

## BOOK REVIEWS

### GENERAL

ASHLIMAN, D. L. *A Guide to Folktales in the English Language: Based on the Aarne-Thompson Classification System*. Bibliographies and Indexes in World Literature, Number 11. New York: Greenwood Press, 1987. xvi+368 pages. Introduction, bibliography of secondary literature and of folktales collections, index. ISBN 0-313-25961-5. (Distributed in Japan by Publishers International Corporation, Tokyo)

Professor Ashliman's elegantly-designed *Guide* can best be described as an enhancement of the Aarne-Thompson type listing that has proved so valuable over the years in studying European folktales (AARNE and THOMPSON 1961). Here I propose not to compare the new work with its predecessor, but to view it from the Asianist's perspective.

The *Guide's* primary purpose is twofold, to supply up-to-date bibliographic references to reliable folktale sources and a classificatory framework, or type listing, by which to coordinate and compare tales. It retains the Aarne-Thompson numbering system for the type listing, though streamlining it somewhat, e.g., inconsistencies are removed, some minor subtypes combined, and a few new numbers judiciously inserted. But the summaries of tale types are completely rewritten in the *Guide* to better elucidate the tales' contents (and parenthetical notes appear where they might help the reader). I find the source citations included in the listing to be generally well selected, but uneven in places. The Changeling (Type 504), for instance, gets a full page of citations while the Swan Maiden (Type 400) is relegated seven citations. Happily, the citations are printed large enough to do away with squinting. An index in back includes entries by title, subject, and characters; though one would wish it more complete, it does do a fair job of ushering the reader to the right place. Also in back, a ten-page bibliography of folktale collections gives the sources on which the book is based, and a bibliography of 134 secondary sources is supplied; though brief, the latter is pithy. Finally, an appendix lists the Grimms' tales by number and cross-indexes them with the Aarne-Thompson-Ashliman type numbers.

The *Guide* is reliable. I found no errors of substance in it, and only a rare spurious or omitted word to betray that it was put together on a computer data base. The one mentionable problem I encountered is that the bibliography of folktale collections lacks a reference to Seki Keigo's *Folktales of Japan*, which is cited here and there in the type listing.

Of what relevance is the *Guide* for the Asianist? Attempting to find out, I used it experimentally in my own study. One of the first things I discovered was its usefulness while doing comparative work. Monographs dealing with European folktales necessarily make references to the Aarne-Thompson numbers and titles. I seldom know a tale by the Aarne-Thompson number or title. With Professor Ashliman at my elbow, however, I was never at a loss; I had only to look up a tale by its number

and Ashliman's concise but lucid tale summary would nudge me back on track. On the other hand, Ashliman seems of minimal use in chasing out non-European folktales. The Japanologist will not find the Japanese Issun Bōshi 一寸法師 tale cited under Type 327B, nor the Ha-goromo 羽衣 (Swan-maiden) tale under Type 400, nor the Urashima Tarō 浦島太郎 tale under Types 470 and 1889H, nor the Hana-saka Jiji 花咲爺 tale under Type 511. A number of Japanese tales are cited—the Oba-sute Yama 姥捨山 tale under Type 981, the Girl Without Arms tale under Type 706, and the Golden Chain from Heaven tale under Type 333—but at best we are left with haphazard coverage of the Japanese materials. A cursory examination of the citations and the bibliography of folktale collections suggests that specialists in other non-European cultures would find a similar coverage of their areas.

Had Professor Ashliman intended the *Guide* to handle non-European tales efficiently, he probably would have substituted the Aarne-Thompson classification system with that used in Stith Thompson's *Motif-Index of Folk-literature*, which is more suitable as a global framework (Thompson 1975, 10). However, in the introduction he pointedly says, "In selecting entries for the following *Guide to Folktales*, I have, in the main, followed Aarne's and Thompson's geographic limits. Thus, I include non-European stories only if they have European counterparts." The Japanese omissions mentioned above indicate that Ashliman has not entirely succeeded in the endeavor to represent non-European counterparts, but after all, where is one to draw the line? That references to such tales do appear in the work should be counted a bonus. One must keep in mind, too, that Ashliman intends reference only to English-language sources the reader can consult; good comprehensive Asian collections in the English language are anything but plentiful. On balance, as I have stated, the included citations appear well selected.

One final matter ought to arouse the Asianist's keenest interest: Ashliman's work has clearly demonstrated the practicability of compiling folklore reference materials on data bases. Moreover, in the brief time elapsed since he took up the work, hardware and software have become even more powerful and easier to use, and by now are priced within reach of almost every institution. Thus we can dream of a day when a periodically-updated assortment of multi-volume, multi-lingual reference works in pan-Asian folklore is distributed on disks, when heaps of Asian data can be searched, sorted, statistically analyzed, and otherwise processed by computer. If this dream is too grand, then certainly we can hope to see the indexes to our current Asian collections eventually updated, emended, extended, and supplemented by computer—following Ashliman's precedent vis-à-vis Aarne-Thompson.

#### REFERENCES CITED:

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