

Folklore in Africa

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Imagine it is twilight, the work of the day is accomplished, the comfort of the firelight is drawing you closer to enjoy each other's company with a cup of palm wine. It is a time of relaxation after the evening meal. Children amuse each other with guessing riddles, gradually the friendly chatter subsides when you hear me say, "A story for you".

The Hyena and the Dead Ass

The hyena once had the luck to come upon a dead ass. There was enough meat for three whole days. He fell to with a will and was busy enjoying his meal when suddenly he saw his children coming. He knew their healthy young teeth and growing appetites, and as he did not want to share the magnificent carcass with them, he said:

"You see that village over there? If you're quick you'll find plenty of asses there, just like this one. Only run."

The hyena's children rushed toward the village, shouting the good news at the tops of their voices. And as the tale travelled to all corners of the bush, starving animals crept out - jackals, civet-cats, tiger-cats, all the smaller wild animals - and ran toward the village where a feast of asses' meat was to be found.

The whole morning the hyena watched them go by, singly or in flocks, until in the end he began to be worried.

Well, he said to himself, it looks as if it must be true. That village must be full of dead asses.

And leaving the carcass he had all to himself, he started off to join a band of other animals who were running toward the village. (Guillot, 1966, pp. 88-89)

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What you have just heard is an example of a West African folk-tale. It is a short story showing exaggeration as an art in which one of the favorite characters, the stupid Hyena, is shown.

The intent and purpose of this paper is to discuss folklore and its appearance in various tribes in western, central, eastern, and south-eastern Africa.

Folklore is the common orally transmitted traditions, myths, festivals, songs, superstitions and stories of all peoples. The term was first used by William J. Thoms in 1846. The three major folklore areas of the world are: 1) Africa, Europe and Asia; 2) South and North America; and 3) the South Sea region. Each of these areas has considerable folklore unity. Most folklore consists of survivals which continue to have functional value. Sir Lawrence Gomme (1853 - 1916) tried to make the study of folklore scientific and emphasized the historical, ethnological and sociological components. Folklore has come to mean all kinds of oral artistic expression. It may be found in societies that have no writing and it may be found unwritten in a literate society. Originally folklore was the study of the curiosities of culture, but gradually it became specialized as the study of popular literary activities. (Winick, 1968, p. 217)

Today, anthropological folklorists are more interested in improving methods of reporting and analysis than trying to advance theories. They find it quite sufficient to say a number of significant, though unsystematized, things about myths and tales. They show little preoccupation with plot, slight concern with the reconstruction of original localities and little interest in migration patterns of motifs. There is even repugnance for statements about ritual-to-myth

and archetypal origins. Anthropological folklorists do not display any advanced ideas of a system of scientific theory about oral expressive behavior. However they do believe it is now necessary to study all aspects of expressive oral literature. (Jacobs, 1966, Foreward)

Folklore, as presented here, is an oral form of literature. The demand for entertainment during the long dark hours, devoid of modern conveniences such as television or theaters make story-telling an attractive and popular pastime. The environment in which tales are told is just as important as the tale itself. This environment includes the story-teller, the audience, the temperature, the time of day and the season. All are an integral part of folklore in Africa. It should be remembered that there is no right or wrong way, in most instances, of telling a story. It depends on the mood of the narrator, the participation of the audience and the occasion of the story. There is always a dramatic quality in the story-telling sessions which is probably due to the fact that they are generally told at night. Origins are unimportant in the context of this paper.

There are different forms of folklore which will be briefly discussed. In many instances there is no clear distinction as to placing a tale under a particular category, because many if not all stories include aspects of more than one type. Stith Thompson, a folklorist, not an anthropologist, has written a monumental reference work setting forward the basic elements of folk narratives of all kinds. (Thompson, 1964) Although in direct contrast to the present anthropological folklorist as pointed out before by Mellville Jacobs, Malefijt believes cataloging is a necessary prerequisite to

any systematic study. (Malefijt, p. 172) The types of folklore under evaluation here are as follows:

1. Animal-Trickster tale These are probably the most popular in Africa. There is always a small animal of high intelligence and cunning, quite unscrupulous, with great cupidity and gross appetite. He victimizes a series of fellow creatures, generally one animal that is his particular prey. He is inevitably larger and stronger than the trickster, always dull-witted, often earnest and hard working. People respond easily to trickster's suave arguments and alluring promises. The trickster is not always depicted as besting an intended victim. On occasion he loses and is shown as anything but cleyer. (Herskovits, p. 449)

Herskovits believes there is an element of psychological and sociologic significance to be found in the size of trickster who must employ his ingenuity to best his more powerful adversary. This may be regarded as a "reflection of African thinking in approaching the day to day situations a human being must meet and resolve."
(Herskovits, p. 450)

