

Medieval Tales and Fairy Tales in the 17th Century

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Abstract

The article describes the genre of faire tale, its history and principles of development. It is based on the information about the origin, evolution, characteristics and structure of the folklore genre.

Keywords: faire tale, artistic image, folklorist, folklore, character, tradition, historical, ethnography, patriot, scientist children folk.

I. Introduction

At the beginning, this domain was quite limited, we only considered folkloric fairy tales and other marvelous stories, taking place in a more or less fanciful or purely imaginary world. It is by closely studying the content of these stories that we discovered that they implemented much more than fantasies, but also preserved remnants of beliefs and customs once organized into autonomous systems. Thus the fairies are obviously survivals of ancient deities, who were the object of a true cult that the spread of Roman paganism, then of the Christian religion had made pass first to the rank of superstitions, then to that of poetic fantasies and literary themes.

This is, if I may say so, an extension of folklore in depth. At the same time, an extension in breadth was made: to fairy tales, it was necessary to add all the other stories that are current in the countryside and to find out to what extent they have, or not, a literary origin. Thus, the legends of saints do not all come from manuscript collections or hagiographical prints; there are some which were born on the spot, or

which are adaptations to the Christian saints of anterior accounts, relating formerly to pagan divinities. Similarly, the songs collected from the mouths of the peasants do not all come from mediaeval collections: certain themes are truly rural inventions, and in this special field, it has been necessary to engage in extensive comparative and historical research.

II. Literature review

The activity of the peasants was again manifested in an original and personal way in the progressive arrangement of ceremonies of all kinds, in pilgrimages as well as in the rites of marriage and funerals. Also independent of the superior production of towns and courts is their aesthetic production, in certain directions at least, notably for all that concerns everyday objects and their decoration.

We see that the field of folklore embraces, nowadays, several branches, which relate to the study of literature and linguistics, to the study of music as well as to that of decorative art. As a result, the boundaries of folklore are not always drawn very exactly. He was reproached for it. However, if we want to try to draw the

exact limits of any other science which treats of human activities, one will see that the obstacle is everywhere the same. Where, for example, does political economy begin and where does it end; or the study of higher art and aesthetics; or linguistics, or geography? The difficulty is often so great that over the past thirty years we have seen the formation of disciplines that straddle one or more sciences that were once considered independent: we speak of physics-chemistry, mathematical astronomy, geography human, etc., whereas the etymological sense of these terms would seem to prohibit such verbal juxtapositions. If, however, we have come to this, it is because in nature, and I understand human activities in nature, there are no sharp demarcations, but a continual ebb and flow, and imperceptible transitions from one pole to the other. This is why pure linguistics comes to overflow, with its own method, over folklore through semantics and through the bastard discipline invented by the Germans called "Words and Things".

In short, what matters is that our science is primarily concerned with a special element of social life, with which no other science is primarily concerned. This special element is that designated by the term *popular*. Thus the history of literature deals with works due to named, identified characters, in short to individuals; on the other hand, popular tales and legends do not have an individual author; they run from mouth to mouth, are classified according to a certain number of universal categories, and nothing in their literary style allows them to be attributed a particular author or to assign them an original period, or to classify them in other literary categories; they form a separate one.

This difference is very clear also in the fables with animal characters; those of Aesop, Phèdre, and La Fontaine are presented in a particular, individualized literary form; but these same fables are even more current today in a large number of countries in an amorphous, arbitrary, non-individualized form, in other words: popular.

III. Analysis

We can even distinguish Perrault's *Cinderella*, clothed in a precise literary form, typical of the seventeenth century, from tales of the same type collected from the people and which are a literary unremarkable story, badly presented, chaotic. It's the same for the song, for the furniture, for the decoration

The same goes for song, for furniture, for the decoration of pottery as opposed to that of earthenware or porcelain, in short for all manifestations of popular life. These observations already allow us to grasp the problem more closely. If literature, music, art history deal with individual productions, on the other hand folklore deals with collective productions; moreover, if the superior literary and artistic production is addressed to a restricted public, also superior to the average of the nation in a given place and time, on the contrary the folkloric production is intended for the mass of this nation in the same time and same place; it is, if one may dare to use this anachronism, a "large-industrial" production.

