

# Methods in Folk-Narrative Research

## Their Status and Future

The study of folk-narratives is a central part of folkloristics, which deals with socially controlled and mainly orally transmitted forms of cultural tradition and their context. Questions posed by folklorists concern the history, origin and diffusion, change and development, genre, structure, content, style, performance, use, function, and meaning of folklore products. During the post-war decades the emphasis has switched from text-oriented to context-oriented approaches. Present-day folklorists are more interested than their colleagues were in the past in the ecological conditions and socio-economic structures which frame and give meaning to folkloric acts of verbal communication and other behavior connected with them. The demand for systemic and holistic thinking has brought about intensive empirical studies on individuals and small groups, authentic performances of tradition, the environmental adaptation of tradition and bodies of tradition actually in use in living communities. The rise (and decline) of modern sociology and the only success-story in the humanities in the recent past, modern linguistic theories, have both left their imprint on folklore methodology. Semiotic and communication studies are in vogue and shape the terminology. Certain trends in cultural anthropology and socio-linguistics have inspired some folklorists. Psychological and, to a lesser extent, psychoanalytical explanations are also alive. Studies on personality, life-history, and folklore repertoires of particular informants thrive, alongside studies on recurrent cultural symbols. Vivid interest in myth, world-view, supranormal experiences and religious genres has made comparative religion and phenomenology of religion an important neighbouring discipline for folklorists.

Much of this newer methodology is only emerging. And much of the old pre-war methodology still persists, sometimes refashioned, and produces concrete results. Any statement on the status of folklore methods will thus have to concern itself with past, present, and future, much of the present accomplishments being the result of methods which were developed in the past, and many present theories still having to show their workability. To discuss trends in methodology therefore becomes an exercise in history and futurology.

The relative importance of particular methods to folk-narrative research and to folkloristics in general varies to some extent, but that does not constitute a problem from the point of view of this presentation. Methodological developments, whatever branch of folkloristics they have occurred in, have usually also been felt in the study of folk-narratives, and vice versa. Concentration on folk-narrative may, however, help to sharpen the profile of methodological development.

## THE EVERGREEN HISTORICAL-GEOGRAPHICAL METHOD

In the introduction to a recent American survey on modern folklore theory, William R. Bascom recognizes two major problems "which have concerned earlier scholars and which are still important today". And he continues: "The first question is, how are we to explain the similar tales that are found in different societies, sometimes separated by great distances? Some of the answers that have been proposed are suggested by the following questions. Are these similar tales to be explained in terms of extreme antiquity; that is, did they spread with man from the cradle of mankind? Are they to be explained in terms of the psychological unity of mankind, or the principle of limited possibilities, or in terms of historical accident? Are they to be explained by diffusion or borrowing, or by migration, or by independent invention, perhaps inspired by common sources in nature?"<sup>1</sup>

This is a familiar bundle of questions, not only for folklorists but also for ethnologists and anthropologists. The answer given by the oldest folklore method worthy of the designation was quite clear: observable affinities are the result of historical connections between, and the diffusion of, tales, or more precisely, between the variants of a migrating tale. The method originated in Finland during the latter half of the 19th century through the works of Julius and Kaarle Krohn, father and son, and has been called the "historical-geographical" or "Finnish" method ever since. Parallel development or convergence, which would explain the occurrence of similarities on the basis of factors other than genetic interdependency, was not taken into consideration: each folktale had been invented only once. With this method, a scholar should be able to pinpoint the place, time and language of origin for each folklore product. By way of reconstruction it should be possible to delineate the archetype, *Urform*, basic form or original form of the tale. The network of variants, when compared and analysed carefully, could open up the lines of diachronic heritage and geographical diffusion of the folktale in question. Several criteria of primariness were to be used to sort out the primary episodes, motifs, traits, elements, etc. from the secondary ones. General knowledge of history, culture, and migration of population had to be utilized to avoid the contradiction of established facts and to complement the information derived from the comparison of variants. The final aim of the study was usually a monograph which outlined the origin, diffusion and the emergence of local redactions of the narrative.<sup>2</sup>

1 William R. Bascom, ed., *Frontiers of Folklore* (Washington D.C., 1977), p. 2.

2 Kaarle Krohn, *Die folkloristische Arbeitsmethode* (Oslo, 1926). Walter Anderson, "Geographisch-historische Methode", in *Handwörterbuch des deutschen Märchens* II, ed. Lutz Mackensen, (Berlin und Leipzig, 1934-40), pp. 508-522.

Along these lines folkloristic monographs are still being written today. The publication of "Folklore Methodology", the English translation of Kaarle Krohn's "Die folkloristische Arbeitsmethode" (1926), took place in 1971, and is another sign of the continuous importance attributed to the method.<sup>3</sup> In spite of all the outspoken criticism, there seems to be a silent agreement among folklorists that under certain premises the principles of the historical-geographical method are applicable. But the limitations of the method are seen more clearly now than during its heyday. Firstly, it works best – if it works at all – with fixed and complex forms of folklore such as long folktales, ballads with metre and stanza structures, formulaic riddles and proverbs, i.e. forms as complex and stereotyped as possible, to give the assumption of monogenesis some plausibility. Secondly, the archetype or basic form is at best a relative thing, little more than a handful of hypotheses as to the relative primariness of some traits.<sup>4</sup> Kaarle Krohn's dream of the well-balanced, poetically perfect wording of the *Urform* as the most legitimate target of all folkloristic research has been abandoned long ago. Thirdly, the idea of wave-like diffusion does not account for the observable diffusion of the material.<sup>5</sup>

There are other and more fundamental doubts, however, which cannot be eliminated simply by improving the method. A folktale is handled as a particular, unique creation on one hand, and as a carrier of a not-so-unique theme and as a typical representative of one or more folklore genres on the other. The fact that themes cross genre boundaries fairly easily, and that genres have specific rules of production and different communicative functions, leads fairly often to the situation where the scholar tracing a tale in fact transcends systems of genres and genre-specific communication without realizing that he is actually following not a tale but a theme, which may carry very different messages. The question arises whether the historical-geographical hunter is really chasing the same hare all the time. Many a writer of a folkloristic monograph has had considerable difficulty in drawing the line between the tale or ballad proper and other similar tales or ballads to be used only as material for comparison. And even after certain items have been accepted as variants of a particular folktale, there may be difficulties in placing them within one consistent genealogy. All this suggests that the similarities and dissimilarities between variants may not have originated in the way assumed in the historical-geographical method; the idea that all folklore is produced in the same manner, and subordinated to the same kind of change when used and transmitted, may be all too simplistic. If this doubt is legiti-

3 Kaarle Krohn, *Folklore Methodology* (Austin, 1971).

4 See e.g. Matti Kuusi, "Virolais-suomalainen Maailmansyntyrä", *Kalevalaseuran Vuosikirja* 56 (Helsinki, 1956), p. 80 and the reference in Alan Dundes, ed., *The Study of Folklore* (Englewood Cliffs, 1965), pp. 414-416.

