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Another New Mexico Version of the Tar-Baby Story

By AURELIO M. ESPINOSA

IN Volume I, II, 85-104, of this journal I published a few of the most important types of versions of the Tar-Baby Story thus far found in New Mexico, both among the Spanish New Mexicans and among the Pueblo Indians. I also gave a brief outline of my study on the origins and diffusion of this tale in India, Europe, Africa and America, and of the conclusions reached by me with respect to its India origins, as published in the *Journal of American Folklore*, XLIII, 129-209. The New Mexico versions like those of Spanish America generally are of Hispanic origin and ultimately of India origin, although as the tale has been transmitted from country to country across the centuries the actual versions found all over the world today show the special characteristics developed in each particular region or country in addition to the baustein or heart of the original, primitive form.

Among the New Mexico Pueblo Indians the tale is quite common. The general type is well known, the type that is near the baustein and known in India, Africa and America. The Pueblo Indians of Taos, however, have a special form in the type of versions where the rabbit after being caught in the usual fashion with a tar-baby and killed and cooked and being served to eat comes to life again. This type of version from Taos was first found by Dr. Elsie Clews Parsons, one of whose versions I published in the *Journal of American Folklore*, and in this journal in the articles above mentioned is the type of traditional tale that shows a decidedly vigorous local influence, an entirely new and extraordinary element having been added, and one that is definitely Indian. Of this I am fairly certain in view of the fact that I have found Indian folk-tales from San Ildefonso and San Juan that have the episode of the animal that comes to life again when the soup is spilled on the floor.

Recently I have collected another type of Pueblo Indian Tar-Baby Story, an extraordinary type also, and one that is exceedingly rare, but curiously enough it is not an Indian type. In fact the newly found version is so much like the first Tar-Baby Story to be found in modern tradition, the Lithuanian tale of Schleicher, discussed by me in my long article in the *Journal of American Folk-Lore*, that I believe it is another European type. If I am right in this assumption we have another argument for the European-India origin of the various types of this tale that are found today in Spanish America and among the Indians where Spanish tradition is strong. The vigor of Spanish tradition in Pueblo Indian culture has been eloquently manifested to me in a recent trip to New Mexico when I discovered that even the traditional Spanish ballads are recited and sung by the Pueblo Indians of today. Specifically, six versions of three different traditional ballads of the Spain of the XVth century were found in the Pueblos of Isleta, Santa Clara, and San Juan.

The new Pueblo Indian version of the Tar-Baby Story was found at the Laguna Pueblo of Paguate. It was told in Laguna speech by Mariana Lenti and translated into English for me by her nephew, Edward Pradt. This version is to be published in the near future in a large collection of Pueblo Indian tales found by me in New Mexico. In view of its special interest to readers of the NEW MEXICO QUARTERLY and to show the type of extraordinary surprises that one may meet with in the search for folklore in New Mexico, I beg to publish the version below.

Fox (*mascha*) and Rabbit (*get*) were friends. One day they wandered off to the hills looking for food. Soon they came to a piñón tree and Rabbit said, "There is a lot of pitch on this piñón tree. I am going to gather it." "What are you going to do with it?" said Fox. "Just wait," replied Rabbit. "I know what I am going to do with it." And he gathered all the pitch from the piñón tree into a little pile.

Fox wondered what he was going to do. Fox stood there and looked on. Rabbit said he was going to make gloves for Fox to play with. Fox laughed. "Come here, friend Fox," Rabbit said. He put pitch all over her hands. "Those are the gloves," said Rabbit. Fox laughed, "What shall I do now?" said Fox. And Fox laughed.

Rabbit then took Fox to the piñón tree. It was there the piñón tree. "Now hit the piñón tree with your right hand," Rabbit said. He told Fox to hit hard. Fox hit the piñón tree as hard as she could. The hand stuck to the piñón tree. Fox tried to pull it off but couldn't. "What shall I do now?" Fox asked. Rabbit laughed and said, "Hit the piñón tree with your other hand." Rabbit said this. "You must hit very hard," Rabbit said. Fox hit the tree with her other hand. It got stuck. Fox was caught by both hands.

