Characteristics of Occupational Narratives

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December 13, 1976: The grade school auditorium was filled with the sizzle and smell of deep fried foods, which hinted at the delights of the feast that would be enjoyed that night. I was there visiting the monthly meeting of the Central Office Club, a social organization of telephone company workers in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area. About sixty men, all of them white, sat in groups playing cards, laughing, talking, and joking.

I did my best to explain to the men that I wanted to hear the stories that they tell to each other on the job and on occasions such as these. I told them that I was especially interested in stories about characters, and otherwise outstanding individuals. At the request of one of the men, Joey Hall, I sat down at his table, turned on the recorder, opened a beer, leaned back and enjoyed myself. Soon the men were eagerly swapping stories with each other.

Joey turned out to be an excellent storyteller. Bill Farmer was at the table, telling a lot of stories, mostly on himself. Bobby King, a young man who had been with the company for eight years, divided his attention between my microphone and his card game; while Bob Jones, who was sitting at the other end of the long table, occasionally contributed a story and an idea.

Bill Farrier: I was with Dusty one time over IBM, and John Vee came looking for us, remember? They have these doors that are locked. Vee comes up there looking for us, and Dusty sees him coming. So when Vee starts knocking at the door, Dusty was standing on the inside of the door and he wouldn’t let Vee in. He stood there, Vee was taking his fists and crashing against that door, and Dusty wouldn’t open it for nothing. I was standing back there, sweat running away from me, cause I figured Vee was going to bust the door in. You know, its a secure door, its got to be opened from the inside, you’ve got to push a button to open it.

Santino: So just for the hell of it he wouldn’t let him in?
Farrier: He wouldn’t let him in because he was the boss.
Santino: What is Dusty’s job?
Farrier: Dusty is Private Branch Exchange. He works outside. Oh man, if I could tell a story.
Bobby King: You’re going to give this man the wrong idea!
Farrier: Remember when Dusty and those guys chipped in and bought the pie for that guy so the guy could dump the pie on Ralph Abrams’ face?
King: I heard about it, yeah.
Hall: I heard about it.

The conclusions and hypotheses in this article are based on fieldwork I have been conducting since August, 1976, with railroaders, airliners, and telephone company workers. In addition, I have studied hundreds of hours of taped occupational narrative, principally those of transportation related occupations, in the collection housed at the Smithsonian Institution Office of American and Folklife Studies. I would like to thank Dr. Robert H. Byington and Robert McCarl for their many suggestions and ideas.

1. All names used in this article are pseudonyms.
Jones: Who was the guy?
Farrier: I don’t know. Some crazy guy. He was a guy who had been retired from the D.C. police force for disability, for nervousness. And they all sat down, at the navy hospital, and Pete came in there with Niles, and they were sitting there—you never heard that story?
Hall: I heard it, yeah.
Farrier: And some guy says “Man, I’d give ten dollars, I’d give anything if somebody’d hit that son of a bitch in the face with a pie.” And this guy says, “Well, I’ll do it for ten dollars.” You see this money right out on the table. And the guy went up there and took enough slices of pie to make a big round pie. And he walked right like that, carrying the pie. I wasn’t there, but there must’ve been a lot of guys there, cause I’ve talked to guys that—Dusty was there—and he walked right up to Ralph and then he made out like he tripped and hit Ralph right in the face with the pie. You know, knocked the glasses off his face. . . the guy wound up he had to pay the cleaning bill for Ralph’s clothes.
Santino: Was Ralph a boss?
Farrier: Yes sir! He was the big boss!
Santino: And the other guy, what was his job?
Farrier: Just an installer.
Hall: Times are different. These things generally happened some years back.
Farrier: But there are so many funny things that you probably couldn’t see the humor in them. Like the time the guy spent two hours teaching me how to put the steady ringing on a number. Out at the hospital where what’s her name works, you know, the operator? So for two hours he’s got me in the office, with all these layouts, and all these prints and diagrams.
“All you have to do is just blow a fuse and that’ll do it!” somebody said. “It’s simpler than that!” someone else said. [The story at this point had become general conversation among all the men.]
Farrier: And he says “Get up there and work overtime if you have to.” I said, “Right!”
Jones: You don’t need no two hours to do that!
Farrier: Yeah right! I went down and pulled out the card, changed the option, and stayed up there till nine o’clock!
King: They were up there for two hours in the morning, drawing up relays. Bill sat there for two hours.”
Hall: And you knew it all the time, didn’t you?
Farrier: Sure I did!

