

ELORE (ISSN 1456-3010), vol. 19 – 1/2012.

Julkaisija: Suomen Kansantietouden Tutkijain Seura ry.

[http://www.elore.fi/arkisto/1_12/frog.pdf]



BOOK REVIEW

LEGENDS IN CULTURE – CULTURE IN LEGENDS

AF KLINTBERG, BENGT 2010: *The Types of the Swedish Folk Legend*. Folklore Fellows Communications 300. Helsinki: Academia Scientiarum Fennica. 501 pages.

Frog

Every culture has shared models of the world and how it is viewed. How that world is constructed, shaped and perceived is largely through discourse – through people talking about it. Not surprisingly, this is more prominent regarding things that are difficult to test against the senses, things ranging from unseen realities to the irrecoverable past. Legend traditions are particularly interesting because they are central tools in the social negotiation of these models. An overview of a culture's legends is also a reflection of its visions, conceptions, fears and fantasies as these are conventionally realized and negotiated through discourse. This makes legend indices a valuable resource for research in numerous areas. *The Types of the Swedish Folk Legend* (TSFL) is the most significant and substantial legend index to date and should be ranked among Bengt af Klintberg's most significant works in an already remarkable bibliography. TSFL combines scope and scrutiny with cross-referencing and an extensive bibliography to make this an exceptional resource for many intersecting disciplines.

OVERVIEW

Work on TSFL began already in 1962, when af Klintberg was assistant to Carl-Herman Tillhagen at the Nordic Museum in Stockholm, making it the fruit of half a century of research and consideration. A concise introduction outlines the history of the work,

the genre and corpora, frames TSFL in relation to other indices and their varying perspectives, priorities and definitions of 'legend', as well as offering some general remarks on variation in the tradition geographically (with a map of regions). The index is then divided into 24 alphabetical sections (A–H, J–N, P–Z) according to a subject domain or thematic nexus of belief traditions, such as “Giants” (J) and “Times of War” (W). An outstanding innovation is a short introduction to each of these sections with a survey and synthesis of traditions in that category including variation in lexicon, conceptions, emphasis and so forth according to region. Relationships of variation to relevant social practices, means of livelihood and other social realities are also observed. Each section is organized with sequential numbering, divided into thematic sets (titled for practical reference). More than 1,800 types are described, some divided into sub-types. Entries contain a title, short description, regions of documentation and archives holding sources, published primary materials, secondary literature, cross-references to other type-system indices (legends, tales, ballads) and cross-references to other TSFL types. Notes on relevant variation also appear (e.g. in terms or mythic/cultural figures in different examples). The number of examples is not provided, but when a type is not preserved in recent tradition, this is indicated (e.g. F4). A thirteen-page keyword index and a list of TSFL types corresponding to ATU (Aarne-Thompson-Uther) tale-types are provided. One does not normally think of 'reading' a type-index, but TSFL is both entertaining and stimulating. Its short narrative summaries are particularly well-suited to reading while travelling, and I would recommend it to anyone interested in narrative traditions in Nordic cultures or in the Circum-Baltic area more generally.

TSFL AND A RETURN TO TYPE-INDICES

Not only does TSFL outstrip all legend indices that have been produced before, but it is a rising star in a neglected area. TSFL took root when af Klintberg's mentor Tillhagen published a grand plan for developing a unified legend cataloguing system (1963). The tide was coming in: a system comparable to the Aarne (1910), Thompson (1928; 1961) and Uther (2004) tale-type system (ATU hereafter) was expected to set sail in the wake of Waldemar Liungman's *Sveriges sägner i ord och bild* I–VII (1957–1969), Reidar Th. Christiansen's *The Migratory Legends: A Proposed List of Types with a Systematic Catalogue of the Norwegian Variants* (1958), and Lauri Simonsuuri's *Typen- und Motivverzeichnis der finnischen mythischen Sagen* (1961). However, the vitality of this research area and movement toward an international legend-type system met contrary winds. In the 1960s, research turned from ideal types and historical continuities (kept alive by *das Volk*) to social individuals, synchronic understandings, performance and contextual variation. Confusions of “laudable index terminology” defining traditions rather than referencing material were spotlighted (e.g. Dundes 1962, 99) and ideal models of genres long taken for granted came under scrutiny. The foundations, applicability and general relevance of these typologies were questioned and even criticized. These winds of change carried research in a different direction,

concentrating on synchronic variation and how traditions were distinguished and combined by users rather than the ideal Eurocentric typologies of researchers. The ATU system was so established that criticisms could not outweigh its value as a practical frame of reference, but legend type-systems, still in the process of becoming, fell by the wayside – presumably because they were viewed as relevant for archives but not living folklore and fieldwork in a time when these were considered opposed rather than interrelated. Half a century later, the tide is rising again, as reflected in Marjatta Jauhiainen's revised edition of Simonsuuri's index (1998), Heda Jason's guide to type-systems (2000) and Hans-Jörg Uther's three-volume edition of ATU (2004). Af Klintberg's remarkable and innovative TSFL may mark the crest of this tide and the opening of new directions for a new era of research.

