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NUMBERING A TALE THAT TRAVELS

YE XIAN AND THE SHARED SKELETON

A ninth-century Chinese MISCELLANY compiled by Duan Chengshi records a girl named Ye Xian, kept in rags by her STEPMOTHER, helped by the bones of a fish she had befriended, who loses a SHOE as she flees a FESTIVAL and is found by the man who holds it. No line of descent connects it to Perrault that anyone can prove. In 1893 Marian Roalfe Cox printed 345 versions of the same story and sorted them by a shared skeleton: the MISTREATMENT, the HELPER, the festival, the shoe, the RECOGNITION. A VARIANT is one recorded telling; the whole related family is now called the CINDERELLA cycle.

SPELL Spell: MISCELLANY

MISCELLANY

SPELL Spell: STEPMOTHER

STPMOTHER

KNOWN What is the term for one single recorded telling of a story?

VARIANT

KNOWN What is the whole related family of tales built on that shared skeleton called?

CINDERELLA

SEMI_OPEN Name two of the shared episodes Cox sorted the 345 versions by.

NEEDS 2 OF MISTREATMENT / HELPER / FESTIVAL / SHOE / RECOGNITION

OPEN In the Chinese version, the helper is the bones of a fish the girl had befriended. What would you choose as the helper in a version of your own?

Open response - use practitioner judgment

MATH Cox printed her collection of versions in 1893, and Perrault published his French tale in 1697. How many years separated them?

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A UNIT FOR COMPARISON

Comparison needed a unit. In 1910 the Finnish folklorist Antti Aarne published an index of tale types: a **TYPOLOGY**, meaning a **CLASSIFICATION** by kind rather than by origin, in which each recurring plot receives a number any **SCHOLAR** can cite. Stith Thompson twice revised it and Hans-Jörg Uther expanded it in 2004, which is why Cinderella is catalogued as type 510A. Thompson also indexed the smaller unit, the **MOTIF** - the least element with the power to persist in tradition, an object, a character, a strange incident. His six-volume index sorts them into lettered classes: **ANIMALS**, **TABOO**, **MAGIC**, **OGRES**, **DECEPTIONS**.

SPELL Spell: **CLASSIFICATION**

CLASSIFICATION

SPELL Spell: **SCHOLAR**

SCHOLAR

KNOWN What is the term for the smallest element of a tale with the power to persist in tradition - an object, a character, a strange incident?

MOTIF

KNOWN What is the term for a scheme that sorts tales by kind rather than by origin?

TYPOLOGY

SEMI_OPEN Thompson's index sorts its material into lettered classes. Name two of those classes.

NEEDS 2 OF **ANIMALS / TABOO / MAGIC / OGRES / DECEPTIONS**

OPEN If a new lettered class were added to the motif index, what kind of story element would you want it to hold?

Open response - use practitioner judgment

ONE ORIGIN OR MANY

The numbered index sidestepped a question the previous generation had fought over. Scholars had split between MONOGENESIS, the claim that a tale is invented once and spreads by borrowing, and POLYGENESIS, the claim that similar minds in similar conditions invent it independently. Kaarle Krohn's Finnish method attacked the problem empirically: collect every recorded version, chart each trait geographically, and reconstruct the ARCHETYPE, the hypothetical ancestral form from which the rest descend by diffusion. The reconstructions proved fragile and the archetype fell out of favour, but the catalogue outlived it. Computational phylogenetics has since revived the question, treating variants as taxa and their traits as inherited characters.

SPELL Spell: MONOGENESIS

MONOGENESIS

SPELL Spell: POLYGENESIS

POLYGENESIS

KNOWN What is the term for the hypothetical ancestral form of a tale, the single early version from which all the later ones are said to descend by spreading?

ARCHETYPE

OPEN Krohn tried to rebuild the original tale from hundreds of versions, and the reconstruction fell apart. Which story would you most want to trace back to its first telling?

Open response - use practitioner judgment

PROPP'S THIRTY-ONE FUNCTIONS

A type index sorts by content, and content is the part that changes. Vladimir Propp, working through Russian wonder tales in 1928, argued that the CONSTANTS lie in structure. He reduced the tales to thirty-one functions - acts defined not by who performs them but by their CONSEQUENCE for the plot - which appear in a fixed order, though any given tale uses only some of them. The functions fall to a small cast of recurring roles, among them the VILLAIN, the DONOR, the HELPER, the DISPATCHER and the HERO. Two tales filed under different numbers can share this MORPHOLOGY exactly.

SPELL Spell: CONSTANTS

CONSTANTS

SPELL Spell: CONSEQUENCE

CONSEQUENCE

KNOWN Two tales with completely different content can still run through the same functions in the same fixed order. What is Propp's term for that shared underlying structure?

MORPHOLOGY

SEMI_OPEN Propp said the thirty-one functions are distributed among a small cast of recurring roles. Name two of those roles.

NEEDS 2 OF VILLAIN / DONOR / HELPER / DISPATCHER / HERO

OPEN Propp said the same thirty-one moves sit under tale after tale. Which of those moves do you think your favourite story could not do without?

Open response - use practitioner judgment

THE INDEX AND ITS LIMITS

The index is a tool with a biography. Aarne built it from Finnish, Scandinavian and German collections, and the classification still fits Europe and western Asia better than it fits anywhere else; Uther's revision widened the sources but could not undo that shape. Tellers, meanwhile, do not respect it. Two types routinely fuse in transmission, which folklorists call CONTAMINATION, and a tale that settles into a region hardens into a stable local form - Carl Wilhelm von Sydow's OICOTYPE, RECOGNISABLE by details the next valley never uses. No performance is ever type 510A; the number names a family resemblance a scholar noticed afterwards.

SPELL Spell: OICOTYPE

OICOTYPE

SPELL Spell: RECOGNISABLE

RECOGNISABLE

KNOWN What is the term for two tale types fusing together in transmission?

CONTAMINATION

OPEN Which detail would you put into a tale to make it sound like it came from your own town?

Open response - use practitioner judgment

TELLERS AND REPERTOIRES

Whichever Cinderella you carry - Perrault's glass SLIPPER, the Grimms' hazel tree and helpful birds, the animated film you saw as a child - you hold one variant, and 510A is the coordinate that lets you set it beside a ninth-century Chinese telling instead of arguing about which one is authentic. Folklorists would call you a passive BEARER: you know the tale but rarely tell it. The active bearer is the one who performs it, and every teller works from a REPERTOIRE, the limited set of stories they actually tell, shaped by audience and occasion. Repertoires are where variants come from.

SPELL Spell: REPERTOIRE

REPERTOIRE

SPELL Spell: SLIPPER

SLIPPER

KNOWN What does a folklorist call someone who actually performs a tale for listeners, rather than only knowing it?

BEARER

OPEN You hold one version of Cinderella, and a ninth-century teller in China held another. What detail of yours do you think would surprise them most?

Open response - use practitioner judgment