

TOPICS AND COMMENTS

ITALIAN IMMIGRANT NARRATIVES

Collected by Samuel Sandoli
Annotated by Sabina Magliocco

The following narratives were collected by Samuel Sandoli, an 8th grade Social Studies teacher in Oneonta, New York, from his parents and grandparents, who emigrated to the United States from Sicily (Italy) at the beginning of this century. Mr. Sandoli has collected approximately twenty tales, including ten märchen, several legends and memorates, an etiological tale, and a personal experience narrative of the earthquake in Messina in 1908. Among the tales are several anecdotes involving Giufà, the Sicilian trickster-hero. Although *Folklore Forum* cannot print all of Mr. Sandoli's submissions, we offer here a brief sampling. Interested readers are urged to contact Mr. Sandoli for additional texts at 8 Columbia St., Oneonta, New York 13820.

Märchen: Thirteen and the King

This tale was told by Salvatore Sandoli, age seventy, a maintenance worker in a bakery in Oneonta, New York. Mr. Sandoli was born in Rocca San Felice in Sicily and first heard this tale from his parents. He told this tale in English for the collector. The tale combines elements of AT 328, *The Boy Steals the Giant's Treasure*, and AT 532, *I Don't Know*. It contains the following motifs: L 10.1.1, "Thirteen" name of victorious youngest son; H 912, jealous brothers; B 401, helpful horse; K 62, thimble full of ants and bed bugs; J 2672, theft of magic blanket; D 475, golden axe; and G 514.1, ogre trapped in box.

Another one she used to tell me is about the thirteen brothers, and they couldn't find a job. There was a lot of kids in the family and they wanted to eat and all the big brothers couldn't get a job. His father had twelve boys; when the thirteenth came he did not know what to call

him, so he called him "Thirteen." So, "Thirteen" everybody went out for a job except you, you are the only one who hasn't looked for a job."

So Thirteen went around and came to the King, and the King said, "The only job I have got is in the horse stable." So he said, "All right, I'll go to work." With all the horses he was singing, whistling and having a good time. So all his brothers went over there and saw what he was doing, they were jealous of Thirteen and they wanted to get him in trouble because they couldn't hold a job like Thirteen could. He was working and having a good time over there. So one of the brothers went to the King and said, "King, King, do you know what Thirteen said? He is able to steal the blanket off the giant's bed!"

"How is Thirteen able to steal the blanket off the giant's bed? I'd give anything to have that blanket, why that blanket is made out of silver and gold."

"That's what Thirteen said."

So the King called Thirteen in his study room. "I hear you are able to steal the blanket off the giant's bed."

"Oh! how am I able to steal the blanket off the giant's bed?"

The King said, "Well you got to go steal it."

So he went back to the stable and started crying, and so while he was crying in there, there was a big horse stood in a corner, and the horse said, "Thirteen, Thirteen!" He looked around and did not see anybody, only horses.

"Thirteen come over here, what are you crying for?"

"Oh! the King says I got to steal the blanket off the giant's bed, and how am I going to do it when he has it on top of him at night? I can't steal it."

The horse said, "Tell the King you want me and his gold buggy tonight, and you want a thimble full of ants and a thimble full of bed bugs, and tell him if he gives you those, OK! If he don't, you can't."

So he went to the King and said, "I want that horse, your gold carriage, a thimble full of red ants and a big thimble full of bed bugs."

"Oh! I can't give 'em to you." "If you cannot give me those, then I cannot go and get the blanket."

So the King finally said, "All right," and he got a servant and he went and got the ants and another got the

bed bugs and he got in the carriage and went off. Then Thirteen said to the horse, "Now I have got them."

"Now hook me to the carriage and we'll got down to the giant's house."

So on the way the horse talked to Thirteen and nobody else. So he goes over there and he climbs up on the sill and he said, "Now, when you go over there, you climb on a sill and throw the bed bugs and ants under the bed, and hide quick underneath the shed and do not let him see you, because if he does, he will kill you."

