An example is "Magic Sizing" (an ironing aid) which puts "body" into clothes.<sup>13</sup> At another level, magic objects are associated with products for much the same purpose—to suggest the magical power of the product. An example is the magic carpet (D 1155 "Magic Carpet") in the well known "Sominex" ad.<sup>14</sup> The association being elicited in the viewer is that between the magical transport of the object and that suggested for the drug. Folk belief themes appear at an affective rather than associative level in an ad such as that for French salad dressing.<sup>15</sup> In this commercial a sorceress appears with her magic wand to "put an end to fat salads" by transforming them into salads with "Frenchette Dressing." Here we find the traditional elements of the witch figure (G 200), the magic wand (D 957 "Magic Twig") and the transformation of one salad to another (D 450 "Transformation—one Object to Another"). Traditional belief motifs are utilized as the means of rejecting the undesirable and producing the desirable.

Perhaps the most skillful use of supernatural folk belief motifs in the advertising for this day occurred in an "Alka Selzer" ad.<sup>16</sup> A man was shown sleeping on a bed while it was suggested that there are various qualities of sleep. As the audio portion enumerated each of three causes of unproductive sleep (headache, stomach upset, nervousness) a different wraith figure emerged from the sleeping man to find a place at an edge of the bed. The three shadowy wraith figures exhibited their individual problems in their actions. Each wraith was supplied some "Alka Selzer," after which the wraiths, one after the other, returned to disappear into the sleeping man. The supernatural belief motif utilized here is the wandering soul (E 721.1 "Soul Wanders from Body in Sleep").

The use of traditional supernatural beliefs in television advertising is extensive, but it is not the purpose of this paper to present all of the various items. Rather, a few examples have been given to show the range of beliefs involved and the different functions of belief in the commercial messages (as an agent for association, action or illustration). Clearly the belief motifs are the only dimension of the message that is folkloric.

Folk belief elements in television are not only large in number but permeate all aspects of the programming at all times of the day. In addition it is one of the few categories in which we find items which seem to satisfy the criteria for "true" folklore. If there is any dimension of tradition that is viable in television it would be this one—traditional belief.

## Gesture

It shouldn't be surprising that traditional gesture is the third largest category of lore found in television since it is a visual medium that is involved. Not counting the numerous ordinary gestures of greeting and departing (waving, shaking hands, kissing, hugging), eleven more unusual gestures appeared in the course of the day's programming. An instance of a gesture qualifying as "true" folklore occurred on a news program where a film clip was shown in which a person described as a Hippie gestured to shame another person who had just grabbed and torn the Hippie's protest sign. The gesture employed was the stroking of one forefinger by the other in the direction of the offender.

Other gestures are bound up with folk belief. For instance, the sign of the cross was made three times during the day. An example of the gesture expressed in a non-fictive context occurred on the show "The Galloping Gourmet" where Graham Kerr crossed himself before eating a quail egg stuffed with fried ants.<sup>17</sup> The gesture qualifies as true folklore because in addition to the traditional nature of the non-verbal text and its performance, the situation of its occurrence is legitimate due to the contextual flexibility of the belief which lies behind it. In addition, because the gesture is a charm and directed to the performer himself, the absence of a natural audience is not a factor. The item requires no audience of any kind for its expression.

Most of the gestures which appeared in the real television world were also found in the fictive situation. For instance, in "The Flying Nun"<sup>18</sup> a bumbling police captain who comes to realize his mistakes makes the sign of the cross as a charm in anticipation of the punishment he expects to receive from his superior. The two instances of the expression of the sign of the cross differ only in that the sign used in the fictive instance was produced in an artificially constructed situation.

Six gestures were produced by Alejandro Rey on the "Mike Douglas Show" at what we have called the metafolkloric level. Alejandro and Mike considered briefly how a non-Spanish speaker might get along in South America, and Alejandro indicated gestures for "come here," "good bye," "O.K.," "stingy," "hungry," "satisfied," and "be careful." While the texts and their performance were traditional, the gestures had been abstracted from any real situation or audience. The performance was illustrative and occurred in the context of a discussion about the lore itself.

