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FOUR FUNCTIONS OF FOLKLORE

By William R. Bascom

In a paper given at the El Paso meetings last year I expressed the opinion that the most effective way to bridge the gap between the anthropological and the humanist points of view towards folklore is through a common concern with common problems, rather than relying as in the past on a common interest in a common body of subject matter. I also attempted to explain the anthropological approach to folklore, and extended the invitation for someone to present in a similar manner the viewpoint of the humanities.[1] I do not propose tonight[2] to reverse my role completely and take up my own challenge. I believe that this job can be done far more competently by a non-anthropologist, although I am still convinced that if this underlying disagreement can be brought out into the open and discussed moderately and rationally, in the same spirit in which I attempted to do it, it will be for the ultimate good of our Society.

This year, when we are meeting with the American Anthropological Association, I propose rather to expand on three of these common problems which are of especial concern to anthropologists, but which could only be mentioned in passing last year. These are: (1) the social context of folklore, (2) the relations of folklore to culture, which might be phrased as the cultural context of folklore, and (3) the functions of folklore. The most appropriate transition between what I said last year and what I have to say tonight is a quotation from Hallowell:

> So far as the anthropologists are concerned I believe it is fair to say that while it has been customary over a long period to collect a representative sample of the oral narratives of the people they happen to be studying, it is an open secret that, once recorded, very little subsequent use may be made of such material. Indeed, these archival collections, once published, often moulder on our shelves waiting for the professional folklorist, or someone else, to make use of them in a dim and uncertain future. . . . The consequence has been that, for many anthropologists, folklore becomes a floating segment of culture and the close study of the oral narratives of a people they investigate may remain of marginal interest to them, except for the obvious connections such as those between myth and religion.
>
> This marginal position which oral narratives have occupied in anthropological studies is not due to the inherent nature of the material but to a failure to exploit fully the potentialities of such data. Perhaps the major barrier has been the traditional emphasis upon problems of a literary-historical nature, almost to the exclusion of the investigation of other types of problems. Scholars, like the rest of folks, may become tradition-bound. Over a long period of time, at least, the major contributions to the study of oral narratives, both inside and outside of anthropology, seem to have remained within the

[1] W. Bascom, "Folklore and Anthropology," *JAF*, 66 (1953), 283-290.

[2] Presidential address delivered at the Sixty-fifth Annual Meeting of the American Folklore Society, Tucson, 27 December 1953.

literary-historical orbit. Consequently, anthropologists uninterested in the problem defined by this frame of reference have not bothered much with oral narratives, and those concerned with such problems have not made use of the material in any other way. . . .[3]

Despite the important contributions that have been made to the study of oral narratives from a literary-historical point of view and the further work that undoubtedly needs to be done, the fact remains that only a limited range of problems can be envisaged within this framework. Among other things it seems pertinent to ask, for example, whether the study of oral narratives has by any means contributed its full share to our understanding of culture and its functioning in human societies, or whether the study of myth and tale has nothing whatsoever to do with investigation of human psychology and the adjustment of the individual to his culturally constituted world? If the use of oral narratives *is* relevant to such questions, then they should be one of the *primary* concerns of the anthropologist rather than an isolated subject-matter that occupies a marginal position. In my opinion, such studies need to be put upon a much more comprehensive basis than that represented by the literary-historical approach alone. For this, two other frames of reference, which nicely supplement each other, are needed—the "functional" and the "psychological."[4]

The first point I wish to discuss is that of the social context of folklore, its place in the daily round of life of those who tell it. This is not a "problem" in the strict sense, but rather a series of related facts which must be recorded, along with the texts, if the problems of the relation between folklore and culture or the functions of folklore, or even the creative role of the narrator, are to be analyzed. These facts include: (1) when and where the various forms of folklore are told; (2) who tells them, whether or not they are privately owned, and who composes the audience; (3) dramatic devices employed by the narrator, such as gestures, facial expressions, pantomime, impersonation, or mimicry; (4) audience participation in the form of laughter, assent or other responses, running criticism or encouragement of the narrator, singing or dancing, or acting out parts in a tale; (5) categories of folklore recognized by the people themselves; and (6) attitudes of the people toward these categories. These factors have long been recorded, even if haphazardly and incompletely, by some folklorists, but the importance of understanding the "social context" of folklore, "its setting in actual life" was repeatedly emphasized by Malinowski in his *Myth in Primitive Psychology:*[5]

The limitation of the study of myth to the mere examination of texts has been fatal to a proper understanding of its nature. The forms of myth which come to us from classical antiquity and from the ancient sacred books of the East and other similar sources have come down to us without the context of living faith, without the possibility of obtaining comments from true believers, without the concomitant knowledge of their social organization, their practised morals, and their popular customs—at least without the full information which the modern field-worker can easily obtain. . . .[6]

The anthropologist is not bound to the scanty remnants of culture, broken tablets,

[3] A. I. Hallowell, "Myth, Culture and Personality," *American Anthropologist,* 49 (1947). 544-545.

[4] Hallowell, 1947, p. 546.

[5] B. Malinowski, *Myth in Primitive Psychology* (New York, 1926) p. 90.

