

ENDNOTE 6

Working-Definitions Of Some *Folklore* Terms

Folkloristics is the study of **folklore** in the generic sense, by **folklorists** (as **linguistics** is the study of **language** in the generic sense, by **linguists**). In studying Folklore, Folklorists usually **write-down** (transcribe) the **Oral** Traditions they study. However, the **writing-down** of **Oral** Traditions starts the O.T.s off on an entirely different track, and this point must be kept in mind constantly.

Folklore is the traditional **oral** stories & sayings preserved **orally** in any / all societies. Folklore is a generic term which includes several specific categories of Oral Traditions, some of which are defined below.

Myths are **sacred** oral narratives explaining the actions of deities and the nature of rituals. Often, **another** people's *religion* is contemptuously called *myths* – i.e., *myths* are what **other** peoples have, while **we** ourselves have (written) *scripture* and (written) *history*.

Legends are **secular** oral narratives explaining folk-beliefs, usually set in regional place & traditional time contexts. Legends are told as *true*, and by unquestioned repetition get accepted as factual, often to become a group's **folk-history** (both oral and written).

Folktales are CREATIVE oral narratives recognized as fiction. Folktales often are short stories primarily for entertainment, but frequently teach important values too. FAKELORE (usually only WRITTEN) has intentionally intruded into the FOLKTALE category, yet there always are LEGITIMATE new ORAL folktales being added to any society's repertory through ongoing incremental cultural processes. FOLKTALES often are altered, either naively or maliciously, to appear to be LEGENDS; then repetition eventually "launders" them enough to seem "true" enough to become FOLK-HISTORY (both oral and written).

Epics are **long** oral narratives, sometimes in poetry or rhythmic prose, recounting the glorious events in the life of a **factual**, or **legendary**, or **fictional** person. Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's (1855) *The Song Of Hiawatha* is a **written** Epic Poem about a fictional Native American *Noble-Savage* (see ENDNOTE 8).

Lore is, in the most general sense, the accumulated oral & written traditions of the customs & beliefs about **any** subject. A specific example is **Camp-Lore**, meaning the oral & written traditions passed from seniors to juniors at **summer-camps** for young people (which long have been numerous in the Lakes Region of Maine). **Camp-Lore** very often has been based on fictitious Native American variations on the *Noble- Savage* theme (see ENDNOTE 8).

Euhemerism is named after a Greek mythographer, **Euhemerus** (fl.c.300BC), who theorized that the Greek **gods** originated from the elaboration of earlier traditions about distinguished historical **humans**. Simply stated, **euhemerism** is the story telling process of developing a sand-grain of fact into a pearl of fancy / fantasy. Euhemerism easily can taint earlier Oral Traditions to the point of spoiling their original integrity, and produce misleading oral & written *neotraditions* too.