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 feminine*, 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)**


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
   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

Feb. 5 – Speech Play and Conversational Tropes
   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
   Basso, “Wisdom Sits in Places,” pp. 53-90
Bring: a story about the origin of a place name familiar to you.

Feb 12 – Legends
   Brunvand, “Urban Legends,” in MacDonald, *TST*, pp. 572-76
Bring: an urban legend or ghost story, providing information requested in the guidelines posted to the blackboard.

Crisis and Transition
Feb. 14 – Story Cycles and the Life Cycle
Read: Gridner, “Children’s Ghost Stories,” *TST*, pp. 539-43
   Tucker, “Preadolescent Girls’ Storytelling,” *TST*, pp. 559-62
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*
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
View: DVD on reserve: Soldier Jack
Feb. 26 -- Storytellers as Tricksters: The Unity of Tales and Their Tellings
    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
April 3: Corporate Bodies and Technologies of Writing
   Read: Roemer, “Photocopy Lore and the Naturalization of the Corporate Body,”
   Dorst, “Tags and Burners, Cycles and Networks: Folklore in the Telecronic 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**

April 8: Graffiti
   Read: Castleman, selection from *Getting Up*
   Stewart, “Grafitti as Crime and as Art”
   View: Folkstream “Style Wars”

April 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**

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

**NO CLASS APRIL 25**

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

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