But this immediately suggests a remark: nowadays, objects intended for the masses are in fact made industrially and in series; from stable lanterns to cowbells, from serial novels to café-concert songs that soldiers scatter in the countryside, from

statues of saints made in the Saint-Sulpice district to color newspaper supplements, everything is "drawn and is dispatched in large numbers to our countryside, so that little by little a uniformity is established in several directions which, formerly national, tends even today to become international; for example our saws, our spades, our household utensils of more or less American origin give more and more to our French rural life a uniformity similar to that of the other countries of Europe.

Nevertheless, it was not the same in the past and this in a more or less remote period depending on the proximity of the big cities. The folklore of the surroundings of Paris has long since disappeared and that of the surroundings of Lyons, Marseilles, etc., is also tending to disappear, whereas a few kilometers from Grenoble or Lille, Nantes or Bordeaux, one can still hear folk tales or songs, and see the survival of very old customs. Large-scale modern industry is a factor in the disintegration, sometimes even in the destruction, of popular life, and above all of certain popular activities of a practical and aesthetic nature. How many corners of France are there still sculpting butter molds and scythe handles, firebacks or front door lintels? Very little, of course! See again the disappearance of the local arts of which we once knew admirable manifestations, namely the sculpture of churches, cathedrals and their furniture, anonymous and collective works in the same way as paintings and rural furniture. If I say collective, I do not mean by that "made in common". Care should be taken not to confuse these terms. The sculpted porches of Romanesque churches, transposition to stone of decorative and figurative elements borrowed from

miniatures (see in this collection the excellent little book by Mlle ^{Jalabert}) were not carved by the entire assembled population of a village, but by a few specialists who no doubt roamed the country. Only one does not know, in each particular case, neither their number, nor their name, nor where they came from, nor where they took their documents. On the other hand, we note in their decorative motifs elements that are common and are repeated, especially in the costumes and in the expression and type of the characters: these are features borrowed from the surrounding life, which do not correspond to individual conceptions or to particular feelings, but to collective feelings and common beliefs. It is the same in literature and music: the vocabulary, the literary form, the theme, the rhythm, the popular melody are without their own individuality, but run from one place to another, from one village to another, because they are made up of general, common, collective constituent elements.

Sometimes, moreover, it is possible to find the starting point or the source of this collective good. At least it is to find again, an individual starting point that scholars strive for. For the essential problem, in folklore as in the other branches of sociology, is to determine, with the greatest accuracy possible, in each particular case, the relation of the individual and the mass. One cannot attribute to the entire mass the gift of invention, nor even of transformation: each time that one has closely analyzed the factors which come into play, one finds that the invention properly so called is the act of an individual, unique, whose production is then modified by other individuals who come into contact with the

first, or with its production, individuals who already form a small collectivity, which reacts on other more and more numerous and considerable ones, until constitute what is called "the popular mass"

This is a limitation of folklore, which is necessary, under penalty of penetrating too much into the domain of other related sciences. If folklore deals with ancient, historical or archaeological facts, it is only incidentally, because each current fact has antecedents, that we must try to discern in order to understand it. Nevertheless, what interest's folklore is the living, direct fact; it is, if you will, sociological biology, like ethnography. It is very good to collect in museums the objects in use in our various provinces; but this is only an accessory of folklore, its dead part. What interests us is the use of these objects by currently living beings, the customs actually carried out before our eyes and the search for the complex conditions, especially psychic, of these customs. However, life quests cannot cease.

Thus folklore comes here to be linked to what is called collective psychology, which is expressed in rural life quite differently than in the industrial or urban masses. All sorts of customs, often very old, sometimes poetic, sometimes crude, express it there but which are, precisely because of the number of people who perform them, the real links of this "traditional chain" which cflabbergasted as a whole. That if the in-depth study of rural life has been neglected for so long, it is precisely because it did not interest so-called higher circles; that, much more, she was in horror to them. It is useless, I believe, to recall the attitude of the writers of the seventeenth^{century} with regard to the

peasants; even in the 18th century, few were interested in popular mores; and consequently few were those who understood the popular explosions of the Revolution other than purely political or economic. Nowadays, there is progress; but there is still a great deal to be sought and discovered, in both the domain of lectology, another victim of the same prejudice.

The domain that I assign here to folklore is much wider than that admitted by the first "traditionists", who considered as "transmitted by tradition" only tales and legends, songs, beliefs and observances, witchcraft practices, etc. The progress of our science has compelled us to add to it the study of all the ceremonies, of games and dances, of the popular worship of saints, of the house and of the village, of household utensils, of tools of all kinds, minor and major arts, institutesple or survivor of ancient periods, finally ways of feeling and expressing oneself which differentiate the "popular" from the "superior".

