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Margaret Read MacDonald

Use of Motif and Type Indexes by Teachers, Storytellers, and Children's Librarians

Folklorists likely perceive motif and type indexes as scholarly tools of interest mainly to other folklore scholars. There exists, however, a large body of lay users who find these tools of great use . . . once they learn of the existence of such indexes. Librarians, teachers, and storytellers use folktales in their work. All have need at times to locate specific folktales or to find folktales related to a certain theme.

Public library children's librarians have some familiarity with the folklorist's use of motif and type numbers. These librarians are constantly beset by queries from parents and teachers seeking specific folktales they hope to use with their children. And patrons often come to the librarian asking for a story they remember hearing once about "that big bear that got stuck in a tree." When *The Storyteller's Sourcebook: A Subject, Title, and Motif Index to Children's Folklore Collections* appeared in 1982, children's librarians greeted it with open arms. They mastered the motif-index schema quickly and now, fifteen years later, are clamoring for a sequel.¹ Since many of the 556 collections and 389 picture books indexed in *The Storyteller's Sourcebook* are available in public and school library collections, this index works well as a finding tool. Its title index allows the librarian to locate tales within collections quickly, and the subject index helps them round up a group of stories on a topic for use in thematic storytimes. They use the index in their own program preparation, and they find it invaluable in answering reference questions from parents and teachers. In fact children's librarians have such a strong need for this kind of indexing that librarians in Great Britain, Australia, and New Zealand value the book, despite the fact that many of the sources it indexes are available only in North America.

Through use of this *Storyteller's Sourcebook* children's librarians have become familiar with the S uth Thompson motif classification. Today some children's folktale collections include motif and type numbers in their tale notes, and an occasional picture book gives the motif or type for its tale.² Children's librarians understand and appreciate this information.

The public children's librarian also uses a series of indexes originated by Marie Huse Eastman and continued by Norma Olin Ireland and Joseph Sprug.³ Beginning with the 1979 edition, this set indexes story collections by title and adds a subject index. The set does not attempt motif-indexing. It is a useful supplement to *The Storyteller's Sourcebook*, however, because it indexes some non-folk material and other titles that fall out of the range of the *Sourcebook* and because it is updated regularly.

The school librarian also finds great use in an index such as *The Storyteller's Sourcebook*. However, the budget constraints of the school library mean that not many own this expensive (\$95) reference tool. The school librarian is more apt to be conversant with motif and type uses than the classroom teacher, but this librarian often has had less hands-on experience using an index than the public librarian.

A second group which appreciates fully the value of folktale indexing is the storytelling community. The National Storytelling Association numbers its members at over 5,600.⁴ Each of these tellers is continuously seeking new material. Folktales form a major part of many tellers' repertoires, but finding good variants of stories is not easy. Tellers have learned that motif and type indexes can point the way to sources. Most of these storytellers were introduced to the motif-index through *The Storyteller's Sourcebook*. Since most larger public libraries own this reference tool, it is easily accessible to many tellers. Other type and motif indexes, considered scholarly fare, are seldom purchased by public libraries, so the user must visit a large academic institution to find them. Storytellers are highly motivated once they begin tracking a story, however, and will sometimes take the trouble to travel to an academic library to continue their research. They are eager to know about type and motif indexes. Workshops on the use of folktale indexes are sometimes offered within the storytelling community and are greeted with enthusiasm. These folks are eager for all the information they can get about the availability and use of folktale indexes. Storytellers are so highly motivated to research sources because they realize that each source will add something new to their perception of the story and enhance their own tellings.

A third, potential user of folktale indexes is the classroom teacher. The subject approach to a tool such as *The Storyteller's Sourcebook* can be quite helpful to a teacher building a thematic unit. However, such indexes are seldom available in schools, and trips to a curriculum center or public library are often difficult for teachers. The concepts of "motif" and "type" do enter the classroom however. Most educators are aware that such terms exist. Unfortunately misinformation about these terms is bandied about in the education literature.

