

## CORRESPONDENCE

Re: REJOINER TO JAN-ÖJVIND SWAHN'S REVIEW OF *PROVERBS, SONGS, EPIC NARRATIVES, FOLKTALES OF EAST ASIA: SELECTED TEXTS, PARALLEL ANALYSIS AND COMPARATIVE APPROACH*.

Jan-Öjvind Swahn reviewed my book *Proverbs, Songs, Epic Narratives, Folktales from East Asia: Selected Texts, Parallel Analysis and Comparative Approach* in *Asian Folklore Studies* (Volume 58 [1999], 238–40). While I am grateful for the reviewer's concluding remarks indicating that "scholars have begun to write studies of folktales in East Asia... and to compare them with tales from other areas" and that "an immense field of research opens up," I cannot help voicing an outcry, if only for the benefit of readers of my book, because Swahn's review is flawed by a careless and misleading achronic approach that presents misconceived ideas.

To begin with, my book deals with proverbs, songs, epic narratives, and folktales of East Asia—the shortest chapter being on folktales. Swahn's concluding remarks sound as if my entire book is about folktales. (For the other three chapters, Swahn matter-of-factly summarized what I wrote.) The reason for Swahn's doing so is not hard to construe: publication records indicate that prior to the review of my work, Swahn has never published one single item on East Asian<sup>1</sup> proverbs, songs, epic narratives, or folktales. There is no better example to demonstrate Swahn's misconception than his concluding remark on chapter three in my book: "Yen more closely analyzes a series of motifs and ethnopoetic composition in the epics in question" (439). Swahn's statement is misleading. My purpose in writing a section on ethnopoetic composition in Korean songs is to show, retrospectively with chapter two in mind, how Chinese ethnopoetics in songs influenced Korean songs in one epic narrative. I used the image of the moon or the stars to delineate the technique of ethnopoetics at work in Korean songs. Space allows me to quote one item:

The *moon* shines bright on the fifteenth night,  
 But is hidden in the clouds.  
 My beloved now in Seoul is hidden in Samch'ong-dong.  
 Moon, bright moon, do you see him?  
 Why can I not see where he has gone?

(YEN 1997, 170)

I mentioned that "the image of the moon... is followed by a complaint marked by the interrogative word *why*" (YEN 1997, 170). This and other pieces are good examples of Chinese influence on Korean songs. Swahn's statement sounded as though I used "a series of... ethnopoetic composition in the epics," whereas I actually used one page and 13 lines to describe the Korean songs in one epic using ethnopoetic composition. Swahn's statement indicates that he does not know what he was writing about.

To show what led to Swahn's misconceived ideas, I would like to review the assumptions stated at the outset of my work: "The *comparative approach*... for the chapters on epic narratives/folktales is that of Milman Parry and Albert Bates Lord, known as the 'Parry-Lord Oral Theory'; ... The findings and methods that Milman Parry and Albert Lord pioneered along with East Asian parallels are highlighted from a comparative perspective" (YEN 1997 xvii and xxv). It has never been my intention to highlight the Aarne-Thompson system of classification nor is there any chapter title or subtitle to deal with the AT approach. Then, suddenly, without warning, Swahn brings in types "AT 613/AT432," complaining that "the

first tale [C. Russia (A.1) in YEN 1997, 177–78] belongs to tale type AT 613..., whereas the second one [tale G. India in YEN 1997, 191–92] is a somewhat fragmentary version of tale type AT 432.” Why does Swahn make such a harsh intrusion upon my work, which is a departure from the AT tale types? There are publications about tale types of various nations, and such studies are endless. Works of this sort, however, have offered no insight as far as the latent meaning(s) of folktales go. That is because the idea of the AT system is to classify the tales—“the catalogues of Aarne and Thompson” (439). AT tale types? Catalogues? Does not Swahn go astray by imposing the AT tale types on my work, which has no affinity to the catalogues of Aarne and Thompson? Wearing Aarne-Thompson glasses, what Swahn could see was “these two types [AT 613/AT432] have not one single motif in common” (439). Of course, Swahn could never find a “motif” in the way he understands it in my study. Hence, his conclusion “[AT 613/AT432] have not one single motif in common.” What Swahn did not realize is that when legends or accounts like *Nishan Shamaness* transform themselves into folktales or myths, they assume a different narrative mode. This is certainly not the answer Swahn was looking for. He wanted “something or somebody shaman-like [to] appear” (440) and they have to be in the contexts of AT 613/AT 432. The inadequacy of the AT system shows that tale C. Russia (A.1) and tale G. India are seemingly ambiguous in light of AT 613 and AT 432. To persons like Swahn, research stops here: tales conflicting within AT 613 and AT 432 should go no further. For Swahn concluded “if you reduce folktales to summaries that go into two or three lines in a book, the thesis about the few patterns is acceptable, but it means that you rough-hew the contents of the individual texts or tale-types (in the classical... types in the catalogues of Aarne and Thompson) to totally meaningless sequences” (439). To students with intellectual curiosity, the search goes on despite the inadequacy of the AT tale types system. Swahn claimed that “these two types have not one single motif in common”—that is, in the sense of “motif” as Swahn understands it. But the fact of the matter is that tale C. Russia (A.1) and tale G. India do have down-to-earth commonality in terms of story-patterns that Swahn did not want to present:

C. Russia (A. 1):

O Righteous peasant: 1 Travel: 2 Mutilation of Eyes: 3 Tree Climbing—Hero climbs oak tree: 4 Secret Knowledge revealed by devils: 5 Restoration of Lost Eyes: 6 Return—Hero searches for the merchant (and works for him for three years to obtain the image of the Mother of God): 7 Other Cures—Hero cures princess’ illness.

