"It Happened Not Too Far from Here...": A Survey of Legend Theory and Characterization
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One of the main concerns of folklorists studying legend has been developing new classificatory systems and revising previous definitions (Hand 1965; Bødker 1965:253–261). In 1975, in an article entitled “The Legend and the Sparrow” Linda Dégh observed the failings of these attempts and proposed that efforts would be better spent examining the obstacles to deriving a characterization of the “genus” legend (Dégh 1975:188). Both the congresses of the International Society for Folk Narrative Research and the series of Sheffield conferences on contemporary legend held since 1982 have made great headway in addressing the concerns Dégh voiced in her article. The goals of this paper are to provide a historical survey of the earlier legend scholarship that has laid the groundwork for current discussions and to develop a characterization of the legend genre based on a synthesis of previous scholarship in a manner that does not delimit the range of the genre but rather explains the basic characteristics of the folk legend.

Jacob Grimm was perhaps the first to begin the process of legend characterization, when he observed that, “Das Märchen ist poetischer, die Sage historischer” (Grimm 1865:v). This characterization influ-
enced the entire course of legend scholarship. Early scholars who investigated legend focussed their efforts on literary approaches to the genre, with disregard for social context, performance and psychological motivations, preferring to examine the legend in relation to other folk narrative forms, primarily the folktale. Examples of such approaches may be found in Karl Wehrhan's (1908) early study of legend, as well as Friedrich Ranke's (1971) and Will-Erich Peuckert's (1965) works on legend. In the 1950s and 1960s, scholars began to consider legend from a broader perspective, including considerations of context and performance. Referring to the 1962 congress of the International Society for Folk Narrative Research, Leopold Schmidt declared that a new era in legend scholarship had begun (L. Schmidt 1969:53; Peeters 1963). This new era envisioned both the development of an international legend catalogue as well as the new approaches to legend which included anthropological and psychological perspectives. Conversely, Stefaan Top declared that legend research had been plunged into a crisis (Top 1969). He was joined in this assessment by Lutz Röhrich (1973:13). The crisis was mainly one of classification, based in the difficulty scholars faced when they tried to categorize legend. Most categorizations relied heavily on questions of content, trying to establish a legend type index similar to the Aarne-Thompson folktale index. Catalogs of this type necessarily overlooked important considerations of context and mode of performance, being based on a contentual characterization of the genre. A synthetic view of legend, one that considered legend from literary, anthropological and psychological viewpoints, was missing.

Literary approaches to the definition of legend are the most abundant. The majority of these studies consider aspects of legend form in relation to other types of folk narrative. One of the earliest distinctions made was the relative lack of form legend exhibited in comparison to folktale (de Boor 1928). Röhrich further delineated the distinction between the two forms when he examined their relative treatment of reality (Röhrich 1956:9–26). Max Lüthi also considers this same question (Lüthi 1961). While the folktale uses reality in an ironic way, legend tries to reconstruct reality in a believable fashion. Legend narrative is linked to outer reality, opposed to the inner reality of folktale, making specific allusions to verifiable topographic features or historical personages. Also, unlike folktale, the core of a legend narrative consists of a single experience (Lüthi 1961:46–48). This characteristic accounts for the episodic nature of legend. In most instances, the legend narration centers on a single event and is mono-
episodic. Finally, while folktale considers man himself, legend considers what happens to man (Lüthi 1966). Although both forms may include similar motifs, this difference in orientation leads to differing treatments of these motifs. The similarity of folktale and legend motifs implies that legend is not necessarily more historical than folktale (Heiske 1962). As similar motifs appear in both narrative forms, the distinguishing characteristic is not relation to reality, but rather presentation of motifs, world view and portrayal of protagonists.

In the comparison to folktale, legend was frequently considered to be formless. Dégh noticed, however, that the observed lack of form was more a result of improper collection than an actual aspect of legend character, legends often being truncated by editorializing fieldworkers (Dégh 1965:84). Gillian Bennet has addressed the problems the field worker faces in collecting legend narrative, mentioning that “the natural legend telling context is largely inaccessible . . . and . . . an induced natural context is particularly difficult to create” (Bennet 1987:16). Bill Ellis provides an analysis of a performance of “The Hook” as an example of both the problems inherent in providing a verbatim transcript of a legend performance as well as the benefits such a transcript provides in the analysis of legend function, noting that “it is through analysis of whole performances that we comprehend whole legends” (Ellis 1987:57). While acknowledging the difficulty the field worker encounters both during collection and transcription, he posits that “the majority of printed legend texts . . . do not represent legend telling but rather legend summarizing” (Ellis 1987:34). To remedy this problem, he suggests that legend collections include notations of the subtle aspects of performance because it is in these linguistic and paralinguistic details that legend meaning is encapsulated (Ellis 1987).

