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*Bodies: Sex, Violence, Disease, and Death in Contemporary
Legend* (review)

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portant for the individuals who pass them on in informal performance venues and also for the community that unselfconsciously sponsors them (pp. 18–9). The study does not only focus on narrative. As the Mennonites and Amish are famous for their conscientious objection to war, there is a chapter on protest songs. Glass paintings of flowers, birds, and butterflies with moral statements are a common genre of folk art in the culture, and Beck provides an examination of this kind of cultural production. Almost every Mennonite home has a family record book, and genealogy is a vigorous form of historical memory practiced within the community, including the maintenance of detailed birth, marriage, and death records. The Relief Sale Festival is a folk festival, not a fair, organized by the Mennonites and for the Mennonites. Beyond these genres, this is, most importantly, a book of countless tales. It shows how individual stories can be retold in differing versions with various understandings and interpretations, and it also explores humorous narratives.

In sum, Beck's *MennoFolk* is an interesting introduction to the Mennonite folk culture through stories and other traditions. The language used in the book is plain and clear, and the concepts conveyed are easy to grasp. If a picture is worth a thousand words, the generous inclusion of photographs and illustrations in the book has definitely aided my understanding of the Mennonites' uniqueness as a people. Finally, this study is recommended to all who want to gain a general knowledge of Mennonite religious and folk traditions from an insider's perspective.

Bodies: Sex, Violence, Disease, and Death in Contemporary Legend. By Gillian Bennett. (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2005. Pp. x + 313, preface, key texts, references, afterword, index.)

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When we consider the 1960s, our attention cannot help but be drawn to urban and contemporary legends. This decade has taken on the connotations of revolution, rock and roll, sex,

hippies, and feminism, all jostling in the final and fateful confrontation of tradition and modernity. Here, fairies and monsters are replaced by aliens and hook-handed killers, and myth and folktale are replaced by news and history—but legend continues to partake of both. This is, perhaps, legend's central problematic. In her marvelously accessible but scholarly style, Gillian Bennett goes straight to the heart of this problematic, "the cultural clash of discordant categories and concepts" (p. xv). She reminds us that one of the key facts about the legend is that it is difficult to define. Legends are marked by their longevity, geographical spread, style, the multiplicity of audio and visual media through which they are disseminated, and the recurrence of specific details or motifs. Avoiding the cartographic pedantry (that is, the historical-geographical or Finnish method) of definition and delimitation, Bennett points out that legend is not a scientific term and, as such, it has no real referent. Legend can be superstition, relic, delusion, and curiosity, or it can be cool, new, sexy, urban, and teenaged. In the unfolding reassessments of the discipline, legend has been deconstructed or at least "declassified"—the distinction between reality and legend is no longer considered to be clear-cut. Contemporary legend, itself an orphan of the 1960s, has in many ways become an exemplar of the contemporary life of the discipline.

Bennett's *Bodies*, therefore, is about folklore as much as it is about contemporary legend. In her encyclopedic detail and analysis, Bennett draws attention away from the supposed novelty of the genre to broader generalizations about the discipline. Following Paul Klee's approach to painting, Bennett takes "a line for a walk," exploring thematically the evolving shape and form of six particular legend case studies from their early variants to their contemporary inflections (p. xv). Here the shape-shifting element of story is exemplified. Story is information, entertainment, strategy, news, gossip, rumor, warning, lesson, joke, photocopy, graffiti, fallacy, or political commentary—in short, a palimpsest of life. As a popular poetics of interpretation, legends may be better understood within contemporary discursive paradigms or contexts. They are a kind of social,

psychological, and cultural diary full of scribbles, and yet they cannot be reduced to the encoded fears of society.

Defying national and generic boundaries in literature, journalism, theater, television, or the Internet, legends appear both homeless and universal, old and modern, urban and rural. AT 939A, "The Murdered Son" (or "The Killing of the Prodigal Son," as Bennett prefers to call it), has a life of four centuries. The Bosom Serpent complex can be traced back to twelfth-century Ireland; indeed, the idea of reptiles infesting the body was orthodox medicine. Ancient Greek and Roman literature and European medieval monkish culture are saturated with similar themes. One could be tempted to see the tale-type or motif indices themselves as inventories of universal themes, veritable handbooks of humanity, rather than exclusively folkloric checklists. One might ask, if urban legends remained seamlessly hidden in the streams of discourse for so long, are there other unlisted, sleeping genres?

Bennett includes examples drawn from China, India, Ireland, and Greece as well as from biblical or apocryphal narratives. The protagonist of legend may be Rock Hudson, and the storyteller may be Jackie Collins. Legends do not end happily ever after but in death or madness. Current contamination themes echo earlier epidemics of typhoid, cholera, plague, syphilis, and leprosy. What if AIDS Mary is just a newer version of Typhoid Mary? How does the researcher avoid jaded or jaundiced reductionist analysis that appears to debunk folklore, legend, or the gullibility of humanity? According to Bennett, the stories themselves "are enough," and folklorists should consider documenting the presentation and use of legends as more than a trivial pursuit (p. 307).

Bennett's interpretations here are as diverse as the symbolic, cultural, and psychological meanings implicit in the genre. The approaches to contemporary legend cobbled together in this book confront the ideas that legends are false or trivial stories; are told to discredit certain companies; are derived from private fear, anxiety, or distrust; are cautionary tales; are a psychocultural response; are a vernacular etiology; are symbolic or metaphorical truths; are a reflection of gendered psychology; are serious and dangerous; and are a projection of a desolate view of

the human condition. The preferred approaches to legend study used in the book involve sampling the cultural complex that involves the legend or including all related material associated with the particular case study, highlighting a specific example with local behavioral and cultural norms, or viewing legend as a sociopolitical language where the pathology or symptomatology of the body mirrors the sociological or ethnographic analysis of the social body. Legend might create mainstream opinion, but it also follows it. For example, AIDS legends might absolve heterosexuals from culpability in the spread of the disease, or stories of street urchin syringe aggressors may relocate danger beyond the environs of the home. Bennett's analysis is more revealing and intriguing for its careful consideration of vernacular gender perceptions that shape and create the imaginative undercurrents in the ocean of stories that she presents.

The legend is an emotionally powerful and challenging genre. Gillian Bennett's innovative and questioning exploration of this topic reminds us that folklore studies sometimes has a tendency to trivialize reality as mere urban legend. Folklore studies was long a romantic hobbyhorse, and today it must insist on its right to explore the social and cultural fallout caused by the quarrying of "mere folklore" from the most grotesque nadir of human behavior. Legend tends to echo life, and life echoes legend as well; as a result, a common rejoinder to accounts of legends should be, perhaps, that they are not in fact legend, but truth.

Types of the Folktale in the Arab World: A Demographically Oriented Tale-Type Index.

By Hasan M. El-Shamy. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004. Pp. xxviii + 1255, bibliography, register of tale types, list of changed tale-type numbers, register of motifs, index of authors and sources, register of countries, tale-type subject index, addendum.)

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As Hasan El-Shamy notes, the classification scheme of Aarne and Thompson's tale-type index "is seldom adequate for identifying folk