The above transcript is typical of the way workingmen tell stories, of the times and places where they tell them, and the kinds of stories that are told. Moreover, this transcript introduces one of the most pervasive themes in occupational narrative: hostility toward authority as realized by a prank a subordinate worker plays on a superordinate.

I hope that at least some of the spontaneity and enthusiasm of this story swapping event is suggested by the brief transcript. The scene must be experienced first hand, of course, in order to be fully appreciated. You had to be there: to hear the hullabaloo, the jingle jangle of money won and lost in the poker games, the staccato punctuation of beer cans regularly being opened, the vigorous voices resounding with the pleasures of camaraderie, of good times remembered and recreated.

If workers tell stories to each other on the job, it will be during a break, a slack period, or before and after the day’s duties. Airline flight crews, for instance, often tell stories during the preflight instrument check. Usually, however, people on the job are too busy working to tell stories. Although they certainly engage in folkloric and communicative activities (see McCarl), narratives which are a comments about the work and the job, are usually told during non-work periods. When workers come together for more or less purely social reasons—after work in a bar, or at a meeting of a club, for example—they engage in the more expressive verbal aspects of their work culture.
As one would expect in these situations, there are both active and passive bearers of tradition; people who tell stories and people who do not, even though they have heard them and know them. And while there are always certain workers who are known for their ability and willingness to tell a story at the kind of social event that I have been describing, the concept of a star performer is not that relevant. Usually, the spotlight is traded from raconteur to raconteur, each story triggering a memory and a corresponding story from someone else. There is a certain freedom to interrupt, which allows group correction as well as group reinforcement of both the details of the stories and of the sentiments expressed.

It is useful to mention and describe the most common subjects of occupational narratives, without suggesting that these are classificatory categorizations. These thematic groupings will be suggested by any survey of a large body of occupational narrative, but they are by no means intended as mutually exclusive categories. They are intended to serve as a descriptive introduction to the kinds of stories that are told in the contemporary occupational context.

Although major disasters are of course always talked about, such unusual, extreme accidents tend to dominate conversation for only a few days and then fade from the forefront of group awareness. There is a kind of accident story, however, that is persistent over time and consistent across occupations. I call these kinds of stories cautionary tales. These stories are found in every occupation that I have worked with, and they enjoy an importance corresponding to their persistence in time. They are very similar to many occupational ballads in structure, while their function is similar to the parable—they teach. They do not simply document the unusual accident; but they suggest a system wherein the reason for the accident can be determined, and, if the lesson is properly learned, similar accidents can be avoided in the future.

As an example, we can return to the Central Office club meeting, where Manny Fenstermacher, a thirty-five year veteran with the company, told me this story triggered by a question from Bill Farrier:

Farrier: Remember when that guy stepped in a pot of hot lead?
Fenstermacher: Oh yes. Ed. I had just started with the company. He went up the pole, and it was out in the bushes just off the East-West Highway. And at that time... it’s all built up now, but it was nothing but bushes. And he wanted to hurry up and finish his job, so he left a pot of solder down on the hand line, and then he says, “I’ve got the tent ready, set the pot of solder down.”
Farrier: It was molten lead.
Fenstermacher: Yeah. And he came down the pole and jumped into the pot of lead.
Santino: What happened to him?
Fenstermachers Well, he hurt his ankle, bad. They took him to the hospital. He got all right.

Notice that in this story, Ed was in a hurry to finish his job, did not take the proper precautions, was careless and so caused an accident. This narrative sequence can be compared to the stories told in a great number of occupational ballads, in which a taboo is broken and an accident results. Sometimes the taboo is supernatural, as is the case in “The Jam On Jerry’s Rocks,” which documents the destruction of “six brave youths and their foreman, young Monroe” because they went out to break up a log jam on a Sunday. Other times the taboo, or interdiction, is not to work double shifts, as did Casey Jones; not to try to do too much work, as did John Henry; or not to be “wild and reckless,” as was Johnny Stiles in the ballad of the same name. These interdictions are often implicit. We interpolate them because the consequences—accidents—are graphically made known to us in the narratives. Thus the stories


3. In regard to this idea of group correction, see Walter Anderson, Kaiser und Abt, dies Geschichte eines Schwanks, (Helsinki, 1928), 397—408. Also see Dan Ben-Amos, “Toward a Definition of Folklore in Context,” in Toward New Perspectives in Folklore, eds. Americo Paredes and Richard Bauman (Austin and London, 1972), 8—15.
teach that it is dangerous to try to do too much work, to be reckless, or to be careless.

