

## **A European Classification of Traditional Legends – towards e-research using a digital harvester of national and regional folktale databases**

Notwithstanding permeable boundaries (Dégh), a difference can still be recognized between *memorates* and *fabulates*, between the experience and the memory thereof, and the tale (von Sydow). To give a few Dutch examples: the narrative about the experience of a 'nightmare' that pressed on your chest, is clearly a memorate; the story about the nightmare who entered through a keyhole, was caught, and then married her catcher until the blockage of the keyhole was removed, can without much debate be ranked as a fabulate. Telling that some people put on a sheet or a bag and go out at night to (play) 'werewolf' (memorate) is different from the story about the werewolf lover who attacks his girlfriend and is afterwards recognized by the threads between his teeth (fabulate). Relating a journey to a witch doctor undertaken to obtain a cure against a bewitchment (memorate) stands apart from telling that witches travel to a winecellar, preferably in Cologne (fabulate). This difference has an analytic value, but it is also useful for the classification of legends. The mass of memorates is extremely hard to classify, but this is much more feasible in case of the fabulates. The latter present a kind of tale type, while the former can best be made accessible by keywords. The motif indexes, Baughman rather than Thompson, are only of limited use here.

This observation has also proven valuable in the practice of national legend indexing, at least within Europe. The system of Migratory Legends, devised by Christiansen for Norwegian legends, mostly concerns fabulates. This also applies to the Swedish (af Klintberg), Finnish (Jauhiainen), Laplandish (Qvigstad), Estonian (Aarne), Livonian (Loorits), English (Briggs; see also Westwood & Simpson), Scottish (MacDonald; see also Westwood & Kingshill), and Irish (Almqvist) indexing of migratory legends. In the Dutch and Flemish folktale databases it has proven to be much easier to classify with Sinninghe numbers (mostly fabulates) than to properly index the bulk of the other texts. Yet although a uniform system like the Migratory Legends or Sinninghe's catalogue (see also Zender) suggests the international occurrence of fabulates, since they 'migrate', it still needs to be tested whether the different national systems can be easily combined. Ireland, for instance, hardly seems to have any witch legends and the ones found in Scotland or Finland are mostly alien to the Netherlands. Swedish werewolf legends are hardly recognizable in Flanders. It may very well be the case that only some of the fabulates are truly international (possibly with national accents). Another question that arises, is whether in some cases there are only fabulates.

It would undoubtedly be useful to find a relevant way to compare memorates accross national boundaries. But details of legends still have to be teased out manually and, given the amount of texts, this is now hardly feasible even on a national scale. This is certainly the case with

witchcraft legends, but the number of werewolf texts for instance is becoming overwhelming, too. It also requires ongoing research and debate, since it is impossible to determine beforehand which keywords will be useful. Designing a European Type Index of Traditional Legends, which focuses on the obvious fabulates, would be of great benefit in the near future, now that we are starting to build digital, on-line databases. An international system we can not only use to identify and classify legends but also to compare legends crossing national borders, provided we decide to link our databases and make use of one uniform classification system. The concrete goal of this project is to arrive at a European Type Index of Traditional Legends, that can serve the same purposes as the ATU Index for folktale genres like fables, fairy tales and anecdotes. As a first attempt, we propose to distinguish the following large legend categories:

1. Etiological Legends (“how come that...?”)
2. Historical Legends (with some historical core in it)
3. Building Legends
4. Legends about Treasures
5. Legends about extraordinary people ("born with the caul", freemasons, gypsies)
6. Legends about the Nightmare
7. Legends about the Werewolf
8. Crypto-zoological Legends (dragons etc.)
9. Legends about Giants (ogres)
10. Legends about the Little People (fairies, hobgoblins, brownies, kobolds)
11. Legends about Death
12. Legends about Demons, Spooks, Ghouls, Poltergeists, Waterspirits, Mermaids etc.
13. Legends about Revenants (returning human souls)
14. Legends about Omina (signs, tokens, soothsayers, also about the weather)
15. Legends about the Devil
16. Legends about God, Belief and Religion
17. Legends about Sins (taboos)
18. Legends about Magic
  19. Legends about Wizzards
  20. Legends about Witches
  21. Legends about Cunning Folk
22. Miscellaneous Legends

Of course, these large categories are open to debate (cf. Greverus, Dekker); for instance, if we

reserve a section for legends about devils and religion, shouldn't we create a section for legends about saints as well? To begin with we will attempt to establish a list of large categories and we will try to fill in some of these categories. Subsequently, more sections will be filled in. Our final product should be a catalogue, fit to be published in the FFC series.

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