

HEDA JASON, DEMITRI SEGAL, EDITORS

Patterns in Oral Literature

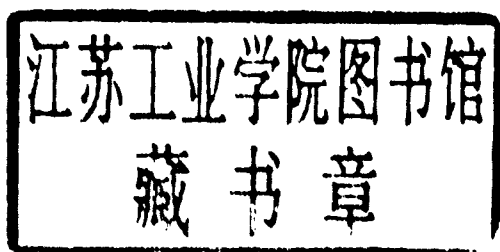
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Patterns in Oral Literature

Editors

HEDA JASON
DIMITRI SEGAL



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General Editor's Preface

When scholars ask new questions about an old subject answers suddenly are hard to find. For the present book, the question is "How is the performer able to improvise on the spot thousands of lines of an epic, or tell a story for hours on end?" Scholars working in areas relevant to this question, with ideas recently developing in structural anthropology and linguistics, compare their findings and come to further questions. Does the folk performer use a presumably unconscious ethnopoetic artistic canon — consisting of both content units and rules of composition — which enables him to improvise his works? If so, what methods can be used to discover, or uncover, such canons? Purely taxonomic methods have not provided tools powerful enough to account for the complexity of the data; can the generative approach do so? The papers in this volume, responding to such questions, are a result of a conference which was inspired by an international Congress which sought to see beyond the present borders in many areas of the human sciences. It was arranged in Jerusalem by the Editors, held in Copenhagen, and reported to the IXth International Congress of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences in Chicago.

The IXth Congress was planned from the beginning not only to include as many of the scholars from every part of the world as possible, but also with a view toward the eventual publication of the papers in high-quality volumes. At previous Congresses scholars were invited to bring papers which were then read out loud. They were necessarily limited in length; many were only summarized; there was little time for discussion; and the sparse discussion could only be in one language. The IXth Congress was an experiment aimed at changing this. Papers were written with the intention of exchanging them before the Congress, particularly in extensive pre-Congress sessions; they were not

intended to be read aloud at the Congress, that time being devoted to discussions — discussions which were simultaneously and professionally translated into five languages. The method for eliciting the papers was structured to make as representative a sample as was allowable when scholarly creativity — hence self-selection — was critically important. Scholars were asked both to propose papers of their own and to suggest topics for sessions of the Congress which they might edit into volumes. All were then informed of the suggestions and encouraged to re-think their own papers and the topics. The process, therefore, was a continuous one of feedback and exchange and it has continued to be so even after the Congress. The some two thousand papers comprising *World Anthropology* certainly then offer a substantial sample of world anthropology. It has been said that anthropology is at a turning point; if this is so, these volumes will be the historical direction-markers.

As might have been foreseen in the first post-colonial generation, the large majority of the Congress papers (82 percent) — like those in the present book — are the work of scholars identified with the industrialized world which fathered our traditional discipline and the institution of the Congress itself: Eastern Europe (15 percent); Western Europe (16 percent); North America (47 percent); Japan, South Africa, Australia, and New Zealand (4 percent). Only 18 percent of the papers are from developing areas: Africa (4 percent); Asia-Oceania (9 percent); Latin American (5 percent). Aside from the substantial representation from the U.S.S.R. and the nations of Eastern Europe, a significant difference between this corpus of written material and that of other Congresses is the addition of the large proportion of contributions from Africa, Asia, and Latin America. “Only 18 percent” is two to four times as great a proportion as that of other Congresses; moreover, 18 percent of 2,000 papers is 360 papers, 10 times the number of “Third World” papers presented at previous Congresses.

This significant increase in the input and physical presence of scholars from areas which have until recently been no more than subject matter for anthropology resulted in both feedback and also long-awaited theoretical contributions from the perspectives of very different cultural, social, and historical traditions. Many who attended the IXth Congress were convinced that anthropology would not be the same in the future. The fact that the next Congress (India, 1978) will be our first in the “Third World” may be symbolic of the change. Meanwhile, sober consideration of the present set of books will show how much, and just where and how, our discipline is being revolutionized.

The Congress was — and the resulting books in this series are — rich in studies of past and modern experiences of life and thought from cultures on all continents, by scholars who themselves represent the rich variety of cultural heritages. They learned from one another in Chicago and invite us all to share their experiences.

