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Moral Lessons in East African Trickster Narratives

A case study of the hare-related narratives

Trickster narratives are one of the genres of oral literature in East Africa and the hare features as a trickster in a number of these narratives. There are a number of issues to examine in trickster narratives, for example, narrator-audience interaction, style of presentation and settings for story telling.

This study will examine an aspect that has been inadequately analysed, that is, the moral lessons in these narratives. A number of researchers tend to state the moral lessons such as hard work, discernment and intelligence but they leave a number of questions unanswered:

- What is the basis of deriving the moral lessons from these narratives?
- Can more than one lesson be derived from a single narrative?
- Is society encouraging and teaching its members, especially youth, to emulate the bad habits of the hare such as cheating and being lazy?
- Why is the hare not punished despite the many wrongs he commits against other animals?

These questions constitute the problem that this study seeks to analyse.

SILVIU ANGELESCU
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**Nasreddin Hodja, a Character of Oriental Folklore,
and his Romanian Hypostasis**

This study is conducted on the avatar of an epic hero – is he a person who becomes a character or a character who becomes a person?

Here one discusses the versions and variants and the causes that explain its flexional forms and his literary career within the Romanian narrative space. Key words in my presentation include epic hero, oriental, Romanian, oral aspect, written aspect, legend, anecdote, story, narration in verses, poem and Nasreddin Hodja.

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**De-emphasizing the Trickster,
Transnationalizing the ‘National’ Hero in the Global Ethnoscape:
‘One day, when Nasreddin was surfing the internet ...’**

Found in various cultures of the Mediterranean, Central Asia, Middle East, and elsewhere Nasreddin Hodja presents embedded characters in its figure. He is a Muslim saint, an everyday man, but more importantly, an anti-hero – a trickster. Borrowing the term from Barbara Babcock-Abrahams, all his traits are molded into a ‘marginal man of the masses’.

Despite this complexity in his personae, a particular trend in folklore studies and popular research concentrates on the Hodja phenomenon, by highlighting Hodja as one of the national icons of Turkish culture: a purified, sanitized, and genuine character of the folk. This particular trend permeates through the corpus of Hodja stories and makes use of only the good, moralizing, and didactic ones. By de-emphasizing the trickster traits and highlighting the characteristics of a well-behaved, white-bearded old man, it simultaneously claims Hodja as the sage of an imagined ‘Turkish’ wit and humour.

Two incidents in the field of folklore research on Hodja can place this in perspective. As part of his opening address at the Fifth International Conference of Turkish Folk Culture, İlhan Başgöz recounted an obscene Nasreddin Hodja joke. The rendition outraged Saim Sakaoğlu, another Turkish folklorist at the conference, who protested: “This is an insult to our Turkish identity!” The ensuing row among conference attendees spilled over onto the international scene.

The second incident concerns the research of Pertev Naili Boratav, who, until his death in March 1998, was working on Hodja’s celebrated audacity. Upon the publication in Turkey of this extensive research on Nasreddin Hodja, Boratav’s book was retrieved because it contained ‘unspeakable’ jokes.

Both instances present us with an attitude that reflects a strong conservatism and a subverted sense of nationalism inherent in Turkish folklore studies. Known mainly for the didactic tales that feature him in oral tradition and children’s storybooks alike, how dare Nasreddin Hodja, our ‘national hero,’ appear as a trickster?

This paper aims at reconsidering the representation of Nasreddin Hodja beyond the Hodja stories and it examines the ‘meta-narratives of Hodja’ through a wide range of media in the age of globalization. With the spread of print media, travel and tourism, and more importantly, through internet, a new Nasreddin Hodja image is created and purported through a transnational sphere, in a ‘global ethnoscape’. Particularly, the paper argues for three important points: first, by producing a new kind of narrative, the stories aim to create a ‘pure’ image of the Hodja. This *vox populi* is inherent in academic works, the popular story books for children, and in the minds of the *populus*. These ‘good’ stories become the very vehicles to perpetuate the image of a national hero.

Secondly, the meta-narratives produce a new kind of textual feature: by distancing itself from the main narrative, established at the 'word' level of meta-narrative establishes itself via the 'image' level. Meta-narratives are materialized, visualized, and popularized through cultural displays, public monuments and festivals, the internet, and other various forms of 'touristic' events. Cultural displays include festivals in which Hodja is enacted to maintain a national framework for future generations. The 'touristic' includes magnets, book-marks, public monuments, and other kinds of mementos in which Hodja is represented, riding backwards, often on the back of his beloved donkey. However, there is an interesting point in the attempts to de-emphasizing the trickster, and 'transnationalizing' the 'national' hero.

Thirdly, the paper argues that surprisingly this new transnational meta-narrative is not free from national sentiments and anxieties. The purported 'purified' image of Hodja is the very mirror image in / of the traditional stories, including those of the trickster type. The new transnational narrative only gives a twist to the newly created transnational hero – it is a twist with a national claim. Nonetheless, it cannot escape from the trickster in the old man of religion.

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The Trickster in Assamese Folktale

The trickster figure in every culture is a complex character. He is tricky, clever and resourceful. In many cases he is found to be full of contrasts and ambivalences. He is a rogue, a clever deceiver and a trouble-shooter. By virtue of his wit and resourcefulness he outwits his adversaries and wins the battle of wits. In spite of his vices and negative personality traits, he is an extremely popular figure in the world of folk narrative.

In most of the Western cultures the trickster is also a culture hero, especially in the origin myths of the American Indian tribes. But the trickster figure in Assamese tales is not a culture hero. The trickster hero is found active in a number of roles, but never elevates to the role of a culture hero. The reason for this should be sought in the specific socio- cultural context of Assam, where a good number of ethnic communities have settled together for centuries and developed a common cultural tradition of their own in spite of the diversities and pluralities in their linguistic and cultural traditions. Folklorists, the like of Goswami (1960), have seen the identical traits of the trickster figures or Assamese folktales and the folktales of some of the South Eastern Asian nations.

The paper endeavours at studying the special traits of the Assamese trickster figure in the context of the multi-ethnic and multi-cultural society of Assam.

AGNÈS CHAVANON

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The Function of Folktales in Contemporary Society

Tales of wisdom and stupidity

in the professional narration of the 'femme de la parole'

I narrate tales of the wise fool for enjoyment, because they are extremely funny. But in the background they always have a connotation of didactic wisdom which allows the narrator to help young people with problems in prisons – experiences I have witnessed and which I will be sharing with the participants of this international conference.

