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HUMANO-ARBOREAL TRANSMOGRIFICATION

by Stanley E. Anderson

(and Angelee Sailer Anderson)

•(Reprinted from *Mythopoeic American*, January 1988)

From the Journal of Stanley E. Anderson, August 19, 1985:

How has this indisputable fact of science remained hidden until now? Is it through the tendency of unenlightened men to prefer comfortable tradition to stirring revelation; or because the process of persons becoming trees was a matter of legend long before learned doctors concerned themselves with it, and was therefore thought by unimaginative politicians to be unworthy of support? Or perhaps, it is the result of the insidious superstition that has clung to the understanding of this phenomenon even in the most brilliant of minds, of which my late colleague and friend, Dr. Worrall, was one.

I compose this journal entry with the assurance that I will achieve recognition and all the shallow rewards of fame for my "discovery," though the truth should be self-evident to anyone who exercises his organ of rationality. I, an undistinguished botanist, will be the first in our time to raise the study of humano-arboreal transmogrification to the level of common knowledge.

It behooves us to review what literary sources have told us of this "mythological" occurrence. The manner of transmogrification accepted and described by most chroniclers is this: first, the legs of the human become immobile as his feet send out root-tendrils into the earth. His arms are then compelled skyward as if in praise to the Deity; his nether limbs merge at last into one massive trunk which absorbs also his neck and head. Meanwhile, his arms and fingers have forked many times to produce branches sprouting leaves and flowers; and thus is the transmogrification rendered complete. Where in forest or in meadow had walked a man, there now stands an elm or an oak, offering shade to travellers such as it once was grateful for in the days before its

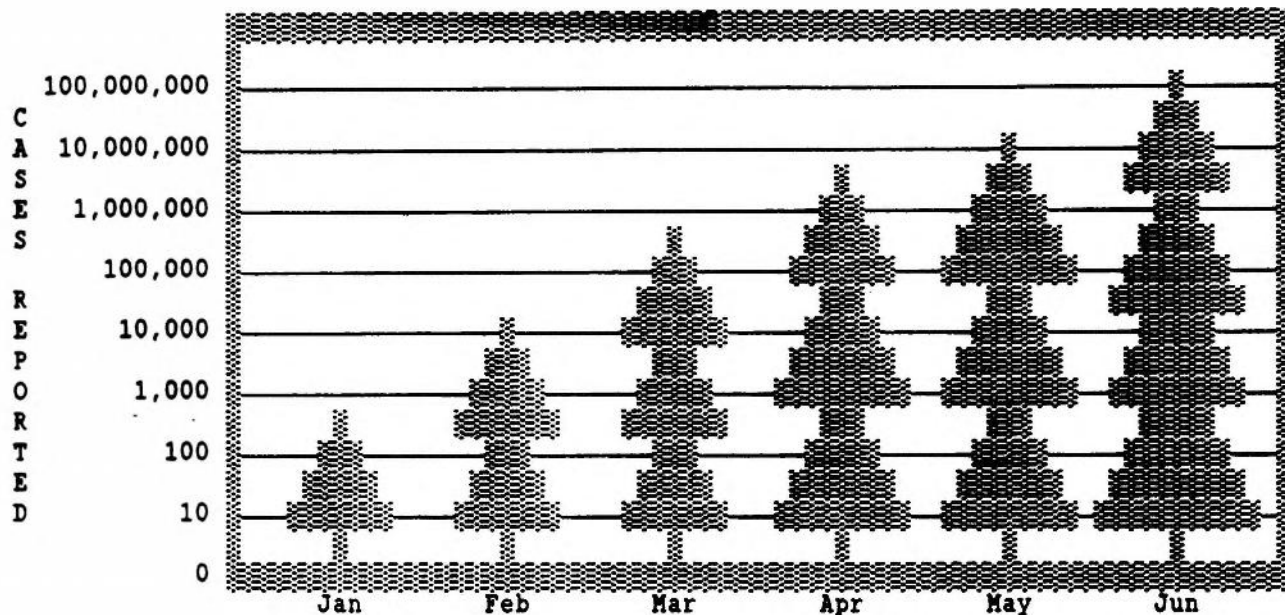
change.