IV. Discussion

Folklore uses in the first place the *method of observation*, and this by very definition, since I^{have} already said that it^{deals} with living and actual facts. Moreover, a current fact has its antecedents, which can only be discerned by the use of the *historical method*, which includes various secondary methods, such as the criticism of testimony, that of written sources, etc. This technique is so well taught and so well known that it is useless to insist. However, where it is necessary to insist, it is on this that the folklore is not only historical, and is not a section of the history. It is only little by little that we begin to recover from

the disease of the 19th^{century} which we can call the historical mania, according to which all the present counts only in relation to the past and which means that, according to the theme of a famous novel, the Living only count against the Dead.

This psychic and methodological disease has spread so well that few educated people avoid, in the presence of an object or an act, to estimate only its archaeological or historical value. Here is a recent case: a friend of mine acquires a Negro statuette; he notices that it is modern and bears traces of European influence he says to me: "Since^{it is} not old, I am going to give it as a toy to my granddaughter". I answer him: "No, keep it carefully; it is a direct example of the current modifications, those of which we can grasp the mechanism, whereas the mechanisms of the old modifications, we can only reconstitute them by analogy or by hypothesis".

Anyone who wants to be interested in folklore must therefore first abandon the historical attitude to adopt the attitude of zoologists and botanists, who study animals and plants (collective facts too, since the individual cannot modify anything by himself themselves) during their lifetime and in their milieu, which is also alive; therefore replacing the historical method with the *biological method*.

This observation is of extreme importance: it explains why historians have long despised folklore and why the best folklorists of the last century have been naturalists, geologists, biologists, painters, artists in general, or at least scholars who possessed the gift of direct observation as well as the gift that characterizes the scholar. The supremacy granted to history

over the natural sciences during the 19th^{century}, that is to say to erudition over the observation of nature, yet so highly placed by the 18th^{century}, also explains the mania archeology which is so opposed to the progress of our science.

A scientist who would indeed combine these two elements, static and dynamic, in political economy would act exactly as modern folklorists do, who also deal, by definition, with these two modalities of social life. On the other hand, the ancient folklorists did not feel this need and followed too much the rut of the collectors of antiquities and curiosities. This is why Paul Sébillot, Breton nevertheless, never devoted a comprehensive work to his Brittany, nor gave a complete description of the inhabitants of his country, but contented himself, with Luzel and other, to collect tales, legends, or to report small curious facts; while on the other hand, Le Goffic and others did not apply the rigorous method of biological observation. Closer to the goal were a few English, German and Italian folklorists, though rare, notably Richard Andree and Raffaele Corso.

Undoubtedly, it is difficult, by observing current facts, to describe them entirely "flat", because, the social facts are, if I may say so, not surfaces but volumes; it would be necessary to apply to them geometry in space, since each social fact presents itself with an infinity of different facets, all in dependence one on the other, and of which nevertheless the whole constitutes a particularized whole.

To insist here would lead us too far; I would have to expound a general theory of sociology as a whole. Most sociologists, moreover, are not good observers; in particular, almost all of them contented

themselves with transposing the historical method and the psychological method to sociology; they did not apply the biological method, nor did they personally make direct and lengthy observations within any community. So we can say that sociology as a whole needs to be redone.

Closer to us are the linguists; they know that every language, whether general or special, is in a constant state of transformation. Therefore, we see many linguists dealing with folklore, and many folklorists familiar with the general directions of linguistics, sometimes even experts in dialectology. It would be difficult to carry out surveys in our provinces without practically knowing a little patois, and without encountering especially linguistic problems. This necessity gave birth to a bastard discipline already mentioned, that of the study of "Words and Things", created by Meringer (*Wörter und Sachen*) and which had at least the advantage of broadening the vision of linguists, while by providing us with secondary elements of evaluation in certain cases of detail.