Like folk belief, gesture is one of the few categories where "true" folklore was found in the television programming for this particular day. Using the four criteria for "true" folklore, it has been possible to differentiate gesture expressions in the medium at the "true," fictive and metafolkloric levels.

## Narratives

Besides Märchen motifs in advertising which will be considered in a moment, ten traditional narratives, all in the form of jokes, appeared in the course of the day's programming. All of these jokes occurred on the same program and were produced by the same performer. The traditional joke on television seems to be the property of a specific type of performer. Generally this



person is an older man who identifies with some ethnic group and who exploits that group's humorous narrative traditions either professionally or as an avocation. The younger professional comedians who regularly appear on television (Bishop, Griffin, Carson, Newhart, etc.) and whose material must appeal to a mass audience on a daily basis rely more on writers who for the most part steer clear of ethnic humor which might offend portions of a potential audience. Pat O'Brian, who is himself Irish, is a comedian who makes extensive use of Irish lore. Most of what he produced on "The Joey Bishop Show" was traditional material. The following joke is an example,

These two fellows had been drinking quite a bit and they were standing at a bar in Chicago, and the one fellow said (mumbled in an Irish brogue), "I have asked you about the weather. What am I going to ask you now? What's your name?" "My name is Hawkins." "How about that," he says, "my name is Hawkins too. Bartender, give this fellow a drink. Do you live here in Chicago?" "No," the other fellow says, "I live in New York." "How do you like that? My name is Hawkins too and I live in New York. Hey, Bartender, what do you think of that?" Then he says, "Where do you live in New York?" "Seventh Avenue." "How do you like that? I live on Seventh Avenue too. Bartender, give him a couple of drinks. His name is Hawkins too, he lives in New York on Seventh Avenue. What's the address?" "1179." "Mine is 1179 too. How do you like that?" There was a fellow at the end of the bar, and he looks at the bartender and he says, "What's with these two guys?" The bartender says, "I don't know. Forget it. That's father and son. They've been drunk for five days."<sup>19</sup>

A variant of this joke told by a young Negro in Mississippi involves two Negro G-I's who find they have the same address back home and are married to the same woman. The joke concludes with the realization that the two are husbands-in-law.<sup>20</sup> Basically the same tale was adapted by Eugene Ionesco in 1954 as a one act play entitled "The Bald Soprano."<sup>21</sup> Clearly the joke text is traditional. Pat O'Brian's performance was like that of any talented joke teller. If the text and performance of the joke were largely traditional, the situation in which the item was told and the nature of the audience were far from traditional. The joke was told in a television studio with the performer standing alone on stage before a microphone and a large seated audience. Like the traditional songs considered earlier, the O'Brian jokes fall short of being "true" folklore because of non-traditional situation and audience elements. Had O'Brian been seated and addressing himself primarily to members of the onstage group, as is the case when a large number of jokes and anecdotes are told on the late evening talk shows, the item produced might have been much closer to "true" folklore as it has been defined.

Four of the five advertisements using Märchen material draw upon familiar characters and plots and fit them to a product. The Proctor and Gamble use of Cinderella (AT 510) to push the cleaning agent, "Mr. Clean," is typical:

One older sister: Cinderella, wash the floor.  
 Other older sister: Yeah, wash it, and then re-wax it.  
 (Sisters leave for the ball.)  
 Cinderella: Wash, wax, pfui.  
 (Fairy Godmother appears.)

Fairy Godmother: Phew, ammonia. That strips wax. But use Mr. Clean with no ammonia. Mr. Clean gets the dirt but leaves the wax shining and you get a sheen.

Cinderella: Wow.

Fairy Godmother: And now off to the ball?

Cinderella: Ball-schmall. Tonight's my bowling league. Bye.<sup>22</sup>

The commercial focuses on a portion of one episode, the plight of Cinderella left to tend the house while her sisters go to the ball. The fairy godmother is introduced into the situation and solves the problem by producing a bottle of "Mr. Clean" rather than resorting to magic. The material drawn from the tale is parodied in the final reaction of Cinderella who decides to go bowling rather than attend the ball.