Chicago, Illinois
May 30, 1977

SOL TAX

Preface

From August 15-18, 1973, the conference on structure in oral literature took place in Copenhagen as part of the IXth International Congress of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences (Chicago, September 1973). The present volume contains some of the papers discussed at the conference; to these are added other contributions which were submitted later.

It is a pleasant duty here to thank all those who helped to bring the conference into being: to Bengt Holbek (Folklore Institute, University of Copenhagen) and Peter Madsen (Institute of Literature, University of Copenhagen), who took care of the local arrangements in Copenhagen in the best possible manner, and to all colleagues who attended the meetings and participated in the discussions: Viggo Brun, Antonio Buttitta, Kerstin Erikson, Torben K. Grodal, Erhardt Güttgemanns, Inger Lövkrona, Peter Ludvigsen, Antonio Pasqualino, Mrs. Pasqualino, and Viggo Røder. Without the patient encouragement of Sol Tax, President of the Congress, and the help of the staff of the Congress and of our publisher, this volume would not have come forth.

The members of the conference are very grateful to the University of Copenhagen, which provided facilities for the conference, and to the Statens Humanistske Forskingrad of Denmark, the Ministry of Education and Culture of Israel, Tel Aviv University, and Hebrew University, all of which generously took upon themselves to provide for the mundane needs of our conference.

Jerusalem

HEDA JASON
DIMITRI SEGAL

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Introduction

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Studies of the narrative structure of oral literature developed in Europe at the end of the last century, and were especially productive in Russia in the 1910's and 1920's, the very same period during which modern linguistics developed (see Erlich 1955, Pomorska 1968). The work of Veselovskij (1940), Shklovskij (1925), Skaftymov (1924), Volkov (1924), Nikiforov (1927) and Propp (1928a) laid the foundations of the investigation, posed the basic questions, worked out the basic units of analysis and the relations between them, and indicated the basic approaches for the development of a model for the narrative structure. (For a critical review of their work in relation to each other, see Jason 1971b, Meletinskij et al. 1973.) These approaches could probably be brought together in a model which would be analogous to the generative approach of modern linguistics. In fact, a foreshadowing of thinking along generative lines may be found in Nikiforov's work.

Why did folklorists start investigating oral literature by means of structural models? And for what aims? The basic question which the folklorist asks is: How is it made? How is the performer able to improvise on the spot thousands of lines of an epic, or tell a story for hours on end (Lord 1960)? In order to answer these questions an artistic canon of rules and units has been postulated, which works similarly to a "generative grammar," "generating" narratives. Such is the approach initiated by Shklovskij and Nikiforov.

In reality the tales continuously dissipate and are again composed by special rules of composition . . . (Shklovskij 1925: 23-24).

The law of the grammatical formation of the plot is particularly interesting because it leads us to the conclusion that natural forces are at work at the basis of folktales, forces which bring about the development of various

spheres of folk creativity (language, the folktale plot) according to similar formal categories (Nikiforov 1927: Page 28 of the English translation).

Propp approaches the problem of plot structure as a tool to find an extratextual linear model which would both provide a semantics of the plot and a genetics of the fairy tale.

The question about the origin of species which Darwin posed, can be posed also in our realm. . . . In order to answer this problem, one should first elucidate the question about the character of the similarity of fairy tales. . . . One can compare tales from the standpoint of structure, and then the similarities between them will appear in a new light (Propp 1928b:70).

. . . to discuss genetics, without special elucidation of the problem of description of the structure is completely useless. Before throwing light upon the question of the tale's origin, one must first answer the question as to what the tale itself represents (Propp 1928a: Page 5 of the 1968 edition).

Faithful to this basic concept after the publication of his morphology, Propp turned to the comparative study of the tale's content (1928b) and to the study of the origins of the fairy tale (see Propp's dissertation, reviewed by Zelenin in 1940 and published in 1946).

After the first English translation of Propp's work in 1958, development of the analysis of narrative structure in the West started with Dundes (1962a, 1962b, 1964), Ben-Amos (1967), Jason (1971a [written 1967], 1971b, 1972 [written 1968]), Powlinson 1972, and Colby (1973a, 1973b), and in Europe with Bremond (1964, 1966, 1970, 1973), and Güttgemanns (1973 and this volume).

