

# CHILDREN'S FOLKLORE REVIEW

VOLUME 32  
2010

PUBLISHED BY THE  
CHILDREN'S FOLKLORE SECTION OF THE AMERICAN FOLKLORE SOCIETY  
WITH SUPPORT FROM THE DEAN'S OFFICE OF HARPUR COLLEGE AT  
BINGHAMTON UNIVERSITY.

## CONTENTS

FROM THE EDITOR . . . . .	5
 HELP! I'M A FEMINIST BUT MY DAUGHTER IS A "PRINCESS FANATIC!": DISNEY'S TRANSFORMATION OF TWENTY-FIRST-CENTURY GIRLS <i>ALISA CLAPP-ITNYRE</i> . . . . .	 7
 "I SAW MRS. SARAY, SITTING ON A BOMBALERRY": RALPH ELLISON COLLECTS CHILDREN'S FOLKLORE <i>ROBERT BARON</i> . . . . .	 23
 BOISE IKASTOLA: BOISE BASQUE LANGUAGE IMMERSION PRESCHOOL <i>JACQUELINE THURSBY</i> . . . . .	 53
 <b>WINNER OF THE 2010 WILLIAM WELLS NEWELL PRIZE</b> "CHEEKY BEHAVIOR": THE MEANING AND FUNCTION OF 'FARTLORE' IN CHILDHOOD AND ADOLESCENCE <i>TREVOR J. BLANK</i> . . . . .	 61
 BOOK REVIEWS . . . . .	 87
 CHILDREN'S FOLKLORE SECTION: 2009 ANNUAL MEETING . . . . .	 93
 NOTES AND ANNOUNCEMENTS . . . . .	 95
 CONTRIBUTORS . . . . .	 97

## FROM THE EDITOR

ELIZABETH TUCKER

As this thirty-second volume of *Children's Folklore Review* goes to press, I feel grateful for the assistance of many people. The executive board of the American Folklore Society's Children's Folklore Section has helped me to affiliate our journal with Indiana University's ScholarWorks, which will soon put back issues of *Children's Folklore Review* online. It will be exciting for children's folklore researchers to have easy access to all of our past issues. In this era of rapid online research, it is crucial to have this kind of availability. I want to thank the whole executive board and especially C.W. Sullivan III, the journal's editor for thirty years, for helping to make this transition possible.

I also want to thank the other members of our staff who have worked on this volume: Kristiana M. Willsey, our assistant editor, Dana Hercbergs, our book review editor, and Jay Mechling, Priscilla Ord, and Simon J. Bronner, our editorial board. All of their contributions are greatly appreciated.

Special thanks go to the Dean's Office at Harpur College of Binghamton University, which has generously continued to support *Children's Folklore Review*. I am also very grateful to Kathy Buchta for her excellent work on layout/design and to Sheridan Press for its fine services.

This volume of *Children's Folklore Review* contains diverse and very interesting articles: one on Disney princesses, one on Ralph Ellison's collection of children's folklore, and one on a Basque pre-school in Utah. The article by Trevor J. Blank, the winner of this year's William Wells Newell prize, explores the fascinating realm of "fartlore."

Submissions and comments are always very welcome. Please feel free to contact me any time: ltucker@binghamton.edu. Dana Hercbergs, our book review editor, can be reached at the e-mail address hercbergs@yahoo.com. Thanks very much for your support of our journal.

## HELP! I'M A FEMINIST BUT MY DAUGHTER IS A "PRINCESS FANATIC"! DISNEY'S TRANSFORMATION OF TWENTY-FIRST-CENTURY GIRLS<sup>1</sup>

ALISA CLAPP-ITNYRE

As I began this paper, my then four-year-old daughter, Annetta, sat singing "Part of Your World" from Disney's *Little Mermaid*, playing with her Pocahontas Barbie doll, wearing her Cinderella dress, and planning to watch Disney's *Snow White* for the umpteenth time that night ... and I wondered where I had gone wrong. From dolls to lamps, bikes and bathing suits, underpants and toothpaste, the "Princess theme" is everywhere. Disney is cleverly pulling together all its heroines from earlier film classics — Snow White, Cinderella, and Sleeping Beauty — and adding the latest versions — Belle, Jasmine, Ariel, now even Tiana — to create a whole world populated by women whose only desire is to marry a prince. Kids now attend "princess" ice shows in costume and throw "princess" birthday parties — while parents (like me) pay for all the souvenirs and party supplies. Is there anything that goes beyond consumerism and sexist fairy tales in the Disney formula? I am not the only scholar-parent asking this question and, drawing upon the published record as well as my own very "intimate" knowledge of Disney's Princesses, I will consider in this paper the transformation of girls today into "sleeping beauties," "material girls," and potentially even "radical feminists" after having been "touched" by the Disney spell.

Ironically, the Princess phenomenon started with a Disney ice show which Disney Consumer Products president Andy Mooney attended in 2000 and there witnessed, as he says, "thousands of young girls dressed in costumes, Mulan and Snow White. It was like a rock concert for little princesses" (qtd. in Wloszczyna 2003)). He was inspired to combine the "Princess" heroines together into one brand, a "pretty controversial" move, he says, given how these princesses had only ever existed "in their own mythological worlds. [...] But young girls and mothers voted with their dollars. They believed in the unifying attributes of the Disney princesses" (qtd. in Wloszczyna 2003). Geared towards little girls, three to five, this line has created a financial explosion. Between 2002 and 2005 the Princess brand grew a whopping 300% (*Business Wire*), and has now overtaken both Disney's Winnie-the-Pooh and Mickey Mouse himself as their most popular brand (Arkoff 2009). Since its inception, Disney Princess merchandise has garnered \$3.4 billion in profits (Arkoff 2009). Today it is the largest "global girls franchise" (*Business Wire*) with markets in ninety countries (Arkoff 2009), including Russia, China, and India (Millard 2006). Three of the ten top-selling videos around the world are Princess films (*Beauty and the Beast*, *Aladdin*, and *Pocahontas*; Artz 2004, 117); five of the top six Disney videos ever released have been Princess films (Arkoff 2009).<sup>2</sup> *Raves* entertainment editor for *Sweet Sixteen* magazine, Vicki Arkoff, "Moms embrace it because, in a time when little girls are maturing at a much faster pace, Disney Princess lets little girls remain children for a little longer time. Disney aims to empower girls with the wholesome stories about virtues of integrity, honor, discovery, friendship, and love" (2009).

Scholarly opinion, on the other hand, has been more wary of the intense consumerism and social implications of Disney tales. The original “princess” tales (*Snow White*, *Cinderella*, and *Sleeping Beauty*) have especially come under intense scrutiny. From Frances Clarke Sayers in 1965, Kay Stone in 1975, Jill May in 1981, to Jack Zipes in 1995, all have regretted Disney’s distortions of folk literature.<sup>3</sup> As Jack Zipes has said, “There is something sad in the manner in which Disney ‘violated’ the literary genre of the fairy tale and packaged his versions in his name through the merchandising of books, toys, clothing, and records” (1995, 40). Kay Stone, in her classic “Things Walt Disney Never Told Us,” further pointed out the feminist implications: “The only tests of most [Disney] heroines require nothing beyond what they are born with: a beautiful face, tiny feet, or a pleasing temperament. [...] [Yet] to judge from the 186 heroines found in five major Angle-American folktale collections, oral narrators do not confine themselves to passive princesses” (1975, 45).

I will divide my own examination into three sections, examining first the “Princess” movies under Walt Disney’s own direction (*Snow White*, *Cinderella*, *Sleeping Beauty*); the second “golden age” of Disney in the 1990s under Eisner and “Team Disney” which began with *The Little Mermaid* (1989) (I will not include *Aladdin* in this discussion since it is mainly Aladdin’s story, not Jasmine’s); and then the phase we are experiencing right now in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, when Disney is regurgitating its “masterpieces” through products and re-releases, while apparently also trying to inaugurate another decade of Princess films with *The Princess and the Frog* (2009) and *Tangled* (anticipated late 2010). Within each era, I will analyze 1) the narratives, 2) the images, and 3) the songs that indoctrinate and influence successive generations. I do believe, along with many scholars, that Disney’s attempts in the 1990s to become more politically correct were fairly successful and can become a positive model for our young girls. The other eras, the 1930s through 50s, due to patriarchal bias, and now our own, due to crass consumerism, have been less golden.

### **“Someday My Prince Will Come”: Princesses of the ‘Walt Era’**

Perhaps Disney’s princess theme seems so engrained within the imagination and corporation of Disney because its first full-length feature *was* a princess film: *Snow White* (1937). Marie Claire Simonelli feels that “Disney breathed new life into a genre that had long been forgotten” with his films *Snow White* and *Cinderella* (1999, 69). From *Snow White*, to *Cinderella*, to *Sleeping Beauty*, early “Princesses” were undeniably sweet, patient, and obedient girls whose only emotions ranged from extreme happiness to utter dejection.<sup>4</sup> It is likely due to these fairly dull heroines that the narratives containing them so quickly move to other characters and stories: it is indeed a breath of fresh air when the dwarves and talking mice arrive on the scene. Artz even argues that *Sleeping Beauty* failed at the box office because it was the only Disney film “without an animal sidekick” (2004, 121). The plots involving the heroines are simplistic and standard fairy-tale narrative, with heroines portrayed as “helpless, passive victims who need protection” (Henke, Umble, and Smith 1996, 234); they receive this protection from princes, fairies,



Figure 1. Annetta as Belle, age three.  
Photograph by Alisa Clapp-Itnyre.

even male mice. As M. Thomas Inge sums up, "[Snow White] accurately reflected the general public attitude toward the place of women in society [of the 1930s] and continued a long tradition in Western culture of portraying women as passive vessels of innocence and virtue, although [he adds] Disney's Snow White shows a good deal more spunk than most fairy tale princesses" (2004, 141).<sup>5</sup>

In terms of image, early Princesses were, obviously, stereotypically slender, beautiful, and elegant, modeled after current stars and icons of the time. Snow White "was envisioned as a 'Janet Gaynor' type" (Inge 141); "Under the peasant costume," writes Rebecca Anne C. DoRozario, "Snow White is a 1920s/'30s starlet with a flapper's haircut, rosebud mouth, and high-pitched warble" (2004, 38), yet drawn to be about fourteen. Cinderella may look older, but, like Snow White, even

she looks amazingly elegant even under the most impoverished of circumstances.<sup>6</sup> Finally there is Sleeping Beauty who, as DoRozario points out, is "a prototype Baby Boomer," walking about barefoot, crushed when she misses her date with a boy. Like her Barbie doll image, which came out in 1959, too, she represents "the idealized American teen" of the 1960s (2004, 38). These are the images still being pushed and packaged as seen on the re-released VHS and DVD covers.

My special interest is in the songs that accompany these films, which carry ideological meaning more strongly than any dialogue because viewers still sing the songs well after they have stopped watching the films. Who does not know the song "Someday My Prince will Come" with or without watching *Snow White*, after all? My four-year-old daughter did and pointed out an error in one of scholarly articles I was reading to her which erroneously credited Sleeping Beauty with the song! Little girls are bombarded with "happily-ever-messages" even from the first moments of *Snow White*, which, in fact, opens with six songs in just the first thirty minutes. As Simonelli writes, "songs carried the central themes of the stories, conveyed the personality of the characters who sang them, and finally helped unify the whole works through musical themes" (1999, 65). The words exude romantic ideals now parodied and problematic by today's standards: "Someday my prince will come ... And away to his castle we'll go. To be happy forever, I know ... And the birds will sing and wedding bells will ring. Someday when dreams come true." As journalist Jami Bernard described in 1993, at the film's re-release, the song is "eminently hummable, ennobling the virtues of passivity and pre-



Figure 2. Annetta as Snow White, age three, at a Disney ice show with “princess” friends: Andrea Pegg, Madelyn Brunton, and Natalie Pegg. Photograph by Alisa Clapp-Itnyre.

determined happy endings. [...] That song sets up little girls for a lifetime of feverish romantic expectations that don’t easily mix with the jungle out there that is the modern dating scene” (qtd. in Inge 2004, 141). These songs suggest more potent influence on little girls since it is their tunes and words which little girls remember long after viewing the film itself.

*Cinderella* is especially known for its songs and had Academy Award nominations for Best Musical Score and Best Song (Bibbidi-Bobbidy-Boo; O’Brien 168).<sup>7</sup> “A Dream is a Wish Your Heart Makes” could be a complex statement about abject poverty and how to face it: “In dreams you will lose your heartaches. Whatever you wish for, you keep. Have faith in your dreams and someday, your rainbow will come smiling through. No matter how your heart is grieving, If you keep on believing The dream that you wish will come true.” *Cinderella* uses aesthetics to escape the reality of her life though, like Snow White, *Cinderella* lacks any motivation to change her and

others’ poor circumstances: note that the only time she shows any kind of anger is in this song—to the clock for waking her up: “O that clock! Killjoy! I hear you! Come on, get up, you say. Time to start another day. Even he orders me around. Well, there’s one thing: they can’t stop me from dreaming.” It is interesting that this appears to be the only time *Cinderella* gets angry, yet she reverts to dreaming as escape. The male-identified clock further is significant; *Cinderella* is living under patriarchal rule. As Naomi Wood writes, “*Cinderella*’s challenge over the course of the movie is to hold on to her dreams ... [but she learns that] all wishes have to be earned by obedience to the dream-fulfilling authorities who reward good behavior and innocent faith. [...] Her acceptance and promotion of patriarchal values [...] provide the justification for the fulfillment of her dream” (1996, 37-8). Her relationship with the Prince is given very little film space, limited to just the Doris-Day-like ballad “So this is Love,” a duet in which, significantly, the Prince only echoes *Cinderella* throughout. This, and a similar love duet from *Sleeping Beauty* based on the Tchaikovsky ballet score (“I know you! I walked with you once upon a dream”) are significant not only in that men share the songs with the women (a trend dropped in 1990s films) but also in reinforcing the concept of “dreaming,” taking young women’s minds away from realistic problems and relationships, and letting “fate” work its magic.



### **"I Want So Much More Than They've Got Planned": Princesses by 'Team Disney'**

After Walt Disney's death in 1966, the Walt Disney Company, led by family members who often lacked business savvy, began to flounder (O'Brien 1996, 168). Churning out simplistic, "cutesy" films like *The Fox and the Hound* (1981), Disney began to lose money and viewers. By 1984, Disney stockholders brought in new leaders from other studios, with Michael Eisner from Paramount as chairman of the board (O'Brien 1996, 169). Termed "Team Disney," this committee led by Eisner, determined to return to Disney's very successful fairy-tale adaptations of earlier years.<sup>8</sup> A number of recent critics are willing to praise "Team Disney's" attempts to rectify gender and cultural biases of past films: "[L]ater films shift from simple stories of passive, young virgins in conflict with evil, mature women to more complex narratives about rebellion, exploration, and danger" according to Henke, Umble, and Smith (1996, 234). Two sociological studies of Disney films (Hoerrner; Towbin et al.) both find that, though not completely free of gender stereotyping, recent films show stronger women "with problem-solving abilities and actions on a more equal footing with their male peers" (Hoerrner 1996, 225).

Not that *The Little Mermaid* (1989) was any immediate break-through; Regina Bendix, in "Seashell Bra and Happy End," argues that "*The Little Mermaid* follows the same formula Disney created with his *Snow White* adaptation" (1993, 289). Admittedly, Ariel is now spunky and feisty but channels this towards obtaining a man, at great cost: as Henke, Umble, and Smith write, "Little wonder [...] that alarms sound for feminists concerned with the psychological development of girls and women's sense of self when Ariel literally sacrifices her voice" (1996, 237). Disney makes this condition more sexist than in Anderson; note Ursula's quips such as "It's she who holds her tongue who gets a man." Leading a barrage of critics,<sup>9</sup> Roberta Trites, in her 1991 article, concluded, "The movie depicts women as either self-effacing or evil, incapable of creating their own responsible power without either depending on men or stealing power from them. Thus, Disney's interpretation of Anderson's story perpetuates sexist values by teaching those values to a new generation" (152).

Some critics found "Team Disney's" next production, *Beauty and the Beast* (1991), to be "the same old story, a romance plot that robs female characters of self-determination and individuality," to quote June Cummins (1995, 22). Others, myself included, found that the film really did break new ground in greatly submerging the fairy-tale-romance ending almost to an afterthought. Additionally, the agency accorded to Belle is ground-breaking: she "exercises more power on her own behalf than previous Disney heroines" (Henke, Umble, and Smith 1996, 238) and claims literally twice as much screen time as any other character in the film (Thomas in Henke, Umble and Smith 1996, 238). Belle resists societal pressures by engaging in reading, dreaming beyond "provincial" norms, rejecting the town suitor, and even defying the Beast himself. As Henke, Umble, and Smith explain, "No victim, Belle sets the terms for the bargains she makes. In this sense, she exercises more power on her own behalf than previous Disney heroines. [...] She preserves her own options [...] [And] by freeing her father from the Beast's



prison, becoming a prisoner herself, and saving the Beast from the wolves, [s] he holds *their* futures in her hands" (1996, 239). In stark contrast to those lightly-glossed-over relationships of the early Princess films, "It offers to viewers a model for intimacy which presumes that both partners must seek wholeness of Self before either can find wholeness in relationship," according to Susan Z. Swan (350), with Belle choosing a man "who wants the same things [books and intellect], [thus] symbolically [...] marrying an aspect of herself" (Ross 2004, 63).

I am pleased to say that my daughter Annetta's first Princess favorites were, in fact, Belle and Pocahontas. Acknowledging that there has been a large outcry

especially from Native Americans and cultural critics against *Pocahontas* (1995),<sup>10</sup> from a strictly feminist perspective, I still do appreciate "Team Disney" portraying a minority heroine who shows even greater personal risk in "saving her man" than even Ariel or Belle and who, in other ways, goes against the grain. Forget that we know from the historical record that Pocahontas in fact married someone else and migrated to England, or that race relations could not be mitigated by simply one strong person. It is enough, I think, that the last image we see on the screen is of a courageous woman standing alone without a husband but with a mighty purpose to undertake. As Henke, Umble, and Smith write, "Our reading of Pocahontas implies that she is clearly the most elaborate and complex character in this group of heroines. [...] [She is] an adventurous female who [...] chooses a destiny other than that of heterosexual romantic fulfillment" (1996, 240-1).

"Team Disney"'s last "princess" movie, *Mulan* (1998), is possibly their



Figure 3. Annetta as Pocahontas, age two, trick-or-treating on Halloween. Photograph by Alisa Clapp-Itnyre.

best. Again I admit that cultural critics have much maligned the film in its huge deviations from traditional renderings of the Mulan legend, using clichéd images of the East, and using "streetwise black lingo" through the character of Eddy Murphy's Mushu character (Ma 2003, 151).<sup>11</sup> Nevertheless, there are important strides here in showing a strong, independent, brave woman whose story, for the most part, does not even rely on a romance plot but is one about martial bravery and quick-thinking as Mulan concocts strategies for defeating the Huns and rescuing the Emperor. In the first instance, she cleverly aims her gun not at one soldier but at a snow-covered to create an avalanche that subdues the entire Hun

army. She then creates a plan to save the Emperor when the Huns kidnap him and, knowing her resourcefulness by now, the men immediately follow *her*.

