



events of the present" (61). The *korero* forms a field of discourse with political, economic, social, and religious values, where understanding a narrative is a multidimensional process of interpretation.

In the second part of the book the Siikalas guide the reader into the horizontal dimension of the habitus of the *tumu korero* and their relationship to tradition, performative skills, spatial memory, and the importance of naming and transforming sacred places and cult sites into landmarks in time and space, real "monuments of island history" (131). The most relevant narratives appear to be those occupying the Maussian space of reciprocal social relations, where foot often becomes a metaphor of position and rank.

The long-lasting fieldwork of Anna-Leena and Jukka Siikala in the southern Cook Islands emphasizes how variation should be examined in a wider perspective by illustrating all the factors influencing the life of oral discourse. After James Clifford's *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century*, the authors remind the reader that the fieldworker has to move and the field site could be found in a "hotel lobby, urban café, ship or bus" (264). Both authors skillfully contextualize philosophical borders and horizons within the indigenous narratives and sensual geography (cf. Mau'ke's "navel of the world"). The book advances the goals of contemporary ethnography in the Pacific in several ways. A topic like *korero* penetrates deeply into the ethnographic reality being studied, and at the same time it reduces the distance between the reader's world and that being described.

Guido Carlo Pigliasco
University of Hawai'i, Mānoa

La Fiaba di Tradizione Orale. By Giuseppe Gatto. Milan: Edizioni Universitarie di Lettere Economia Diritto, 2006. 230 pp.

Giuseppe Gatto's compact but thorough exploration of how scholars have tried to wrest meaning from the magical subgroup of ordinary folktales, ATU 300–749, also suggests why these stories are so central to many European, African, and Asian cultures, and now to global mass-mediated culture—a "why" bound inextricably to the intuitive brilliance and imaginative failures of those scholars.

Gatto divides his book into "Aspects of the Tale," "The Tale: Documentation and Study," and "Texts." None of these sections is exhaustive, but they are convincingly representative. Gatto first introduces Venetian, Scottish, Russian, Sicilian, Emilian, and Sardinian versions of ATU 709 ("Snow White"), and then he introduces the concept of tale type with a critical reminder: "The terms we are using—type, motif—are neither generic nor neutral, but rather have a precise history and methodological connotation" [*I termini che stiamo usando—tipo,*

motivo—non sono generici e nemmeno neutri, ma hanno una storia e una connotazione metodologica precisa (21)]. He follows with four Italian versions of ATU 300 (“The Dragon Slayer”), like “Snow White” one of global popular culture’s favorite folktale commodifications. These two tales echo explicitly and implicitly through Gatto’s study, from considerations specific to their gendered protagonists, to formal issues, to matters of performance.

Subsequent chapters in this section define broad concerns surrounding narrator-audience, narrator-text, formal characteristics, and transcription. Citing recent work by Bernadette Bricout (1987) and Maurizio Bettini (1998) as the latest elaborations on Milman Parry and Albert Lord’s pioneering oral formulaic theory and Richard Bauman’s performance theory, Gatto arrives at this eloquent summary: “One can speak of a theatricality of narrative, of a narration that is in reality a complex act, not simply a verbal one; an act, and not a performance, because a fundamental aspect of performance is missing, and that is the distinction between actors and spectators: here the spectators do not watch, but participate” [Si può parlare di una teatralità del narrare, di una narrazione che in realtà è fatto complesso, non puro atto verbale; fatto, e non spettacolo, perché è assente un elemento fondamentale dello spettacolo, appunto la distinzione tra attori e spettatori: qui gli spettatori non assistono, ma partecipano. (35)]

The chapter on narrator-text notes that the narrator’s technique or “particolare tecnica combinatoria” (37) resembles Claude Lévi-Strauss’s concept of bricolage in mythic thought. Gatto offers Fabiano Mugnaini’s recent fieldwork in Umbria (1999) as evidence for considering a particular narrator’s repertoire as hypertext. Nicole Belmont’s twenty-first-century reconsideration of the much-maligned tale type from a narrator’s perspective as a “narrative space, the area of admissible oscillation of a scenario” (38, paraphrasing Belmont, 2001) returns Gatto to that space’s first elaborated set of rules, Axel Olrik’s 1908 *Epic Laws of Oral Tradition*, which bulwarks the elaborate structural exploration to come.

