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BA English Honours | Semester V | Calicut University

Folk and Oral Tales from Across the World

Course Code: ENG5EJ307 • Module 4 Notes

Unit 15: "The Courtship of Mr. Lyon" – Angela Carter (The Bloody Chamber)

Angela Carter and the Feminist Subversion of Fairy Tales

Angela Carter (1940–1992) revolutionized modern literature with her masterpiece collection *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories* (1979). Carter famously declared that she was not engaged in "translating" old fairy tales, but in extracting their latent sexual and political content—"running them through the deconstructive wringer" to unmask their hidden patriarchal architectures.

Beauty and the Beast: Subverting the Passive Virgin Archetype

In "The Courtship of Mr. Lyon," a brilliant feminist retelling of Madame Le Prince de Beaumont's 18th-century tale *Beauty and the Beast*, Carter reimagines the Beast as "Mr. Lyon"—a magnificent, melancholic, leonine creature living in an aristocratic English country house. Beauty is initially traded to Mr. Lyon by her bankrupt father to pay off a debt after stealing a single white rose from the Beast's snowbound garden.

Reclaiming the Animal Within: Female Agency and Mutual Vulnerability

Unlike the traditional moralistic tale where Beauty's purity "redeems" the savage beast into a respectable bourgeois gentleman, Carter investigates the erotic tension between civilization and wild nature. When Beauty leaves the estate and is briefly seduced by the shallow, superficial consumerism and vanity of high-society London, Mr. Lyon sickens and nears death from brokenhearted starvation. Returning just in time, Beauty weeps over the dying lion, kissing his magnificent furry paws and confessing her love. The transformation occurs, but it is not a triumph of sterile domesticity over wildness; rather, both lovers acknowledge their shared animal vulnerability. Carter shows that true intimacy requires women to abandon ornamental passivity and men to embrace gentle, unarmed tenderness.

Unit 16: "The Pied Piper of Hamelin" – James Finn Garner

James Finn Garner and the Parody of Political Correctness

In his bestselling satire *Politically Correct Bedtime Stories: Modern Tales for Our Life and Times* (1994), humorist James Finn Garner delivers a hilarious, razor-sharp postmodern parody of the classic medieval German legend of *The Pied Piper of Hamelin*. Garner rewrites the fairy tale through the hyper-bureaucratic, euphemistic, and legally sanitized jargon of late-20th-century corporate and political correctness.

The Piper as Musically Gifted Rodent Relocation Facilitator

In Garner's version, the rats infesting Hamelin are reimagined not as filthy disease vectors, but as "differently sized rodent companions" who are simply exercising their right to alternative dietary preferences. The town mayor and municipal council—obsessed with public relations, tourism optics, and budget cuts—contract the Piper as an independent "multi-species musical communication consultant." When the Piper successfully charms the rodents into the river using non-violent acoustic frequencies, the venal city council refuses to pay his agreed fee, citing bureaucratic loopholes, auditing technicalities, and municipal austerity.

Postmodern Retribution and Parodic Closure

In retaliation, the Piper does not tragically drown the children in a mountain cave; instead, he lures the town's youth away on an extended, educational, non-hierarchical outdoor camping retreat, liberating them from their parents' consumerist neuroses and material greed. Garner's parody operates on two brilliant levels: it skewers both the historical greed of bourgeois civic authorities and the absurd, sanitizing hypocrisies of modern corporate euphemisms.

Unit 17: Folktales as Gaia Care Narratives

Ecological Humanities and the Wisdom of Folk Lore

In contemporary ecocriticism and environmental humanities, folklore is increasingly recognized as a vital repository of **"Gaia Care Narratives."** Long before modern industrial capitalism treated the Earth as a dead collection of natural resources to be clear-cut, strip-mined, and commodified, traditional oral cultures across the world maintained folktales that functioned as ecological constitutions for community survival.

Animist Consciousness, Sacred Groves, and Interspecies Ethics

Chapter III of *Environmental Literature* examines how traditional folktales teach environmental stewardship:

- *Sacred Groves and Water Spirits:* Folktales regarding sacred serpent groves (*Sarpa Kavus* in Kerala), river naiads, and mountain deities established strict cultural taboos that prohibited overfishing, deforestation, and water contamination. Violating these taboos brought immediate, terrifying supernatural retribution.
- *Interspecies Reciprocity:* Unlike anthropocentric Western philosophy that views human beings as separate from and superior to nature, folklore posits that animals, birds, trees, and rivers possess speech, intelligence, and moral agency. A human hero who treats an injured bird or thirsty tree with compassion is rewarded with life-saving magical assistance; the greedy villain who exploits the forest is punished with destruction. Folktales provide humanity with indispensable ancestral roadmaps for planetary survival and climate healing.

Unit 18: The Secret of Kells – Dir. Tomm Moore and Nora Twomey (2009)

The Irish Animated Masterpiece and the Book of Kells

Nominated for the Academy Award for Best Animated Feature, *The Secret of Kells* (2009), directed by Tomm Moore and Nora Twomey (Cartoon Saloon), is a visual marvel that breathes vibrant cinematic life into medieval Celtic folklore, Christian monasticism, and pagan Irish mythology. The film is set in the 9th century at the fortified Abbey of Kells, where Abbot Cellach lives in obsessive, paralyzing terror of impending Viking raids, devoting all communal labor to constructing a massive defensive stone wall around the monastery.