Many of the strides made in narrative strategy are backed by more politically acceptable physical images. Belle and Mulan, for instance, reveal fewer curves, and flaunt “untidy” hair which shows rebellion of society’s codes of neat femininity. In fact, Mulan is androgynous for most of the movie. Of course, the same could not be said for Ariel and Pocahontas. Ariel is barely clothed with small shells to cover her breasts while Pocahontas is leggy with hardly any waist, an off-the-shoulder look to show off her voluptuous breasts. DoRozario refers to their athleticism, “enact[ing] a shift from the ‘princesses’ of ballet to the ‘heroes’ of sport” (2004, 47) and describes them as moving with “the grace of sportswomen. Ariel performs underwater feats and rescues Eric from drowning in a storm. [...] Pocahontas dives off waterfalls, sings a solo while shooting the rapids and duets while running cross-country” (46-7). However, as Bean notes, they are “male-defined fantasies of female biological perfection. Drawn according to the same impossible dimensions as the Barbie doll — or any number of surgically altered Hollywood actresses — Disney’s heroines all feature tiny waists, large breasts, curvy hips, and sensuous hair” (2003, 55). Queries Jacquelyn Kilpatrick, “Would [Pocahontas], like Barbie, fall over if really given those dimensions?” The simple image of her body threatens to undermine any powerful feminist or ecological message she might promote, Kilpatrick writing, “She does sing to John about living naturally in tune with the Earth [...] but does she have to do it in an off-the-shoulder miniskirt?” (1995, 36-7)

But the 1990s Disney films would still probably have failed had they not been enhanced by incredibly promoted soundtracks. *The Little Mermaid* won an Oscar for “Under the Sea”<sup>12</sup> while Celine Dion and Peabo Bryson’s pop version of “Tale as Old as Time” blared over all radio stations in 1991-2. The “Princess” songs from these films now appear in various sing-along and princess collection CD’s, dispersing their ideologies to more and more generations of kids. I find “Kiss the Girl” masking some dangerous sentiments (“You know she wants it”) with our increased attention to date rape in recent decades. But many of the others, including Ariel’s song, “Part of Your World,” Belle’s Song, Pocahontas’ “Just Around the River Bend,” and “Mulan’s “Reflection,” are all about a young woman’s sense of confinement under patriarchal laws; to quote Ariel, “Bright young women, sick of swimmin’, ready to stand.” Most speak about defying society and choosing their own course of action, as Belle sings: “I want adventure in the great, wide somewhere, I want it more than I can say ... I want so much more than they’ve got planned.” “Mulan’s “Reflection,” though least known, probably best sums up this powerful trend in revealing women’s anger and rebellion in a patriarchal society:

Now I see, that if I were truly to be myself, I would break my family’s heart.  
... Somehow I cannot hide, Who I am, though I’ve tried.  
When will my reflection show who I am inside?

If there is a problem in these songs, it is the self-deprecating way that each woman begins her song, Ariel asking “Maybe there is something wrong with me,” for example. Pocahontas, in “Colors of the Wind” is made to blindly state, “You think I’m an ignorant savage, And you’ve been so many place, I guess it must be so” while even Mulan begins her reflection by admitting, “Look at me, I will never pass for a perfect bride or a perfect daughter.” Too, as I have just delineated, most of the songs’ feminist stances run counter to the ultimate romance plots; despite defying society’s marriage expectations, all women end up married or sought after by the end.<sup>13</sup> I would argue that, taken independent of their opening recitatives and especially the ultimate outcomes in the films, though, these songs, sung on their own, are fairly liberating “hymns to her.”

**“Look at This Stuff, Isn’t It Neat?”  
21st Century Manifestations of the  
Disney Princesses**

I end, then, with contemporary manifestations of the Disney Princesses. Indeed, the re-releases and sequels of these now classic films keep their images alive on the screen for each new generation. The Disney Company tries to redeem the historical record by having Pocahontas marry John Rolfe in England in *Pocahontas II: Journey to a New World* (1998); Ariel, ironically, succumbs to overly-protective motherhood herself in *Little Mermaid II: Return to the Sea* (2000) while we learn of her own mother’s tragic adventure in *The Little Mermaid: Ariel’s Beginning* (2008); and Mulan and her romantic interest Li Shang, in un-Asian fashion, try to prevent three arranged marriages in *Mulan II* (2004).

In the midst of my revision of this article, Disney unveiled their first Princess movie in eighteen years, *The Princess and the Frog* (December 2009). Clearly, Disney was attempting to address earlier “sins:” Tiana is the first African-American princess and her dream is to own her own restaurant, not find a “prince;” in fact, her rich, white friend, Lotty, whose only aspiration is to find a prince becomes easy fodder in the “evil plot.” In the end, it is Tiana who gets the prince, and her dream becomes his, so she achieves that twentieth-first-century, feminist goal of having a man and a successful career, too. But Tiana’s desire to own her own restaurant is, in large part, an extension of her dead *father’s* dream, and much of the movie serves to point out her almost foolish one-tracked obsession with it,



Figure 4. Annetta as Mulan, age six,  
and cousin Becca as Ariel, age five.  
Photograph by Alisa Clapp-Itnyre.

to the exclusion of “finding love.” Further, Disney playfully inverts the princess-and-the-frog motif so that both Tiana and Prince Naveen spend most of their on-screen time as amphibians; this thus limits the amount of time Disney can devote to exploring human gender roles. Its release has not, ultimately, seemed to have made a huge impact. It made only \$263 million worldwide at the box-office and \$67 million on DVD sales (by comparison, the next big children’s film, *Toy Story 3* [June 2010] grossed \$984 million world-wide; the-numbers.com). Though nominated for Best Animated Feature Film of 2010 at the Academy Awards, it lost to Pixar’s *Up*; ticket sales, too, confirmed popular preference for *Up* (#4 in ticket sales for 2009) than *Princess and the Frog* (which was 38<sup>th</sup>). Even Disney seems to have pulled back in promoting the film: their official *Princess Magazine* highlighted Tiana in their October 2009 magazine in anticipation of the film, but subsequent issues have simply shown her as part of the princess line-up at the back, with no feature stories. Internet articles and blogs show viewers divided on Disney’s achievement, commending Tiana’s minority status while complaining that she follows the stereotype of a poor black in the segregated South, that she marries a “whiter” Prince, and that the use of voodoo is overwhelming and frightening. Maybe their next Princess movie, *Tangled*, set to be released in November 2010, with a feisty — albeit still blonde and sexy — Rapunzel, will bring back a flamboyant 1990s heroine.

It may be no surprise, then, that Disney has continued to promote their other Princesses. For our twenty-first century computer-savvy little girls, Disney has its own Princess website at <http://disney.go.com/princess> where “happily ever after happens every day.” Ironically, much of the website is devoted to more consumerism: purchasing Princess products and videos, viewing Disney theme parks, etc. When girls are asked to participate, it is to paint, hear a story, decorate a room, or to help a Princess dress. Girls love this: the Princesses call the girls their “friends,” play their favorite songs in the background, and “you get to pick out their clothes and they’re all so pretty,” my eight-year-old tells me. Yet I respond that it is too bad she wasn’t asked to greet the guests, help rule the kingdom, or do other more meaningful work! As Meghan Sweeney recently pointed out, the covert messages are still conservative: Princesses look coy, are overly appreciative and sweet, while the little girls’ own agency — simply dressing and decorating — is severely limited.<sup>14</sup>

Book publishers are also eager to share the Princess market. Random House uses Princesses in their Step Into Reading series. Redan Publishing, using Disney artwork by permission, publishes a *Disney Princess Magazine* targeting girls 3-8 years old with crafts and stories. A plethora of Golden and other such books repeat the film’s versions of these fairy tales. Scholastic Books publishes a line of books through their Princess Book Club: The Disney Princess Collection. These books are aesthetically weak, using Disney Princesses to tote pedantic stories about being brave, paying attention, taking turns, and telling the truth. What is potentially useful about the books is that they enlarge the meaning of “princess” beyond those who are royal or rich, and clearly define it as a character trait — something any brave or clever girl could emulate — by giving a problem and then asking, “What would a princess do?” The books further disavow the princesses’

royal and/or romantic status by setting books before they have married their prince, or quickly dismissing their princely-husband. In the first instance, we often find Cinderella back dealing with problems with her stepsisters and see Mulan back as a man among the troops. In the second instance, Princess Snow White will leave her prince to visit the dwarves, and when her prince is off visiting another kingdom, Princess Cinderella cavorts around the castle with the mice, often dressed very much like the servant Cinderella. In several Pocahontas books, Pocahontas actually plays with Capt. Radcliffe's dog Percy, reminding readers that the context is post-Smith but not once mentioning him while Pocahontas carries on her daily routine with fellow villagers. This is fascinating to me because it suggests that, despite the “hype” over the Princess status — as romantic and royal — it is much more interesting to tell stories of their lives as single, poor women. It is not a bad reminder to make to girls.

And girls everywhere need to be reminded of this to offset the bombardment of images on everything from cereal boxes to pajamas. Combining the princesses erases any individuality among them: Belle is simply not Snow White if you have seen the movies. The most common combination of Princesses is the Caucasian Cinderella, Belle, and Sleeping Beauty, as we see on towels, clothes, and many other products. Pocahontas, Mulan, even Tiana are still shown much less often, defeating the cultural strides the films had made. Too, the Princesses are now usually shown in very regal and sexual ways, again disappointing given the statements of the actual movies: the book-worm Belle now has a cleavage, the modest Aurora looks alluring, and Jasmine often seems to be starting a strip-tease.<sup>15</sup>

All of these points are manifested visibly at Walt Disney World itself where my daughter (in 2008, age six) and her four-year-old cousin stood in half-hour lines to be photographed with the *royal* Belle, Aurora, and Cinderella in the Magic Kingdom. Mulan, on the other hand, was showcased only briefly, and without wait, at the China exhibit in EPCOT — as if she were an exotic cultural icon like the Great Wall. Pocahontas is easy to miss in Animal Kingdom, appearing in her own small nature show completely dwarfed by the Lion King show next door ... and was never available to be photographed with little girls. Both facts suggest Pocahontas as an “animal-other”, housed far from humans, used only to teach ecology lessons.<sup>16</sup>

And what songs are ringing in little girls' ears these days? When not singing along to soundtracks and sing-along CDs — which encourage rote memory of potentially problematic lyrics just discussed — little girls may be singing adulterated versions of classic and folk songs; my daughter owns a Princess Fairy Tale Song book in which Irving Berlin's classic “In my Easter Bonnet” is now perverted to “Smile and show your dimples”! When Disney tries to be original, with their much heralded 2004 release of a newly written song, the “princess anthem,” ‘If You Can Dream,’ on Walt Disney Record's *The Ultimate Song Collection*, performed by many of the original soloists of Princess films (Judy Kuhn, Jodi Benson, Paige O'Hara, and Lea Salonga, etc.), a ridiculous hodge-podge of clichés from all the princess songs are put together into unrealistic, romantic sentiments:



There is a world where hope and dreams can last for all time  
 A wondrous place to go you'll know it when your heart finds ...  
 Hearing our song as old as rhyme, Hold my hand, we're gonna' fly  
 What a magic ride, and just a kiss away ...

*[Refrain]*

If you can dream, the wish we're making on a star is coming true  
 The colors of the wind will lead my heart right back to you  
 'Cause if you can dream, reflections in a diamond sky come shinin' on  
 through  
 Romance will always be so new and love will save the day.

I am especially disturbed to see the "colors of the wind" phrase torn from its environmental theme and appropriated into the romantic message. If this is as good as Disney can now do, I am turning off my CD player.

### Conclusion

And so we come to some conclusions as I ponder the eminent fate of my eight-year-old daughter, now in her sixth year of "Princess fan-dom." Bendix reminds us that "How children ultimately process their encounters with [Disney] [...] remains a largely unexplored domain. [...] It remains to be hoped that children around the world will be resilient enough to challenge the commodified fantasies that are coming their way" (1993, 290). Hastings warns that "Such moral simplification [of good/bad people; of all desires fulfilled] increases the likelihood that these children will become adults who find the causes of their own unhappiness in personalized, 'evil' antagonists — a sure formula for continued conflict" (1993, 90). Yet O'Brien points out that children usually use the characters, not the plots, in their play so rebellious girls from the 1990s films still offer positive role models (1996, 178). In 2004, Alexander M. Bruce conducted a study of second- and third-graders about the Disney princesses, concluding that "the girls did tend toward one general reaction: they want the life of the princess — just not necessarily the prince himself" (2005-2006, 7).<sup>17</sup> Though reassured that girls may be shaking off some of Disney's romantic notions and are becoming more independent (paralleled, in fact, by the phenomenon found in Scholastic's book-series where the men actually disappear), I note the troubling extension of this: that to be a princess yet means "to have all the beautiful possessions they could hope for" with great significance placed on physical beauty (Bruce 2005-2006, 15). In my limited experience, I do find that Annetta has always been more fascinated by the characters themselves, not the storylines or romantic endings. She and her friends love waltzing into a room in full princess regalia or stealing around the backyard as Pocahontas and friends, creating their own stories. We talk about the physical beauty, tiny waists, jewelry, and moments of complete acquiescence not being necessary or even appropriate to being a "princess." Indeed, Mia Adessa Towbin and others suggest using the films as a "springboard for family discussion. If parents watch the movies with their children and ask questions before, during,

and after, parents can begin to increase their children's media literacy" of how to read films (2003, 40).

I cannot ignore the look of rapture whenever my daughter dons her Sleeping Beauty dress or meets Ariel at Walt Disney World. So I am going to continue to let Annetta enjoy her Princess dolls and dresses, but I am also going to be a continual presence in the reading, listening, and viewing of anything "Princess." To enjoy, with an analytical eye; to share, while developing a critical world view: these can be the feminist attitudes I can pass on to my exuberant "Princess fanatic."

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my sister, Amy Clapp, and friends Kristen Brunton and Beverly Pegg for reading and discussing portions of this paper, and for allowing me to showcase their daughters in the imbedded images: Rebecca Salmonson, Madelyn Brunton, and Andrea and Natalie Pegg, respectively. I would also like to thank Dr. Elizabeth Tucker, Editor of *Children's Folklore Review*, for an incredibly enjoyable experience publishing this paper. Finally, I thank my daughter, Annetta Itnyre, and husband, Ron Itnyre, who have been with me every step of the way with this project!

## NOTES

1. This study originated as a conference paper given at the Annual Children's Literature Association Conference, Manhattan Beach, California, 10 June 2006.

2. I am using internet articles and EBSCOhost database news-articles: Vicki Arkoff, "How Disney Princess Works," *HowStuffWorks*. 2006-9. HowStuffWorks, Inc. May 31, 2009. <entertainment.howstuffworks.com>; Rosie Millard, "In five years, Disney Princess has bloomed into a hugely successful multinational brand," in *New Statesman* (January 9, 2006); "Disney Princess proves she's still the fairest of the land," "Business Wire" (New York, June 21, 2005); and Susan Wloszczyna, "Disney princesses wear merchandising crown," in *USA Today* (Sept. 17, 2003). See also Lee Artz, "The Righteousness of Self-Centered Royals: The World According to Disney Animation." *Critical Arts: A Journal of South-North Cultural and Media Studies*. 18. 1 (2004): 116-46.

3. Frances Clarke Sayers accused Disney of "sweeten[ing] a folk tale ... [which] destroys the proportion and purpose of the story, the conflict and its resolution" (118). Jill May has regretted that "One of Disney's greatest achievements in the realm of film was to replace the reader's desire to pursue a book's theme through the viewing pleasure of light-hearted American entertainment" (464).

4. Their sweetness is amplified by consistently including older women — not their mothers — who are the antagonists of the films, from Snow White's Evil Stepmother, to Lady Trumain, to Millicent, those "femme fatales" ably discussed in Henke, Umble, and Smith; Bell; and DoRozario. The princess's "weaknesses are contrasted with the awesome and awful power of the evil women with whom they struggle" (Henke, Umble, and Smith 234).



5. See both of their articles for close analyses of what Disney changed from the original Grimm version.

6. Naomi Wood suggests the voyeurism of Cinderella, as when the Duke looks at her through his monocle which "serves to focus on and frame Cinderella, particularly her legs and feet, and places us as the audience in the same appreciative position" (32).

7. With *Cinderella*, Walt Disney used every star and advertising gimmick to sell the movie through its songs, with well-known singers such as Dinah Shore and Bing Crosby signed on to sing promotional versions of "Bibbidi-Bobbidi-Boo" on radio and recordings (O'Brien 166).

8. Noting the lack of fathers in these earlier films now often corrected in this new films, DoRozario writes that "Team Disney's re-affirmation of a closer bond suggests the company's own paternal attachment to the more challenging daughters of the late twentieth-century and early twenty-first, to whom Walt Disney himself is little more than a black and white photograph of a rather old-fashioned looking man" (36).

9. See Bendix; Hastings; O'Brien; Henke, Umble, and Smith; Finkelstein in Ayres; and Ross.

10. See Edgerton; Kilpatrick; Kiyomi; and Perekh.

11. It is regrettable that Team Disney felt so unsure of their story that they had to add the sassy dragon voiced by Eddy Murphy whose jokes are not only culturally inappropriate but bordering on the disrespectful at times. Too, its ending, Mulan returning to her home with a suitor soon following, is a bit disappointing.

12. Lyricist Howard Ashman, co-author of *The Little Shop of Horrors*, and composer Alan Menken came together to write the songs for *The Little Mermaid*; Eisner credits Ashman as being "the most important creative decision we made on" the film (qtd. in DoRozario 48).

13. It is significant that Ashman and Menken wrote the songs to *The Little Mermaid* before the animation was started (Sells 183), because there is a sharp disconnect between the liberating lyrics here and the ultimate conclusion of her tale: as Ross puts it, "Yes, she gets her legs, she makes her stand, she marches — but only down the aisle, to marry some guy named Eric" (60).

14. Meghan Sweeney, "We Have an Opening for a Princess: Disney Princess Culture on the Web," 37<sup>th</sup> Annual International Conference of the Children's Literature Association, Eastern Michigan University, 11 June 2010.

15. See Bean for a discussion about the erotic portrayal of these princesses in the films and elsewhere.

16. Kenneth B. Kidd problematizes the Animal Kingdom in other ways in "Disney of Orlando's Animal Kingdom."

17. Bruce and his students asked useful, probing questions of their elementary students, such as "Do you think Cinderella was right to act as she did?" and "How do Belle (*Beauty and the Beast*) and Mulan differ from Aurora (*Sleeping Beauty*) and Snow White?" See Alexander M. Bruce, "Princesses without a Prince: A Consideration of Girls' Reactions to Disney's 'Princess' Movies" in *Children's Folklore Review*, 28 (2005-6): 7-21.

## WORKS CITED

- Arkoff, Vicki. 2009. How Disney Princess Works. HowStuffWorks. 2006-9. HowStuffWorks, Inc. May 31. [entertainment.howstuffworks.com](http://entertainment.howstuffworks.com) (accessed May 31, 2009).
- Artz, Lee. 2004. The Righteousness of Self-Centered Royals: The World According to Disney Animation. *Critical Arts: A Journal of South-North Cultural and Media Studies* 18(1): 116-46.
- Ayres, Brenda, ed. 2003. *The Emperor's Old Groove: Decolonizing Disney's Magic Kingdom*. New York: Peter Lang.
- Bean, Kellie. 2003. Stripping Beauty: Disney's 'Feminist' Seduction. In *The Emperor's Old Groove: Decolonizing Disney's Magic Kingdom*, ed. Brenda Ayres, 53-64. New York: Peter Lang.
- Bell, Elizabeth. 1995. Constructing the Pentimentos of Women's Animated Bodies. In *From Mouse to Mermaid: The Politics of Film, Gender, and Culture*, ed. Elizabeth Bell, Lynda Haas, and Laura Sells, 107-124. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Bell, Elizabeth, Lynda Haas, and Laura Sells, eds. 1995. *From Mouse to Mermaid: The Politics of Film, Gender, and Culture*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Bendix, Regina. 1993. Seashell Bra and Happy End: Disney's Transformation of *The Little Mermaid*. *Fabula*. 34(3-4): 280-90.
- Bruce, Alexander M. 2005-2006. Princesses without a Prince: A Consideration of Girls' Reactions to Disney's 'Princess' Movies. *Children's Folklore Review* 28: 7-21.
- Budd, Mike and Max H. Kirsch, eds. 2005. *Rethinking Disney: Private Control, Public Dimensions*. Middleton, CT.: Wesleyan University Press.
- Cummins, June. 1995. Romancing the Plot: The Real Beast of Disney's *Beauty and the Beast*. *Children's Literature Association Quarterly* 20(1): 22-28.
- Disney Princess Proves She's Still the Fairest of the Land. 2005. *Business Wire*. 21 June. Lexis-Nexis Academic.
- DoRozario, Rebecca Anne C. 2004. The Princess and the Magic Kingdom: Beyond Nostalgia, the Function of the Disney Princess. *Women's Studies in Communication*. 27(1): 34-59.
- Downey, Sharon D. 1996. Feminine Empowerment in Disney's *Beauty and the Beast*. *Women's Studies in Communication* 19(2): 185-211.
- Edgerton, Gary and Kathy Merlock Jackson. 1996. Redesigning Pocahontas: Disney, the 'White Man's Indian,' and the Marketing of Dreams. *Journal of Popular Film and Television* 24(2): 90-98.
- Finkelstein, Richard. 2003. Disney's *Tempest*: Colonizing Desire in *The Little Mermaid*. In *The Emperor's Old Groove: Decolonizing Disney's Magic Kingdom*, ed. Brenda Ayres, 131-48. New York: Peter Lang.
- Hastings, A. Waller. 1993. Moral Simplification in Disney's *The Little Mermaid*. *The Lion and The Unicorn* 17: 83-92.