Another stream of thought, namely, the investigation of the semantic aspects in myth and the problems of human thought (Lévi-Strauss 1955, 1964-1971), gave the impulse to a reworking of Propp's ideas by combining them with Lévi-Strauss' approach. This direction was followed by Greimas (1965, 1966) and Köngäs Maranda and Maranda (1971), and partly by Güttgemanns and the contemporary Russian semioticians Meletinskij, Nekliudov, Novik, and Segal (1969, 1971).

The main trait of the first group of studies, however heterogeneous and different they are, is that they have basically a classificatory quality. They divide and classify the elements of the narrative into units of various orders.

The second trait of most of the work done (except Colby 1973a, 1973b, Güttgemanns 1973 and this volume) is the tendency to reduce the number of the units which Propp labeled "functions" and to expand the unit's scope of meaning. The new unit is thereby elevated to a higher level of abstraction than the level of Propp's functions. Another common trait of works stemming directly from Propp (except that of Jason and the Russian semioticians) is the lack of the concept of tale role in the proposed models. Greimas reintroduced the tale

role (1966) and his followers used the concept in their models (especially Bremond and Güttemanns).

Several of the scholars developed models with multiple layers. Propp's model features combinations of moves which follow one another (either continuously or discontinuously) but are in the same layer (1928a: Pages 93-94 of the 1968 edition). Dundes' model already contains the beginnings of a multilayered relationship between narrative units; for example, in the motifeme *LACK LIQUIDATED* is embedded a string of motifemes which show in detail how the lack is liquidated (Dundes 1964:92, *LACK, LACK LIQUIDATED* [by Deceit, Deception]). Bremond similarly distinguishes between layers, for instance: "Drawing up of a hypothesis, Deduction [setting of a test, passing of a test, test passed], Hypothesis verified" (Bremond 1964:22). In these cases we have two layers. Jason unfolds the model into more layers (Jason "Model . . .," this volume; see example 26A where four layers of embedding are found. Note that the tale in example 19 has two independent strings of moves, each with two layers).

The general idea of the possibility of a generative approach, represented in the twenties by Nikiforov (1927), is taken up by Jason. The model has as its primitives two units: the tale role and the action of the tale role. These are combined by certain rules to form models for the measuring of narratives.

Structure in oral literature — what does that mean? Structures of *WHAT* in oral literature? In the course of the discussions at the conference, it turned out that this is not self-evident. Oral literature is a complex phenomenon, and several elements in it can be measured by models, some of them structural. At least four elements in oral literature can be handled by formal theories:

- | | |
|--|---|
| a. The level of wording: | { surface layer
{ deep layer |
| b. The level of poetic texture: | (not yet clear how many layers) |
| c. The level of narrative: | { surface layer
{ deep layer |
| d. The level of meaning:
(symbolic component) | (presumably includes several
layers) |

The level of wording (level a), the language, forms the raw material for the texture (level b) which is the organization of the wording into a work of poetry. To be sure, the wording is the only level which can be directly observed; the rest, including the texture, have to be inferred and constitute the artistic and semiotic organization of the work of oral literature.

The ontological status of the three structural levels (texture, narrative, and meaning) may be understood in two basic ways: either they exist in reality and the analyst has to discover them and their qualities; or they are the analyst's theoretical construct and his task is to find the most elegant theory to describe them while still remaining faithful to the only directly observable level, the wording.

The level of the wording (level a) is handled outside folkloristics proper; it is the domain of linguistics, especially one of its branches, dialectology. The level of the texture (level b) uses tools developed by general poetics in order to investigate the lexical, stylistic, and prosodic features of the oral literature work (see, for instance, investigations by Sebeok 1956, 1959, 1962, and Lord 1960; Lord's "formula" is a textual feature).

While the work of oral literature, of course, forms a whole in which all the elements and levels are interconnected, it is necessary, for analytical purposes, to differentiate between the textural structure (level b) and the narrative structure (level c). Propp was the first to keep the two clearly apart, enabling him to design a coherent model for the narrative structure. Propp's model can be understood as a "surface layer" of the heroic fairy tale genre (this term was proposed by Nikiforov [1927] to designate a fairy tale about a male hero who wins a bride). For other genres of oral literature, elaborate surface layers have not yet been worked out (cf. attempts to work out the surface layers for the "female" and the "reward-and-punishment" fairy tales in this volume by Dan and Drory, respectively).