This misinformation begins with the textbooks used to instruct teachers. I examined four of these texts: Norton (1983); Cullinan (1989); Sutherland and Arbuthnot (1991); and Huck, Hepler, Hickman (1993). Each included

a chapter on folklore literature for use with children. None mentioned that indexes are available to access this material. Three attempted a discussion of tale "types" and "motifs." These texts usually provide a list of "motifs," leaving the impression that these are the only or main motifs in use. There seems to be little attempt to draw on the actual terminology used by folklorists. Perhaps because folklorists have so much difficulty defining their own terms, the educators seem able to create their own lists of "types" and "motifs" with impunity. *Children's Literature in the Elementary School* (Huck, Helper, and Hickman 1993), for example, provides a boxed table labeled "A Cross-Cultural Study of Folktale Types." The types listed are: cumulative, pourquoi, beast tales, wonder tales, and realistic tales. The impression given is that these are the major types of the folktale. Language arts instructors bring these "folklore facts" to a younger audience by including such lists in their textbooks for children. Students are asked to learn the basic "types" of the folktale or to memorize a list of folktale "motifs." Each educator seems to create his or her own list of basic "types" and "motifs."

Educators too often rely on other educators as their primary sources when preparing folklore units. Seldom do we see evidence that they have consulted the scholarship of professional folklorists. Donna Norton, in her *Through the Eyes of the Child: An Introduction to Children's Literature*, tells us that "Mary Ann Nelson claims that there are over five hundred European versions" of Cinderella (1983:239). Nelson is the author of another children's literature textbook (1972). Though all four texts I examined discuss the Cinderella tale in detail, only Cullinan (1989) cites Cox's seminal work (1893) and none mention Rooth's (1951).

The most amazing example of motif and type invention by a lay writer is *Folklore: An Annotated Bibliography and Index to Single Editions* by Elsie B. Ziegler (1975). Her book contains indexes called "Stories by Motif" and "Stories by Type of Folklore." By "motif" she means sixteen motifs mentioned by Huck and Kuhn in *Children's Literature in the Elementary School* (1993): "humor, magic objects, magic transformation, enchanted people, tasks and trials, wit prevails, fools and simpletons, wishes, trickery, realistic events, talking animals, pourquoi, local legendary heroes, supernatural creatures, friendly animals, and legendary heroes." Her "types of folklore" are "Epics, Fables, Folk Songs, Ballads, Folk Tales, Legends, Myths, and Nursery Rhymes." The problem is that the user of this book understands this to be the way in which the folklorist uses the terms "motif" and "type." The explanations, after all, come from a book titled *Folklore . . . an Index*. Many teacher manuals assume such lists to be the entire meaning of the folkloric terms "motif" and "type."

Many sources suggest that teachers offer a unit of folktale comparison study for their students. This has become a popular concept that works well both on the elementary level and for junior high and high school students.

The story most often chosen for comparison is "Cinderella." Unfortunately teachers seldom know of the existence of folktale indexes which could help them locate variants. They rely on the few sources mentioned in their teacher's guide or ask their school librarian to round them up a few titles. Responding to this interest in folktale comparative study, Judy Sierra published in 1992 a collection of twenty-five Cinderella variants along with classroom use suggestions and initiated the *Oryx Multicultural Folktales Series*.⁵

Because *The Storyteller's Sourcebook* contains some features of both a type index and a motif index, it is especially useful for comparative study in the classroom. *The Storyteller's Sourcebook* chooses to describe each tale in its entirety at one point in the index, rather than forcing the user to refer to each of its constituent parts. The user is referred to this one tale description from each of its motifs within the index. "Cinderella" for example is described in full under R221 *Heroine's threefold flight from ball*. With cross references from such motifs as C761.3 *Tabu: staying too long at ball* and H36.1 *Slipper test*. Under R221 the book describes in their entirety thirty-six variants of type 510 from ninety-seven different sources. Using this index the teacher can easily locate several variants from within local library resources, and a perusal of the thirty-six tale descriptions gives a quick overview of the variation within type 510. Still few teachers know of this reference tool.

