

Every time he had a big problem, he knew just what to do; he called for Babe, his big blue ox. I answered with, "Let's see what else we can find."

Here I must acknowledge the invaluable assistance of an excellent librarian. We went through every source she had and ordered every book the budget would allow. Many weren't any better than Paul Bunyan and my eleventh-grade critics said so, but of some, such as the Mike Fink collection, they said, "Why don't they put stuff like this in the textbooks?"

I knew nothing of the "fakelore" controversy, and could give students no guidelines, but they sorted it out on their own. Some stories they shared with their friends (Hey, Mickey, who was that guy you read? Don said he was good). Others received the Paul Bunyan treatment. There was no in-between. The fancied-up versions were simply rejected.

My classes complained repeatedly that textbook editors always included stories which they, as adults, thought the students ought to like. I thought the complaints were justified, and was challenged to discover what folklore was really about. I intend to return to my "slow" high school classes, after studying at the Folklore Institute. Maybe next time around I can teach them as much as they taught me, and learn why blue oxen and slow learners are smarter than textbook editors.

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To: All Folklorists
From: Dick Reuss, Wayne State U.

Subject: Hair (mine, not the play)

It has been suggested to me by an eminent fashion designer and scratch-board artist of my acquaintance that I would do well to reshape my image in the guise of one or more distinguished hairy and/or bearded avant-garde leaders of 20th century American culture. This coincidentally harmonizes with my own internal predispositions of the moment, and so I am inviting my associates to tender me their advice as to what design, so to speak, my external facial appearance should follow in the future. (Plastic surgery being expensive and decapitation too final, I am limiting the discussion to considerations of sideburns, beard, hair, mustache, and other hairy vestiges which at present or in the future might possibly encountered on my head.) To wit: should I let my hair grow as long as Tiny Tim's (or Ellen Stekert's)? Should I grow a beard like Kirk Douglas (or Barre Toelken)? Should I crop my hair closely the way Yul Brynner (or Dan Crowley) does? Should I cultivate a walrus mustache like Henry Glassie? Friends and fellow inmates: here is your chance to play God and exercise those graffitti instincts. What is your pleasure? On this or another sheet of paper, sketch or paste in your conception of what a rising young folklorist, Dick Reuss, age 29, should look like from the neck up. Label your drawing and attach an explanation in 25 words or less. (Libel suits are hereby waived but shotgun blasts in the night are not.) Return to me at the Folklore Archive. Drawings and other suggestions will be graded on neatness, spelling, originality, and potential practical application. A qualified and impartial judge (the eminent fashion designer alluded to above) will make all final decisions. Laugh all you want, but send those cards and letters in, folks. Winner receives two dandruff seeds and a forged signature of Allen Ginsberg.