- Henke, Jill Birnie, Diane Zimmerman Umble, and Nancy J. Smith. 1996. Construction of the Female Self: Feminist Readings of the Disney Heroine. *Women's Studies in Communication*. 19(2): 229-49.
- Hoerner, Keisha L. 1996. Gender Roles in Disney Films: Analyzing Behaviors from Snow White to Simba. *Women's Studies in Communication* 19(2): 213-228.
- Inge, M. Thomas. 2004. Walt Disney's *Snow White*: Art, Adaptation, and Ideology. *Journal of Popular Film and Television* 32(3): 132-44.
- Jeffords, Susan. 1995. The Curse of Masculinity: Disney's *Beauty and the Beast*. In *From Mouse to Mermaid: The Politics of Film, Gender, and Culture*, ed. Elizabeth Bell, Lynda Haas, and Laura Sells, 161-74. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Kidd, Kenneth B. 2004. Disney of Orlando's Animal Kingdom. In *Wild Things: Children's Culture and Ecocriticism*, ed. Sidney I. Dobrin and Kenneth B. Kidd, 267-88. Detroit: Wayne State University Press.
- Kilpatrick, Jacquelyn. 1995. Disney's "Politically Correct" Pocahontas: Race in Contemporary American Cinema: Part 5. *Cineaste: America's Leading Magazine on the Art and Politics of the Cinema*. 21(4): 36-37.
- Kiyomi, Kutsuzawa. 2004. Disney's Pocahontas: Reproduction of Gender, Orientalism, and the Strategic Construction of Racial Harmony in the Disney Empire. *Atlantis: A Women's Studies Journal* 29(1): 43-53.
- Ma, Sheng-mei. 2003. Mulan Disney, It's Like, Re-Orients: Consuming China and Animating Teen Dreams. In *The Emperor's Old Groove: Decolonizing Disney's Magic Kingdom*, ed. Brenda Ayres, 149-66. New York: Peter Lang.
- May, Jill P. 1981. Walt Disney's Interpretation of Children's Literature. *Language Arts* 58 (4): 463-72.
- Millard, Rosie. 2006. In Five Years, Disney Princess has Bloomed into a Hugely Successful Multinational Brand. *New Statesman*. 9 January. Lexis-Nexis Academic.
- O'Brien, Pamela Colby. 1996. The Happiest Films on Earth: A Textual and Contextual Analysis of Walt Disney's *Cinderella* and *The Little Mermaid*. *Women's Studies in Communication* 19(2): 155-83.
- Perekh, Pushpa Naida. 2003. Pocahontas: The Disney Imaginary. In *The Emperor's Old Groove: Decolonizing Disney's Magic Kingdom*, ed. Brenda Ayres, 167-78. New York: Peter Lang.
- Rollins, Lucy. 1987. Fear of Faerie: Disney and the Elitist Critics." *Children's Literature Association Quarterly*. 12: 90-3.
- Ross, Deborah. 2004. Escape from Wonderland: Disney and the Female Imagination. *Marvels and Tales: Journal of Fairy-Tale Studies* 18(1) : 53-66.
- Sayers, Frances Clarke. 1973. Walt Disney Accused. 1965. In *Children and Literature: Views and Reviews*, ed. Virginia Haviland, 116-25. Glenview, IL: Scott, Foresman.
- Sells, Laura. 1995. Where Do the Mermaids Stand? Voice and Body in *The Little Mermaid*. In *From Mouse to Mermaid: The Politics of Film, Gender, and Culture*, ed. Elizabeth Bell, Lynda Haas, and Laura Sells, 175-92. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

- Shortsleeve, Kevin. 2004. The Wonderful World of the Depression: Disney, Despotism, and the 1930s. Or, Why Disney Scares Us. *The Lion and the Unicorn*. 28(1): 1-30.
- Simonelli, Marie. 1999. A Facelift for Timeworn Tales: Walt Disney's Vision in *Snow White* and *Cinderella*. *Creative Screenwriting* 6(3): 63-69.
- Stone, Kay. 1975. Things Walt Disney Never Told Us. *Journal of American Folklore* 88 ( ): 42-50.
- Swan, Susan Z. 1999. Gothic Drama in Disney's *Beauty and the Beast*: Subverting Traditional Romance by Transcending the Animal-Human Paradox. *Critical Studies in Mass Communications*. 16: 350-69.
- Sweeney, Meghan. 2010. We Have an Opening for a Princess: Disney Princess Culture on the Web. 37th Annual International Conference of the Children's Literature Association. Eastern Michigan University. 11 June.
- Towbin, Mia Adessa, Shelley A. Haddock, Toni Schindler Zimmerman, Lori K. Lund, and Litsa Renee Tanner. 2003. Images of Gender, Race, Age, and Sexual Orientation in Disney Feature-Length Animated Films. *Journal of Feminist Family Therapy*. 15(4): 19-44.
- Trites, Roberta. 1991. Disney's Sub/Version of Anderson's *The Little Mermaid*. *The Journal of Popular Film and Television* 18(4): 145-52.
- Wloszczyna, Susan. 2003. Disney Princesses Wear Merchandising Crown. *USA Today*. 17 September.EBSCO-Host.
- Wood, Naomi. 1996. Domesticating Dreams in Walt Disney's *Cinderella*. *The Lion and The Unicorn* 20: 25-49.
- Zipes, Jack. 1995. Breaking the Disney Spell. In *From Mouse to Mermaid: The Politics of Film, Gender, and Culture*, ed. Elizabeth Bell, Lynda Haas, and Laura Sells, 21-42. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

**“I SAW MRS. SARAY, SITTING ON A BOMBALERRY”:  
RALPH ELLISON COLLECTS CHILDREN’S FOLKLORE**

ROBERT BARON

Along Harlem streets, in housing projects and on playgrounds, Ralph Ellison employed his formidable gifts for observing and rendering speech play as a collector of children’s folklore. His collecting for the Federal Writer’s Project (FWP) in 1939 represented one dimension of a life long engagement with African American folklore. It extended from traditions acquired in his youth in Oklahoma City through works of fiction employing multiple folkloric genres and essays discussing the centrality of folklore for the African American experience and its indispensable role for cultural resilience. Collecting at a time of heavy African American migration from the South, Ellison researched folklore that embodied both a Southern heritage of largely rural character and traditions adapted to a new urban environment.

As a New Yorker who moved permanently to Harlem in 1938, Ellison experienced first hand the struggles of recent arrivals adjusting to a vastly different social and cultural situation. Remarking on these challenges in “Harlem is Nowhere”, written in 1948, he wrote of how “American Negroes are caught in a vast process of change that has swept them from slavery to the condition of industrial man in a space of time so telescoped ... that it is literally possible to step from feudalism into the vortex of industrialism simply by moving across the Mason-Dixon line”. In Harlem, the “folk personality” was “caught in a process of chaotic change” (321, 325). Writing on “Harlem’s America” in the *New Leader* eighteen years later, Ellison saw continuity as well as change in Harlem’s folklore, where “you see the transformation of the Southern idiom into a Northern idiom,” in “a place where our folklore is preserved, and transformed” and “the body of Negro myth and legend thrives” (1966, 28).

The modern and the traditional were also at play in Ellison’s own fiction. He was one of the great modernist writers of twentieth century literature and, without contradiction, infused folklore throughout his work. Influenced by existentialism and writing surrealistically, counting Eliot, Dostoyevsky, Faulkner, and Malraux among his literary “ancestors,” (1995f, 185) Ellison all the while incorporated folklore in his work at least as much as any of his peers. Writing in 1958, he stated that “I use folklore in my work not because I am a Negro, but because writers like Eliot and Joyce made me conscious of the literary value of my folk inheritance,” and he found early in his career that the “Negro American folk tradition became precious as a result of an act of literary discovery” (1995d, 111, 112). A few years after seeing that “in both *The Waste Land* and *Ulysses* ancient myth and ritual were used to give form and significance to the material” Ellison came to “realize that the myths and rituals which we find functioning in our everyday lives could be used in the same way” (1995g, 216). The “grist for my fictional mill” included “details of old photographs and rhymes and riddles and children’s games, church services and college ceremonies, practical jokes and political activities observed during my prewar days in Harlem” (1994, xxvii).

For Ellison and other major mid- and late- twentieth century writers, field research for the FWP provided indispensable source material, which was utilized along with experiences remembered from their working class youths in subsequent literary works. In *The Cultural Front*, Michael Denning notes that "the writings of the plebeian writers who worked on the projects – Algren, Ellison, Himes, Tomasi, Sincliar, Conroy — embodied a dialectic between fictional invention, autobiographical reflection, and urban fieldwork" (1996, 228). The FWP represented for Ellison and many other writers their first employment as cultural workers. Through the WPA arts projects, the numbers of people employed as artists increased vastly, and many of them, like Ellison, saw that it was possible to make a living through their creative work. In *New Deal Modernism*, Michael Szalay contends that the WPA Arts Projects "led to new ways of conceiving literary labor", creating a "newly professionalized industry of salaried writers (2000, 5), acting as, according to Denning, "a way-station for the young plebeian artists and intellectuals of ethnic working-class backgrounds who would go on to careers in the federal bureaucracies, the culture industries, and the universities" (48).

Making a living for the first time through his cultural work for the FWP, Ellison collected personal narratives from compelling Harlem characters (published many years later in Ann Banks's 1980 anthology, *First Person America*), carried out extensive research about local African American history for a planned publication, "The Negro in New York," (which was never published) and took to the streets to collect children's folklore *in situ*. Rhymes, games and other forms of children's folklore were collected as a major focus of the FWP in New York City. In New York City, Ellison was among a group of FWP workers supervised by folklorist Herbert Halpert, who instructed them to "look for children's rhymes, making specific note of the nationality of the reciter, the place of collection, and any comments made by the children. Since the workers were untrained, a questionnaire for each collector's guidance was prepared" (1946, 5). In all, about 1000 items of children's folklore were collected, and Ellison contributed approximately 100 different items. He observed children at play and noted contexts while recording texts, conducted interviews with adults as well as children, probed their memory culture, and even contributed folklore remembered from his own childhood.

Consisting mainly of folk rhymes, the children's folklore collected by Ellison included texts retained from Southern tradition as well as others transformed and localized to New York City. While many were maintained largely or entirely within African American tradition, with some exhibiting African derivations, others were part of repertoires shared by New Yorkers of diverse ethnic backgrounds. In his master's thesis, "Folk Rhymes of New York City Children", which included rhymes collected by Ellison, Halpert singled out African American and Puerto Rican children as each having "unique" rhymes, while noting that they also perform variants of nearly all the rhymes he collected elsewhere in New York City. However, Halpert found that rhymes introduced to Harlem by migrants from the south are not disseminated elsewhere in New York City (1946,15). He suggested that a "large part of the stock of rhymes and games ... held in common by White



and Negro children dates from before World War I," when the "color barrier" was not as strong, and the African American population was smaller (16).

Whatever their cultural source, the rhymes collected by Ellison were distinguished by their innovative and improvisatory qualities, features often noted by him and consonant with the high value placed upon innovation within tradition in African American folk culture. According to Halpert's proposal for a book based upon the entire New York City FWP children's folklore collection, *Children's Rhymes and Games*, more old English rhymes make their appearance" in African American children's folklore "than in any other group, but there are, on the other hand, considerably more innovation and invention." They were also distinguished by "a greater variety of subject matter and rhythmic pattern" than the rhymes of other groups in the FWP New York City collection (n.d., n. pag.).<sup>1</sup>

The Ellison children's folklore collection is housed in the Manuscript Division of the Library of Congress. While some of the folk rhymes he collected have been previously published, they lack the information about Ellison's collecting process and the tradition bearers that appear in the collection housed in the Library of Congress and which I am including in this article.<sup>2</sup> In the collection at the Library of Congress, we see the collector at work as he observed, interviewed and recorded texts of children's traditions. At times, Ellison recorded variants and versions of the same folklore item. He had a keen eye for observing creativity in process through improvisation, and delight in word play suffuses the collection. Ellison recognized the musicality of the rhymes, noting "polyphony" on one occasion, and referring to performance as "chanting," implying that they could be viewed as being somewhere between speech and song. The rhymes contained influences from popular culture, specific local references, topical references, and content reflecting harsh urban realities like problems in paying rent and gun violence.

Much of Ellison's field research occurred near his home at 25 Hamilton Terrace. One report, dated October 13, 1939, described field research on "the streets and playground located in the area extending from 125<sup>th</sup> St to 145<sup>th</sup> St and between St. Nicholas and Lenox Avenues." This report contained the most complete accounts of Ellison's field research on children's play, offering multi-layered descriptions of the collecting situation. He presented multiple dimensions of text, context and performance rarely before provided in collections of children's folklore.

One group of children demonstrated improvisation and individual creativity as they performed a taunt, followed by improvised lines to what Ellison called a "jingle," and a riddle. He describes their performance of folklore as an emergent process, rather than as repetition of a fixed text. We see what Hymes has called a "breakthrough into performance" as interviewees move from *reporting* folklore to spontaneous *performance* (1981, 79-86):

Buster Brown

When you see a guy got on brown pants you say:

Buster Brown

Went down town

With his britches hanging down."



When the above was given other members of the group chimed in with the following. While most of the jingles appear to have a set formula, there were many attempts at improvisation. Each voice followed the other in rapid succession, giving an antiphonal effect as varied as the colors named.

"Yellow, Yellow  
Kiss a fellow."  
"Blue, Blue  
I love you"  
"Black, Black  
Sit on a tack"  
"Green, green  
Eat ice cream  
Stick your nose in kerosene"  
"White, white,  
You can fight"

Hey Mister, if you shut up in an iron house without any windows and  
you didn't have nothing but a baseball bat?

In an Iron house?

Yeah, yeah that's right. Come on sister, what'll you do?

Well, I guess I don't know.

Gee, don't you know how to play baseball? Anybody who can play  
baseball knows how to get out there.

Well how would I get out?

Three strikes and you out, Mister ...

You see what he means, THREE STRIKES AN YOU OUT!<sup>3</sup>

Thickly describing these performances, Ellison anticipated the approach to folklore as emergent performance and situated small group interaction developed in folklore studies three decades later.<sup>4</sup> One actually sees folklore as it is created, as "living lore," the term of FWP national folklore editor Benjamin A. Botkin, who stressed that folklore is "living speech ... responsive to the mood of the moment," which, rather than disappearing, was still being created, in urban as well as rural areas (1958, 190). As Hirsch indicates, Botkin's *Manual for Folklore Studies* instructed collectors to "submit complete field notes from every interview together with a personal history of the informant" (1988, 58). While Ellison regrettably submitted minimal personal information about almost everyone he interviewed, his field notes, at their best, provide highly textured accounts of the collecting

of folklore in, and as, performance. In his later fiction writings, he would vividly render the performative and improvisatory qualities of speech in general, and oral folklore in particular. These writings embody a "collaboration ... between oral and literary techniques and traditions; between performance and composition" which John F. Callahan sees in "Frequencies of Eloquence: The Performance and Composition of *Invisible Man*" as intrinsic to *Invisible Man* (1994, 89). While Ellison scholars have long emphasized the influence of improvisation in jazz upon his fiction, his folklore collecting for the FWP demonstrates an emphasis upon improvisation, emergence and performance in folklore which reemerges in subsequent literary works.

Ellison's field research involved close observation of children at play as well as interviews with both adults and children to elicit traditions both in active tradition and memory culture. He drew reports and performances of folklore from tradition bearers young and old who recalled folklore from a younger age. His October 13, 1939 report included a series of descriptions of traditions both reconstructed from memory and actively practiced, with some traditions presented in the sequence in which they were performed:

Helen Simons, of 201 W. 139<sup>th</sup> Street, gave the worker the following chants. Helen is now eight years old and had some difficulty in remembering some of the chants since "only the little kids play them." The following verse was sung to the tradition melody of "Pop-Goes the Weasel!" and as far as Helen knew is not used in any of the games the children in the neighborhood play.

I went up to Mary's house  
 Mary had the measles.  
 This is the way the measles go,  
 Pop! Went the measles.

The following rhyme was chanted very fast and like the above was not used in a game:

Once upon a time,  
 Goose drink wine.  
 Monkey chewed tobacco on a street car line.  
 Street car broke,  
 Monkey choke  
 And they all went to heaven on a streamlined boat.<sup>5</sup>

"When we play 'Blue Bird' in my window we all stand in a circle and one girl skips around behind us and we all sing:

Blue bird, Blue bird  
 In my window ...

And when she gets to the one she wants to be next she taps him on the shoulder and sings:

Oh, Johnny I'm sorry.

Or whatever the kid's name is. Then the one what got tapped skips around and you go like that.”

London Bridges All Broke Down  
(Sung, to the tradition melody)

London bridge is all broke down  
All broke down, all broke down.  
London bridge is all broke,  
My fair lady.

London bridge is half built up,  
Half built up, half built up,  
London bridge is half built up,  
My fair lady.

London bridge is all built up,  
All built up, all built up.  
London bridge is all built up,  
My fair lady.

Mrs. Julia Fisher of 2816 Eighth Avenue sung the following words to a slightly varied melody of “Little Sallie Walker.” Mrs. Fisher learned this version as a child in Key West, Florida:

Little Sallie Water  
Little Sallie Water  
Sitting in a saucer,  
Crying and weeping for a young man  
Oh, rise, Sallie, rise,  
Wipe your weeping eyes,  
And turn yourself to the water front  
And tell them who you love the best.<sup>6</sup>

Versions and variants of “Little Sally Walker” and “Little Sallie Water” have been collected widely in the United States, including two versions collected by Zora Neale Hurston in Florida and included in her writings on folklore for the FWP, *Go Gator and Muddy the Water* (1999, 100, 101-102). Another “Little Sallie Water” was collected by Ellison at the Utopia Children’s House. He described it as a “singing game” in which “the child chosen as ‘Sallie Water’ stands in the middle of circle as the others sing the song. She goes through the directions of the verse pantomime.”

Little Sallie Water  
 Sitting in the saucer  
 Rise, Sallie rise,  
 Wipe your winking eyes  
 Turn to the East, my darling,  
 Turn to the West, my darling,  
 Turn to the very one that you love the best  
 Put your hands on your hips,  
 And let your backbone shake my darling  
 Shake it to the East, my darling  
 Shake it to the West, my darling  
 Shake it to the very one that you love the best.

A group of young girls demonstrated singing games substantially maintained from Southern folklore, embodying the creolization of traditions. One game included a refrain, "Sail Away, Sail Away, Sail Away," well known in Anglo-American folk song. A tap dance, perhaps a new element, was introduced in another game. Had moving images and/or sound recordings also been used, African cultural sources for these games might be adduced, since, as Bess Lomax Hawes has noted in notes to the film "Pizza Pizza Daddy-O," African American singing games "stylistically, especially in terms of musical and kinesic elements ... seem equally clearly African, or at least Afro-American as British and Anglo-American in derivation" (qtd. in Sanches and Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1976, 69). At times, such as in the following accounts of "Buckeye the Rabbit," "Lady in the River" and "I Had a Little Dog His Name Was Buster," Ellison demonstrates how the singing games of African American girls involve a tight interrelationship between song and movement, which Kyra D. Gaunt, in *The Games Black Girls Play*, sees as "embodied musical practices" (2006, 2) incorporating "intrinsic" relationships between movement and music (7).

"Buckeye the Rabbit," in another variant, appears in *Invisible Man* as the narrator experiences electroshock treatment after the factory accident. Asked "Who is Buckeye the Rabbit?" the narrator responds in a manner both "giddy" (1972 [1952], 183) and grounding, a moment which, Keith Edward Byerman notes in *Fingering the Jagged Grain: Tradition and Form in Recent Black Fiction*, brings out "cultural history" which "prevents his total loss of identity" (1985, 27). The narrator in *Invisible Man* remembers that "I was Buckeye the Rabbit ... or had been, when as children we danced and sang barefoot in the dusty streets" (1972 [1952], 184). In Harlem, Ellison had observed children dancing as they sang in this children's singing game played in both the North and the South:

Buckeye the Rabbit  
 I'm riding through Kentucky  
 I'm riding through the sea,  
 And all I catch behind me  
 Is a buckle on my knee  
 Buckeye the Rabbit,

Shake it  
Shake it  
With a buckle on my knee,  
I swing to the bottom  
I swing to the sea  
And all I catch behind me  
Is a buckle on my knee  
So Buckeye the Rabbit  
Shake it  
Shake it  
So Buckeye the Rabbit  
Shake it  
Shake it  
With a buckle on my knee.

The worker observed this game played by a group of five girls, four of whom joined hands and formed a circle around the fifth. All five took part in singing the above verses up to the line "Buckeye the Rabbit" upon which the girl in the center began dancing steps from a tap dance routine. One girl, Mary Suarez of 259 W. 139<sup>th</sup> St., sung the following words as she continued to dance after the others had finished one of the songs.