FRANCESCA MARIA CORRAO

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Giufà and his Never Ending Story

When I started studying Guhā's story many years ago, I decided to compare the anecdote I had found in both Arabic, Turkish and Sicilian folklore. Already at that time it was clear to me that the Turkish anecdote had a strong mystical influence. The great mystic poet Jalaluddin Rumi had mentioned the Anatolian trickster Nasreddin Hodja. His anecdotes were spread later in Egypt under the name of Nasreddin Hodja al-mulakkab Guhā al-rūmī (named Guhā the Anatolian).

Later I discovered the existence of a few Guhā anecdotes in the *Panchatantra* and in the Indian collections of tales *The Ocean of Tales*. As I studied the oriental origin of the Egyptian shadow theatre, I discovered that Guhā's stories were spread in Egypt earlier, before the Turkish trickster's had appeared; I also learned that there existed an Indian Sutra attributed to the Buddha Shakyamuni entitled 'The wise and the fool's Sutra'. From the reading of this old text I came to understand the oriental roots of Guhā's foolishness.

In my paper I will try to explain a deeper understanding of the anecdotes.

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Abu Nuwas Extending to the East African Coastlands and Savannahs, Schoolbooks and Popular Media

Through maritime trade contacts the famous Arabian name of Abu Nuwas reached the shores and islands of East Africa: the coastlands of Somalia, Kenya and Tanzania, the islands and archipelagos of Lamu, Zanzibar, Madagascar and the Comoros. Partly he became *Abunuwasi* or *Bwana Wasi*, partly he mingled with the trickster type of hare as employed by the Bantu-speaking farmer communities. In the early 20th century mission and colonial literacy canonized his stories in Swahili schoolbooks which had their repercussions in oral storytelling not only in these littoral regions, but also on the mainland as far as Eastern Congo.

The paper discusses the spread of this trickster, sage and fool in East Africa, its variation and tale types, its local ethics and semantic shifts. The text sources are school readers and scholarly editions of the last hundred years, new comics and recent oral recordings which are mainly expressed in Swahili as the language of wider spread, but also in some coastal Bantu languages (like e.g. Pokomo) whose speakers also have an affinity to Swahili. The geo-literary dimension of the paper, which also considers variants from elsewhere, shows that Abu Nuwas once more emerges as a figure of world literary format (while folklore and the non-European philologies indeed still have to revisit and re-map the concept of ‘world literature’).

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Humour and Heroism
Fools and Tricksters in Welsh Tradition

Wales, a westerly facing peninsula on the mainland of Britain, is just over 3,000 square miles in size. Its native language, Welsh, belongs to the Celtic, Indo-European group, and was first spoken in the 6th century. Not surprisingly, it has a long and rich folk narrative tradition. During 1964-2006 the author was privileged to undertake a survey of this tradition, and of approximately 4,000 individuals interviewed, 450 were recorded on tape, amounting to some 700 hours of recordings and over 15,000 items of narrative.

Since the days of the classic eleven medieval tales of magic, the Mabinogion, Wales is better known for its brief local legends relating to the supernatural, brief socio-historical legends and traditions, and numerous brief tales and anecdotes of humour. A small, but significant, selection of these humorous tales and anecdotes relate to tricksters and ‘wise’ fools.

The present paper only briefly mentions the important role played by the fool in 18th and 19th century Welsh language *anterliwtiau* (‘interludes’: popular folk plays presented in verse), and by the fool, or *cadi*, in 18th and 19th century north Wales May (Morris) dancing customs. The paper concentrates, rather, on the form, function and transmission of tales and anecdotes associated with:

- Thomas Jones, ‘Twm Siôn Cati’ (c. 1530-1609), a landed gentry, antiquary and genealogist, portrayed in tradition and legend as a Welsh Rob Roy who, through his mischievous deeds and clever disguises, became a renowned folk hero and supporter of the poor against the tyranny of the ruling classes;
- so-called fools and entertainers, employed by the Welsh gentry, in particular ‘Twm Siambar Wen’ (18th century), from Pen-y-bont-fawr, Powys, north Wales, employed by the Wynnstay family;
- fools associated with certain districts in Wales, such as Aberdaron and Llangernyw, north Wales, and Llanwnnw, south Wales (many of these anecdotes are cycle tales);
- popular local characters, well-known for their quick, witty remarks and one-upmanship;
- historical and imaginative characters, portrayed in legend and tradition as simpletons and fools, yet, who through their ingenuity and humour, become heroes, much to the joy and satisfaction of the listener and reader.

MIHÁLY HOPPÁL

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Shamans, Tricksters and the Wise Fool

There are definite functions within society which must be fulfilled, such as healing, fortune telling, weather forecast, leading sacrificial rituals, poetic narrative function, etc. A basic idea lies behind all these functions, namely mediation between illness and health, known and unknown, balance and imbalance, profane and sacred, etc.

Practically all the trickster-like characters of folktales around the world have the same kind of mediation. They are inferior persons but their contribution to the creation of the world, or balancing the world order, is equally important. The same is true of the 'wise fool' who is seemingly a stupid, weak, socially 'other', ethnic, minority member of the given society but as a result of his / her often funny way of action, the moral or physical order of the world will be restored. Wise fools are mediators in shamanic sense since they act in an unusual or foolish way but the result is positive. They may be fools on the personal, but they are wise on the social level. This is the social meaning of the 'wise fool' type of persons by whom the community may learn the proper social behaviour.

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Why the Third Brother is Fool in the Tales of Magic?

Many researchers of folktales have proposed different explanations of the phenomenon of the third brother. Russian folklorist E. Meletinskij proposed a theory that the fool is the youngest brother, left without his father's inheritance. This theory is not convincing because it is based on infrequent and additional details of the texts.

In Lithuanian tales of magic and in tales of other European nations, the fool is one of the three brothers, not always the youngest. In several Lithuanian variants there are one hundred and one brothers.

The opposition of behaviour of the intelligent brothers and the fool is very important in the text structures of tales. The intelligent brothers act identically in their incorrect behaviour and they always lose. In the same circumstances the fool behaves rightly in an opposite way and wins.

These elementary plots build a simple structure, the second type of simple structures illustrates and confirms the rules of correct conduct. So this type of simple structures may be very archaic, i.e. from times when the function of folk tales was pragmatic.

The simple structure of the second type is also used to show the opposite behaviour of twin brothers, two sisters or two girls. When the tale is about three brothers or three sisters (the third sister sometimes is a fool), the negative elementary plot is repeated without any changes, but this repetition does not essentially change the simple structure.

