

Perspectives on Contemporary Legend

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Abstracts

Giving Life to Legends: The Material Practice of Ostensive Behavior

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This conference presentation, generated from a forthcoming paper, explores the relationship between ostensive practice and material behavior as represented in the legend of the thylacine's present existence in Tasmania. Ostensive practice is an extension of the semiotic theory of ostension, emphasizing ostension as not a singular act or expression, but rather an aggregated series of actions that serve to perpetuate the legend cycle (Peck 2016). Material behavior focuses on the process in creating material objects; it assigns significance not simply to the object itself, but the processes in making, using, and responding to physical objects, and is tied to behavioral studies (Owen-Jones 1997). Theories of ostensive practice and material behavior, when brought together, have yielded significant contributions to understanding thylacine fandom phenomenon. The legend of the thylacine's present existence, coded in its physical form, are maintained through a series of practices in the creation and expression of storytelling through artwork. The combination of these two theories, I will refer to as "ostensive behavior," sustains and gives new tangible life to the thylacines and its surrounding legends. I argue that the theoretical concept of ostensive practice can be expanded for analyzing material behavior; both of these concepts focus on the production and maintenance of a legend expressed in forms that refer to the legend tangibly, implicitly, and symbolically more than explicitly. This presentation utilizes the work of two artists who feature the thylacine as a central concept in their art to explore this idea.

"We Trace This Nile Through Human Thought": Deconstructing Alternative Beliefs Concerning Ancient Egyptian Monuments

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We have all heard the theories before: the pyramids were built by extraterrestrials; enslaved Hebrews constructed the entire monumental complex of the Giza Plateau; the Great Sphinx is 10,000 years old, an emblem of a pre-Egyptian super-civilization; and so on. Despite significant evidence to dispute these claims, alternative beliefs about the pyramids and the Sphinx (the most famous constituent elements of the Giza Plateau) are both popular and contemporaneously propagated. Our analysis reveals degrees and frameworks of alternative belief, from the outlandish to the somewhat rational, based chiefly on the historical as well as present-day notions of occidental supremacy: that the West, the so-called pinnacle of civilization, has Othered the rest of the “inferior” world to the point of distant mystery. Such logic suggests that ancient peoples—other than Greeks or Romans—could not possibly have created such splendor themselves. This Othering process began in antiquity; as Egyptologist Alan Lloyd explicates, ancient Greek and Roman perceptions of Egypt resulted from a “dialogue between what existed at an objective level and what [they] wanted and needed Egypt to be.” (Lloyd, 2010: 1085) Today, their ancient outlook is reflected in such media as documentaries, films, video games, and both popular and academic writing, to name a few. Similarly, Abrahamic religious systems, particularly in the Judeo-Christian tradition adopted by the West, have influenced our understandings of ancient Egypt through particularly villainizing, yet alluring, characterizations.

This paper will explore why such alternative beliefs concerning ancient Egypt—specifically the Giza Plateau—are circulated and propagated with such vigor and resilience that they are widely held to be true. Touching on theories of Orientalism, cultural reception, and Susan Lepselter’s concept of alternative beliefs as founded on bricolages of apophenia, we will thus attempt to parse out the nuances inasmuch as possible that influence these alternative beliefs.

(Fake) News and Legend: Lessons from an Interdisciplinary Seminar

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Approached to teach an upper-level seminar on ‘Fake News’ in our undergraduate university, the need to engage with and draw from disciplinary perspectives outside of my own while also negotiating the suspicions of students about the potential contribution of (Noyesian ‘Scarlet F’) folklore was critical. Rather than approach it on a purely case-by-case basis, overarching and pan-disciplinary themes—what impels us to trust, what is the value of honesty, how does news function as an activity within capitalist rhythms, what is the role of play, where does power reside in truth and lies—were considered. An emerging concern, and the direction of this paper, is the sense

that folklorists have been too quick to co-locate fake news within contemporary legend discussions and that an initial pause is required for us to consider news as a folk practice abutting legend, building on but moving beyond Oring's approach. The imparting of immediately pressing and pertinent information is of vital consequence to vernacular contexts yet, because informational rather than artistic considerations are foregrounded, and because they do not stress credibility (as determined by both participants and by the folklorist as observer) and thus demonstrate by breach the tacit boundaries of worldview, little focus has been paid to them by folklorists. If we pay heed to the flow of talk that thus passes us by and, as often noted, comprises the 'first story' that initiates further stories in the conversational contexts of ludic talk, we may be better equipped to parry with our equivalences between face-to-face and mediated narrative contexts.

The Future of Things Past: Folklore and Legend Studies in Post-Brexit Britain

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ISCLR was born in 1987 at a conference hosted by the Centre for English Cultural Tradition (CECTAL) at the University of Sheffield as 'an association of people actively engaged in the field of contemporary legend research' (Bennett & Smith 1990). CECTAL played host to five international conferences on the theme of contemporary or 'urban' legends and published a series of papers under the title *Perspectives on Contemporary Legend*. While Folklore Studies has become an established discipline in higher education institutions in North America and Northern Europe in England, where it began, academic interest has withered on the vine. The Sheffield centre closed in 2008 and its founder, Prof JDA Widdowson has highlighted the paradox 'that a discipline named, created, and developed in England received such scant regard in the country of its birth' (Widdowson 2010).

The referendum of 2016 that led the UK to leave the European Union consolidated a resurgence of interest in *English* folklore that had been growing since devolution and the rise of Euro-skepticism at the turn of the Millennium. It has also coincided with a general cultural boom reflected in film, TV, music and literature particularly with respect to those legends linked to the English landscape known as 'folk horror' (Scovell 2017). Popular interest has not so far been reflected in the teaching of folklore and legend studies in Higher Education, but in 2019 the University of Hertfordshire launched the first Masters in Folklore Studies, the first since the closure of CECTAL. Meanwhile, in Sheffield, a group of scholars who specialize in media and communications created the Centre for Contemporary Legend (CCL) and plan to launch a new MA in Legend Studies.