"You jump to the front  
And you jump to the back  
And you do the snake-hips 1,2,3  
A riding to the sea."

The others joined in:

"So Buckeye the rabbit,  
Shake it shake it etc.

Upon finishing this, girls took her place in the circle and one of the others took her place, whereupon the same routine began again. The game is flexible and allows for the use of varied dance steps. The worker was informed that this game was learned from other children, while one girl, Catherine Mason, said she learned it in Richmond Va.

Lady in the River (*a game song*)  
There's a lady in the river  
Sail away, sail away, sail away  
There's a lady in the river  
Sail away,  
Looking for her lover  
Sail away, sail away, sail away.

Then she found her lover  
 Sail away, sail away, sail away  
 Then she found her lover  
 Sail away, sail away, sail away.

This game was not played for me but the lyrics were sung.

Helen and Fredric Lewis vividly described and demonstrated another singing game. Ellison noted that it was "spoken rhythmically":

"I had a little dog his name was Buster' is a game that had a rhyme to it. You pick some body to get in the circle and when we sing they shake their duster." Helen placed her hands upon her hips and sang, while Fred stamped his foot and clapped his hands:

I had a little dog,  
 His name was buster.  
 I sent him to the store to shake his duster  
 Oh, come on, buster  
 Shake your duster.<sup>7</sup>

When she came to the end of the verse she shook herself and flipped the tail of her dress.

Helen Lewis offered what she claimed was an original, collectively created "taunt". It expresses the competitiveness and fierce identification that many New York City residents have felt for their own block. In *City Play*, Dargan and Zeitlin note that streets, like public schools, buildings and playgrounds, are often identified by number in New York City, but can be the subjects of great pride. They describe play about such numbered places, and indicate that while "identified by number seemingly anonymous places in a crowded city are rendered meaningful through play" (1990, 10). This "taunt" contains, like older rhymes of Southern provenance collected by Ellison, the formulaic refrain, "buckeye the rabbit," along with newer content.

"When the 134<sup>th</sup> Street girls get together we all say this rhyme, we made it up ourselves."

Take off your shoes and stockings,  
 and let your feet go bare.  
 For we are the girls from One hundred-thirty-four  
 So don't you dare come near.  
 So, buckeye, the rabbit,  
 Shake, shake  
 Buckeye the rabbit  
 Shake, shake  
 So don't you dare come near.

Ellison documented several folk rhymes on October 13th used for quick repartee between friends or acquaintances. This speech play seems as if it might be primarily used by older children and adults:

"You know this one, mister?  
See you meet a guy you know and he's doing something good  
and you say "Gee, that's fine!"  
And the other guy says, "wine!!"  
And you say, "Sho nough, that's fine as wine,  
As a Georgia pine  
Two old grandmothers drinking wine."  
"Here's another one. You ask me 'Gimme a nickle'"  
"Gimme a nickle."  
"Go down town and tickle."  
"You want a dollar? Go on, say 'yes'"  
"Yes"  
"Go up on the roof and holler!"

Ellison recorded a number of ball bouncing rhymes found, with variations, in other New York City neighborhoods and ethnic groups. Ball bouncing involves hitting a rubber ball or tennis ball with the open palm, with the bouncing in time to the rhyme (Halpert 1946, 41). Ellison asked the children performing the rhymes about acquisition and observed that the traditions were learned from other children rather than adults – a characteristic of children's folklore that folklorists have noted wherever it is collected:

The following are rhymes chanted by little girls while bouncing their balls and were collected at the corner of 141<sup>st</sup> Street and Hamilton Terrace, Manhattan. None of the children questioned were able to tell where they learned the rhymes. In each instance they replied that they had been taught by "another girl", or "another kid." Sometimes the writer was told that certain rhymes were the original creations of the child involved, but in no case was I able to obtain a rhyme which had been taught a child by his parents.

One Two Three a Nation  
One, two, three a nation,  
I received my confirmation  
In the Church of the Annunciation  
One, two, three a nation.<sup>8</sup>

One, two, three a nation  
Doctor, doctor here's a patient  
Waiting for an operation,  
One, two, three a nation.<sup>9</sup>



One Two Three O'Lerry

One, two, three, O'Lerry,  
 I saw Mrs. Saray  
 Sitting on a bombalerry  
 Just like a chocolate ferry.<sup>10</sup>

I Had a Little Monkey

I had a little monkey,  
 I sent him to the country  
 To buy a loaf of bread.  
 Along came a choo choo  
 And knocked my monkey coo coo  
 And now my monkey's dead  
 With a bullet in his head

Charlie Chaplin

Charlie Chaplin went to France  
 To teach the ladies how to dance  
 This is what he taught them:  
 "Heel and Toe, Clap your hands and over you go."<sup>11</sup>

A marginal note by Ellison alongside "Charlie Chaplin" indicates a "contemporary reference." He collected other rhymes featuring such figures from radio, film and comic strips as Charlie McCarthy, the Lone Ranger, Rin Tin Tin and Buster Brown. Remarking on the use of characters from popular culture, Halpert said that "girls blithely incorporate their heroes and heroines from these media (a startling number) into the world of play" (1946, 48).

Like "Charlie Chaplin," another rhyme which appears in Ellison's October 13<sup>th</sup> report, "Gypsy, gypsy lived in a tent" was used as both a jump rope rhyme and counting out rhyme.

Gipsy Gipsy

Gipsy, gipsy lived in a tent,  
 She couldn't afford to pay her rent.  
 She borrowed one  
 She borrowed two,  
 She passed it over to y-o-u<sup>12</sup>

The October 13, 1939 report was unique in its substantial number of detailed accounts of folklore in performance. On other occasions, Ellison relied entirely upon interviews, apparently recognizing that it would have been preferable to observe spontaneous performance. A report dated December 15, 1939 noted that because of the "weather and the seasonal character of the games I was unable to see, and hear, these games in the actual play situation." He reported that these rhymes "were received near the corners of 134<sup>th</sup> and 135<sup>th</sup> Streets and Lenox Avenue, around Public School 89" and "in all instances the informants were born

in New York City, though several said that their parents came from the South." P.S. 89 itself was the subject of two rhymes. In his book proposal for *Children's Rhymes and Games*, Halpert indicated that there were few rhymes in the entire New York City FWP collection which referred to schools, with the exception of derogatory ones (like the ones reported by Ellison). In this collecting situation, Ellison noted the effect of his presence upon the performance:

Most of the rhymes in this group were collected in the vicinity of Public School #89 and in every instance the informant was a boy. The following rhyme reveals one boy's attitude toward P.S. #89; the first version before he knew the words were to be taken down, and the second, more respectable version, when he saw the pencil put to paper.

Remember the Eight  
Remember the Nine  
Remember that 'City Dump' 89

Remember the Eight  
Remember the Nine

Remember that 'White House' 89

Ellison's remarks about his impact as a collector upon the content of these rhymes reflects his awareness of the dynamics of subject/object relationships in fieldwork situations. He became at once both the subject and object of his own research when he acted as his own informant. Interspersed among the texts collected in Harlem are several items of children's folklore remembered from his Oklahoma childhood. Ellison, after all, was part of the great migration of African-Americans to Northern cities, and he retained his own memory culture of Southern tradition even while moving in literary circles and beginning his writing career in New York City.

Ellison remembered a "choosing rhyme" from 1925. Other versions of this widespread counting out rhyme have been reported from Canada, England, Scotland and the United States:<sup>13</sup>

My mother and your mother  
Were hanging out clothes  
My mother hit your mother  
Right in the nose  
O-U-T Spells Out!

A "taunt" was remembered from 1920, when he was about six years old:

Patty on the brooms tick  
Patty on the sea

Patty tore his britches  
And layed it on me

Another taunt, from 1922, was "used to taunt white children as well as for the choosing of sides":

Enny meany minny moe  
Catch a white peck by the toe  
If he bites you let him go  
Enny meany minny moe!

Both Ellison's texts and children's folklore collected from non-African Americans in New York City for the FWP include a number of taunts referring to other ethnic groups. Coming across the taunts in these collections came as no surprise to me, having grown up in the Bronx in the 1950s and 1960s and remembering folklore performed by members of various white ethnic groups referring disparagingly to other groups, most viciously about African Americans. Taunts, whether with ethnic reference or not, are a widespread genre of children's folklore. Halpert indicates that "the pattern of insulting another group" has long been practiced in the United States, although sometimes they "reflect an attitude that children do not feel with any particular force (1946, 17, 19). They are pervasive among children, and Jorgensen, in "Teases and Pranks," notes that as "forms of victimization", represent "behaviors that children are likely to experience at almost any time and in any place." Taunting, especially when it involves "socially unacceptable words or taboos," is "usually not done in the presence of adult authorities, but otherwise it is a fairly everyday type of occurrence" (1999, 213-14). The large number of taunts collected by Ellison testifies to his ability to establish rapport with his research subjects. They included taunts referring to various kinds of other groups. One, about "crackers," collected on 142<sup>nd</sup> and Eighth Avenue from William and Eddie Freeman, was both pithy and pointed. The Freemans reported, "that's what we used to say when the white boys made us mad":

Cracker, cracker ring the bell  
Cracker, cracker go to hell!

Children who "cannot read well" felt the signifying sting of another taunt:

Can you read  
Can you write  
Can you smoke your daddy's pipe?

An overweight child was the target of another taunt:

Fat and skinny had a race  
Fat fell down and broke his face  
Skinny said I won the race

Fat said that ain't fair  
Cause I lost my underwear

"Delaware" rhymed easily with "square" and "fair" (for the 1939 World's Fair) in a taunt used for "strangers":

Look at them squares  
From Delaware  
They musta got left  
from the World's Fair

Ellison noted that the following version was recited "when a stranger or out-of-town license on a car driven by Negroes, is noticed." The last two lines were recited by Herbert Lambert, sung to the tune of Shave and a Haircut. Lambert, who recited other rhymes for Ellison, used this tune "to end off every verse he gave."

I'm a square from Delaware  
Just in town to see the Fair  
Boom da dee ah dee  
Boom, boom!

While Lambert is named as the tradition bearer, Ellison usually did not give the names of the performers. An unusual amount of personal history was provided for William and Eddie Freeman, who like many other African American New Yorkers, before and since, spent time during their childhood visiting relatives in the South:

The following rhymes were given the writer by William and Eddie Freeman, who operate a vegetable cart in the Eighth Avenue market near 143<sup>rd</sup> Street. William was born in Charleston, South Carolina but was brought to New York when three months old. Eddie was born in Conn. During 1936 the boys visited relatives in Charleston and the "Cracker Cracker" rhyme was learned there. Eddie chose to recite the rhymes and during the recitation was advised by William not to use the word black, but to use the word dark instead. The boys are twelve and thirteen years of age.

Once upon a time  
A darkey found a dime,  
Dime turned red,  
The darkey fell dead

I know something you caint tell  
Three dark niggers on a peanut shell  
One kin sing,  
One kin dance,  
One kin sew my old man's pants.

Topical references appear in other items collected by Ellison. The Opies, in *The Lore and Language of Schoolchildren*, categorize such rhymes as "topical rhymes" since "the era in which it belongs is immediately apparent," but caution that a "topical rhyme" may be a version of much older rhymes (1959, 98). Halpert found widespread reference to "contemporary events, personalities and institutions" in rhymes collected during the 1930s (1946, 14). Joe Louis appears in the following rhyme, with a notation in Ellison's hand about the "trucking" dance :

Joe Louis and Bob Pastor  
 Bob Pastor was on his knees  
 Said, "Joe,  
 Don't hit me please,  
 Just go on trucking on out the ring."

(Use) This rhyme tells the story of the Pastor-Louis fight, which took place in 1939. The term 'trucking' refers to a dance step popular at that time; a version of which was inspired by Louis' peculiar, shuffling footwork.

According to Halpert, children "quickly became adept exponents of truckin'," introducing it in a number of songs and games" (1946, 114). He indicated that the "truckin'" rhymes were not known outside of Harlem. Halpert viewed them as a kind of emergent folklore, as "for the most part recent compositions either based on older rhyme forms or composed from scratch" (15-16).

Another rhyme was chanted rhythmically to African American dance steps which "were popular in New York around 1928":

Hay, hay,  
 Farmer gray,  
 Took another  
 Load away

Ellison collected a ball bouncing rhyme about an encounter with a policeman guarding Macy's department store. While this rhyme was found among other ethnic communities in New York City, it might have had special resonance for residents of Harlem. During the mid and late 1930s, struggles against discrimination in hiring in department stores were a focus for African American political activism. This rhyme illustrates how children's folklore (in any culture) provides mechanisms for working through issues, concerns and anxieties through play:

I won't go to Macy's any more, more, more!  
 There's a big fat policeman at the door, door, door  
 He grabbed me by the collar  
 And made me pay a dollar  
 And I won't go to Macy's any more, more, more!<sup>14</sup>

Only a few jump rope rhymes appear in the collection. As in ball bouncing rhymes, the rhymes used for jumping rope act to structure movement, as Sullivan notes in "Songs, Poems and Rhymes" (153). Halpert, in his proposal for *Children's Rhymes and Games*, speaks of how specific words may be used to indicate actions. In the first of the two rhymes which follow, the rope jumper is expected to either straddle the rope or miss her turn, allowing the jumper to avoid a "faux pas". Both of these rhymes are found extensively in Anglo-American tradition and Great Britain:

I know a lady  
By the name of miss  
Sat by the fire and gave me a kiss  
All of a sudden  
She missed like this!<sup>15</sup>

Johnny on the ocean  
Johnny in the sea  
Johnny broke a windowpane and blamed it on me  
I told ma  
And ma told pa  
And Johnny got a beating and ha ha ha<sup>16</sup>

Ellison almost always presented ball bouncing and jump rope rhymes as texts, without describing the form of the activity which the rhymes accompany. An exception was the following ball bouncing rhyme, with Ellison's comments alongside the text:

I live in Chinka China  
My name is Carol See.  
I wash and dry the dishes  
For fifty cents a week.  
So sister, sister, sister  
You ought to be ashame  
To marry, marry, marry  
A man without a name.  
So my father is a butcher  
My mother cuts the meat.  
I am a little hot dog  
hat runs across the street.

This is one of the longer ball bouncing jingles. The repeated words represent variations in the bouncing, for instance on the words 'Sister, sister, sister' the leg is crossed over and the ball bounced over it, after which the bouncer returns to the straight pattern.

A rhyme beginning "Your old man is a dirty old man" was collected in different versions and variants by Halpert in various parts of Manhattan. He characterized it as an adaptation of the song "Old Dan Tucker", well known as a minstrel song in the nineteenth century. For Halpert, it demonstrated how some children's folklore in New York City can contain the "remnants" of older adult folklore (*Children's Rhymes and Games*). The version collected by Ellison includes a street address in the Lower East Side, on the other end of Manhattan from Harlem:

My mother and your mother  
Live across the way  
315 East Broadway  
Every night they have a fight  
And this is what they say  
Your old man is a dirty old man  
He washes his face with the frying pan  
He combs his hair with the leg of a chair  
Your old man is a dirty old man<sup>17</sup>

Ellison ascribes various genres to the folk rhymes he collected. Categorization of children's rhymes, however, is a tricky business. Sanches and Kirshenblatt-Gimblett contend that taxonomies created through categorizations of rhymes cannot be "predictive" since the same rhyme in different play groups can accompany jumping rope, ball bouncing, or taunting another child (1976,67).<sup>18</sup>

This "gag" collected by Ellison was also recited in my own childhood in the northwest Bronx, with the addition of a "the" before "ice":

Ladies and gentlemen  
Take my advice  
Pull down your pants  
And sit on ice.

A variant called for movement:

Ladies and gentlemen  
Take my advice  
Pull off your pants  
And slide on ice.<sup>19</sup>

A very short verse collected by Ellison was labeled a "baseball rhyme." Short verses were found widely among New York City children — Halpert speaks in his proposal for *Children's Rhymes and Games* of the "distinctly New Yorkese rhyme which is short, snappy and to the point."

In and out  
Three strikes and out



Another rhyme was used as a mnemonic, with Ellison noting the use of such rhymes in the South:

Columbus was a Jew  
Fourteen-ninety-two!

(Use) Such rhymes are used to aid the memory; in this instance it is a historical date which is memorized. In the South, superstitions, moral and other observations are given such a statement.

A "dare" was also categorized by Ellison by its "use":

You can slip  
And you can slide  
But I'll kick you for a buggy ride.

(Use) - Dare

Some rhymes were classified as "pastimes." The polysemy of the word "bill" was at play in one of these rhymes. As Sanches and Kirshenblatt-Gimblett note, it embodies two kinds of rhetorical patterns found in children's rhymes, "adnominatio (pun and wordplay) and conversio (repetition of the last word in successive phrases)" (1976, 109). Variants of this rhyme were recorded by other FWP fieldworkers among Italians and Puerto Ricans in East Harlem, and in the Bronx and Brooklyn among performers whose ethnicities were not indicated.

Well hello Bill  
Where you going Bill  
Down Town Bill  
What for Bill  
To pay my gas bill  
How much Bill  
Ten dollar bill  
So long Bill

Some rhymes were uncategorized by Ellison. The text of a rhyme which improvised upon a popular song was followed by a note about continuities between African American folk and "commercial" song:

Margie is a swimming pool  
All around the house  
But never in the pool  
Well allright then ...

The above rhyme is an improvised lyric to a popular song, originating in Harlem, the title of which is "Well All Right Then." This title, which

gives the tune its refrain, is nonsensical as far as actual meaning is concerned. And as is typical of such Negro songs, the pattern of "WELL ALLRIGHT THEN" is very elastic in order to allow for such improvisations; a characteristic which comes out of the folk period of Negro music and which has been carried over into the commercial.

African American children's rhymes and singing games have continued to incorporate popular music. Kyra Gaunt shows that this relationship works both ways in an ongoing circulation between folk and popular traditions, citing many examples of rhythm and blues, blues and hip hop songs appropriating children's game songs (2006, 2-3, 68-69, 89-110). Ellison saw how such use of popular song underscores the fluid, improvisatory character of African American music, characteristic of both a "folk period" when African American music consisted largely of folk music, and his own time, when commercially produced popular music had become a dominant force shaping cultural preferences. In referring to continuity and change in African American music, Ellison speaks to transformations in Black American culture occurring during the interwar period, when he was working for the FWP. He collected traditions brought by migrants from the South who maintained them in Harlem, as both active and passive carriers of tradition. These traditions were often adapted, localized and changed by children in Harlem, who also performed traditions maintained as well by other ethnic groups, and practiced emerging folklore newly created in New York.

In *The Craft of Ralph Ellison*, O'Meally indicates that Ellison perceived Southern sources "even when the Harlem lore seemed indigenous," and he would sometimes "recognize a remnant of a saying or rhyme he had heard in the South reduced to a 'mumble' or nonsense phrase in Harlem." O'Meally discusses Ellison's contention that these traditions suggested a bridge to the south and to African ancestry, and he cites Ellison as stating that their "tradition goes way back to the South, and some of it goes back to Africa" (1980, 34). While much of the children's folklore collected by Ellison was distinctively African American in provenance and current practice, some of these traditions were also practiced by whites, including traditions with sources in Great Britain. In Zora Neale Hurston's collections of African American children's folklore in Florida, she noted that they included "white games that have been learned by Negro children in contact with whites" like " 'London Bridge is Falling Down', ... white games that have been modified by Negro use, like 'Little Sally Walker', and purely Negro games like 'Bama,' 'Rabbit Dance,' and 'Chick-Mah-Chick'" (1999, 105) — a pattern like that of the games Ellison collected in Harlem. The critical essays and fiction of Ellison embody his views of the creative genius and cultural distinctiveness of African American cultures, the importance of Southern roots, and the Americanness of African Americans, all characteristics evident in the children's rhymes he collected early in his career.

The children whose rhymes were collected by Ellison experienced both tradition and change, through their folklore as in other aspects of their lives. In his own life at this time, Ellison was experiencing personal and professional transformations as a migrant as well as a writer. Like other FWP folklore workers,

he collected during the day and wrote in the evenings (35-36), working for the first time as a full time cultural worker, now possessing a primary occupational identity as a writer.