But the question is why the *third* brother is considered a fool. In ancient cultures the number three meant *many / much* (for example, *three Yakuts* - all Yakuts). Moreover, *three* is the least number of objects which one can divide into a majority and a minority. One of the three brothers does not act as the majority does. That's why he is considered a fool. Only at the end of the tale the majority is convinced that his behaviour is correct.

The third brother is a fool only at home. Nobody calls him a fool when he acts outside his relatives' circle. The fate of the third brother may be compared with the fates of a great number of artists, scientists and other people in real life who have invented something new, though unknown for the majority of their community – they were often considered fools at home, too.

LUCAS A. DOUGLAS KIVOI

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Is the Trickster a Cultural Hero?

Animals play a very prominent role in African society. They are often represented as thinking, speaking and acting just like human being. It is worth noting that most prominent and successful African soccer teams have been named after animals. For instance ‘The Indomitable Lions’ (Cameroon), ‘Lions of Teranga’ (Senegal), ‘The Super Eagles’ (Nigeria), and ‘The Elephants’ (Ivory Coast).

Since animals appear to be similar to men and women, the virtues of mankind are encouraged and vices criticised by means of stories about animals. Little animals are made to strut, boast, and even cheat larger ones. In Luhya¹ fables the hare is generally depicted as ‘a hero’. Most of these tales are humorous and light hearted, but beneath this humour lie subtle commentaries on social activities since fables are moralising tales.

If we look closely at animal tales we realise that they are actually human beings in animal masks, representing human characters in society. It is believed trickster tales were mainly narrated by grandmothers to children as a form of entertainment in the evenings. The success of these trickster stories lies in the way they symbolise human qualities.

This paper unravels some of the underlying characteristics of the hare as a trickster and also its peculiarities. It also tries to examine why smaller animals are preferred for tricksters than larger ones for their dupes in trickster narratives.

The paper, drawing its material to elucidate on the above from two selected Luhya trickster tales, also examines whether, after all, the trickster is a celebrated hero in the African society and why. It will also discuss whether trickster stories are specifically meant for children and if there any traits and values adults can learn across the cultural boundaries.

¹ Luhya is a Bantu community which lives in western part of Kenya in east Africa.

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**From Didactics and Ritual to Teasing
in the Latvian *dainas* Tradition**

Singing to someone or about someone [apdziedāšana (*apdziedaashana*)], very often in a satirical or humorous manner, is an integral part of almost any celebration in the Latvian *dainas* or folk song tradition. It can take the form of a song contest or battle of words: one group of singers against another group, but it also includes singing to objects, fields, and animals to obtain magical effects. As the tradition moved away from its oral roots, acquiring new characteristics, the song contests have changed. Changes are reflected in the songs and themes chosen for the performance, as well as in the performing context and functions.

Approximately up to the end of the 19th century the song leaders the episode of [apdziedāšana (*apdziedaashana*)] within oral tradition when performing in a celebration had the role of ritual teaching or reminding the participants of the group's social norms. The occasion also served as an opportunity for ritual conflict resolution, and it was a means of transmission of the art itself. All happened in a playful or ironic mood. With the passing of time, we notice a shift away from the normative and magico-religious concerns toward entertainment: singers engage in a lighter play and teasing, while still humorously expressing critical or divergent views. It is reminiscent of the play of a court jester.

In the present paper I will analyse this process of change, by taking materials, songs and ethnographic descriptions, from different periods of tradition, including contemporary practices such as performances at the last Baltica festival (July 12-16).

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A Comparative Cross Cultural Study of the Wise Fool in the Genre of Jokes

A phenomenon that appears to be virtually world-wide in its occurrence is that of the joke that engages some self-ironic attitude or mischievous form of commentary about the wit, wisdom or intellect of particular individuals or social groups. Many such jokes appear at first sight to have an ethnic or cultural specificity.

We have also discerned in our research that many such jokes provide a subliminal dialectic that is intended to expose the absurdity of social stereotyping by engaging what we have now chosen to call the 'wise fool' paradox.

Examples are widespread. A pointer to our theme is the joke (enshrined in an old song) about the Jew condemned to hang who was promised that his last request would be honoured. His 'foolish' request was that he should be hung from a gooseberry tree.

During our collaboration about folklore traditions common between Britain and Poland we became interested in the apparent similarity of certain jokes that are told and re-told in our two countries. Moreover, we recognised that certain such jokes fit the 'wise fool' paradigm.

This paper reports the results of our research into the cross cultural similarities between such jokes. It is not confined to jokes from Britain and Poland, enquiring into the self ironic nature of jokes from Ireland, Russia, the USA and elsewhere, and so-called 'Jewish' jokes that occur throughout the Western world. The paper also reflects upon the apparent ethno-specific nature of some of these jokes.

HASSO KRULL

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Unfinished Monuments

The Cosmic Trickster in Estonian Mythology

Estonian mythology has been an object of academical studies for over a century. In fact, the studies began already in 1838, when Friedrich Robert Faehlmann founded the Learned Estonian Society (*Gelehrte Estnische Gesellschaft*), aiming to ‘further knowledge of the past and present of the Estonian nation, its language and literature, as well as the country settled by the Estonians’ (<http://www.ut.ee/OES/History.html>). In 1919 Matthias Johann Eisen made the first comprehensive attempt to give an overall description of the subject (*Eesti mütolooia*, 2nd edition, 1995). However, after the Second World War the development of Estonian ethnology was restricted by the official banishment of religious studies. A fundamental change of this situation took place only after the revolution of 1988-91.

In Estonian mythology one can discern different strata of trickster tales. The object of my study is a thick layer of fragmentary tales that has hitherto been known in Estonian ethnology as ‘ancient tales of gigantic heroes’ (*hiiu- ja vägilasmuistendid*). This Estonian trickster *par excellence* appears under various disguises and has many names; in ethnological publications most of the recorded texts have been regrouped under the proper names of *Vanapagan* (‘the Old One’), *Kalevipoeg* and *Suur Tõll*, despite several overlappings and the appearance of other proper names. He is a primordial being, who has been continuing the work of creation in the primeval times and has therefore many distinctive features of a culture hero. He does not appear in a strictly theriomorphic form, but sometimes he seems to be an intermediary being between wild animals and humans. He is probably not the first creator of the universe, but he might appear in a creator pair with a certain Grandfather (*Vanaisa*), who seems to be his old acquaintance and collaborator. There is no doubt that he has given the present shape to the Earth, although his creative works are often unintentional or a result of some failed performance, that may express his tricky mood or mischief. He can be foolish or malignant, sometimes evidently lascivious (in case, he is called *Kalevipoeg*); if he appears in the present day, he might strongly resemble humans, and his relations with the peasant community have clear features of an ancient contract. He has a wife, who sometimes seems to be an original creator and Earth Goddess (*Gaia*); he has a family, and in the caves or woods he usually acts in a plural form (e.g. *metspaganad*, *Vanapagana lapsed*, etc.). In certain tales he figures as a guardian of mysteries and secrets, and his household activities are evidently related to the Moon and lunar calendar.