2. Fairy-tale This is defined as a longer narrative, serious in general, but by no means excluding humor, centering on one hero or heroine, usually poor and destitute at the beginning who, after a series of adventures in which the supernatural element plays a conspicuous part, attains his or her goal. It is essentially melodramatic in tone and character. There is usually a helper or two for the hero and a villian or villians. Generally the hero possesses whatever virtues one may wish for and no mention is made of possible flaws. There is no evolution of character discernable

in most fairy-tales; the hero is supremely good or clever throughout the story. The virtues are always courage, cleverness, presence of mind, generosity, willingness to listen to good advice, kindness and common decency. The helper to succeed in the hero's task is important in the story. He can be an animal or person, often with supernatural powers. Sometimes help is given the hero involuntarily such as by overhearing animal talk, or through inanimate objects such as trees, magic rings, a cloak of invisibility, or an inexhaustible money bag. The villain can be near the hero, such as relatives, or unconnected with him until his tasks bring him in contact, such as giants, dragons, ogres, witches, soocerers or magicians.

There are usually a set of tasks, often three, that the hero must overcome to win the reward, which is always something concrete; a treasure, long life, or the ideal woman. The number two or three prevails throughout the story not only to the characters but also the incidents with a gradual intensification of action. The third is the most dangerous, most valuable, prettiest, youngest, etc. There is generally an absence of death except for the villain and the ending is inevitably happy and successful for the hero. (Krappe, pp. 1-32)

3. Myths These stories are intimately connected with religious beliefs and practices of a people. They tell of sacred beings, of semi-divine heroes and of the origins of all things, usually through the agency of these sacred beings. (Thompson, p. 9) They appear in the form of a narrative with a plot; often with style and beauty. As a cultural institution they have psychological and social functions and meanings as well as religious overtones. (Malefijt, p. 172)

4. Fables Fables are a highly developed literary form in certain cultures of Negro Africa. They are short stories in which the protagonists are talking animals with both human and animal traits. They always state or suggest a moral (Winick, p. 200) Fables are derived from the animal tale and know only one philosophy-common sense. (Krappe, p. 66)

5. Legends Tales that are attached to a definite locality, and therefore are fixed in place if not in time, for they do not migrate. Local legends are tied to the landscape in which they arise, usually to explain some uncommon feature of that landscape. They are generally brief and even where historical events are at the bottom of a given tradition, they only preserve the kernel of a happening. They can be the result of dream experiences or spiritual illusions. They have an episodic structure and can be melodramatic without happy endings. (Krappe, pp. 70, 79, 84) (Thompson, p. 8)

6. Explanatory and Pourquoi stories These are stories explaining the origins and characteristics of various animals, plants, or natural phenomena. (Thompson, p. 8) (Walker, p. 83) These are often for children and frequently the explanation seems to be the entire reason for the existence of the story. Animals often play the main roles. They are generally short and the numbers of motives few. (Krappe, p. 60) A motif or motive may be thought of as the smallest divisible unit of a tale. (Malefijt, p. 172)

7. Proverbs Proverbs represent, in their essential form, some homey truth expressed in a concise and terse manner. (Krappe, p. 143) There are many occasions where the proverb is used, but it plays a particular role in law courts much as we cite

precedents. (Herskovits, 1958, p. 57) "It is used with great effectiveness as an instrument in achieving the paradox of plain speaking through induction. It is used to warn, admonish, reprove, guide, praise and encourage. It reflects the deepest-set values of a people, showing the drives that motivate behavior and the controls that regularize the relations of an individual to his fellows."

(Herskovits, p. 451)

8. Riddles These are usually limited to children who are encouraged to learn them to sharpen their wits. They are ordinarily presented in the form of a statement rather than a question.

(Herskovits, p. 453)

9. Merry Tales or Anecdotes These are short narratives in prose or verse, relating an episodic event or series of events culminating in a humorous situation. (Krappe, p. 45) Merry tales depict ordinary human life. They express elementary simplicity and extreme realism, and have a wider appeal than fairy-stories. The chief characteristics of a merry tale are 1) it is episodic, 2) it is humorous, 3) the supernatural, if occurring at all, is quite negligible and in no way affects its essential qualities, 4) the characters are everyday people facing everyday problems and temptations and 5) wit and satire are important, often making certain trades the object of satirical attacks. They are often disgusting but not immoral.

10. Ogres, Giants, and Demons These characters often appear in connection with other mentioned types, but occasionally are put in separate categories.