5 C.W. von Sydow, *Selected Papers on Folklore* (Copenhagen, 1948), pp. 11-43.

mate, rules of production and forms of adaptation of different genres should be given at least as much attention as the *Urform*. Perhaps this could be the way out of that contradiction inherent in the historical-geographical method which manifests itself in the simultaneous adherence to the monogenetic origin of the tale and to the polygenetic origin of its theme.<sup>6</sup>

### THE DILEMMA OF COMPARISON AND THE PARADIGMS OF DEVELOPMENT

The art of folkloristics has always been based on comparison. Modest motifs and local themes of narratives acquire new splendor when their parallels in other, sometimes ancient cultures are disclosed. Many tales and numerous motifs which were found in the oral tradition of an European country have been traced back to ancient Greece, Egypt, or the cultures of the Middle East. Why? Not necessarily because those literatures showed the closest resemblance to the tales and motifs studied, but because this was the most prestigious order of inheritance in what we call European culture. Actually, this was a way of saving nations which had less historical grandeur than some others, simply by showing that their oral tradition belonged to an original and common European heritage. Furthermore, it was a way of showing that folklore was not necessarily backward and trivial, a kind of antipode of civilization.

Instead, folklore was a natural resource, a storage of wellkept and valuable documents of the past. The adherence to the culture-historical lineage was so strict, that the concept of fairytale or *Märchen* was applied by some folklorists only to the Indo-European fairytales.<sup>7</sup> The question whether other linguistic groups and other parts of the world also possessed fairytales was left open and has been debated ever since.<sup>8</sup> Today folklorists are adopting more anthropological attitudes and some Eurocentric categories are being substituted by universal ones.

Folkloristics has always been broadly comparative, in the past even more so than in the present. If we leave aside the bankruptcy of unchecked comparativism in the manner of Frazer and others, there still remain some problems in the methodology of comparison. In the above I referred to the single-tale quest of the historical-geographical approach, where the unit of compa-

6 Lauri Honko, "A Hundred Years of Finnish Folklore Research: A Reappraisal", *Folklore* 90; 1979 ii (in print).

7 E.g. Stith Thompson, *The Folktale* (New York, 1946), p. 22 et passim.

8 William R. Bascom, "The Forms of Folklore: Prose Narratives", *Journal of American Folklore* 78 (1965).

parison may transcend from tale to theme. Single motifs can also be chased across seas and continents: when all the parallels to particular motifs and elements in a given narrative are assembled for comparison, the analysis may acquire impressive dimensions in time and space. The atomistic nature of such comparison does not, however, appeal to present-day folklorists. They seem to doubt the fruitfulness of single-item comparisons in general. They want to know more about the context, e.g. the body of knowledge or the complex of behavior or the institution of which the item is a part. They may ask questions about the genre affiliation of the item. In other words, modern folkloristics is becoming systems-oriented. As a practical result of this, comparisons remain but they tend to focus on broader bodies of traditional knowledge in limited geographical areas and less extensive historical periods. In the future, probably less monographs will be written on single narratives than on whole genres or interactions of genres within defineable social and historical settings.

Most comparisons imply statements on change and development of folk-narratives. These statements are not as directly the results of meticulous analyses as they seem to be, for behind them we also find broader personal theories and preferences concerning the character of folklore development. At this point it may be useful to differentiate between the reverse paradigms of evolution and devolution. In the paradigm of evolution a folklorist tends to see narratives as constantly developing, becoming more complex, branching out, attaining new elements and characteristics, growing from modest beginnings to splendor and perfection. In the paradigm of devolution the narratives are at their best and closest to perfection in the beginning, just when they have been created, and the development is generally one whereby the narratives may break to pieces, lose their beauty and decline. These paradigms help the scholar, when the evidence is scanty or problematic, to bridge a gap, and they play their invisible role in the systematization of research material.

It is not feasible to say that any particular one of these paradigms is becoming more popular in modern folkloristics. It could be argued that the paradigm of devolution made the quest for the archetype so well worth the trouble. But then again, the founder of the historical-geographical method, Julius Krohn, was an evolutionist, whereas his son Kaarle became a devolutionist. More than anything else these paradigms belong to the realm of personal theory: it is a choice that a scholar makes intuitively, many times, as he sketches a line of development. Regardless of the permanency or coherence of the choice, it should be recognized by the critical reader, because a dominating paradigm powerfully structures the results of a study.

### GENRE-SYSTEMS — IDEAL OR REAL?

Genre analysis is an identity-bearer of folkloristics. Regardless of their theoretical, and sometimes opposed positions, most folklorists utilize the concept of genre. As a dominant method, genre analysis may be used for purposes of taxonomy and classification, term analysis, cross-cultural comparison of genre-systems, analyses on genre interaction, etc.<sup>9</sup> Perhaps more often the method is used in combination with some other method, e.g. communication theory, frequency analysis, function analysis, and the like. Generally it acts as a check on the arbitrary use of narrative materials.

Much of the dynamism in recent writing on genre theory may be derived from a basic opposition between ideal and real genres. Are genres only categories upon which scholars have agreed, or do they also exist and operate in the reality of informants and tradition communities? Ideal and real genres should not be conceived as more or less alternative concepts, as Dan Ben-Amos seems to do.<sup>10</sup> On the contrary, the dialectics of genre theory rest on the insight that ideal and real genres are in continuous interaction in the making of theory. Bronislaw Malinowski was one of the first to try to delineate a real system of narrative genres in the Trobriand Islands, but in fact he was forced to crossbreed native and scholarly concepts.<sup>11</sup> Similarly, folklore scholars, teachers, archivists etc. do not only utilize a set of ideal-typical genre definitions. They also develop and adjust that set, on the basis of new empirical findings. There is a constant flow of information from particular, empirical and real genres toward general systems of genres as defined by folklorists. Whether his point of departure is the grassroots of native concepts or the heights of abstract, general systems, the scholar will sooner or later be compelled to build bridges between the two.