Another interesting use of the Märchen is exhibited in the commercial for Stevens-Utica no-iron sheets,

Once upon a time there was a man who had wrinkles, and everything he touched became wrinkled. [The man touches his clothes and they wrinkle; then he touches his dog and it wrinkles; finally he gets into bed.] But he had one thing that didn't wrinkle—his sheets. They were Stevens-Utica No Iron Sheets. They don't wrinkle. They can't wrinkle. They never wrinkle.<sup>23</sup>

Rather than utilizing the content of a specific Märchen, this ad draws on the Märchen structure and opening formula. Notice the threefold repetition of items the man touches and the thrice repeated closing statement. Visually there is even a happy ending. The man who was depressed by his wrinkled world at the beginning is smiling as he rests on his wrinkleless sheets.

Clearly it is in a very limited sense that we can speak of the Märchen in advertising. What we find are Märchen characters, plot elements and structures used as vehicles for creating a mass culture message about a product. The lack of traditional performance, situation and audience aspects is obvious. Higher on the continuum toward "true" folklore in television are the Pat O'Brian jokes which lack only traditional situation and audience elements.

### Proverbs and Proverbial Sayings

Proverbs appeared nine times in three different contexts: cartoons, commercials and games. It is a bit surprising that this form did not appear in the many soap operas that form the bulk of the early afternoon programming. Likewise I can remember that a staple source of a laugh on situation comedies of not long ago was the humorous proverbial response of the character caught in an awkward situation. Yet no proverbs were used on the situation comedy shows watched on this day.

In spite of their prevalence, none of the nine proverbs qualifies as "true" folklore. The appearance of the proverb in cartoons is exemplified by a comment of John Doormat's in "Another Day in the Life of John Doormat."<sup>24</sup> The henpecked John Doormat returns a defective piece of merchandise to a department store. John is quite free in his advice to the elevator boy as he ascends to the return office, saying that one has to be commanding

if he expects to get ahead. At the return desk John proceeds to rant at the management (i.e., he is very masculine). He is discovered by his wife who also happens to be in the store, and instantaneously he becomes quite meek. In his wife's tow, John returns to the elevator to exit from the building. Before the elevator boy once again, but this time commandeered by his wife, John says to the elevator boy, "That's the way the ball bounces."<sup>25</sup> Here the text is traditional but the animated performance, the contrived situation and the home viewing audience render the item only remotely folkloristic.

A proverb appeared in a commercial only once in the day's programming. It occurred as the introductory statement for a "Bounty Beef Stew" ad,

Ladies, the way to a man's heart is through his stomach, and the easiest way is Bounty Beef Stew or Chicken Stew. Here we have Bounty Beef Stew. Are these not the tenderest, leanest chunks of beef you'll ever see? So tastefully surrounded by a garden of vegetables. Now watch what happens when the Bounty Beef stew enters the stomach. There you are, ladies, living proof that the way to a man's heart is Bounty. [Machine saying I - I - love - love - you.]<sup>26</sup>

By linking "the Way" with "Bounty Beef Stew" the advertisers not only associate their product with familiar tradition but also pair the product with a man's love and a woman's success in obtaining it. Once again we find a traditional text and performance but an artificial situation and a home viewing audience.

In the game context, the proverb appeared at the metafolkloric level. On the game show "Dream House" the moderator asked the following question of two competing couples,

The expression, couples, "put your shoulder to the wheel," comes from a fable from none other than Aesop. And it's about a wagoner who thinks he can't make it, so he calls on the strongest man he can think of to help him. Whom does he call? (Hercules)<sup>27</sup>

Here we have not a "who said it" but "to whom was it said" question. The moderator is asking who the original audience was for the expression of the proverb; he is not himself suggesting action to another person.

