THE TRICKSTER STORY

(Its Structure and Heroes)

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Wise and subtle as he is, the folk-tale prankster, or, as he is usually referred to by specialists in folklore, the "trickster", represents one of the most lifelike and amiable folklore characters. One can hardly find a plot in which, in one form or another, there is no amusing or serious, kind or malicious, cheerful or gloomy trickster story. Thus, the trickster myth must be considered an inseparable and especially important part of world narrative folklore. This fact itself has led to great attention being paid to tricksters and a thorough investigation of them being made. This explains why an article on trickster stories may be not simply entertaining but useful too: since it conveys some idea about certain characteristic features of narrative folklore in general.

1. Notes on the Structure of Trickster Stories

Probably every one of us remembers from his childhood the amusing German tale (by the Grimm Brothers) telling how two hedgehogs, standing at opposite ends of a ditch, "had a race" with a hare. This fable can be regarded as one of the

most typical examples of contest stories which exist all
over the world. Perhaps there is not a single group of
people in whose folklore one cannot meet at least one or
two myths, tales, fables or anecdotes with the same or a
similar plot. This makes contest stories fairly convenient
for our purposes, the more so since these stories, as a rule,
are very short in length.

Following the study of a great many stories of this kind it
is now possible to state a series of peculiarities concerning
tricksters. I had the opportunity to discuss some of these
features in the book "From Proverb to Folk-tale". In this
study it was shown that contest stories and, in particular,
stories about races, similarly to all other folklore texts
of the same structural level, *can be viewed from at least
three planes or aspects: a) from their external (compositional)
structure; b) from their semantic message (logical structure);
and c) from their object-image (realia) plane.* It was emphasized
that *all the above three planes appear to be not only
interdependent but to some degree autonomous.* Thus, the animals
taking part in a contest as competitors together with the
setting for the competition may vary from one story to another
whereas the course and the message of the story remains
unchanged. In order to see this it is sufficient to compare
the Micronesian tale about the Sargan-fish and the Crab, the
Tuvinian fable about the Fox and the Burbot or the Simalur one
about the Snail and the Monkey, the Puerto Rican tale about
the Frog and the Mouse or the fable of the Guayana Indians

about the Deer and the Tortoise. At the same time, stories
that are so similar in the characters taking part in the
competition or stories that are so much alike in the terms
agreed upon, do not always and necessarily coincide as far
as their message is concerned. In some cases a story may
arrive at the moral that intelligence (cunning) is more
important than strength (speed), but other tales may have a
totally different sense: "perseverance always wins" or
"conceit never pays", etc. It can be demonstrated by the
Latvian tale "The Hedgehog and the Hare" or the Syrian fable
of the same name and other similar stories. Finally, the
method used by the weaker side to gain victory over the
stronger opponent and the corresponding development of the
plot may also vary with the text, still having one and the
same main message. It can readily be seen from a comparison
of a series of tales such as the Negro one named "The Tortoise
and the Hare" or the Japanese fable "The Cat and the Crab".
Both these types of tales are intended to demonstrate that
cunning is more important than strength, but cunning is used
in different ways: in the first case the weak or slow animal
uses its outward resemblance to its own kin, posting them all
along the route from start to finish; in the second type it
makes use of the physical strength of its opponent by imper-
ceptibly clinging to its tail.

It is notable that different structural elements
("motifs") of any of the planes, for instance those of the
compositional or of the realia plane occuring in texts of the

type mentioned may exist apart from these texts, too, in a
significantly different relation. Thus, a crayfish that
clings to the tail of a stronger animal can also be seen in
the Bulgarian anecdote "The Performing Dog" telling how a
shrewd Gabrovo citizen managed to steal a crayfish from a
market-woman with the aid of a dog, or the Polish fable named
"The Horse, the Ox, the Rooster, the Cat and the Crayfish",
similar in its plot to "The Bremen Musicians" (in the fable
the Crayfish clings to the tail of the Ox in order to travel
round the world). And two hares, one placed at the beginning
and the other at the end of the route, can be met not only
in tales about races but also in stories about tricks performed
by Nasruddin and other tricksters (compare, for example, the
Azerbaijan tale narrating how Molla sold the ruler a "wise"
hare "capable" of giving orders to others). All these and
similar facts - of which one may collect any amount - once
again underline the relative measure of autonomy enjoyed by
the different planes (levels) of folklore texts.