[6] Malinowski, 1926, p. 18.

tarnished texts, or fragmentary inscriptions. He need not fill out immense gaps with voluminous, but conjectural, comments. The anthropologist has the myth-maker at his elbow. Not only can he take down as full a text as exists, with all its variations, and control it over and over; he has also a host of authentic commentators to draw upon; still more he has the fulness of life itself from which the myth has been born. And as we shall see, in this live context there is as much to be learned about the myth as in the narrative itself.[7]

The text, of course, is extremely important, but without the context it remains lifeless. As we have seen, the interest of the story is vastly enhanced and it is given its proper character by the manner in which it is told. The whole nature of the performance, the voice and the mimicry, the stimulus and the response of the audience mean as much to the natives as the text; and the sociologist should take his cue from the natives. The performance, again, has to be placed in its proper time-setting—the hour of the day, and the season, with the background of the sprouting gardens awaiting future work, and slightly influenced by the magic of the fairy tales. We must also bear in mind the sociological context of private ownership, the sociable function and the cultural rôle of amusing fiction. All these elements are equally relevant; all must be studied as well as the text. The stories live in native life and not on paper, and when a scholar jots them down without being able to evoke the atmosphere in which they flourish he has given us but a mutilated bit of reality.[8]

Malinowski's remarks touch upon the functions of folklore and upon the relations of folklore to culture, as well as upon what I distinguish as the social context of folklore. Moreover the last quotation refers to some of the specific features of what Malinowski calls the "fairy tale," which is only one of three forms of narrative distinguished by the Trobriand Islanders themselves:

(1) Fairy tales (*kukwanebu*) are fictional, dramatically told, and privately owned. They are told in November, between the harvest and fishing seasons. There is a vague belief, not very seriously held, that their recital has a beneficial influence on the new crops which have been recently planted in the gardens, and they end with a formalized reference to a very fertile wild plant.

(2) Legends (*libwogwo*) are believed to be true and to contain important factual information. They are not privately owned, told in any stereotyped way, or magical in their effect.

(3) Myths (*liliu*) are regarded not merely as true, but as venerable and sacred. They are told when rituals to which they refer are to be performed, or when the validity of these rituals is questioned.[9]

Even this brief, familiar summary should show the importance of recording the native categories of folklore. The times and places they are told, the identity of the narrator and the composition of the audience, the factor of private ownership, the style of recitation, the participation by the audience, the attitudes of the people, and even the functions are to a considerable extent unique or distinctive for the various categories which are recognized. Although many studies of folklore still do not discuss the native categories, it is worth noting that an excellent discussion of this important point is to be found in Chatelain's comments on

[7] Malinowski, 1926, pp. 17-18.
[8] Malinowski, 1926, p. 24.
[9] Malinowski, 1926, pp. 20-30.

Mbundu folklore in the first volume of the *Memoirs* of this Society.[10] It is unfortunate that Chatelain's discussion cannot be quoted here in full, because it shows great insight into points which will be considered later.

Nevertheless, the literature is still surprisingly deficient on these "non-scientific" but extremely suggestive classifications, and also on the attitudes of the people towards their own folklore. It would seem that many folklorists neglect even to ask the simple question of whether or not the various tales, which they take great pains to record, are true. Nevertheless it is certainly significant that some groups, such as the Trobriand Islanders, the Marshall Islanders,[10a] the Mbundu,[11] the Ibo and Yoruba,[12] the Ashanti,[13] the Mandan, Hidatsa, Arikara, and Dakota[14] distinguish between narratives which they regard as true and false, while the Ojibwa regard all their tales as true.[15] It is essential to the understanding and interpretation of folklore to know whether a given tale is regarded as historical fact or fiction. This bears directly upon the explanation of folklore as a form of amusement or as "literature," and on the troublesome, perennial problem of the nature of myth.

The problem of the "cultural context" or the relationship between folklore and other aspects of culture is in itself far more important. This problem has two dis-

[10] H. Chatelain, *Folk-Tales of Angola* (Memoirs of the American Folklore Society), I (1894), 20-22.

[10a] "The myths are generally accepted as true, though today parts, particularly those which tell of the old gods and demigods, may not be so regarded. . . . Modern myths . . . are the 'true' stories of today. Because their veracity is undisputed, they are very hard to get, for the people do not class them with the other forms of stories. . . . The fairy tale always begins with the word *kininwatne,* which without having specific meaning signifies 'this is a fairy tale; it may or may not have happened long ago; it is not to be taken seriously; it is not always supposed to be logical.' In ordinary discourse, a person exaggerating or telling an unbelievable story is accused of telling fairy tales." W. H. Davenport, "Marshallese Folklore Types," *JAF,* 66 (1953), 221, 223, 224.

[11] Three classes of narratives are distinguished in Kimbundu terminology. "The first class includes all traditional fictitious stories, or rather, those which strike the native mind as being fictitious. . . . The second class is that of true stories, or rather stories reputed true; what we call anecdotes. . . . Historical narratives . . . make a special class of history. They are the chronicles of the tribe and nation, carefully preserved and transmitted by the head men or elders of each political unit, whose origin, constitution, and vicissitudes they relate." Chatelain, 1894, pp. 20-21.

[12] W. Bascom, "The Relationship of Yoruba Folklore to Divining," *JAF,* 56 (1943), 129. According to an Ibo student in the United States, the Ibo also make this distinction.

[13] Despite the fact that folktales might refer to actual social situations and characters, the Ashanti storyteller stated before beginning "that what he was about to say was just make-believe" through the nominee "We do not really mean, we do not really mean, (that what we are going to say is true);" and he concluded, in one of their conventional endings, "This, my story, which I have related; if it be sweet, (or) if it be not sweet; some you may take as true, and the rest you may praise me (for the telling of it)." R. S. Rattray, *Akan-Ashanti Folk-Tales* (Oxford, 1930) pp. xi, 49, 15, passim.

[14] "The Dakota Indians of the plains distinguish two classes of tales—the "true" and the "lying" . . . Other Indian tribes make somewhat similar distinctions. The Mandan, Hidatsa, and Arikara groups recognize three classes of storytelling which approximate very nearly to the myth, legend, and tale of Malinowski." M. W. Beckwith, *Folklore in America. Its Scope and Method* (Publications of the Folklore Foundation, II, Poughkeepsie, 1931) p. 30.