The trickster tales were in the focus of the Estonian ethnology right from the start. But in 1850, the year of Faehlmann’s death, the secretary of the Learned Estonian Society handed all the papers concerning that mythic hero over to Friedrich Reinhold Kreutzwald, who promised to compose an epic. In 1857-61 the first bilingual (Estonian-German) edition of *Kalevipoeg* was published, and in 1862 a popular edition followed. This literary work was largely a product of the author’s imagination. The trickster-like aspects of the protagonist were not totally effaced, but remarkably reduced and set on a secondary level; his link with the creation of the world remained

obscure. One might say that Kreutzwald's epic partly managed to send the trickster into exile – he was replaced by the figure of a gigantic hero, a primeval king of the nation, who could be compared with Siegfried in the *Nibelungenlied* or old Norse gods. Thus, the idea of a tricky primordial being, who has participated in the creation of the world, was suppressed for more than a century.

My paper will concentrate on the visible signs of the trickster's activity – hills and valleys, rivers and lakes, large rocks and sets of stones. Such geomorphic structures have often been interpreted as *unfinished monuments* in the Estonian oral tradition. The trickster and / or his family have started a monumental oeuvre, e.g. the building of a castle or a bridge, but their work has been interrupted and the result left as it is. In fact, many of the 'trickster's castles' have been old loci of religious worship or funeral rites, while others are just natural objects that have been integrated into the traditional cosmology by means of a short narrative. I will first offer an overview of the divergent mythical motives, and then I'll try to find a cosmological explanation to the recurrent idea of an unfinished work. I'll also describe some more successful activities that have been attributed to the trickster's family.

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**The Transnational Trickster
Nasreddin Hodja here, there, and everywhere**

No character of international popular tradition is better suited to discuss the phenomenon of the trickster on a transnational level than Nasreddin Hodja. In its present appearance constituting a unique amalgamate of mostly Turkish, Arabic and other Mediterranean traditions, the character has been documented to cover a chronological range of more than a thousand years, and the narratives of his pranks and jests are known on a regional scale from Morocco to China, including dozens of traditions in between. The combined effort of international research over the past two centuries has made it possible to retrace in minute detail the way the character has developed.

The present paper is to survey this development against the backdrop of general considerations. Particular attention will be given to the following aspects: What factors have enabled Nasreddin to gain his present prominent position? How did he integrate or, otherwise, overcome, various competing tricksters over the centuries? To which extent does the character possess universal appeal, and to which extent has he been shaped by the requirements of regional contexts? In short: Why is Nasreddin the most successful exponent of the transnational trickster?

LICIA MASONI
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A Fool in Context
A Man who Taught his Community to Laugh about him

This paper presents the personal narratives of a man who intentionally became the fool within his own community. The corpus of narratives was put together over a period of four years of fieldwork conducted in a mountain village in the Apennines, in the North of Italy.

In this village, struggling to find his role, this imaginative man became a barber, a mason, a violinist, a dentist and more. His intelligence and his sensitivity, and the need to be accepted by a community he loved, led him to build a fictional identity for himself, which he narrated to his people. If in reality he felt he did not meet the standards of his society and that his lacks and faults would have made an inferior of him, in his new fictional identity he figured as the opposite of who he really was. In his stories, he was a man with exaggerated positive qualities, a super hero. His tall tales were extremely humorous, because of the huge contrast they made with his real self. He was aware of this mechanism and was able to play with it, through his rare imagination, thus achieving great narrative results.

Mixing traditional narratives and real experiences, he produced anecdotes which soon became extremely popular among the villagers, who began to tell them themselves. Through his narratives, he was able to reinsert himself into the very society which had rejected him on the basis of their codified norms. By repeating his stories, the members of the community were not only reinforcing his fictional existence, but also creating a privileged space for him within the community. They soon needed him as a humorous scapegoat and as a source of entertainment.

If this implied that they had an interest in feeding his narrative identity (so much that they started to make up new narratives about him following his model) it also meant, more importantly, that his real identity had suddenly acquired equal importance. It was now necessary to the community, as it provided the counterpart which was essential for the production of the humorous effect.

The fool had thus achieved the purpose of being ‘accepted’ by the community for who he was. At the same time, in this new era of social inclusion, his stories had become an open denounce of the concept of social inclusion itself and a tool for the criticism of the social norms which had forced him to invent a new identity for himself.

This paper analyses this man’s narratives, as collected from those who heard them, in the attempt to portray a fool in context and to reflect the social constraints which lead to intentional folly.

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Hero, Fool or Rogue?

Arno Funke alias Dagobert in media discourse

The wise fool or trickster is a popular figure in narrative culture with a variety of roles. His character is of hybrid nature, alternating between heroic and knavish traits. In this dynamic conceptualisation of the trickster, the figure provides insights into a wide system of value and norms within specific societies.

In my paper I would like to investigate the case of the historic person Dagobert alias Arno Funke who, from 1988-1994, kept Germany in suspense with a series of blackmailing and bomb attacks on the famous mall 'KaDeWe' in Berlin. His case received large prominence in German newspapers which the mall had to use in order to communicate with the blackmailer. Prime topics of the newspaper reports were the imaginative technical constructions and the trickiness with which he fooled the police in more than forty efforts of catching him during the money transfers. In the media, which saw a new peak after his release in 2000, Dagobert was portrayed as popular hero. In analysing the media discourse, I can show that this positive image is based on the narrative tradition of trickster stories and hereby give an example of the dynamics of generic structure and reader response. Furthermore, in comparing Dagobert's case with earlier examples of violent property damage in Germany, we can detect a noticeable shift in the representation and reception of these disturbers of established orders. This shift suggests modifications in traditional hero-patterns as well as in the social structures of post-modern German society and thus raises important questions in today's European Ethnology.

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A Wise Fool's Anecdotal Cycle in Malta

A Reappraisal

The predominant anti-hero in Maltese folk narrative is Ġaħan (/ˈdʒahan/). He is the wise fool, popular with one and all in contemporary Malta. However, in the first half of the twentieth century there was a historical undercurrent which, through children's literature, has manipulated and bowdlerised the discursive richness of Maltese folk culture to the extent of framing Ġaħan as a 'light-headed' fool, at times defining his anecdotes, brimming with sagacity, slyness, guile, cheats and deceits, as 'stupidities'.