I now wish to continue to set forth the observations made
in the treatise "From Proverb to Folk-tale".

If one enlarges the circle of texts to be studied, it turns
out that the contestant does not exceptionally use its
outward resemblance to its own kin or its opponent's strength
so as to gain victory, but it can resort to other tricks as
well: in one case it posts a fleet-footed stand-in in its
place (for example, a "younger brother", i.e. a hare, lying
under a bush, as does for instance Ivanko-Medvedko in a

Russian tale), sometimes it arranges for the opponent to fall in to a pit (as is the case in the race between the Fox and the Wolf in the corresponding European fables), or it uses magic invocation and witchcraft (like the Chameleon in the Hausa tale "The Antelope and the Chameleon) etc. No matter what kind of a trick the trickster resorts to, the main message and the characteristics of the stories themselves, however, remain unchanged in principle. The same holds true for the analysis of stories about competitions in "strength" (outbalancing, fighting), in reaching the highest point (flights, jumps) and also in other skills (who eats the most, who catches sight of the Sun the earliest, and so on cf, e.g. the North American Negro tale "How Brer Turtle Came to Be the Strongest of All?", the Surinam Negro fable "Who Flies the Highest of All?" and the Kazakh "The Happiest Year" together with a number of similar tales of other peoples).

In this way, it appears that all stories about contests between weak but clever (cunning) and strong but foolish protagonists *represent a uniform common tale in the world*, albeit that the concrete manifestations dispose of numerous national, geographical, social and other specific variants. It must be added that in his time the Soviet scholar V. J. Propp arrived at a similar conclusion after investigating different folklore material..

Applying Propp's method, I found that stories about contest together with other types of folktales are identically submitted to certain regularities. Thus, the structure of contest tales

is also divisible into individual structural elements and
blocks. In a tale about competition the number of structural
elements is constant and is even less than in a fairy tale –
only twelve, with seven functions and five compositional
elements. The functions are as follows: *meeting of the*
competitors, agreement to compete, preparation for the contest,
the course of the competition, victory of one competitor.
awarding the prize to the winner and *punishing the loser.*
Compositional components are: *orientation in space and time,*
characterisation of the participants, repetition of the competi-
tion and, finally, the *etiological element* ("since then it has
been the way..."). Furthermore, all these elements are arranged
in a strict pattern: first come the time and place of the
event (orientation); then the competitors are described (this
is sometimes combined with the next element); then come the
first five functions cited above (in that order); they are
followed by a second competition (usually at the loser's
request); then come the two last functions; and, finally, the
etiological element. Like fairy-tales, tales about contests
have their own special set of characters with clearly delineated
functions. The difference is that in this folk-tale type the
number of characters is not seven but four: the two
contestants, a stand-in for one of the contestants and the
referee. Sometimes their functions (most often that of the
stand-in) are distributed among several persons.

Naturally, I have described an "ideal" contest story. In fact,
each text lacks one or more of the above mentioned features:

sometimes a referee is not included in the tale, in other
cases a prize is not awarded to the winner or there is no
repetition of the competition, and so on. Yet there is a
great number of more or less complete contest stories.
A typical example of such tales could be the Zunian tale
"How the Gopher Had a Race with Runners from Kiakime",
which possesses - with the exception of a repetition of the
competition - all structural elements beginning with orienta-
tion ("The event took place in the Valley of Shivin at the
time when Kiakime inhabitants were famous for their strength
and high speed...") and ending with the etiological element
("Since then up to this time Zunian youngsters when preparing
for a competition in running have taken with them the sacred
yellow pollen and red paint and painted beautiful red plumelets
for the gophers dwelling by the path for running...").
Almost the same can be said of the Vietnamese tale "The Tiger
and the Mollusc", the German story named "The Hare and the
Hedgehog", the Eskimo fable "The Elk and the Goby" and the
Shoshonean Indian folktale "The Wolf and the Frog" and of
many, many others as well.