Dundes' model (1964) for Amerindian tales contains elements of both surface and deep patterning. Bremond's units (1964, 1966, 1970) are on the same general level as Dundes'. Colby's eidons (1973a, 1973b) also include elements of both layers, but are on the other end of the scheme: while Dundes and Bremond operate with broad general units on a higher level of abstraction than Propp's, Colby's units are on a lower level of abstraction. Within this framework, Propp's and Gütgemann's units, which basically represent a surface layer (with the possibility of the units being organized into several levels), are on a medium level of abstraction. Jason's model is conceived as a deep layer model, underlying the surface models of every narrative genre of oral literature.

While it is necessary for analytic purposes to differentiate between the levels of texture and narration, the analysis of the narrative structure, which starts "deep down" and "climbs up" to the "surface," should account for every word on the level of texture. Thus the organization of narration and of texture are closely enmeshed (see examples analyzed in Jason, "Model . . .," this volume).

The meaning of oral literature (level d) may be analyzed on different

levels, from the most basic and general message of a logical structure underlying a text or a corpus of texts, to the semantic level of the wording of the text. The meaning of whatever level seems to be the result of the interplay of various elements of content and structure. Lévi-Strauss' work and the work of the Marandas lie in this area; for other attempts see Meletinskij et al. 1969 and 1971, and Jason 1975.

As mentioned above, the ontological status of the structure remains controversial; there is no unique structure which can be assigned to a text on whatever level (except perhaps certain prosodic and stylistic features on the level of texture, which are directly observable). The double analysis of the same texts made by Jason (in "Model . . .," this volume, examples 8 and 26A) and Bremond (in the comment to Jason's paper) demonstrates that a multiplicity of models is capable of accounting for the same text — possibly, an infinite number of models can in principle do the same service. No specific theory has as yet been developed, in the framework of which these different models could be compared and evaluated. The papers in this volume attempt to describe the structure of the work of oral literature on various levels.

Dan follows Propp and Volkov in trying to devise a model for the surface layer of the narrative structure of the "female" fairy tale (a tale in which a persecuted heroine wins a royal husband). Propp's concepts of the tale role and the action in the tale are used, and a linear model of the Proppian kind is devised.

Drory tries to do the same for the "reward-and-punishment" fairy tale (a tale in which two parallel protagonists act — both either male or female — one of whom behaves according to certain specific rules and is rewarded, the other of whom breaks these rules and is punished). This subgenre of the fairy tale is akin to the sacred legend genre, which makes for some complication in the building of the model (one text, a sacred legend, is analyzed in this volume both by Drory's surface layer model and by Jason's deep layer model [example 8]). Nevertheless, a model is devised which accounts for the texts.

Bremond's paper is the last in a series of papers in which he developed a model for the fairy tale (Bremond 1964, 1966, 1970, 1973). In the paper published here a series of closed models is described. Each model represents an episode in fairy tales. While they are formed from the same building blocks, the models are closed in themselves and no transition from one to the next is envisaged. Thus a taxonomy of tale episodes emerges. A whole tale can be built from a combination of several episodes, each with its own model, an idea found earlier in Nikiforov (1927). As Nikiforov has only been recently translated into a Western language (published in September 1973 after the IXth ICAES

took place), Bremond's discovery of the episode in the fairy tale is an independent one. The qualities of the episode and its functioning in the development of the fairy tale are worth further investigation. Bremond's theory is built on the assumption that the fairy tale is a "morally edifying narrative, which is governed by the optimistic requirement of a happy ending." Such a definition of the fairy tale is, however, not shared by all (see Jolles 1929, Greimas 1965, Jason i.p.).

Güttgemanns tries to establish a surface pattern for sacred legends of the tale corpus in the Gospels. The functions of Propp are recorded and several new functions added to fit the material better. The functions are used only in their aspect of action; the tale role is not built into this part of the theory. Thus the units become a more flexible but at the same time a somewhat less accurate tool, pointing to fewer relations in the text. In the second part of the paper, Güttgemanns proposes to view the relations between functions in a manner similar to the logical relations in the Square of Opposition. The relations, translated into truth tables, should indicate which combinations of functions are permissible for forming well-formed narratives (i.e. "true") and which are not (i.e. "false"). Thus the relations between functions are conceived in a new way which differs from the approaches taken in all other structural studies of oral literature. This new way seems worth exploring in greater detail.

