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ACTUAL

BOOK CULTURE FROM BELOW

The Eighteenth Annual Conference of the Society for the History of Authorship, Reading and Publishing (SHARP) in Helsinki, 17–20 August 2010: Keynote session “Exposing the oral and literary background of fairy tales”

Comment: Literary fairy tales and the types of international folktales (AA, AT, ATU)

Satu Apo

Through my own research, I have learned that the history of the fairy-tale genre is difficult to grasp without considering two modes of transmission – spoken and printed (Apo 1995, 39-44; Apo 2005). Literary fairy tales have, however, been a blind spot to several generations of folklorists. Why has the attention paid to literary tales been so scant in research on oral narration? I propose to tackle the problem by examining the most important reference book for the folkloristic study of the fairy tale. Published in four editions, *The Types of International Folktales* continues to endure as a classic in the field of folkloristics. The first edition appeared in 1910, and the most recent, edited by Hans-Jörg Uther, came out in 2004.

Folklorists use the concept “tale type” to indicate an abstracted plot of a narrative which has been recorded in several versions from the oral tradition. A tale type is deemed international if it is represented in the oral narratives of at least two ethnic groups (Uther 2004, 8). Scholars have furnished each type with a name and a number. For instance, “Beauty and the Beast” is identified as tale type 425 C. The number indicates a fairy tale written by two well-known authors, Gabrielle Suzanne de Villeneuve (1695–1755) and Jeanne Marie Leprince de Beaumont (1711–1780). Their literary creation was incorporated into the folkloristic reference work because the story of a beautiful maiden and a monster had also found its way into the oral

tradition. The type index also includes information on the fairy tale's distribution across the countries and language areas of Europe and other continents.

The first classification of international folktales was made one hundred years ago by the Finnish folklorist, Antti Aarne (1867–1925). His aim was to produce a practical way to systematize folklore collections in the folklore archives in different countries. The use of a common catalogue helped scholars delving into the history of folktales to locate the necessary data from folklore collections from other countries. To ascertain the international tale types, Aarne used data from three distinct language areas. He drew from Finnish and Danish folktale collections as well as from the Grimms' *Kinder- und Hausmärchen*. He considered the *magnum opus* of the Grimms to be a truly scientific collection of texts offering a reliable picture of the German folktale tradition.

How did Antti Aarne define “La Belle et la Bête”, the literary creation of two French women writers? For one thing, he gave this literary fairy tale the new name “Das Mädchen als Frau des Bären”. This new designation pointed to the tales circulating among the folk. Aarne did, however, add a brief note on the tale type's literary origins. His description parenthetically includes the name of the story “Amor und Psyche,” thus alluding to the widely known narrative by Lucius Apuleius (c. 124– c. 170 CE)

AMERICANS BREATHE NEW LIFE INTO THE TALE-TYPE CATALOG

Folklorists found Aarne's tale types very useful. Increasingly, his catalog was used as a fundamental work of reference among the international community of folklore scholars. In the 1920s, the American folklorist Stith Thompson (1885–1976), who was at the time a professor of English at Indiana University, made a new version of the Tale-Type Catalog. Thompson worked closely with his European colleagues. The result of his labors was a new version of the reference book, now in English, called *The Types of the Folk-Tale: A Classification and Bibliography* (1928).

What sort of treatment did literary fairy tales receive in this work? “La Belle et la Bête” continues to be called “The Girl as the Bear's Wife”. The northern half of Europe also receives extra emphasis in the data Thompson presents on distribution. According to his list, the fairy tale was known in Scandinavia, Finland, Estonia, and Russia. His presentation of Central Europe is limited to Germany and Flanders. Interestingly, France, the homeland of the writers of the fairytale, went unmentioned altogether.

Thompson's type catalog nevertheless proved helpful, albeit indirectly, to researchers with an interest in the literary tradition. As for the tale types included in the Grimms' *Kinder- und Hausmärchen*, Thompson referred to the monumental reference work by Johannes Bolte (1858–1937) and Georg (Jiří) Polívka (1858–1933), modestly entitled *Anmerkungen zu den Kinder- und Hausmärchen der Brüder Grimm* (I–V, 1913–1932). This work took literary versions of tales into consideration. For

example, in the case of the story of Beauty and the Beast, Bolte and Políkva provide data on how, as early as the 18th century, publishers of children's literature drew from Mme de Beaumont's work.

In 1961, Stith Thompson brought forth a new edition of the tale-type catalog. Folklorists used this for over forty years. Though the coverage is indeed sketchy, this edition was the first one to draw attention to literary fairy tales. Thompson (1961, 7) refers to storytellers of antiquity, the folktales of India, and to *The Arabian Nights*. Of the Italian classics, Thompson also included Giambattista Basile's *Il Pentamerone*. I found no discussion on Giovan Francesco Straparola (c. 1480–1558), not even regarding his famous tale of "Puss in Boots". The 17th- and 18th-century writers of French fairy tales are conspicuously absent. Thompson nevertheless chose to use the original name of the fairy tale "La Belle et la Bête", so that since 1961 folklorists have referred to the folktale type AT 425 C by the name of "Beauty and the Beast". Regarding distribution, however, there continued to be no mention of France.