So, OK, and he did it and pretty soon the giant jumped up and he started hollering at his wife and he got a stick and was going to hit her. He said, "You didn't clean the bed and make it!" So he went back to bed and they began to bite again, so he took the blanket and he opened the window and hung it over the window. And so Thirteen went to work and grabbed the blanket and he put it in the carriage and started running. And the giant said, "Oh! there goes Thirteen, he stole my blanket, Thirteen stole my blanket!"

So that was all right. So he went back to the stable and went to work. So the horse said, "Thirteen do not tell anyone that I talk to you. You must be quiet." So he went to work and he did not say anything.

So one of these days his brothers they again became jealous.

"King do you know what Thirteen said? He said he's man enough to go get the giant and bring him to you in a cage."

"Ha! That is impossible, he can't get the giant in this cage. How is he going to do that? It is impossible."

"He said he could, he said he was man enough to go get him."

"Well," said the King, "if he is man enough to steal the blanket then he must be man enough to bring him here. I got to see."

So he went to work and called Thirteen back in his chamber, so he got him in there and he said, "Thirteen, I heard you were man enough to get the giant and bring him to me."

Thirteen said, "Oh! I can't do it, I can't do it."

The King said, "You either do it or I will chop off your head."

Thirteen got scared and he went to the stable and was crying and he was not too big a man so he was crying and carrying on, so the horse said to him, "Thirteen, what is the matter, what are you crying for?"

"Oh," he said, "my brothers, they are jealous; they played a trick on me. Because I am working and they are not, they are jealous, jealous and now they say that I am man enough to go and get the giant and bring him here and it is impossible, he is a big man."

The horse said, "You tell him you want me and you want the gold carriage and his best saw and you want his best ax he's got and the gold spikes he's got; and you want all of them. And tell him if you can't get all this, tell him you can't get the giant."

So he went back and he told him, "I want the horse, carriage, best saw you got, the best ax you got and all the gold spikes."

"Oh!" the King said, "Impossible!"

"Well, if you can't give me them, I can't bring you the giant."

So he thought it over and said, "All right, all right, all right." He said, "Tomorrow morning you come here and I will have them all ready."

So he got the carriage out and the saw out and the great big ax out and gold spikes and put them all in the carriage. Thirteen came along and the King said, "There, they are all ready." So Thirteen got the horse and he put on the gold saddle on him and started.

Thirteen said, "What am I going to do?"

The horse said, "You listen to me. We will get him and on the way I'll tell you." So they were going and as they were going down he said to Thirteen, "I want you to sing 'Thirteen is dead and I got to make a box to put him in, Thirteen is dead and I got to make a box to put him in, Thirteen is dead and I got to make a box to put him in.' That is what you must sing all the while."

So he got down by the giant's house. He had a great big oak tree so he got the ax and started chopping. Boom, boom! The giant heard him and run out and said, "What are you doing?"

"Thirteen is dead and I got to make a box to put him in, Thirteen is dead and I got to make a box to put him in," and he was hitting with the great big ax, and the

ax was singing, see, because it was a gold ax and made a lot of noise. And he was singing, "Thirteen is dead and I got to make a box to put him in, come on give me a hand and we will make a box, we'll make a box to hold him, we don't want him to get out of that box after we make it."

So the giant said, "All right," and he got on the other side of the saw and they got a-sawing and by and by they sawed the boards.

Thirteen said to the giant, "We got the box built and we made the cover for it. Now, do you think this box is strong enough to hold him?"

He said, "What do you mean?"

"We got to test it. We just can't make the box and put him in there; suppose he gets out?" So he said to the giant, "You get in the box and I'll drive a couple of nails in," and he said, "We'll try it out." "Oh!," he said, "Thirteen is stronger than I am, now," he said. So he talked the giant to get into the box and he started nailing it. When he got it nailed up, "Haw, haw this is Thirteen!" And he took him to the King; and that is the story of Thirteen and the King.