It is the aim of this paper to show how through his research and publications the present author has challenged this pseudo-scientific assertion which has been crystallised in the native language of the Maltese archipelago. Humour is not only a device to uphold interest in the tale. Above all it also facilitates the comprehension of the progression of events, thus heightening effectiveness and efficiency of the narration.

Although artificially indulging in anti-social behaviour, the Maltese wise fool semantically also takes the role of a social critic in his farce as well as that of an interceder for the injured and the insulted. He is a poetic vehicle to express folk wisdom, often putting on himself the fool's cap. His tales are a kind of 'ritual of rebellion' which represents an institutionalized way of expressing antagonism towards authority. His anecdotes, better known in Maltese as '*praspār*' (/p'ra:spar/), constitute the temporary subversion of a conscious, symbolic order in the interests of a pleasure-oriented subconscious. Ġaħan's duty is to change chaos to its inverse, cosmos, social disorder to order, the indistinct to the distinct, disequilibrium to equilibrium, to create life and the symbolic universe of our life.

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The Rat Meal
Story-telling of a Trickster between Reality and Fiction

My paper will deal with the darker part of the trickster and give an example of the story-telling about a historic person who was seen as a trouble maker. He became a very rich man in his town but was not accepted by the upper class families. He decided to emigrate and invited the richest and most honoured citizens for a last dinner. They all enjoyed the splendid meal and only found out in the end that they had eaten rats.

There is a long poem on this event written in Low German. It is part of the vivid folktale tradition of Papenburg, a little town in North Western Germany which was founded during the Thirty Years' War as a fen colony. Since the end of the 18th century Papenburg developed into an import seaport. The inhabitants now became captains and sailors, ship-owners und shipbuilders and their sailing-ships were soon to be found on all oceans.

The descendants of the old families, of captains and shipbuilders, are nowadays widespread but some of them are highly interested in learning about their past as much as possible. They collect the oral and written tradition of the adventurous world of captains and sailors going round the world in Papenburg's sailing-ships. One of these stories is the Low German poem about the rat meal and the man behind it. The poem is very well known and often told by today's descendants, not least due to the fact that their ancestors had taken part in this dinner.

My paper will deal with this poem on a trickster and the relationship between reality and fiction, between oral and written tradition. It will put this example in the wider field of folktale traditions of exchanged meals.

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Learning Wisdom from Numskulls

The Moral in Stories of 'The Wise Men of Chelm'

'Chelm' is a commercial city near Poland's eastern border, southeast of Lublin. Yet, in Jewish folklore and humour it is perceived from the 19th century onwards not as a real, geographical place, but rather as a legendary Jewish town, whose inhabitants have acquired a reputation of being good and well meaning, but stupid. The Wise Men of Chelm (in Yiddish, *Chelmer ḥakhomim*) are portrayed as confused by everyday standards. Therefore, they are ceaselessly faced with problems and crisis situations. Sometimes one *Chelmer* or the other comes up with a solution, but traditionally the problems are brought in front of a council of seven sages, who rack their brains thinking, as is their custom, 'for seven days and seven nights,' until they come up with an answer.

The Chelmers' solutions are generally impractical, applying twisted and lopsided reasoning, not knowing how to apply 'theory' to practice. There is a cognitive contradiction between their inner logic – apparently suitable for the problems they encounter and reality, in the light of which their solutions are incongruent. This 'appropriate incongruity', as phrased by Oring,² stimulates humour. It also enables to name the Chelmers 'wise', for their foolishness is not mere stupidity. Rather it can be seen as a sort of convoluted mis-logic that satirizes the process of Jewish theological reasoning.

Another characteristic enabling to see the inhabitants of Chelm as wise is the street wisdom embodied in their tales: 14 of the 32 Chelm-stories in IFA, all told by the same raconteur, include a moral, which makes use of the Chelmers' conduct to comment on misdoings in the realistic world, such as communism, wars, politics, clerical work, etc. The explicit wording at the end of the tales, deducing from the Chelmers' behaviour to human nature in general, transforms them from 'jokes' to 'fables', whose moral can be applied on countless situations in everyday life. Humour thus serves the didactic purpose to enforce a useful truth, clarifying an ethical lesson, or satirizing people.

The paper is intended to project a new reading in the stories of 'The Wise Men of Chelm'. True, they are numskulls, not tricksters. Yet, I wish to expose the ways in which their 'fool's cap' is used as a poetic vehicle for expressing folk wisdom, the way it is done in the stories of Hershale, Nasreddin, Juha, Hodja and Bahlul.

² Oring Elliott, "Appropriate Incongruity," *Jokes and their Relations*, Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 1992, pp. 1-15.

ANTOANETA OLTEANU
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The Wise Fool in Folk Legends in Fairy Tales

The paper intends to present some aspects of the wise fool in folk traditions. I intend to take into consideration mainly legends and fairy tales, which help us to show various aspects of the chosen character with reference to Romanian and some Slavic (mainly Russian and Bulgarian) folk cultures.

There is, of course, the image of the wise fool as trickster, one of the most important characters of fairy tales – being usually a helping person, a metamorphosite (mainly wearing an animal mask) who offers valuable information to the hero, or the hero himself, seen as the most insignificant character, but eventually appearing as a main, leading character of the story (the youngest son, for example). Both aspects could be interpreted as intrusions of the other, supernatural world into the world of humans, the wise fool disposing most of his features as an unusual, supernatural character.

On the other hand, the same mask the supernatural trickster wears in the human world one can meet in folk legends, *memorata* or *fabulata*, which narrate extreme contacts of humans with various kinds of demons. The latter look like ordinary men, except for some extraordinary features, usually hard to be noticed by an untrained eye, but rather obvious for the experienced. In some legends the human actor seems to be a sort of a wise fool comparable to the demons – there are a lot of situations in which the human manages to trick the demons, thus escaping from an extremely unpleasant situation.

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***The Chick-Pea Master as a Human Parallel for Trickster Fox in
Greek Popular Tradition***

Considerations on oikotype AT 514D*

Oikotype ATU 545D* (*The Pea King*) is a quite popular narrative in the Greek folktale corpus with thirty-three registered variants. While the plot's main part is typologically associated with tale type ATU 545B (*Puss in Boots*), the denouement normally meets the plot of tale type ATU 812 (*The Devil's Riddle*) in its Greek context.