Yet we must recall that Thompson, to his credit, compiled a second reference work by the name of *Motif-Index of Folk-Literature*: (1932–37; 1955–1958), which offers a wealth of details on the medieval literature of Europe, the Middle East, and India, and their connections to folklore.

GERMANY TAKES THE REINS

A long-awaited innovation, that is, the presentation of both oral and literary fairy tales as different aspects of a common historical tradition, was realized in the case of the catalog of international folktales only a few years ago. The maker of the most recent edition, Hans-Jörg Uther, is a professor of German literature at the University of Duisburg-Essen. The altered attitude to literary fairy tales is clearly evident in the handling of the tale type Beauty and the Beast. Uther presents historical data on the fairy tale in question in the following way: "It first appears in two 18th century French versions, Mme de Villeneuve's *La Belle et la Bête* (1740) and Mme de Beaumont's tale of the same name (1757)." Uther even includes a reference to an earlier fairy-tale author, Marie-Catherine Le Jumel de Barneville, baroness d'Aulnoy. He also presents an impressive array of facts on the tale's distribution. They reveal that oral versions of Beauty and the Beast have been recorded on five continents and from at least 30 language areas. France, too, is finally acknowledged.

THE DUBIOUS LEGACY OF THE FINNISH SCHOOL

Why did Aarne and Thompson, the first compilers of tale-type catalogs, negate the literary origins of the most well-known European fairy tales? The main reason, in my view, is that their reference work was designed to meet the needs of researchers working within a certain paradigm – the so-called Finnish School – whose primary task

was to chart the history of a single tale by comparing a great number of texts geographically and historically. The method entailed wide-ranging and ambitious efforts to gather folktales directly from the mouths of the “common folk.” Unfortunately, from the point of view of historical study, these narratives, which were collected in the 19th century, represented a very late and very modern stratum of oral tradition. Nevertheless, collecting brought thousands of texts to the archives not only in Finland but also in the Baltic countries, Scandinavia, and Ireland. In the early 20th century, recorded folktale texts in Finland numbered at about 70,000 texts. Of these, over 7,000 could be classified as wonder tales or fairy tales (Rausmaa 1972, 46). This vast collection of data was organized in the Folklore Archives of the Finnish Literary Society in accordance with the Aarne and Thompson type index.

Antti Aarne also made an impact in the international community of folklore scholars by publishing a detailed methodological guide. *Leitfaden der vergleichenden Märchenforschung* [Introduction to the comparative study of folktales] came out in 1913. Aarne’s guide gives pride of place to the textual data compiled from folk narration, and he labels literary fairy tales as secondary sources. The basic point of departure was that the writers of fairy tales had adopted their narratives from the oral tradition. According to Aarne, the majority of European fairy tales had their origins in the Middle Ages.

Aarne complemented his guide to methods with *Übersicht der Märchenliteratur* (1914), a survey on fairy-tale literature. Here Aarne assessed the value of Italian and French fairy-tale literature from the vantage point of historical research. Because fairy tales had originated in the Middle Ages, the researcher could only draw conclusions about the kinds of narratives that were still being told in 16th and 17th century Europe on the basis of collections by Straparola, Basile, and Charles Perrault. Moreover, the fairy tales composed by French women writers could be easily disregarded, for they had become too estranged from the “pure, popular form” (Aarne 1914, 13–15).

Aarne refutes the hypothesis that the literary tradition would have made a significant impact on the oral narration of fairy tales and other folktales. He finds support for this important premise from the results of previous research. At that time, Aarne (1913, 18–19) presented only two (Swedish) studies as evidence. Additionally, he underlined the view that the folk did not know how to read. Although Aarne’s assumption about the independence of the folktale tradition was insubstantial, it served to form the basis for dogma, and it continued to have currency for decades, even in the 1960s. It goes without saying that the claim does not even hold true for Finnish folktales (Apo 1995, 39–45).

Why have the “folk” and orality figured so powerfully in the historical studies of fairy tales? According to Hans-Jörg Uther, one explanation can be found in the conceptual models deriving from cultural nationalism and romanticism. As he puts it, “folktale scholars believed that oral traditions had existed unchanged for centuries, and thus provided an important source of evidence for the belief systems of their ancestors” (Uther 2004, 9). For this reason, for the construction of a national identity, the oral tradition was more expedient than written sources dating back only a few hundred years.

In my view, Uther's interpretation only partially fits in with comparative research on folktales. Aarne and Thompson were clearly conscious of the international character of European fairy tales. The researchers of their day were no longer using folktales to search for information on primordial beliefs. Such an undertaking has more in common with the time of the Brothers Grimm. At the same time, however, I do believe that Uther is fully justified in seeking to raise the old, Romantic concept of the stability and archaic nature of the oral tradition (cf. Abrahams 1993, 10–13). Folk narrators would have preserved the tales created by earlier generations for centuries. A folk appreciative of their own traditions would have shunned the modern influences that were spread through literacy and the increased volume of printed materials.