[15] "The northern Ojibwa, for example, have no category of fiction at all; both their sacred stories and their tales are thought to be true. Consequently there is no art of imaginative fiction in this society, and no incentive to its creation." Hallowell, 1947, p. 547.

tinct facets, the first of which concerns the extent to which folklore, like language, is a mirror of culture and incorporates descriptions of the details of ceremonies, institutions and technology, as well as the expression of beliefs and attitudes. Boas' classical analysis of Tsimshian myths[16] has demonstrated, in the words of Herskovits, that "a substantial body of folktales is more than the literary expression of a people. It is, in a very real sense, their ethnography which, if systematized by the student, gives a penetrating picture of their way of life."[17]

The recording of folklore, in itself, is a useful field technique for the anthropologist. It gives further leads for the investigation of the content of culture, insuring that important cultural details are not overlooked; it provides a non-ethnocentric approach to the ways of life of a people, emphasizing, as Boas pointed out, the things which are important in their own minds;[18] it may offer clues to past events and to archaic customs no longer in actual practice, although not to the degree assumed by the Cultural Evolutionists;[19] it may provide a means of getting at esoteric features of culture which cannot be approached in any other way;[20] it reveals the affective elements of culture, such as attitudes, values, and cultural goals[21] and, moreover, may verbalize these in a form which needs only to be translated and quoted as evidence of a consensus of opinion.

Despite a general awareness of the importance of folklore as a part of culture and as a useful field technique, anthropologists, with a few outstanding exceptions, have neither fully explored the relations between folklore and culture, nor fully utilized the insights into culture which folklore can provide. As Hallowell has said:

[16] F. Boas, *Tsimshian Mythology* (Annual Report of the Bureau of American Ethnology, **31**, Washington, 1916) pp. 29-1037.

[17] M. J. Herskovits, *Man and His Works* (New York, 1948) p. 418.

[18] Speaking of his analysis of Tsimshian mythology, Boas states: "The underlying thought of this attempt was that the tales probably contain all that is interesting to the narrators and that in this way a picture of their way of thinking and feeling will appear that renders their ideas as free from the bias of the European observers as is possible. Matters that are self-evident to the Indian and that strike the foreign observer disappear while points of view will be expressed that may be entirely overlooked by the student." F. Boas, *Kwakiutl Culture as Reflected in Mythology* (Memoirs of the American Folklore Society), **28** (1935), v. "After all, what people choose to talk about is always important for our understanding of them, and the narratives they choose to transmit from generation to generation and to listen to over and over again can hardly be considered unimportant in a fully rounded study of their culture. When, in addition, we discover that all their narratives, or certain classes of them, may be viewed as *true* stories, their significance for actual behavior becomes apparent. For people *act* on the basis of what they believe to be true, not on what they think is mere fiction." Hallowell, 1947, p. 548.

[19] Benedict cites several instances which are preserved today only in Zuni folklore and ritual. R. Benedict, *Zuni Mythology* (Columbia University Contributions to Anthropology, **21**, New York, 1935), I, pp. xiv-xv.

[20] "Many years ago in recording tales at Zuni I learned the familiar fact that esoteric practices or terms are referred to or used freely in story-telling which would be withheld from a questioner." E. C. Parsons, *Taos Tales* (Memoirs of the American Folklore Society), **34** (1940), 4.

[21] "In addition to reflecting the life of a people as of the period when a given story of a living lore is told, folklore also reveals much about their aspirations, values and goals." Herskovits, 1948, p. 419.

The relation between myth and ritual has been frequently discussed, to say nothing about the relations of myth to the prevailing world view and to religion. The relations of values expressed in narratives to actual conduct and sanctions is another large topic. I cannot help believing that the surface has hardly been scratched, and that much valuable material that would deepen our understanding of culture lies awaiting those who will systematically study oral narratives in relation to all aspects of a society.[22]

The extent to which folklore is a mirror of culture has been mainly the concern of anthropologists, but when stated conversely it becomes the concern of all folklorists: the folklore of a people can be fully understood only through a thorough knowledge of their culture. Malinowski, who emphasized this, points out how a typical Trobriand origin myth involving the simultaneous emergence of brother and sister might be misinterpreted as a mythological allusion to incest, which would be entirely erroneous. The sister is responsible for the transmission of the family line, and the brother, rather than the husband, is indispensable as the guardian. If, on the other hand, an attempt were made to determine the identity of the sister's husband, an outside observer "would soon find himself once more confronted by an entirely foreign set of ideas—the sociological irrelevance of the father, the absence of any ideas about physiological procreation, and the strange and complicated system of marriage, matrilineal and patrilocal at the same time." "Only a full knowledge of matrilineal ideas and institutions gives body and meaning to the bare mention of the two ancestral names, so significant to a native listener."[23] The full meaning of these origin myths becomes clear only when the kinship system, the legal concepts of local citizenship, and the hereditary rights to territory, fishing grounds and local pursuits are understood.

The second aspect of the problem of the relations between folklore and culture has to do with the fact that characters in folktales and myths may do things which are prohibited or regarded as shocking in daily life. Old Man Coyote, in numerous Plains tales has intercourse with his mother-in-law, whereas the American Indian who finds humor and amusement in this situation must himself observe a strict mother-in-law avoidance. Whether it be the tales of violence or the tales of polygamy among the mild, monogamous Zuni, the unscrupulous and disrespectful behavior of the trickster in many bodies of folklore, or the mother-in-law jokes and obscene stories in our own puritanical society, the striking contrasts between folklore and actual conduct raise new problems of wider theoretical significance concerning the relations between folklore and culture. Over many centuries folklorists and other scholars have attempted to explain them, or to explain them away. Most of the earlier explanations are unacceptable today, but the problem itself remains with us as one of the most intriguing and basic of all the problems of folklore, raising significant questions about the nature of humor and the psychological implications and the sociological functions of folklore.

Long before the beginnings of folklore as a discipline, in the sixth century B.C., the Greek philosopher Xenophanes complained in a poem that the gods were credited with committing the worst crimes of mortals; somewhat later the Greek poet Pindar refused to repeat a story in which the gods were said to eat human

[22] Hallowell, 1947, p. 548.
[23] Malinowski, 1926, p. 41.

flesh.[24] About 316 B.C. Euhemerus offered his theory that myths had their origin in actual historical characters and events, and that the gods were once men who were deified and worshipped after their death. Thus the gods had feet of clay, and the crimes of the gods were really crimes of men.