On the other hand, among contest stories there can be found
certain tales in which the potential existance of a complete
set of structural elements is actually precluded. Such is the
case in fables of the Russian "The Fox and the Crayfish"
type, in which the weaker side uses its opponent's strength
and, as a result, can do without a stand-in and even without
a referee. Similar texts (i.e. those incapable of being

complete as far as their total number of structural elements
is concerned) I have singled out into a distinct "constructive
type 2" in order to distinguish them from those theoretically
capable of being complete in this respect.

Furthermore, contest stories have other, more prominent
peculiarities not dealt with in the book "From Proverb to
Folk-tale". After a study of other texts it appears that,
apart from the above-mentioned properties, tales possess
some other features as well. In particular, these texts
together with others observed earlier in this paper *form a
definite system of semantic (or logical) transformation* very
much similar to the one I described earlier in connection with
proverbial phrases as well as fablettes, one-scene anecdotes,
fables and Schwänke, i.e. in connection with all synthetic
(or, in other words, those allowing of extended interpreta-
tion) folklore clichés of other compositional levels.
It must be noted that, whereas some of the tales about
contests demonstrate that intelligence (cunning) is better
(more important) than strength (speed), others show the
opposite: the stronger opponent undoubtedly wins against the
weaker one. Moreover, there are tales in which neither of the
protagonists or, on the contrary, both of the contestants
turn out to be the winners. Finally, there are texts from
which it is not clear which of the opponents is the *winner*,
after all. Such tales usually end with an appeal to the listener
(reader) suggesting that he himself give the answer to the

question. This type of stories can be illustrated by the
Hausa Schwank (plot anecdote) "Who Is the Most Skilful?".
It must be noticed that contest stories of the last three
types (i.e. when the stronger wins, when no one gains victory
and when it is not known who is to be considered the winner)
exist not only as exceptions. This is far from the case.
True, contest stories ending with a question occur relatively
scarcely. None the less there is a fairly large number of
tales in which it is the stronger participant that manages
to be the winner. These stories are frequently met not only
on their own but also as episodes within the limits of some
longer narrations. For example, one can recall many stories
narrating how the hero, having procured a magic horse, takes
the upper hand, outruns or "outjumps" his contestants and
marries the princess. However, since such ("honest") tales
describe ordinary things, they do not attract great attention
and it may even occur to the inexperienced observer that it is
the other ones, i.e. those that have the weaker side win,
that prevail.

Characteristically, after having recourse to a sufficiently
representative collection of tales (such as that of the
Brothers Grimm, J. Harris or A.V. Afanasyev, etc.), one can
discover all or almost all the abovementioned semantic
variants .(logical transformations) not only in world folklore
as a whole but also *in the folklore stock of each distinct*

people.

And, what is particularly noteworthy is as follows: *all the said logical transformations are practically equivalent in the sense that none of them can be considered as being any more right than the rest.* In the foregoing I shall mark them with the letters A, B, C, and D, respectively. Transformation A will refer to texts "demonstrating" that it is the strongest who wins; transformation B will denote cases with the most intelligent (cunning) opponent; transformation C where neither (or both) of the contestants gains victory; transformation D will designate stories in which it is unclear who is to be considered the winner. Of course, these types are certainly demonstrated (told or recalled) in different situations. Thus, the tale about the Hare and the Hedgeheg may be remembered by a German when, in the course of a dialogue, an incident is mentioned with reference to a weak but cunning man who gains victory over a strong but foolish one. On the contrary, the same German may think of the tale about the Eagle and the Wren or the Herring and the Flounder if the situation is just the opposite. There is nothing strange in this, since most of the contest stories, especially all tales, fables and Schwänke of this type, as well as all other types of folklore texts with a didactic function, *represent different life and logical situations.* Let us consider a very realistic, i.e. not phantastical episode in fairy tales, for example a man is sitting on a bough and this bough cuts wood with its own hand. Such an episode is naturally impossible in real life. But in fairy tales we

often meet such events (consider the stories about Nusreddin,
Abu-Hassan and other tricksters). And here they do not appear
meaningless, but they contribute to the formulation of the
content. In order to understand this significance we should
not interpret the text in a literal, but in a metaphorical
sense. In this case we can immediately tackle and solve the
problem of the relevance of the fairy tale to everyday life:
how often men cut the wood on which they are sitting!