### Custom

In one sense custom pervades everything on television. On a talk show alone most of the rules of etiquette are observed. Guests are introduced to the audience and to other guests. Men rise for introductions, women kiss men, etc. Yet, custom is not only reflected in television, there are also the traditions of the media itself. In a sense the movement from early morning talk shows to late evening talk shows forms a cycle with other types of shows fitted in the slots between. For instance, game shows appear primarily in the late morning slot between 10:00 a.m. and 1:00 p.m. while soap operas are reserved for the 12:00 noon to 4:00 p.m. time period. Why? At least with regard to the latter we can point out the correspondence between the types of shows that appear in the 12:00 noon to 4:00 p.m. period on television and on radio, and we can suggest that television has adhered

to the customary pattern set up earlier by radio for soap operas. At a more specific level, what about the traditional appearance of the national anthem at sign-on and sign-off times? There is no law regarding this, and it seems reasonable to suggest once again a practice adopted from radio. The same is probably true for the moment of meditation or prayer at the beginning of the day's programming and the benediction at the close. No one, it seems, has bothered to look into custom in the mass media itself.

The reflection of custom in television hardly becomes noticeable until the topic is addressed in a metafolkloric context as it was on the "Debbie Drake Show." Part of this program is devoted to teaching the intricacies of proper female behavior. Here is what an authority on etiquette, Jean Stark, had to say on proper smoking behavior,

And how, how about smoking? If you do smoke--or if you have to smoke--there are certain pointers. However, I do want you to remember, smoking is not feminine, and nowadays we try to stress being a woman. You don't smell as nice, your clothes don't smell as nice when you are smoking, and many times they can be very offensive to people that don't smoke. Say they have allergies .... So always remember, if you have to have a cigarette, ask the people around you if it is perfectly alright. And then, when you light your own cigarette, don't stick the cigarette in your mouth this way (cigarette dangling out of the mouth), and light up. Remember, the cigarette stays always in your fingers. Open the matches, strike away from yourself, the cigarette is still in your fingers, you don't place it in your mouth, bring the cigarette to your mouth. The smoke goes out of the mouth, not out of the nose. Note. (Blows smoke out of her nose.) I look just like a bull. Keep your cigarette away from people, if possible. Don't sit up here and talk to the girls and wave your cigarette around and all of a sudden get the smoke right in someone's nose. Keep the cigarette down. Don't put the ashes in the drinking glass or in the coffee cup. It's very distasteful to people. Let's say, for instance, that you have yourself and that there are three other people sitting at your table. You have a cigarette. Don't blow the smoke straight into someone's face. That way you have to blow the smoke into the other direction. When the ashes come off of the cigarette, roll the ashes off, don't flick, because they end up around the ash-tray, and then it's a big mess. So remember, if you have to smoke, and I stress, have to smoke, try and smoke like a lady. And this is very difficult to do. I'd rather see you try and break the smoking habit.<sup>28</sup>

Presented here are really but a few of the unwritten rules (customs) which govern the social act of a woman's smoking. Folklorists have been singularly uninterested in investigating customs of this sort. Rather they have focused on unusual behavior associated with rites of passage. For instance, there is the throwing of the bridal bouquet to the unmarried girls after a wedding. This custom was referred to on the show "My Favorite Martian."<sup>29</sup> Just why the folklorist is so interested in the bridal bouquet and not the cigarette is not clear. The problem for the folklorist is not scarcity of custom on television. There is plenty of it there, but little of it has the antiquarian mystique of the Maypole about it.



supplied the opportunity for the pun. In this item we seem to have reached the ultimate distance from a "true" item that can be attained and still have tradition present. There is no traditional text, performance, situation or audience; there is only an allusion to the name of a traditional item.

Traditional rhymes appeared in a commercial and a metafolkloric game context. The makers of Vaseline indicated that one of the extra benefits of the purchase of their product besides the control of diaper rash is the appearance of nursery rhymes on the back label of the jar.<sup>35</sup> As in the case of the reference to the game name, here we have only the traditional category of lore named. Elsewhere, on the game show "Dream House," the first line of the rhyme "Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled peppers"<sup>36</sup> was given and a question asked about the literary term used to describe the sequence of initial sounds found there (alliteration). The fragment of a text produced in this case is not performed but rather is used as a familiar example of a specific poetic phenomenon. Clearly neither of the two preceding references to rhymes comes close to being "true" folklore as it has been defined.