In 1934, Carl Wilhelm von Sydow differentiated between “memorate” and “fabulate” (von Sydow 1934:261). The basic tenet of this distinction was that first hand accounts of supernatural experiences are a different type of folk narrative than second or third hand accounts. To avoid the exclusionary nature of such a distinction, von Sydow considered the movement of memorate across the border into fabulate, labeling this group of cross-over narratives “Erinnerungssage (minnessägen) . . .” (von Sydow 1934:261).¹ Gunnar Granberg built on von Sydow’s memorate/fabulate distinction, by equating legend with the category fabulate and suggesting that leg-

¹ Von Sydow first uses the term “minnessägner” in 1931 (von Sydow 1931:98).
end, like fabulate, is a "kurze, ein-episodische Erzählung" (Granberg 1935:120). Legend springs from the imagination of the folk and exhibits a fixed form in tradition (Granberg 1935:121). The defining feature of memorate is the personal focus of the account, even if the narrative is related by someone other than the person who experienced it (Granberg 1935:121). Reidar Christiansen provided a theoretical modification of the distinction when he observed that memorate derives importance from the narrator having personally experienced the related event (Christiansen 1962:99). Fabulate, on the other hand, derives importance from the narrated event. In 1968, Juha Pentikäinen presented a clear summary of the memorate/fabulate distinction, stating that fabulates, in contrast to memorates, exhibit a more fixed form, with anonymous characters (Pentikäinen 1968).

Dégh and Andrew Vázsonyi successfully challenged the memorate/fabulate distinction, noting the progressive liberalization of the memorate definition, with first hand accounts being supplanted by second and third hand accounts (Dégh and Vázsonyi 1974:226–228). At any time, a fabulate can take the form of a memorate and, more importantly, vice-versa, simply by changing narrative voice. A primary reason for this change is the tendency to perform legend as a true narrative. A legend preceded by "A friend of a friend of a friend told me . . ." has essentially no credibility (Dégh and Vázsonyi 1974:230–231). In his discussion of the folk belief story, Otto Blehr limits the number of transmissional links to two (Blehr 1974:42). Any more transmissional links seriously compromise the believability of the account. During performance, the narrator is therefore motivated to reduce the number of transmissional links, possibly to the extent that he would relate it as a first-hand experience. This brings into question the definition of tradition. In this context, a narrative should be considered in tradition when original authorship is no longer verifiable and transmission is still actively taking place—this could occur in as few as a single transmissionary link. Any narrative that has ever been in tradition can be said to be a traditional narrative. Point by point, Dégh and Vázsonyi discredited von Sydow's distinction of memorate and fabulate, showing that legend cannot be characterized by narrative voice or other internal manifestations of transmissional links.²

² The study of memorates has been supported by various scholars, and may be quite useful in understanding folk belief (Honko 1964; Klintberg 1976). Concerning the relationship between memorate and legend, Klintberg mentions that "sägner och memoratet är två genrer som lever tillsamans i traditionen i en ständig växelverkan" (af Klintberg 1976:269).
Legend has also been considered in relation to rumor. Both of these narrative forms are believable and often presented as true, with a single event forming the core of the narrative. Ernst Bernheim touched on the similarity of legend and rumor when he suggested that legend is simply a survival of rumor (Bernheim 1920:97–108). Gordon Allport, in his celebrated work on rumor, agreed and added “Legends persist because they embody undying states of mind” (Allport 1947:164). Edgar Morin studied the genesis, life and disappearance of a rumor in the French city of Orléans, showing that temporality and extreme localization are two factors that, if not overcome by widespread transmission or adaptation of the narrative to a fixed form, may cause the rumor to disappear rather than remain in tradition (Morin 1982). A similar study by Carsten Bregenhøj supports many of Morin’s conclusions (Bregenhøj 1978). To account for the brief life of some narratives, William Jansen suggested that legends which disappear quickly be termed “short-term legends” and those with more staying power be termed “long-term legends” (Jansen 1976:270). This effectively eliminates the rumor/legend distinction. The only remaining distinction is that while legend is always a narrative, rumor may be but a short statement. As such, rumor exhibits an even more elastic form than legend does.