Legends: Lu Fuddittu

The **folletto** (**lu fuddittu** in Sicilian dialect) is considered a minor devil in Italian folklore. He has certain characteristics of the poltergeist, such as hiding household objects, throwing things, and causing mysterious noises, as well as certain attributes commonly associated with the witch-riding experience. Along with household objects, he sometimes hides or steals children, as happens in one of these legends. He also knows the location of hidden treasure and can be made to reveal it if he is caught. Stories of stolen children and fairy treasure are common throughout Southern Italy; they are reported by Pitrè in **Usi e Costumi, Credenze e Pregiudizi del Popolo Siciliano** (Palermo, 1889), vol. IV, pp. 68-71 and by literary authors such as Carlo Levi, **Christ Stopped at Eboli** (New York, 1947).

These legends were told by Thomasine Sandoli, age sixty-nine, a homemaker born and raised in Oneonta, New York. Ms. Sandoli first heard these legends from her grandfather and uncle, who lived with her family; both men were born in Messina, Sicily. Ms. Sandoli narrated these legends in English. The first contains motifs F 341, **fairly grants**

wishes and F 348.0.1, fairy gold disappears when taboo is broken. The second legend includes motifs F 473.2.2, poltergeist hides objects, and F 473.3, poltergeist mistreats people.

Then there is also the one about the little men the elfs. So this little elf, Fodito, would appear to you and he would say, "What would you want the most of?" and you would say, "A pot of gold." And he said, "All right, I will bring it to you." So the person was overjoyed and he (the elf) would disappear. But, you would have the pot in your hand for one second; as soon as he disappeared, the pot of gold would disappear with him. So the story goes. The people learned that if you put something of yours into what he gives you--a coin or a piece of clothing--when you do this it will not disappear with him.

Once upon a time a woman had a baby in her house. She was living in and it was in bed asleep. She was wanted by the spirits and the baby was not and the spirits would take the baby and leave her all over the house, and she even lost her once, and found her in the fireplace, and the baby did not cry. So she finally had to leave because the spirits kept taking the baby and leaving her all over the place.

Etiological Tale: The Two Giants

This unusual tale attempts to explain the presence of a statue of David in Messina. It was told in Italian by Josephine Spinola and translated into English by the collector. Ms. Spinola was eighty-one years old at the time she narrated this tale. She was born in Messina, Sicily and died in Oneonta, New York at the age of ninety-two. She and her husband operated a retail business in Oneonta for many years, but Ms. Spinola never learned to read or write English. She told many other folktales to her children and grandchildren, including stories about the trickster Giufà.

This tale contains motifs F 531.1.7.2, black giant; G11.2, cannibal giant; F 531.3.4, giant eats prodigious amount; G 512.8.2, ogre killed by striking with stones.

There was a giant and giantess. The giant was black and the giantess was white and they lived by Messina. So he [the giant] came out on the town and they had to give him a man to eat. They tried to capture him many times but to no avail. Just to look at him would scare you. He was a Turk and she was Christian and a very beautiful lady. He was able to eat a whole cow. When there was a feast everyone tried to stay out of his way. So one day he went out alone to eat Christians. A bell would ring when he would come out so they all could hide. So when he came into town the plaza of the cathedral there was a statue of himself. There was a child that played who was lame and he had a string and a stone. He threw it at the giant and the giant fell and was dead. And there is a statue of the boy in Messina with a string and a rock.

Practical Guides to Studying Folklore

Folklore Forum began as a publication to facilitate communication among folklore students. In its sixteen years of existence, **Forum** developed into a scholarly journal, leaving little room for the practical dimensions of being a student of folklore. With this new series of **Practical Guides to Studying Folklore**, we hope to broaden our scope to again include information relevant to students actively working on degrees.

There are still few folklore degree programs in the United States though there are increasing possibilities to work on folklore-related degrees, and we hope to make students aware of them. Folkloristics has always relied on an international network. With our new series, we hope to encourage folklore students to consider spending semesters abroad and to become acquainted with different approaches and different teachers.

We welcome further contributions to this new series, and we are particularly interested in students' perspectives. Aside from its curriculum, each university offers particular resources--museums, archives, internship programs--and making such information available may help folklore students to broaden their own conceptions concerning their careers and courses of study. We also welcome listings of recent dissertations.