This paper examines adaptations of the plot in the Balkan countries' traditions and discusses the extent to which the human 'Chick-Pea Master' assimilates the qualities of the Fox Matchmaker – which normally replaces Puss in Boots in the Greek oral tradition. The combination with tale type ATU 812, decisive for the hero's destiny, is also bespoken of the tale character's specific attributes.

STELIOS PELASGOS (KATSAOUNIS)

Mount Pelion, Greece

The Wise Fool in the Greek Tradition

The wise fool is either a genuine fool who acts foolishly and exposes the foolishness of those who consider themselves wise, or a wise man who pretends to be a fool in order to question the certainties of the wise, or is ambivalent and is both a wise man and a fool, shaking our perceptions of foolishness and wisdom with his antics.

The Greek tradition is enormously rich and for many thousands of years has venerated and spread the concept of the wise fool in all his aspects. We encounter the wise fool in many Aesop fables that incorporate a rich Oriental tradition, in the philosophical anecdotes of the 'Philogelos' collection of the 5th century that were incorporated in the stories of Nasreddin Hodja. Many medieval Greek folktales refer to the wise fool creating special versions and variations of the main Aarne-Thompson types.

The wise fool is also a spiritual example in the mystic traditions of the Greek and the Mediterranean world. This fool arrives at the mystical union with God through his foolishness and total abandonment to His will as is expressed in the Greek folktale 'The Wise Man and the Saint' that is common in many Eastern countries of the North (e.g., India) or the South (e.g., Russia, also collected by Leo Tolstoy). In the Medieval Greek world we encounter the wise fool in the Byzantine tradition of the fools for Christ (Δια Χριστόν σαλοί) in many collections of stories that refer to Christian monks. This Christian tradition meets the mystic Islamic tradition of Sufism in the person of Nasreddin Hodja, a favourite figure of all the Greeks of Asia Minor. When my grandfather was made a refugee and abandoned the famous town of Smyrna, he brought with him and transmitted these stories to his children and grandchildren.

In the Greek philosophical tradition Socrates is the wise fool *par excellence* and many folk stories referring to his life were made and circulated even in his lifetime. The philosopher admits his ignorance and pretends to be a fool in a way that humiliates all those that pretend to know the Truth. This tradition continues with the legends about the philosopher Diogenes and others.

The recent Greek oral tradition enjoys the tricks of the wise fool not only through storytelling but also through the popular shadow theatre of Karagiozis. The latter is a direct descendant of Aesop and Socrates. All these wise fools the legendary (Aesop), the historical (Socrates) and the fictional (Karagiozis) are notoriously ugly and deformed

Many heroes of the Greek tragedies were inverted wise fool people who considered themselves wise but attained wisdom after their downfall only when they acknowledged their foolishness.

Oedipus exemplifies this kind of tragic hero. He considers himself and is considered by the public opinion as wise. He has delivered the town using his intellect. He has solved the riddle of the monster, the Sphinx, acknowledging the limits of the human condition but he cannot admit his fatal mistakes. He scorns the divine wisdom of the

mystics – the oracle of Delphi and the diviner Dieresis – and treats them as fools confident of his logic. Only his final humiliation and tragic downcast offer him true wisdom. He was considered a powerful, wise king, but he attained true wisdom after his downfall. King Oedipus has the same arrogance as king Pentheas in 'Bakhes' of Euripides and they share the same tragic fate.

STELIOS PELASGOS (KATSAOUNIS)

Mount Pelion, Greece

The Wise Fool

*The storyteller's way of mastering and educating
the interpersonal and intrapersonal intelligence*

*“The folk story is a wise person who has reached
the end of his road. The storyteller is the fool
that does his best in order to serve this wise person.”³*

Considering the storytelling performance from the point of view of the multiple intelligence theory we can observe five different abilities at work simultaneously. The traditional storyteller or bard uses his linguistic, bodily-kinaesthetic, musical, interpersonal and intrapersonal intelligence.

The storytelling performance is attended by a wide variety of people who differ in age, gender, social and economical status, education, political and even religious beliefs. The oral artist is able to touch each and every one of them with his art using his interpersonal and intrapersonal intelligence as a wise fool. The storyteller identifies himself with the wise fool to overcome any barriers that separate him from the various members of his audience. His foolishness offers him impunity and through laughter he can transcend the limits of the socially accepted attitudes and question them, thus becoming wise.

His personal intelligence is extremely sensitive and directs him to approach his audience through the side door, entering as a wise fool. As a person he may be a fool, in fact sometimes he strives to be considered as such. But as a storyteller he is wise. His wisdom is not a personal achievement, but his stories are wise.

In this way he can give highly personal advice without being personal. As a wise fool he can serve his fivefold ‘meaningful social role’. He can be an entertainer, a teacher, a historian, a healer and a spiritual guide.

³ Catherine Zarcate, *Conte et Spiritualité*, Le renouveau du conte, G. Callame-Griaule, ed., C.N.R.S., 1991, p. 391. Zarcate is a French professional storyteller, psychologist and one of my great teachers.

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**Culture-hero Tricksters
among Bedouin Tribes in the North of Israel**

The paper is based on my fieldwork among the Bedouin tribes in the north of Israel where I collected more than 100 folktales from many different tribes. Some of these stories deal with culture-hero tricksters.

One of them is Djoha (Jucha, Joha), who is known all over the Mediterranean – North Africa, Israel, Syria and Turkey, and also in the Judeo-Spanish culture. I will present a typical Djoha story and demonstrate a possible connection between this story and stories ascribed to the famous Arab poet Abu Nuwas (750?-815?).

The second hero is a more local one by the name of *Hassan-el-Shater* (Hassan, the clever one). I'll present him through one of the stories ascribed to him and discuss his role in the particular Bedouin society.

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Anecdotes of Nasreddin Hodja and Clever Pejo
Comic heroes from the Republic of Macedonia –
Similarities and Differences

The anecdotes on the personality of Nasreddin Hodja have been subject to numerous changes and various interpretations throughout the centuries. Their popularity in the past and contemporary oral tradition is more than evident. It is so because the anecdotes are present not only in story tellers' repertoire, but also in frequent use in everyday speech as colloquial phrases referring to some contemporary situations.

In current oral tradition from Macedonia Nasreddin Hodja is a folkloric character living the way ordinary people do. Narrating anecdotes about him is one of the ways to use his acting, his extremely clever and brave personality to reflect needs, fears and similar contemporary realistic situations in the life of the story tellers and their listeners.