However, for the study of general problems, we need another methodological instrument, which is the *comparative method*. In the past, there were some rather violent struggles between "historians" and "comparatists" in the study of religions, literatures, etc. Comparatists everywhere won the victory; it was unmissable; because the natural sciences have always been comparative, and it even seems ridiculous to refuse to compare between them facts of the same category according to their essence and not according to their location. A zoologist compares the fishes of the Mediterranean with those of the Bay of Bengal without being blamed. In

addition, we were criticized for comparing a Breton folk tale to a Polynesian folk tale, or a sacred Roman offering to a Mexican sacred offering! Note that this theoretical obstacle is eliminated in other sciences and that there does not yet exist a treatise on the psychology of the Persians, or of the Chinese, but that all our psychology is a science based on the examination of a few thousand Central Europeans (or North Americans, which is equivalent). Lévy-Bruhl is the only one in France who has tried to enlarge this domain of psychology comparatively; but he did it while retaining for

Now, here too, folklore brings new and important documents. The psychology of peasants is not yet scientifically established. We find numerous indications in regionalist novels, but always with an exceptional, if not pathological tendency. What has been said of the "Breton soul" or the "Basque soul" is very little; it is always the same refrains that return to the benefit of certain types of school, such as the "mystical Breton", to the detriment of other equally characteristic psychic types and their secondary variations. This special area of folklore is still almost virgin; and I hope that this little book will help to determine a movement of research. How many faculty and high school professors, how many teachers, doctors, wealthy landowners who could finally study, according to the rigorous methods of modern psychology, the "soul" of the rural population around them ; to study it without aiming at the romantic or at the effect, and to accumulate the materials on which will finally be built a truthful treatise on "Psychology of the French"!

The use of these various methods requires not only knowledge but also tact, tact, and

to some degree a certain natural gift. To observe well, it is necessary in advance to know what to observe, therefore to have a certain amount of general knowledge on the subject which is the object of the research, to know which are the theories which have been eliminated and which are those which are currently current, even if it means seeing them modified under the influence of new discoveries. What is true of the natural and physico-chemical sciences, is also true of folklore insofar as it is a biological science. Similarly, one should not compare randomly, but only facts of the same category. Finally, the questions that are put to the peasants must be asked in such a way, not only not to attract psychic opposition, but also not to suggest an answer that would be false or diverted.

The peasants often feel a kind of modesty towards people who seem to them to belong to another social background, or who they feel are more educated: they fear, when they are questioned about their mores and customs, that people will not want to make fun of them. Sometimes, even an interested nuance intervenes: I had great difficulty studying Kabyle pottery because the sheikhs and the potters took me for a financial inspector looking for objects and industries liable to new taxes. This obstacle is lower in France; yet it is not always easy to visit the interior of the houses, to examine the popular utensils, and to survey the plan of the rural constructions.

However, here is a way, which is valid for all folklore surveys: it is to first tell how it is done elsewhere and to ask if it is the same in the village, you are exploring. In Savoy, a dried skin of a toad is hung in the barn to ward off insects; we say it, and we ask how we go about it here for this

purpose. We start by singing a few popular songs, and soon the people of the village are singing theirs to you. Marriage ceremonies are described in various countries, and people describe to you those, which are in use among herbarium or a mineralogical collection: but there is a way of going about it, which succeeds when you love this science and you also love rural life, in short, when you add to scientific work this sympathy, this "humanity as we said in the 18th^{century}", which removes social and intellectual barriers.

Direct inquiry is best; but one cannot thus cover a large territory. The direct survey must then be supplemented by means of *questionnaires*. Those published by the *Revue des Traditions Populaires* and various learned societies are usually too dense. Experience has shown me that the best questionnaire is one that is very short and devoted to only two or three special problems, but well defined. Rather than brewing the facts, it is better to move forward methodically, starting for example with the wedding ceremonies by studying them in depth; or, in another direction, to study the means of transport, or the means of lighting, or the statues of saints and pilgrimages, or the belief in sorcerers... When a questionnaire is short and above all precise, we have many chances of getting correct answers.

Even the negative answers are important: they often prove that such and such a custom or belief has disappeared while older texts certified its existence. It is then necessary to seek the causes and the factors of this disappearance, which is an important element of the general and comparative science of civilizations. In

this area again, there are still many discoveries to be made.

V. Conclusion

- In children's literature, tales are often present in the form of parodies, rewrites; one tale may hide another by Road Dahl

- Yet very successful popular tales from series like Tales and legends of...Nathan, or A Thousand Years of Tales Milan, regional anthologies, accounts of tales Claude Seignolle. This success may be due to the feeling public and children that this is a national culture, a heritage, local product.

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