WHAT TYPE OF TYPE-INDEX IS TSFL

Indices of narrative types emerged as indexing tools to facilitate the comparative research of archived materials. Although research interests, methods and ideologies have changed, this remains the case. Early type-systems emerged in the era of the Historical-Geographic Method and their publication was oriented to international comparative research. Antti Aarne's (1910) international tale-type system developed on a simple numerical sequence from 1 to 1960 (now to ca. 2400). Any tradition is characterized by tensions between inherited models and their adaptation to current valuations, interests and ideologies. In spite of such tensions, Aarne's model has been maintained through expansions and revisions (Thompson 1928; 1961; Uther 2004), and Christiansen sought to extend it by indexing international legend narrative types from 3000–8025. Christiansen's international emphasis demanded excluding the better part of the Norwegian legend tradition from his index. Simonsuuri circumvented this problem by emphasizing belief traditions over narratives, levelling distinctions between narrative and motif. He accordingly borrowed the model of Stith Thompson's *Motif-Index of Folk-Literature* (1932–1936), alphabetically coding each thematic grouping and giving it an independent numerical sequence. Af Klintberg also employed this strategy, but TSFL is “restricted to narratives with a fixed plot, documented in more than one variant” (p. 12), rather than blurring boundaries of plot and motif. In spite of Tillhagen's influence, the priorities of TSFL are characterized by the devaluation of international comparisons in favour of accurately rendering vernacular categories. Rather than presenting an international type-system, TSFL sets out to provide an exhaustive index of Swedish language legend narratives according to vernacular typologies. Hence subsection divisions in each category have been rounded up to even tens (presumably) for mnemonics, but it was considered unnecessary to allow for additional types when a subsection was full (e.g. in L31–40). Exhaustive indexing was enabled by defining ‘folk legends’ as those of “the population of pre-industrial Sweden” (p. 13), relegating modern urban legends to another index. The tradition is thus historical and no longer generative (‘new’ legends belonging to a different typology), while the documentation of the Swedish folk legend tradition has apparently been exhausted, with no additional legend-types to be found.

ACCESSIBILITY

Indices are research tools. The hierarchical organization of TSFL according to 24 thematic categories equips the index first for investigation of these nexuses of belief traditions, how they are connected to narrative plots and their distribution. The narrative plots being indexed are at the bottom of the hierarchy, making it unavoidable that some plot-types are multiply indexed, but this is potentially inevitable in any hierarchically organized indexing system and even occurs in the ATU tale-type index (cf. Dundes 1962, 98–99). This is accommodated by cross-referencing individual relevant plot-types under each entry. Founding the typology on vernacular categories made it unnecessary to align the coding of categories with those of other indices (e.g. “Giants” = TSFL’s J, Simonsuuri’s N, Thompson’s G) or to conform its representation of the tradition to externally generated ideals. This more accurate rendering of the vernacular tradition is not without compromise. As a culture-specific indexing system, other legend traditions cannot be integrated into the TSFL type-system nor can the type-system be applied to other cultures without reassigning the principle vernacular categories and building anew on that foundation. Publishing the index in English orients it to a foreign, international audience, for whom the unique system will be unfamiliar. The international accessibility sacrificed to a unique, but more accurate culture-specific indexing system could have been accommodated by better indexing, particularly where TSFL is less well equipped for investigating elements of the tradition that are outside of its main thematic categories and not identical to plot-types (e.g. motifs). The keyword index helps a reader find relevant material, but it is not very sophisticated for navigating more than 1,800 types distributed over 436 pages, and seems limited by priorities (e.g. prehistoric kings such as Håkon Ring in W121 and Ragnar Lodbrok in X2 are not indexed). Other type-systems are well cross-referenced in TSFL’s apparatus for each plot-type entry, but only the ATU tale-type correspondences are listed at the back of the volume. Lists of other cross-references would have made TSFL more practically accessible to a range of scholars approaching Swedish legends from diverse perspectives. A motif-index would be a welcome future supplement.

AN EXCITING RESOURCE

The wealth and diversity of information in TSFL makes it a valuable resource and opens many research possibilities. Framing regional variation in relation to social realities and interactions between beliefs and real-world phenomena is both vitally informative to an unfamiliar reader and also provides foundations for future investigations. The structure of TSFL invites analysis of the impact of different categories of adversary or mythic being on stable plot-types as well as of the intersection of narrative plot, belief tradition and cultural environments as a social process. Plot summaries highlight certain expressions that index a mythic being as the speaker,

inviting a linguistic investigation of, for example, the formulaic ‘register of trolls’ in the legend tradition. Terminological surveys will be a boon to linguists more generally, while the relationship of regional variation to term, conception of mythic being and plot-type could be productively explored.

TSFL offers material relevant for approaching apocryphal Christian traditions such as the Wandering Jew (B101–104) as well as riddles of oral-written interfaces, from the medieval text of *Gautreks saga* (T61–63) and the tradition of the magical meal of Sigurd the Dragon-Slayer (M1) to uses of traditional legends as resources in modern literature and cinema. Intriguing parallels to the plant-weapon used to slay the god Baldr (A12) and other myths invite situating legends in long-term perspectives while this will be a rich resource of material for considering the adaptations and circulation of different belief traditions across cultures in the Circum-Baltic region. Reading through TSFL reveals patterns of social concerns, fascinations and even mythological thinking within the communities where these legends were collected. These range from sexual vulnerabilities and proprieties to attitudes toward death; from the unexpected identification of trolls with baking to a fascination with situations that compel a man to wash with his own urine; and even from conceptualizations of the landscape to models of the soul and body that seem to have been active in these cultural environments. TSFL truly presents a rich resource which will be of interest and value to many fields and can provide a valuable foundation for new directions in research.

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