This paper examines the potential future development and direction of folklore and

legend studies in post-Brexit Britain. I will explore how economic, pedagogic and methodological obstacles could be overcome in order to re-establish the subject as both academically viable and attractive to students. I invite feedback from delegates as to how this could be achieved by email david.clarke@shu.ac.uk and Twitter @shuclarke

The End is Near: Domsday Conspiracy Theories and Apocalyptic Paranoia

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Project Blue Beam, a conspiracy theory originally pedaled by the late Canadian journalist Serge Monast, claims that an imminent, technologically spectacular broadcast of the second coming of Christ is being planned by NASA, along with other powerful, secret, government entities. This powerful display will help establish a new age religion, bring the Antichrist into power, and usher in a New World Order. Monast may have died in 1996, but his theories have influenced more recent conspiracy theorists, including the late, evangelical radio host Texe Mars, who blamed the Oklahoma City bombing on the U.S. government. These religious conspiracies are supplemented by more secular ones, which predict the coming of a third world war which, if conspiratorial history is to be believed, has been planned for nearly a century. The attraction to the end of the world prophecies and conspiracies have always been popular, but world events, especially the presidency of Donald J. Trump and the worldwide effects of the Covid-19 global pandemic, has only increased interest in such narratives.

One of the most prominent, heavily publicized events that failed to deliver on the promise of impending Armageddon was the Mayan Calendar scare of 2012. Conspiracy theorists remain undeterred from such failed predictions, simply looking at other calendar events to peddle this distinct brand of fear. Most recently, the eccentric conspiracy theorist Paul Begley predicted that, because of a rare planetary alignment, the end of days would occur on December 21, 2020. This presentation will examine prominent doomsday prophecies and conspiracies, focusing on religious and secular narratives to provide both historical and religious contexts. The discussion will progress from early conspiracy theories to more recent ones, examining the factors that lead to their proliferation and popularity.

Two Colourful Trickster Legends of Haida Gwaii: The Golden Spruce and The White Raven

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Two vibrant and vital visitor attractions central to the folklore of Port Clements, Haida

Gwaii are continuously cited in the current tourist guides for the area. Ironically, despite their current lure to the area, both the supernatural “Golden Spruce” and the legendary “White Raven” were downed within months of each other in 1997, one purposefully by an environmental protester, and the other by accidental high jinks with an electrical transformer. Both the three hundred-year old spruce and the white raven had a chance colour mutation that made them revered in the community and for the Haida. The Golden Spruce (K’iid K’iyass) was considered once to have been human and the white raven, was identified as an extraordinary trickster in this land of raven tales.

According to local belief, the Haida Gwaii archipelago of over 150 islands is where time began, and people first appear. Raven, the trickster, liberated humankind from a clamshell before creating continuous and alternating chaos and order for those he freed. According to the ancient tales, this took place on Graham Island, not far from where the recent white raven was born. Haida artist April White states that “White Raven travels through time to be present and swaggers down the dangerous divide, again with an eye to opportunity.” Raven, according to White, is a supernatural being that is the transformer-creator principally responsible for changing the world to its present form. It is through her painting of the white raven, entitled “Urban Legend,” that I became cognizant of Port Clements and its folkloric environment. The residents of Port Clements built a tourist trade from the narratives and presence of the luminous Sitka spruce and the white raven that is still very essential to the area decades later.

This paper will briefly examine the two Haida legends, their physical presence, and the impact they have on the local community and beyond and will include photos from my 2017 visit to the village.

<http://aprilwhite.com/art/v/giclee/urbanlegend.jpg.html>

“... No dad, it was not *Mein Kampf*! It was *Minecraft*!!!”

On a Digital *Quid Pro Quo* about a Generational Misunderstanding, or When a Hoax Becomes Viral in the Context of Fake News

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2019, December 24th. The French stand-up performer Yann Stotz published on his Instagram account what looks like a classic Christmas Eve moment. Taped via his smartphone, the video shows a happy family unwrapping some presents when the video maker gets suddenly shocked and stuck. “What the hell is that?!” he shouts when getting closer to his son. Still recording, he snatches from the hands of the eight-to-ten years-old boy a book that happens to be Adolf Hitler’s *Mein Kampf*. Quickly, he moves the camera toward his own father – the boy’s grandpa:

- Stotz: “Come on dad, what’s that?!”

- Grandpa: "He asked me, *Mein...*"
- Stotz: "... No dad! T'was not *Mein Kampf*! T'was *Minecraft*!! A videogame! For kids! It's not possible!"

Recorded as a hoax – already performed on stage – by a well-known professional humorist, the video that makes fun of generational misunderstandings (grandpa/grandson) and sounds-like words (*Mein Kampf*/*Minecraft*) quickly spread on the internet and turns out to be viral. Despite some factual elements that undoubtedly show that the book was actually not *Mein Kampf* – but a bad quality photocopy of the front cover pasted on another book – many people whether shocked or amused start to take the video for granted. Indeed, as the video gradually spread away from its original source and was relayed on the internet through social networks and websites, including some cultural news media and far-right organizations, more and more people were prone to believe it was authentic. Comments published on YouTube under the video also confirm that many people were fooled.

So say, this communication first aims to explore *why* and *how* so many people have been, for different reasons, scammed or duped: the emotive context of Christmas, a – too – fast glance at the video on a busy evening, a – too – quick sharing, some personal experience about present misunderstandings and/or generational *quid pro quos*, the liberalization of re-printing *Mein Kampf* in Europe, the emotional and symbolic load of Hitler face, the recent media coverage of anti-Semitic acts, digital nativity or weak literacy, political opportunism, etc.