Thus understanding Hodja today implies that we have to take into consideration various cultural, sociological and political developments in the past centuries, during which his personality has been shaped as a unique phenomenon in the folkloric world. Hodja always uncovers the naked truth to everybody in his special way, he is always against falsehood, the reason why his name has been living for good among peoples of all nations and races through thousands of amusing stories called after his name.

His closest friend from Macedonia is Clever Pejo. This is evident in almost 70% of the anecdotes in Macedonian prose tradition as much as is evident in the texts of the present collection too. Their relationship has been analysed by many scholars. In our present work the two characters, acting as friends, can be seen in the body of most popular anecdotes. Passing through the period of their national and religious oppositions and rivalry, they come to an evident conclusion: they are multifaceted heroes of the same kind.

They are vulnerable like any ordinary persons. However, many very hard realistic truths readily come out of their tongue. They are representative of the ordinary people and they speak on their behalf. That is why we love their keen sense of humour, their philosophical remarks, particularly their humility and willingness to make the best of every bad situation.

The present work deals with similarities and differences between these two typical comic heroes as represented in the text of oral anecdotes recorded in several regions in the Republic of Macedonia.

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The Wise Fool in Slovak Oral and Literary Tradition

The wise fool cycle in Slovakia includes tricksters and bird-brains as well as heroes that are often underappreciated and underestimated, though still preserving their pride, social status and social acknowledgement. In the narrative tradition of Slovakia there are several heroes known in rural environment as well as wise fool heroes in the urban environment.

Cycles of wise fool heroes can in principle develop in two ways: firstly, the cycle grows from a certain generally widespread local type of fool, who has characteristic features (often according to his socio-professional ranking). By cumulative additions to the anonymous stories of the persons around him, a new narrative type develops (e.g., the Nácko wise fool hero from an original mining town of Banská Štiavnica). Secondly, the cycle centres on a real person who in the social, local or professional environment of his group, can gain such influence that gradually brings broader popularity in the tradition area and/or at the same time the stories of other anonymous heroes are focused on him (e.g., Žigo from Banská Bystrica or Paulovič-Rintintin from Martin).

There is an exceptional example of a transitive type of hero called Uncle Ragan from Brezová who developed as a result of an amalgamation of a real person with a literary hero from a novel of Elo Šándor, a Slovak writer at the beginning of the 20th century. There are specific tricksters often with a tragicomical bent, but generally accepted persons also in urban environment, e.g. Schöne Náci in Bratislava. A typical urban trickster in Slovakia was Žigo from the city of Banská Bystrica. The proof of his celebrity, in comparison to his biography, is found in the local oral tradition up to this very day.

According to Bergson, a central hero of a humourist cycle comes in a certain sense of social gesture. At the narration level a hero ceases to be a real man and becomes an aesthetic projection of his community needs. He becomes a code, expressing the details of human experience in a sensitive way, different from proclaimed requirements, thus projecting a more universal and true statement.

In the urban environment a wise fool can change according to particular historical situations, from group influence up to whole city influence. Such a person is usually in contrast to tragic and comic destiny. He harmonizes conflicts and social relations in everyday life by carrying on his shoulders the subjective problems of his community. He is in favour of equilibrium to overcome social and ethnical contradictions and connects the historical periods. He rekindles the inner harmony of community, thus bringing about different hierarchical and attitudes and evaluating criteria in minds of people by breaking the norms of social behaviour, and poking fun at administrators and politicians. He plays a particular important role in the process of establishing a

local group at the higher level of an urban unit (e.g., in the awareness of social identity).

The seemingly harmless wise fools become the 'speakers' of the group, especially in urban environment, by expressing the real, generally accepted views. In a way these heroes are the regulators of community needs, gaining its positive evaluation and approval, even though they might not always be positive personalities.

There is a particular chapter is Slovak Eulenspiegel, Geľo Sebechlebský. His excesses were already recorded in the 18th century in the poetry of Ján Chrastina and Bohuslav Tablic. That is why it is possible to compare the motives and materials with contemporary fieldwork material. Geľo has been dramatised several times and in 1958 the outstanding Slovak composer Tibor Andrašovan composed his opera '*Figliar Geľo*' (trickster Geľo), based on Ján Holly's play written in the 19th century. A film in the sixties and a successful TV production '*Geľo Sebechlebský*' revitalised oral tradition. Several features, even if not always pro-social, can be taken as an anthropological constant, presenting these fools as the beloved heroes of the times, very often the constant heroes.

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The Wise Fool between History and (Popular) Literature
(Spain, Germany and Italy, 1500, 1600)

Using selected examples from history and popular literature, the paper examines the character of the court jester in the tension between disport and wisdom. Special attention will be devoted to dwarf-figures in the arts – for example in Velázquez’s painting ‘Meninas’ (Mari-Barbola) –, aiming at investigating not only their role regarding spectacle and the comical, but also as conveyors of a wise didactical programme which could be especially useful for children. Recently found archival documents shed new light on the female dwarf in ‘Meninas’ and on Velasquez’s painting.

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Three African Tricksters, Fools or Wise Fools?

In Africa, trickster tales are very common. The majority of them are animal trickster tales, they are particularly favoured by the Bantu-speaking peoples who form the bulk of the Sub-Saharan population.

However, my paper will be devoted to tricksters whom the narrators imagine in human form only. They are three tricksters about whom sufficient material is available to allow a deeper study:

1 /Kaggen of the /Xam Bushmen of South Africa. Their traditions were documented in the 1870s and in the meantime language and culture of these Bushmen have died out.

2 Haiseb of the Damara of Namibia.

3 Waito of the Baka in the Cameroons.

The three ethnic groups formerly were hunter-gatherers and their trickster figures have much in common. First of all they were regarded as beings of mythical primeval times. The characters of these tricksters show, however, a remarkable diversity. To all three of them some aspects of a culture hero are attributed. On the other hand, all three are sometimes depicted as fools. Yet the balance between mythical hero and mythical fool varies considerably. Our paper will trace how far each of them can be called a wise fool or only a fool.

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Image of the Trickster in Russian and Tatar Folklore

Russians and Tatars are the most numerous ethnic groups in the population of Russia. The main territory of their interaction is a region of the Middle Volga. Russian and Tatar folklore is very rich in forms and personages. Such forms as narratives, adages, proverbs, anecdotes, legends and others are full of different characters: clever and foolish, generous and greedy, kind and unkind. Most of the characters have roots in heathenism – the reason why folklore genres are important historical sources.