With the foundation thus laid, we are now ready to examine some specific African tribes and their individual folklore. We will look at the individual types of folklore appearing in each, the relative importance of the tale-teller, the setting and the unique characteristics of the culture that affect their folklore where it is presented. Sometimes what is deliberately omitted from the folktales is just as important as what is included and this will be mentioned whenever possible. We will begin in West Africa, proceed to central, then eastern, and finally to Southeastern Africa.

The Afikpo Ibos, of the thickly populated farming area of Southeastern Nigeria, have tales, proverbs and riddles that make up their folklore. They do not have a mythology explaining the nature of the universe and the creation of man, or poetry per se. There are two principal types of tales. The historic tales deal with the origins and development of the villages, compounds, and lineages; and fairy-tales which have as their characters humans, animals and objects of nature such as the sun, moon, river, etc. Proverbs are utilized as philosophical comments on life, to instruct children or to warn adults against foolish behavior. They also are expressions of group solidarity.

Riddles are employed mainly for recreation. They appear in the form of a tale, in a simple question, and as paired proverbs having the same meaning. In this latter type the first proverb is stated, and the reply is the second.

example; "Soup in a flat plate cannot be licked."

"A white man's work is never done." (Ottenberg, 1965, p.34)

Moving from the Afikpo to the Yoruba, it is learned that folktales were the only means of transmitting the culture from generation to generation. Oral traditions of beliefs, mores, social attitudes related by the folktales have not lost their importance even with the coming of the British. (Walker, 1961, p. 1) The story-telling sessions are for the leisure after-dinner hours. They are dramatic and musical performances as well as oral ones. The narrators identify themselves completely with the characters of their tales. They use appropriate movements and gestures when necessary to illustrate a point. Musical effect is both haunting and curiously appropriate to the mood and content of the tales. (Walker, p. 4) The audience often participates in the story-telling; they may sing the choruses, beat drums or other instruments to heighten the effect. They will even cheer at the conclusion of a particularly good rendition of a favorite story.

Nigerian folktales are divided into tales of demon lovers, pourquoi stories, moral fables, trickster tales and tales that deal with fertility. The theme of mixed marriages between mortals and other wordly creatures of different kinds are seen in the demon lover stories. The nonmortal mates are often associated with the animal kingdom. These are tales of enchantment where time often has a special dimension. (Walker, p. 79)

The pourquoi stories illustrate folk efforts to explain to themselves the nature of their physical world. They seem intended primarily for children, but could also come close to myths. "Why the Tortoise's Shell is Cracked and Crooked", "Why the Fox chases the Cock", "Why the Sky is So Far Away", "Why the Bat Comes Out

Only at Night", are only several of the stories in this category.

Cannibalism during time of famine in the distant past is reflected in animal allegory. (Walker, p. 86) Twins are a justification for traditional reverence and appear in many Yoruba stories, but other Nigerian tribes abhor them. (Walker, p. 88) The moralizing tendency is so strong in some fables, they seem to exist solely for that reason, but others exist for other reasons. They are all brief and direct. Tortoise in Nigeria usually assumes the role of thinker whether he wins or loses. From tribe to tribe various animals take precedence for cunning and wisdom. The hare in Southeastern Africa, the spider along the Ivory and Gold Coasts and the Jackal among the Hottentots. Some of the fables are primarily instructive and show that if a warning is ignored, it can be fatal. (Walker, p. 93)

In the Yoruba trickster tales, the trickster appears as a wily and respected planner; a rascal who preys on others and lives by his wits; sometimes he is a simple ordinary person who exploits the opportunities that come his way. Humor and satire are always apparent in these stories. (Walker, p. 99) Escapades of trickster entertain as much as they teach.

The tales of fertility like those of demon lovers, have only one theme. Among the Yorubas the desire for children is particularly strong and fertility is the key to social status, both within the family and the community. There seems to be a very high infant mortality rate. They often get so carried away with the preoccupation of fertility in their tales that even men become pregnant. (Walker, p.8)

The Limba, who live in the upland rice farming area of Sierra Leone also possess a great deal of unwritten literature. Their

stories are part of that oral literature, as are their riddles, proverbs, occasional historical narratives, and songs that frequently occur in the stories. During long evening sessions these stories are told, usually by men around a fire with vivid gestures and dramatic effects that are admired and echoed by the fascinated audience. In practically all Limba stories there is some element of amusement. Riddles are proposed and songs are sung in the same environment. Proverbs and parables sometime enrich the language of the more noted elders, for these are often used to make a point in some legal discussion. Much of the Limba life is saturated by what is in its own way a literature. (Finnegan, 1967, Preface)

Again each narration is a dramatic performance, depending for its effect not only on the excellence of the narrator's composition, but equally on the details of his delivery which means the gestures he uses, and the active participation of the audience. The subtlety of their story-telling is almost wholly lost when it is read away from the area. So from one point of view the stories of animals or people are only simple stories that are short and uncomplicated, but it is the live performance that give them meaning. Story-telling therefore is a living art, and each narration of the same story even by the same person can be different and unique. The story-teller is the central character who shapes and orders the themes and gives the effectiveness to the enactment of the plot.