A short chapter on formal issues places opening and closing formulas into their performance setting, noting the worldwide predominance of late evening for tale telling, formulaic opening exchanges between narrator and audience, and the impossible aspect of many openings (e.g., “Back when animals talked . . .”). Folklorists, however, have so focused on the folktale’s “negation of good sense” that they have systematically ignored the profound “tale truth” shielded by the opening formula’s disavowal of reality, Gatto argues (46). As for transcription, Gatto reminds us how much material still awaits (Mugnaini’s Tuscan fieldwork is a recent example), adding, however, that “narration as a collective act belongs to the past, and the descriptions we have are often fruit of a reconstruction along the thread of memory” [“la narrazione come fatto collettivo appartiene al passato, e le descrizioni che abbiamo sono spesso frutto di una ricostruzione sul filo della memoria” (51)].

The book’s central section, culminating in Vladimir Propp’s intuitive prioritizing of function over type and his successors’ elaborations and renunciations of structuralism, reveals what a dramatic tale is that of folkloristics itself. Even discredited theory still merits review for understanding how we have defined tales, it seems. The Grimms believed in their texts’ “absolute faithfulness,” for example, because they were driven by Herder’s distinction between *Kunstpoesie* (artistic, individual poetry) and *Naturpoesie* (natural, communal poetry); so long as the true folktale was not clothed in the former, it was legitimate. Surely some contemporary storytellers on the folk revival circuit are still influenced by this distinction as they strive to define authenticity. Pierre Saintyves’s ritual theory, which, following on Andrew Lang’s theory of ancient “survivals,” asserted that these tales were ritual exegeses, like Max Müller’s solar theory and Theodor Benfey’s Indianism, looks laughably rigid now, its content analysis irrelevant thanks to its disregard for worldwide variants and performance context—but the crazy grandeur of these theories reflects the tales’ own seeming universality.

Gatto helps readers consider consequences of large choices folklore study has made, a little like rash choices made in tales. What if it had not fallen into Linnaean step in the nineteenth century, attracting classifiers? More imaginably, what if it had not lagged thirty years in embracing an obscure, self-taught language of professor’s intuitions that *functions*—actions considered from the viewpoint of their significance to the tale’s plot—and not motifs are the tale’s “true narrative atom” (135)? Sometimes Gatto states these choices explicitly, as in the first case; sometimes he leaves the question unanswered, as in the second. In that sense he does not push the cutting edge of folklore dialogue, but rather inspires students to apply some of that recent dialogue to their own studies.

Ironically, Propp the visionary is introduced via his later and more problematic *Historical Roots of Magical Tales*, a “fascinating” book in Gatto’s opinion, marred like the English anthropological survivalists’ work by its “rigid evolutionary nineteenth-century imprint” [“rigida impostazione evolutivista di stampo ottocentesco” (96)]. Gatto saves his harshest indictment for Bruno Bettelheim, a favored whipping boy of contemporary folklorists. I find the case overstated. Bettelheim’s illogic in asserting tales are products of infancy while acknowledging they were only marketed as such since the mid-nineteenth century seems not worse than Propp’s illogic in the *Historical Roots*, where he fills his ostensibly scientific origins study of tales with “schematic and obviously arbitrary evolutionary series” [“serie evolutive schematiche e ovviamente arbitrarie” (97)]. As for ignoring everything but the Grimms’ collection, Bettelheim was in good contemporary company there, too.

Gatto conveys the drama of Propp’s discovery of thirty-one functions and four types of tales in his groundbreaking 1928 *Morphology of the Folk*

Tale (those with only “combat-victory,” those with only “difficult task-execution of difficult task,” those with both, those with neither): “If we thus analyze the four types of tales, examining their functions we see they array along a single axis common to all, with two alternative blocks constructed from the two aforementioned pairs, which are both present in two-sequence tales. We must conclude from this the absolute uniformity of all tales; this, says Propp, is a completely unforeseen result” [“Se cioè analizziamo le quattro specie di fiaba, esaminando le loro funzioni vediamo che si dispongono su un unico asse comune a tutte, con due blocche alternativi costituiti dalle due coppie sudette, che sono tutt’e due presente nella fiaba a due sequenze. Se ne deve concludere l’uniformità assoluta di tutte le fiabe; e questo è, dice Propp, un risultato del tutto inatteso” (125)]. Propp’s most criticized idea was this “identical structure theory.” Gatto returns the reader to his initial variants of ATU 300 and 709 to test it, noting how the Russian Formalist distinction between “story” and “plot” does not really cover the fuzziness of Propp’s insistence on function order immutability in what he insisted on calling *plot*.