Confusion among teachers and librarians regarding motif and index use is compounded by problems of standardization within the folklore field. Since each researcher turns up much material not previously indexed, adaptations to the Thompson or Aarne-Thompson schema must be made to accommodate the new material. Scholars working at the same time in separate locations can easily assign the same tale to two different locations within the index. Working with material for *The Storyteller's Sourcebook* I designated all new motiving with an asterix. Usually extensions within Thompson's schema were obvious. But sometimes the indexing seemed forced, and another scholar might well have chosen a different spot to enter that particular tale. Before creating my own extension I consulted the work of other scholars who had indexed in that geographic area, but access to the works of other indexers was difficult and expensive, many available only through University Microfilms, some not available at all. These problems need to be solved so that the folklorist can present a unified motif and type schema to the lay user.

Recently a few authors with folklore degrees have begun to write for children.⁶ These folklorists usually include tale and motif numbers and brief notes for their stories. Professional storytellers who are producing books for children now sometimes include type and motif information as well.⁷ In order to encourage and reward the production of fine folklore books for children, the Children's Folklore Section of the American Folklore Society now awards an Aesop Prize each year to a book for children.⁸ As more

publishers become aware of the Aesop Prize, a turn toward more scholarly and complete notes in children's books may occur. Each time a teacher sees such a book note, the awareness of folklore indexing increases.

Do teachers, librarians, and storytellers need to know about folklore indexes? Clearly the use of these indexes can make their work easier and better. Folklore scholars can help them discover these indexes. Undergraduate classes should learn to use indexes and understand that these indexes have practical use beyond academia. Simple sources such as *The Storyteller's Sourcebook* can introduce folktale indexing to educators and lead them into the other indexes. Workshops and lectures for teachers should include discussion of folktale indexes. Folklorists can write articles for teacher journals showing the uses of folktale indexes. Those writing for children or those who work with children should make it a point to add brief but scholarly tale notes, including motif and type numbers. Through the vast body of folktale indexing carried out by folklorists over the years, a massive and useful source has been created. It is now the folklorist's duty to share this database with those who need access to stories.

*Kirkland,
Washington*

NOTES

1. *The Tale Finder: A Motif, Subject, and Title Index to Popular Folktale Collections*, by Brian Sturm and edited by Margaret Read MacDonald, forthcoming from the H. W. Wilson Company, will include folktale collections published 1982–1997.

2. See for example *Scary Stories to Tell in the Dark* by Alvin Schwartz (1983) and other collections by Schwartz. See also *The Diamond Tree: Jewish Folktales Around the World* by Howard Schwartz and Barbara Rush (1991). Though few authors include type and motif numbers in children's collections or picture books, many do provide tale notes discussing the origin of the story and sometimes giving comparative comment. Library reviewers usually mention the presence of such notes with approval, and publishers, ever eager to please the reviewers, have begun to ask authors to provide such notes.

3. See Eastman (1926, 1937, 1952); Ireland (1979, 1985); Ireland and Sprug (1989); Sprug (1994).

4. Phone call to National Storytelling Association, October 23, 1996.

5. Others in this series are George Shannon, *The Oryx Multicultural Folktale Series: A Knock at the Door* (1992); Margaret Read MacDonald, *The Oryx Multicultural Folktale Series: Tom Thumb* (1993); Betsy Hearne, *The Oryx Multicultural Folktale Series: Beauties and Beasties* (1993). Sierra explains the terms "type" and "motif" and discusses tale type 510A, 510 B, and 511 briefly. Shannon discusses type 123 at length and discusses related types. MacDonald discusses types and motifs and delineates each of the constituent motifs within her thirty-two tales. Hearne mentions her tale types, 425, 425A, 425C, 402A, and 400 in her preface.

6. For example, Frank de Caro, *The Folktale Cat* (1992); Margaret Read MacDonald, *Tuck-Me-In-Tales* (1996), *Pickin' Peas* (1997a), and *Slop!* (1997b); Josepha Sherman, *Trickster Tales: Forty Folk Stories from Around the World* (1996); and Judy Sierra, *Nursery Tales from Around the World* (1996).

7. For example, Pleasant de Spain, *Eleven Nature Tales* (1995), and Jeff Brown, *We Like Kids: A Multicultural Storybook* (1995).

8. Ruth Stotter, chair of the 1996 Aesop Committee, reports that of the 112 titles submitted for consideration in 1996 only four contained motif or type references. Three of these were publications of August House, a press which publishes for the folklore market as well as for children.

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