

English 099/ Folklore 241
American Folk Literature

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Office hours: Room 404, 3619 Locust Walk

T-R 1:30-3
Bennet Hall 138
Wednesday 2-4 and by appointment

This course will introduce you to concepts and varieties of American folk literature, and the public discourses that have debated their role in national life since the late 19th century. We will trace the evolving intellectual, political, and technological contexts for the study and performance of folk literary forms from the classic canon (including ballads, folktales, proverbs, riddles, and legends) to a range of contemporary expressions. Through readings, films, and field assignments we will explore how the verbal arts of everyday life engage what Kenneth Burke called “literature as equipment for living,” including place names, nicknames, speech play, mock instruments of writing, the practice of *écriture féminine*, testimonies, occupational performance traditions, and the genres associated with stages of the human life cycle and ameliorating displacements occasioned by social and natural catastrophes. The cultural poetics of Bakhtin will illuminate our inquiry into how genres of speech play and verbal art, staged from multiple perspectives and social positions, continue to shape and reflect on the experience of becoming American. We may conclude that, like objects in rear view mirrors, folklore is much closer than it appears. Work for the course will include readings, active participation in class discussions, short reflective prose pieces related to collecting exercises based on the readings, and a research paper.

Required texts (available at Penn Book Center, 24th and Sansom, except where indicated)

Roger Abrahams. 1985. *African American Folktales: Stories from Black Traditions in the New World*. New York: Pantheon.

Richard Bauman. 1992. *Folklore, Cultural Performances, and Popular Entertainments*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Craig Castleman. 1982. *Getting Up: Subway Graffiti in New York*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Mary Hufford, Marjorie Hunt, and Steven J. Zeitlin. 1987. *The Grand Generation: Memory, Mastery, Legacy*. Seattle: Washington University Press. (out of print: available from instructor)

William Bernard McCarthy. 1994. *Jack in Two Worlds: Contemporary North American Tales and Their Tellers*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.

Kathryn Morgan, 1981. *Children of Strangers: The Stories of a Black Family*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Joel Sherzer. 2002. *Speech Play and Verbal Art*. Austin: University of Texas Press.

All other required readings, recordings, video clips, and links to films will be found on the course blackboard site. Supplementary resources, including films and reference works, will be placed on reserve in Van Pelt Library’s Rosengarten Reading Room.

Work for the Course

1) Class participation. Please come to each class prepared to discuss the readings and to share your developing collections along with your research and reflections. If you must miss a class, please let me know in advance. Unexcused absences will be reflected in your final grade.

2) Timely completion of two written assignments. The first assignment is incremental, and consists of developing a collection of folk literature that you encounter in everyday life. The first assignment is due on January 29. While there is no limit to the number of items you might collect, I will require that one is fully annotated according to guidelines posted on the assignment page of the course blackboard site. Your collection will include a variety of genres from a variety of sources. Working on this collection will involve integrating the course readings into your observations, and will complicate and enrich our class discussions.

The second assignment will be an in-depth analysis of and reflection on a performance of folk literature, not to exceed 25 pages including footnotes and references. Guidelines for this will be posted on the assignments page of the blackboard site as well. During the week of March 3 I will schedule individual appointments during class time in order to discuss your topic with you. A detailed proposal will be due on March 27, and the final paper is due on May 10.

I will post guidelines for both assignments and for the proposal, along with framing questions and other prompts, to the blackboard site.

Schedule of Readings and Topics

I: Introduction

Jan. 17 – What is American Folk Literature?

Jan. 22 – The Search for American Tradition

Read: Bronner, pp. 3-76

View: Selected video clips from “Masters of Traditional Arts”

Canonical Genres

Jan. 24 – The Ballad

Read: Renwick, “Ballad,” in Brunvand, *Encyclopedia*, pp. 57-61

Stewart, “Scandals of the Ballad,” *Crimes of Writing*, pp. 102-31

View: Folkstreams video of Almeida Riddle: <http://www.folkstreams.net/film,131>

Jan. 29 – The Folktale

Read: Ben-Amos, “Folktale,” in Bauman, pp. 101-18.

Stewart, “Notes on Distressed Genres,” *Crimes of Writing*, pp. 66-101

View: Folkstreams *Appalachian Journey*: <http://www.folkstreams.net/film,128>

Bring: written inventory of the times, spaces, and technologies of tales and tale telling in your experience.

Literature as “Equipment for Living”

Jan. 31 – Proverbs and Riddles

Read: Hasan-Rokem, “Proverbs,” in Bauman, pp. 128-133

Green, “Riddles,” in Bauman, pp. 134-138

Abrahams, "Figures of Speech," *Everyday Life*, pp. 1-38

Feb. 5 – Speech Play and Conversational Tropes

Read: Abrahams, "Forms in Opposition," "Genres," *Everyday Life*, pp. 39-69

Dorst, "Neck Riddles and the Dialogue of Genres,"

Skim: Sherzer, *Speech Play and Verbal Art*, for genres and examples of speech play to inform your collecting

Bring: collected and annotated proverb, riddle, or other conversational genre.

Placemaking

Feb 7 – Place Names

Read: Basso, "Apache Moral Narratives," pp. 19-55

Basso, "Wisdom Sits in Places," pp. 53-90

Bring: a story about the origin of a place name familiar to you.