So has the process been conjectured to occur -- yes, and so foolishly has defenseless theory often been labelled fact. Even so far from reason were the tedious and convoluted attempts of the pre-Copernican astronomers to explain the motions of the heavenly bodies with ever increasingly complex cycles and epicycles. But just as Copernicus forever proved the folly of these attempts by turning the earlier system upside down and placing the sun at the center instead of the earth, so I will do for arboreal studies by revealing the true manner of the transmogrification which I have personally observed. Indeed I observed it with great horror and anguish, as it occurred in one dear to me and as much like myself as any man I have known.

A fortnight past, my colleague, Dr. Worrall, and I were conducting botanical research in the rain forests of the Olympic Peninsula of Washington State. While investigating an unusual depression in one of the eldest of the trees, Dr. Worrall discovered a leathery skin; though it was blemished by weather and age in many places, we clearly discerned upon it the markings of a strange hieroglyphic system of writing.

Dr. Worrall, being native to the area, recognized the writing as representing the language of an extinct tribe of the mountains, and he immediately began the task of translating it. After he had done, he commenced to rave distressingly about self-propagating sorceries and of how we had had it all backwards -- what "it" was, I could not then begin to guess. I feared -- and still put forth as an only explanation -- that some unknown chemical substance or viral strain had been introduced into the skin whether by accident or design, and that this was released into my colleague's system as he repeatedly handled the skin and bent low over it, inhaling its ancient perfume.

Whatever the agent that effected the awful metamorphosis, its course was as follows. Within a few days of his discovery, Dr. Worrall began to com-



Projected Incidence of Humano-Arboreal Transmogrification
(Logarithmic Scale)

plain of a dry throat, scaly skin, and a cramped sensation in his toes. After this relatively innocent beginning, his infirmity suddenly worsened so rapidly that I was unable to return him to civilization for medical attention before the transmogrification was progressed beyond help. Each strand of his hair and beard became very thick, and each divided into other strands and those into others, giving an ominous new meaning to the trivial woe of "split ends." Meanwhile, his neck grew both bulkier and longer -- so much longer that it soon lost all proportion proper to a human being, though it might perhaps have done handsomely for a giraffe or an ostrich. For a time my colleague appeared not unlike Tenniel's drawing of Alice after she had imprudently consumed the cake marked "EAT ME," which resulted in her "opening out like the largest telescope that ever was!" But unlike Alice, Dr. Worrall's "neck" (that term had by now become inappropriate, as the relative sizes of neck and torso were reversed) had stiffened to complete rigidity, and was so massive in height and weight that his legs could no longer support him and he was compelled to lie on his side to obtain relief.

Even more grotesque were the effects of the change upon his head. Those among his features that had protruded, flattened, and those that had receded, swelled, until nothing that could be termed a face was distinguishable. His hair and beard were now a tangled mass of snaky growths as tough as carrots.

With what was left of his mouth, he asked me to aid him in a task which was as abhorrent to my sensibilities as burying a man alive. He was ravenous for earth, and begged me to dig a large hole that he

might eat of the rich, tender clods thus upturned. This I did to assuage his painful pleadings; but his unnatural desire did not end there. He requested that I ease his head into the hole while lifting his neck and limbs to a vertical position, so that, were he still human, he would be standing on his head. Now at last, I divined the significance of his rds about having it all backwards. The human-to-tree transmogrification occurs UPSIDE DOWN.

A scientific theory gains credence not only by offering explanations for observed facts, but by bringing to light facts previously undiscerned. Within the limitations of the old transmogrificational hypothesis, it was difficult to conceive how two legs, a body, and a head could merge smoothly into one trunk. But in observing the true manner of the process in Dr. Worrall, the suitably shaped neck becomes the trunk while the torso and its organs dwindle into inconsequence; the limbs both upper *and lower* extend themselves to become branches (significantly, the *limbs* of the tree), and the twenty digits split off further into twigs. The head becomes the root system -- and here especially is displayed the sublime, terrible logic of this version of the transmogrification. A wolf-head is quite diverse from a human one, yet we recognize both as heads and would never commit the fallacy of imagining that in transmuting from species to species a man's head would become a werewolf's tail. Similarly, it should long ago have been apparent to men of science if not to all men, that the roots whereby a tree takes in nourishment correspond to a man's mouth, *whose location is in his head*. The correspondence continues to hold true with reference to the other parts: the

trunk of the tree carries nutrients upward just as food travels downward by means of the throat; the correspondence between limbs and limbs has already been noted; and finally, the human genitals are now in the proper orientation to become the flowering portion of the tree.

