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In order to properly evaluate Soe Marlar Lwin's book that is excellently structured, rich in references, and provides a well-chosen text selection, we need to give a short overview of the historical 'currents' in folktale research. European culture has been a 'cradle' for folktale research and by the 20th century a new interpretive approach, breaking away from this historicity, has been formed providing a universal interpretive framework independent of the European roots.[1]

Taking a closer look at the historical changes considering the history of European tale research, we should distinguish between three different periods, all of which approach tales with a specific point of view. Therefore, each of them is associated with different aspects of folktales and the phenomena in tales. In the *premodern period* concepts, thought schemes originating from European Romanticism defined the essence of tales. For researches of the period, the most important task of folk culture when following the Herderian organic historical approach was considered to be the formation of identities of linguistic-cultural communities through the concept of nation based on folk culture, folk poetry, and especially folktales. Therefore, in accordance with their most significant aim, collecting and canonizing folktales resulted in the establishment of a set of texts (according to the latest research we should rather speak about the creation of these texts) – previously folktales were not regarded as part of high culture – by which a special value was bestowed upon folktales: On the one hand, preserving the traces of the mythical past of nations, folktale functioned as an inexhaustible archive (for the disciplines of the history of language and of folklore); on the other hand, it functioned as a model for contemporary literary production and national awakening that everywhere brought with itself the process of the literary tale becoming a special, priority genre.

Those interpreting the *modern period* – partly due to the oral tradition seemingly being pushed to the background – were not interested in finding new tale texts; they rather turned to the interpretation of already existing (collected) texts from various aspects. The folktale text is separated from the concept of the national; attention is turned toward the universality of tales. This is how the interpretation of tales becomes the research of structures – the series of narrative elements as Proppean or archetypal reminiscences, as in the case of Jungian tale interpretations. In both cases folktale becomes interesting as a text that may carry a message for the community, remaining valid over a long period of time

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1   This book review has been translated from Hungarian into English by Gabriella Agnes Nagy.

because it either activates the basic narrative desires of man ("*Narrare necesse est!*"), or the cathartic force hidden in recognizing and making conscious of world view structures identified with the images of the collective consciousness. A pledge for all this is the well-graspable structure of the text which partly carries pseudo-initiative characteristics (*Mircea Eliade*) – a text that may be well-revealed and may be transformed into structural formulas and motivic catalogues.

Folktale research in Central-Europe took the first steps toward the interpretation of folktales in the *postmodern period* when tales were no longer interpreted as being a historical archive or a network of narrative structure but a kind of socio-cultural phenomenon in which text production and reception governed by interpretative tendencies gave a new color to folktale research. Between the 1940s and 1970s Central-European folktale research has stepped out of the closed world of texts collected in the 19th century; researchers again began to venture out to field work and recorded the last traces of the living traditional European folktale telling tradition. According to the theory of the individuality (or Budapest) school coined by Gyula Ortutay – which became famous and respected internationally due to Linda Dégh's work – folktale is not simply a structure but it carries with itself traces of the storyteller's world view and experiences. This approach is elaborated in Jack Zipes meme-theory. According to his theory, folktales carry a specific consciousness content (they are called memes by evolutionary biology): These are cultural, intelligent "means" by which individuals and communities form the order of human existence and convey "instructions" for existing in the world. This interpretative path was lately expanded by the Hungarian phenomenological-hermeneutic school coined by Péter Bálint – a school researching the folktale tradition of the Carpathian Basin – according to which tale is a performative phenomenon created together by both the storyteller and his community/audience.

When, after this short overview, we open Soe Marlar Lwin's book we may definitely see that the author took an unavoidable step in researching the Burmese folktale tradition. After the work of previous researchers, such as Maung Htin Aung (the first publisher of Burmese tales in English), and the first in-depth overview by Abbott and Khin, Lwin undertook the task of continuing her predecessors' work navigating from the premodern folktale research period, based on the most extensive overview of reference materials, to the directions offered by postmodern folktale research.