Ellison's experiences collecting folklore resonated in later works of fiction and short stories. O'Meally notes that "the project's structured examination of language and folklore planted seeds that helped his writing grow beyond the limits of literary realism" (1980, 36). He writes of how the "process of interviewing and transcribing" the narratives "sharpened Ellison's ear for idiosyncrasies of speech and gave him practice in getting particular speech patterns onto paper"(34)." His performative and improvisatory renderings of African American speech and oral traditions of various genres demonstrates, as Callahan puts it, a "commitment to an American improvisatory vernacular" (89). Rather than serving only illustratively, folklore was deeply infused within Ellison's fiction. Ellison viewed the use of folklore in fiction as absorbing "folk tradition into ... thematic structures ... plots, symbolism and rhetoric" (1995d, 111). As his collecting was informed by both text and context, so was his fiction, as O'Meally indicates:

Many of the rhymes, jokes and peculiarities of speech which enrich Ellison's fiction were drawn from his experience in Oklahoma and Alabama; many others were drawn from notes he made while researching and interviewing in Harlem for the Federal Writer's Project. Beyond simply copying bits of already collected folklore into his fiction, Ellison developed a working knowledge of Afro-American rhymes, games and stories. Moreover, he refined his sense of the folkloric context: the moments and the settings in which persons, particularly Afro-Americans, were likely to use the stylized speech of folklore. He studied text as well as context. In his fiction ... the lore is more than local color; it is ritualistic as well as reflective of a whole lifestyle (1980, 35).

Folklore also figured multifariously in Ellison's essays and creative non-fiction. Drawing from wellsprings of memories from his Oklahoma boyhood, formative years as Tuskegee student and migrant to New York, and keen observations as a FWP field researcher, he possessed an abundant store of folklore material borne out of first-hand experience. While working for the FWP, Ellison was associated with leftist politics and wrote about folklore in publications self-consciously identified with the working class. The writers for these publications, who were of working class origin, asserted, according to Michael Denning, "pronounced class awareness or consciousness" which framed "working class ideologies" central to a "cultural front" that shaped American culture for generations to come. (8). During this early phase of his literary career, Ellison authored essays and reviews about folklore found among African Americans and elsewhere in the world which Marxist literary scholar Barbara Foley, in her article "Ralph Ellison as Proletarian Journalist" sees as demonstrating "a materialist and internationalist approach" which views "folklore as a site of resistance" Ellison definitively rejected Communism by the mid-1940s and became increasingly critical of

the Left. Nevertheless, he continued to see folklore as a means of resistance despite a profound ideological shift which has been variously interpreted by Ellison scholars. Foley contends, for example that his view of folklore remained consonant with the ideology of the popular front, arguing against critics who saw the representation of folklore as resistance in *Invisible Man* as representing "a culturalist tendency antipathetic to Marxist analytical categories" (1998-99, 543). As Rampersad demonstrates in *Ralph Ellison: A Biography*, Ellison's immersion in leftist intellectual circles and, eventually, in the New York literati, was accompanied by personal disengagement from participation in African American vernacular culture. Nevertheless, even as he became personally more distant from working class culture, he continued to strongly assert the significance of folklore for African American cultural resilience and survival.

As a young writer, Ellison was profoundly influenced by the Cambridge school's view of the relationship of myth and ritual, especially Lord Raglan's archetypal study of the hero. He was also inspired by the applications of mythology and folklore by Eliot and Joyce, and he came to see that African American folklore could be used in his fiction as well. According to Rampersad, this revelation emerged during Ellison's collecting of folklore in Harlem for the FWP. "Ironically," Rampersad states, "explaining New York street life had taken him back into the arcane world he had entered in exploring the footnotes of T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*, and especially the indebtedness of Eliot to Jessie Weston and other British scholars in the so-called Cambridge school of myth and ritual studies" (2007, 116).

The Cambridge school's approach to folklore differed greatly from other twentieth century folklore scholarship, including the approaches of both comparative, text oriented European folklorists and American folklorists engaged in ethnographic studies of living traditions. Its conceptualization of the origins of myth in ritual is unverifiable and reductive, positing relationships belied by systematic field research. For Ellison, there was apparently no contradiction between his systematic collecting of folklore in a project guided by ethnographic methodologies and the inspiration his studies of myth and ritual brought to the genesis of *Invisible Man* as well as his essays about African Americans.

Ellison viewed folklore as central for understanding African American culture, and over the years he increasingly spoke in terms of both its universal significance and cultural specificity. In "Richard Wright's Blues," published in 1945, Ellison saw the blues as a quintessential African American art form, "an autobiographical chronicle of personal catastrophe expressed lyrically" (129). A 1948 *New York Star* article, "A Journalist Considers the Position of the Negro in American History," contended that "Negro Americans ... evolved, from disparate influences, a folk culture embodying ... a conception of human life, a 'style,' a musical culture, a somewhat crude psychology, and a very advanced philosophy of human freedom" (qtd. in Rampersad 2007, 240).

Later writings argued against reducing African American folklore to archetypes and seeing it *primarily* as a vehicle of resistance, as they stressed its transcendent value for African Americans in particular and humankind in general. In "Change the Joke and Slip the Yoke," written in 1958, Ellison criticized Stanley Edgar

Hyman's view of the archetype of the trickster in *Invisible Man*, with Ellison asserting his freedom as a novelist to create characters with specific cultural resonances. He stated that "spirituals .. blues, jazz and folk tales" have "much to tell us of the faith, humor and adaptability to reality necessary to live in a world which has taken on much of the insecurity and blues-like absurdity known to those of us who brought it into being" (112). His 1964 review of *Blues People* argued against its sociogenic approach and emphasis upon the blues as a means of political protest. He underscored the universal significance of the blues and its importance as an art form along with its value for African Americans as a technique of cultural survival. For Ellison, the blues "speak to us simultaneously of the tragic and comic aspects of the human condition and they express a profound sense of life shared by many Negro Americans precisely because their lives have combined these modes" (286).

Folklore was integral to Ellison's view of African American culture as a major shaping force in the lives of all Americans, and the continuing cultural interactions of blacks and whites throughout American history. Stressing the importance of the vernacular in American culture, and Black influence on American culture, a news release for Ellison's first course at New York University in 1970 stated that it would be "exploring the relationship between sophisticated and vernacular culture in the United States ... one of the abiding phenomena in this country starting from our American and British background." European cultural traditions had come "into ceaseless contact with the imaginations of Negro Americans who have been in the unique position of being inside the society and yet outside" (quoted in Rampersad 2007, 471).

Ellison's collections of children's folklore for the FWP incorporated traditions distinctive to African Americans as well as others shared by New Yorkers and other Americans from diverse cultural backgrounds. While Ellison did not note that many of these traditions were also practiced by non-Blacks, their provenances reflected the interactions through culture of blacks and whites as well as the distinctive contribution of African Americans to American life, themes which ran through Ellison's writings over the years. In his scathing critique of *Blues People* by Amiri Baraka (known at the time as LeRoi Jones), Ellison contends that "Jones has stumbled over that ironic obstacle which lies in the path of anyone who would fashion a theory of American Negro culture while ignoring the intricate network of connections which binds Negroes to the larger society. To do so is to attempt delicate brain surgery with a switchblade" (1964, 283). Mutual influences between African Americans and other Americans were seen by Ellison as continuous and ongoing. In "Some Questions and Some Answers," written in 1958, Ellison wrote of a "body of folklore" as among the fundamental expressions of "American Negro" culture, but hastened to add that "it must, however, be pointed out that due to the close links which Negro Americans have with the rest of the nation, these cultural expressions are constantly influencing the larger body of American culture and in turn influencing them" (292). While recognizing the reciprocal cultural influences between African Americans and other Americans, Ellison viewed African American folklore as a hallmark of African American cultural genius, asserting humanity and creativity over centuries of oppression. Much of African American folklore,

like many of the children's traditions Ellison collected, is distinctively African American in character, created and shaped by blacks in the Southern United States and Harlem. Like folklore, fiction by Ellison and other African American writers counters dehumanizing representations of their culture<sup>20</sup>, following from the imperative Ellison states in "Twentieth Century Fiction and the Mask of Humanity" for "Negro writers" to take on the "task of defining Negro humanity" (1953, 99), a task which for Ellison integrally involved folklore.

While Ellison's FWP folklore collections have enduring significance as a foundation for both his fiction and non-fiction, they also have substantial but unrecognized value as folklore collections on their own terms, drawing from multiple cultural sources while demonstrating creativity in the creation of emerging traditions. Reading Ellison's field notes and texts of seventy years ago from the standpoint of a folklorist trained in the performance centered approach to folklore study, I am struck by his accounts of performance situations, his sensitivity to performance styles, and the contextual details he provided. Contemporary folklorists should also be impressed by his frequent notes about the uses of particular traditions and his remarks about distinctive features of form and the localization of particular traditions.

As a writer, Ellison was a literary modernist who wrote stylistically advanced fiction deeply infused with folklore, representing African Americans maintaining traditions while experiencing modern life. As a folklorist, he was a modern folklorist, observing and reporting context while recording texts, collecting older traditions maintained by southern migrants, folklore localized and transformed in the city and emerging urban traditions. Rather than seeing folklore as residual culture, as static relics of a Southern past, Ellison projects a dynamicist view of the children's folklore he collected as emergent in performance. Folklore, and speech in general, are viewed performatively, marked by improvisation and innovation. Folk culture is located within modernity, rather than outside it, through the folklore research he carried out at the outset of his career as well as in subsequent fiction and essays about African-American culture. Tradition and modernity are intertwined throughout the body of Ellison's folklore research and literary production, embodying a view of the traditional and the modern in dynamic interaction rather than as disjunctive forces. While Ellison's brief period collecting folklore occurred early in his career, it represented a highly formative episode in his literary career which continued to reverberate on many levels.

## NOTES

An earlier version of this work was presented at the American Folklore Society's annual meeting in Milwaukee in 2006. Research for this article was carried out while I was a Non-Resident Fellow of the W.E.B. Du Bois Institute for African and African-American Research at Harvard University. I am grateful to Roger D. Abrahams, Henry Louis Gates, Jr., Felicia R. McMahon and John F. Szwed for their encouragement and critical comments about this article.

1. While the manuscript for the proposal for *Children's Rhymes and Games* in the Manuscript Collection of the Library of Congress does not include the

author's name, Halpert refers to it an account of his early career in "Coming Into Folklore More Than Fifty Years Ago." He recounted that he was "fired" from the FWP, "mainly because the book I had proposed, on New York City children's lore, was thought to be too large a project – one that would take too long to reach publication" (451). The proposed book was never published.

2. Nine "Children's Street Rhymes" in this collection were included in a book of photographs by Aaron Siskind, *Harlem: Photographs 1932-40*, taken for the "Harlem Document" initiative associated with the Photo League, as Battle indicates in "Harlem: A Document" ( 2-6). *The Book of Negro Folklore*, edited by Langston Hughes and Arna Bontemps, has a section "Harlem Children's Rhymes and Gags" in a chapter on playsongs and games, which included four items collected by Ellison, each framed by either Ellison's notes or comments by the children reciting the rhymes (433-35). A number of the rhymes collected by Ellison also appeared in Halpert's master's thesis.

3. All of Ellison's transcriptions of children's rhymes and associated field notes are reprinted here as they appear in the reports held in the Manuscript Collection of the Library of Congress, without emendation, except for small changes to regularize spelling.

4. During the 1970s, the academic discipline of Folklore turned from an emphasis on textual analysis to a performance-centered approach. Viewing folklore as artistic communication in small groups, it focused upon how folklore emerges in face-to-face interaction, and its social and cultural context. In their "Introduction" to an issue of *Western Folklore* marking the twentieth anniversary of the landmark *Toward New Perspectives in Folklore* which articulated the new approach to the study of folklore in context and as performance, Shuman and Briggs write of how "style, content, and context" were "brought under a single theoretical aegis as they were studied in particular, situated acts of communication" (114).

5. Abrahams indicates that this rhyme derives "from a formula opening of English tales" (145).

Versions of this rhyme were collected by Johnson on St. Helena Island (134, 137, 155) as opening formulae for folk tales:

Once upon a time  
Monkey chaw tobacco an' spit white lime

Once upon a time  
Monkey chaw tobacco an' de cat drink wine

Once upon a time, a very good time  
Monkey chaw tobacco on de railroad line

6. Bessie Jones and Bess Lomax Hawes suggest that little Sallie's last name as "Water" is found in "perhaps the oldest versions" of this game of British origin which they collected as an African American ring play. They note that the concluding stanza, "Shake it to the East/Shake it to the West," is an African



American addition to this game (1972, 107).

7. Hale and Hale indicate that the expression "Shake Your Duster" dates to the second decade of the twentieth century or earlier, when it had an "admonitory" purpose, to "speed up a person's effort in the business at hand," and they "suspect it may refer to long coats, or 'dusters'" which the "first automobilists" wore "when the motor car was young." (1938, 918).

Another version collected by Ellison had a more plausible rationale for the visit to a store:

I had a little dog  
His name was buster  
Sent him to the store  
To buy some mustard  
Oh well a come on  
Buster  
Bring that mustard!

8. Variants of this rhyme were recited throughout New York City, its suburbs, and in Northwestern Connecticut. Halpert notes variants of this rhyme recited in New York City, with a different third line, as "On the day of decoration" or "On the day of declaration" (Folk Rhymes 172). In her dissertation, "Folk Jingles of American Children", Dorothy Howard indicated that "the day of declaration" variant was found in East Orange, New Jersey, Nangotuck (sic), Connecticut and Westchester County (1938, 115).

9. Halpert notes that this rhyme was also collected at Greenwich House, in Greenwich Village (1946, 172). Greenwich House served a largely immigrant population at the time.

10. This rhyme was also reported from throughout New York City. A variant included in "Folk Rhymes of New York City Children" was transcribed (or spelled) differently, as "One, two, three a-lairry,/ I spy Mrs. Sarey,/ Sitting on a bumble lairry,/Just like a chocolate fairy" (1946, 171). Howard reported a version from "New York State" as "One, two, three a-larry/I spy sister Sarrie/Sitting on a bumbleberry/ Eating Chocolate like a fairy" (1938, 116). Ethel and Oliver Hale indicated that "no one has told us what a bumble-airy or bumble-eery is, so we must assume it is a concocted word, created to fit a rhyme scheme" (1938, 126).

11. Abrahams provides 39 references from throughout the United States of variants and versions of "Charlie Chaplin" as a jump rope rhyme (1969, 26-27). In New York City, Halpert reports, in "Folk Rhymes of New York City Children" that Charlie Chaplin as counting out rhyme and jump rope rhyme included a variety of last lines, "And turn yourself around," "And turn around to the submarine," "And turn your back to the Kaiser," from Greenwich and Church House, Jones House and Greenwich House, respectively.

12. According to Halpert, "Gypsy, gypsy, lived in a tent" was found throughout New York City (1946, 192). Abrahams notes, that it is more frequently found as a counting-out rhyme than as a jump rope rhyme (57) Versions of this rhyme are found in England and Scotland (Abrahams 1969, 57; Abrahams and Rankin 1980, 87).

13. Abrahams reports that more common versions than the one Ellison remembered begin with the same two lines, but the following lines say;

My mother gave your mother  
A punch in the nose  
What was the color of the blood?  
Blue [or Red]  
B-L-U-E or R-E-D (152)

Halpert collected another version, from the West Side, as:

Your mother and my mother  
Were hanging out the clothes  
Your mother gave my mother  
A sock in the nose.  
What color was the blood?  
'Red'  
R-E-D (1946, 125)

14. Versions collected by Halpert had different third and fourth lines. In one from the West Bronx, "I socked him in the nose/And I stepped on his toes," in another from Jones House "I squeezed him like a lemon and sent him up to heaven, and, in a text from Brooklyn's Willoughby House, "He'll pull me by my pants/And make me do a dance ." Abrahams reports that as a jump rope rhyme, "I won't go to Macy's" has been collected in California and Nevis (1969, 97).

15. Abrahams references sixteen versions of "Miss, miss, little miss, miss:/When she misses she misses like this" from the throughout the United States, Britain and Scotland in *Jump-Rope Rhymes: A Dictionary*, including one from Britain which begins, "I know a woman/And her name is Miss (1969, 123-24).

16. In *Jump-Rope Rhymes: A Dictionary*, Abrahams lists references to versions and variants found in thirty one states and Scotland (1969, 102).

17. This rhyme is used both as a counting-out rhyme and a jump rope rhyme. Abrahams's *Jump-Rope Rhymes: A Dictionary* and Abrahams's and Rankin's *Counting-Out Rhymes: A Dictionary* identify, all together, versions and variants from thirteen states (Abrahams 135-36, Abrahams and Rankin 154-55).

18. Sanches and Kirshenblatt-Gimblett reference the research on rope skipping games of the Cooperative Research Project in *Rope Skipping Games: Language, Belief and Customs*, Tri-University Project on Elementary Education, University of Nebraska and U.S. Office of Education. 1968.

19. Another variant, which Halpert dates to 1918 from East 78<sup>th</sup> Street, was reported as "Ladies and Gentlemen/Take my Advice/Take off your Britches/And Slide on the Ice" (1946, 93).

20. Ellison's views of the received dehumanizing and distorted representations of Blacks in American literature are akin to Toni Morrison's notion of the "Africanist" presence in American literature discussed in her *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (1992).

## WORKS CITED

- Abrahams, Roger. 1969. *Jump-Rope Rhymes: A Dictionary*. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Abrahams, Roger and Lois Rankin. 1980. *Counting-Out Rhymes: A Dictionary*. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Banks, Ann, ed. 1980. *First Person America*. New York: Knopf.
- Battle, Marcia. 1990. Harlem: A Document. New Introduction to Aaron Siskind, *Harlem: Photographs 1932-1940*, 3-6. Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press.
- Bauman, Richard and Américo Paredes, eds. 1972. *Toward New Perspectives in Folklore*. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Botkin, [Benjamin] A. 1958. We Called it Living Lore. *New York Folklore Quarterly* 14(3): 189-201.
- Byerman, Keith Eldon. 1985. *Fingering the Jagged Grain: Tradition and Form in Recent Black Fiction*. Athens: University of Georgia Press.
- Callahan, John F. 1994. Frequencies of Eloquence: The Performance and Composition of Invisible Man. In *New Essays on Invisible Man*, ed. Robert O'Meally, 55-94. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Dargan, Amanda and Zeitlin, Steven. 1990. *City Play*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press.
- Denning, Michael. 1996. *The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century*. London; New York: Verso.
- Ellison, Ralph. 1939-40. Harlem Children's Folklore. New York City FolkloreCollections, United States Work Projects Administration (WPA) Records, Federal Writer's Project: Folklore Project. Manuscript Collection, Library of Congress. Container A 648.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1966. Harlem's America. *New Leader*. 26 September: 22-35.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1972 [1952]. *Invisible Man*. New York: Vintage Books.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1994. Introduction [from the 1981 printing; 1952]. *Invisible Man*, xvii – xxxiv. New York: Modern Library.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1995a [1945]. Richard Wright's Blues. In *The Collected Essays of Ralph Ellison*, ed. John F. Callahan, 128-44. New York: Modern Library.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1995b [1948]. Harlem is Nowhere. In *The Collected Essays of Ralph Ellison*, ed. John F. Callahan, 320-27. New York: Modern Library.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1995c [1953]. Twentieth Century Fiction and the Black Mask of Humanity. In *The Collected Essays of Ralph Ellison*, ed. John F. Callahan, 81-99. New York: Modern Library.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1995d [1958]. Change the Joke and Slip the Yoke. In *The Collected Essays of Ralph Ellison*, ed. John F. Callahan, 100-112. New York: Modern Library.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1995e [1958]. Some Questions and Some Answers. In *The Collected Essays of Ralph Ellison*, ed. John F. Callahan, 291-301. New York: Modern Library.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1995f [1963/64]. The World and the Jug. In *The Collected Essays of Ralph Ellison*, ed. John F. Callahan, 155-58. New York: Modern Library.