Whether spoken or sung, these cautionary tales share a certain didacticism, despite their differences. They remind workers to be careful and to avoid unnecessary risks. Improper placement of one’s tools is an unnecessary risk, as is rushing through a job, and these stories teach the workers that violation of simple safety rules can and does result in accidents.

Another very common subject of narratives is the first day on the job. I am including here such related themes as “how I got started” and stories about initiation pranks that were played on newcomers. Another related subject are reminiscences and stories about the old days, or the good old days. Every industry’s workers seem to have a conception of a golden age, a time before the present when things were different and somehow better; e.g., the days of steam in the railroad industry, or the days of propeller aircraft in the airline industry. There is a hint of this in the introductory transcript when Joey says “Times are different. These things generally happened some years back.” In fact, telephone company workers also look back to the old days, when there was much less supervision and much more individuality.

Pranks are the subject of a great many stories. More often than not, pranks are played on newcomers as initiation rituals, and overlap with the above category. Not all stories about pranks are stories about the first time on the job, however. Many stories are about pranks and tricks played on bosses, management, and co-workers.

Although there is great overlap in these categories, some stories are clearly focused on the prank, while others may focus on the fact that he or she was a novice when the trick was played. A third focus may be on the person who pulls the prank, and this brings us to another grouping—characters and heroes.

Stories about tricksters and practical jokers abound among workers. It is not uncommon for a notorious practical joker to become the subject of a number of stories which have wide circulation within the limits of the occupational setting. Very occasionally, such characters become well known throughout the entire industry, but usually the circulation of their stories is restricted to a particular job site, home base, or group of workers.

People such as these, whose adventures and activities become the subjects of a number of narratives, are contemporary occupational folk heroes. They are real people, often retired or dead, whose stories are told and repeated and found meaningful.

Richard Dorson has described a folk hero as “a local character, a wag, an eccentric, talked about in close-knit circles for feats of strength or of eating or drinking, or for knavish tricks and clever sayings.” The contemporary heroes of occupational narratives are exactly that: local characters, certainly, often known by the people who tell their stories. It is common for workers to tell stories on themselves (witness Bill Farrier in the introductory transcript) and, in fact, when there are legends and stories about a particular individual, these individuals often tell their own stories best.

While “feats of strength” are certainly the stuff of hero tales, the needs and occasions for strength or derring-do have diminished in most contemporary industrial and white collar occupations. Where working conditions are not too dangerous or physically demanding, strong man heroes are not too common.

Stories of “knavish tricks” and of knaves and tricksters, however, flourish. Behavior such as throwing a pie in a boss’s face may seem like slapstick comedy, but given the facts of status differentiation and authoritarianism in a job, such an act is heroic, and such behavior, framed in narrative, is prized. It seems that the dangerous physical conditions that gave rise to tales of daring physical feats have been superceded by uncomfortable social conditions that give rise to tales of tricks and practical jokes, which are, in their own way, socially daring.

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Every industry and every job will have its own set of challenges, duties, skills, working conditions, and its own social milieu, and all of these will affect the narratives of that job. For that reason it is difficult to isolate the folklore of one industry to serve as a model for occupational narrative in general. Nevertheless, examples must be chosen, and I have chosen to present here stories from workers on the railroad.

I fired for another engineer, up on the hump one time, and this is at the time that they first started the environmental thing. Even before that—they used to get us for smoke violations. They had a smoke inspector, and he’d stand there with a chart. And if the smoke was dense, they would charge you with number three smoke and so forth. Well, anyway, the smoke inspector came all the way from downtown. He saw the smoke up in the sky. He came out to see who was doing it, and this particular engineer had turned the stoke on; he was feeding coal into the fire and he caused this smoke.

Well, anyway, one day when I was firing for him, he told me to get the engine hot, which meant to get the steam pressure up. So I said, “Well, what for? We don’t need it.” He said, “Well, I’ll let you know.” So when we backed down over the hump, the pop valve went up. That meant the steam pressure got what was safe in the boilers, and all this water went over on the office. I said, “Steve what was that for?” He said, “Well, I want to wash that place off. I’ve got to go up there and talk to them about a smoke violation. I wanted to clean it up for them a little bit.”

