

It is facile to think public folklore undertheorized, intellectually deficient, or ethically dubious. Green's writing shatters the illusion that doing public folklore work precludes serious scholarship, providing a basis for research in the rich history of this work. This volume articulates theory within practice, challenging anyone who cares about the discipline to work intelligently and conscientiously in the field.

---

Narváez, Peter, ed. 2003. **Of Corpse: Death and Humor in Folklore and Popular Culture**. Logan, Utah: Utah State University Press.

Gabe McGuire  
Indiana University

The essays in this collection cover a wide range of different places and events, but are unified by a common focus on humorous responses to death. Peter Narváez writes in the introduction that death is fascinating precisely because, in a world of which human beings have increasing knowledge, death is the "universal enigma." While death itself may be a mystery, people's perceptions of it are cultural constructs, and ranging from religion to humor. Narváez writes that the essays in *Of Corpse* are intended to reveal the complexity and variability of humorous responses to death. The function of such humor can range from attempts to alleviate fear to a celebration of life in the face of death. The essays documenting this phenomenon are divided into four sections: disaster jokes; rites of passage, festivals, and popular culture.

Christine Davies begins the disaster joke section with her excellent essay "Jokes That Follow Mass-Mediated Disasters in a Global Electronic Age." She notes that the disaster joke is a relatively recent phenomenon, and asks why that might be. Her answer is that it is a response to the incongruity of television's interspersing a highly moralistic and sorrowful narrative of disaster with crass commercials. In her view, the disaster joke is a response to the attempted moral autocracy of television commentary, commentary that tells viewers how they should respond to the disaster. This section's second essay, Bill Ellis's "Making a Big Apple Crumble: The Role of Humor in Constructing A Global Response to Disaster" uses internet chat rooms

to trace the trajectory of disaster jokes following the World Trade Center attack. He shows how the fears and wishes articulated by disaster jokes have changed over time, as people have moved from attempts at coping to a desire for normalcy.

The collection's second section, rites of passage, begins with two essays that address humor at wakes: Ilana Harlow's "Creating Situations: Practical Jokes and the Revival of the Dead in Irish Tradition," and Peter Narváez's "Tricks and Fun: Subversive Pleasures at Newfoundland Wakes." Both treat such practical jokes as a pretended revival of the corpse as a rite of passage, intended to involve the dead in the social situation, and perhaps also to mock death's power. The section closes with Richard E. Meyer's "'Pardon Me for Not Standing': Modern American Graveyard Humor." Meyer examines the rising popularity of humorous epitaphs. He argues that this reflects a shift in emphasis from the collective to the individual, and is furthermore a commendable attempt at appreciating life in the face of death. Although a strong essay, I would have appreciated a more detailed analysis of the motivations behind the choice of a humorous gravestones; simply saying such people have "an entrenched streak of independence" seems insufficient.

The section on festivals begins with Jack Kugelmass's "Wishes Come True: Designing the Greenwich Village Halloween Parade." He examines the history of the parade in light of the increasing popularity of festivals, and concludes that it is intended to make a specific claim about the identity of Greenwich Village, while simultaneously opening a space for celebrations of the gay community. The other three essays in this section all examine the way in which skeletal images are used in festival to attack the powerful and celebrate the poor. Kristin Congdon's "Making Merry with Death: Iconic Humor in Mexico's Day of the Dead" and Stanley Brandes's "Calaveras: Literary Humor in Mexico's Day of the Dead" both look at this idea in the context of art associated with Mexico's Day of the Dead, while Donald J. Cosentino's essay "Exit Laughing: Death and Humor in Los Angeles and Port-Au-Prince" documents the playful Haitian death spirits known as Gedes.

Luanne K. Roth's "Dancing Skeletons: The Subversion of Death Among Deadheads" opens the section on popular culture. She traces the history of how the Grateful Dead's name, borrowed from a folktale,

has led to deadheads embracing the incongruous image of dancing, grinning, rose-draped skeletons. In her view, these images celebrate an ideal fundamental to deadhead identity—that of a social group unified by music, dance and communitarian values. “Traditional Narrative, Popular Aesthetics, Weekend at Bernie’s, and Vernacular Cinema,” by Mikel Koven analyzes how a traditional idea—manipulating a corpse—has been assimilated into modern media through the film *Weekend at Bernie’s*. In so doing, he demonstrates once again the universal nature of the death-humor pairing. This pairing can serve multiple functions—from placating the dead at a Newfoundland wake to criticizing the rich in a Mexican festival—but, as the essays here show, the rhetorical zip of such humor is derived from the fundamental incongruity of responding to death with laughter.

---

Paul Schullery and Lee Whittlesey. **Myth and History in the Creation of Yellowstone National Park**. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2003. Pp. xi + 160. \$22.00 cloth.

Curtis Ashton  
Indiana University

In a short ten chapters, this text takes us through an intricate and problematic creation myth that not only resulted in Yellowstone National Park, but our current approach to public lands conservation. The myth's storyline has been retold unproblematically for decades: in a campfire conversation by members of the Washburn-Doane Expedition at Madison Junction in September 1870, it was suggested that the entire Yellowstone Valley be set aside not for private development, but for public enjoyment. Schullery and Whittlesey follow up the work of former Yellowstone historian Aubrey Haines to show how this invented tale of altruism masked a darker one of greedy, gilded age capitalism bent on making a fortune from a steady stream of railroad tourists. For his painstaking work in uncovering this darker side of the park's history, Haines was carefully shunted out of his post as official historian at Yellowstone. This book's revisionism is partially to atone for those past wrongs. The authors include in their appendix a detailed bibliography of original accounts of the Washburn party, showing how