

DB. Review of "On Another Day": Tales Told among the Nkundo of Zaire,
by Mabel Ross and Barbara Walker. Journal of American Folklore 94
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brief but authoritative account of Fipa grammar and syntax, and with three narratives in Fipa with literal interlinear translations. Few books on African folklore have given me as much pleasure as this one.

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"On Another Day...": *Tales Told among the Nkundo of Zaire*. By Mabel H. Ross and Barbara K. Walker. Foreword by Daniel J. Crowley. (Hamden, Connecticut: Archon Books, 1979. Pp. 596, appendices, selected bibliography, index. \$35.00)

The main portion of this volume is comprised of ninety-eight oral narratives (numbered 1 through 95 and 2A, 30A, 40A) from the Nkundo (a Mongo-speaking group living in west central Zaire) and others (Yongo, Ntumba, Ngonje-Ngombe?). Sixty-nine tales were recorded from 1972 to 1974 by Ross (a missionary who spent twenty-six years, 1950 to 1976, in the region); eight were provided by Stewart (a Peace Corps volunteer); eighteen texts are translations from an earlier Lonkundo anthology (*Bekolo Bemo Bendemba Ba-Nkundo*, compiled for "class-room use" and published in 1957 by three missionaries); and three are from De Rop, *De gesproken woordkunst van de Nkundo* (1956), and Hulstaert and De Rop, *Rechtspraakfabels van de Nkundo* (1954).

From a rapid glance at the map (p. 46), it appears that what seems to be a geographically wide-ranging sample is in fact much more restricted in scope. Apart from twenty-one previously published texts (translated from Lonkundo and Flemish), eighteen were collected in the cities of Boende and Mbandaka, forty-seven in villages that are or were important centers, with hospitals, mission stations, and mission schools; the rest come from smaller villages. The tales collected by Ross and Stewart were taped in different settings: a church house, a private house, and a hospital ship, and a few others in a village context. Some were recorded without an audience, directly in English; others were recorded with Ross alone or with a come-and-go audience; and still others were recorded with a group of genuine village listeners. Except for the twenty-one tales selected from publications, the narrator, place, and date of each recording are indicated. Among the seventeen known narrators, only three are women (they provided five tales). The men, most fairly old, are of varied educational backgrounds, from no formal western schooling to several years of school and university training; many of them were or had been teachers, preachers, repairmen, directors of schools, and a few were simply elders. Four of the seventeen narrators told forty-three tales (Bongonda, eight; Bokunge, sixteen; Lontomba, eleven; Mpanga, eight). These facts at once show the limitations of the sample. The tales taped in Lonkundo were first translated into "a modern Lonkundo" (p. 30) by a multilingual Nkundo team (p. 33) assisting Ross, who provided the English translations.

The tales are introduced, annotated, and organized in an elaborate apparatus by Walker, a curator of the Archive of Turkish Oral Narrative at Texas Tech University. Careful information is provided about the narrators' attitudes, reactions, responses, and social positions, but their ethnic identities or traditional statuses and experiences remain almost unknown. From the extensive comments given about each narrator, it seems as if ethnic, kinship, and political

affiliations as well as life-cycle and occupational experiences (outside the modern ones) are of little or no significance in assessing Nkundo narrative techniques, attitudes, values, conditions, and settings. It is quite clear from other ethnographic accounts, however, that there are many distinctive Nkundo-Mongo related ethnic groupings and cultural variations in the vast area between Mbandaka and Tondo in the west and Wema in the east, where the tales were collected. If this is of no relevance, one would expect such evidence to be provided.

Walker groups the tales into four conventional and inadequately circumscribed groups: origins accounts and *pourquoi* tales (pp. 71-134), animal tales (pp. 135-229), people tales (pp. 231-465), and cumulative and dilemma tales (pp. 467-512). It is unclear to what extent such categories, which are based on a mixture of divergent criteria (types of actors, content, form, and purpose), reflect Mongo thinking in general and the conceptions of the narrators in particular. In his remarkable book, *Folktales of Egypt* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), Hassan El-Shamy points out the importance of "the narrator's intent" and not just "the story's style and content" in the determination of the tale's genre (p. xliv), something I have found also to be true in some central African narrative traditions. Since "*On Another Day . . .*" devotes much effort in the introduction and comments to presenting the narrators' attitudes, one might have expected the classification to include this factor, but is this possible if the full traditional setting was not preserved in many of the recordings?

The boundaries between animal and people tales are certainly difficult to draw. Not only do animals frequently act like humans, and humans often interact with animal characters, but also "cultural patterns" (subtitle for the animal tales) and "problems and solutions" (subtitle for the people tales) can be communicated equally well through both types of narratives. The monstrous beings (ogres, *biloko*) that appear in many Nkundo stories are classified with the people tales for unspecified reasons.