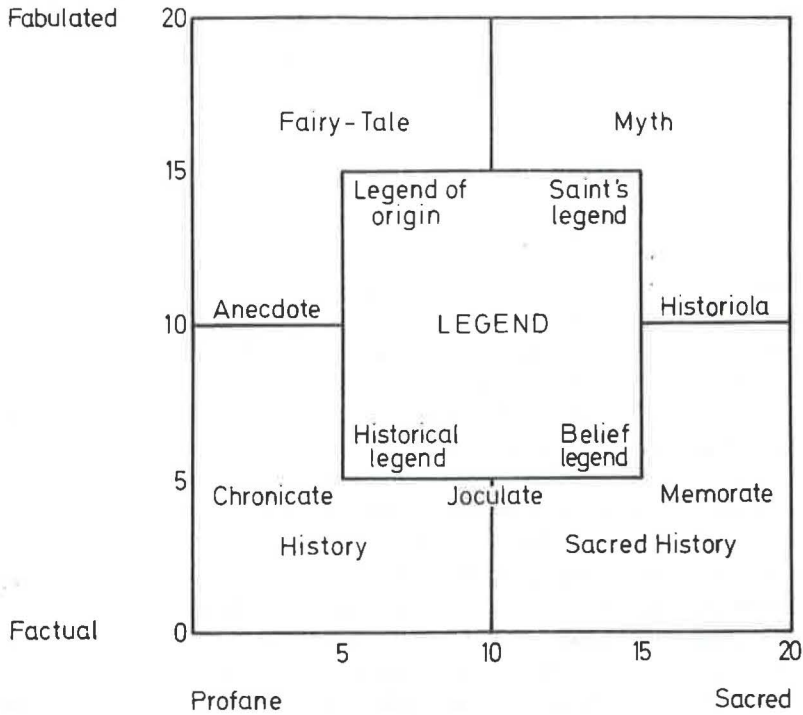
Most of our genre terms, such as fairy-tale, legend, myth, or anecdote, are very general or inaccurate from the viewpoint of a particular tradition community. Pure genres seem to be rare. The definitions of genres which are thought of as more or less universal emphasize certain characteristics or criteria which seem to be able to differentiate one genre from others, but this oppositional web of discriminating characteristics will never represent a full description of existing, real genres. Because our general genre concepts tend to over-emphasize certain typical qualities and omit others, I have resorted to the concept of ideal-type, which, according to Max Weber, is based on

9 Lauri Honko, "Genre Analysis in Folkloristics and Comparative Religion", *Temenos* 3 (1968), pp. 48-66. Juha Pentikäinen and Tuula Juurikka, eds., *Folk Narrative Research*, Studia Fennica 20 (Pieksämäki, 1976), pp. 13-74. Dan Ben-Amos, ed., *Folklore Genres* (Austin and London, 1976).

10 Ben-Amos, op. cit., pp. xv-xx.

11 Lauri Honko, *Genre Analysis* . . . . ., pp. 57-59 and "Der Mythos in Religionswissenschaft", *Temenos* 6 (1970), pp. 45-52.

reality but is not a reflection of it.<sup>12</sup> Let me illustrate this by presenting one possible paradigm of the ideal-typical narrative genres and their mutual relations:



This diagram is a further development of the scheme presented by C. Scott Littleton.<sup>13</sup> Two axes, “factual – fabulous” and “profane – sacred”, were chosen to measure the relative placement of narrative genres in terms of the degree of fabulation and sacredness usually attributed to them. Other variables could be chosen, and the map would have to be modified according to them. The present scheme differentiates fairly well between non-religious narratives and religious ones (i.e. narratives referring to supranormal beings and events). It also shows the distance of a narrative from the level of everyday realities dominated by present-day history, sacred and profane. Thus chronicates relate factual experiences people have had; if the topic of the report is not only historical but also humorous, we label it joculate; and if the topic is supranormal, we are dealing with a memorate. The central category, of legend, includes factual and profane historical legends, factual and sacred

<sup>12</sup> Honko, *Genre Analysis . . . . .*, p. 61. Cf. Max Weber, *The Methodology of Social Sciences* (Glen-coe, 1946), p. 89 et passim.  
<sup>13</sup> C. Scott Littleton, “A Two-Dimensional Scheme for the Classification of Narratives”, *Journal of American Folklore* 78 (1965), p. 26.

belief legends, fabulated and profane legends of origin, and fabulated and sacred saints legends. But, as we can see, these characteristics are not absolute, precisely because legends represent a transitional field between everyday life and the realms of fairy-tale and myth. More genres could be added to the scheme: as an example, I have placed within it anecdotes (i.e. humorous tales and jokes) and historiolas (mythical narratives used in charms, prayers etc.).

The one-sidedness of an ideal-type finds its justification in analytical instrumentality. Ideal-typical genre concepts provide us with a common language of forms which should help us to see existing forms and communicate about them. This is more important than the disturbing observation that the genre system of a given culture does not fit neatly into our terminology. The narrative genres of the general system will always be culturally homeless or supracultural. The use of Weber's concept of ideal-type in this context does not transform all genres into instrumentalities; instead, it helps us to understand why, in the mass of narratives, so few items fully correspond to our genre definitions and so many represent incomplete or mixed forms.

The opposition "ideal vs. real" is not identical with, but runs parallel to such pairs of concepts as "universal vs. particular", "etic vs. emic", "nomothetic vs. idiographic" and "scholarly fabricated vs. native" classification. The latest developments in genre theory have tended to stress the latter components of these pairs: it is real, existing genres in particular societies, and emic, native systems of genre concepts, that are at the focus of interest. The study of these requires good fieldwork and theoretical imagination.

There is, moreover, a diachronic and developmental dimension in genre analysis. The same content may appear in one period as memorate or chronicate, in another as legend, and in a third period as myth; or conversely, a myth may give rise to a new memorate or legend tradition. Instead of just creating better taxonomies, etic or emic, future genre research, be it historical or empirical, will have to engage itself in the study of the development of genres and genre systems. An urgent task is to study this in relation to societal development. The life span of a genre is limited in two ways: historically speaking, a genre may die or disappear altogether; or it may become inadequate or obsolete in one social group, but continue to exist in another (in the same or another function). The cause is usually not to be found in the genre itself, but in changes in the socio-economic structures around it. The degeneration and decline of a genre is normally a symptom of cultural and social change, which has numerous manifestations within and outside folklore. In our time, demographic changes in rural populations and the mechanization of agriculture, along with the expansion of mass-media, have be-

reft many a traditional genre of the social conditions for its existence. Folktales and some forms of legends are on the verge of dying out in many places in Europe, recent reports tell us. An upsurge of "short, personal narratives" (memorates, chronicates, jocolates, etc.) is discernible and folklore archives are flooded with ethnohistorical memoirs and other materials previously regarded as non-traditional. A clear profile of this development is still to be drawn. A statement on the existence or lack of certain genres will not be enough. We want to know about the stratification and density of genres in society as well as of the cultural centrality or marginality of a given genre.