### Conclusions

Any attempt to assess traditional materials in the mass media must take into account that performance style, situation and audience elements as well as the text are an integral part of the traditional item itself. In this paper any item which is traditional in all of these aspects constitutes "true" folklore in the mass media. To the extent that an item is less than wholly traditional in any of these aspects the item becomes less than "true" folklore in the mass media. With such a concept of folklore, the investigator of traditional material in the mass media is able to distinguish several different levels or degrees to which tradition is present.

The survey of one day's television programming has revealed that there is a good deal of traditional material (101 items) covering a wide range of genres (twelve) in the television media. There is, however, little "true" folklore. "True" folklore and the material approaching it seem to be present in primarily two areas: 1) in the peripheral regions of the programming on locally produced shows which are directed to a more or less specific subculture audience, and 2) in those programs where the atmosphere on stage is reasonably casual and where the performers on stage can be said to compose a kind of folk group which the mass audience is simply overhearing and viewing. The area of programming where the most extensive use of traditional material is made but where the least "true" folklore is found is advertising. Texts are often fragmented; performance, situation and audience elements are non-traditional; and the item itself is non-focal.

With regard to genres, folk belief seems to be the most prevalent, pervasive, and viable. It is the only genre of tradition, for instance, that has penetrated prime time programming where it flourishes in situation comedy. Still, these beliefs exist almost exclusively in the form of fictive supernatural belief motifs expressed in an entirely mass culture manner. Traditional narratives appear only as jokes and anecdotes performed by a specific type of ethnic performer on the talk shows. While traditional music and song, particularly in the form of country and western music (itself a folk-mass product), is prevalent in terms of the number of items, it

appears on only one or two channels, is locally produced, and is restricted to peripheral slots in the program schedule. The appearance of items from other genres is sporadic and mostly restricted to commercial and meta-folkloric contexts.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>This tune was performed on the show "Midwestern Hayride" on channel 13 at 10:00 p.m.

<sup>2</sup>The paper was titled "Country Western Music and the Urban Hillbilly," delivered at Wayne State University, May 20, 1968.

<sup>3</sup>Sigmund Spaeth, A History of Popular Music in America, New York, 1948, p. 128.

<sup>4</sup>Two versions are from privately produced LP's. 1) Kessinger, Clark, Sweet Bunch of Daisies, Side A, track 1, "Listen to the Mockingbird." 2) Washburn, Tony, Sixth Annual Old Time Fiddlers' Contest, Craftsbury Common, Vermont, side 1, track 8, "Mockingbird." One version is from the Archives of Traditional Music at Indiana University: 66-198 F, N.A., U.S. Va. 2nd Roanok Bluegrass Festival (Rinzler and Rosenberg, 1966), EC 1553, last item, "Mockingbird." The fiddler is D. Martin.

<sup>5</sup>This ad was associated with the show "What's My Line?" 7:00 p.m., channel 4. For the traditionality of the item see: Iona Opie, The Oxford Dictionary of Nursery Rhymes, Oxford, 1951, pp. 394-395.

<sup>6</sup>The program appeared on channel 6 at 11:30 a.m. For the traditional nature of this Stephen Foster song see: Newman Ivey White, North Carolina Folklore, vol. III, Chapel Hill, 1952, pp. 504-505.

<sup>7</sup>The program appeared on channel 6 at 4:00 p.m. For the belief in tradition see: Wayland Hand, North Carolina Folklore, vol. VI, Chapel Hill, 1961, p. 758, # 2774 "It is bad luck to cut an unbaked loaf of bread."

<sup>8</sup>The program appeared on channel 4 at 11:00 a.m. For the traditionality of the belief see Harry M. Hyatt, Folklore From Adams County, Illinois, New York, 1935, p. 156, #3324 "To read over one's shoulder will cause you bad luck." For the general belief in the probable injury to the body and mind by excessive mental exertion in youth see John C. Gunn, Gunn's New Family Physician, New York, 1866, p. 673.

<sup>9</sup>The program appeared on channel 6 at 7:25 a.m.

