

## „Fakelore“

Von Richard M. Dorson

All folklorists know that "folklore" was coined in 1846 by William John Thoms but relatively few know that the present writer has the dubious distinction of coining the word "fakelore" in 1950. Since *Time* magazine and the *Saturday Review* have used "fakelore" in their pages, the term has by now attained national currency. The reasons that led to my contriving this neologism derive directly from the state of American folklore studies in the 1940's, and in a larger sense the state of American mass culture, as I perceived them. The following account is therefore highly subjective and personal.

Folklore as an academic subject was barely lifting its head in the 1940's. At Harvard, where I completed my Ph. D. in 1943, in a new field called History of American Civilization, folklore was almost wholly unrepresented. George Lyman Kittredge, whose eminence as a Shakespearean scholar lent prestige to his studies of balladry, witchcraft, and popular belief, had retired and left no successor. My own interest in and awareness of the subject matter of folklore developed accidentally through an undergraduate paper on Mark Twain's debt to the oral tall-tale tradition of the frontier. This interest led to my publishing, in 1939, two years after my graduation, an edition of almanac tall tales from the 1830's, 40's, and 50's, under the title *Davy Crockett, American Comic Legend*. As I had just entered graduate school, I felt keenly the need for some direction in folklore, and learned by chance of the presence on the faculty of one folklore-minded professor, Kenneth H. Jackson, in the Celtic department; he agreed to give me a reading course, and initiated me into the mysteries of the Motif-Index. (Professor Jackson shortly after left Harvard to take the chair he presently occupies at the University of Edinburgh.) My dissertation on "New England Popular Tales and Legends", completed in 1943 and published in 1946 under the title *Jonathan Draws the Long Bow*, while it was based entirely on printed sources, did carry me deep into folklore research. Then in 1946, when I had begun teaching at Michigan State University, I undertook my first expedition into the field, in the remote and ethnically varied Upper Peninsula of Michigan. This same year I attended the summer Folklore Institute at Indiana University that Stith Thompson had initiated in 1942 on a quadrennial basis as a means of bringing together the relatively few scattered folklorists around the country.