### STRUCTURAL ANALYSIS AND THE PROBLEM OF MESSAGE

The story of structuralism has been told so many times that I may be brief on it. From the viewpoint of folk-narrative research, the fact that one of the Russian formalists of the 1920s was a folklorist seems to be of paramount importance. This man, Vladimir Propp, published his most important works, *Morphology of the Folktale*, and an article on Transformations of the Folktale, in 1928, eighteen years before the publication of his doctoral dissertation (*Historical Roots of the Folktale*, 1946).<sup>14</sup> Thirty years later, 1958, an English translation of the *Morphology* appeared and generated a boom of folkloristic structuralism in the United States. Simultaneously linguistic and anthropological structuralism, with Claude Lévi-Strauss as one of the spearheads of the latter, was quickly gaining ground. During the 1960s, the Soviet Union, the U.S.A., and France became the strongholds of structuralism, and this was also true in folkloristics: names like Eleazar Meletinskij, Yuri Lotman, Alan Dundes, Elli and Pierre Maranda, Claude Bremond and A.J. Greimas became known as advocates of structural analysis.<sup>15</sup> Folk-narratives, especially the so-called ordinary folktales (tales of magic) and myths, were the main field of methodological experiment, and only slowly did structural analyses begin to deal with other genres, such as epic and lyrical folk poetry, charms, riddles and games.

14 Vladimir Propp, *Morfologija skazki* (Leningrad, 1928), in English translation *Morphology of the Folktale* (Austin, 1958), "Transformacii volsebnyx skazok", *Poetika* IV (1928), *Istoriceskie korni volsebnoi skazki* (Leningrad, 1946).

15 Claude Lévi-Strauss, "The Structural Study of Myth", in *Myth. A Symposium*, ed. Thomas A. Sebeok (Bloomington, 1955). Eleazar Meletinskij, "Structural-Typological Study of the Folktale", *Genre* 4 (1971). Jurij M. Lotmann, "Sur la délimitation linguistique et littéraire de la notion de structure", *Linguistics* 6 (1964). Alan Dundes, *The Morphology of North American Indian Folktales*, *Folklore Fellows' Communications* 195 (Helsinki, 1964). Elli Kõngäs Maranda and Pierre Maranda, *Structural Models in Folklore and Transformational Essays* (The Hague, 1971). Claude Bremond, "Le message narratif", *Communications* 4 (1964). A.J. Greimas, *Sémantique structurale* (Paris, 1966).

Structuralism has taught at least one important thing to students of folk-narratives, i.e. that there are similarities and dissimilarities between narrative texts which are not manifest on the surface. Two texts may be structurally identical, although they may not have a single motif in common on the textual level. The idea of three levels, texture, text, and structure, has become familiar to analysts of folklore texts, and the actual linguistic form, the contentual level, and structure are accordingly seen as parts of study which require different operations.

Defining structure always means reduction. The level of abstraction may vary from low to high, but never are structures to be found on that level on which motif analysis takes place. It is customary to speak of deep structure, when the level of abstraction has reached the point where an intermediary structural level may be necessary to show those structural features which cannot be included in the deep structure. The choice of structural units is of strategic importance. A basic rule would be that in a deep structure you have less units than on the level of intermediary structure; the units on these two or more levels may be partly or totally different.

Structures may be paradigmatic or syntagmatic. Paradigmatic structures do not follow the chronological order of elements of the text, nor do they cover the text in its entirety. Units for paradigmatic structures are usually abstracted from among the key events or actions in the narrative. One unit may contain one or more events and in the latter case, events are considered parallel or identical from the structural point of view. During the process of finding the units, their mutual relations are studied. Sometimes the relation is opposition (binary opposition is a fairly frequent structural feature), sometimes more complicated relationships between units emerge. The definition of these relations is a second key operation in paradigmatic structure analysis. It is here that the meaning or message of the narrative begins to take shape: the comparison of units and the organization of their relationships may, if we are to believe Lévi-Strauss, disclose a meaning which probably never was explicitly understood or formulated by the people who told the narrative or myth in question. Very often the message is a statement of a conflict (between life and death, nature and culture, or between some specified alternatives or elements of world order); sometimes the conflict is mediated (thus "mediator" is a frequent structural unit), sometimes not. The ambition of the structural analyst goes, then, beyond the cold and silent structure and finds a meaning, a message. According to Lévi-Strauss the myth of Oedipus states a conflict — without solving it — which in ancient Greek culture centered around the origin of man and his way of birth. By stating a real conflict innumerable times, the myth generates more and more variants of itself — none of which is more authentic or current than any

other variant — finally consuming itself to the very end where the intellectual impulse dies and the myth (and the reality of conflict?) disappears.<sup>16</sup>

Syntagmatic structures are chronological and linear. They cover all essential events and elements largely in that sequence in which they appear in the text. One might expect that they would represent that order in which things are presented on the content level of narratives closer than paradigmatic structures do, and in some cases this is true; i.e. when the number of units is relatively large and the coverage of the contentual elements good. But it depends totally on the units chosen. If the structure is defined as "lack — lack liquidated", then unless we have a very short narrative the level of abstraction remains very high, and there is only a basic polarity, somewhat similar to paradigmatic structure.