Both the legend and rumor are closely related to questions of belief. Rumor, like legend, relies on popular belief as a generative impetus (Shibutani 1966:156). Important to the formation of rumor is ambiguity or a lack of official information, which helps precipitate accounts which reflect both commonly held beliefs and interests (Shibutani 1966:157; Allport 1947:33–36). Once a rumor no longer reflects collective biases, it disappears from tradition. Bengt af Klintberg considered this reliance on folk belief in the two forms of folk narrative (af Klintberg 1976). He points out that the category, “Urban Legend,” is often a reflection of rumor (af Klintberg 1976:270). If a narrative rumor persists, it is a legend. Thus, a more suitable characterization is that rumor narrative experiences a hyperactive transmission in a short time span, often within an extremely localized area. Narrative rumor is a transmissionary state of legend—a state which, despite its intensity, does not guarantee longevity.

Legend style and internal aspects of composition and structure have also been examined as a means for describing the legend genre. Mathilde Hain included in her view of legend considerations of the internal landscape and localization of the narratives (Hain 1937 [1969]). Through its believability, the internal landscape of the legend
reinforces the believability of the narrative (Hain 1937[1969]:99). Peuckert pursued a similar examination of the internal landscape of the legend and the historical nature of the narratives, suggesting that these two forces combined result in an account believable to both narrator and audience (Peuckert 1938[1969]:151–152). Siegfried Beyschlag concurs in this evaluation of the role of a credible internal world in developing the believability of the narrative (Beyschlag 1941 [1969]). This distinguishes the world portrayed in legend from those portrayed in folktale and myth.

Legend morphology and the study of structural elements have played important roles in the development of a view of legend and its composition. Axel Olrik identified eighteen "epic laws" which govern the composition of all folk narrative (Olrik 1908 and 1921). Johann Folkers modified this approach specifically to fit legends, developing a morphological approach to the compositional elements of legend, and attempting to establish a group of functions serving as the grammar for the narrative (Folkers 1910). Oldřich Sirovitka also一篇 morphological approach in a much later article, with a focus on legend motifs to help develop a legend index (Sirovitka 1964). Unlike folktale motif, legend motif is a more autonomous entity and subject to greater variation (Sirovitka 1964:101). This autonomous motif coupled with the tendency of legend narrative towards incorporation and contentual instability leads to the elastic form legend exhibits. Ina-Maria Greverus suggested that a systematic analysis of type, motif and theme would result in a clearer understanding of legend, concluding that Friedrich Hebbel's (1839) "Ideen-alfabet" should be applied to the analysis of legend morphology (Greverus 1965[1969]:401). Vilmos Voigt also suggested a morphological approach as a means for developing the grammar of legends, suggesting that a very short formula could describe the syntagmatic structure of legend (Voigt 1973:80). Pentikäinen later explored the link between legend structure and legend function (Pentikäinen 1976). He discovered that legend structure differs according to each particular legend function (Pentikäinen 1976:149). W. F. H. Nicolaisen has also considered morphological aspects of legend structure, focusing primarily on contemporary legend. Basing his study on William Labov's (1972) study of Afro-American vernacular narrative, he suggests that legend narrative consists at a minimum level of three structural elements—orientation, complicating action, and result (Nicolaisen 1987:72). However, he allows that the legend may encompass as many as six
distinct structural elements or as few as two (Nicolaisen 1987). Despite the promise of these structural approaches to legend study, none has been able to establish any set rules of legend morphology. Part of the failure of these approaches lies in the extreme elasticity of the legend narrative and its high degree of ecotypification. Also, most of the approaches are forced to ignore important aspects of context and performance, centering primarily on considerations of content. However, morphologies such as Nicolaisen's and Pentikäinen's do provide both much needed insight into the structural relationships between legend and other forms of oral narrative as well as maps of the minimum structural elements that make up a legend narrative.