Rabbit began to laugh. Fox did not laugh now. Fox was angry. "What shall I do now?" Fox said. Fox tried to get away, but she couldn't. Both of her hands were stuck to the piñón tree. "I tell you what I think I must do," said Rabbit. I must put gloves on your feet so you can kick the piñón tree." Rabbit went and got some pitch and put it all over Fox's feet. "Now you give the piñón tree a kick with your right foot," Rabbit said. He told Fox to hit hard. And Fox hit the piñón tree as hard as she could. Her foot stuck. "My foot is stuck also," said Fox. "Well hit the piñón tree with your other foot," said Rabbit. Fox hit the tree with the other foot. Fox hit very hard. The other foot stuck also. Rabbit laughed and laughed. There Fox was stuck to the piñón tree. Rabbit left her there and went away laughing.

After a while Rabbit felt sorry and came back. He came back there where Fox was stuck to the piñón tree. He told Fox he was going to help her. But he saw that he could not free her. "I will go and look for help," said Rabbit. He went away for a little while and returned with a wood-rat (*tsena*). The rat said he knew how to free Fox. He got some animal fat and chewed it. Then he put it on Fox's

feet and rubbed it. The pitch got loose and Fox came off. All agreed to be very good friends.

But Fox wanted to get even with Rabbit. Fox asked Rabbit if he liked cheese. Rabbit said he did. They went east to a lake. The moon appeared on the lake. "Do you see that cheese in the water?" Fox said. "Indeed I do," Rabbit replied. "You must go in and get it," Fox said. "But don't go in yet. Wait till I count to four. Then you can jump and get it." This Fox said to Rabbit. Fox counted, "*Ishk, dwooe, chemi, dyana,*" and Rabbit jumped into the lake. He found nothing. He could not get out of the water. He nearly drowned. Fox started to run along the edge of the lake, wondering how she could get Rabbit out. There a chipmunk (*kayama*) appeared. Fox asked Chipmunk to help her get Rabbit out of the lake. They looked all around. They didn't see Rabbit anywhere. They wondered where Rabbit was.

On top of some willows they saw a mocking-bird (*spadyi*). The mocking-bird was singing. Chipmunk understood the song. The mocking-bird was saying that Rabbit was out of the lake, that Rabbit was safe. Fox and Chipmunk then went to the forests to gather acorns. When they had gathered many acorns they parted.

In this extraordinary Pueblo Indian version the fox gets stuck gradually to the piñón tree upon advice from the rabbit. In exactly the same manner, the witch of the Lithuanian version of Schleicher gets stuck gradually to the tarred-horse on the advice of one of the brothers of Onutte whom the witch has carried away. The similarity of the baustein in both versions is so remarkable that we naturally think of European origin through Spanish versions. The influence of Spanish tradition on the Pueblo Indian culture of New Mexico being so strong we can hardly suppose here independent development. The general setting of the actual Tar-Baby baustein in the series of Rabbit and Coyote incidents of the cheese taken for the moon, etc.,

is quite commonplace in the American Spanish versions. For the actual version in question, however, we have no exact parallel from Spain or Spanish America. This simply means that it has not yet been found in Spanish tradition. The general type as documented in the beautiful similar version from Lithuania was undoubtedly well known in Europe, and through Spain, I believe it came to Spanish America, where it appears now among the Indians of Paguete. Tradition is very capricious. Versions are transmitted and then forgotten at home, but as we investigate we find from time to time the versions left along the path. Paguete is on the path of Spanish-Europe-India tradition and has here yielded a traditional version. Another conspicuous example, and one that is found in a very similar form in modern peninsular Spanish tradition, is the Tar-Baby Story from Taos published by Elizabeth Willis DeHuff in *Taytays Tales*, 61-64. In this tale Coyote gets stuck to a tar-baby on the edge of a spring and falls into the water with it. In an Asturian tale published by Aurelio Llano de Ampudias, *Cuentos asturianos*, number 189, a man fights in the same manner with a tar-baby near the sea and is carried away by the waves.

New Mexico, then has given us four extraordinary types of the Tar-Baby Story: the regular Spanish-American type that has the baustein and in addition the episode of the race at the start; the Taos type of the ordinary baustein with the extraordinary coming to life again of the dead and cooked rabbit; the Asturian type of the falling into the water of the animal or person caught by a tar-baby; and lastly the Paguete version of the sticking fast on advise from another one, the Lithuanian type. Of these four the first is found in the regular Spanish tradition of New Mexico, the other three are from the Pueblo Indians. But of the three Pueblo Indian versions only one, the Taos version of Dr. Parsons, has features that are specifically Indian and recently developed. The other two correspond to well-

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known European types, and are apparently of Spanish-European source with no special, new features. The Taos version of Dr. Parsons, however, has inherited from Spanish-European tradition only the baustein.