

## Some Remarks about an Ethnological Synthesis

TO INTEGRATE EUROPEAN ETHNOLOGY (including folklore) will always be a hard task owing to the historical changes and national variation of Western civilization. The efforts of my friend for more than fifty years, Professor Sigurd Erixon in Stockholm, who has now passed away, require, however, several remarks on this theme as a homage.

To begin with I am obliged to forecast some points in the present situation of the ethnological disciplines, as I see it today.

The dividing line between material and non-material objects seems no longer relevant. Man's bodily and mental functions are to be considered together not only from a substantial point of view but also in methodological questions. A "material" ethnology (viz. ethnography) and a "spiritual" folklore are only empty phrases without a scientific basis. On this account their objects cannot be biased or one-sidedly evaluated. The design of an artefact may be symbolical, magico-religious, ethical or aesthetical, not only economical. Generally speaking we can never make out "beginnings" in the history of culture. Any starting-point from evolutionary "origins" or, from a historical standpoint, *primordio rerum*, will be only relative. Most products of culture are flowing into the stream of tradition.

Nevertheless we can almost everywhere detect lacunae or discontinuities in its progress. Tradition as a cultural process is twofold. On the one hand it is historically successive, on the other hand it is socially diffusional and, relatively seen, simultaneous. In time and space the context of tradition is accordingly relative. The criterion of oneness is never directly applicable to such matters. The reason is that they are to be regarded as results of a participating process in social media. Notwithstanding that traditionally given facts are transmitted by personal carriers which take a share in their varying shape, the results of the process become intrinsically typical. These facts are fundamental for all views on the distribution of ethnic phenomena, if only considering that the diffusion of them at the same time is socially determined. This is also the main reason why the founder of social anthropology, Edward Burnett Tylor, could leave us the classical definition of the ethnological facts as "acquired by man as a member of society." It implies, however, much more than diffusionalism in its varying forms.

The social aspect informs us, however, about much more than the problems of cultural diffusion. The social substrata of popular tradition vary. The primary groups are family, age and sex group, kind, clan and tribe, but also neighbourhood, village community, parish and town. All the genetical and cohabiting groups are intermingling, expanding or extending, open and closed, on account of the social consciousness in all national and political relations. I think such sociological circumstances can never be left out of consideration. Finally all the moral, religious, aesthetic and economic valuations depend on the social groupings.

It seems necessary to begin a social analysis of popular tradition from this starting point. Primarily social objects are behaviours, attitudes, habits, gestures and other expressions with their psychical concomitants and social participation. Commonly they are called popular institutions, customs, rites, usages, practices, games, dances and coherent musical and dramatic performances. A characteristic feature is that the participation, openly or covered, has a deontic and normative sanction by accepted habits.

A very great part of popular tradition belongs to the milieu of magico-religious thinking and claims to be in some way accepted as veracious. During the last two or three centuries this tradition, at least in North-European countries, has apparently progressed from demonic to natural magic, a form of sympathetic magic more or less dominated by a rationalizing supernaturalism. This was also the starting point of Sir James Frazer, when he declared magic older than religion. A great number of beliefs, charms and spells concern disease and health and are not seldom presented as esoteric wisdom. The historical structure of such superstitions is obvious enough. In spite of all, pre-scientific medicine did not consist of pure absurdities and, as Francis Bacon said, there can also be "a superstition in avoiding superstition."

The importance of popular beliefs is rather immense. Because they are so widely spread and their influence so far-reaching their study is a very central part of folkloristic and ethnological research. However heterogenous popular conception in historical connection may seem, dominating structures or patterns can nevertheless be discerned in milieus of time and space. This shows a social connection of primary importance between attitudes of belief (myth) and custom (rite). These problems, however, may be left out here, but one must notice that structure and function are always to be considered together.

Here we come to the popular lore of numerous tales, sayings, songs and other fiction in the non-literary tradition, the material of which forms the greatest part of objects for folkloristic study. Whatever may be said in favour of the independence of this research, especially because of its connections with pure historical or philological disciplines, folklore as a traditional product is principally not to be distinguished from ethnological material. This may easily be seen from the fact that belief very often takes a narrative shape and accordingly is sustained and propagated as typical tales about supernatural beings even where the belief may be observed or totally lacking. The aesthetic vein is manifest in nearly all kinds of folklore fiction. This is why the tradition becomes as highly varied and individualistic as products of popular art. The tradition of fairy tales (*Märchen*) is often told only for its own sake, sometimes also with a slight secondary accent of *sens moral*, as in the fables.

Not much attention can be paid here to the various species of folklore. However, some principal differences between folkloristic and ethnological matters are to be emphasized in so far that they concern the economical, technical and ergological features in the branch of ethnology, which is sometimes practically defined in these terms. (I think this may be partly due to art-historical views.) But the economic utilities are all founded on needs and values, and the traditional products of them have no more reality than customary modes of behaviour, magical or religious attitudes, or fictional or musical expressions in the life of a people. All artefacts are designed and made with the help of human brains in not only a useful but very often even beautiful style. Techniques are common not only in economics but also in knowledge, religion, art and poetry and are most important as vehicles of understanding all views on types and generalities in ethnological matters.

I suppose that viewpoints as in a nutshell proposed above would be necessary for the future analysis of structure and function of contemporary facts and provide frames for culture-patterns of past epochs.