Secondly this video happens to be a typical case to investigate the transgeneric and semantic shifts of the expression "fake news" since 2016: from its literal and original sense, i.e. true or genuine *fake news* made on purpose to mock mainstream media or political institutions (e.g.: *The Onion* or *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart*) to *false* information forged on purpose to mislead the public. Hence, in the case studied, whilst the author has never planned to fool the people and was clear the video was a hoax, many did not understand its humoristic trend and, after its funny/phony character was commonly acknowledged, claimed the video was *fake news*. It happens as if the narrative compass between the producer and the receivers, including mainstream media, has been break off because humor was no longer perceived *per se*. Facing the development of popular journalism that challenges their gate-keeping function, dominant media are more and more likely to immediately consider hoaxes, parody, mockery, or irony as disinformation, forgery, falsification, and *fake news* (Giry 2020).

The Origins of ISCLR: A Memoire

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Like all scholarly communities, the ISCLR has a history. I suggest that it may also have some origin myths. In the belief that a proper understanding of our history can contribute to our understanding of the phenomena we study, I am inviting legend scholars to consider our recent past. What I would argue is the “modern era” of contemporary legend scholarship dates from the publication of *The Vanishing Hitchhiker* by Jan Harold Brunvand in 1981 and the first seminar on *Perspectives on Contemporary Legend* held in Sheffield in 1982. My particular perspective on our history is coloured by the fact that, first, by profession I am a psychologist, secondly, I was already studying these stories in the 1960s and 1970s, and, thirdly, I was one of the small working party set up at the PCL meeting in 1987 to consider the founding of an international society. Amongst the aspects considered are the fact that it was hoped that the new society would include researchers other than the British and North American participants who predominated at the early PCL meetings. It will also be noted that the scholars involved were mainly, but not exclusively, folklorists. The international aspirations have certainly been at least partially achieved, witness the ISCLR’s conferences in various European cities, including now in Tarragona. It may be harder to demonstrate that dialogues about legends between folklorists and scholars in other disciplines have been enhanced.

“The Tragic Mistake” as Contemporary Legend?

Current Versions of Traditional Narrative in Oral, Popular and Elite Culture of Central and Eastern Europe

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The paper presents an overview of several contemporary versions of international narrative motif of “The Tragic Mistake” by oral, popular and elite culture with special emphasis on territory of Central and Eastern Europe. It builds on existing research conducted by folklorists, ethnologists and literary historians while trying to present new data as well as to critically interpret popularity of the motif both in historical and contemporary contexts (Krejčí, 1947–1948; Kosko, 1966; Brednich, 1977; Campion-Vincent, 1998). The motif, classified by folklorists as narrative motif N.321 *Son returning home after long absence unwittingly killed by parents* can be found in 24 language traditions of more than 20 countries, most prominently in Europe (Thompson 1957, p. 94). It can be briefly summarized as follows: *After many years spent abroad, a son returns home to his parents. They do not recognize him and think he is a rich stranger. Because of greed or poverty, they murder and rob him. Truth comes to light, and parents commit suicide.*

The popularity and constant returns of this archaic motif, especially in contemporary contexts, are somewhat puzzling. The narrative, in literally hundreds of its versions and

variants, permeates many oral, literary and popcultural genres, and represents, in a sense, an “eternal story”. It also shares a number of parallels with two other important narratives of European civilization, the Oedipus and Odysseus Myth. The paper will also offer two possible clusters of interpretations of this motif: *universalistic* ones (most specifically, *psychoanalytic*, *structuralist* and *semiotic* ones), and those which take account of its *historical and cultural specifics*.

The Phenomenon of Apparent Death in History, Literature and Folklore

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Storylines associated with apparent death are known all over the world. Hardly any other subject or motif of folklore can offer a more coloured bouquet in genre than apparent death, ranging from fairy tales and romantic legends and narratives to rumours, ballads, and jokes. The earlier texts of Estonian Folklore Archives date back to the late 1880s, but the vast majority of Estonian apparent death stories were collected in the second half of the 20th century. The historical origin of the stories of apparent death reaches to antiquity and probably also relies on some truthful occasions, but the formation and spread of folk tales on this subject fall into the Enlightenment period in Europe.

The paper focuses on the context of apparent death stories in 18th-19th century and in the first decades of 20th century Europe and Estonia. The emergence and developments of this topic relate to medical and religious practices, journalism and literature.

Behind the pandemic: Covid-dissidents in search of the truth and agency

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In Russia, Covid-dissident ideas are a significant form of response to the pandemic: about 38% of Russians believe that the danger from the virus is deliberately exaggerated in the interests of some elites (Zavadskaya & Sokolov 2020).

It can be assumed that such an interpretation of the pandemic is associated with a specific belief system that determines the way in which official messages about the virus and restrictive measures are perceived. To understand how this system works, I conducted 23 interviews with Covid-dissidents and monitored two thematic Russian-speaking groups on Facebook.

There are at least two types of Covid-dissidents. “Moderate” dissidents assume there is a hidden political rivalry and vested interests behind the pandemic, but these thoughts

do not take the form of conspiracy narrative. "Radical" dissidents believe the pandemic is the result of a global conspiracy that threatens the lives and freedoms of ordinary people. Why do they use this different model to explain what happens?

Both types of dissidents equally distrust officials and the mass media. However, the belief system of the radicals has some special elements absent among the moderates. Firstly, radical dissidents distrust not only authorities and journalists, but are also deeply skeptical about official medicine and science in general, making them favourable towards different forms of "stigmatized knowledge" (M. Barkun). Secondly, the world, in their vision, is steadily degrading, and this pessimistic view provides an apocalyptic interpretation of any social changes, including those associated with the pandemic. Thirdly, radical dissidents often feel their vulnerability and helplessness in front of some powerful forces.