Jason's paper ("Model . . .") is an attempt to construct a deep-pattern theory for the structure of oral literature. The model, based on three of Propp's functions and two of his tale roles, fits most narrative genres; so far it does not tie in with the surface patterning such as Propp's fairy tale model. The theory uses some of the notions of generative grammar. A tripartite model is used by Greimas as well as Bremond, but these and Jason's models were developed independently from each other.

The paper by Klein et al. summarizes the results of an experiment at generating sample texts of "folktales" with the help of a computer program. This is the first attempt to use Propp's plot pattern as the basis for a computer program, and the results show that both the model and the computer procedures applied are sufficiently powerful tools to generate texts similar, to a large degree, to fairy tales. The paper includes actual examples of artificial folktales. These samples show that the modeling of the narrative level alone is still not sufficient for generating tales which are wholly acceptable to the "native speaker." It is also necessary to take into account the constraints imposed on the cooccurrence of elements along the syntagmatic axis. These elements include individual objects, characters, as well as larger segments of the narrative (episodes). There is hope that if and when

this additional semantic analysis is added to Propp's scheme, the computer will produce much more verisimilar texts. In the meantime Klein's experiment has helped considerably in understanding the role of such semantic constraints in the structure of the fairy tale.

This leads us to the papers dealing with the symbolic semantic aspect of oral literature.

Freilich's paper attempts to analyze the methodological foundations and implications of Lévi-Strauss' analysis of myths. In his paper, Freilich introduces culture as a whole into the discussion, which otherwise concentrates on one element of it, oral literature. From his basic analytic notion of the space-and-time dichotomy in culture, Freilich develops a set of procedures to tackle the analysis of Lévi-Strauss' mythic "non-sense."

Meletinskij discusses Scandinavian mythology as a closed system and traces dyadic relations of oppositions in the content of this system. The oppositions are examined in the mythical models of space and time, as well as in the relations between the mythic beings. Thus the particulars of the space-and-time models become necessary parts of an organized whole. The system of relations traced in the paper can serve as a basis for the investigation of the semantic model in this mythology.

Jason's paper ("Content analysis . . ." [originally written 1968]) reviews Colby's and Maranda's early computer experiments for detecting patterning in oral literature. The technical problems, premises, goals, and results of computerized content analysis are discussed.

Let us conclude our introduction by a brief reflection on the question: where is the structural analysis of oral literature going? The review of recent work done in structural analysis of oral literature (published here as well as elsewhere) shows a number of common traits. We are dealing with second- or third-generation work (second generation from Propp, or third generation by way of Propp/Lévi-Strauss/Greimas). Yet the development has not been cumulative. Each investigator goes his own way and explores his own path of inquiry. These paths do not merge; on the contrary, they branch off into different directions. In spite of basically taking off from Propp's and Lévi-Strauss' concepts, everybody develops his own theory starting afresh. This situation shows through in the terminology where each investigator finds it useful to invent new terms for *his* units, often without taking pains to explain how and why his units differ from those next door. Most of the paths of inquiry taken lead in the taxonomic direction. To use once more the linguistic analogy, since the problems here are similar: taxonomic tools do not seem to be powerful enough to account for the complexity of the data; but tools of the

generative approach with its greater theoretical possibilities are only now being developed.

Since the investigation of oral literature started at the beginning of the nineteenth century, it has moved in parallel to linguistic research, sharing the basic paradigms of the latter, asking similar questions, and looking for similar answers using similar methods. The study of language and the study of oral literature were often done by the very same people, the Brothers Grimm being the best-known example. During the nineteenth century the basic approach was historical (with rare exceptions, such as some of Max Müller's ideas [1856]). In this century, the parallel development of linguistics and the study of oral literature continues: with the development of structural linguistics and semiotics, the structural approach enters the study of oral literature as well.

Structural analysis of oral literature presupposes the concept of an ethnopoetic artistic canon. The canon consists of content units (such as characters, deeds, models of time and space) which form the "lexicon" of oral literature, and a set of rules of composition (structural models of narration and meaning) which form the "syntax" and the "phonology" (the texture) of the canon. The folk-performer is unconscious of this canon and cannot verbalize it. Yet the canon is the tool which enables the performer to improvise his works, just as the unconscious knowledge of the grammar of one's language enables the speaker and the hearer to produce and receive speech.

Thus, once more, the interests of linguistic research and research of oral literature flow in the same direction.

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