The Limba are rice farmers residing in villages where their social life is centered. Even though young men go to Freetown for work and wages, they return to add new interest and themes to the traditional ones. Some of these villages are high in the hills and are reached

by narrow winding paths. The women travel up to the villages many times a day carrying their water containers on their heads. Their stories make many references to the cultivation, preparation, cooking, and eating of rice, and add an extra dimension to their whole narrative. (Finnegan, p. 7)

Chiefship is an important institution and a frequent subject in their literature where winning a chiefship is the conclusion and climax to a story. The exaggerated picture of a chief reflects the common tendency to exaggerate riches. (Finnegan, p. 10)

The method of wooing a wife is one of the most crucial endeavors in any man's life, and it is not surprising many stories reflect this. (Finnegan, p. 16) Relations between husbands and wives are the frequent object of direct or allusive comment in their literature. Many tales about the greedy anti-social spider and his wife Kayi deal with this subject, the spider is constantly trying to get the better of his wife. The view of women as independent or treacherous in their role as wives is also a common theme in the stories. The wife who tricks her husband for love of another man is one of the conventional motifs. (Finnegan, pp. 16-17)

Like many West African people, the Limba assume the existence of a single High God. At the same time they lay emphasis on the power of their dead ancestors. Kanu, as they call God, frequently appears as one of the characters of their stories. Kanu, as a remote all powerful and unknowable being, is not at all the way he is shown in the literature. In the stories, Kanu is a kindly father, or a seeker of palm wine, or a chief of a magical land. Reference to the dead are most infrequent in the literature, yet in everyday

existence they are of central importance. (Finnegan, p. 20)

The most common folklore are tales about Kanu, twins, heroes and animals, mainly spider. Morals are not an integral feature of the stories, but merely one of several stylistic devices used to bring them to a fitting conclusion. (Finnegan, p. 29)

Stories of people and heroes offer the greatest range for innovation and variation by individual story-tellers. One of the most common figures here is that of the hunter. He is given special powers for it takes a long time to train to be proficient. He is an important, if somewhat mysterious, person in reality as in the stories. Twins are frequently the central characters, and are commonly believed to also possess special powers. They are always shown as acting together and helping each other. (Finnegan, p. 33)

Limba tales cannot be classified as myths for they do not form any systematic theology, philosophy or mythology. Stories of origins are not taken seriously when they do appear. Even Kanu stories are light, not told at prescribed occasions or are in any way associated with a ritual. What is often described in Kanu or origin stories is a detached generalization about the relation and purposes of present human society.

Animal stories are the most popular, marked by humor and sometimes obscenity. The most common character is Spider, who is depicted as stupid, gluttonous, selfish and irresponsible, consistently outdone by his wife. The relation between him and his wife represent everything that is wrong or opposite in reality. Occasionally Spider is the cunning trickster who outwits larger animals. There are a few other animals with stock characteristics; the antelope, small, shy,

very clever; the goat, also clever; the leopard, dangerous, unscrupulous, full of deceit; the squirrel, clever, who comes to help larger animals; the finch, who appears in the role of diviner; and dogs, closely attached to humans. Most animal stories allude to a moral or are of the explanatory type, and do not seem to be taken too seriously. Riddles are often asked by children. Some analogy of sound, nature, or situation is usually suggested which must be correctly identified. (Finnegan, p. 40) Proverbs are frequently used in the context of persuasion in court.

The tales do not treat such subjects as wars, sieges, great historical changes or long-drawn out events. The tales are short and simple, with brief action, simple plot and little characterization. The topics most used are that of marriage or love, family relationships, position and fortunes of orphans, friendship and cooperation, chiefship, rice, food and eating. Greed for meat is found as an especially funny topic. (Finnegan, pp. 46-60)

The Dohomeans show many similarities to the Afikpo, but "offer a striking example of how each society must be studied in terms of its own particular orientation;" (Herskovits, 1958, p. 14) They have two categories of folklore; history, or ancient lore which are true stories, and tales, which are about things that never existed. To a Dohomean, life is based on history. Under the history category there are: 1) myths, comprising stories of the dieties and the creation of the world and its people; 2) clan myth-chronicles, which tell origins of families or clans and their adventures including explanations of ritual behavior, food taboos and positive sanction; and 3) verse sequences, which usually are sung and composed by

professional verse-makers for the purpose of memorizing geneologies and events that have been incorporated into ritual or law.