Let us turn back to the question of the logical transfor-
mations.

First of all, it must be stated that the abovementioned
system of logical transformation *concerns not only contest*
stories but also folklore texts of other structural and
semantic types, such as, for example, tales, fables and
anecdotes about judgements. The numerous folk-tales about
clever and righteous judgements (just remember the "judgements
of Solomon") stand in contrast to the likewise numerous
stories about stupid and mistaken judgements (e.g. the judge-
ment on the Pike that was sentenced to be drowned, or the
famous "Shemyakin judgement"). Among stories about judgements
there is a fairly great number of tales in which both sides
turn out to be equally right. Yet another type of story about
judgements is the so-called "dilemma story", which generally
carry no assertion as to the question of which side is right:
they merely end with a question addressed to the listener. An
example of stories of this type is afforded by the Liberian
riddle-question named "The Beautiful Youngster" and also by

analogous African text cited in the anthology compiled by
Alta Yablow ("Yes and No").

Furthermore, *transformation spreads over all components of
folklore texts including distinct structural elements and
blocks as well as characters.* The latter can be well observed
in the examples of those folklore heroes to whom cycles of
differing extents are devoted. The same Fox that could be
deceived with so much skill by the Crayfish in the above con-
test tale appears in a series of other European and Asian
tales and fables as the most clever and cunning animal.
In this connection there is no significant difference between
the Fox and the shrewd and witty Deer of the Indonesian tales
or Brer Rabbit of the American Negro tales, which are
"outraced" (in fact, accompanied) by the Snail and the Turtle,
respectively. Semantic transformation is even more manifest in
the case of the anthropomorphic heroes, such as Abu Nuwas,
Ahmet Ahay, Burbal, Kemine, Kim Son Dal and Nasruddin. All
these characters appear to be either clever or stupid, rich
or poor, religious or atheist, kind or malicious, and so on,
and so forth.

Finally, semantic transformation of folklore stories is
a rather early phenomenon. It manifests itself already *in the
most ancient layers of folk art,* e.g. in the archaic myths
about the so-called "culture" heroes who acquire for mankind
such blessings of civilisation as fire, working tools and the
like. In this way, the mythical character ("culture" hero or

creator-demiurge) of the Koryaks and Itelmens (Kamchadals),
viz., the clever and ever so mighty Raven acts as a trickster
or a goose in some cases. Incompatible features are allotted
to the mythical hero of the Americal Indians of the Great
Basin, namely, the Coyote, or to the hero of the ancient
Ossete epos, Syrdon, and to almost all other characters of
archic peoples's art. It is in stories about twin brothers,
which figure prominently in the mythology of many peoples all
over the world, where the semantic "dualism" of archaic folk-
lore becomes especially apparent. One of the brothers, as
a rule, is benevolent and sharp-witted, whereas the other is
usually stupid and muddle-headed. The creation of all good
things, natural phenomena and customs is ascribed to the first
brother while all the bad, unnecessary things, beginning with
harmful insects and ending with death are attributed to the
second. An example to illustrate this is offered by the twin
brothers To-Kabinana and To-Purgo or To-Karvuvu, the Melanesian
folklore characters of New Britain. Nevertheless, the semantic
differences in question reveal a somewhat different quality
in myths as compared to tales, fables or anecdotes resulting
from the myths themselves being basically different from the
texts mentioned. Myths proper, just like other analytical
clichés (omens, economic, legal and medical sayings) have only
*one concrete meaning and allow of no extended interpretation
of any kind.*