More dramatically, Propp’s formalism was indicted by his first cheerleader, Claude Lévi-Strauss, who charged Propp with concentrating on syntagmatic (i.e., chronological) analysis while ignoring the underlying paradigm. Gatto summarizes Bengt Holbek’s analysis of the almost tragic misunderstanding between Lévi-Strauss and Propp over whether the latter’s model was so abstract as to offer no insight into individual tale variants, a misunderstanding arising from the fact that “the former studies myths, which create our perception of the world, while the latter studies tales, which presuppose a preexisting and . . . incontestable world order” [“il primo studia i miti, che creano la nostra percezione del mondo, mentre il secondo studia le fiabe, che presuppongono un ordine del mondo già esistente e . . . incontestabile” (131)].

So much in folkloristics today grows from Propp’s insights, even his arguably faulty ones. Gatto explores how Claude Bremond (1964, 1966, 1977) problematized those insights, separating, for example, “the logical requirement that a function presumes its precedent (victory presumes a battle) from the cultural stereotype by which a function implies the succeeding one (in Russian tales battle implies victory)” [“l’esigenza logica per cui una funzione presuppone la precedente (la vittoria presuppone la lotta) dallo stereotipo culturale per cui una funzione implica la successiva (nelle fiabe russe la lotta implica la vittoria)” (136)]. Then he proceeds to Algirdas Greimas’s (1977) profound semiotic reduction of the tale’s syntagmatic structure to three “semic” function categories (contract, communication, test), in which only the third lacks a negative equivalent, making it the tale’s “irreducible diachronic nucleus” [“nucleo diacronico irriducibile” (141)].

Structuralism’s modifications, narrative analysis based on real performance settings, and psychoanalytic insights all converge in Bengt Holbek’s *Interpretation of Fairy Tales* (1987) imprimatured here and by Alan Dundes (1991) as the starting point for any new magical tale theory. Turning from Holbek’s “grammar” of the tale to its “lexicon,” Gatto maps the field’s current hard ground: “The basic thesis is that symbolic elements . . . refer to the concrete reality of the narrator’s and audience’s direct experience; that these express affective reactions toward beings, objects, and events of the real world, organized in narrative sequences that allow narrators to treat community problems, hopes, and ideals in a veiled manner.” [“La tesi fondamentale è che gli elementi simbolici . . . rinviano alla realtà concreta dell’esperienza diretta del narratore e del suo uditorio; che essi esprimono reazioni affettive agli esseri, oggetti, avvenimenti del mondo reale, organizzate in sequenze narrative che permettono ai narratori di trattare in modo velato problemi, speranze, ideali della comunità” (158).]

Strikingly, Gatto does not identify the twenty-seven texts in part 3 by tale type, though an anchoring majority cluster around ATU 300 and 709, with nods to ATU 325 and 425, “The Sorcerer’s Apprentice” and “Beauty and the Beast.” One side effect of such an arrangement, this reviewer noticed, was to make structuralist and post-structuralist approaches to folktales more accessible: the student reader is required to consider narrative functions and axes especially in stories like ancient Egypt’s “Story of Two Brothers,” which threshed merely for tale types is an uninformative hodgepodge of ATU 302B (“Life Hangs from a Sword”), 303 (“The Two Brothers”), and 318 (“The Unfaithful Wife”), with a foreshadowing of ATU 410 (“Sleeping Beauty”) and 530 (“The Princess on the Glass Mountain”).

Also, an anchoring majority of texts in the first and last sections is Italian, mostly from nineteenth- and early twentieth-century regional collections, with a preponderance of contemporary Italian and other European fieldwork cited in the book’s analytic sections. This does not seem to me a problem. Gatto never makes the mistake—as Propp did—of mistaking cultural stereotype for true tale function, but perhaps that is because he largely leaves the reader to try applying theory to these texts.

Some might find Gatto’s big gaps in theory tracking less excusable than he does in his conclusion’s summary of what he has ignored: thematic analyses, cross-cultural transcriptions, studies of feminist rewrites and other ideological or artistic uses of magical tales, and more. He has, however, fully explained the mechanisms of structural, performance-oriented, and psychological analysis that many would agree are the most meaningful vehicles for exploring these tales’ magical terrain.

Andrew Giarelli

Washington State University, Vancouver