<sup>10</sup>For the prevalence of liniment treatment for rheumatism in folk belief see: Hand, North Carolina Folklore, vol. VI, # 1996, 2029, 2031.

<sup>11</sup>The program appeared on channel 4 at 7:30 a.m.

<sup>12</sup>The program appeared on channel 13 at 4:30 p.m.

<sup>13</sup>The ad appeared in association with the show "The Dating Game" on

channel 2 at 1:00 p.m.

<sup>14</sup>The ad appeared in association with the show "Hollywood Squares" on channel 6 at 11:30 a.m.

<sup>15</sup>The ad appeared in association with a movie shown on channel 8 at 9:00 a.m.

<sup>16</sup>The ad appeared in association with the show "The Flying Nun" on channel 13 at 7:30 p.m.

<sup>17</sup>This ad was associated with the show "What's My Line?" 7:00 p.m., channel 4. For the traditionality of the item see: Peter and Tona Opie, The Oxford Dictionary of Nursery Rhymes, Oxford, 1951, pp. 394-395.

<sup>18</sup>The show appeared on channel 13 at 7:30 p.m.

<sup>19</sup>The show appeared on channel 13 at 11:45 p.m.

<sup>20</sup>Richard M. Dorson heard the joke on July 1, 1953 in Cleveland, Mississippi while on a collecting trip. Unfortunately the joke was not recorded and we must rely on Dorson's recollection of it.

<sup>21</sup>In Four Plays By Eugene Ionesco, New York, 1958, pp. 15-19.

<sup>22</sup>The ad appeared in association with the show "Search for Tomorrow" on channel 10 at 12:30 p.m.

<sup>23</sup>The ad appeared in association with the show "The Beverly Hillbillies" on channel 10 at 10:30 a.m.

<sup>24</sup>On the program "Kartoon Karnival" on channel 4 at 7:30 a.m.

<sup>25</sup>For the traditional nature of this saying see: Mac E. Barrick, "Proverbs and Sayings from Cumberland County," KFQ, VIII (1963) p. 143.

<sup>26</sup>The ad appeared in association with the show "The Beverly Hillbillies" on channel 10 at 10:30 a.m. For the traditionality of the saying see: William G. Smith, The Oxford Dictionary of English Proverbs, second ed., Oxford, 1960, p. 696.

<sup>27</sup>The show appeared on channel 4 at 2:30 p.m. For the traditionality of the item see: Smith, Dictionary of English Proverbs, p. 586.

<sup>28</sup>The show appeared on channel 13 at 8:30 a.m.

<sup>29</sup>The show appeared on channel 4 at 6:00 p.m.

<sup>30</sup>The show appeared on channel 4 at 11:00 a.m.

<sup>31</sup>The show appeared on channel 8 at 10:30 a.m.

<sup>32</sup>The show appeared on channel 13 at 10:00 p.m. Since the video portion of the telecast was not recorded the traditional nature of the dances could not be researched.



<sup>33</sup>This message appeared at the conclusion of the show "Today in Indiana" on channel 6 at 6:15 a.m. For the traditionality of the game see: Alice B. Gomme, The Traditional Games of England, Scotland and Ireland, vol. II, New York, 1964, pp. 43-45, "Pitch and Toss" or "Buttons."

<sup>34</sup>The ad appeared in conjunction with the program "Dream House" on channel 4 at 2:30 p.m. For the traditionality of this item see: Gomme, Traditional Games, vol. I, pp. 131-132, "Follow My Leader."

<sup>35</sup>The ad appeared in association with the show "Hollywood Squares" on channel 6 at 11:30 a.m.

<sup>36</sup>The show appeared on channel 4 at 2:30 p.m. For the traditionality of the item see: Opie, Dictionary of Nursery Rhymes, p. 347.

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The subject matter is virtually unrestricted, with the term folklore being interpreted as broadly as possible. The editors are particularly interested in articles offering new theoretical or methodological approaches, or attempting new applications of current folklore theory. Other types of studies, short monographs, indexes, handbooks, etc. are not to be discouraged. For further details see the May, 1969, issue of the FORUM.

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