If Lévi-Strauss is the paradigmaticist, then Vladimir Propp is the syntagmatist *par excellence*. In his study of Russian tales of magic, he came to the conclusion that these tales had one basic and common syntagmatic structure; all existing tales in that genre were variations, mostly incomplete, of that structure. Propp distinguished 31 units, which he called functions, and listed altogether approximately 150 structural elements in the tales of magic. It becomes easier to read Propp if we accept three levels: first, the level of functions (to which all elements on the upper levels can be reduced); second, the level of "forms" of functions (also a structural level, but alternative manifestations of a function which appear in tales are preserved); and third, the level of the text itself. Two tales may have different plots on the textual level but still be identical on the level of functions. Propp regarded functions and their order as constant. Functions he based on action: acts like Absence, Interdiction, Violation, Reconnaissance, Fraud, Villainy etc. could be carried through by different actants. He also operated with morphological roles, of which he identified seven; their sphere of action covered 1-6 functions and was not used as a structural unit. Furthermore, Propp listed some twenty forms of transformation in tales of magic: according to these, an element could change or vary by reduction, amplification, deformation, inversion, intensification, debilitation, and by various forms of substitution and dissimulation.<sup>17</sup>

Propp has been criticized. In fact he seems to contradict himself, when he maintains that the order of functions is constant, for in thirty of his 45 analyses of the structure of individual tales exceptions are made to this rule. What is even worse, in some cases the location of an element in the sequence defines its affiliation to function. The question why there should be just 31

<sup>16</sup> Lévi-Strauss, *op. cit.*

<sup>17</sup> Propp, *Transformácií . . . .*, pp. 70-89.

functions is also open for debate, as well as the relevance of the "hero-pattern" studies.<sup>18</sup> More interesting, perhaps, is the criticism presented by Lévi-Strauss, which is by no means negative, but stresses the need of reducing the number of functions by various transformation rules, e.g. the Departure and Return of the hero are equal to Disjunction of the hero, positive and negative. After such operations, a paradigmatic structure begins to emerge and the clarification of the meaning of the tales of magic becomes possible.<sup>19</sup> Lévi-Strauss thinks that syntagmatic, linear models do not reveal anything about the meanings of narratives. He does not realize or know that Propp's "explanation" of structure is intended to be historical, not psychological or phenomenological.

Alan Dundes, the most prominent defender of Propp's method, prefers to replace "function" by the term "motifeme", and speaks of allomotifs which fill a motifemic slot on the manifest, contentual level. His own analyses on North American Indian folktales show less motifeme depth, i.e. less structural units, than Propp's, but this has been interpreted as being due to differences in the primary material, not in methodology.<sup>20</sup> The same tendency can be found in other post-Proppian methodology, which in general is more occupied with the elaboration of analytic models than with the testing of the models on primary materials. A.J. Greimas has systematized Propp's idea of morphological roles and developed a transformational model, which is a reduction of Propp's 31 functions into four basic units (agreement, test, absence of the hero, and communication).<sup>21</sup> E. Meletinskij has built the structural scheme of the folktale on two key units, 'test' and 'values',<sup>22</sup> this also is a reduction of Propp, in the spirit of Lévi-Strauss. C. Bremond has been less interested in crossbreeding syntagmatic and paradigmatic approaches; his models focus on the linear and partly parallel logical processes in the narrative and they also take the role of the narrator into consideration.<sup>23</sup> Thus he approaches what has been labeled narratology, the study of structural principles of narration, both oral and literary.

Structural theorists have evoked hopes that we might find genre-typical structures. As far as plot structures are considered this may not be the case: the same narrative structures can be found in various narrative genres, and in many other genres as well. At this point it seems that structure analysis does

18 Archer Taylor, "The Biographical Pattern in Traditional Narrative", *Journal of the Folklore Institute* I (1964), pp. 114-129. Cf. Dundes, *The Study of Folklore*, pp. 142-144.

19 Claude Lévi-Strauss, "L'analyse morphologique des contes russes", *International Journal of Slavic Linguistics and Poetics* III (1960), p. 143.

20 Dundes, *The Study of Folklore*, pp. 206-215.

21 Greimas, op. cit., p. 203.

22 Boris Gasparov, "Tarton semioottinen koulukunta", in *Strukturalismia, semiotikkaa, poetikkaa*, ed. Satu Apo et. al. (Helsinki, 1974), pp. 39-41.

23 Claude Bremond, "Morphology of the French Folktale", *Semiotica* 2 (1970), pp. 251-257.

not contribute to better distinctions between genres. Structural cross-genre studies are oriented toward structural identification of different genres. We probably need more contrastive studies on folktale, legend, and other narrative genres before the question of genre-specific structures can be answered.

At present the future of structure analysis is unclear. There is no need to deny the fruitfulness of the structural mode of thinking itself, but the usefulness of some of its results is questionable. For the moment, studies are being written on the basis of various mixtures of paradigmatic and syntagmatic aspects; folktales of a geographical region or a language community are being analysed along Proppian-Dundesian lines, and one may find an occasional attempt to combine structural analysis with the folktale classification of a region. Admitting that folklorists may well preserve the technique of structural analysis, the general trend seems to be toward semiotic and cybernetic models, i.e. toward more comprehensive presentations of human communication. It remains to be seen how much the dull boxes of information theorists will improve our not so dynamic structural schemes. One possible improvement is the orientation toward processes of transmission and the problem of message. If structures are bearers of the essential meaning of narratives as Lévi-Strauss has insisted, they should be included in the study of semantic processes. One of the future tasks may well be the integration of narrative structures and narrative codes.

#### *EMPHASIS ON PERFORMANCE AND PRODUCTION OF TRADITION*

If structural analysis has been non-empirical, textoriented and highly abstract, there is another pervasive methodological trend which favours empirical, context-oriented approaches. I refer to the study of performance and affiliated methodology.<sup>24</sup> The focus of interest is thus removed from the folklore texts to the performers of folklore. 'Performance' is not to be understood here as artistic performance, although this aspect is by no means excluded. All users of folklore are now and then performers: telling a joke or uttering a proverb constitutes in itself a performance. The key insight is that there is no natural existence for folklore beyond the performance. Folklore archives are nothing but collections of dead artefacts, arbitrarily limited texts, which came about under rather special, mostly non-authentic circumstances and were immediately placed outside of that living system of communication which maintains folklore. These limitations may be circumvented by better documentation (sound film etc.) of authentic

<sup>24</sup> Dan Ben-Amos and Kenneth Goldstein, eds., *Folklore. Performance and Communication* (The Hague, 1975).

folklore performances, but only to a degree. Archived data remain at best momentary reflections of living folklore. The other possible form of existence for folklore is the human mind and human memory. But this type of folklore storage is also problematic and delusive: research on brain and memory may never unveil how exactly the preservation of non-active folklore takes place. What remains then is a hard look at the performance of folklore, at that particular situation where folklore for a moment becomes accessible to empirical observation.

We may study both the competence of the performer and his particular performances. With the help of repertoire analysis and life-history interview, it is possible to create a picture of those systems of cultural expression of which the person has a command. It becomes possible to say on which topics and genres he is likely to be a specialist, an active bearer, or a passive one. The gaps in his knowledge of tradition also emerge and his cognitive maps begin to take shape. If there is comparative material available concerning other individuals and performers in that culture, he can be placed in a typology of alternative cultural competences.