The seven chapters of the book constitute a logically structured, well-arranged text that follows a clear cut argument: Beginning from the structuralist theories she establishes her thesis by analyzing specific folktale texts. The central idea is to examine the previously ignored narratological questions of "how the fundamental events interlock with one another to create a plot and how formal patterns are related to the story's content" (p. 125).

Having briefly defined the genre of folktale in the first chapter, in the next two chapters the author continues by clarifying narratological concepts, providing the basis of her analysis and the elaboration of the methodology she wishes to use. The introductory chapter on narratological concepts proves a thorough knowledge of reference literature on the subject. She avoids the mistake that Central-European folktale research schools – partly due to the ideological constraint of the previous

communist period – began to overcome only recently. They no longer consider the Proppean type of narrative analysis as the master key of tale interpretation but as a possible *starting point* for interpretation. In Lwin's overview, the reformed structure analysis based on later narratological concerns reflecting on the Proppean narrative analysis – for instance Dundes, Toolan, Bal, Ochs/Capps – seems to be much more applicable for describing different text types. In her analysis she "classified the functional events into various models" (p. 37). Lwin consciously chooses the seemingly most significant segment for the narratological dictionary of concepts: "Among all the different aspects, the present study chooses the aspect of story structure. It aims to identify the functional events forming the storylines in some Burmese folk tales and their relation in various models of the basic story structure" (p. 20). In further parts of her book, after identifying the functional events, it becomes visible where the researcher's path would lead to after clarifying the key concepts:

> While examining how the events are linked into familiar trajectories, the study will also take note of any deviation from them and will explore what effect such deviation has on the storyline of a tale. With this, the . . . study will argue that, instead of looking for a single pattern in plots that may be different across different types of tales, an analysis of narrative structures should investigate various possible temporal and/or causal linkage with which events are bound together into well-organized storylines. (p. 22)

Perhaps this is the greatest achievement of Lwin's work since she opens up possibilities of structural-narratological analysis by expanding the category of the 'well-organized' storyline – those texts may also be considered 'well-organized' that previously, according to the lesser defined Proppean system, were listed in the periphery of texts as having no value, being incorrect, and uncategorizable.[2] Since in the case of those tales, where the order of functions regarded as constant is modified, Propp seems to reveal only 'oscillations', incidental digressions or deviations from the perfect narrative structure. Contrary to Propp, in Lwin's system there is a possibility to identify functional events and to reveal the linkage in the storyline. Therefore, "according to the similarities in their structural patterns and functional events, making up the main storyline" (p. 37), Lwin lists the given folktale texts under five models under which specific folktales may be described by the help of binary oppositional pairs (reward/punishment, interdiction/violation, problem/solution).

After achieving the scientific goal set out by Lwin, the closing chapter of the book does not really end but opens up paths for further research in folktale interpretation: "The functional events, the different models, and the linkage among those events in each model discovered in this study are expected to serve as a stable 'what' for the discussion on the 'how' of storytelling in future research" (p. 128). Obviously, in this chapter Lwin's flexible approach prepares a new series of studies to be written by the author where she may interpret tales as a complex phenomenon: "[A]n oral storytel-

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2   Due to similar experiences during the analysis of the Gypsy storytelling tradition of the Carpathian Basin, the previously mentioned Hungarian folktale research school has also turned away from the Proppean model and opened up possibilities for folktale reception toward the hermeneutical-phenomenological textual interpretation.

ling performance can be regarded as a synaesthetic activity with the verbal, vocal, and visual aspects occurring at the same time" (p. 130).

On the one hand, the book entitled *Narrative Structures in Burmese Folk Tales* directs the attention of international folktale research to the specificities of Burmese folktales, and on the other hand, the textual force, the clear cut and excellent use of concepts, the articulate and well-organized argument contribute to a kind of approach that ultimately enriches the reference literature of folktale research. By using the most important theoretical outcomes of modern text centered folktale research it provides the possibility for the Burmese tales, and tales in general as a complex genre, to become worthy of attention even for the postmodern approach – an approach focusing on orality, multidimensionality, and performativity.

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