Timothy Melley suggest that conspiracy theories articulate the individual's anxiety about the loss of his or her subjectivity and agency ("agency panic"), and at the same time propose "a defense of individualism and a rationale for resisting the horror of external control" (Melley 2008: 149). The conspiracy explanations of the pandemic act in the same way: they articulate feelings of being under control of powerful forces which are personified in the images of Bill Gates or "Big pharma" in conspiracy narratives. At the same time, practices of resistance to official regulations allow radical dissidents to compensate for their perceived lack of agency.

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On the typology of urban legends related to cultural entomology¹

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"And the rabbis say: "...even things in the world which seem to you unnecessary, such as flies, fleas and mosquitoes, they too are included in the creation of the world as it written..."

Talmud

"The Holy Blessed be He, makes everything his messenger, even a serpent, even a frog, and even a scorpion and even a mosquito..."

Talmud

This paper analyzes a motif/formula presenting the idea of insect/bird/small animal penetrating a person's orifice (i.e., nose/ear) and causing them harm/death. This motif is rooted in the archaic ideas associating insects/animals with chthonic characteristics

with uncanny and underworld.² However, unlike others, this particular formula is thriving and generates modern narratives: (urban) legends and rumors. It is also productive cross-linguistically in idioms³ denoting mental derangement. Stories based on this motif circulated as early as Talmud, which describes Titus's death of an insect flying into his nose, and gradually killing him by gnawing his brain for seven years (as a punishment for the Temple destruction). According to Hazan-Rokem, this is folkloric plot, which most probably circulated as rumors. Indeed, typologically/ structurally similar motifs are abundant in Thomson's Motif Index but under different rubrics (type of the animal, body part where the animal settles: AT 285B; B765.5).⁴

Contemporary variants are known as "bug-in-the-ear" horror story/urban legend, which is widespread and recurs often. It also emerges in literature (gothic, belief story, metaphorically).⁵ The paper discusses the possible psychological explanations for the persistence and recurrence of the studied motif/formula.

¹ This term is borrowed from Johnson J. Tarantula-Infested Cacti and Brain-Eating Bugs: Arthropods in Urban Legends. *The newsletter for the Central California Arachnid Society*, 1/3, 1995.

² Beelzebub /Lord of the flies.

³ i.e., French, "avoir une araignée au plafond"; Polish, "ma sowy w głowie"; English, "bees in the bonnet"; "bats in the belfry".

⁴ B784.0.1. Frog living in person's stomach rises into throat, croaks every spring; B784. 1. How animal gets into person's stomach/body; B784. 1.1. Person drinking from brook swallows animal egg (frog); B784. 1.2. Person swallows pebble on beach, snake grows in stomach; B784.1.9. Woman swallows snake egg, gives birth to snake; B784.2. Means of ridding person of animal in stomach; B784.2.2. Patient sits before tempting meal without eating, animal emerges; B784.2.3. Frog is enticed from patient's mouth by offering it a piece of cheese; B784.2.3.1. Spider coaxed from stomach by using fly as bait.

⁵ "Black Spider", J. Gotthelf; "Egotism: or the Bosom Serpent", N. Hawthorne; "The soldiers on the Nevsky prospect". S. Dovlatov.

The Nigerian Scam 2.0

How an Improved Online Scam Trick Made an Unsuspecting Dutch Man Over 20.000 Euros Poorer

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Tuesday July 10, 2018 I received a friend request on Facebook from someone called Robert Batterman, apparently an older London lawyer. I didn't know the man, but I often get such requests because people are interested in folktales and storytelling, for example. The question remains whether such people are always able to understand my Dutch messages. But I saw that Batterman was also a friend of two of my trusted Dutch Facebook friends at the time, so it seemed fine and I accepted the friend request.

Somewhat to my surprise I received a message via Messenger from this Batterman in Dutch:

ROBERT BATTERMAN

TUE 22:32

Hello, Theo Meder. I am a lawyer who represents the late Alain Meder. I have something important to discuss with you. Kindly write me on my private email or text me back...

One Dutch Facebook friend got a similar message, but now about “the late Alain Schaaap”. We both realized that this must be a Nigerian Scam. I decided to find out some more about this British lawyer and put a warning about this scam on the Internet the next day. Three weeks later I received an e-mail by a Dutch man who told me he saw my warning a little too late. He already lost a considerable amount of money and he was prepared to tell me what happened.

The Folk Fight Back: Anti-legends and Counter-memes in the Fight Against Poverty

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Poverty and welfare in the U.S. have not fared well in face-to-face narratives or online memes. Legends of welfare queens and memes of cheats and frauds dominate the vernacular tradition. Yet research has made it clear that not only can legends and memes challenge the status quo, they often do. So where are the stories and memes that stand up for the poor? This paper explores the memescape to consider where anti-legends and counter-memes are, how they function, how they are constructed, and why the folk tradition is so lopsided.

This study focuses on the online meme tradition, identifying the scope of pro-welfare, pro-poor memes and analyzing their form, function, themes, contexts, and aesthetics. In doing so, I consider the nature and utility of the anti-legend both as genre and rhetorical tool, and its relationship to counter-memes as a weapon of the folk in fighting against social and political injustice.

Results of a multi-pronged online analysis that resulted in dataset of 71 internet memes suggests one of the reasons the folk tradition is so lopsided lies in structures built into these forms and platforms. For those memes that do exist, research reveals how people use anti-legends and counter-memes to leverage humor, exaggeration, contrast, and claims of hypocrisy to undercut dominant legends.

This study offers insights not only into vernacular responses to anti-poor and anti-welfare lore, but to the nature, form, and characteristics of anti-legends in the memescape, with suggestions for the utility of the genre in counter-hegemonic discourse and more broadly for the study of folklore.