On the subject of semantic transformations of folk
stories there is yet one important point to be made. In my
discussion of the relative autonomy of the different planes
of folklore texts, it was pointed out that several stories
about competitions in running, similar from the point of
view of the competitors and the terms of the contest agreed
upon, do not always coincide as far as their main message is
concerned: some of them maintain that intelligence (cunning)
is more important than strength or fleet-footedness, the
others firmly state that conceit does not lead to success,
and so on. And later, when I was dealing with the problem of
logical text transformations and was singling out transforma-
tional types A, B, C and D, it might have seemed as though
I was trying to give an explanation of the existing lack of
semantic coordination. This is in fact, far from being the
case. Stories about races with different messages, (e.g. the
Latvian tale "The Hare and the Hedgehog" and the Syrian fable
of the same name) do not represent logical transformations
of identical ideas and situations. The difference between
them is of some other origin. Here the texts are built up of
one and the same structural elements, the texts themselves
belonging to markedly different structural-logical types, i.e.
the texts modelling far from identical types of situations.
It must be added that from this point of view (as well as from
many others) narrative folklore texts approach proverbial
phrases (of e.g. the Vietnamese and Chinese proverbs emerging

from one and the same realia but different in their logical
structure: "If there is no fish crabs are welcome" and
"Where there are crabs there must be fish, too.")

2. The Problem of Preference

In the tale of the Caddo Indians titled "The Coyote and
the Turtle" it is the Turtle that makes a fool of the Coyote
in the same way as it outwits Brer Rabbit in the American
Negro tale named "How Brer Rabbit and Brer Turtle Had A Race?".
In the Latvian tale about the Fox and the Crayfish it is the
Crayfish that happens to be the more cunning, and, in the
Simalur fable about the Snail and the Monkey and in the
Cambodian one about the Snail and the Hare it is the weaker
animal, viz., the Snail, that gets the better of its feet-footed
opponent. Taking into account some other stories with one or
both of the above characters, however, it becomes apparent
that in many other cases it is the animal fooled in the above
examples that turns out to be the most intelligent and cunning
of all. The same is true of the contestant taking part in
competitions of strength, skill and all the rest.

But who is, after all the most cunning of all tricksters?
Who is, then, the strongest of the strong? And, on the whole,
which of these folklore characters is the most successful
and undefeatable?

It is not at all simple to answer these questions. This
is so not only because different characters are considered to
be the most successful in the folklore of different countries

and peoples, but also because this phenomenon is peculiar to almost every distinct folklore of each separate people.

Thus, the American Negrous think of the turtle and the rabbit as the cleverest of the animals, while Latvians think in the same way of the fox and the hare. The folklore of many peoples has several ingenious tricksters, either anthropomorphic or zoomorphic.

The Turkmenians, for example, have many tales or anecdotes about famous tricksters and fun-makers (such as Kemine, Esenpolate, Mirali, Karu-Ate and Effendi Nasruddin. There exist cycles of tales or fables about cunning trick performed by a hyena, a jackal, a hare, a turtle or a spider, as manifested in the folklore of Sudan.

Moreover, if one observes thoroughly the obtainable folklore texts of one separate people, it appears that there - in accordance with all the rules of transformation described in the previous section - each character is presented to the listener (reader) either as witty or simple-minded, strong or weak, undefeatable or defeated, etc. As a result, each folklore hero can be attributed to any value system of folklore characters as its best and at the same time worst element. It becomes extremly apparent in the case of the "ring-like" cumulative tales, such as the Vietnamese tale named "Who Is the Strongest?" It goes like this:
"The strongest of all in the world is the king:
By his order a thief is
caught and executed immediately.

Nevertheless, the thief is strong, too:

he can steal a rooster

and cook it for dinner.

Yet, the rooster is strong, of course:

It can swallow worms with much skill.

But the worm has its strength, too:

It eats away the leg of the throne

and the king flies to the ground.

Who is the strongest of all in the world?"

Symbolically the interrelation between the king (K), the
thief, (T), the rooster (R) and the worm (W) in the above
tale can be shown in the form of a chain:

$$K > T > R > W > K,$$

where ">" serves to signal preference (superiority) and reads
as "stronger than" or "better than", "preferred to" etc. It
can be easily recognised that the given chain is endless and
that it can be schematically presented in the form of a ring
each link of which is superior to the one following it and the
link itself is "surpassed" by the preceding link:

K
W
T
R
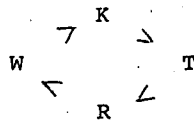
Scheme 1

One can find analogous superiority ring, - either big or small, simple or "figured" - in the folklore of any people.