The Grimm brothers, with their theory of the spread of folklore through Aryan migrations and their etymological techniques, suggested that words in the tales had become mangled and misunderstood in the course of retelling, and that by reconstructing the original proto-Indo-European words the inconsistencies and absurdities in tales could be explained. Max Müller, who also used the etymological technique, but whose linguistic reconstructions reduced myths to allegories of nature, stated "to represent the supreme God as committing every kind of crime, as being deceived by men, as being angry with his wife and violent with his children, is surely proof of a disease [of language]."[25] The numerous scholars of the Nature Allegorical school who relied on the comparative method without even the verification of etymology, contended that what appeared to be shocking events were in reality beautiful allegories when their true meanings were understood, thus denying that there were any crimes or obscenities in myths and tales.

The British anthropologists and folklorists of the Cultural Evolutionary school contended that the discrepancies between folklore and conduct must be explained, not as derived from false etymologies from a common Aryan sun-myth, but as survivals of an earlier, pre-Aryan state of savagery in Europe. In support of this they pointed out that the odd and inexplicable incidents in our nursery tales and the odd and superstitious beliefs and practices of country people resembled the customs and beliefs of non-literate peoples in various parts of the world. In the words of Lang,

> now, with regard to all these strange usages, what is the method of folklore? The method is, when an apparently irrational and anomalous custom is found in any country, to look for a country where a similar practice is found, and where the practice is no longer irrational and anomalous, but in harmony with manners and ideas of the people among whom it prevails. . . . Our method, then, is to compare the seemingly meaningless customs or manners of civilised races with the similar customs and manners which exist among the uncivilised and still retain their meaning.[26]

Of all the recognized "schools" of folklore, only the Diffusionists, the Functionalists, and the Finnish school have indicated little interest in this problem. The Diffusionists, such as Benfey and Cosquin, and the Finnish Historical-Geographical school have been pre-occupied with the question of distribution of similar tales. While the contradictions between folklore and human conduct could be explained by the element of fantasy, or could develop through the operation of Aarne's laws or "principles" of folklore change[27] the same laws or principles could as easily have operated to eliminate discrepancies between folklore and culture. Malinowski,

[24] Cited by A. Lang, *Myth, Ritual, and Religion* (London, 1887) I, p. 3.

[25] M. Müller, *Contributions to the Science of Mythology* (London, 1897) I, p. 69.

[26] A. Lang, *Customs and Myth* (New York, 1885) p. 21.

[27] A. Aarne, *Leitfaden der vergleichenden Märchenforschung* (FF Communications, **13**, 1913) pp. 23-39.

despite his remarkable insights into folklore, makes no comment regarding the discrepancies between folklore and human conduct.[28]

The Psychoanalytic School provides well known answers to what have been considered atrocities and obscenities, based largely on the identification of sex symbols and the Oedipus and Electra situation in myths. Some of the contradictions between folklore and culture are thus explained as wish fulfillment or escape from sexual taboos on a fantasy level by mechanisms comparable to those found in dreams or daydreams.

Finally, the American Anthropological "School" has been as eclectic in this respect as usual, refusing to accept any single explanation for the many different cultures and historical situations without first examining the specific facts bearing upon each case. Thus Benedict explains some of the discrepancies between Zuni folklore and custom in terms of cultural lag. The tales describe entering a house by a ladder through a hatchway in the roof, although doors have been common in Zuni since 1888. The use of stone knives, also, is retained only in folklore and in ritual. Benedict considers the possibility that accounts of polygamy in folklore may also be "survivals" from a period in which polygamy was actually practised, but discards it because, first, "it is doubtful whether any folklore can be cited, from any part of the world that reflects cultural conditions as remote as those before pueblo culture took form."[29] Second, she rejects it on grounds that would also argue against borrowing this motif from neighboring polygamous cultures:

> In the second place, even if it were possible to interpret the Zuni folkloristic pattern of polygamy as a survival, we should still have to explain why the marriage with eight wives or with two husbands is prominent in Zuni mythology and not generally over North America. The simultaneous marriage with many wives was culturally allowed over most of the continent, but it does not figure in tales as it does in pueblo folklore. The presumption that is indicated by a study of the distribution of this folkloristic pattern in North America is that in the pueblos polygamy is a grandiose folkloristic convention partaking on the one hand of usual mythological exaggeration and on the other of a compensatory daydream. Just as the hero of folktales kills a buck every day, or four in a single day, so he also is courted by eight maidens and marries them. . . . Marriage with many wives is a Zuni fantasy of the same order as raising the dead or travelling with seven-league boots in other bodies of folklore. It plays a fairy-tale role in Zuni mythology which is automatically rendered impossible in those areas of North America where tales of polygamy and polyandry have bases in fact.[30]

Benedict cautiously concludes that it is hard to prove what compensatory elements are embodied in marriage with many wives, but that "other contrasts between custom and folkloristic conventions must be explained as fundamentally compensatory."[31] Thus, the abandonment of children at birth is a constantly recurring

[28] Radcliffe-Brown is concerned with the internal inconsistencies in mythology, such as the contradiction between the Andamanese view of lightning as a person who shakes his leg, and as a fire-brand thrown by Biliku; but he is not concerned with the inconsistencies between the behavior of characters in folklore and members of a society. A. R. Radcliffe-Brown, *The Andaman Islanders* (Cambridge, 1933) pp. 396-397.

[29] Benedict, 1935, I, p. xvi.

[30] Benedict, 1935, I, p. xvi.