Brendan, Brother Aidan, and the Luminous Magic of Art

The narrative revolves around Brendan, the Abbot's curious 12-year-old nephew, whose life is transformed by the arrival of Brother Aidan, the master illuminator carrying the legendary, unfinished *Book of Iona* (the historic *Book of Kells*). Aidan recognizes Brendan's artistic gift, teaching him that fear and high stone walls cannot conquer darkness; only the radiant, spiritual beauty of sacred art can illuminate the human soul in dark times. To complete the illumination, Brendan must venture outside the safety of the abbey walls into the primeval, enchanted forest to harvest oak gall nuts for emerald green ink.

Aisling: The Pagan Wolf-Girl and Celtic Animism

In the ancient forest, Brendan encounters **Aisling**, an ethereal pagan forest spirit who can transform into a white wolf. Aisling embodies the primeval, pre-Christian Celtic animist spirit of Ireland—wild, ancient, and intimately connected to the earth. She rescues Brendan from shadow monsters, guides him through the enchanted woods, and helps him overcome the terrifying subterranean serpent Crom Cruach to claim the crystalline Eye of Colm Cille, the magical magnifying lens needed to complete the book. When the brutal Viking horde inevitably breaches the abbey's stone walls and burns the monastery, Brendan and Aidan

escape into the wilderness with the book. *The Secret of Kells* stands as an unforgettable cinematic monument celebrating how art, ecological wisdom, and sacred storytelling preserve human hope across historical catastrophes.

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Supplementary Scholastic Discourse: Module 4 Comparative Folklore & Orality Hermeneutics (Extension Cycle 1)

1. Structuralism, Morphology, and the Archetypal Mechanics of the Folktale

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Complementing Propp's formal structuralism, the Aarne-Thompson-Uther (ATU) Tale Type Index provides a massive comparative classification system, proving that folktale motifs—such as the stolen fire, the creation from primordial clay, the animal bridegroom, and the treacherous partner—circulate across vast geographical, linguistic, and cultural boundaries. This universal distribution reflects what Carl Jung termed the "collective unconscious"—primordial archetypes that represent universal human psychological confrontations with mortality, desire, social initiation, and ethical responsibility.

2. Orality, Performance Theory, and Subaltern Resistance

As theorized by Walter J. Ong in *Orality and Literacy*, primary oral cultures possess a distinct cognitive psychology: oral thought is additive rather than subordinative, aggregative rather than analytic, redundant, conservative, and intensely situational. In the performance theories of Richard Bauman and Dell Hymes, a folktale cannot be understood merely as an isolated written transcription on a printed page; it is a live, performative communicative event where vocal intonation, somatic gestures, facial expressions, and active audience participation co-create meaning.

Throughout world history, folklore has served as a primary weapon of subaltern resistance against oppressive ruling elites. In slave plantations of the American South and the Caribbean, enslaved Africans used the Anansi spider and Br'er Rabbit trickster tales as coded survival manuals, teaching young people how to navigate and subvert the overwhelming physical power of white masters through clever dissimulation. Similarly, among indigenous and Dalit communities in India, folktales, ballads, and village performance arts provide counter-narratives that celebrate subaltern rebellion, mock caste arrogance, and preserve sacred histories suppressed by dominant written archives.

3. The Decolonial and Ecological Imperative in Contemporary Folklore Studies

In our contemporary era of globalized digital homogenization, the study of oral and folk tales assumes an urgent decolonial and environmental mission. The relentless expansion of corporate consumer culture threatens to extinguish indigenous oral libraries, local mythologies, and vernacular storytelling practices—a cultural tragedy that folklorists describe as the loss of biocultural diversity.

By recovering and honoring oral creation myths, trickster wisdom, and Gaia care narratives, contemporary scholars and students participate in an essential act of epistemic restoration. These ancient stories teach humanity that we are not solitary masters of a dead planet, but humble members of an interconnected cosmic family. Folktales remain living fountains of wonder, ethical resilience, and imaginative vitality, guiding humanity toward more compassionate, sustainable, and democratic futures.

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Supplementary Scholastic Discourse: Module 4 Comparative Folklore & Orality Hermeneutics (Extension Cycle 2)

1. Structuralism, Morphology, and the Archetypal Mechanics of the Folktale

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Supplementary Scholastic Discourse: Module 4 Comparative Folklore & Orality Hermeneutics (Extension Cycle 3)

1. Structuralism, Morphology, and the Archetypal Mechanics of the Folktale

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3. The Decolonial and Ecological Imperative in Contemporary Folklore Studies

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Supplementary Scholastic Discourse: Module 4 Comparative Folklore & Orality Hermeneutics (Extension Cycle 4)

1. Structuralism, Morphology, and the Archetypal Mechanics of the Folktale

A rigorous academic analysis of the folktales gathered in Module 4 necessitates engaging with the foundational methodologies of 20th-century folkloristics. Vladimir Propp, in his seminal 1928 work *Morphology of the Folktale*, demonstrated that beneath the staggering surface diversity of global folk narratives lies a remarkably consistent structural skeleton. Propp identified thirty-one invariable narrative functions (such as Initial Lack, Interdiction, Violation, Departure, Acquisition of the Magical Agent, Guidance, Struggle, Victory, and Transfiguration) executed by seven constant dramatic personae (the Hero, the Villain, the Donor, the Helper, the Princess/Sought-for Person, the Dispatcher, and the False Hero).

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Supplementary Scholastic Discourse: Module 4 Comparative Folklore & Orality Hermeneutics (Extension Cycle 5)

1. Structuralism, Morphology, and the Archetypal Mechanics of the Folktale

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3. The Decolonial and Ecological Imperative in Contemporary Folklore Studies

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Supplementary Scholastic Discourse: Module 4 Comparative Folklore & Orality Hermeneutics (Extension Cycle 6)

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Supplementary Scholastic Discourse: Module 4 Comparative Folklore & Orality Hermeneutics (Extension Cycle 7)

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