Let us turn to the example of the Latvian animal epos. There are fables among the Latvian tales about animals in which the Fox gains victory over the Cat, the Wolf, the Bear, the Lynx, the Raven the Rooster, the Dog, the Goat, and several other animal characters as well as the Man. In the same collection one can also find tales in which it is the Fox that turns out to be the loser, being conquered by the Heath-cock, the Rooster, the Hare, the Ravan, the Crayfish, the Hawk, the Cat and the Man. On the other hand, the Hare, for example, is stronger (or more cunning) than the Fox, the Wolf, the Lion, the Dog and the Man. The Man wins against the Bear, the Wolf, the Fox, the Hare, the Gadfly, the Bird, the Fish, the Worm. The Wolf is recognised as being inferior to the Dog, the Sheep, the Hare and the Pig and so on.

On the basis of the above relationships it is possible to construct a series of chains and rings of superiority. Here are some of them:
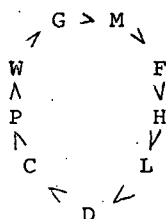
Elementary

1/ Fox > Rooster > Fox;   2/ Fox > Raven > Fox
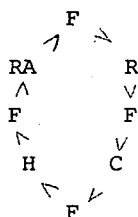
3/ Fox > Cat > Fox   4/ Fox > Man > Fox.

Complex

1/ Man > Fox > Lion > Hare > Dog > Cat > Pig > Wolf > Sheep > Man;

2/ Fox > Rooster > Fox > Cat > Fox > Hare > Fox > Raven > Fox.

It is convenient to depict schematically such complex
chains in the form of rings; the letters stand for the names
of the animals, respectively, RA denoting "Raven" as opposed
to R "Rooster":

```
        G  >  M                            F
      ↗           ↘                     ↗      ↘
   W              F              RA              R
   ∧              ∨              ∧               ∨
   P              H              F               F
   ↖             ↙               ↖              ↙
     C        L                   H        C
       ↖   ↙                        ↖    ↙
         D                            F
```
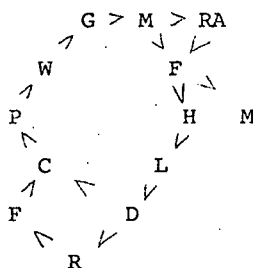
Scheme 2   Scheme 3

If some of the links of the big rings are replaced by
corresponding and equivalent rings of a smaller size, the
scheme will have the following appearance:

```
            G  >  M  >  RA
          ↗        ↘   ↙
         W            F
        ↗             ∨  ↘
       P              H    M
       ↖             ↙
         C        L
       ↗    ↖    ↙
      F          D
       ↖      ↙
          R
```

Scheme 4

Many links can be substituted for each other by simply
changing their places or the things of preference (>) can be
turned as to point in the opposite direction, - yet the scheme
will remain relevant to the folklore material.

What, then, are we dealing with here?

To be honest, we cannot be absolutely certain.

Is it the case that, to a certain degree, the versatility of these heroes can be explained by the existing cunning of the animals, by their admirable fitness to conditions of existence which is reflected so truthfully in the folklore? Maybe. At any rate, it is commonly known that many animals are "apt to be cunning". How skilfully hares double back when running away from their pursuers! Or chameleons, changing the colour of their body according to the colour of their environment, also hide from their enemies in an extremely "witty" manner. Plovers sitting on their eggs pretend to be injured whenever a man approaches and, dragging their "wounded" wings on the ground, they attract the unbidden guest away from their nests. Even more cunning is the way in which tree sparrows act in building their nests in the wall of the nests of their worst enemy the falcon: falcons do not hunt near their nests and they do not let other birds and beatst of prey come close to the nests. And this is what experts on octopuses say: if an octopus cannot open a shell in order to regale itself on a mollusc, it waits until the shell itself opens, and at that moment the octopus places a piece of stone or coral into the opening.

