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*Types of the Folktale in the Arab World: A Demographically
Oriented Tale-Type Index* (review)

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psychological, and cultural diary full of scribbles, and yet they cannot be reduced to the encoded fears of society.

Defying national and generic boundaries in literature, journalism, theater, television, or the Internet, legends appear both homeless and universal, old and modern, urban and rural. AT 939A, "The Murdered Son" (or "The Killing of the Prodigal Son," as Bennett prefers to call it), has a life of four centuries. The Bosom Serpent complex can be traced back to twelfth-century Ireland; indeed, the idea of reptiles infesting the body was orthodox medicine. Ancient Greek and Roman literature and European medieval monkish culture are saturated with similar themes. One could be tempted to see the tale-type or motif indices themselves as inventories of universal themes, veritable handbooks of humanity, rather than exclusively folkloric checklists. One might ask, if urban legends remained seamlessly hidden in the streams of discourse for so long, are there other unlisted, sleeping genres?

Bennett includes examples drawn from China, India, Ireland, and Greece as well as from biblical or apocryphal narratives. The protagonist of legend may be Rock Hudson, and the storyteller may be Jackie Collins. Legends do not end happily ever after but in death or madness. Current contamination themes echo earlier epidemics of typhoid, cholera, plague, syphilis, and leprosy. What if AIDS Mary is just a newer version of Typhoid Mary? How does the researcher avoid jaded or jaundiced reductionist analysis that appears to debunk folklore, legend, or the gullibility of humanity? According to Bennett, the stories themselves "are enough," and folklorists should consider documenting the presentation and use of legends as more than a trivial pursuit (p. 307).

Bennett's interpretations here are as diverse as the symbolic, cultural, and psychological meanings implicit in the genre. The approaches to contemporary legend cobbled together in this book confront the ideas that legends are false or trivial stories; are told to discredit certain companies; are derived from private fear, anxiety, or distrust; are cautionary tales; are a psychocultural response; are a vernacular etiology; are symbolic or metaphorical truths; are a reflection of gendered psychology; are serious and dangerous; and are a projection of a desolate view of

the human condition. The preferred approaches to legend study used in the book involve sampling the cultural complex that involves the legend or including all related material associated with the particular case study, highlighting a specific example with local behavioral and cultural norms, or viewing legend as a sociopolitical language where the pathology or symptomatology of the body mirrors the sociological or ethnographic analysis of the social body. Legend might create mainstream opinion, but it also follows it. For example, AIDS legends might absolve heterosexuals from culpability in the spread of the disease, or stories of street urchin syringe aggressors may relocate danger beyond the environs of the home. Bennett's analysis is more revealing and intriguing for its careful consideration of vernacular gender perceptions that shape and create the imaginative undercurrents in the ocean of stories that she presents.

The legend is an emotionally powerful and challenging genre. Gillian Bennett's innovative and questioning exploration of this topic reminds us that folklore studies sometimes has a tendency to trivialize reality as mere urban legend. Folklore studies was long a romantic hobbyhorse, and today it must insist on its right to explore the social and cultural fallout caused by the quarrying of "mere folklore" from the most grotesque nadir of human behavior. Legend tends to echo life, and life echoes legend as well; as a result, a common rejoinder to accounts of legends should be, perhaps, that they are not in fact legend, but truth.

Types of the Folktale in the Arab World: A Demographically Oriented Tale-Type Index.

By Hasan M. El-Shamy. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004. Pp. xxviii + 1255, bibliography, register of tale types, list of changed tale-type numbers, register of motifs, index of authors and sources, register of countries, tale-type subject index, addendum.)

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As Hasan El-Shamy notes, the classification scheme of Aarne and Thompson's tale-type index "is seldom adequate for identifying folk

narratives outside [its] relatively select corpus of European dominated data; nor is it always successful in relating Middle Eastern and Arab tales to the proper tale type" (p. xxvii). This shortcoming of Aarne and Thompson's index has long been apparent to those who try to use it for regions, such as the Middle East, outside of the core area from which they selected their tales, and on that basis alone Hasan El-Shamy's *Types of the Folktale in the Arab World: A Demographically Oriented Tale-Type Index* is a welcome addition to the available folktale indices.

El-Shamy's index is not, however, solely an index of Arabic-language tales from the Middle East. It is rather, as the title suggests, a broader index to tales told in the Arab world. As he writes, the "Arab world has been characterized by its 'mosaic' demographic composition" (p. xvii), and a proper tale-type index must reflect that diversity. "An index that limits its scope of coverage to only Arabic texts would be incomplete," he continues, and would not "be representative of the Arab world culture" (p. xvii). Numerous languages and cultural groups exist alongside the Arabic-speaking group, so El-Shamy has included tales from these peoples in his sample. This is one way in which this index is, as the subtitle indicates, demographically oriented. But its demographic orientation also shows in the material provided in the entries. El-Shamy gives careful attention to data about the tale tellers, indicating the gender, religion, and ethnicity of the tellers. Information about archived and published versions of the tales, as well as about literary or semiliterary forms, is also included.

One aspect of this index that users might find odd is that El-Shamy does not "provide a single pattern of action (plot), constituted of a certain set of episodes in a fixed sequence," as does Aarne and Thompson's index (p. xviii). El-Shamy rightly observes that "when considering dozens of variants of a narrative (tale-type) such a syntax is not always stable or uniform" (pp. xviii–xix). Without more research into the folk narrative of the Arab world, he suggests, it is premature to assign a characteristic syntax to the tales; "[c]onsequently, in this index, a tale-type title succinctly presents the core of action" (p. xix). Instead of a plot outline, El-Shamy gives what he calls a "motif spectrum" that lists

the characteristic motifs of a particular tale type and also supplies cross-references to all tale types relevant to the one currently at hand. As he writes, "similar but independent tale-types frequently overlap and share certain motifs or episodes" (p. xviii). By approaching classification in this way, El-Shamy gives his index an openness often lacking in earlier indices and removes the problem of assigning to a tale a specific plot that may or may not be characteristic of the type as a whole.

El-Shamy has published a series of important works on Arab folk narrative in recent years. The first of these was his 1995 *Folk Traditions of the Arab World: A Guide to Motif Classification* (Indiana University Press); the second, his 1999 *Tales Arab Women Tell* (Indiana University Press). With *Types of the Folktale in the Arab World*, he adds yet another major work to the list of key books on Arab folk culture and narrative.

Good Humor, Bad Taste: A Sociology of the Joke. By Giseline Kuipers. (Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 2006. Pp. viii + 293, appendices, notes, references, index.)

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Good Humor, Bad Taste is a sociological approach to understanding aspects of taste in the reception of jokes specifically and humor more generally. It explores humor appreciation in relation to the factors of age, gender, and class. To date, the research on humor preference has been conducted primarily by experimental psychologists and has been linked only with aspects of personality. Although Giseline Kuipers—an assistant professor of sociology at the University of Amsterdam—considers the joke to be a form of communication embedded in social relationships, hers is not a study of joke telling in situ. The data are gathered from interviews and questionnaires. Subjects for the study were acquired through newspaper advertisements and personal contacts in the Netherlands, but mainly through people applying to participate in joke-telling contests for a Dutch television program. Kuipers also interviewed editors of