The stylists of legend narrative has also been considered as a basis for genre definition. André Jolles' influential Einfache Formen includes a short discussion of legend based on its form and content (Jolles 1958:50–74). His definition, however, links legend to concepts of family, clan and blood relations, a somewhat misleading view of the genre. A more productive approach concerns legend style rather than legend content. Friedrich-Wilhelm Schmidt explored the particular stylistic features of legend, concluding that, like folktale, it is an artistic folk expression with a definite form, using a narrative frame to structure the account (F. W. Schmidt 1929[1969]:64). He mentions that the legend is often "episch-dramatisch" and exhibits a poetic lyricism, concluding that Wilhelm Wisser's observation on the nature of folktale, "Mit dem Inhalt der Geschichten ist die Form überliefert, die gleichsam von selbst aus diesem hervorwächst," also holds true for legend (F. W. Schmidt 1929[1969]:64–65; Wisser 1925). Carl Hermann Tillhagen later shared this same view (Tillhagen 1967). However, a major problem of analyzing the form and style of the legend is the lack of clear and consistent terminology for describing the narratives (Ferenczi 1966). It is often forgotten that a definition refers to an ideal type, rather than being an exact representation (Honko 1968). In part, it was the breakdown in the ability to clearly and adequately characterize legend which led to the failure of the international legend catalogue. In the process, however, a great deal was discovered about legend style and form.

Legend has an elastic form; it expands, contracts and survives great variation. Lee Doo Hyon mentions that this elasticity is one of the unique characteristics of the genre (Lee 1983:361). Part of the process of variation may be linked to von Sydow's concept of ecotypification (von Sydow 1932[1948]:16). Herbert Halpert observed that "each
geographical and cultural area tends to ascribe supernatural legends to its dominant supernatural figure" (Halpert 1971:50). This observation is directly related to Albert Eskeröd's concept of "tradition dominants" (Eskeröd 1947:81). Klintberg noticed the ethno- and sociocentric nature of Swedish contemporary legends, suggesting that each individual culture places its own ethnicity, conventions and norms in opposition to groups which do not conform and are therefore threatening (af Klintberg 1976:271 and 278). This process of ecotypification can be extended to the entire legend genre, whereby the narrative is variated to fit the needs of the culture and its tradition. Because of the effect of social and psychological forces, a definition based solely on content or form cannot possibly adequately describe the genre. However, these literary considerations must play a role in such a final characterization.

The Grimms originally characterized the legend as historical. The general trend in legend research in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was to consider both the historical core of the legend as well as the worth of legends as sources for archaeological and historical studies (Cederschiöld 1932). In 1888, Franz Muth commented on the connection between legend and rumor, noting the focus of both narrative types on historical events, and folk interpretation of these events (Muth 1888). Kristoffer Nyrop continued the reasoning that legends are accurate reflections of the past, stating that legends provide insight to the ancient past, and could be used as a means for studying ancient history (Nyrop 1907–1933). Wilhelm Cederschiöld was perhaps more perceptive in his view of legend, proposing that the legend contains an historical core which is an accurate recording of an historical event (Cederschiöld 1924). The legend narrative surrounding this core may distort the historical contents of the narrative (Cederschiöld 1924). The belief that oral tradition may be used as a historical source was solidified by Jan Vansina's work on oral tradition and historical methodology (Vansina 1985). Unlike earlier works, he advocated caution in dealing with these narratives, as the historical veracity of the accounts varies greatly and is often non-existent.

It was not until the 1970s that the historicity of the legend was truly brought into question. Heda Jason, writing in the *Journal of American Folklore*, suggested that the Grimms' "historischer" definition was flawed and should be reconsidered (Jason 1971:134). Bjarne Hodne
continued this line of examination with a thorough analysis of the historical value of legends as opposed to their entertainment value (Hodne 1973). At best, legends should be used as secondary historical sources, since the reliability of their historical value is questionable. Marta Šrámková supported earlier suggestions that legend is a reflection of folk history, in that it records what the “folk” consider to be important, pointing out that legends rely on the connection between the narrative content and locality, both in space and time, for their survival in tradition (Šrámková 1975). Rudolf Schenda concurred in the folk history hypothesis, stating that in legend one can find a reflection of the socio-historical context one needs to understand the history of sixty to eighty percent of the population ignored by official history (Schenda 1982:186).

While legend may appear to be a historical narrative because of reference to readily verifiable topographic and geographic features, as well as a reliance on culturally credible characters, legend has been misinterpreted as a fundamentally “true” narrative. Simply because it is often performed as “true,” the narrative content itself is not necessarily an actual reflection of historical events. Studies such as Hodne’s have shown that the historic core of the legend is often hard to find, and then of dubious historical value when finally isolated. Legends are better characterized as historicized narrative. The process of historicization may be likened to diachronic ecotypification. The believability of the narrative is underscored by the historicization of the account.