[31] Benedict, 1935, I, p. xvi.

theme in Zuni folklore, but is alien to their culture. Seeking one's own death by summoning the Apache is another popular theme, but "suicide is unknown and even inconceivable to the Zuni mind, and violence is culturally taboo. . . ."[32] "In each case the story is a daydream motivated by resentment, and maneuvers the daydreamer into the martyr's position," "without the necessity of any violent act save on the part of the Apache. . . ."[33]

Another theme, which also reflects Zuni culture but with a difference, is that of violent action based upon secret enmity. Grudges are cherished in Zuni. They are usually the rather generalized expression of slights and resentments in a small community. In actual life they give rise to malicious aspersions, but in folklore they are usually satisfied by nothing less than the death of the offender. . . . In a culture in which homicide occurs with such extraordinary rarity that instances are not even remembered, the compensatory violence of these reprisals is the more striking.[34]

Zuni folklore therefore in those cases where it does not mirror contemporary custom owes its distortions to various fanciful exaggerations and compensatory mechanisms. The role of day-dreams, of wish-fulfillment, is not limited to these cases of distortion. It is equally clear in the tales that most minutely reflect the contemporary scene. . . . Their most popular theme is the triumph of the despised and weak and previously worsted. The poor orphan boy is victorious in hunting, in stick races, in gambling, and in courtship . . .; those who do not have witch power are triumphant over those who have . . .; the stunted ragamuffin Ahaiyute win first place in everything.[35]

Certainly it can no longer be possible to regard folklore simply as a true and accurate mirror of culture, or to ignore the basic importance of investigating the actual behavior in any society, the ideal patterns of any culture, and the attitudes of any people whose folklore is to be interpreted. Even if there are societies in which contrasts between folklore and culture are completely absent, this fact in itself is important to know and to attempt to explain. Opler emphasizes

the high correlation of the details of Jicarilla mythology with the actual conduct of the bearers of the culture and the forces which maintain it. . . .[36]

The compensations for satisfactions denied in reality by the culture, the elaborate day dreams, the exultant departures from the true culture ethic which are characteristic of many mythologies, are seldom encountered in Jicarilla legends. The culture heroes perform deeds that may be expected of no mortal, of course, but when a rite or observance is attributed to a supernatural or an animal, one may be sure that the Jicarilla carry out the details of that procedure in much the same way. And when feelings, attitudes, judgments, likes and dislikes are described for the protagonists in the myths, one may be fairly certain that the same responses belong to the normal reaction pattern of the average Jicarilla. In other words the myths provide a surprisingly accurate guide to Jicarilla culture. . . .

There is scarcely a story in this collection which does not reveal fidelity to the cultural round. . . .

[32] Benedict, 1935, I, p. xviii.
[33] Benedict, 1935, I, p. xix.
[34] Benedict, 1935, I, pp. xix-xx.
[35] Benedict, 1935, I, pp. xx-xxi.
[36] M. E. Opler, *Myths and Tales of the Jicarilla Apache Indians* (Memoirs of the American Folklore Society), **31** (1938), xi-xii.

It was in spite of initial scepticism that I came to recognize the degree to which Jicarilla mythology mirrored Jicarilla culture.[37]

Yet Opler's Jicarilla collection contains a typical tale of "Coyote and His Mother-in-law" and a tale of how "Coyote Marries His Own Daughter,"[38] and two years later Opler writes of the Lipan Apache:

Of the four Athabaskan cultures which I have studied, the Lipan is the only one in which the mother-in-law avoidance is not required. Interestingly enough, Lipan Mythology does not include in the coyote cycle an episode in which the trickster violates his mother-in-law.[39]

As a final example of this point, Rattray, in his discussion of Ashanti folklore, refers to:

the peculiarity presented by a people normally decorous in speech and conduct, whose Folk-tales nevertheless often contain the most Rabelaisian passages, who would yet consider it highly improper to relate these passages if divorced from the occasion and context in which they are nightly publicly paraded. . . .[40]

Subjects ordinarily regarded as sacred, e.g. the Sky-god, the lesser gods, fetishes, spirit ancestors, the sick, chiefs, sexual matters, appear to be treated as if profane, and sometimes even tend to become the subject of ridicule.[41]

In the middle of a story or between tales actors may enter the circle and give extremely realistic and clever impersonations of various characters in the tale which call forth roars of laughter from all who witness them.

On one occasion—it was in connexion, I think, with a sketch depicting an old man covered with yaws—I asked some one seated beside me if people habitually laughed at persons inflicted by *Nyame* (the Sky-god) in this way, and I suggested it was unkind to ridicule such a subject. The person addressed replied that in everyday life no one might do so, however great the inclination to laugh might be. He went on to explain that it was so with many other things: the cheating and tricks of the priests, the rascality of a chief—things about which everyone knew, but concerning which one might not ordinarily speak in public. These occasions gave every one an opportunity of talking about and laughing at such things; it was "good" for everyone concerned, he said.[42]

From this, and from other evidence, Rattray concludes "that West Africans had discovered for themselves the truth of the psycho-analysts' theory of 'repressions,' and that in these ways they sought an outlet for what might otherwise become a dangerous complex."[43]

This has taken us already into our third problem and the consideration of what folklore does for the people who tell and listen to it. From what has been said it

[37] Opler, 1938, pp. xii-xiv.

[38] Opler, 1938, pp. 313-314, 280-282.

[39] M. E. Opler, *Myths and Legends of the Lipan Apache Indians* (Memoirs of the American Folklore Society), **36** (1940), 7.

[40] Rattray, 1930, p. ix.

[41] Rattray, 1930, p. x.

[42] Rattray, 1930, pp. x-xi.

[43] Rattray, 1930, p. xii.

should be clear that folklore cannot be dismissed simply as a form of amusement. Amusement is, obviously, one of the functions of folklore, and an important one; but even this statement cannot be accepted today as a complete answer, for it is apparent that beneath a great deal of humor lies a deeper meaning. The same is true for the concepts of fantasy and creative imagination. The fact that the story teller in some societies is expected to modify a familiar tale by introducing new elements or giving a novel twist to the plot is in itself of basic importance to the study of dynamics and the aesthetics of folklore, but one may ask why the teller chooses to introduce specific elements and twists.