- \_\_\_\_\_. 1995g [1964]. The Art of Fiction: An Interview. In *The Collected Essays of Ralph Ellison*, ed. John F. Callahan, 210-24. New York: Modern Library.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1995h [1964]. Blues People. In *The Collected Essays of Ralph Ellison*, ed. John F. Callahan, 278-87. New York: Modern Library.
- Foley, Barbara. 1998-99. Ralph Ellison as Proletarian Journalist." *Science & Society* 62(4): 537-556.
- Gaunt, Kyra. 2006. *The Games Black Girls Play*. New York: New York University Press.
- Hale, Ethel and Oliver. 1938. *From Sidewalk, Gutter and Stoop: Being a Chronicle of Children's Play and Game Activity*. Manuscript, New York Public Library, Special Collections.
- [Halpert, Herbert]. n.d. *Children's Rhymes and Games*. Proposed book manuscript. Work Projects Administration (WPA) Records, Federal Writer's Project: Folklore Project. Manuscript Collection, box A647. Library of Congress.
- Halpert, Herbert. 1946. Folk Rhymes of New York City Children. Master's thesis, Columbia Univ.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1992. Coming Into Folklore More than Fifty Years Ago. *Journal of American Folklore* 105(418): 442-457.
- Hirsch, Jerrold. 1988. Cultural Pluralism and Applied Folklore: The New Deal Precedent. In *The Conservation of Culture: Folklorists and the Public Sector*, ed. Burt Feintuch, 46-67. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky.
- Howard, Dorothy G. Mills. 1938. Folk Jingles of American Children: A Collection and Study of Rhymes Used by Children Today. Ph.D. Diss. New York University.
- Hughes, Langston and Arna Bontemps. 1958. *Book of Negro Folklore*. New York: Dodd, Mead.
- Hurston, Zora Neale. 1999. *Go Gator and Muddy the Water: Writings from the Federal Writer's Project*, ed. Pamela Bordeon. New York: W.W. Norton.
- Hymes, Dell. 1981. *"In Vain I Tried to Tell You": Essays in Native American Ethnopoetics*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Johnson, Guy B. 1930. *Folk Culture on St. Helena Island, South Carolina*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.
- Jones, Bessie and Hawes, Bess Lomax. 1972. *Step it Down: Games, Plays, Songs and Stories from the Afro-American Heritage*. New York: Harper and Row.
- Jorgensen, Marilyn. 1999. Teases and Pranks. In *Children's Folklore: A Source Book*, ed. Brian Sutton-Smith, Jay Mechling, Thomas W. Johnson, and Felicia R. McMahon, 213-24. New York: Garland, 1995.
- Morrison, Toni. 1992. *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*. New York: Vintage.
- O'Meally, Robert G. 1980. *The Craft of Ralph Ellison*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Opie, Iona and Peter. 1959. *The Lore and Language of Schoolchildren*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Rampersad, Arnold. 2007. *Ralph Ellison: A Biography*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.

- Sanches, Mary and Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, Barbara. 1976. Children's Traditional Speech Play and Child Language. In *Speech Play*, ed. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 65-110. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Shuman, Amy and Charles Briggs. 1993. Introduction. Special Issue, Theorizing Folklore: Toward New Perspectives on the Politics of Culture. *Western Folklore* 48(2,3,4): 109-34.
- Siskind, Aaron. 1981. *Harlem: Photographs 1932-1940*. Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press. 1990.
- Sullivan, C.W. III. 1999. Songs, Poems and Rhymes. In Sutton-Smith, et al, 145-160.
- Sutton-Smith, Brian, Jay Mechling, Thomas W. Johnson and Felicia R. McMahon, eds. 1999. *Children's Folklore: A Source Book*. Logan, Utah: Utah State University Press.
- Szalay, Michael. 2000. *New Deal Modernism: American Literature and the Invention of the Welfare State*. Durham: University of North Carolina Press.

## **BOISE IKASTOLA: BOISE BASQUE LANGUAGE IMMERSION PRESCHOOL**

JACQUELINE THURSBY

### **Defining the Boise Basques**

It is said that the first Basques to reach the Western Hemisphere were early cod fishermen. Following them was the fleet of Christopher Columbus, whose ships had been built in Northern Spain by Basques, and there were Basque sailors in his fleet. Some remained in South America and their descendants still flourish there, mostly in Argentina and Uruguay. At the time of the California Gold Rush, many of the Basques who ran cattle and sheep in the Pampas region of South America migrated to the United States. They were not made to feel welcome in the gold rush camps, because they were looked on as sojourners rather than American citizens. In order to survive, they slowly took over what had traditionally been the work of the Native Americans: namely, the sheep herding industry.

During the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, many Basques, young men and women, migrated to the United States from the Basque Country in northern Spain and the Basque region in Southern France. Economic need forced vast Southern European migration at that time because of little hope for the future. By the turn of the century, large sheep companies had been created in the American West, located mostly in the states of California, Nevada, Wyoming, Oregon, and Idaho. The companies were often owned or tended by reliable and competitive Basque sheepherders. Invitations were extended to brothers, uncles, nephews, and friends to join and work with the herders in the American West. A network of one hundred twenty-one Basque hotels sprung up throughout the West, and young women were invited to come from the old country to work in the hotels. Those gathering places were sometimes called “marriage mills,” because many of the young Basques met their life-partners there.

Boise was one of the early settling places for the Basque people. There were hotels where the language was spoken, familiar foods were served, and familiar music, games, and dances were practiced. The language is a major marker in the Basque tradition. It cannot be definitively traced to any other language. There is an old joke told again and again to explain why the Basques are so good. It seems the devil decided to corrupt the pure people of the Basque region. Try as he might, he could not learn the difficult language. He learned “yes - bi” and “no - es,” but that was all. Consequently, because he couldn’t tempt the Basques in their own language, he left and they remained very, very good people – even to this day. Right here on Grove Street, there is an old Basque hotel that has been lovingly restored and donated to the Basque community of Boise.

### **Maintaining Cultural Identity**

There are many people in the United States of Basque heritage, and the Basques are recorded as a group separate from the Spanish or French in the United States

census. Because of the unique language, cultural mores, and rich traditions of the old country, the American Basques work hard to blend and syncretize their Basque heritage and their American national identity, and that often begins with the young children. The National American Basque Association, called NABO, has chapters in many states throughout the country, including New York and Florida, and NABO provides club interaction, language training, and other activities for adults. For children, the Basque Museum and Cultural Center sponsors summer *Euskara* Immersion camps, and NABO supports other opportunities for Basque language training, dance and music lessons, arts and crafts, and a variety of other Basque cultural experiences from festivals to study abroad programs (through the University of Nevada at Reno and Boise State University) to trips and tours of the old country.

### **History, Purpose, and Goals of the Basque Ikastola**

Founded in 1998, Boiseko Ikastola is a preschool for children to learn to understand and speak Basque. Housed at St. Paul's Catholic Church on the Boise State University Campus, it introduces young children to Basque and not only aids in their comprehension of the Basque language, but also helps with developing other language skills. Twenty-five years ago the Basque government was one of the first to recognize the need to establish a curriculum especially designed for preschool aged children. The program, called the *Urtxintxa* Project, has been replicated by other European countries. The Ikastola uses this same curriculum and has proven very successful for children continuing on at both private and public kindergartens. There are two full-time instructors with Early Childhood Development degrees.

### **Language and Literacy**

Children learn the Basque language through thematic units and interaction with teachers, peers, music and print. Other opportunities for conversation include dramatic play, story time, circle time and puppet shows. The Ikastola's print-rich literacy environment includes some of the following: books in Basque and English, books made by individual children, magazines and newspapers appropriate for young children, calendars, bulletin boards, alphabet charts, labels on materials, supplies, equipment, lists of all kinds, children's names displayed, child dictation or writing and drawings displayed. When the children want to write, copy or draw, the "tools" are always available.

### **Science**

Open-ended questions by the teacher help the children learn how to question, how to be thinkers. Hands-on activities include using simple machines, sensory table play, plant and animal life, and cooking activities.



**Math**

The children learn to print and work with numbers. They compare, sort, classify, and organize objects. The concepts of time and seasons are introduced, and the children learn the days of the week and months of the year. Clocks and calendars are used to teach time.

**Social Studies**

Learning about the “world around us” is the focus of this curriculum area. Field trips and studies of occupations are included.

**Art**

Exploratory, sensory art activities help the child experience a variety of media. Paints, chalk, pencils, crayons, markers, glue and play dough (made by the children) are available in a “free choice” area for the children to use as they wish.

**Large and Small Motor Skills**

Movement activities including dance, running, balancing, and sports are just part of the large motor program. From using scissors to completing small puzzles, children are continually offered opportunities to develop their smaller muscles.

**Field Trips**

Students enjoy a variety of field trips that add to the rich learning experience. Common trips are to The Basque Museum and Cultural Center, Fronton, Edwards Greenhouses, The Pumpkin Patch, Zoo, and the Boise Public Library.

**Dramatic Play**

Dramatic play is one of the most valuable forms of play for children. The preschool gives children many opportunities to play and the toys and tools with which to learn. Play provides opportunities for exploration, manipulation, and experimentation that are vital for a child to construct knowledge. Through immediate feedback of peers, children refine their learning and restructure concepts.

**Guidelines**

Because it is a non-profit center, a portion of the annual budget is generated through fund raising activities and events. Boiseko Ikastola requires a parent participation activity from each student's family. This parent participation activity program is designed to keep students safer, and to keep parents involved in their

children's learning environment. Under the auspices of the *Urtzintza* Project, the following guidelines (condensed here for time purposes) are to be followed:

- The project cultivates children's natural knowledge aptitudes, self-confidence, physical abilities, social and communicative skills.
- Instructive games are inclusive and work towards each child's autonomy and shared social development.
- One of the program's first aims is to enforce respect for diversity.
- The program teaches practices of cooperation and compromise to reinforce human values and self-respect.
- This is a project structured for all students, within or without the Basque Country. Thus, the contents of the lessons are directed to develop among the children knowledge of the Basque language, culture, customs, and sentiment all over the eight territories of the country in and out of Europe. The project includes the study of traditional songs, poetry, art, literature, theatre, mythology, and rural sports as a way to widen their love and respect for the Basque language and culture.
- The project is focused on teaching and learning in Basque language. The program heightens the respect, use and knowledge of the Basque language.
- The project aims to develop the love of the Basque culture as a way for developing within the students the respect, admiration, and care for the rest of the nations, cultures, languages, and peoples all over the world.

### **Purpose and Linguistic Performance**

For many adult Basque Americans or American Basques, learning the language of the old country is a frustrating dream. The unique language itself is non-Indo-European, and it is difficult to learn because the vocabulary is not rooted in Latin or Greek, the common origin languages of the Western world. Because the Basque language is dialectical and can vary significantly from village to village, Basque scholars created a consensus language called Batua, which is now taught both in the old country and in the United States. There are Basque language classes in various American cities including Boise, Reno, Fresno, San Francisco, and New York.

In the Basque Country, much of the dominant language is Spanish. The primary reason for the rise in early second-language acquisition in the Basque Country is a result of studies conducted there concerning monolingual and bilingual presence

in families in various regions of the country. Basque language scholar Maria José Ezeizabarrena reported that “research into early language acquisition has lead many researchers to conclude that bilinguals with ‘sufficient “ input behave like monolinguals” (2007, 1). In other words, in homes where Basque is the dominant language, children are monolingual before the age of three or four. Older children become more and more bilingual as they pass through the educational system. Production data of Basque vocabulary, verb morphology, case morphology, and Spanish-Basque mixed utterances have shown that monolingual and balanced bilingual children follow a very similar developmental pattern in linguistic production.

The value of second language acquisition in early childhood is particularly significant because it can enhance cross-cultural understanding, and it fosters an active interest in learning one’s own cultural knowledge and maintenance. In the United States, as children progress through the elementary grades, studies suggest that they retain the ability to form certain sounds of the language learned in early childhood even though they may not remember all of the vocabulary. This ability to enunciate the sounds correctly will serve as an aid in their mastering the language in their later years should they return to the study.

Through shared lore, songs, expressions, games, and belief practices, children in these early second language acquisition programs learn to understand and adapt to new situations. The Ikastola enculturates children into their own ancient heritage as well as the language and culture of the United States, their homeland. W. K. McNeil, in his introduction to Simon Bronner’s 1988 edition of *American Children’s Folklore*, referred to the research of William Wells Newell as saying: “By this means he also demonstrated that games, songs, and rhymes moved across linguistic and geographic barriers just as easily as folktales and legends” (1988, 11). Though Newell feared that traditional lore was waning, time has proven differently, and many scholars have demonstrated that children’s lore continues over time and space.

Referring to the playful sound sequences in *Dr. Seuss’s Sleep Book* (1962), such as “Up at Herk-Heimer Falls, where the great river rushes And Crashes down crags and in great gargling gushes,” a scholar of children’s language and learning, Judith Wells Lindfors, stated, “I believe that it is the unexpected in the language of these books that is most engaging to the child” (1987, 73). The books I observed at the Boise Ikastola, written in Basque, carry the same kind of language play presented in stories familiar to American children. *The Three Pigs*, for instance, called *Hiru Txerrikumeak*, cleverly tells the old tale and is profusely illustrated with the expected visual images: first a house of straw, then a house of sticks, followed by a house of bricks, and then what appears to be a foiled (but still living) picture of a wolf with a scalded foot. Another book tells the story of the peculiar duckling, rather than the ugly duckling. As these changes are pointed out, the different tellings of the tales introduce the children not only to subtle differences in story, but also subtle and sometimes not subtle differences in the expressed culture of varied people.

## Second Language Acquisition

In a Stanford doctoral dissertation, L. W. Fillmore posed a question and offered a succinct answer: “What is it that second-language learners must learn? After intensively observing during an entire school year five Spanish monolingual children (ages five to seven) acquiring English as their second language, one researcher summed up the second-language learner’s task this way. The learner must figure out how the sound system of the new language is organized, how units of meaning are organized into words, by what principles these words are put together to form sentences, how these sentences can be used appropriately in given settings, and in what ways meanings can be conveyed in the new language and culture (1976, 634).

Using the new language as it is learned, “it is fascinating to watch children of all ages in dramatic play as they assume high-status roles and role play interactions in various status relationships. They play with various language styles, deliberately changing style when they are queen or subject, teacher or pupil, boss or employee, parent or child. Such play is an important support for the children’s growing ability to express and to interpret language expressions of role relationships, one of the many reasons that sociodrama should be an ever-present opportunity in *every* elementary and preschool classroom” (Lindfors 1987, 377).

Children possess an innate curiosity and actively pursue their urge to find out about the world, and school is a good place to do it. In an interesting study about questions asked by pre-school children with the categories being curiosity, procedural, and social-interactional, researchers found that “of the 159 preschool-kindergarten questions analyzed, approximately 45 percent (almost half) were social in nature, approximately 33 percent (one-third) were curiosity questions, and approximately 23 percent (less than one-fourth) were procedural” (Lindfors 1987, 288). Lindfors continued her discussion with examples of typical pre-school/kindergarten questions demonstrating the various categories of the questions under consideration. A curiosity question addressed to an adult observer in the classroom was: “Is God in cookies?” A procedural question asked of the teacher during an art lesson was, “Do I have to write my name up here?” And a social-interactional question, spoken after an argument between children at an art table was, “I forgive you, Jenny. Do you forgive me?” (Lindfors 1987, 288-89). Questions help children build a rich theory of the world, and in a focused school like the Boise Ikastola, curiosity, play, and learning are constantly fed.

## Conclusion

October 2008 marked ten years since the Boiseko Ikastola opened its doors in Boise, Idaho. On May 15, 2008, Ikastola families (past and present), teachers and supporters gathered to commemorate this milestone. More than 130 people came to the Basque Block to enjoy lively music, good food, entertaining games, and precious memories. As in the Japanese Foreign Language in Elementary School (FLES) programs in the United States, Islamic primary schools for teaching Arabic in order for the children to study the Q’uran, Jewish early Hebrew training, and

even the folkloric and play activities taught to the Yupik Eskimo children, like carving stories in mud with a knife, Basque people are sensitive to the realities of lost cultures and languages.

Professor Dan Dewey, an early childhood linguistic scholar at Brigham Young University, stated that early second language acquisition has many benefits. He listed increased brain development and capacity, even without mastery; greater use of the left and particularly the right brain; a more sensitive cultural awareness; increased ability to pronounce sounds in language; increased vocabulary; and an early knowledge of the subtleties of language (Dewey 2008).

In the article "Narrative Practices and the Social Construction of Self in Childhood," the authors state: "Although we believe that personal storytelling plays an important role in the social construction of self throughout the life span, we are especially interested in the beginnings of this process. There is evidence that conversational stories of personal experience are available early in life to children from a variety of cultural backgrounds. ... The process of self-construction may be especially visible in early childhood, when it first gets under way. Bruner (1986) has suggested that stories are one of the first cultural constraints on the nature of selfhood" (Miller, Potts, Fung, Hoogstra, Mintz 1990, 263). Wouldn't it be fascinating to sit in on a conversation among these budding bilingual children and see for ourselves how they are or are not constructing themselves with a strong American Basque identity?

## WORKS CITED

- Bruner, Jerome. 1986. *Actual Minds, Possible Worlds*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Dewey, Dan. 2008. Personal Interview. November. Provo, Utah.
- Ezeizabarrena, Maria José. 2008. "The Linguistic Performance of Early Bilingual Speakers of Basque Compared to Monolinguals." Paper presented at the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) Centre for Research on Bilingualism. Bangor, North Wales, UK, 28 April.
- Fillmore, L. W. 1976. *The Second Time Around: Cognitive and Social Strategies in Second Language Acquisition*. Doctoral Dissertation. Stanford University, Stanford, California.
- Lindfors, Judith Wells. 1987. *Children's Language and Learning*. 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc.
- McNeil, W. K. 1988. Introduction. In *American Children's Folklore*, ed. Simon J. Bronner, 11-23. Little Rock: August House Publishers.
- Miller, Peggy J., Randolph Potts, Heide Fung, Lisa Hoogstra, and Judy Mintz. 1990. "Narrative Practices and the Social Construction of Self in Childhood." *American Ethnologist*. Vol. 17, No. 2 (May) 292-311.
- Seuss, Dr. 1962. *Dr. Seuss's Sleep Book*. New York: Random House.

## CHEEKY BEHAVIOR: THE MEANING AND FUNCTION OF 'FARTLORE' IN CHILDHOOD AND ADOLESCENCE

TREVOR J. BLANK

Whether it is due to social taboos about bodily functions or sheer ingenuity, *flatulence* has well over a dozen common terms associated with its occurrence: passing gas, breaking wind, letting one rip (or go), cutting the cheese, busting ass, pooting, tooting, foofing, fluffing, puffing; folk retorts that mask the anxieties caused by flatulence through euphemistic annotations also exist, such as “dropping a bomb,” “making a stinker,” “cooking some eggs,” “baking brownies,” “making an air biscuit,” “stepping on a duck,” “cracking a boom-boom,” or “rolling out some thunder.”<sup>1</sup> Regardless of the fact that flatulence is a universal bodily production, the public discussion of its occurrence is a forbidden social taboo; as Josepha Sherman and T.K.F. Weisskopf point out, the aforementioned genteel euphemisms “emphasize its unsuitability as a topic of polite adult conversation” (1995, 55). Still, *farting* (as the passing of flatulence is most commonly referred to in American culture) is a part of our daily lives as well as our folklore — so much so in fact that the term “fartlore” has emerged to refer to the folklore of flatulence.<sup>2</sup>

Fartlore research has appeared sporadically in children’s folklore scholarship, but in nearly every instance the collected materials are a mere footnote in comparison to the other topics reported upon. Likewise, most existing collections are descriptive rather than analytical, and they insufficiently explain the meaning and function that flatulence-themed folklore has in the lives of children, adolescents, and adults. This begs the question: beyond their face value, what do the flatulence-themed components of folklore *mean* when enacted in games, songs, humor, beliefs, or verbal art? More importantly, what *purpose* do they serve in society and why?<sup>3</sup>

Using an interdisciplinary framework drawn from psychoanalysis, folkloristics, and sociology, this essay seeks to elucidate the means by which children and adolescents attempt to circumvent, challenge, or cope with adult authority in their confrontation of social taboos while establishing their own identities. Through a survey of historical and contemporary texts, I interpret the projective functional purpose and meaning of fartlore in the social worlds of pre-adults. In doing so, I contend that the data I have accumulated represents a distinct genre within children’s and adolescent folk culture in which folklore about bodily functions — especially those with scatological themes — is ubiquitous. In addition, my study of fartlore intends to demonstrate that fartlore is a subversive and compensatory genre that is a reflexive manifestation of unspoken societal attitudes and anxieties (see Sidoli 1996). Ethnographers should consider the value of collecting folklore for the broader interpretation of gendered and life-course experiences (including in national contexts) and especially those areas that dwell outside of mainstream scholarship boundaries in their future research endeavors.

When I was a graduate student at Indiana University, I wanted to complete my Master’s thesis on latrinalia in the twenty-first century. I was quickly shut down

after receiving the explanation that my proposed topic was (and I quote), “too unsanitary.”<sup>4</sup> Clearly, the topics of flatulence and scatology trigger highly emotional responses in the public sphere! In an example outside of my own personal experience, the children’s book *Walter, the Farting Dog* (Kotzwinkle and Murray 2001) — which tells a rather innocent story about a loveable, adopted dog that has a chronic flatulence problem — was banned from numerous public school libraries in Wisconsin in 2009. Some public schools have openly discussed banning children from farting (Mills 2008), and a twelve-year old boy was even arrested recently for deliberately “breaking wind” during class.<sup>5</sup> Why all the fuss?