Connected to the historicized nature of legend is the relation between legend and folk belief. At the root of this relationship is the “trueness” of the legend narrative. Legend may be characterized as a reflection of folk belief: commonly held values and beliefs in the community in which a given legend exists (Dömötör 1977). Peuckert examined the relationship between legend and belief, although he also viewed legend as a primarily historical narrative (Peuckert 1965). Röhrich presented a more balanced view of the relationship between legend and belief, centering his study on the demonic and magic (Röhrich 1949). He suggests that legend narrative both reiterates and reinforces belief. Blehr expanded on Röhrich’s hypothesis, using accounts of both legends and beliefs to illustrate their symbiotic relationship in tradition (Blehr 1974). Legend and folk belief, especially concerning the supernatural, reinforce each other, neither being uni-
laterally dependent on the other. In tradition, legend derives part of its believability from the folk beliefs it reflects, while folk beliefs are supported by legend narratives.

A subcategory of legend, the belief legend, was proposed as a means for categorizing legends which depend largely on folk belief. These legends or folk belief stories often relate encounters with the supernatural and are told with first or second hand authority (Blehr 1965:32–47). Dégh has shown how contemporary legends incorporate beliefs about the supernatural in a manner consistent with a contemporary world view, rather than discard those beliefs (Dégh 1971). It is possible that legends which are not easily recognized as incorporating folk beliefs make use of these beliefs in a more subtle way. While the term "folk belief" has been limited to beliefs concerning supernatural phenomena in past scholarship, an analysis of legend based on belief should include considerations of taboo and generalized belief (Mullen 1971). A broad view of this nature is necessary to understand how legend derives believability by tapping already established beliefs and values. By constructing a symbolic reality which encompasses these values and beliefs, the legend not only maintains its vitality in tradition, but also reinforces those very beliefs it makes use of. As the complex forces at work on society change beliefs and values, the changes are reflected in the legend narrative (Dégh 1971). Otherwise, the narrative loses its viability.

The psychological study of legend is a long neglected field (Dundes 1971). An early psychological approach to the understanding of legend was presented by Gerhard Gesemann in which he considered the question of sociological and psychological continuity in legend narrative, abandoning the formal approach of his contemporaries (Gesemann 1928). Gotthilf Isler, in his 1971 dissertation on the Alpine legend "die Sennepuppe," suggests that the legend narrative is itself not the narrated experience, but serves a deeper religious function (Isler 1971:247). The singularity of events combined with the archetypes found in the collective unconscious undoubtedly account for the episodic nature of the legend (Isler 1973). Experiences combine with archetypes of the unconscious and elements of folk belief in the genesis of legend (Isler 1971:247). Legend, according to Isler, reflects, "die aktuellen Tendenzen des kollektiven Unbewußten" (Isler 1971:251). This Jungian perspective of legend suggests that legend is a symbolic reflection of universals molded by collective experiences.
The immediate reason a person tells or remembers a legend well enough to perpetuate it is psychological (Crane 1977). Beverly Crane concentrated on the legend cycle of "The Roommate's Death," and suggested that it persists because of "its ability to organize a complex set of environmental factors, which appear to be contributing anxiety and tension to the lives of the individuals concerned" (Crane 1977:147). Gary Alan Fine, in his discussion of "urban" legends, suggests that it is the socio-psychological situation of the present-day which imbues contemporary legends with their urbanness (1980:223). Since legends are intended to be believable and believed, they act as an unconscious fictionizing (Ranke 1971:202–203). Legend addresses real psychological problems associated with the geographic and social environments, acting as a reflection of commonly felt pressures. However, it is not only fears which are addressed but also desires. Much of folk narrative is the human fantasy engaging in wishful thinking. Legend, thus, acts as a symbolic representation of collective experiences and beliefs, expressing fears and desires associated with the common environmental and social factors affecting both the active and passive tradition bearers.