(Herskovits, 1958, p. 17)

Tales are classified as: 1) divination tales; 2) hunter stories; 3) enfant terrible stories; 4) "Yo" stories; 5) tales of women; 6) explanatory and moralizing tales; and 7) transformation tales. Here again the narrator is all important. He sets the stage of characters and the task before them; the end of the tale describes it. Moralizing tales are always omitted from funeral sites, for they believe only a fool would moralize the dead. (Herskovits, 1958, p. 25)

In the divination stories it is tradition that all of them come from Fa, the personified system of divination. "There is symbolically an interesting tradition about the vast number of myths and tales that are told. It is said that each distinctive tale represents a year of human existence on earth, and only after all the stories that can be used for Fa divination are exhausted will the world come to an end." (Herskovits, 1958, p. 26)

Hunter is similar to the Limba interpretation. He has knowledge of magic, spiritual helpers, and extends frontiers of the world by bringing back knowledge of herbs. He is also a scout during wartime. (Herskovits, 1958, p. 28)

Enfant terrible stories have to do with actions of superior people, with knowledge of the supernatural who often avenge wrongs done to them. Twins and orphan stories are common in this group. "Yo" is the protagonist of the humorous tale. He symbolizes the impulsive, gross, greedy and gluttonous. He is always laughed at, but never despised as is hyena. The theme in these tales is usually

his insatiable appetite, but also of hunger anxiety which is often prevalent in Dohomean reality. The stories of women stress plot and moral. Tales of the loyalty of friends or the opposite bring emotional satisfaction. Jealousy, fraternal rivalry, hypocrisy and intrigue, faithlessness of women, and love are other frequent themes. Stories of Legba, the trickster-diety, are very common. He may be thought of as the one who "loves mischief, knows no inhibitions, recognizes no taboos and dares to challenge injustices." (Herskovits, 1958, p. 36) It is perhaps the trait of not being cowed by those in power that endears Legba to all Dohomeans. Very rarely is he duped.

Riddles play an important part in the folklore. The people especially enjoy the play on words that are so important in everyday communication. One form of the riddle, called conundrum, is attributed to professional story-tellers, and can be very long. Wagers were once made at the king's courts on the outcome of guessing contests. A period of riddling precedes all story-telling and has the special function of a memory device for children. It is characterized by exaggeration and by reference to the grotesque, the incongruous and the forbidden. (Herskovits, 1958, p. 55) Proverbs phrase the philosophy of the Dohomeans and are never used by children to press a point.

Again and again the stories stress the idea that one must be discrete at all times, and not overbearing even if one has many possessions. Social conformity is a central theme and insights into the political order and structure of power can be seen. (Herskovits, 1958, p. 79)

The Hausa have a picturesque legend of their origin. It relates

how the prince of Bafhdad made his way to Daura, slew the monstrous snake which lived in the well and terrorized the townsfolk. He was rewarded for this deed by being made the consort of the queen.

Their children and grandchildren became the founders of the seven Hausa states. It is possible this legend shows the peaceful union of immigrant peoples and the indiginous tribe. The folklore seems to belong to two different periods of history, that before 1500, and that after 1500. The animal and fairy tales of the early period were simple and relatively unsophisticated, but it is to the latter period that the fiction, proverbs and historical legends belong.

It is the peasant class and their tastes that reflect in the stories of wonder, surprise, tension, dilemma, violence, and humor.

(Johnston, p. 30)

The oral literature of the professional story-tellers possess a residule streak of cruelty, especially in the early tales which are often harsh and bloody. This is replaced in the later tales by modified callousness and a macabre type of humor. Much of this humor is based on the discomfort of the great ones on the earth such as the lion. He is pictured as full of power and dignity as he is empty of wit and imagination.

There are stories describing events that are factual. Others, such as the animal and fairy tales, are probably as old as the language itself. The folklore is divided into animal stories, fairy-tales, proverbs, historical legends, true stories, and fiction.

The social motives in some Hausa stories are obvious while others are strictly for entertainment. Among traditional stories, a number deal with witchcraft but they do not necessarily reflect what

the Hausa believe.

Story-telling is a dramatic form of oral expression. The narrator creates the atmosphere by his mimicry, gestures, accents, and tone of voice. There is no such thing as an authentic version of a folktale. As we have seen before, each time a version is told it is somewhat different.

Animal stories are the most popular. The animal hierarchy lends itself very easily to two of the most popular themes; the triumph of brains over brawn, and the discomfort of the mighty ones. There seems to be no evidence of totemism among the Hausa. The spider, hare and jackal all appear in Hausa tales, but they have given each specific qualities. The spider is unscrupulous and vindictive, the hare gay and mischievous and the jackal cunning and sagacious. The villain is usually the Hyena who is shown as greedy and stupid, overbearing to inferiors, and servile to his superiors. He always loses in his duels with trickster.