Greek Contemporary Legends on the Internet

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With this paper we aim to present the results of a doctoral research on the spread of Greek contemporary legends on the internet. We attended to find out how internet affected the folkloric genre, its morphology and function. These issues may have long been discussed by the international folklore community, but in Greek folkloristics they are entirely new. In fact, Greek folklore studies were mainly interested in traditional genres, as well as in rural life. The modern ways of life have only been recently employed by younger researchers.

This is the main reason why this research on contemporary legends was the first extensive study of the genre in Greek folkloristics. This is also the reason why it was the trigger for the first collection of contemporary Greek legends to be made, as well as the first attempt at classification. There was so much to be covered just to realize that the genre had been altered and changed. Nowadays contemporary legends on the internet are actually perceived as 'scary stories' and are included in creepypasta!

The proliferation of contemporary Greek legends on the Internet revealed the evolution of this genre in another context, and gave us the opportunity to gather material and create a catalogue.

So what are the most popular contemporary legends in Greece that emerge from this research? How can they get classified based on the space and time of the action described? What are the figures that symbolize or embody man's fears? What is, in short, the role and substance of the 'villain'?

Rumors During Unclear Situations

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When an organization is under pressure during a crisis, it is often about not knowing what to communicate to the public and the media. Unclear situations create confusion among citizens, media and decision makers. When unclear situations prevail, rumors have the ability to climb high up to the decision makers and sometimes become top news. In such situations, trust issues sometimes arise internally or between organizations and it's very hard to take the initiative and get control.

The purpose of this study is to investigate methods of how crisis communication should be conducted in unclear situations where there is a great demand for answers from the public, the media and other stakeholders. Emergencies and crises challenge the authorities' responsibility and duty to inform citizens.

The study should be able to provide answers about crisis communication tactics and strategies that can be used to manage and relate to rumors, without thinking that they can be eliminated forever. The purpose is to investigate selected cases such as an evacuation in the event of a forest fire, a murder of a child in an exposed suburban area, the spread of a disease and a terrorist act. The study will also investigate cases where media platforms in interaction with the public have made an impact on the authorities' crisis communication.

Experiencing the Supernatural in the World of Original Pokemon Series

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Pokémon as a Gameboy platform game dominated the world in 1996. The game also inspired many other products of popular culture such as comics books, movies or TV series. My presentation is focused on the Pokémon TV series, more precisely on its first version, which began broadcasting in 1997.

The world of Pokémon is setting in which a certain degree of supernaturalness has its place. After all, the Pokémon themselves are fantastic creatures for us. But if we break away from this thinking and look at Pokémon beings only as a specific part of the realistic world, we can still trace a link to old legends and mythology.

Pokémon are divided into several basic types, but for this work a pivotal is the type encompassing all ghost Pokémon. Ghost type Pokémon are not ghosts in the classical sense of the word, but it is a type covered by a certain veil of mystery. People often avoid these Pokemons because they are afraid of them. Ghost Pokémon usually appear in a mysterious intangible form, inhabit spooky places, do not like daylight and control various forms of psychic attacks including hypnosis.

In this presentation, I explore the thin line between the realistic and supernatural worlds that ghost Pokémon pose. This is demonstrated on the example of episode The Ghost of Maiden's Peak, which at the same time refers to the classic Japanese legend about young woman turned into stone while waiting for her loved man's return from war.

The Legend-Ritual Complex of Santa Claus

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For the most part, academic approaches to Santa Claus come from psychology, sociology, or cultural studies. These scholars, when thinking of genre, tend to classify Santa as a myth, tying him to ideology, capitalism, and consumption. Few studies have been

conducted by anthropologists or folkloristics. This paper will examine Santa Claus from a folkloristic perspective, using contemporary accounts of Santa performances, and theorizing three vital aspects of Santa culture—belief, ritual, and performance—as they pertain the belief of young children and the performance of adults who care for young children. Uniting these aspects is the concept of ostension, as introduced to the study of legend by Dégh and Vaszonyi and developed by Ellis, Koven, and Tolbert. This subject also provides an opportunity to revisit the connection between legend and game articulated by Janet Langlois. Children believe in Santa Claus not merely because adults and older children tell them that he's real; they believe because they see evidence of his activity and, quasi-ostensively, conclude that Santa is real based on both the evidence and on the tradition they have experienced. Children believe because adults and institutions (municipal, commercial, and cultural) work together, pseudo-ostensively, to produce that evidence. Because belief is the dominant factor, as perpetuated by adults and interrogated by children, Santa is thus most appropriately labeled a figure of legend. By understanding him as a legend, we shift focus from children—usually the subject of study when it comes to Santa culture—to adults: the primary performers of the legend who must adapt to children's developing psychologies and social needs. An ostensive framework for interpretation provides a means by which to account for these changes.

Rübezahl's Kin: Current Faces of Genii Locorum in Folklore and Folklorism

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The paper discusses development, origins and attributes of regional patron spirits in Czech folklore and their current uses by fiction writers, local communities and tourist industry. The earliest character of this type, Rübezahl (Krakonoš), is known from early modern period and has undergone many changes over centuries, becoming an influential archetype that helped to shape appearances of other similar characters, both folkloric and artificial. Such Rübezahl-like spirits are well documented to emerge since the 19th century, but their origins are different and while they form a distinguishable group of legendary entities in general, their universal characteristics have not yet been defined.

To achieve such a definition, it is necessary explore and discuss some main defining attributes of these characters. They are, for example, usually tied to one mountainous region, tend to act as representations of nature and guardians of its pristinity, are helpful in general and often follow an evolutionary trajectory from local variants of usual (sometimes even malevolent) legendary entities towards regional symbols, fairy tale characters in stories belonging to the domain of folklorism and even registered brand marks. However, while Rübezahl is the defining example, it is debatable whether some minor characters can be considered to belong in this group.