The study of actual performances presupposes the observation of the performer in action, but also many other things. The forming of that particular social situation or microenvironment in which the performance takes place deserves attention. There may be more or less unique social events and backgrounds in the past which, so to speak, load the performance with meanings and connotations that may be difficult to detect in the produced folklore text itself. The audience is of crucial importance, and more often than not, its role cannot be characterized as passive. There may be other distinctive roles and objects of behavior, such as the patient in a healing act, or the gods in a sacred ceremony, which influence and participate in the performance. In most cases, however, the performer proper is the conductor of the role-play and he provokes, interprets and modifies the behavior of other actors. Nevertheless, it may be more adequate to analyse some situations of performance as socio-dramas than as role performances by one individual.

Today it is a commonplace to state that problems of meaning cannot be solved without contextual information. The emptiness of folklore texts becomes obvious when one begins to list all the occurrences of a proverb, a joke, a legend, etc. The scale of occasional meanings is often very wide. Many narrators are able to include new dramatic and semantic elements by identifying themselves and some individuals in the environment or in the audience with the personages of the narrative. It is probably most correct to conceive the situation of performance as a mixture of reproduction and creative production. There are models, to be sure, in the mind of the narrator: memories of similar performances in the past by others and by himself,

structural and genre-specific rules, mnemotechnic devices, stylistic norms, and alternative situational ways of developing the story. There is more material than can be used in one performance; in other words, there is choice. But it is not a question of memorizing a text word by word, for example, even if some very limited examples (recitation of a charm and the like) might form exceptions to this. In fact a narrative is reborn in every performance, specially produced to fit in a particular situation. The selections made by the narrator are not arbitrary, but determined by the circumstances to the point where finally the range of alternatives narrows down to one which begins to seem the only possible.

Among the methodological impulses that have fertilized this approach some branches of sociolinguistics could be mentioned. The study of speech acts under the label of "ethnography of speaking", which refers to the theoretical formulations of Dell Hymes,<sup>25</sup> and to the folkloristic applications of the theory by Alan Dundes and others,<sup>26</sup> is one of them, and probably the most influential. Psychology of perception and role theory may open up other paths toward the creation of a multi-disciplinary strategy of performance analysis.<sup>27</sup> Added emphasis on minute fieldwork and empirical genre research is a corollary of this trend, as may be observed in most articles included in the volume "Folklore. Performance and Communication" (1975). When Linda Dégh concludes, on the basis of her tape-recordings, that legends are not believed in but reacted to in a number of ways which shift differently in auditors as the narration proceeds, she does not merely question our convention about legend genres but draws attention to the need to deepen the analysis toward reactive types.<sup>28</sup> To be able to deal with variation in folklore we have to look at the processes of production and adaptation of learned tradition to new narrators and auditors in particular situations. It may well be that the dialectic of productive types and reactive types will be one of the key elements in the analysis of narrative processes in the future.

25 Dell Hymes, "The Ethnography of Speaking", in *Anthropology and Human Behavior*, eds. T. Gladwin and Wm. C. Sturtevant (Washington, 1962), pp. 13-53. Further references see Ben Amos and Goldstein, op. cit., p. 3, note 11.

26 E. Ojo Arewa and Alan Dundes, "Proverbs and the Ethnography of Speaking Folklore", *American Anthropologist* 66:6 (1964), pp. 70-85. The interest in the analysis of folkloric events runs parallel to this trend also in less linguistic forms, cf. Robert A. Georges, "Toward an Understanding of Storytelling Events", *Journal of American Folklore* 82 (1969), pp. 313-328. Cf. also articles in *Toward New Perspectives in Folklore*, eds. Americo Paredes and Richard Bauman (Austin, 1972). A more recent application of the sociolinguistic approach to the production of tradition, i.e. spontaneous sermons, is the doctoral dissertation of Päivikki Suojanen, *Saarna, saarnaaja, tilanne* (Helsinki, 1978). See also Richard Baumann, "The Ethnography of Speaking in Folk Narrative Research", (to be published in *ARV*, 1979).

27 The study of shamanistic seances is a case in point, cf. Lauri Honko, "Role-taking of the Shaman", *Temenos* 4 (1969), pp. 26-52 and Anna-Leena Siikala, *The Rite Technique of the Siberian Shaman*, *Folklore Fellows' Communications* 220 (Helsinki, 1978), pp. 31-77, 319-341.

28 Linda Dégh and Andrew Vázsonyi, "Legend and Belief", *Genre* 4:3 (1971), republished in Ben-Amos, op. cit. pp. 93-123. — Cf. also their article "The Hypothesis of Multi-Conduit Transmission in Folklore", in Ben-Amos and Goldstein, op. cit., pp. 207-252.

### TOWARD AN ECOLOGY OF ORAL TRADITION

The thrust of modern folklore theory has for some time been extratextual. Actually we may be coming to the point where contextual information ceases to be mere illumination of the text of a folknarrative and where text, context, and environment become deeply intertwined in the process of telling a story or producing a social drama of which the story is a part. The roots of this movement may be seen in the Malinowskian functionalism of the twenties, but the decline of interest in functionalism in the social sciences over the past fifteen years has not been matched by a similar development in folkloristics. On the contrary, folkloristic fieldwork methodology made considerable progress during the sixties, resulting in intensified interview and observation procedures in which the gathering of contextual information was made a rule. The scholar working solely on archived data became almost an object of ridicule, doomed to mere guesswork because of deficient contextual information of the data. Today the archives are changing in this respect: where we used to have an abundance of folktales, ballads, proverbs and other genres with no information about the context, we are now getting vast amounts of ethnohistorical memoirs, life histories and contextual interviews but relatively little of traditional genres.

The fieldworker may be said to have at least two advantages as compared to the archive scholar. Firstly, he is not left at the mercy of fragmentary data collected by others. Instead, he can direct the quality and amount of his material in a problem oriented manner. Secondly, personal contact with informants and participation in the life of the community give him an invaluable feel for the reality he is studying and certainly save him from many odd misunderstandings. To be sure, there are also problems in the field. One is how to restrict the contextual information to something which may be called "relevant context", necessary from the point of view of the problem but not too vast to make the task too heavy.