Besides the many Nkundo dilemma tales included in William R. Bascom's *African Dilemma Tales* (The Hague: Mouton, 1975), this is the first volume on Nkundo narratives available in English and therefore a welcome contribution to studies on African oral literature. The work, however, fails to include a single example of a text in the Lonkundo language and unfortunately neglects to make full use of the extensive works on Nkundo-Mongo culture and oral literature by a group of Belgian missionary-scholars: Boelaert, De Rop, and particularly Hulstaert (who is referred to on page 65 as "the most outstanding non-Nkundo authority on Nkundo folklore") have devoted monumental publications to the Nkundo world in French and Flemish, together with the original texts. Many of Hulstaert's essential books—*Le mariage des Nkundo* (1936); *Dictionnaire Lomongo-Français* (1957); *Les Mongo* (1961); *Contes mongo* (1965); *Fables mongo* (1970); and *Contes d'ogres mongo* (1971)—are absent from the bibliography (p. 527) and unused in the introductions and the annotations. At the very least, one would have expected to find references to variants of tales offered by Hulstaert. In addition, Ross's general introduction on "Nkundo life styles, customs, values and diction" (pp. 20-32), which fails to mention many aspects of Nkundo social organization and religion, would have benefited greatly from the data presented by Hulstaert. Since Walker is interested in comparing the range of tales available in the Ross sampling with those of "twenty-five years ago," why not include in this consideration texts collected by De Witte (1912-1913), Brokerhoff (1928), and others appearing in Hulstaert's *Fables mongo*?

The neglect of Hulstaert's work on oral literature in an otherwise densely annotated book is extremely clear in the discussion of variants of the tales. An example of tales 18-20 (pp. 142-59) is a case in point. The stories are said to deal with "the false friendship theme [and]

the trickster-outtricked element" (p. 153). It should be noted that in tale 18, Leopard is a friend both of Wise Antelope and Foolish Antelope; in tale 19 (where the narrator made initial confusions, p. 147), the friendship situation is confused; and in tale 20 it is not stated. Since among the Nkundo-Mongo the friendship pact (originally based on a blood pact) is an often stated motif that begins stories, and since it is not explicit in at least one of the three tales, then the "false friendship theme" cannot be applied indiscriminately. The identification of "the trickster-outtricked element" is also not convincing, because as Halstaert (*Fables mongo*, p. 568) has rightly noted, there is a striking difference between the trickery of the turtle and that of the antelope (who is less astute, less dishonest, and more foxy). The narratives center on Leopard's tricking Foolish Antelope (and in one variant, also on two other species of antelopes) before being outwitted by Wise Antelope; the main events happen on the road to and in the village of Leopard's in-laws. In each case the trickery of Leopard leads to the death of Foolish Antelope, and the smartness of Wise Antelope to the killing of Leopard. The very general title of the three tales ("The Leopard and the Antelopes") is based on the mere enumeration of characters and ignores the distinctions that narrators make among different species of real and fictive antelopes (Dark Brown Antelope, Marsh Antelope, Large Antelope, Dwarf Antelope, and Wise Antelope and Foolish [Dwarf] Antelope). The title does not reflect the "relationship or deed or value or personal characteristics" that the author determined as criteria for an apt titling (p. 40).

Variants of the same narrative cores and themes occur in Hulstaert (*Fables mongo*, tales 10 and 12, pp. 608-617 and 620-623; with the summary of six other variants, n.1, pp. 616-617). Hulstaert's choice of texts presented under the title "L'antilope imbécile et l'antilope intelligente" is not immune to criticism (for example, his tale 10 "est composée à partir de deux textes fort semblables," while other episodes of one of the texts are presented separately as tale 20, p. 616, n.1). Comparison of both sets of variants (and of other tales in Hulstaert where Wise and Foolish Antelope confront each other), however, would have offered additional perspectives on the types of dramatis personae; on the substitutions and the additions of actors; on the narrators' individual techniques (for example, expansion and retraction), social backgrounds, and motivations and intents; on the conditioning influence of the setting of narration; and on the continuity of themes and core narrative elements in ethnographic space (the variants mentioned by Hulstaert were given by individuals from the Bosaka, Ntumba, Eleku, Boangi, and other ethnic subgroups). Instead, the elaborate comments (pp. 153-159) on the three tales list motifs and tale types drawn from various cultures, rather than beginning with geographically closer documentation.

The methodological flaws already mentioned are compounded by problems of unverifiable translation, erased tapes, and disjointed, truncated, and telescoped tales (facts repeatedly acknowledged by Walker, pp. 78; 88; 90, n.1; 109; etc.). This does not belie the fact that many texts and the majority of the comments are illuminating contributions to our understanding of Nkundo oral narrative and cultural values. The translations are eminently readable; the introductions and textual notes are written in uncluttered English. More detailed work on thematic categories, functions, and contextual influences on style and performance can now be undertaken on the basis of the large corpus of available Nkundo-Mongo oral literature.

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