Whatever one may think of the various applications of classical Freudian theory to folklore, one must admit that there are basic ideas here which go far beyond sexual symbolism and the Oedipus plot. Viewed in this light folklore reveals man's frustrations and attempts to escape in fantasy from repressions imposed upon him by society, whether these repressions be sexual or otherwise and whether they result from taboos on incest or polygamy, or from a taboo on laughing at a person afflicted by yaws. The concepts of compensation and the escape mechanism are fully as suggestive when applied to the familiar theme of rags to riches, or to the Cinderella and Frau Holle tales, as when they are applied to the Oedipus myth. But folklore also reveals man's attempts to escape in fantasy from the conditions of his geographical environment and from his own biological limitations as a member of the genus and species *Homo sapiens*. The same approach is also suggestive when applied to the Zuni hero who kills four bucks in a single day, to the Seven League Boots, to the Magic Flight, to life after death, or to the psychological identification with a hero who conquers his enemies by magic, or with a trickster who overcomes his more powerful associates by shrewdness and cunning.

Classical Freudian theory has required considerable revision to make it applicable cross-culturally in a meaningful way. It has been necessary to reject Freud's hypothetical reconstruction of the primeval horde because it is based upon questionable sources and upon the premises of the Cultural Evolutionary school; to reject the interpretations of Abraham and Rank because their comparative method, as much as that of the Cultural Evolutionary school, tears superficially similar data out of their cultural contexts; and to reject Jung's "archetypes" and his ethnocentric application of European symbolism to all folklore because it disregards the influence of culture on both symbolism and folklore. All of the classical Freudians seem to have relied upon a mystical racial or biological inheritance for the transmission of beliefs which are learned, and to ignore significant cultural differences. As Malinowski has shown, the Oedipus complex itself has its roots, not in the biological factor of sex as Freud assumed, but in the cultural factors of family structure and parental authority. Both the cultural context and the environmental setting must be known before the causes of repression or frustration can be identified, and their responses can be interpreted.[44]

[44] "The folklorist whose intent goes beyond the merely descriptive to the dynamic must be prepared to search out and listen to the cultural associations and contexts of his materials, just as the analyst must listen to the individual free associations of his patients. It is repeating the error of Frazer to accept descriptive similarities at their face value, and not to seek the local context of the symbol." W. La Barre, "Folklore and Psychology," *JAF*, 61 (1948), 388.

If Freud's biological determinism has been rejected, Freudian mechanisms have not; and when translated into cultural, rather than biological terms, Freudian mechanisms are meaningful and suggestive for the interpretation of folklore. Sex is a drive in all societies, but not the only drive; and even the blocking of learned secondary drives can produce frustration and escapes in fantasy. In this sense, as Kardiner has pointed out, folklore can be viewed as a projective system.[45]

However accurately folklore may mirror the familiar details of culture, and incorporate common situations from everyday life, as Benedict has shown, the unusual or even the impossible is an important ingredient of myths and folktales. Yet the unusual, and the impossible, are defined in terms of each individual culture and habitat, as well as in terms of the biological limitations of *Homo sapiens*. Any universals are to be sought in the common denominators of man's biological heritage, of his natural environmental settings, and of his socio-cultural ways of life. But, knowing the range of both the factors of habitat and culture, it cannot be naively assumed that the European sex symbols are universal. As La Barre has said, "without a respect for cultural difference, one runs the risk of creating new etiological myths, rather than explaining the old ones."[46]

A second function of folklore is that which it plays in validating culture, in justifying its rituals and institutions to those who perform and observe them. Myth is not explanatory, Malinowski emphasized, but serves as "a warrant, a charter, and often even a practical guide"[47] to magic, ceremony, ritual and social structure.

> Myth fulfils in primitive culture an indispensable function: it expresses, enhances, and codifies belief; it safeguards and enforces morality; it vouches for the efficiency of ritual and contains practical rules for the guidance of man. Myth is thus a vital ingredient of human civilization; it is not an idle tale, but a hard-worked active force; it is not an intellectual explanation or an artistic imagery, but a pragmatic charter of primitive faith and moral wisdom. . . .[48]
>
> The function of myth, briefly, is to strengthen tradition and endow it with a greater value and prestige by tracing it back to a higher, better, more supernatural reality of initial events.[49]

When dissatisfaction with or skepticism of an accepted pattern is expressed or doubts about it arise, whether it be sacred or secular, there is usually a myth or legend to validate it; or a so-called "explanatory tale," a moral animal tale, or a proverb, to fulfill the same function. Malinowski's statement is so widely accepted today that it should not require further discussion, but it is interesting that as the founder of the "Functionalist school," this was the only function of folklore that he recognized, and that in his later works he devotes little attention to folklore.[50]

A third function of folklore is that which it plays in education, particularly,

[45] A. Kardiner and Associates, *The Psychological Frontiers of Society* (New York, 1945) p. 29.

[46] La Barre, 1948, p. 387.

[47] Malinowski, 1926, p. 29.

[48] Malinowski, 1926, p. 19.

[49] Malinowski, 1926, pp. 91-92.

[50] See B. Malinowski, *A Scientific Theory of Culture, and Other Essays* (Chapel Hill, 1944).

but not exclusively, in non-literate societies. The importance of the many forms of folklore as pedagogic devices has been documented in many parts of the world, although perhaps most comprehensively in Raum's study of education among the Chaga of East Africa. Here ogre tales, like our bogey-man stories, are used in the discipline of very young children, and lullabies are sung to put them in a good humor. Somewhat later, fables or folktales incorporating morals are introduced "to inculcate general attitudes and principles, such as diligence and filial piety, and to ridicule laziness, rebelliousness, and snobbishness."[51] Riddles are used to express a threat which the speaker may not later wish to carry out, to direct another's action where a blunt command might offend, or to incite a person to action through irony. Beginning at the age of about fourteen, "when a child flies into a rage, when he lies or steals, when he is recalcitrant or violates the code of etiquette, when he makes an ass out of himself, when he is cowardly, he hears his actions commented upon in the words of a proverb."[52] This is sometimes so effective that as an adult the Chaga can remember the situation in which they first heard a particular proverb. The formal instruction given to Chaga boys in the initiation ceremonies is often summarized or emphasized through the use of proverbs, and Raum feels that a number of these discussions or "lectures" are developed to support or justify the point made in a particular proverb. He also believes that the "examinations" or dialogues between teacher and student are related in form to the riddle. Some of the verbal instruction during the initiation ceremonies of boys and the preparation of girls for marriage is given in the form of songs; and throughout later life, songs of ridicule are important as a means of censuring misbehavior.