Contemporary legends, referred to as "urban" or "modern" legends, have become a major focus of those interested in legend psychology. The term "modern urban legend" received broad exposure as a result of Jan Harold Brunvand's popular collections of these "urban belief tales" (Brunvand 1981, 1984, 1986 and 1989). In contrast, Klintberg, in his collection of Scandinavian variants of the legends, refers to them as "folkságner" (af Klintberg 1986). The debate over the suitability of the term, which suggests that these legends are both modern, and therefore divorced from earlier tradition, and urban, and therefore different from their rural counterparts, has been fought out in journals throughout the world. One camp views the "modern urban" legend as a distinct genre, with Daniel Barnes asserting that "[the] everpresent impulse to redefine the roles of dramatis personae—of villains, victim, hero—... finally makes the urban legend... distinctively different from most other forms of traditional narrative" (Barnes 1984:77). Fine also defends the use of the term, asserting that "urban" is not a geographic signifier but rather a referent to a socio-psychological condition (Fine 1980). Georgina Smith also views the genre as unique, citing the mode of performance as the defining feature, viewing "modern urban legend" as a narrative form
which is often told with a certain degree of narratorial detachment (Smith 1981:171; 1979:41).

On the other end of the spectrum one finds the camp which views the term “modern urban legend” as both a misnomer and an unnecessary attachment to the already bulky baggage of folklore genre terminology. This group prefers the appellation “contemporary legend,” thereby situating the narratives according to their present state in tradition. Any legend viable in tradition may be viewed as a contemporary legend. The Sheffield conferences mentioned above are published under the rubric Perspectives on Contemporary Legend, revealing the general orientation of these scholars in this terminological debate (Nicolaisen 1985:214). Noel Williams has tried to characterize the contemporary legend, noting that “what we may regard as a distinct genre is actually not distinct from traditional legend, except by virtue of our own attitudes as participants in the culture of its transmission” (Williams 1984:228). Nicolaisen straddles the viewpoints of the two camps well, suggesting that “modern urban legend” be considered a “blurred” genre, containing elements not only of legend but also of the personal experience story, a view also held by Bennet (Nicolaisen 1985:216; Bennet 1985:222). Nevertheless, Jacqueline Simpson’s proposal that contemporary legend is a “clever transformation of . . . old rural supernatural motif[s] into modern, urban rationalized form[s],” deserves consideration (Simpson 1981:203). In a well known study, Shirley Marchalonis provided three medieval analogues to a common contemporary legend, “Spiders in the hair,” proving that a high level of continuity exists in legend tradition even over great lengths of time (Marchalonis 1976). Bennet, in a similar study, showed a high level of continuity between contemporary “Reptile in the stomach” legends and earlier variants (Bennet 1985). These two studies confirm the process of historicization or diachronic ecotypification mentioned above.

Ulrika Wolf-Knuts provides the most convincing rebuttal of the term “modern urban legend,” proposing that these legends be considered instead as migratory legends (Wolf-Knuts 1987). She compares Brunvand’s definition of “modern urban legend” to Klintberg’s definition of legend and notes the similarities: “both form part of a collective tradition, they are both related in a serious manner in order to provide more or less authentic information, and they are spread orally or by mass communication” (Wolf-Knuts 1987:173). In suggesting the use of the term migratory legend, she points out that “modern
urban legend and migratory legend spread vertically from generation to generation for hundreds of years and horizontally from country to country over very wide geographical areas" (Wolf-Knuts 1987:178). Rather than viewing "modern urban legend" as an isolated expression of a particular age, these scholars choose to view the contemporary legend as part of the continuing legend tradition. By effectively eliminating the proposed distinctions that separate "modern urban legend" from legend in general, a broad, encompassing characterization of the genre is closer at hand. Such a characterization, in turn, should help in understanding the function of legend in the larger societal context. Understanding the function of narrative tradition as part of the macro-context has been labeled by Fine as the goal of the "third force in American Folklore" (Fine 1988:352–353).

The study of context and social function of legend performance is another critical but often neglected aspect of the legend genre (Abrahams 1975). Arnold van Gennep recognized the importance of context in defining legend: "De nos jours on se demande: où, quand et à qui se raconte une histoire déterminée?" (van Gennep 1912:306). He also examined the social function and internal psychological aspects of the narratives, as a means for understanding context for legend genesis (van Gennep 1912:305–306). Friedrich Ranke's early definition of legend was not based solely on form and content, but also included a consideration of performance: "Volkssagen sind volkäufige Erzählungen objektiv unwahren, phantasiegeborenen Inhalts, der als tatsächliches Geschehen in der Form des einfachen Ereignisberichtes erzählt wird" (Ranke 1925[1969]:4). Dégh voiced the complaint that most legend definitions were too literarily based, and noticed that most legends had been collected improperly, lacking critical contextual information (Dégh 1965:78). Legends have been printed as continuous, cohesive narratives. In context, legend is not a neat, compartmentalized narrative performed for a captive audience. Rather, during performance, legend exhibits no predetermined beginning or end, but progresses in fits and starts, interrupted by others' observations or linked to jokes, and often serving rhetorical purposes (Dégh 1965 and 1976). In a study where Dégh examined legend performance in a Hungarian emigrant community, her transcriptions reveal an interesting view of how various conversational narrative forms comingle during transmission, particularly the relation between joke and legend (Dégh 1976:109). Gary Butler's study of Terrenuevienne legends supports the assertion that legend is a conversa-
tional genre (1980). During legend performance, the boundary of narrator and audience blurs, transmission taking place interactively. The conversational nature of legend, in turn, adds to the believability of the narrative and its function as a mechanism for reaffirming beliefs since the narrative is not set off by any distancing formula.