With the shift of research focus from texts of folklore to the informants and tradition communities, there is no doubt whatsoever that empirical contact with these research objects has become a *sine qua non* of folklore methodology. Normally this contact will be established through fieldwork carried out by the scholar himself. On another occasion I have sketched the importance of *interactionism* on three levels: on the personal level, where human elements of ideas and emotions, liking and disliking are exchanged and intimate circumstances of one's life are disclosed between the scholar and the informant, on the instrumental level, where the scholar and the informant create a marginal field of interaction between their cultures and translate their goals and knowledge in an apprehensible way; and on the obligatory level, where the scholar attempts to strike a balance between his

moral and practical obligations to those who have initiated or funded his research on the one hand and to the tradition community he is studying as well as to the individuals who have co-operated with him on the other.<sup>29</sup> The *marginality* of the folklorist should be deeply felt and understood by every person training himself to become a folklore scholar. Gradual elimination of the marked *asymmetry* between the scholar and the object of research, human communities, is a long-term goal and should lead to new initiatives and increasing participation by the communities themselves in the research activities.

This ideology may be something new to folklorists, who are used to climbing up their ivory towers of text-comparison and diffusionistic perspectives. But it is the logical outcome of the latest development in the anthropological sciences, in a world where passive and introvert cultures are becoming self-conscious nations. It also implies the possibility of studying the importance of storytelling in the contexts and environments in which the narratives make sense, or from which they derive their sense. In addition to informant or individual and tradition community, context and environment also become the special key-words of field methodology in an approach toward the understanding of tradition-ecological systems.

But what is then contextual information? In the simple technical sense, it includes basic data about the situation in which the "text" was collected, about the informant, his life and social background, about his teachers in folklore in general and about the origin of the collected item in particular, his reconstructions of earlier performances (by himself and by others) and his comments on the meaning of the item. It also includes observations by the scholar on authentic performances, and if possible, a full description (notes, tape) and visual documentation (photo, film, etc.) of the behavior of performers and the audience. Furthermore, contextual information should contain basic information about the community studied, socio-economic structure, physical setting, local history (formation of settlement, migrations, etc.), cultural geography (contacts with other groups, mobility) and the system of education (home, school, church and other institutions). Preliminary analyses and the making of hypotheses in the field are important aids to the scholar trying to define the limits of contextual information.

Richard Bauman has recently recommended a checklist of no less than six contexts to be remembered by the fieldworker seeking "to comprehend folklore in terms of the web of contextual interrelationships that define its essence": 1) context of meaning (what is the average interpretation of the item given by the members of the community?), 2) institutional context

29 Lauri Honko, "The Role of Fieldwork in Tradition Research", *Ethnologia Scandinavica* 1977, pp. 88-89.

(where does it fit within the culture?), 3) context of cultural domain (how does it relate to other kinds of folklore?), 4) social base (what kind of people does it belong to?), 5) individual context (how does it fit into the informant's life?) and 6) context of situation (how is it useful in social situations?).<sup>30</sup> The list is useful, although the six contexts partly overlap. So, for instance, the actual meaning of a folklore product may be very much dependent upon the context of situation and cannot be derived from the average interpretation or context of meaning.

The concept of environment is central in what I have called tradition ecology.<sup>31</sup> One may speak of "perceived", "effective" and "total" environment. The demarcation line between the first two is man's perception: he is aware of and consciously exploits the perceived milieu, but his acts have also effects in, and he himself is influenced by, the effective environment without being aware of it. Total milieu is an umbrella concept: it covers both perceived and effective environments plus those factors which are neither perceived by man nor influence him. One may also speak of "habitat" (the physical milieu around man), "niche" (a sector of man's exploitative activity) and "microenvironment" (a particular behavioral situation). The last one is in fact identical with the context of situation in the list above.

When we think of living folklore in a particular environment, we usually find it organized according to social roles, depending upon socio-economic structures and natural environment. To be able to have access to and a permanent locus in the environment, folklore, a folk-narrative for example, must adapt itself to cultural, social, economic and physical factors. I have suggested four forms of adaptation.<sup>32</sup> In (1) milieu-morphological or "exterior" adaptation, a narrative undergoes familiarization and localization, i.e. the foreign natural setting is translated into the system of well-known features of the psychical milieu of the tradition community in question and the story is linked to a locality in the perceived environment. Among the processes of (2) tradition-morphological or "interior" adaptation there is the linking of role-figures of the narrative to well-known personages (tradition dominants), the censorship of tradition whereby elements which would lead to norm conflict are rejected or replaced, the adaptation of the narrative to a genre in a local or personal genre-system and to the genre-specific codes of communication. Most adaptations imply change. The change brought about by two

30 Richard Bauman, "The Field Study of Folklore in Context", in *Handbook of American Folklore*, ed. Richard M. Dorson (manuscript).

31 Lauri Honko, "Tradition Barriers and Adaptation of Tradition", *Ethnologia Scandinavica* 1973. On the concept of environment see my introductory essay in *Tradition och miljö*, ed. Lauri Honko (to be published in Sweden).

32 Lauri Honko, "Perinteiden sopeutumisesta", *Sananjalka* 21 (1979), pp. 57-76 (with English summary); an English version will be published in a forthcoming issue of *Studia Fennica*.

preceding forms of adaptation are lasting and take place only once. I have labeled these changes as "great variation". But is the actual meaning of the narrative already defined by milieu- and tradition-morphological adaptations? Obviously not. What is still required is the (3) functional or "momentary/situational" adaptation with its many occasional and unique features. The personality of the narrator, the composition of the audience, the actual focus of interest of the community, events of the recent past and fears and hopes for the future, will normally intervene and bring about changes which lend the story a meaning *hic et nunc*. It should be remembered that the story itself may have been heard many times already in different microenvironments. Nevertheless, it is able to convey new messages and meanings, thanks to functional adaptation. The changes brought about by adaptation do not, however, last very long and may have disappeared already in the next narration of the story. That is why I have called them "little variation".

It is obvious that theories of tradition production and tradition adaptation meet in the analysis of function and situation of performance of a narrative. It is also obvious that various adaptations may take place simultaneously, i.e. within one process of narration. But will all the piecemeal analysis sketched out above lead us to some kind of synthesis? How should numerous observations on folklore adaptation and production be organized with the purpose of revealing some basic characteristics and the uniqueness of a tradition community? To achieve this we must turn to the ecotype and processes of (4) ecotypification. I have elsewhere surveyed various folkloristic and non-folkloristic uses of the concept of ecotype.<sup>33</sup> The folkloristic contribution to the discussion on ecotypes probably culminated in Roger D. Abraham's study on black ghetto traditions in Camingerly (Philadelphia). The value of his argument appears to be the view of ecotypification as something completely transcending genre boundaries, and including a motley collection of content elements, contextual factors, stylistic and structural features, together with a possibility of connecting the tradition with its specific social base.<sup>34</sup> Ethnologists and anthropologists have used the term ecotype somewhat differently (Steward and Wolf in the U.S., and Campbell, Stoklund, and Löfgren in Scandinavia),<sup>35</sup> but always in relation to economic

<sup>33</sup> Honko, *Perinteen sopeutumisesta*, pp. 71-75.