In many non-literate societies the information embodied in folklore is highly regarded in its own right. To the extent to which it is regarded as historically true, its teaching is regarded as important; and to the extent to which it mirrors culture, it "contains practical rules for the guidance of man."[53]

> It is plain that the myth is of greatest functional importance to the Jicarilla in the guidance of his behavior, his beliefs, and his ceremonies. . . . The mythology represents for him the summation of knowledge on the basis of which he must act. . . . The mother or grandparent schools the child in accordance with its dictates. The ceremonial man conducts his rite in terms of directions found therein.[54]

> The mythologic system of a people is often their educational system, and the children who sit listening to an evening's tale are imbibing traditional knowledge and attitudes no less than the row of sixth-graders in our modern classrooms.[55]

Myths and legends may contain detailed descriptions of sacred ritual, the codified belief or dogma of the religious system, accounts of tribal or clan origins, movements and conflicts. Proverbs have often been characterized as the distilled wisdom of past generations, and are unmistakably so regarded by many African peoples.

Even African folktales which are regarded as fictitious are considered as impor-

[51] O. F. Raum, *Chaga Childhood. A Description of Indigenous Education in An East African Tribe* (London, 1940) p. 214.

[52] Raum, 1940, p. 217.

[53] Malinowski, 1926, p. 19.

[54] Opler, 1938, p. x.

[55] A. H. Gayton, "Perspectives in Folklore," *JAF*, **64** (1951), 149.

tant for the education of children, because many of them are animal fables or other moral tales. Riddles serve as a didactic device to sharpen the wits of young children, while dilemma tales, for which there is no "correct" answer, do the same for those who are more mature. Chatelain says of Mbundu anecdotes, "the didactic tendency of these stories is in no way technical, but essentially social. They do not teach how to make a thing, but how to act, how to live."[56] As opposed to practical instruction in productive techniques, folklore appears to be the principal feature in the general education of the child in non-literate societies.

In the fourth place, folklore fulfills the important but often overlooked function of maintaining conformity to the accepted patterns of behavior. Although related to the last two functions, it deserves to be distinguished from them. More than simply serving to validate or justify institutions, beliefs and attitudes, some forms of folklore are important as means of applying social pressure and exercising social control. Although this clearly emerges in Raum's study of Chaga education, it is also to be distinguished from the function of education, not simply because it continues throughout adult life, but because it is employed against individuals who attempt to deviate from social conventions with which they are fully familiar. When this happens, a song of allusion, a proverb, a riddle or a folktale may be used to express disapproval. Or, as among the Jicarilla Apache, it may be sufficient "to chide aberrant conduct by inquiring scathingly of the transgressor, 'Did you have no grandparent to tell you the stories?' "[57] Among the Ashanti,

> It was also a recognized custom in olden times for any one with a grievance against a fellow villager, a chief, or even the King of Ashanti to hold him up to thinly disguised ridicule, by exposing some undesirable trait in his character—greed, jealousy, deceit—introducing the affair as the setting to some tale. A slave would thus expose his bad master, a subject his wicked chief. Up to a point the story-teller was licensed. He took care, moreover, to protect himself by a public declaration to the effect that what he was about to say was just make-believe. He also, my informants stated, avoided the use of personal names.[58]

Folklore is also used to express social approval of those who conform, and certain forms such as "praise names" and songs of praise are specifically intended for this purpose. In many societies folklore is employed to control, influence, or direct the activities of others from the time the first lullaby is sung or ogre tale is told them. Folklore may also become an internalized check on behavior, as shown by the previous quotations from Opler, or by Raum's statement about Chaga proverbs:

> Their intrinsic value to the Chaga lies in two qualities: they are an inheritance from their ancestors incorporating the experience of the tribe, and they serve as instruments both for self-control and for the control of others. Stefano Moshi said: "When a man is tempted by his own desire or by the suggestions of an evil friend and remembers a proverb he desists immediately. The youth of to-day treat many ancient things with contempt, but they never jest about proverbs. They respect the wisdom embodied in these sayings, for they strike like arrows into the heart."[59]

[56] Chatelain, 1894, p. 21.
[57] Opler, 1938, p. xii.
[58] Rattray, 1930, p. xi.
[59] Raum, 1940, p. 217.

Because of the high regard in which they are held and because they are considered as especially appropriate to adult life, African proverbs are highly effective in exercising social control. Because they express the morals or ethics of the group, they are convenient standards for appraising behavior in terms of the approved norms. Because they are pungently, wittily and sententiously stated, they are ideally suited for commenting on the behavior of others. They are used to express social approval and disapproval; praise for those who conform to accepted social conventions and criticism or ridicule of those who deviate; warning, defiance or derision of a rival or enemy and advice, counsel or warning to a friend when either contemplates action which may lead to social friction, open hostilities, or direct punishment by society. Thus the Yoruba proverb "No matter how small the needle, a chicken cannot swallow it" conveys the lesson that an apparently weaker individual can cause unexpected difficulties for a more powerful rival. It can be used to warn or defy a more powerful enemy to treat the speaker more respectfully; to warn or advise a friend to change his behavior toward a rival who is weaker; or to ridicule and criticise someone whose behavior toward a weaker person has brought trouble on himself.

