

University of Theatre and Film

Beyond the Otherworld

A Dramaturgical Approach to Oral History

D.L.A. Thesis

Péter Kárpáti

2012

Theses

The paper consists of three texts: a thesis and two plays. All three texts deal with the same topic from three different aspects and all of them are based on the same material of “border infringing” legends. By border infringement I mean crossing the threshold between the worldly sphere and the otherworld.

The thesis itself can be considered border infringement, too: it analyses matters belonging to the realm of folklore studies and motif history from a *dramaturgical* point of view. And from a dramaturgical aspect, our whole attitude towards folk tales is wrong: we approach them as literature. Folktales are something completely different, though: a tale can be considered perfect draft material for any free, improvisatory theatre.

For a story to remain extant for centuries the exact retelling is not enough. Creative imagination is needed and generations of - usually anonymous - creators who rejuvenate the ancient story using their free imagination. However, the ancient story can only stay alive if these creators both have a deep understanding of the tale and possess a special talent.

In the first part of the thesis I analysed some dramaturgical, psychological and poetic aspects of oral culture.

Based on the two types of “lie-tales” (*A walk through heaven for our godmother* and *My father’s wedding*) I presented the phenomenon, for many centuries, tales have been capable of suggestively transmitting messages (for instance, children’s imaginings related to birth) that almost none of the thousands of tale-tellers were conscious of.

Continuing this thought, in connection with the legend type “*Angel sheep*” I analysed how it affects today - if at all - the interpretation of the tales, if their background mythology (in this case the Turkish-Altaic underworld visions) has become totally obscure.

Moreover, I have also made an attempt to draft the imagined dramaturgy how the belief-based fairy tales (like “*Friends for life*” and the “*Hurt skull*”) have evolved. I paid special attention to the phenomenon that the chance of survival of a story always multiplies if a constant figure, the charm of a special character is involved (*Don Juan-myth*).

In the context of a - to the Hungarians for long unknown - legend, the *Contemplating Conrad*, I have examined the way plots stay part of collective memory and the way the traditional folk tale becomes a means to deal with individual traumas.

In the chapter “*Interlude in Nagykálló*” I tried to draw an outline of the way any new plot is born. I also examined how the oral medium makes use of its inherent dramaturgical possibilities and how mistakes and misunderstandings can sometimes have *creative power*.

The above questions constitute an introduction for the second, longer part of the thesis, where one single legend type is analysed from a historical, mythological and dramaturgical point of view.

The thesis is centred around the topics of going to the otherworld and border infringement along the oeuvre of Lajos Kálmány.

Border infringement is a vital element in legend type „AaTh 759” discussed in the second half of the thesis where I followed its history from the first known appearance (in the Koran) to modern Hungarian folklore. Once again, Lajos Kálmány can be thanked for recognizing the most significant turn in the motif history related to this legend: the fact that with the re-appearance of two characters (Christ, the wanderer and Saint Peter) an ancient plot structure from Asia-Minor was reborn in modern folklore.