Everybody farts. On average, men fart fourteen to fifteen times a day and women do it an average of eight to nine times a day en route to creating over a quart of gas (Dawson 2006, 1). Stemming from swallowed air, food, and other natural body processes, the accumulation of internal gases eventually passes through the rectum, whereupon the anal sphincter vibrates and creates the distinctive sounds associated with flatulence (Alvarez 1942). A combination of gasses are present in *flatus* (the medical term for gas expelled from the digestive tract), which is composed of approximately 79% nitrogen, 17% oxygen, 4% carbon dioxide, and small traces of hydrogen and methane. Of that, less than 1% of the gas in the average fart contains the unpleasant smell associated with its passing; this includes small amounts of ammonia, hydrogen sulfide, indole, skatole, volatile amines, and short-chain fatty acids (Rabkin and Silverman 1991, 8, 14). Before I scare anyone off, I would like to contextualize my rationale for including this information.

It is understandable that one may be “grossed out” by the physiological processes behind flatulence. We strive to avoid discussions about flatulence *when* we fart; if we break wind, we might pray that it does not make a sound or smell that will draw attention to us; we may simply avoid acknowledging that a fart has taken place, or if we do, we might pass the blame onto the family pet<sup>6</sup> or to a peer with diffusing remarks or posturing; undeniably, some people will endure great physical discomfort in order to withhold flatulence or acknowledge anal productions in public. As such, it is not surprising to note the lack of social awareness or interest about *how* we fart, much less (and more curiously) *why*, *when*, and *where* we do it. Despite its proclivity for creating anxiety, flatulence is a pervasive part of folklore — beginning with learned behaviors during childhood and reinforced by parents and society throughout the life course — and as such, the subversive and compensatory nature of fartlore serves as an excellent entry-point into a deeper understanding of the myriad ways that people — especially children and adolescents — navigate and respond to the pressures of not only their bowels, but their social worlds. Indeed, one would be hard-pressed to find someone over the age of ten who was unfamiliar with the enduring children’s song, “Beans, Beans,” which features stanzas such as:

Beans, beans, they’re good for your heart  
 The more you eat, the more you fart  
 The more you fart, the better it feels  
 Beans should be served at every meal!



And:

Beans, beans, the musical [or magical] fruit  
 The more you eat, the more you toot  
 The more you toot, the better it feels  
 So serve some beans at all your meals!

Even though a significant portion of fartlore plays on the social anxieties stemming from flatulence, it bears noting that “passing gas” was not always a socially taboo subject matter; cultural awareness and engagement with flatulence has been documented for centuries.<sup>7</sup> Societal attitudes about the public embrace or acknowledgment of flatulence have been undergoing revision since the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, when the social classification of highbrow and lowbrow culture became increasingly dichotomous and subjects such as flatulence began to be associated with immaturity or the lower class (see Levine 1988). Accordingly, the historical accounts about the deliberate engagement of flatulence in customs or narrative forms show a cultural revelry with the subject in past generations and cultures, whereas modern fartlore collections hint at secretive, malicious, or emotionally reactive causes behind the creation of fartlore, especially amongst pre-adults.

Perhaps the most (in)famous study of scatology was conducted by soldier-scientist John G. Bourke, who witnessed a ritual urine-drinking ceremony among the Zuñi in New Mexico in 1881 and subsequently became fascinated with the role of excrement in world cultures. Bourke spent over a decade researching and collecting scatological folklore from around the world en route to publishing the exhaustive *Scatologic Rites of All Nations* in 1891. Unsurprisingly, the folklore of flatulence was well-represented in Bourke’s treatise, including the proposition that the fart was seen as a divinity to ancient Egyptians who saw flatulence as the personification of a natural function (87-88) and the revelation that farts were once used as a means of toll payment in France dating back to 1398 (109-10).

My point in sharing these incidents of cultural awareness about flatulence and their influence on the creation of fartlore is to underscore the longstanding tradition of social commentary and interest in the subject and its narrative byproducts. Fartlore is more than just a response to the constraints of modern social norms; it is a derivative of tradition that has managed to repeat and vary throughout history. Could it be that between the psychological need for the creation of fartlore (to bypass social restrictions in order to gain pleasure) and the contemporary social pressures to control one’s anal productions (through reinforcement, peer group dynamics, and the social construction of normalcy) that folklore helps to negotiate children’s understanding of their body and corporeal presence with the expectations and constraints of society in the early years of their development? And if so, why are males seemingly more likely than females to participate in fartlore?

Flatulence is a liminal category between excretion and relief and thus serves as a fertile testing ground for establishing cognitive categories of dirtiness and cleanliness in pre-adulthood (especially childhood). By extension, identification of what makes something profane and sacred, aggressive or submissive, is also a

component of flatulence's importance to child and adolescent development of understanding social boundaries. The agent is unclear in the social construction of the flatulence taboo, and as such the sense of liminality serves to test honesty and responsibility; in a sense it serves as a means of moral conditioning through training the child in a more influential way than during other periods of the life course.

William Bascom's (1954) classic identification of the "four functions of folklore" — escape, validation, education, and social control (with the goal of stabilizing society) — embodies the functionalist approach to understanding the reasons for folklore's creation and dissemination; that is, the assumption that folklore has a purpose or "function" in society and can thus be viewed through this lens of interpretation. Functionalism has long served as a theoretical framework for the study of children's folklore (Gaignebet 1974; Knapp and Knapp 1976; Opie and Opie 1953); however, Elliott Oring (1976) and others have criticized functionalism as merely *interpreting* folklore by providing a greater sense of understanding the consequence of social phenomena, instead of truly *explaining* its causation through empirical evidence and analysis. As an example, the Knapps (1976, 211-16) use functionalism as an entry point into explaining fartlore, and while their collection shows a body of folklore that is clearly mediated by the performative presence of flatulence, their reportage falls short of uncovering the motivational sources or contexts that influence their informants and does not make any notation of gendering issues with fartlore.<sup>8</sup> The functionalist approach has merit as an analytical framework, but — as critics suggest — it requires deeper inquiry into the sources of the tradition that produced the functions, particularly with regard to its role as a cognitive source of categorization.

The reluctance to openly embrace flatulence may be due to the fact that malodorous scents attributed to bodily secretions or emissions (such as perspiration and flatulence) have long been associated with persons of wanton moral character or those of lower class status (Brill 1932, 40; Largey and Watson 1972). Even today, negative connotations are attributed to things that are perceived to be unclean or foul-smelling (see Drobnick 2006).<sup>9</sup> A person who acts undesirably may be called a "stinker," while a clean or pious person might be described as emitting the "odor of sanctity." In the animal kingdom, skunks are symbols of avoidance not for their temperament, but for their smell; similar social contempt is held for people who do not smell pleasantly or appear unkempt. The hesitation to openly acknowledge our body's waste is due in part to the social perception that most of our secretions (from saliva to feces) are "dirty" and therefore symbolize what Mary Douglas (1966) calls "matter out of place" that can threaten contamination and consequently impinge on an individual's personal safety (see also Dundes 1968; Jones 1913, 431; Jones 2000; Praeger 2007, 51).

Although the elimination of waste and the passing of gas are two naturally occurring bodily functions, individuals often take proactive measures to mask from others their urge to defecate or flatulate. Sociologists have labeled this behavioral response as the "fecal habitus," or the delicate social organization of the ways that people go about ridding themselves of feces and their subsequent methods for creating a perception of distance from their excrement (Inglis 2000). Central to the concept of fecal habitus is the assumption that anxiety, embarrassment, or

shame follows a bowel movement or the passing of flatulence if they occur in situations where other people are present. Proximity to one's anal productions (such as feces or flatulence) suggests ownership and creates a sense of shame or embarrassment, especially if there are visual or olfactory remnants that can be linked to the individual.<sup>10</sup> Weinberg and Williams assert that the "threat to character is especially severe with regard to defecation, as failure to control the disposition of fecal outputs [including flatulence] in an appropriate way can project a self that is incompatible with a person's identity as a competent, mature adult" (2005, 316). To this point, Erving Goffman (1967) notes that the embodied signs of embarrassment (blushing, fumbling, stuttering, sweating, etc.), usually occur when identity claims are unfulfilled or when someone does not appropriately present themselves to others in a social situation.

Still, there is a performative component to fartlore. Folklorist Michael Owen Jones points out that "Bravado and the allure of the forbidden are not the only reasons to participate in the disgusting. No sooner do children develop a concept of contagion and learn the disgust response than many of them flaunt it, challenging rules of decorum" (2000, 59). Thus, children may "break wind" intentionally or unintentionally, playfully or maliciously. If children cannot pass gas on command, they might imitate the sound by making noises under their armpits or with their mouths, or engage in a prank such as placing a whoopee cushion on a peer's seat. A certain license is given for children to engage in these activities, although they become aware that as they become older, it is less desirable behavior. Children and adolescents frequently experiment with social taboos through humor and play frames in an effort to better understand the limits of their own corporeal existence, and also in an effort to define their role within the limits of their social networks (see Bronner 1988; Sutton-Smith et. al. 1999). In any case, it is clear that fartlore allows children and adolescents to make their most tangible connections to reality — their own, physical bodies — symbolically disembodied and ethereal, which serves as a psychological release.<sup>11</sup> But how is this applied in children's folklore?

### **Flatulence in Child and Adolescent Folklore: Examples and Interpretations**

In order to understand and explain the meaning and function of fartlore, I have identified several pervasive categories of the genre, but they are by no means representative of all the texts or types of fartlore in circulation. I purposely provide only a handful of examples for each heading in order to keep the focus on the *meaning* and contextual *function* of selected texts, while attempting to avoid overloading this essay with numerous descriptions that lack proper annotation and context.<sup>12</sup> As I have mentioned, a problem with the scant collections of fartlore available is the fact that the authors have often done little more than reprint fartlore texts verbatim without contextual information beyond the geographical location of its collection and perhaps the informants' age. Instead, I wish to reveal a few salient examples of fartlore within each category and utilize an interdisciplinary approach in order to interpret them effectively in this section and the proceeding ones.

## Games

Games have been one of the most popular genres of children's folklore observed, yet many child and adolescent games that incorporate flatulence have gone unreported. This may be due to difficulty of collecting such corrosive material in the moment of their occurrence. One such game of fartlore in many groups of children and especially early adolescents today is the game of "doorknob," which is played immediately after someone farts and like most performative fartlore is almost exclusive to males.<sup>13</sup> There is no official sanctioning of the game's beginning other than the passing of flatulence itself; the farter is supposed to quickly yell "safety" as an invocation of protection from physical retaliation for passing gas. However, if one of their peers cries "doorknob" before "safety" can be called, then the farter will be repeatedly punched in the arm until he is able to touch a door handle. As one boy proudly stated, "the game is best when you're out camping or somewhere where it's hard to find one to touch!"

Weinberg and Williams note that "breaches of the fecal habitus can be downplayed through normalization and neutralization ... [and some] are celebrated in some instances" and tend to occur among young people in same-sex settings (2005, 318). This may also serve to ease the anxiety of repressed anal-erotic desires, which fartlore subconsciously invokes during its performance. On the one hand, the game of "doorknob" seems to thrive on the farter's ability to acknowledge and subsequently revel in the creation of flatulence, especially if there is a big reaction amongst "defenseless" peers. After someone farts and it is acknowledged through the invocation of a magic word (either "safety" or "doorknob," depending on the child's role), a play frame is instantly created and entered amongst members of the group of friends that have the game in their repertoire of tomfoolery. Once engaged, the play frame enables the farter to claim reprieve from their peers' admonishment if he yells the magic word first. Doing so allows him to not only diffuse his level of embarrassment after passing gas, but also talk, mock, or joke about his farts with his peers afterward; this exchange usually takes the form of celebration or humor from the farter and jeering or humorous, derisive commentaries from the "victims" about the farter's inconsiderateness or the potency or supernatural qualities of the fart (like its ability to linger endlessly, or make someone's nostrils burn). To this point, as Mary and Herbert Knapp explain, "the child who farts is almost always the butt of a jeer; thus he is reminded of a cultural prohibition. At the same time, the formulaic nature of these jeers testifies to the frequency and the ordinariness of the situation, and thereby reduces embarrassment to manageable proportions" (Knapp and Knapp 1976: 216).

Significantly, farters risk danger playing "doorknob"; they may fail to recognize that the play frame can be initiated by their peers' invocation of their magic word, "doorknob," could result in physical punishment through an aggressive release of energy that symbolizes the peers' retaliation for the "fart attack" they have endured. From an historical perspective, the modern game of "doorknob" shows evidence of repetition and variation taking place in the passing down of traditional fartlore. In the *Scatologic Rites of All Nations*, John G. Bourke describes the game

of “Touch Wood,” in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. In Bourke’s description of the game, the non-farters would yell “touch wood” when a classmate farted and then proceed to flee for the nearest tree-box. “Those who were slow in doing this,” Bourke notes, “were pounded by the more rapid ones” (93).

### **Humorous Narratives and Verbal Art**

Humor is also a large part of child and adolescent folklore, yet fartlore is often subsumed in collections of jokes rather than given separate attention. Anxiety, coupled with the desire to normalize an embarrassing bodily function, yields a considerable amount of the content from which fartlore is composed. Humor may be categorized as being predominantly sexual and aggressive in its intention,<sup>14</sup> and according to Freud, jokes allow people to “evade restrictions and open sources of pleasure that have become inaccessible” (1905b, 103). In sum, humor allows people to have the freedom to express sentiments and thoughts that may be otherwise considered socially reprehensible. Children and teenagers are no different, and although the measurement of their social capital is more flexible and forgiving than their adult counterparts, they are nevertheless aware of social taboos and actively work to either circumvent them or subconsciously face them through symbolic interactions (see Opie and Opie 1953; Lytle 2003). Jokes are “a powerful way to test and reaffirm cultural values” (Ellis 2001, 8) and act as “an expressive genre through which one is encouraged to defuse, by means of laughter or groans, anxieties about and consequent hostility” toward socially deviant issues (Smyth 1986, 254). The performance and dissemination of humorous or playful fartlore not only massages children’s or adolescents’ repressed desire for anal play, but also helps to alleviate their unpronounced frustrations, anxieties, or resentment over the restrictions of social decorum or elements of society that are beyond their comprehension and acts as a challenge to the authority of adults or social expectations.

A relevant example of this phenomenon comes in the form of homophobic joking, which is especially prevalent amongst adolescents.<sup>15</sup> Homophobic joking helps adolescents to reaffirm their masculine prerogatives and reassures both their peers and themselves that they are in fact “normal” and heterosexual. Considering the social stigma that accompanies deviance from heterosexual orientations, especially during adolescence, homophobic joking appears to engage tensions about sexual orientation, but also reinforces the learned disgust of the anus and promotes the continued repression of anal desires stemming from psychosexual development. Another telling example can be found in a narrative that I collected from a 14-year-old male:

These two gay guys just had sex. The first gay guy asks if he can take a shower. The other gay guy says “okay, as long as you promise not to jack off in my shower.” So the first gay guy says “okay.” About ten minutes later, the first gay guy comes out of the shower. The second gay guy then goes into the bathroom to go pee and looks in the shower and sees [semen] everywhere. He gets really mad and goes back into the other room and yells, “I thought I told you not to jack off

in my shower!" The first guy looks at him and then laughs. He goes, "I didn't! I farted!" (Collected April 9, 2010).

This story is highly sexual in its content and seeks to mock the perceived "grossness" of homosexual intercourse through an intentionally graphic humorous narrative. When performed by the adolescent, the story appears to serve three primary functions: first, to reaffirm the teller's heterosexuality and disgust for homosexual behavior (thus conforming to the masculine expectations of his peer group); second, to distance the teller from any association or empathy for homosexuals — note that the characters in the story do not even have names, they are simply "the first gay guy" and "the second gay guy" — ; and lastly, to demonstrate the teller's willful disregard of societal attitudes about how "extreme" a narrative should be and what language is appropriate for friendly storytelling.

### **Folk Beliefs and Proverbs**

Fartlore does not always have to begin with observations or jokes about the act of flatulence itself in contemporary society; as a matter of fact, there appear to be a few folk beliefs and customs that are derived from historical attitudes and lore about flatulence.<sup>16</sup> Considering that folklore is largely reliant on repetition and variation for continued survival, history provides insight into the influence of oral tradition in the formation of fartlore. For example, there was a medieval belief that a man's soul is passed through his anus at death in the form of flatulence; an accompanying narrative associated with this belief is a tale about a demon that appears and places a sack over the anus of a man who has just died, then flies away with his soul (Bourke 1891, 151). In numerous cultures, people similarly believe that sneezing signifies an attempt by one's soul to leave the body (Orientalia 2008). When someone sneezes in contemporary American society we tend to offer a customary "bless you" or "Gesundheit," either out of imitated kindness, or for some, in order to influence another person's soul to stay in place. As Gershon Legman points out, "under every layer of folklore another deeper layer will be found, going as far back and as deep down as anyone can trace" (1964, 442). Clearly, the logical similarities between modern sneezing beliefs and medieval ideas about the soul at death suggest a connected lineage.<sup>17</sup>

Among the other child and adolescent folk beliefs about flatulence that I collected was the incorporation of fire, usually including a variation about how one could "light a fart" or how farting near a fireplace would create green smoke. These beliefs reveal a desire to make an uncomfortable or embarrassing occurrence into one that not only seems intentional or controlled, but almost supernatural and therefore permissible. Additionally, Freud (1932) notes that fire can occasionally serve as a symbol of masculinity; in the context of fartlore, the presence of fire as a performative component or neologistic companion (as with labeling a smelly fart to be akin to "dropping a bomb" or "making an explosion").

Proverbs about flatulence suggest an awareness of the social pressure not only to control one's bodily functions in the way that they divert blame to a potential accuser, as with "whoever smelt it, dealt it," "he who observed it, served it," and "the smeller is the 'feller," but also to give defensive, proverbial retorts such as,

“he who said the rhyme, did the crime,” “the one who said the verse made the atmosphere worse,” or the non-rhyming (but double-entendre) proverb, “a fox smells his own hole first.” Children are also quick to offer proverbial scatological folk wisdom associated with flatulence and feces as well, such as: “First comes the poop; then comes the soup” which connotes that stomach gas and pain is a sign of impending diarrhea — it should also be noted that “turtle soup” has previously served as a euphemism for diarrhea in American slang: a fact that contributed to its decline as a popular dish in southern Indiana in recent decades (Bronner 2008, 20). Other proverbs support Jones’ (1913) belief that there are important unconscious associations between body functions with similar or interconnected sensory outputs, as observed in “Why fart and waste it when you can burp and taste it?” (Leary 1977, 60).

### **Latrinalia**

It should be noted that fartlore is not limited to verbal or performative genres, as seen in the pervasiveness of latrinalia.<sup>18</sup> Undeniably, there is an historical precedent of scatological humor that incorporates flatulence, such as the “Here I Sit” pattern, observed by Alan Dundes (1968): “Here I sit broken hearted/ Tried to shit and only farted” (99) or “Here I sit in silent bliss/ Listening to the trickling piss/ Now and then a fart is heard/ Calling to the coming turd” (100). In my own ethnographical collection of latrinalia, I have observed that the many of the old patterns are still present, as seen with: “Here I sit among the vapors/ Cleaned the weed but forgot the papers,”<sup>19</sup> which is reminiscent of “Here I sit in stinking vapor/ Some sonuvabitch stole the toilet paper” (1968, 99). The obvious difference here is that my new example of latrinalia references the use of marijuana as opposed to a focused lamentation on the fecal situation. Dundes argues that “the psychological motivation for writing latrinalia is related to an infantile desire to play with feces and to artistically smear it around” (1968, 104). As I have previously noted, the same can be said of fartlore, which combines the infantile desire to play with feces with the desire for challenging social restraints through symbolic smearing in verbal or physical play frames.<sup>20</sup>

### **Folk Speech and Slang**

The folklore of flatulence has also encouraged the negative associations of the word “fart” to be adopted into compound neologistic terms for certain behaviors,<sup>21</sup> including “old fart” to describe an unhip individual that is typically seen as over-the-hill, “fart-knocker” to describe someone who is rude, or a “fart-meister” to describe someone who has mastered the “art of farting.” Perhaps the most recognizable impact of fartlore on folk speech comes in the form of folk annotations about the different “types” of farts, like the “crop-duster,” which is a left-behind, lingering fart whose owner immediately leaves the area where he or she farted so as not to be blamed; the “firecracker,” which is a fart composed of several short, but loud expulsions of gas in quick succession that makes a distinctive *ratta-tat* sound; the “queef,” which is a somewhat mythologized



“vaginal fart”<sup>22</sup> that is said to emit a sound similar to an anal fart and can only be “made by girls”<sup>23</sup>; and the ever-popular “silent but deadly” or “SBD” for flatulence that does not make a sound during its passing, but still manages to stink.<sup>24</sup>

### **Sifting through the Gas: Distinguishing Characteristics and Motivations**

In dissecting these examples of fartlore, one might ask: what are the differences between adolescent and children’s responses to the genre? David Hufford notes that “Obscene material is of great interest to adolescents and forms a very significant part of their repertoires” (1970, 55). As evidenced by many of the examples I have discussed, such as in the game of “doorknob” or in homophobic joke narratives, a substantial portion of adolescent fartlore is either physically brutish or indirectly sexual in its nature. This suggests that adolescent fartlore aims to confirm the maturation process through a more adult-like repertoire of prose while compensating for the social anxieties and insecurities that often accompany the adolescent experience. One of the first surveys of adolescent folklore as a distinctive genre came from Martha Dirks, who in her 1963 essay, “Teen-Age Folklore from Kansas,” distinguishes four main genres of folklore commonly associated with the age group: humor, slang, customs/beliefs, and verse/song. Indeed, the period of adolescence overlaps with the cultural expression of the preceding and succeeding periods of life, and consequently adolescents “unconsciously retain (or consciously mock) elements of the folklore which played such an important role in their childhood years ... [but] many cycles of childhood games or customs disappear completely as youngsters move on to new interests” (Samuelson 1991, 18; see also Meley 1991).