As I have recorded, the final stages of Dr. Worrall's change occurred too quickly for me to obtain help from those wiser than myself; also, I fear that the horror I felt in observing it induced me to act too precipitously on my emotions. I could not endure to see my friend in such a state, and, blinded by tears and oppressed by a great weariness, I felled the remnants of him with my axe and burned the trunk and limbs in a funeral pyre. The morning after (for it was night when I felled him, a fitting time for so dark a deed), I returned to attempt the removal of the stump that I might burn it also. Language cannot express my sickness in finding my friend's head lying in the hole that I myself had dug. His face was the same as before his tragedy began; yet in place of his old expression of kindness and good humor, his mouth and eyes now gaped wide in unspeakable agony and fear.

Now that my mind is clear, I know that I should have left him standing in hopes that a means of reversing the arborization might be found. Those who read this may perhaps judge my act less abominable if they consider that, not only had I suffered grievously in observing his physical ruin, but I had also witnessed the deterioration of his genius into incoherence, as he babbled of magic bearing the blame for what transpired in him. He claimed, repeatedly and emphatically, that the mere knowledge of the true nature of humano-arboreal transmutation was itself a kind of spell, and that anyone gaining this knowledge would trigger the process in himself.

This claim was, of course, nonsensical; but it is proof of Dr. Worrall's tremendous mental faculties that even in the very throes of his metamorphosis, he attempted to deduce conclusions from the bizarre premises insanity planted in his brain. He postulated that, to prevent the "spell" from threatening the survival of the race, evolutionary forces had hidden the obvious truth of the transmutation from the eyes of the masses, permitting it to be seen only by a few visionaries (whom the effects of the spell soon silenced). It is only nature's providence, said Dr. Worrall, that one man's dream has not become the nightmare of all mankind. For with the invention of the printing press, the radio, and the television, dissemination of information has advanced so far that the spell, once unleashed, might in a single day take a toll of as many lives as did the whole history of the Black Death.

It is perhaps fitting here to pay tribute to another of Dr. Worrall's gifts, which he retained even to the very end. Of all my memories of him, the one I cherish

most is his unparalleled ability to arouse in others an appreciation of nature. Indeed it was he that inspired me to pursue the science of botany, as he himself had pursued plant pathology -- the study of *disease* in plants, which irony, in light of his fate, causes my sap [sic] to run cold. Yet terrible as that fate was, I can still recall with joy his ecstatic descriptions of, for instance, the distinctive qualities possessed by different types of soil. Must not every city-dweller's mouth water at the very sound of the words "marl," "ocher," "humus," "loam"? The delicious, bread-dough-like texture of clay between one's t/e/e/t/h/ toes . . . The pure, refreshing draughts of the spring rain; the massaging warmth of summer sun upon bare legs and feet; the poignant decay of autumn in wind-scattered shades of red and brown; the drowsy, peaceful dormancy of winter as I stand nakedly leafless [sic] in her arms. The slow dancing of the centuries [sic] as I grow from seedling [sic] to regal maturity . . .

Prompted by Dr. Worrall's spell upon me, I have wandered outdoors to finish this entry amid the beauty he so loved, together with which he taught me to breathe as one. Perhaps I will write more of humano-arboreal transmutation after I have ~~rested~~ rooted for a time on this hill.

A Note from the Editors of *Mythopoeic American*:

In August of 1985, Dr. Anderson was reported missing, and has for some while been presumed dead. The journal containing the above entry was found belatedly last fall by Dr. Anderson's widow at the foot of a tree not far from the home she had shared with her husband.

From the aberrant phraseology found in the final paragraphs of the entry, it is speculated that Dr. Anderson is in fact still living in the form of a tree, which transmutation occurred as a result of his exposure through Dr. Worrall to the same toxin or virus. It is thought also that the leaves of the journal itself had absorbed some of this toxin, for Mrs. Anderson too has lately been reported missing, as has the member of our staff who procured this material for publication and his entire family with him.

We print Dr. Anderson's account and encourage its reprinting, in hopes that the many respected members of the scientific community among our readers will investigate this rash of human-to-tree mutations and perhaps unearth a vaccine that will prevent its further spread. Our faith in the rational intelligence of these readers is such that we have no fear of their lending credence to Dr. Worrall's theory that the transmutation is transmitted either by a "spell" consisting of a mere knowledge of the process, or by any other means unrecognized by science. Such a foliage theory, if beleafed by the mosses, would surely lead to great panpipes.