These and similar facts and data, however, cannot account for the extant lack of agreement in the estimation of intelligence and other properties of animals, i.e., what we call

qualitative transformation of folklore characters, or, in
other words, the circumtance in which the clever and the
foolish heroes of the stories take each other's places even
within the limits of one and the same plot. Earlier I cited
examples of the clever and of the foolish Nasruddin. Here I
shall list several analogous examples concerning animal
characters. A tale of the Dinka people of Sudan narrates how
the Hyena deceived the Lion. The two animals once managed to
acquire some meat (by killing an antelope). The Hyena said
that the meat had to be fried and sent the Lion to fetch fire.
The Lion set out towards the Sun but returned with nothing.
While the Lion was on his way, the Hyena ate the meat. Then
it told the Lion that the meat had been eaten, most likely,
by the god of the Earth. Kanurin people from "West Africa
tell an identical tale about the Weasel and the Hyena. In this
tale it is the Weasel that deceives the stupid (!) Hyena in
the same way as above, the only difference being that the
Weasel blames people for committing the crime. There is no
doubt that it is impossible to explain the transformation of
the Hyena's image by any biological argumentations.

It is possible that the appropriate answer to the
question lies in the field of ethnography, viz., in ancient
customs and beliefs? Well, this seems very likely to be the
case. At any rate, similar suppositions have already been
made.

According to one, folklore stories about clever and
cunning (and, as a rule, good) animals go back to religious-
-magical texts intended for these very animals. These texts

were once narrated in order to propitiate the animals in
question or to lull their vigilance thereby ensuring the
success of the hunt. Regardless of all its advantages, the
above hypothesis is, however, incapable of explaining why
animals like frogs, spiders, lizards, flies and other animals
lacking any trade or, at least, economic significance, appear
to be *good* animals.

Another supposition seems considerably more convincing.
According to this theory zoomorphic folklore characters go
back to the totemic ancestors of a given ethnic group. Many
Australian, Oceanic, South American and African tribes still
continue to consider certain animals to be their kinsmen,
worship and make sacrifices to them and forbid their killing.
In New Caledonia, for example, it is strictly forbidden to
kill lizards: the inhabitants think of them as the embodiment
of their own ancestors. Analogous situations are narrated by
the Papuan fratrias (marriage classes) with regard to kangaroos,
cassowaries, dogs, wild-boars, eagles, cormorants and other
local animals as well as certain kinds of plants. It can
readily be conceived that parallel to the consolidation of
some genera and tribes as larger ethnic entities such as the
Iroquois League, their ancient totemic ancestors become the
objects of a wider reverence, being worshipped by whole
peoples, i.e. they become converted into gods and demigods.
The latter are driven into the background or, like the first
come to belong to the common national pantheon. Later, at
approximately the time when monotheism is being established,

earlier tribal gods turn into different kinds of cherubs and seraphim or evil spirits.

If however, the supposition about the totemic origin of zoomorphic characters can provide an answer as to why one or other animal is given predominance in the folklore of one and the same people, it is hardly capable of yielding an explanation of the preference of certain anthropomorphic characters to others. It may be the case that the latter ones (i.e. human characters) also go back to ancient tribal archi-ancestors, "culture" heroes that once used to be worshipped as protectors of ethnic groups and, naturally, were considered the cleverest, the strongest and the best of all. This hypothesis still cannot give an adequate and overall explanation of the above facts. Amongst folk-tale tricksters and wise men there· is a good number which appeared as characters relatively recently, probably 300-500 years ago, whereas folklore itself has existed for thousand of years. Above all, these tricksters and wise men are also, as has been demonstrated in the previous section, frequently presented as foolish and simple-minded characters.

True, the latter factor is thought by some specialists in folklore (not without grounds) to be the result of deliberate or undeliberate·parodying of old and outdated notions. Hand in hand with social and cultural development people's opinions, too, undergoe transformation and as a result, the notions that once were good later turn bad and vice versa. Thus, together with the establishment and stabilization of the Ossete patri-

archal customs, their ancient folklore characters undergo
radical transformation. The noble Nart Sosruko (Soslan), the
great hero of the old Ossete legends turns into a cowardly
and treacherous man in the later versions, and his mother
Satana, the demigoddess mother of the Narts is later presented
as an evil witch. A number of such examples can be cited from
the folklore of any people. Yet all of them put together are
insufficient to give an adequate evalution of the diversity
of the transformative forms or, in particular, of the cases
of twin brothers, so frequently met in the archaic folklore,
where one of the twins makes a parody of the others deeds.
After all, both twin brothers act *simultaneously*, so that an
explanation based on the evolution of people's opinion has no
place here.