Examples of this type could be multiplied a hundred-fold from the Kru, Jabo and Yoruba proverbs which have been analyzed in terms of the social situations to which they are appropriate.[60] It is more important to note the remarkably consistent emphasis on the conformity to the moral code, to the social conventions, and to the ideal forms of behavior. Dahomean proverbs are used "to give point to some well-meaning advice; to rebuke or praise a friend; to put an enemy in his place; to emphasize commendation or affection, or ridicule or blame." [61] Among the Jabo,

> Another important function of the proverb is to smooth the social friction and dissatisfaction, and to ease the individual in his efforts to adjust himself in his setting and fate. If people disagree, if they work at cross-purposes, if a man is dissatisfied with his position, if a person complains of injustice, an older, more experienced, or less concerned person is always at hand with a comforting, quieting, light-shedding proverb. The number of proverbs implying, "under the circumstances, what did you expect?" is impressive. The same proverb may be quoted for advice, instruction, or as a warning—always to prevent or lessen friction.[62]

Proverbs of this last type are especially interesting here, and are by no means confined to the Jabo. They warn the dissatisfied or the over-ambitious individual to be content with his lot, to accept the world as it is and his place in it, and thus to conform to the accepted patterns.

Although I have spoken loosely of the "functions of folklore," it is important to remember that the functions of the myth, legend, folktale, proverb, riddle, song and each of the other forms of folklore are to some extent distinctive and must be analyzed separately. As their very names suggest, this is also true of the various types of song: lullabies, love songs, war songs, work songs, ballads, blues, religious songs, songs of praise, and songs of ridicule or allusion. To fully understand folk-

[60] M. J. Herskovits and S. Tagbwe, "Kru Proverbs," *JAF,* 43 (1930), 225-293. G. Herzog, *Jabo Proverbs from Liberia* (London, 1936). W. and B. Bascom, unpublished Yoruba proverbs.

[61] M. J. Herskovits, *Dahomey* (New York, 1938) II, p. 323.

[62] Herzog, 1936, p. 2.

lore and its role in man's life we must have more knowledge of the specific functions of each of these forms in various societies, literate and non-literate, and more of the tedious but extremely rewarding comparisons of the details of folklore texts with those of culture and actual behavior. It is only in this way, also, that we may hope to explain, rather than simply take for granted (somewhat thankfully) the fact that folklore *is* one of the human universals, and perhaps to understand why the importance of folklore has decreased as the written and printed word have spread and mechanical devices such as phonographs, radios, moving pictures and television have been developed. Is it due to the competition of these forms of mass media in the field of amusement? Is it because of the loss of some other function of folklore, such as education? Is it due to the inability of folklore to adapt itself to cultural change which is too rapid or too radical?

I have intentionally oversimplified the varied functions of folklore in order to stress certain important ones. To the four that have been discussed can be added the function of Trobriand Island "fairy tales" in garden magic, of Yoruba myths and tales in divination,[63] of Dahomean obscene stories at wakes,[64] of African proverbs in generalizing the specific[65] and in court trials,[66] or of folklore's function in integrating society and maintaining social cohesion as shown specifically in the analysis of Andamanese mythology.[67]

The four functions which I have discussed could be classified differently. They could be subdivided into various factors which have been distinguished,[68] or, as for the moment I prefer to do, they can be considered as grouped together under the single function of maintaining the stability of culture. Viewed thus, folklore operates within a society to insure conformity to the accepted cultural norms, and

[63] Bascom, 1943, pp. 127-131.

[64] "Similarly, at wakes or ceremonies for the dead, neither these (historical) tales nor the simple animal stories would be seemly, for the dead are held beyond the need for moralizing, and the obscene story is called upon to furnish entertainment." Herskovits, 1938, II, p. 325.

[65] "Proverbs serve a specific and important intellectual function—that of subsuming the particular under the general." Herzog, 1936, p. 7. "The proverb is the product of the faculty of generalization, of getting at the principles, of inference and discrimination, combined with the gift of graphic and concise expression." Chatelain, 1894, p. 21.

[66] "As in other parts of Africa, proverbs play an important part in the legal discussions of the Jabo. The chief aim of the legal machinery, after the facts of the case have been established, is to classify it. . . . In order to be dealt with it must cease to be a particular occurrence. In this light it is significant that this process of generalizing the particular case employs the body of formulae which performs that very function—the proverbs. . . . The more proverbs a man has at his command and the better he knows how to apply them, the better lawyer or spokesman he is considered to be. A proverb misquoted or applied badly may spoil the entire case." Herzog, 1936, pp. 1-2. Herskovits and Tagbwe, 1930, pp. 254-5. "Proverbs are introduced . . . in pleas before courts of justice, in court testimony and court decisions, or in dissent from these decisions." Herskovits, 1938, II, p. 323.

[67] Radcliffe-Brown, 1933, pp. 330-406.

[68] Thus one might distinguish between amusement, creative fantasy, and psychological escape; between the mirroring of culture in folklore and the contrasts between them; between folklore as a validation of culture and as a guide to behavior and ritual; between its rôles in embodying the content of education and as a didactic device; or between its rôles as an internalized check on behavior, as a device for expressing social approval and disapproval, and as a means of suggesting that one be content with his lot.

continuity from generation to generation through its rôle in education and the extent to which it mirrors culture. To the extent to which folklore contrasts with the accepted norms and offers socially acceptable forms of release through amusement or humor and through creative imagination and fantasy, it tends to preserve the institutions from direct attack and change. There is no difficulty of course in finding instances in folklore where laziness, complacency or the lack of ambition and initiative are condemned, but are there any which suggest that the individual destroy or even disregard the institutions and conventions of his society?

Viewed in this light folklore is an important mechanism for maintaining the stability of culture. It is used to inculcate the customs and ethical standards in the young, and as an adult to reward him with praise when he conforms, to punish him with ridicule or criticism when he deviates, to provide him with rationalizations when the institutions and conventions are challenged or questioned, to suggest that he be content with things as they are, and to provide him with a compensatory escape from "the hardships, the inequalities, the injustices"[69] of everyday life. Here, indeed, is the basic paradox of folklore, that while it plays a vital rôle in transmitting and maintaining the institutions of a culture and in forcing the individual to conform to them, at the same time it provides socially approved outlets for the repressions which these same institutions impose upon him.

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[69] Herskovits, 1948, p. 421.