The proposal of an international legend catalogue, similar in scope to the Aarne-Thompson index, forced the crisis in legend research of the 1960s (Hand 1965:441–443). One of the most difficult aspects of classifying legend was the abundance of specific allusions relevant or understandable to only relatively small groups of people (Tillhagen 1969). Also, it was discovered that, due to the mono-episodic nature of legend, it spanned a nearly infinite number of motifs, precluding classification according only to content. Systems such as Julian Krzyżanowski’s, which suggested a division of legend into three main classes, namely religious, historical/local and belief, failed due to the lack of any clear distinction between these categories (Krzyżanowski 1967; Hand 1965:444). C. Scott Littleton’s multi-dimensional, synchronic and diachronic categorization of folk narrative did little to help clarify legend’s characteristics, since legend spanned all of his categories (Littleton 1965). Jason also suggested a multi-dimensional approach to oral literature as a whole, plotting what she calls “determinants” onto the “oral literature space,” with little success (Jason 1969). However, the point that legend must be classified on multiple criteria is one well taken. Vibeke Dahll, in her critical analysis of Nordic legend catalogue systems, concurred with this assertion (Dahll 1973:182). A thorough analysis of properly collected legends and a synthesis of earlier theoretical approaches to legend could lead to a more fundamental understanding of legend characteristics on which one could base a classificatory system (Sirovátka 1964). Sirovátka proposes the use of computers to help plot the characteristics of a given legend; one could thereby classify multi-dimensionally (Sirovátka 1964). The need for a classification system is certainly an important issue. Tillhagen, however, made the most important observation on legend classification when he stated that a legend catalogue is a tool for the study of legend and should not be considered an end in itself (Tillhagen 1969:318). Scholars’ efforts may best be spent exploring questions of performance, motivation, function and structure rather than attempting to pigeonhole the vast numbers of collected variants. Through continued studies, the most suitable classificatory system will undoubtedly present itself. The early attempts at legend classification have brought
to light the often localized and highly ecotypified nature of legend. Each tradition into which a legend moves exerts a cultural influence on the narrative. Because legend is a reflection of culturally based values and beliefs, the ecotypification process becomes exaggerated, problematizing the classification process.

Robert Georges, in his opening address to the American Folk Legend Symposium, suggests that a new definition based on the "nature and structure of the sets of relationships that underlie" legend be developed (1971:18). Such a definition would have to include considerations of all characteristics of the genre, fusing the approaches of earlier scholarship. Although a great deal has been discovered about the underlying relationships—textual, psychological and sociological—which affect the form and function of legends, these discoveries have not been synthesized into a concise and concrete characterization of the genre. The above survey of legend scholarship bespeaks the need for such a synthetic characterization. Distilling the main points of the major theoretical advances considered above provides one with the beginnings of such a characterization. Legend, typically, is a short (mono-) episodic, traditional, highly ecotypified, historicized narrative performed in a conversational mode, reflecting on a psychological level a symbolic representation of folk belief and collective experiences and serving as a reaffirmation of commonly held values of the group to whose tradition it belongs. The promising work on contemporary legend has revived a field that only twenty years ago had been considered to have reached an impasse—a scholarly crisis of paramount proportions. With this survey I have hoped to provide an overview of the main trends which have led to current debates in legend study, as well as suggest areas for continued study. Collection efforts, classification systems and analyses of legends and legend cycles which consider the legend from multiple perspectives will undoubtedly help our understanding of the function of this complex folk narrative genre in the greater context of society. The renewed vigor in legend scholarship bespeaks the emergence of yet another "new era" in legend research.

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