This was about 1947, 1948. Steve Andover. There are other stories about him, but they are a little rough sometimes.

In the above story, the engineer is battling against the bureaucracy’s restraints and infringements upon his job. The story turns on a reversal: they are forcing him to “clean up” against his will; he forces them to “clean up” against their will. They obstruct in areas in which he feels they do not belong, so he obstructs in an area in which they obviously feel he does not belong. The hero who reverses his situation and/or role is a recurring motif in occupational narrative.

Unlike stories in which the protagonist is anonymous, which tend to feature types or characterizations (often either positive or negative role models), stories circulating about a specific individual understandably delineate a more fully realized character. It is in cases when there is more than one story about a specific individual that we begin to approach the concept of hero as symbolically significant person rather than simply as the protagonist of narrative. When there are several stories about a individual, this person is not being remembered because of a single, isolated event. When there are a number of stories about a person, the indication is that it is the idiosyncratic personality of the individual, rather than chance events, that are responsible for the adventures that are being recounted. The details of this idiosyncratic personality become important.

The Steve Andover story was collected from former engineer, Mr. Edwards. At the Potomac yard in Alexandria, Virginia, there are other stories of Steve Andover, and they are told by more than one narrator. We will continue to employ Mr. Edward’s versions, however, because they are the fullest.

In the following narrative, aspects of Steve’s personality are delineated quite clearly. Not only is the “ladies man” aspect essential to the story, but also the lack of concern about his predicament and his apparent disdain for the authorities. Although he is the mistaken target of government officials chasing down corruption, he remains aloof. Although his personality gets him into trouble, since he is innocent of any wrongdoing, he can extricate himself from the problem with a quip:

One time he was over at the Hamilton Hotel and in the cocktail lounge. He used to go over and he was quite a woman’s man. If anybody was looking to be picked up, why, he would buy them a drink and so forth. Well, on this particular occasion, the Federal Communication Commission was investigating somebody who was involved in politics and this woman was giving them information. And when Steve Andover started flirting with her, she thought it was somebody contacting her to pay off. And Steve got into the headlines in the paper because the Attorney General thought it was a contact with some people that were contacting her.

So anyway, the inspector went down to his house to talk to him. So, they came on in and said, “Steve, you hit everything on the head talking to this woman.” See, when he was talking to her, buying her a drink, he’d say, “You’re in town on a big money deal.” He was trying to find out if she had any money. So she said, “Yeah,” so she would go back and tell the federal people [and] say, “They made a contact with me; they’re talking about money now.” So that was the reason the inspectors went down to his house.

So they said, “Steve, where in the hell did you get this information?” And he said, “My crystal ball.” They said ‘What do you mean’ crystal ball?’ He said, ‘You want to see it?’ They said, “Yeah.”

He took them to the closet, and you know these big silver balls that people decorate the yard with? He had it in the closet for the winter. He said, “That’s where I get my information from!” They finally dropped him as a witness.

The final Andover story brings him into conflict with and victory over a yardmaster, by means of his ability to think fast:

I have one about the engineer and the fireman. This happened on the twelve to eight [midnight to eight a.m. shift]. The yard engine goes all the way to the rear end of the train and comes in behind it and shoves it to the hump. Well, on this particular night, the hump engine went all the way around the train and the engineer and the fireman went to sleep. And they used to have a whistle before radio time to blow that whistle for them to shove that train out. Well, they couldn’t get them shouted out, so the yard-master walked down there. About the time that he got close to the engine, the engineer happened to wake up and see his light. So in order to get water into the boiler, they used to have a thing they called the injector. He pulled that injector open and it started squirting steam all around. He hollered to him “Don’t come close! I can’t get water in, it’s liable to blow up. I’ve been after it ever since I got around the train!” He thought real fast and didn’t get caught at being asleep.

Steve Andover’s diffidence to the Federal Communication Commission, his hostility toward the interfering, meddling, bureaucracy and misguided outside agencies is also a generalized aggression directed at that great, amorphous, non-railroading, non-understanding outgroup, the public. Lawyers, judges, bureaucrats, these are roles of public representation, and they, like the yardmaster, are figures of authority. People in these roles are targets of the aggression of the independent, irascible, heroic engineer.