(YEN 1997, 186)

G. India:

O Princess tries to find her prince Sabr: 1 Travel—Heroine sets out in the jungle: Element 2 lacking (Heroine knows Sabr is ill): 3 Tree Climbing—is not mentioned, but Heroine sleeps under a tree: 4 Secret Knowledge—revealed by parrot and *mainá*: 5 Restoration of Lost Eyes—lacking. (Heroine brings back with her a “prescription” for cure.): 6 Return—Heroine comes to Prince Sabr’s country: 7 Other Cures—Heroine heals Prince Sabr.

(YEN 1997, 201)

The commonality Swahn did not note indicates his careless presentation of facts on the one hand, and the presentation of misconceived ideas on the other. In my research, I tracked down more than seventeen tales and reduced them to story patterns (not counting those in chapter three). Are these a “few patterns” or are they a considerable number of patterns? These patterns are closely identical. Are they “totally meaningless sequences” or do they signify something Swahn shunned?

Barely discerning the essentials of my research, Swahn writes: "Folktale study of this kind reminds me of the 'mythosophic' analyses of 150 years ago" (440). Similarly, unappreciative of another author's "artistic interpretation of the folktale," SWAHN wrote in 1983: "To me it is as though fossils from the 'mythosophical' era of the nineteenth century arose to maintain that these simple, uncomplicated stories have secrets deeper than their function of amusing and entertaining people" (1983, 176). Does this kind of whimsical "clever talk" really help his readers to reach a better understanding toward the subject matter under review? Even SWAHN admits to having elliptical thoughts: "perhaps it is I who represent what is fossilized.... It is not easy to teach an old dog new tricks" (1983, 176).

Lastly, let Swahn ask himself this: What do the patterns in chapter three of Yen's book represent? There might be room for us to learn, if he chooses to answer wisely, correctly.

My work also deals with East Asian proverbs, ethnopoetics in song-making, and, to a certain extent, formulaic composition in epics (see chapters one through three). These are significant aspects of folklore studies. Swahn passes over these in silence, merely summarizing what I wrote. In all good conscience, I feel his review does not do justice to my work nor to folklore studies.

When the gender of someone is uncertain, there are protocols to address this matter in scholarship as in business correspondence nowadays. The fact that Swahn misconceived me as "she" (thrice) or "her" (twice) speaks of Swahn's sexual discrimination against me as an author.

Swahn draws his fame from *The Lore of Spices* (1991), *Maypoles, Crayfish and Lucia: Swedish Holidays and Traditions* (1999), and *Mat-historisk uppslags-bok; mat och dryck frdn antikens kok till Absolut vodka* (1999), whose subject matter deals with Swedish cookery—these are some of Swahn's latest works, the last one not deviating from the subject matter, Swedish cookery, as found in Swahn's *Man tager vad man haver*, published in 1970. Swahn's vocabulary found its way into the review with such words as "apple pips," "pear pips," "peel and pulp" (439). Alas, latent meanings of folktales in light of the Parry-Lord theory cannot be found in the lore of spices or Swedish cookery.

#### NOTE

1. That is, Han Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Mongolian, and Tibetan.

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## RESPONSE TO YEN'S REJOINDER

I willingly admit that my review of Ping-chiu Yen's book focuses on its folktale section. The reason is that my field of research is folktales, even if Yen tries to represent me as a kind of cookery book writer. (Studying the history of eating habits is a hobby of mine in retirement, though.) If Yen maintains that I have "never published one single item on East Asian ... folktales," I wish to refer him only to my contribution to the anthology *Cooperation East and West Continued* (Lund 1994), although I could mention others. However, for my criticisms to be valid, it is not necessary to have specialized knowledge in a particular geographical area because they were directed at Yen's methodology and not at his knowledge of East Asian folktales. Had Yen written about Irish or Indian folktales for that matter, my criticisms of his work would have been the same.

Contrary to Yen's assumption, I am not totally unfamiliar with Asian folklore, at least that of Southeast Asia. Since I joined the Lund University Kammu Project in 1974 (the Kammu are an ethnic minority living in Thailand, Laos, and southern China) I have been co-author or co-editor of six (soon to be seven) volumes in the series *Folk Tales from Kammu*, and have published articles on Kammu (and other Southeast Asian) myths and tales (one of which was republished in 1988 in Alan Dundes's textbook *The Flood Myth*). Concerning questions of methodology, I have been invited to lecture and/or conduct seminars about the collecting and researching of folktales at Chulalongkorn and Mahidol Universities in Bangkok, at Sisavangvong University in Vientiane, and at the Central University for Nationalities in Beijing. Furthermore, I have reported on my experiences with the Lund Project at a number of symposia in Germany and the United States. Following my thesis on "The Tale of Cupid and Psyche" (AT 425 and 428), I have repeatedly published books and articles on folktale research in general. Just now I am preparing a type and motif index of Southeast Asian folktales available in Western languages, and I am surprised to find that appropriate AT numbers can be assigned to many Southeast Asian tales, much in the way it has been done for Indian and Chinese tales. Therefore, I think I am sufficiently competent to criticize Yen's methodology, especially when he compares not the full text but ridiculously short summaries of tales that belong to tale types that have nothing in common with one another—see the example Yen repeats in the Rejoinder. That is indeed "to compare apple pips with pear pips without taking into consideration that they have been surrounded by peel and pulp."

To conclude, I stand by my review and the criticisms I made there. As far as I am concerned, I consider the argument closed.

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