The fairy-tales feature supernatural creatures in the form of witches, wizards, familiar spirits that haunt trees, and ogres who are the most interesting. Many are similar to European versions. The supernatural creatures are capable of assuming other shapes and forms, and even people and animals can change their shape in these stories.

The legends are concerned with the deeds of heroes during the wars between the Fulani and the Hausa. Their true stories deal with the topic of African slavery. It is a realistic acceptance of the subject, for their attitude is detached and curiously free of emotion. "The Hausa have a strong sense of history and drama.

Judged as a primitive art, as the majority should be, they reveal unusual merit." (Johnston, Introduction, p. 50)

The Bulu live in the tropical rain forests of southeast and central Cameroon. They have no tribal unity at all. The unity is expressed only in loyalty to one's patrilocal village-family. The lineage family is also the most important social unit. So strong is the idea of village-family togetherness, that everyone outside the group is considered an enemy. Not only does the village include the recognizable forest village but it also includes the ancestor village dwelling which is thought of as being underground. These ancestors are just as real and figure in their life just as much as living men. The Bulu men have two life goals; to achieve a high economic-based status through wealth accumulation, and to receive the same rank in the ancestor village after death that they had at death. The family is timeless, the lineage ancestors send a child to be born on earth by a chameleon or trap-door spider who brings the spirit of the child to the mother. For a son to be disrespectful and not want his father's name is a crime almost too serious to behold. It not only threatens the boy but could put an end to the family itself. This must be prevented at all possible costs. Growing boys find little escape from these traditions. The pressures to gain wealth and status are always present. These pressures are built into their folklore and are relieved when wealth suddenly and magically appears. Most Bulu folktales have human and animal characters. The stories tend to stress tradition, not to offend one's father or the ancestors.

Again night is always the setting for the telling of tales.

Stories teach customs, ethical norms, the goals of the society, how to act, and what to avoid. Stories use language a little more flowery and descriptive than that found in everyday speech. The narrator's gestures and movements reflect the changing emotion as the story is told. The number six is culturally important in their stories, for example, to go six rivers away suggests social separation—an unthinkable concept. (Horner, p. 145-156)

In Evans-Pritchard's collection of Azande tales, he states that they are collected to be simply read, without trying to get elaborate structural and sociological interpretation. (Evans-Pritchard, Preface) Their oral literature very seldom refers to their social institutions. The plots deal with the everyday activities of eating, drinking, working, collecting termites, hunting animals, fishing, gathering honey, wild fruits, yams, mushrooms, salt making, the weaving of barkcloth and the use of magic. What the tales fail to mention of the social life they ignore may be just as significant as what they include.

The Zande, who live in the savannah forest in the middle of Africa, have a patriarchal society. Wives are considered inferior, but this does not mean they are ill-treated or neglected. If this becomes the case, life for the husband is made miserable. This is illustrated in their tales. (Evans-Pritchard, p. 5) The importance of in-law relations, involving respect, reserve, and tension is also evident in tales. The treatment of orphans is also shown. Cannibalism, that is, the eating of enemies killed in war or executed criminals, occurred in the past and is alluded to in their folklore. God is mentioned in the tales, but he has no cult. Oracles are

consulted for many reasons and magical practices are a frequent motif of tales. (Evans-Pritchard, p. 11)

Tales are told in the evening around family fires. It is regarded as improper to tell stories during daylight hours. Usually men tell them, but occasionally women are story-tellers. The audience shows its appreciation by its participation while the narrator displays mimicry, gestures and changes of voice to relate the drama.

The hero of their trickster tales is a character named Ture which means 'spider'. The Azande therefore belong, in this respect, to the West African culture area. Ture is a monster of depravity, a liar, a cheat, lecher, murderer; he is vain, greedy, treacherous and ungrateful. In fact, everything against which Azande warn their children. He is presented with little moralizing, never really malicious. There is an almost endearing innocence about him. What Ture does is the opposite of all that is moral. In reality Azande show many of Ture's characteristics, that is a tendency to show off, a sense of humor, and admiration of slimness.

It is significant that the authority of kings, so prominent in their lives, are not mentioned in the folklore. Witchcraft is also scarcely mentioned yet it plays a dominant part in reality. There is no reference made in the tales to over 100 years of Arab and European occupation, or to their secret societies and initiation rites. It could be that these subjects are too close to reality to figure in imaginative stories which take them into a world of fantasy.