Some of the Rubezahl-like characters to be discussed include Fabián, Praděd and Lake Shepherd Gill, Pelíšek, almost forgotten Bohemian German characters Nippel/Tyllenberger or purely artificial entities like Rampušák or Muhu.

Creating a Monster: How Legends Like Goatman are Made

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Do stories of purported legendary creatures matter? Are folklorists right to embrace such community traditions? Or by doing so, are folklorists merely tolerating, perhaps even encouraging, local charlatans? And if folklorists do take legends of monsters and creatures seriously, what can they expect to learn about how the American landscape and natural phenomenon influence fears, anxieties, and community unease? Research thus far, from Bigfoot to the Jersey Devil, indicates these legends, be they honest reports or duplicitous hoaxes, provide valuable and nuanced insights into the American imagination.

How do quirky, local legends from small, rural towns spread across counties and eventually come to be known across states? While oral tradition is important, in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century, media provided a major mode of monster legend transmission from town to town. Folklorists such as Linda Dégh and Richard Dorson have acknowledged dynamism between legends and the mass media and a need to address news sources, as well as oral sources, in tracking the ebb and flow of legends. I hypothesize in this paper that viewing media as central to monster legend transmission does not diminish the importance or traditionality of a legend, but rather permits folklorists to engage local monsters fully as those monster interact with the implements of the modern world.

In conclusion, I argue folklorists should undertake more investigations of purported legendary monsters and creatures. These beings, often based on honest reports of encounters with natural phenomena, reveal the fears, anxieties, and cultural discontent of the community. The legends these creatures spawn bring those dark anxieties into the light, providing a suitable target for the discussion of community unease. Fully embracing the media's role in monster legend transmission, combined with oral sources, provides the most accurate understanding of the spread of monster legends.

Saint Corona and an oil cross: flows of vernacular narratives on COVID-19 among Russian Orthodox believers

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Anti-COVID measures in Russia in the first half of 2020 included certain limitations to performing of religious rituals and practices, including social distancing, demand to wear face masks, changes in the order of Communion, limitations to pilgrimage, putting monasteries on forced quarantine and finally, closing of churches for believers. These restrictions resulted in fierce online discussions between members of Russian Orthodox church - supporters of measures induced by governmental bodies and church administration, and “dissenters” who chose to stay loyal to vernacular tradition rather than to the institutional authorities and who relied rather on miraculous if not magic healing and protecting qualities of objects and practices related to church life, from the space of churches and sound of church bells to vernacular apotropaic practices. Both sides appealed to same Christian values but (especially the latter) used a vast variety of vernacular genres to support themselves including rumours, conspiracy theories, religious legends, foaf evidences, and many more. In this presentation I’ll discuss the discursive strategies of Orthodox COVID dissenters to investigate the ways in which different types of believers (from clergy to practicing parishioners to nominal Christians) legitimized their point of view, constructed their own “militant church” and sought sense of safety. Contemporary Russian Orthodox believers are very diverse; my key point will be to demonstrate how these strategies fluctuate among communities and act as bridges (or borders) between them in times of “corona” crisis.

Confronting Plandemic: From Book Publicity Stunt To Public Health Nightmare

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In May 2020 a slickly produced, 26-minute video titled Plandemic was released on YouTube by a “father/filmmaker”[sic] named Mikki Willis. It featured a lengthy interview with virologist Judy Mikovits, who offered scattershot conspiracies about the “truth” behind the Covid-19 pandemic, prefaced by claims of having been framed for a crime and rumors of government coverups going back decades involving Dr. Anthony Fauci. The video was widely shared, and soon removed by social media platforms including Facebook and YouTube because it contained dangerous anti-vaccination misinformation. This in turn reinforced the conviction among the conspiracy-minded that a coverup was indeed afoot, despite debunkings by mainstream news media. Willis and Mikovits refused to address their critics, and it became clear that the viral video was in fact a wildly successful publicity stunt for Mikovits’s then-new book *Plague of Corruption: Restoring Faith in the Promise of Science*, which soon topped best-seller lists and whose foreword was written by prominent anti-vaccination activist Robert F. Kennedy Jr. The video and its conspiracies found fertile ground in a social media milieu both fearful of the virus and distrustful of the government. This presentation traces the rise and fall of a wildly successful (and dangerous) anti-vaccination campaign through folkloric and public health lenses, and examines how vaccination fears and rumors were

commodified in the context of the current pandemic.

Covid Customs in Britain 2020-2021

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The Covid-19 crisis of 2020-2021 has resulted in numerous communal and individual responses to the impact of coronavirus and the resulting lockdown across the U.K. that have been widely shared and often copied in both the physical and online worlds. Many of these activities developed spontaneously as new customs and rituals, from the communal clapping on Thursday evenings, to the display of rainbow drawings and teddy bears in front windows and the appearance of scarecrows in gardens and beside roads. Simultaneously, online communities have circulated Covid-19 related memes including cartoons, narratives, rumours, conspiracy theories and contemporary legends. The lockdowns and restrictions resulting from this crisis have also forced the cancellation of many of the traditional calendar customs and communal events still observed across the U.K. often for the first time in a generation or more. Others have moved online, been marked by small scale private observances or found some other form of communal expression. As Rafael Behr noted this is not a superficial aspect of the Covid-19 crisis, as 'societies are shaped by custom and ritual as much as they are held together by legislation' (The Guardian 23 April 2020). Their cultural significance was also recognised by HM The Queen in her March 2020 broadcast when she referred to the need for the country to pull together and evoked a sense of national identity. She suggested that new traditions and customs are an expression of 'our national spirit' that will help to define the country's future. This paper will review a selection of examples of online and physical responses to the Covid-19 lockdown as contemporary customs and ritual and consider the different ways in which traditional customs adapted to the limitations imposed by central government.