Nowadays such notions are being called into question by many folklorists. The history of European narratives – spoken or sung – can not be investigated without taking the literary traditions into account. Therefore, folklorists should find out more about book history and the system of distributing printed materials in the early and late modern period. This new paradigm, characterized by a stress on the history of communications, opens new and attractive vistas for narrative research, as we can see in the works of Ruth Bottigheimer (2000; 2009) and Hans-Jörg Uther.

Translated by Leila Virtanen

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ACTUAL

Book Culture from Below – The Eighteenth Annual Conference of the Society for the History of Authorship, Reading and Publishing (SHARP) in Helsinki, 17–20 August 2010: Keynote session “Exposing the oral and literary background of fairy tales”

Comment: Reflections on Oral and Literary Relations in the Fairy Tale

Caroline Sumpter

Fans of the Victorian novel *Middlemarch* will remember Edward Casaubon, and his obsessive search for ‘The Key to All Mythologies’ (Eliot, 1871–2). George Eliot mocked a scholarly quest that took a lifetime, but got her character no nearer to his elusive goal. I would like to raise some questions that didn’t occur to Casaubon, but may be worthwhile to reflect upon here: why are we still so fascinated with the notion of fairy-tale origins, be they oral or literary, at all? Does authenticity still mean something different to historians of reading and most historians of fairy tales, and if so, what happens when their methodologies meet? Folklore and fairy-tale study has sometimes struggled to transcend the legacy of the real eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Casaubons, who did indeed go in search of just such grand unifying narratives to explain the origin of fairy tales. In the nineteenth-century, these included anthropologists, who believed in a universal ‘savage’ stage of mental development, and philologists, who argued that the fairy tale could be traced back to the language of early Indo-European tribes.

In her characteristically engaging and thought-provoking address, Ruth Bottigheimer makes no such claims. Indeed, her work is in the spirit of wider interdisciplinary attempts to probe the ideological foundations of the nineteenth-century discipline of folklore. In a British context, we might recall the work of historians such as Peter Burke (1994/1978), folklorists such as Regina Bendix (2002), and Marxist scholars of the folksong such as Dave Harker. To take such an approach is not necessary to disavow a vibrant lower-class culture: Harker’s controversial 1985 book, *Fa-*

kesong: *The Manufacture of British 'Folk Song'*, simply argued that this culture evolved through print and the music hall, rather than being centred in an unchanging oral tradition. Ruth Bottigheimer's paper has led me to reflect on what publishing history has brought – and might continue to bring – to these debates. And in keeping with the theme of the 2010 SHARP conference, it has made me ponder another question: how might – *and can* – historians of reading still tell a history of the fairy tale from below? As my own research has focused on nineteenth-century Britain and Ireland, and as the rural Irish were so often cast as 'the folk' in Romantic folklore scholarship, I hope you'll forgive this historical and geographical inflection in my response.

THE *CELTIC TWILIGHT*

I'd like to begin with a quotation that seems pertinent to Ruth Bottigheimer's reflections on oral/literary relations. In the *Celtic Twilight*, first published in 1893, the Irish writer W. B. Yeats recalled a curious oral narrative, which he claimed had been told to him by an old peasant woman in rural County Mayo, Ireland:

[...] she told me of two friends of hers who had been made love to by one whom they believed to be the devil. One of them was standing by the road-side when he came by on horseback, and asked her to mount up behind him, and go riding. When she would not he vanished. The other was out on the road late at night waiting for her young man, when something came flapping and rolling along the road up to her feet. It had the likeness of a newspaper, and presently it flapped into her face, and she knew by the size of it that it was the Irish Times. All of a sudden it changed into a young man, who asked her to go walking with him. She would not, and he vanished (Yeats 1893/1902, 69-70).

Here is an oral informant (if Yeats is to be believed) who wittily responds to print, making the newspaper the subject of her own verbal folklore. While there is no doubt about the sly dig intended at the (unionist) *Irish Times*, this was certainly not the only newspaper cast as a satanic seducer, out to bewitch and bedevil the folk.

In fact, the notion that print – and the newspaper in particular – was a killer of the oral fairy tale was a claim frequently made by Yeats himself, and one which resurfaces (from a Marxist rather than a nationalist angle) in Walter Benjamin's 1936 essay 'The Storyteller'. Why is this relevant to Ruth Bottigheimer's paper? Perhaps because we still wrestle with the legacy of these debates today. Jack Zipes, one of the foremost scholars of the genre, has written widely and often sensitively on the fairy-tale tradition in print, but also acknowledges his own debts to Benjamin. He has explicitly argued that the 'establishment of the bourgeoisie' was based on the 'violation of oral tale telling' (Zipes 1994, 12–13). Zipes, it should be stated, does not locate the fairy tale's origins in a romantic and distant period of pre-history: indeed, he argues that 'there is no evidence that a separate wonder tale tradition or literary fairy tale tradition existed in Europe before the medieval period' (Zipes 2000, 846). Signi-