Feb 12 – Legends

Read: Tangherlini, "Legend," in Brunvand *Encyclopedia*, pp. 437-39

Brunvand, "Urban Legends," in MacDonald, *TST*, pp. 572-76

Stewart, "The Epistemology of the Horror Story," *JAF*, pp. 33-50

Crisis and Transition

Feb. 14 – Story Cycles and the Life Cycle

Read: Grider, "Children's Ghost Stories," *TST*, pp. 539-43

Tucker, "Preadolescent Girls' Storytelling," *TST*, pp. 559-62

Ellis, "Legend Trip," in Brunvand *Encyclopedia*, pp. 439-40

Bring: an urban legend or ghost story, providing information requested in the guidelines posted to the blackboard.

Feb. 19 – Elders Regenerating Cosmos

Read: Hufford, Hunt, and Zeitlin, "The Grand Generation" (all)

Degh, "Two Old-World Narrators in an Urban Setting," *Kontakte und Grenzen*

View: "The Grand Generation" <http://www.folkstreams.net/film,111>

Bring: written down, a story learned from an elderly person and, if possible, an associated artifact.

Tricksters and their Narratives

Feb. 21 – Jack Tales

Read: Lindahl, "Jacks: The Name, the Tales, The American Traditions," in

McCarthy, *Jack in Two Worlds*, pp. xii-xxxiv

Ellis, "The Gentry-Long Tradition and Roots of Revivalism," in McCarthy, *Jack in Two Worlds*, pp. 93-122

Nicolaisen, "The Teller and the Tale: Storytelling on Beech Mountain," in McCarthy, *Jack in Two Worlds*, pp. 123-149

View: DVD on reserve: Soldier Jack

Feb. 26 -- Storytellers as Tricksters: The Unity of Tales and Their Tellings
Read: Hufford, "The Chaseworld Anchored in Stories," in *Chaseworld*, pp. 145-173
Lankford, "Trickster," in Brunvand, *Encyclopedia of American Folklore*

Feb. 28 – African American Tricksters
Read: Abrahams, "Getting Around Old Master (Most of the Time)" and other selections from *African American Folktales*
Pierson, "Puttin' Down Ole Massa: African Satire in the New World," in Crowley, *African Folklore in the New World*.
Bring: examples of jokes or forms of speech play that victimize the audience.

Mar. 4: Open notebook test: Guidelines to be posted

March 6 and 7: Individual conferences on proposals for final papers

March 9-16 Spring Break

Negotiating Membership in an American Social Body

Mar 18: Working on the Social Body through Folklore: A Closer Look
Read: Douglas, "The Two Bodies," in *Natural Symbols*, pp. 72-91
Cantwell, "Tambo and Bones: Blackface Minstrelsy, the Opry, and Bill Monroe," in *Bluegrass Breakdown*, pp. 249-74
View: Folkstream "Medicine Show."

Mar 20: Family Folklore and the issue of race
Read: Morgan, *Children of Strangers*
Bring: written family story with description of who tells it, to whom, and what prompts the telling?

Mar. 25: Mar. 20: Occupational Literatures
Read: Santino, "Miles of Smiles, Years of Struggle: The Negotiation of Black Occupational Identity Through Personal Experience Narrative." *Journal of American Folklore* 96: 393-412.
Lund, "Cowboy Poetry and Other Occupational Folk Poetry," in Read MacDonald, *TST*, 398-402
View: "Cowboy Poets" <http://www.folkstreams.net/film,39>

Mar. 27: No class. Detailed prospecti for final papers due.

The Return of the Social Body: Critical Inscriptions

Apr 1: Voice, Gender, and *Ecriture Feminine*
Read: Theophano, "A Life's Work: Women Writing from the Kitchen," in *Fields of Folklore*, ed. Roger D. Abrahams, pp. 287-299.
Degh, "The Nature of Women's Stories," in *Traditional Storytelling Today*, ed. Margaret Read MacDonald, pp. 580-586
Przybyz, "Quilts and Womens' Bodies: Dis-Eased and Desiring," in

Bodylore, ed. Katharine Young, pp. 165-184.
View: Folkstream "Quilts in Womens' Lives." <http://www.folkstreams.net/film,37>

Apr. 3: Corporate Bodies and Technologies of Writing

Read: Roemer, "Photocopy Lore and the Naturalization of the Corporate Body,"

Journal of American Folklore 107: 121-138.

Dorst, "Tags and Burners, Cycles and Networks: Folklore in the Telectronic Age." *Journal of Folklore Research* 27: 179-190

Sampler of Xerox Lore from Penn Folklore Archive

Bring: metaphors of the body from the internet that you think may be critical of an etherealized social body and its regulation

Exaggeration and Parody: The Retrieval of Public Space

Apr. 8: Grafitti

Read: Castleman, selection from *Getting Up*

Stewart, "Grafitti as Crime and as Art"

View: Folkstream "Style Wars"

Apr. 10: Anti-Literature, Gray Literature, and Mock Instruments of Writing

Read: Hufford, Unmasking the Hidden Subject

Sampler of Mock Instruments of Writing

Bring: a mock instrument of writing known to you and be prepared to interpret.

Wrap up and Oral Presentations

Apr. 15: Oral Presentations begin and continue through Apr. 29. Be prepared to respond with suggestions that will improve the final written version of everyone's papers.

NO CLASS APRIL 25

Apr. 29: Turn in final collections, both electronically and as hard copy.

May 10: Turn in final paper, both electronically and as hard copy.

Eng 099 American Folk Literature
Spring 2008
Bibliography and Resources

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