Contemporary Folklore, Contemporary Media

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British Secretary of State for Health and Social Care Matt Hancock revealed in Feb 2021 that his strategy for the UK's coronavirus vaccination programme was partly shaped by the Hollywood film *Contagion* (2011). It is interesting, therefore, to examine how our present circumstances and technology are influencing not only our rituals, but how they are represented and communicated back to us in film and television. Video calls with their own rituals (muting oneself when not speaking or waving goodbye to fellow

participants) have become newly embedded into everyday life: folklorist Jeff Tolbert states that “normal stuff you do in your daily life, structured by tradition but subject to change, can be seen as folklore” (2020). Prolific memes about the use of Zoom and online video-conferencing liken the practice to a séance-like ritual in itself, with participants of sessions often faced with black screens, prompting them to ask “Is anybody there?” The 2020 British horror film *Host* dealt with this idea head-on, in which a group of young people during lockdown meet in a Zoom chat to hold a séance online. Although framed around a traditional ghost narrative, the background presence of coronavirus, lockdown isolation, and the now-familiar format of Zoom is what bring the unsettling eeriness to *Host*. Another traditional ritual, a funeral service, is examined in an episode of the television series *Social Distance* (2020). ‘A Celebration of the Human Life Cycle’ presents a tragi-comic look at the combination of new rituals with old, as a family hold a memorial service online. It is an important function of folklore scholars to observe and reflect not only upon why we do things and how we do them, but also our media usage in relation to folklore and tradition, and how this, in turn, shapes the narratives, practices and rituals that surround our lives.

Anti-Semitism in Contemporary Russian Legendry

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The Russian legend tradition has long been characterized by anti-Jewish narratives. From the infamous blood libel legend to (largely fallacious) village stories about religious practices of Jewish residents, these belief narratives reveal the fraught history of Jews within the Russian polity. Most of these stories went unrecorded (or at least unpublished) during the socialist era. One might conclude that this lacuna was the result of the Soviet policy of internationalism, which professed solidarity and unity among the over 100 ethnicities in the country. However, Jews underwent persecution throughout the Soviet era (as Mondry 2009 has shown), so that it is likely the more genuine reason was the religious content of the material. The fall of the USSR promised an end to the official policy that targeted the Jewish population and an equal playing field for the Jewish population (a belief that held true through the Yeltsin years for the most part). However, in Putin’s Russia in the 2000s, belief narratives that reveal a distinct shift toward the traditional anti-Semitic views have flourished (as Mondry and Olga Belova (2004, 2005) have documented). Of particular note is the role of the Russian Orthodox Church in furthering this process with its investigation (begun in 2017) to uncover the Jewish conspiracy to murder Tsar Nicholas II and his family. This paper will examine the socio-cultural purpose of contemporary belief narratives about Jews in Russia today.

Memes and Magic Marker: A Sharpie Complex for Trumpian Times

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President Donald Trump is well-known for regularly making assertions that fly in the face of empirical reality, while never admitting that he is wrong. In September 2019, he accidentally tweeted that Alabama was in the path of Hurricane Dorian. Rather than concede an honest mistake, he altered an official weather map with a clumsily-drawn loop to include that state. His use of the Sharpie pen to bolster his claim that he was correct all along has provided a visual referent, a symbolic and iconic distillation of his outrageous tendencies.

As is common with memes, a tradition was born within hours (McNeill). Social media users created and shared altered photos, most showing things that Trump has claimed exist although they do not (a “huge” crowd at his inauguration consisting of child-like stick figures) or eliminating things he has denied (x-ing out a person he claims he never met in a photo showing that person standing next to Trump). All rely on the apparent use of the thick black lines of a Sharpie to reference both the original weather map alteration and Trump’s characteristic use of a Sharpie to sign documents as part of what he intends as a bold, hypermasculine style. This paper seeks to analyze this complex of memes in terms of both the dynamics of meme generation and the genre-related implications for meme scholarship.

Most memes repeat a single image with changing texts, while the Sharpie memes apply scribbled black lines to a new image with each version. In almost every case, the meme depicts an obvious, childish attempt to alter reality to be consonant with an untruth. New memes have continued to appear in response to new Trump lies or exaggerations for almost five months.

In this paper, we will examine the ways in which the original use of the Sharpie by Trump provided an ur-form from which new iterations could be continuously generated. The memes assume the knowledge that it was Trump himself who did this first; thus, it is his foibles that are being magnified. These are not simply anti-Trump memes, or statements; they are using the logic of parody, an almost carnivalesque humor that brings the high low by exposing their feet of clay (Bakhtin).

Memes function, as does much online folklore, in ways that exhibit both oral and literate aspects. Like conversational genres such as legend, they enable the “communal exploration of social boundaries” (Ellis), while creating that community among those who recognize the reference and so “get” the meme. They share characteristics with oral jokes, but also with mass-media forms such as political cartoons. The term “meme” is an emic one, developed concomitantly with the rise of digital lore. As such, memes need to be taken on their own terms. But as with many emergent genres, they exhibit

and recombine qualities of already-existing genres in ways that work best in a new medium and communicative context.

Amabie to the rescue, how a 174 year old monster came to protect against Covid-19

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In 1846 a yōkai (妖怪), a female mermaid monster of a sort, appeared to and spoke to an inspecting official in southern Japan. According to the legend she not only foresaw great prosperity for the community but also offered up a magical protective recourse should disease hit (which at the time was cholera).

The idea of this yōkai, whose name is Amabie (アマビエ), found a very fertile ground in March 2020 as Covid-19 reared its ugly head all over the world. What is of particular interest however is how the legend, and the magical power imbued by those who drew or obtained her image, gained not only general popularity but was quickly incorporated into official scripts such as that of the Ministry of Health, on posters which were circulated all through Japan, as well as adopted by official religious establishments and given or sold as official talismans on their behalf.