The collective pattern of one of the most typical Russian characteristics of is concentrated in the figure of Ivanushka-durachok ('Ivan the Fool'). He performs illogical actions, often gets into trouble, meets people that endanger him, but in the outcome he turns out to be the victor. A specific form of Tatar folklore is a '*mezek*' – a short funny didactic story. The trickster in *mezeks* has different names, but the main idea is always the same – good wins over evil. Russians and Tatars meet in some folklore genres and here their characteristics may be compared. In this way folklore analysis presents a good opportunity for comparative study of ethnic auto- and getero-stereotypes, connections and interactions between peoples, etc.

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Veiled Truths
the Wise-Fool in Shakespeare and the Wondertale Hero

In this paper I propose to show how Shakespeare uses the wise-fool figure to utter the uncomfortable truth of the matter no one else is able to grasp, and how this relates to the fact that wondertale heroes often appear as fools who have it in their power to solve situations no-one else is able to.

In both cases truth is laid out as apparent nonsense insofar as what appears to be true is illusory. Therefore, the wise fool figure draws on the dialectics of hidden truths and blatant illusion, which is central to wondertales as a genre.

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**Bertoldo and Nasraddin-Hodja in the Macedonian Stories
about the Wise Fool**
*An investigation about the impact of these two anecdotic figures
on Marko Cepenkov*

The influence of foreign oral and written literature on Macedonian folktales about the wise fool has scarcely been investigated by previous scholars. Opening a small door to this unknown realm of the still living folk heritage is a very important fact to the cultural history of the Republic of Macedonia in general. This is also an occasion to prop up the merit of the great collector Marko Cepenkov thanks to whom a considerable amount of various folkloric data came and is still coming to us from his published and archived materials.

In his *Autobiography* Cepenkov reveals that he had in his hands, as a very young lad, the books of Nasreddin Hodja and Bertoldo or 'Berodol,' as he calls him. Starting from this very poor information that had awakened the curiosity of all those who had dealt with the work and life of this Macedonian folklorist from the 19th century, one can come to the conclusion that 'Berodol' of Cepenkov could not be other than Bertoldo from the Italian trilogy of *Bertoldo*, *Bertolino* and *Casasenno* by Giulio Cesare Croce (the author of the two first parts of the trilogy) and by A. Banchieri (the author of the third book).

One cannot be certain which book of *Bertoldo* Cepenkov had in mind. Since he did not know Italian, nor other languages than the Slavic ones at that time to read *Bertoldo*, one has to suppose that his original was a Serbian or Croatian or even a Bulgarian translation. The first Serbian or Croatian translation of *Bertoldo* is the one from 1779, ascribed to Nikola Palikuca, in which the Italian hero takes the name of Nasreddin Hodja, common and mostly known among the South Slavic and other Balkan peoples. After that follows the translation by Joakim Vujic, published in 1807 that had many other editions afterwards, of which the most renowned is the 1854 one. This offers a panoramic view of the South Slavic popularity of these two personalities embodying the widely famous protagonists of Nasreddin Hodja and Bertoldo.

Cepenkov, the author of the *Autobiography*, quotes two Bulgarian translations: the one from 1853 and another without a date, but most probably anterior to the first one. Nevertheless, the very fact that Cepenkov in his very early age could have read *Bertoldo*, proves in itself on the one hand that the interest in Macedonia for the religious books ceased to be the unique in the course of the 19th century, and after that the people's attention was oriented to laic literary productions. On the other hand it shows that *Bertoldo* was one of the main literary sources for the formation and education of Cepenkov beside the existing oral tradition of his time.

Moreover, *Bertoldo* inspired Cepenkov to write down several stories and anecdotes, where heroes contain the features of the wise fool but the most prominent one is Jane Zadrogaz from the town of Prilep (in today's Republic of Macedonia, the place where Cepenkov the folklorist was born and lived most of his life).

Later his typical figure of the wise fool has inspired the renowned Macedonian drama writer Goran Stefanovski to write a play in 1974, which carries the same title. It is an example of a play built as a ritual construct. It represents a carnivalesque, scenic fantasy containing the best characteristics of the modern ritual theatre. Here the folkloric is present not only in the usage of motifs, but also in its structural foundations, which could be seen through the superimposition of many layers and non-literal attitudes toward the folkloric material as a basic presumption. The latter endows the play with a contemporary relevance, for it takes two different directions that enable us to discover the very essence of the ritual and draws from it the eternal drama of the folk spirit. It also establishes an ironical relation with folkloric heritage with the sole aim of demystifying it and creating a new relation with modernity.

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‘Eulenspiegel’: German Variant of a Wise Fool?

Till Eulenspiegel, folk hero and prototype of the joker in the Middle Ages, is part of world literature and intangible cultural heritage. He was supposed to be born around 1300 in Lower Saxony and died in Mölln around 1350. The principle of taking everything verbatim is only one means of blaming the vices and deficiencies of his contemporaries. The author of the Eulenspiegel-book (1510) might be Hermann Bote, a scribe, who did not belong to the intellectual elite.

The paper will not only describe the process of translation, purification, dissemination and some famous literalizations (Charles de Coster), but rather analyze content via a new approach of European stereotype research: How did this hero experience otherness in traveling around Europe? And did he do it in a ‘wise’ or in a ‘foolish’ way?

MIKE WILSON

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The Wise Fools of Contemporary Professional Storytelling

In 1936, in the dark days of Fascism, the German critic and essayist Walter Benjamin, in a short piece entitled *'Der Erzähler'* ('The Storyteller'), calls for the telling of stories as an oppositional activity and for story tellers to be true subversives in disseminating truth and wisdom and fraudulent times. Almost seventy years later, American scholar Jack Zipes called for storytellers to be 'cunning thieves' like Jack, the perennial hero of British and American folk narrative, or Robin Hood, exposing injustice and robbing the rich to give to the poor.

This paper will consider contemporary professional story telling movement as essentially a Utopian movement that emerged from the countercultural movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s. It will look at contemporary professional story telling as an oppositional art form and at story tellers as subversive artists, as proposed by Benjamin and Zipes. Another characteristic, though, of Jack is that he is not just a cunning thief, but also a wise fool, a simpleton who is adept at outwitting the tyrant and bully.

This paper will, therefore, look at the responsibilities of the professional story teller today and build on Benjamin's and Zipes's essays by assessing the storyteller's potential for becoming the wise fool themselves, especially in the challenging context of widening professionalisation and commodification of story telling. It will consider a number of examples of practising story tellers who, through their work, attempt to adopt the mantle of the wise fool and, in doing so, revive the tradition of the story teller as a subversive and emancipatory force. Case studies will include Patrick Ryan's 'Listen Up!' project in Northern Ireland, the work of Billy Teare, and the 'Neighbourhood bridges' programme in Minneapolis.