Most probably the reason lies in something else. All our
rings of superiority as well as the whole diversity of the
qualitative variants of folklore characters are connected with
the system of logical transformations of the texts dealt with
in the previous section. In fact, whereas folklore stories
(either as a whole or considered separately) model facts and
situations on real life, the totality of these stories
repeats (as a model) the totality of life situations and
facts themselves. Facts and situations occuring in life may
be and frequently are most heterogenous; they may be observed
in their different ralations to each other, they may be valued
from many sides, and this alone can make them seem different

in each of their real-life situations (and, when considered
in folklore, in each of their folklore contexts): they may
seem good in one case and bad in another, either necessary
or unnecessary, clever or foolish, that is to say, different.
In any case, regardless of all the differences in their
appearance, they may seem quite true to life. It is sufficient
to observe the legend of Samson and Delilah from the viewpoint
of the Philistines and all values will at once change to the
opposite. Delilah, the former traitress will instantly become
a "positive" heroine and she will in no way differ from a
certain Beautiful Helen who tries to make Koschei reveal the
secret of eternal life. Extraordinarily illustrative in this
respect is the wonderful Dungan tale about two brothers who
wooed the daughters of Matsun, the teacher. In order to test
the intelligence and knowledge of the fiancés Matsun put three
questions to the brothers. First he asked the elder brother:
Why does a goose come dry out of the water and why has it such
a loud voice? "And the brother answered: The feathers of a
goose are covered with grease so that water cannot penetrate.
The loud voice of a goose, is brought about by its long neck
and wide throat." Then Matsun asked: "Why is one of these
apples red and the other green?" The elder brother took a
glance at the apple-tree and answered: "Because one half of
the apple turns to the Sun and the other half is in shadow."
Then the teacher led the fiancé to the room in which the elder
sister was sitting and asked: "Why has my daughter white skin
and you - dark?" The elder brother replied: "Your daughter is

white because she sits inside the house all the time but I
am dark since I spend much time in the Sun." Matsun liked the
elder brother's answers and assented to give his elder
daughter in marriage to him. Then the teacher asked the same
questions from the younger brother who was a fellow of a
totally different stamp. Answering the question about the voice
of the goose the younger brother said: "The voice depends
on the kind of the animal." The teacher remarked:
"But your wise brother had answered me that a goose had a loud
voice because it had a long neck." - Oh, no, - protested the
younger brother, - it is merely a particular case and you
cannot make a rule of it. A frog, for instance, has a very
short neck, but is has a very loud voice, all the same." Having
heard the question about the apple, the younger brother took
one from the tree, tore it into two pieces and, pointing to
the seeds he answered: "Everything depends on the seeds, that
is on the sort of apple." "- But your wise brother said that
one half of the apple became red because it had been exposed
to the Sun." - said the teacher. "- Oh, no, - replied the
younger brother - it is just an exeptional case. There are
apples equally red on both sides, although they, too, had been
exposed to the Sun on only one side. Red beet, for example,
sits in the earth all the time and never sees at all the Sun
and yet it is red in colour." Finally Matsun led the younger
brother to his younger daughter and asked him about the reason
of his daughter's white skin. The younger brother explained:
"Her gentle white skin is from Nature." "- But your wise brother
explained that my daughters always keep in the shadow." "- Oh,

no, - protested the younger of the brothers, - it is a particular case. The black insect lives in shadow all the time but on this account it will never turn white. Matsun admitted that the second brother also give adequate answers to his questions and let him marry his younger daughter.

In the above tale the contradictory deeds of the archaic folklore twins reacting in a different manner to identical "creative tasks" now seem deeper and more sensible. It is possible that this many-sided approach, this intention to view phenomena from different angles and not to evalute them identically, is the basis of the admirable wisdom of our ancient ancestors who fixed their richest life experiences in the simple and at the same complex, harmonious and none the less contradictory system of logical transformation reflecting the partical logic of common sense.

(Translated by Károly Fábricz)