This paper will seek to explain the pre-existing elements in Japanese society that allow for such an immediate yet farfetched combination, especially the religious synchronicity which so defines the Japanese religious attitude. How the legend changed and adapted to a different society and its development both online as well as in physical form. The connection between a supernatural monster and magico religious talismans may seem tenuous to most, however when presented in context, in Japanese culture the combination makes perfect sense.

The Girl Who Hid: Campus Rumors and Legends of the Spring of 2020

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As I learned while researching my book *Haunted Halls* (2007), health, hope for success, and awareness of risk are central issues for college students. Rumors and legends thrive on campuses most of the time, but they run wild when a crisis happens. Early in the spring semester of 2020 my colleagues, students, and I heard that a strange new virus was spreading in China, and on March 20 all of our classes went online. As I continued to talk with my students through Zoom and checked our university's Reddit site, I found a number of intriguing rumors and legends.

As Andrea Kitta explains in *The Kiss of Death: Contagion, Contamination, and Folklore*

(2019), people who are in the midst of an epidemic want to identify “patient zero,” the original patient in a geographical area who infects others (26). The earliest rumors about students getting infected at my university concerned members of fraternities who had participated in parties or initiations. Later, students shared legends about female students who hid their health status because they were scared of being identified. In one legend, as in the “Vanishing Hitchhiker” legend complex, an infected female student appears and disappears like a ghost. In another legend, a female student distributes packages without telling the recipients that she may be spreading contagion. The fact that both of these characters are female suggests the possibility of gender typing, which should be considered as this troubling pandemic goes on.

Politically Irrelevant or Politically Pertinent? How the 2016 U.S. Presidential Election Outcome Was Driven by Narratives of Race and Religion

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In a press release that was widely circulated via email following Barack Obama’s Democratic convention nominating speech for John Kerry, attorney Andy Martin alleged that Obama had misrepresented his religion and was a secret Muslim. These and other rumors and legends about Obama’s religious affiliation dogged him throughout his two presidential campaigns and two terms in office. They received so much traction that the Pew Research Center began to regularly poll on them in 2008. Five months before Obama’s second election to the presidency, Pew administered its last poll on the topic. However, the beliefs still persisted. Perhaps assuming that Obama’s re-election rendered the beliefs politically irrelevant, Pew ceased its polling.

Using polling data and two widely-circulated televised encounters between Republican presidential candidates and constituents reciting unfounded rumors about Barack Obama, this paper will make the case that understanding the public’s devotion to these rumors served as a powerful signal about the outcome of the 2016 presidential election.

Notre Dame is Burning. And, Rumors and Conspiracy Theories are Blazing

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April 2019, 15th, the mythic Notre-Dame-de-Paris cathedral burned in a spectacular and unexpected fire so that many people didn’t believe it was real. Therefore, they come to advance different explanations to understand how this monument would have been damaged despite the purported safety measures taken by French authorities.

Without waiting the results of the official enquiry, some people, laymen as well as conspiracy theories entrepreneurs, offer diverse explanations rooted in three sources of inspiration:

1. The French political context of this moment: the mobilization of the *Gilets jaunes* (Yellow jackets), an unstructured and spontaneous social movement appeared in October 2018 that originally protested against the increase of fuel price. Subsequently, protesters demonstrate all Saturdays and block off French roundabouts with different claims. For those who believe Notre-Dame fire was not an accident, it was a means for the French President to divert the French People attention from the government's controversial decisions and gain popularity.
2. Religious beliefs, esotericism and superstitions: some people saw this event as either a God or a Devil message, an apocalyptic announce, or the fulfilment of a prediction of well-known seers like Nostradamus. They argue that some details are clear manifestations of supra-natural agency: the fire happened during the Holy Week of Christian Easter, the miraculous preservation of some great value religious objects; coincidences with fictions, and scriptures like-prophecies, etc.
3. The rumours and conspiracy theories already mobilized or created for previous unexpected and traumatic international events such as the 9/11 attacks or Daesh bombing attacks. In this case, the "real" causes of the fire were hidden to the public by the authorities to avoid panics or protect the attack patrons.

While diverging but sometimes mixed, they all acknowledge the blaze was not an accident. It was caused on purpose.

In this paper, I will present these different interpretations of this event to show that there is nothing new, but simply the recycling of well-known rumoral scenarii.

To Behave Like a Poet: Actual Patterns in Artistic and Non-Artistic Communities of Moscow

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The biographical narratives about poets are formulaic. One can trace certain patterns in the image: poet with sensitive soul (sentimental model), unappreciated genius (romantic model), poet-rowdy ("cursed" poets-symbolists), official poet, who teaches people (classical poet), poet-activist (newest tendency) and some variants of them (including a Soviet "poet-janitor" who is in opposition to official literature). These patterns are realized in narratives, rumors, anecdotes, debates, etc. Certain patterns are

popular in different époque or community (sometimes being unfamiliar to others). But in almost all cases there is belief that poet differs from others in numerous ways. For example, medics give remarks that being nervous or even having dysplasia is typical for poets. Sometimes such beliefs have the echo of “ritual specialist” reputation. If poetry is mediation with the other world a poet should be a little bit nonhuman. Usually sentimental and romantic views are typical for an amateur-reader. In the professional community, on the contrary, the world “poet” itself and idealistic stereotypes serve as a target for irony, although an extravagant behavior is a possible way of socialization and promotion of one’s texts.

The paper explores what models are actual for poets and readers nowadays, what motives and plots form the image of a poet. The material includes about 40 interviews with modern poets (the members of the “guild” who have publications in the most authoritative journals), their listeners, naïve poets and readers, who have no communication with “living” poets. Fieldwork includes also observation in the literary events, such as poetic readings and workshops.

Perspectives on Contemporary Legend

International Society for Contemporary Legend Research

38th International Conference

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