At least, that is how engineers are portrayed in the stories they tell about themselves. It is interesting to compare their portrayal of trainment (flagmen, brakemen, switchmen, etc.) who work on the railroad in subordinate positions. Perhaps the most clearly heroic tales are those of Skippy LeFleur. Engineer Mickey Kent tells them in a story swapping session with a group of trainmen:
Skippy liked to tell jokes all the time. He was really comical. He’d stop in the middle of anything and tell a joke to somebody. Well, he got his leg cut off at Hancock at a switching accident. And his leg was laying over somewhere. And they picked him up and put him in a pick-up truck, I believe it was, to take him to the hospital. And he was still alert. He said, “Hey fellas, don’t forget my leg!”

Well, talking about Skippy, I worked a job at Hancock with him. I’m glad I wasn’t there the day he got hurt, or maybe if I had been, he wouldn’t have been, but I wasn’t there. But we worked that job a few times, and down there you really do. You handle forty-five, fifty loads of sand with no air and you’re kicking them in against the train. I mean it’s rough. You’re on that engine and it shakes everything loose. Of course, that’s the way the operation has to be you know. With the regular crew down there you could always figure, you can’t see them for maybe ten, fifteen car lengths, but you have a pretty fair idea of what you’re doing. Course, the rules always say if you can’t see them, you stop. Well, if you did that you’d be sitting there all night. You’d accomplish nothing.

Course, I could see Skippy real well and I thought Skippy seen what was going on, and I was shoving back and shoving back at Hancock. I thought, “My God, they didn’t extend these tracks, did they?” About that time, POW! Water cooler come down, everything come down! We hit everything. I says to Skippy, I says, “My God, Skippy, what are you looking at?” He liked to eat a lot. He was standing there chewing on a piece of candy. He says, “Did you see those green and red lights on that airplane going by?” There he was, laying on the floor. But that was Skippy.

Well, Skippy, Skippy got injured one time. He got off too fast. They were on the fly, and he got off too fast. When he got off, he tripped and rolled. He rolled down there a long ways and he was wounded. And so when he recuperated enough to come back to work, he met with a claim agent to make a settlement for his injury. So the claim agent wanted to go down to see where he got hurt at. He went down along the track and he said, “Skippy, just where did you get off at?” And he said, “All along here!”

The Skippy stories are typical of the stories about trainmen. They more closely resemble jokes than do the engineer stories. They have punch lines (“Hey fellas, don’t forget my leg” and “All along here”). The accident story shows that Skippy is capable of truly heroic courage, but it is the courage of sustaining great pain and great loss. The story does not explain how he lost his leg, nor does it suggest that he lost it as a result of an act of heroism. Skippy finds himself in situations, and the stories document how he rises to the occasions. Things happen to him, and he deals with them. In railroad narrative generally, trainmen are somewhat more passive than engineers. Engineers are active; they create situations. Trainmen are passive; they react to situations.

Which is not to suggest that trainmen are any less intelligent than engineers; it is simply that their job duties place them in a subordinate position. The dealing with status and authority superordinates by subordinates is a major theme in occupational narrative. This next story almost caricatures the relationship.

When I first started on the railroad, it was a pretty common occurrence to be fired. If you were really railroad, you’d get fired once a week, at least. And for just about any reason. What happened when you got fired, the straw boss, which he hated to be called and which we called him so he would fire us, was, ah, well, tempermental I guess you could say. At every least minor infraction that occurred and he thought he could blame you for it, he’d send you to see the general foreman. Well, the general foreman never got to work before nine o’clock, and we all started at seven, so if you hurried up and got in
trouble around five or ten after seven, you could sit in the boss’s office for two hours and didn’t have to do a thing. Well, I happened to like it up in the boss’s office. It was air conditioned and had nice leather seats that you could sit in, and the coffee machine was right there.

After a while, the boss kept seeing me up there and he told me, “Look, if you don’t stop getting fired, and wasting all this time up in my office, I am really going to fire you.” And that was the last time he saw me. But that was two hours a week for a period of maybe two or three months, and he just got tired of it and let me know, if I didn’t stop getting fired, that he was really going to fire me. That put an end to that, but I did have a good time while I was doing it.