(Evans-Pritchard, p. 20)

Tales of Ture are purely fiction and fantasy. There are only two widely known stories known as myths that have been recorded. One

tells how the royal clan originated, the other is the remarkable feats performed by two witch doctors.

Another tribe in central Africa that offers a slight contrast is the Hadjerai. They live in villages on the sloping platforms around towering Mount Gera bordering the savannah. Somehow they have managed to ward off newer tribes and preserve their ancient ways.

(Fuch, Preface) There are clans who assert that they are the descendents of a particular animal. (Fuch, p. 12)

The author who collected these stories, many of which were told him during daylight hours, got them from women who were acclaimed as noted story-tellers as well as men. (Fuch, p. 45) During the daylight sessions, other women would bring something to do while a story was being told. The audience would suggest or volunteer more.

The main figure in the animal stories is the hyena who is regarded as ugly, stupid, and insatiable. His rival, the squirrel or jackal, is depicted as intelligent, quick-witted and very crafty. There are stories of wizards and witches who eat men. It is during the night these supernatural creatures turn into hyenas and snakes to eat men's souls. (Fuch, p. 36) Other themes in the stories deal with love, fertility, faithless wives, and revenge.

The Hadjerai fear hunger above everything else and for that reason they have only a few stories on the subject. This is especially so during the rainy season when the fate of the village is decided for the whole year. They are afraid to even speak of hunger for the spoken word might become reality and take effect at any moment. (Fuch, p. 107)

God is important in the stories that have been passed on from

generation to generation over a period of hundreds or perhaps thousands of years. He is imagined in human terms. He lives in heaven most of the time, occasionally comes to earth, and is sometimes good and sometimes evil. (Fuch, p. 141) Everyone has oracles that require prayers and sacrifices of beer, but these are seldom mentioned in the folklore.

There are stories of friends that appear many times. Women never come between the friendships of two men, for it is considered too precious for any wise man to let a woman upset it. (Fuch, p. 169)

Death is a strange and ever present reality to the Hadjerai. They believe it is a demon who kills people by the order of God. It is known from ancient tales that somewhere in the wilderness there is a village where deaths live. When anyone dies a death song is sung that goes back to ancient time. Like all their oral literature it is passed down by word of mouth.

The Valuhya tribe lies east of Lake Victoria in Kenya. These people are quickly being acculturated into western ways through the extensive missionary system. Many of the old stories are being forgotten as children enter a new way of life. The beauty of the stories is in the way they are told aloud before an audience. Here again the facial expressions, the abrupt hand movements, "the turning aside to spit on the ground when terribly disgusted, and the abject fear they know so well how to picture when they tell of the giants plundering and killing." (Hoyt, Notes)

The stories contain repeating wailing songs and lullabies. The giant stories are weird with cruel endings. Cannibalism, practiced in surrounding territory, seems to be the reason their belief in

giants and goblins is so pronounced. There are stories "stressing the sacredness of a promise of oath and the terrible power of a curse. These all end in a cruel punishment to the one who has not kept a promise." (Hoyt, Notes)

There are stories of everyday life, such as famine, greediness, how to strike a good bargain or be a good blacksmith. There are stories explaining origins and habits of animals and such natural events as death. They fear the spirits of the dead and try to appease them through sacrifice.

The giants in the stories take different forms; they are more animal than human often having several tails and multiple mouths which suggest their cannibalistic tendencies. They live in a far away land not suitable for people and are always the enemies of man. Only lightning and thunder can kill them. Swallowed people are released by cutting off the dead giant's fingers. They are always stupid or dumb.

Riddles are told mostly for children and proverbs are spoken by the elder wise men.

Folktales of the Thonga of South Africa have literary, ethnographic and philosophical value in their life. Stories are told at night often at the conclusion of games. Story-telling is considered the most refined and pleasing of games, and is strictly a night-time occupation. Story-tellers are of all ages and of both sexes. Tales are classified as animal trickster tales with the Hare as the trickster who outwits larger animals by his intelligence and cunning. Fairy stories that are similar to our "Cinderella" where the despised triumph over the elders who hate them; ogres

tales where triumph of wisdom of feeble creatures over horrible cruel monsters is shown; moral tales where just punishment follows such faults as curiosity, jealousy, obstinacy, unkindness, disobedience, laziness, self-confidence, or selfishness. On the other hand kindness and pity are rewarded. Actual fact stories, that are told purely for entertainment, and foreign tales which have come from Moslem, Portuguese or English sources are also present.

One tale might easily be placed in two or more categories. The animal folklore is generally devoid of moral purpose, but a moral idea may be detected in some of the episodes.

"The literary value varies greatly according to the story itself, and to the narrator." (Junod, p. 214) Tales can be short and insignificant or true compositions in which there is order and design. Songs may form the framework of a story. Repetition is a favorite device. A narrator's performance adds to the interest of any story. These Bantu tales are very old, but the same version is different every time it is told.