<sup>34</sup> Roger D. Abrahams, *Deep Down in the Jungle* (Hatboro, 1970<sup>2</sup>), pp. 173-181. It may be possible to apply the method upon wider culture areas. Generally however, the macroecological approaches as delineated by Matti Sarmela, for example, tend to become detached from physical communities and focus on developmental profiles of certain regions, provinces etc., during a longer span of time. Cf. Matti Sarmela, *Reciprocity Systems of the Rural Society in the Finnish Karelian Culture Area*, *Folklore Fellows' Communications* 207 (Helsinki, 1969) and "Folklore, Ecology, and Superstructures", *Studia Fennica* 18 (Helsinki, 1974).

<sup>35</sup> Julian H. Steward, *Theory of Culture Change* (Urbana, 1973). Eric Wolf, *Peasants* (Englewood Cliffs, 1966). Bjarne Stoklund, "Ecological Succession: Reflections on the Relations Between Man and Environment in Pre-Industrial Denmark", *Ethnologia Scandinavica* 1976, pp. 84-85. Orvar Löfgren, "Peasant Ecotypes. Problems in the Comparative Study of Ecological Adaptation", *Ethnologia Scandinavica* 1976, pp. 103-109.

structure and natural environment. The question is: are these approaches relevant to each other? Can one in practice combine folkloristic material, say, folk narratives, and economic behavior in the analysis of man's milieu adaptation and milieu exploitation? Leaving the detailed argumentation to another occasion, I submit that the answer is positive.

In short, I believe that in defining folklore ecotypes we should let cultural, social and economic systems merge as they do in real life. Means of subsistence, social, roles and oral narratives should go hand in hand in our attempt to grasp the reality of the tradition community. Whatever elements we may choose to include in an ecotype, they should (1) force their way into several areas and have a permeating effect, (2) have a relatively high frequency and representativity, (3) be still productive and able to reproduce themselves, (4) show advanced milieu adaptation, (5) resist alien divergent elements and (6) manifest a distinctive character.

Folklore motifs are seldom unique. Nevertheless, we may sense the uniqueness of the tradition climate in a region or a social group: motifs which are known from elsewhere are organized in a special way and fit neatly into the life-style and environment of the people. The task of micro-studies and regional studies in folklore is to clarify how that uniqueness comes about, and into what the folklore has been fitted in. The task may also have a practical value in our time, when the revitalization of local cultures has become a human need and a political fact.

### *POSTSCRIPT*

Six or seven main approaches to the study of folk-narratives should make a fairly full picture of the status and developmental trends of methodology. Nevertheless, some remarks may be needed to signal the importance of some dimensions of methodology which were not dealt with separately, partly because they are less specific to folk-narrative research than those presented above.

The first remark concerns quantitative methods. Since the sixties, quantification, sampling, and statistical presentation of findings has played a noticeable role in folklore research. One important aspect of this trend is modern cartography. The fact that more recently qualitative methodology has been once again gaining ground in anthropological studies, and that the "hard data" which quantification is able to produce are currently not so sought after, should not, however, hinder us from seeing the importance of

quantification for folklore methodology. It has put a stop to the purely arbitrary choice of examples and drawn attention to the analysis of frequency, distribution and density of folklore products. One aspect of tradition ecology strictly depends upon quantification: I refer to the study of "tradition in use" as something different from the "storage of tradition". The differentiation between collective, individual and idiosyncratic elements in various bodies of tradition (as also in repertoires) is actually a purely folkloristic contribution to the methodology of quantification. Furthermore, there is no danger of over-quantification of folklore research: the case that could be made against hard data sociology is not valid here.

The second remark concerns indexation and cataloguing of folklore. This part of methodology is close to archiving techniques, and it is likely to preserve its strategic importance for research regardless of the fate of comparative studies. Originally it was the need to provide a scholar with all the available variants of a folktale for a comparative geographical-historical study which created the motivation for the extensive preparation of type-catalogues, a trend which still continues even though the monograph is not as popular as it used to be. Ever since, the methods of cataloguing and indexing have been based on genres, types, and motifs. It seems to me that a change is coming about in this respect. Genre-based indexing is growing increasingly ineffective in face of the flood of everyday stories and memoirs which is filling the archives at present. At the Nordic Institute of Folklore a working group is preparing recommendations for indexation; the topic was discussed by the 2nd Nordic Conference on Folklore Archiving and Documentation in 1978 and the discussion will continue at the 3rd conference in 1982.<sup>36</sup> Possibilities for the establishment of central archives with coordination tasks in data search and retrieval will have to be examined.

The last remark concerns studies on the use and revitalization of folklore. Here we find the vivid spectrum of spontaneous, more and less commercial folklore movements, which may well have prolonged the life of folkloristics by some decades. They have been studied very little and should be subject to more attention by scholars in the future. The use of folklore in mass media, in advertising, in comics, and so on, is another important aspect of modern life which imposes increasing demands on the research capacity of the folklorists. It is a multi-disciplinary field and very little has been done so far to create an adequate material base for it. What we would need in the future are archives concentrating on popular culture. The heroes of folk-narratives are very relevant to the study of popular lore and mass lore.

<sup>36</sup> Tradition, dokumentation, arkiv, NIF:s andra nordiska folkloristiska arkiv- och dokumentationskonferens, Åbo 1978, ed. Gun Herranen, NIF Publications no. 6 (Åbo, 1978).

The use of folklore in nation-building has played a conspicuous role in many European countries, and a recent NIF symposium was devoted to the subject, with the focus on the Nordic countries.<sup>37</sup> The role of folklore as a criterion of identity (national, regional, sub-cultural, etc.) and as an element in the dialectic of nationalism and conservatism versus internationalism and liberalism is an interesting issue both in European ethnology and in development studies of the Third World. Much of the methodology will be applicable to the study of present-day tradition communities and culture areas.

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<sup>37</sup> See *NIF Newsletter* 2/1979, June.