We come across the reversal motif in this story of a trick a yard-master pulled on a new switchman:

Years ago the train came in and on the rear end was a load of sheep. And this old fella called the switchman about that and said, “Listen, we’re having some trouble about the number of sheep that’s in the car. How about going out there and counting them for us.” So he went out there; he was new. He’d just been hired. He was trying to count the sheep in the car. Well if you’ve ever seen sheep in a car, they keep moving around. Well, anyway, a train was coming in the yard, and the yardmaster couldn’t get the man. So he was out there about two hours. So when he finally came back he said “Where you been?” He said, “I’ve been out there counting those damn sheep that you told me to count.”

The story is one of poetic justice. The switchman reverses, perhaps unknowingly, the very attempt to make him the fool. He uses the joke played on him to get out of working for a couple of hours and he turns the perpetrator of the joke into the butt of the joke.

The elements of the story are by now familiar: the conflict arising out of the status differentiation, and the trickster strategy of reversal common to railroad narrative generally. The more passive quality of the switchman is an element commonly found in stories told by or about trainmen.

The fact is that engineers, when they tell stories about trainmen, tell the same stories and the same kinds of stories as the trainmen tell about themselves. The converse, however, is not exactly true. Trainmen display an ambivalence toward engineers in their stories. Sometimes a particular engineer is admired; more often, the engineer is ridiculed.

Railroad narrative arises out of and deals with each of the relationships and interactions that are part of the occupation. Engineers portray themselves as being in a highly individualistic, devil-may-care position vis-à-vis the company and the world; while trainmen portray themselves as coping with problematic situations that arise during the daily execution of their work. The engineer-trainmen relationship is one of mutual interdependence; but there is an explicit hierarchy of responsibility and status. With subordination comes resentment and hostility; with superordination comes perhaps a degree of arrogance and condescension.

Trainmen express a dual response to the engineer’s authority. Certain specific engineers are admired, simply because they are very good at what they do. Nevertheless, being on the wrong end of a status hierarchy leads to some very real resentment. This resentment is expressed symbolically in trainmen’s narrative.

As trainmen seek vicarious release for their resentment of subordination in narrative, the engineer likewise expresses his anger at the system and the world that puts him under great pressure and expects so much from him. In the stories, engineers create situations of conflict. They pretty much do as they please—company bosses and the world be damned. Trainmen are much more cautious. Although in the stories they are tricksters, they are not practical jokers. Engineer Steve Andover controls the steam engine, so he sprays the business office. Skippy LeFleur has no such control. Typically, his heroism is
one of passivity and endurance. He deals with the immediate problems in which he finds himself, and typically, he is triumphant. Nevertheless, nothing changes. There is an element of fatalism in the trainmen’s stories. One after another, stories about engineers tell about how the engineer \textit{does} something: picks up women, defies the government, sprays steam on a building, outwits the yardmaster. And one after another, stories about trainmen tell about how something \textit{is done to} them: he is left off the train, a trick is played on him, he is crushed in an accident.

The pattern of hostility as manifested by subordinate workers applies to the narratives of the telephone company that began this article (e.g. the pie throwing incident). The same pattern is consistent with regard to airline narrative: superordinates (pilots) picture themselves as highly individualistic, and many pilots are practical jokers. The narratives of subordinates (flight attendants) correspond to trainmen’s narratives, picturing the flight attendant as put upon by arrogant pilots or inconsiderate passengers. The heroic flight attendant has to deal with the situations she finds herself in, and she usually does so by means of her wit.

Occupational narratives provide insight into and an index of the specific challenges and problems that arise in a job. Two kinds of problems are indicated: (1) the kind of physical challenges requiring the skills a worker in that job would be expected to have, and (2) the sociological problems of responsibility, status, and authority. The volume of stories in which hostility is demonstrated toward one’s superiors, outsiders, or the general populace indicates that these problems are quite real and extensive.

The network of relationships a worker has is complex: he must relate to and work with subordinates, peers, bosses, management, outside agencies, and the general public. Narratives arise along each of these relationships, and allow aggressive feelings fictive release. People working with each other will conflict. Nevertheless, in order for an overall operation to be productive, the individual workers must function well together. They are each moving parts of a larger machine, and they must avoid friction with each other or the machine will break down. Occupational narrative, by allowing the fictive expression of negative emotions, is a kind of lubricant that reduces the friction between the parts and allows the operation to function more smoothly.

\textit{Smithsonian Institution}
\textit{Washington, D.C.}