The root idea of all their folklore seems to be the triumph of wisdom over brute force. Probably because this is a natural and satisfying concept.

Alice Werner acknowledges many similarities of the Bantu folklore of South Africa. The tribes she is speaking of include the Zulus, Xosas, Basuto, Bechuana, Thongas, and Mashona. In general the Bantu do not try to account for the origins of the human race; their legends seem to assume that the particular tribe is the human race. They frequently fail to distinguish between a non-human creator, and the first human ancestor. (Werner, p. 13) Nearly all Bantu have

the legend of the chameleon to explain how death came into the world, or rather why death was not prevented from coming. No unsophisticated African will touch a chameleon if he can help it, nor do they even like to watch a European touch one. (Werner, p. 33,

The dead are supposed to go on living underground indefinitely just like they do on earth. There are many stories describing the adventures of people who have accidentally reached this lower country, usually by following a burrowing animal into a hole. This idea is found in stories wherever Bantu is spoken. (Werner, p. 19)

The idea of one God, as Otiose, is probably believed by all Bantu. There are many stories of a heaven country populated by heaven people. Mortals can reach such a place by a spider web, climbing a tree or a rope.

The dead, which all Bantu honor and recognize, are often depicted in their ghost stories. Snakes, lions or birds are frequent mediums for returning spirits. The possibility that the dead can even return to life is frequently assumed in folktales.

They have legends of past great chiefs whose memory lives on for generations. Animals can also be culture heroes. In many Bantu tribes there is a wonder-child hero. They all have the common characteristics of a woman in difficulty who is helped by an ogre demon, or animal after promising to give it her next born child. A birth takes place and the child is always precocious. Next the child always finds a way to escape the mother's attempt to hand him over to the demon; finally the ogre is killed. There are even sagas which are a series of legends following the lives and adventures of heroes that are probably historical figures. Mythical

elements are incorporated into the legends and stories of the Liongo in East Central Africa.

Cannibals appear in many legends, particularly those of the Zulu. They are not common men, but are magnified into giants and magicians. The ideas here, as elsewhere, probably developed in times of famine, and were more of a ceremonial nature. The man-eaters eventually fled and the practice died out. (Werner, p. 172)

Ogre stories are popular and are probably found in all parts of the Bantu area. Stories of escape by throwing things which turn into a rock, a fire, a forest of knives, a lake or a river are familiar. Many tales deal with marriage to such creatures. The Hyena, as well as the lion and the leopard, has the ability to assume human form at will; sorcerers can assume the forms of these animals. The legend of a monster which swallows the population of a village, or whole country and is then slain by a boy hero is popular in this area as well as all over Africa. The swallowing monster can be an elephant, any female monster, pumpkin or a cannibal ogre. In ogre tales, a frog or tortoise will often swallow children in order to save them from the ogre producing them safe and sound at their home later in the story.

The literature is rich in explanatory tales. Lightning is most often conceived of as a bird, or even a particular bird. A rainbow is nearly always looked at as a malignant and dangerous phenomenon for it is believed that it stops rain - quite enough to classify it an enemy. Often it is associated with ant heaps, in which it is supposed to live, or snakes. Bagandu call the rainbow Musoke, and is thought of as the patron of fishermen. They are

the exception.

The Brer Rabbit stories originally came from Africa by way of the Negro slaves who seem mostly to have belonged to Bantu-speaking tribes. Every story of "Uncle Remus" can be shown to exist in a more primitive form in Africa. Rabbits do not exist in Africa, but they are similar to the hare who is the most prominent figure in the tales. (Werner, p. 925)

The tortoise is the next most favorite character in the folktales and in some ways is more successful in triumphing over his enemies than the hare. Among the Baronga, frogs rival the hare.

Africa is rich in folklore. Hundreds of thousands of stories have been collected. They have a distinctive flavor of their own, yet have much in common with folklore of Europe and Asia. The characters Africans love, such as the animal trickster, infant prodigy, slow thinking ogres are also common to a great part of folklore everywhere. One of Africa's distinctive features is the realism and lack of sentimentality. Other features occurring constantly are the cautionary themes, explanatory themes, dilemma situations in which the hero has to choose between two agonizing alternatives and the audience participation. In Africa there are two basic types of stories: those to entertain and those to present a moral. The surprising aspect is that there is as much uniformity as there is considering the lack of written records. (Johnston, pp. 40 - 41)

Much of African folklore is inspired by their identification with the underdog. (Werner, p. 304) The idea that Africa is a continent without history, poetry or mythology is completely false. (Werner, p. 322)

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