Much of children’s fartlore is related to playing or navigating the social pressures for maintaining control over their bodily functions and urges. Hence, fartlore in childhood often incorporates an awareness of these social pressures by mocking the flatulence taboo through symbolic interaction, and thus reinforces cultural expectations of proper behavior. Since many children learn bodily control in the public school setting where toilet practices and their mastery are enforced and socialized as a necessity, they are more reflexively aware of these expectations through perpetual group feedback and encouragement. When this does not take place, as Weinberg and Williams observe: “Attention to a breach of body boundaries ... is sought to embarrass the offender and provide amusement to others” (2005, 318-19). In other words, fartlore in childhood helps to underscore the importance of bodily control and reinforce social norms and control expected of their age and gender groups.

The celebration or revulsion of flatulence in child and adolescent culture demarcates much more than folk perceptions about anal productions; it symbolizes and reinforces the expectations of gender roles and helps to frame societal definitions of masculinity and femininity. Males that emit perfumed scents may be chastised, and as Largey and Watson acknowledge, “many males of the labor class associate the odor of cologne on a male with effeminacy” (1972, 1023). Undoubtedly, the open enjoyment and playful manipulation of flatulence tends to be seen as a predominantly male behavior, and the great majority of

performative or interactive fartlore is collected from males (Ackerly 2007, 213),<sup>25</sup> but what about females? Elizabeth Tucker (2009) has shown that females are not opposed to partaking in risky or taboo behavior, and other scholars have collected numerous examples of subversive folklore performed and transmitted by females (Knapp and Knapp 1976; Legman 1968; Opie and Opie 1953; Sherman and Weisskopf 1995). We of course know that women flatulate too, despite that they are underrepresented in fartlore collections (admittedly including this one), which suggests either a genuine lack of female participation or an overtaking of the genre by males. Sociologists Weinberg and Williams (2005) posit that women are much more likely than men to have heightened concern over controlling evidence of their anal productions given their physical idealization. They offer that for males,

bodily grossness may be valued for its opposition to the manners that femininity is thought to imply. The delight taken in physical behaviors like burping can indicate men's disdain for what they perceive as feminine. Some men may adopt this form of embodiment as an expression of their power over women as they deliberately breach the [fecal] habitus. Such "strategic embarrassment" is also used to socially control other men who are seen to be straying from masculine ideals (Weinberg and Williams 2005, 317).

In other words, fartlore is mostly *performed* by males because it helps to reinforce social and cultural expectations of "manly behavior" (see Bronner 2005).<sup>26</sup> Conversely, the expectations of females are elevated and hyper-sexualized, which discourages deviance from behaviors that would indicate otherwise. Gershon Legman posits that jokes about farting "must also be an evasive form of scatological abuse of women, since a large proportion of these are particularly concerned with the embarrassment of women" (1968, 858). However, fartlore that is not performed — that is, fartlore unrelated to the actual passing of flatulence — *does* include female participation, as the biting, gender-charged bit of female fartlore "girls pass notes; boys pass gas" suggests.<sup>27</sup> Still, fartlore tends to be a male-dominated genre, and with bodily humor, "the longer the relationship, the more ... [routinized] the experience of other's bodily functions" becomes in peer groups (Weinberg and Williams 2005, 329). One's level of comfort with flatulence or other anal productions is considerably smaller before such routinization takes place amongst his network of friends or playmates. By embracing "gross" bodily functions as a weapon or tool of play, males are able to hold additional power over their peers — especially females — and reaffirm their social status and experiment with genders' social hierarchies.

Perhaps, then, a "lingering" question might be: why is fartlore particularly important in childhood and adolescence? After all, adults are more than capable of participating in flatulence humor or games. The folklore of flatulence in childhood and adolescence is special because all adults pass through childhood and adolescence, where they acquire knowledge and experience with the genre. The social world of pre-adulthood encourages peer interaction and the

experimentation with group dynamics; however, as people tend to get older, their relationships become more dyadic, familial, or introverted, and consequently the performance of fartlore is not only unexpected in social settings, but truly uncommon. Nevertheless, the impact of folklore and knowledge of the taboos impressed upon pre-adults carries into the consciousness of their adult selves, which serves to cyclically reinforce expectations of bodily control in future generations, and continues to control the existing definitions of behavioral ideals and social constructions of maturity. Accordingly, studies of fartlore and subversive topics should begin before adulthood in order to fully understand its context.

### **Psychoanalytic and Folkloristic Considerations**

Flatulence is not exclusively regulated by social pressures; there are biological and psychological factors that influence the creation and dissemination of fartlore as well. The psychoanalytical approach to fartlore might suggest that the anxiety over flatulence is due to the deep-rooted psychological shame felt for deriving pleasure from our anal productions during our development.<sup>28</sup> By making a socially-unacceptable desire (such as the wish to play with one's anus through flatulence) into a symbolically pleasurable act through fartlore, children and adolescents subconsciously satisfy their infantile attraction to their anal productions and help to stabilize their transition into adulthood through play.

According to the father of psychoanalysis, Sigmund Freud (1905a), children pass through several psychosexual stages of development: the oral stage (0-1 years), during which a child's primary source of pleasure is derived from sensations in and around the mouth; the anal stage (age 1-3), which revolves around the process of toilet training and marks the period where the child begins to negotiate control over their own urges and behaviors, especially those related to the expulsion of waste; and the phallic stage (age 4-6) which marks a period of infatuation with the genitals (see Freud 1924). The initial stages of psychosexual development are then followed by a latency period (where sexual urges remain dormant from age 7 until puberty) and the genital stage (from puberty into adulthood), in which the child regains an interest in pleasure derived from the genitals and seeks to facilitate normal relationships with others. Freud suggests that the inability for a child to successfully pass through these stages of psychosexual developmental will result in social and psychological turmoil later in life as represented by their anal-repulsive (disorderly and unpredictable) or anal-retentive (regimented and obsessive) personalities (see also Brown 1959; Freud 1913; Jones 1913, 413-37).

The residual impact of the anal stage (or anal-erotic stage) is psychologically central to the production and dissemination of fartlore later in life; as Norman O. Brown remarks, "some of the most important categories of social behavior (play, gift, property, weapon) originate in the anal stage of infantile sexuality" (1959, 191). During the anal stage, especially during toilet training, children learn that their ability to produce and subsequently maintain control over their bodily waste has symbolic power; withholding their feces can draw the ire of their parents while expulsion of their excrement can result in praise. As a result, children attach

symbolic importance to their anal productions and interpret defecation and contact with their feces as being physically or sexually pleasurable; additionally, they see their feces as their own creations and interpret them as gifts (Jones 1913, 424; Ferenczi 1913, 325).<sup>29</sup> It stands to reason that farting may subconsciously connote failure, as stool is solid and considered an accomplishment when “successfully” passed into a designated receptacle, especially during toilet training.<sup>30</sup>

The psychological process of sublimation occurs toward the end of the anal stage when the child’s pleasurable response and attachment to anal production is transferred to interactions with new symbols that resemble the physical composition of feces, such as mud, clay, or sand; this develops into a desire to play with small, hard objects like marbles, buttons, and stones, and eventually, small coins (Jones 1913, 425-27). Thus, the transference that occurs during sublimation may appear in the form of an adult’s desire to acquire material possessions such as property or money since they can be symbolically analogous to excrement and help to satisfy the person’s repressed anal-erotic desires (Carroll 1987, 491; Jones 1913, 427).<sup>31</sup> Therefore, an adult’s infatuation with money and material objects is a result of the fact that they chose “the love of their parents over the pleasures of [feces, and in] the absence of affection, [an individual will] turn to their sublimated anal desires in hopes of recovering the gratification they traded for parental approval” (Praeger 2007, 114; see also Ferenczi 1914). Freud notes that in “the whole mental domain of the psychology of the neurosis, the sexual still includes the excrementitious, and it is understood in the old, infantile sense,” meaning that the adult’s repressed attraction to anal pleasure still remains even if they are not cognitively aware (1905a, 140). Thus, the homophobic narratives that I reported herein project the adolescent’s own subconscious anxieties about the anus as a receptacle of pleasure. By othering homosexuals, the male informant not only is able to save face in his social network (and actually obtain higher status by symbolically acting “more manly” through the performative dismissal of perceived-effeminate behavior), but also able through rhetorical commentary to tacitly dismiss his own shame for his infantile attraction to anal-eroticism.

Some psychoanalysts believe that a child’s transition from the oral stage into the anal stage imprints a symbolic correlation between the mouth and anus. This may be observed in the neologism for farting, “to clear one’s throat,” which suggests a peripheral awareness of the functional similarities between the mouth (used for things “going in”) and the anus (used for things “going out”). Freudian disciple Ernest Jones posits that flatulence has important unconscious associations with other occurrences that have similar sensory attributes, such as breath and speech, which (like flatulence) also expel air and have olfactory or auditory markers that must be controlled by the individual; from a sociological standpoint, this is supported by the contention that “moral symbolism relevant to interaction is expressed in terms of olfactory imagery” (Largey and Watson 1972, 1021). For Jones, these “important unconscious associations” explain society’s reverence for good dental hygiene and the desire for pleasantly scented breath: because bad breath attracts ridicule by peers if deemed malodorous in the same way that flatulence might. Additionally, these unconscious associations account for the strong emphasis placed on the learning of proper grammar and syntax throughout

a child's tenure at public school, where uncontrolled speech impediments could garner teasing from peers in the same way that gratuitous flatulence would (Jones 1913, 435).

The merger of unconscious awareness and social pressures about the body leads to the complex hybridization of folk knowledge in its disseminated state, folklore. The awareness of similarities between oral and anal functions as posited by Jones — subconscious or not — appears to be responsible for the evolution of the word “cheek” in contemporary slang as a neologism for the buttocks; as the double meaning of this essay's title suggests, a widespread acceptance of this symbolic correlation exists.<sup>32</sup> When used as a noun in conventional English, “cheek” usually refers to a part of the face near the mouth; as a verb, “cheek” can describe the behavior of someone who exhibits impudence. This is not the only case in folklore where the functions of the anus become blurred with the perception of other objects; some folk narratives seem to corroborate Jones' observations about the symbolic associations between functionally- or visually-similar objects and the anal region.<sup>33</sup>

A representative example from folklore can be found in Simon J. Bronner's reportage of a humorous narrative in which a fat woman consumes large quantities of grapes, goes to sleep with an upset stomach facing the wrong direction in bed, and subsequently has her flatulence mistaken as bad breath by her husband (1981, 107-08). As the story continues, the husband becomes enraged that his sleeping wife — who he does not know is actually lying upside-down in bed (with her buttocks near his face) and cannot hear him — refuses to oblige his demand for her to face the other direction; the husband threatens to “slap [her] goddamn eyeballs out,” and after several unheeded warnings, he hits her so hard that one of the grapes she ate flies out of her anus and lands on him. He thinks that he has actually knocked out one of his wife's eyeballs; in a fit of worry he leans forward in the dark and unknowingly kisses her buttocks, shortly thereafter quipping, “Whooo, baby, you be in bad shape because your jaws — you must be got the mumps” (108). The tale of grapes that are mistaken for eyeballs and buttocks that are mistaken for lumpy jaws suggests that folklore can assist a storyteller in encoding his awareness or anxieties about parts or functions of the body through symbolic objects or anecdotes, a claim that has also been supported in photocopy-lore traditions (Dundes and Pagter 1978, 1987). This suggests that there is compatibility between the psychoanalytic and folkloristic approaches to the study of scatological themes (see Bronner 2007b; Dundes 1987, 3-46).

Flatulence has made cameos in numerous urban legends, and not just ones about artists who place paint in their rectums and create “fart art” (Dawson 1998, 155). Elizabeth Tucker references the popular college legend about a student's encounter with laxative-laced campus grub and the gaseous consequences thereafter, and notes that such a tale represents fartlore “at its most extreme: both humbling and hilarious,” and adds that those who hear the legend “can only hope they will continue to be the ones who laugh, not victims of such embarrassing discomfort” (Tucker 2005, 104-05). Another popular urban legend from photocopy-lore as well as oral tradition is “The Surpriser Surprised,” in which a man is blindfolded by his wife on his birthday and must sit alone, waiting alone in

anticipation of his birthday surprise, while she answers a phone call in the other room. Feeling the beans he had for lunch rumble in his stomach, he decides to let out a few juicy farts in her absence. When she returns, she removes his blindfold to reveal that he is seated at a table of his friends, family, and colleagues. As it turns out, his birthday surprise is in fact a surprise party thrown by his wife ... and he has just gassed his guests (Dundes and Pagter 1978, 98-99; see also Jansen 1979).<sup>34</sup>

Folklore serves as a means to project one's anxieties, attitudes, or beliefs, and one of the most reflexive means of such expression comes from the sharing of narratives. Without a doubt, the appearance of flatulence in urban legends suggests at least some level of awareness about the fear of its occurrence in social settings and the potential consequences it would render for one's reputation. Folklorists have often shied away from subjects of controversial scope, but as fartlore shows, there is merit in analyzing the unsavory components of society.

### **Fartlore, Folkloristics, and the Study of the Subversive**

Under every rock of subversive folklore lies a meaning that waits to be discovered and a causation that requires explanation. In his classic study of latrinalia, Alan Dundes remarks that despite the widespread abundance of "shithouse poetry" and its demonstrably traditional structure, "one looks in vain for extended collections of published texts and for any rational discussion of them or the practice of writing them" (1968, 91). Such a statement could easily be adapted to discuss the dearth of modern research collections encompassing the intersection of folklore, flatulence, and scatology. Michael Owen Jones points out that the research of folklorists "usually centers on celebration, festive events, and the positive associations ... [with] ethnic or regional identity" (2000, 53).<sup>35</sup> This narrow-sighted approach has been a longstanding problem within the discipline.<sup>36</sup>

In truth, folkloristics has a history of taking a reserved approach to the study of contentious subject matters. A key example may be found in the *Motif-Index of Folk Literature* (1932-36 and 1955-58),<sup>37</sup> in which Stith Thompson makes a point to state that the categorization of motifs regarding erotic or scatological humor was unnecessary for the purposes of his index. Regarding X700-799, "Humor Concerning Sex," Thompson explains that

Thousands of obscene motifs in which there is no point except the obscenity itself might logically come at this point, but they are entirely beyond the scope of the present work. They work a literature to themselves, with its own periodicals and collections. In view of the possibility that it might become desirable to classify these motifs and place them within the present index, space has been left ... for such motifs (1960, vol. 5, 514).

Thompson left X700-799 blank purportedly for the sake of good taste and for the preservation of his volume's academic integrity. In reality, however, Thompson knew better than to exclude such a fertile source of folklore, especially given



its ubiquity. Instead, risqué tales with themes of eroticism or scatology were inconspicuously wedged between broader themes so as not to raise alarm, including such entries as “Illicit Sexual Relations” (T400), “Humor of Discomfiture” (X0-99), and “Clever Verbal Retorts” (J1250) among them (Legman 1964, 455).<sup>38</sup> According to Gershon Legman, Thompson’s rejection of “obscene jokes with moral horror at X700, while bringing them back in disguise at dozens of other numbers, makes clear one of the deepest deficiencies of any classification scheme: the inevitable subjectiveness of approach by the indexer” (1964, 455). Measuring the appropriateness of a subject is fine, but as Dundes notes, just because a topic is judged to be insulting or crude does not suffice as “an intellectually valid reason not to publish a well-researched paper or monograph” (2005, 404).

Of course, the *Motif-Index* is not the first (or last) case of an academic discipline catering to political correctness, but in the case of folkloristics — a supposed champion of interdisciplinarity and a highly reflexive subject area — why is this so? Why is it considered professionally risky to talk about feces, flatulence, or anal-eroticism, even if presented in a thoughtful and deliberate manner? To be sure, the study of fartlore may strike some as an intellectually devoid or outrageously tasteless endeavor, despite the fact that there is a small, but extant crop of folklore scholarship that demonstrates the value of examining “unpretty” folklore, including the conceptualization of scatological themes (Bronner 1981, 1985, 2007a, 2009, 56-63; Dundes 1968, 1984; Legman 1964, 1968, 1975; Sherman and Weisskoff 1995). We must strive to remember that while folklore can be dark or grotesque, our role as ethnographers is not to judge whether or not a subject matter is too risky to observe or report. Instead, we must hold ourselves accountable to our profession and to our subjects by collecting and interpreting data from *all* aspects of folk culture, including the subversive. Only then will we be able to draw adequate conclusions on the nuances of human behavior within their proper contexts.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This work is dedicated to the late Alan Dundes, whose brave scholarship on everything from latrinalia and psychoanalysis to the scholastic boundaries of the folklore discipline has inspired me to continue his legacy of studying underexplored, yet ubiquitous cultural practices that merit scrutiny despite their unconventional nature. I also owe a special debt of gratitude to Simon J. Bronner for his helpful suggestions, thoughtful critiques, and unwavering enthusiasm for the growth and completion of this essay. I am also grateful to Elizabeth Tucker for her correspondence, advice, and support as well. For a topic that on the surface tends to raises eyebrows (and nostrils), both Bronner and Tucker were pillars of support and generously donated their time to me in order to improve the overall quality and scope of this research. Thanks are also due to my friends and colleagues at the Pennsylvania State University, Harrisburg American Studies program, who provided helpful suggestions on earlier drafts of this essay: Jennifer Dutch, Spencer Lincoln Green, Nancy Jones, Matthew Lavelle, Erica Leonard, Paul Miller, and Amy Milligan. Lastly, I must acknowledge and thank



the love of my life (and a real gas!), my fiancée, Angelina Sanfilippo, who was quick to remind me of the numerous reasons why fartlore is a topic that is long overdue for a serious sniff.

## NOTES

1. See the *New Partridge Dictionary of Slang and Unconventional English* (Dalzell and Victor 2006) or <http://onlineslangdictionary.com/thesaurus>.

2. See Knapp and Knapp (1976, 211).

3. Fartlore relatively functions alongside or in contrast to other taboo subjects as well. For example, another bodily emission that receives little attention in folkloristic scholarship is boogers and their folkloric byproducts — certainly boogers garner a similar response (regarding the fear of contagion) as flatulence.

4. On a personal note, I left Indiana University after my Master's degree for the Ph.D. program in American Studies at the Pennsylvania State University, Harrisburg. There, I was met with enthusiasm by my advisors and instructors, who not only enjoyed the sometimes-controversial or unorthodox subjects that interested me, but challenged me to fully explore all of their nooks and crannies. Indiana University and other folklore programs should take note that encouragement and support is the only way to promote true progress in our humble discipline. It may sound like sour grapes on the surface, but I assure you that the narrow-mindedness I argue combatively against throughout this essay has merit, and folklore programs such as IU should heed the call to welcome the expansion of our discipline's scope rather than suppress a potentially insightful research project in neglected areas of inquiry for the purposes of maintaining the status quo.

5. See "12-Year Old Boy Arrested After Deliberately 'Breaking Wind' in Class." *This Blog Rules*. 12 Jan. 2010. <http://www.thisblogrules.com/2010/01/12-year-old-boy-arrested-after.html> (accessed 18 April 2010).

6. To draw an historical correlation to fartlore, Gershon Legman (1968) notes that the "blaming of the fart on domestic animals is standard, and evidently ancient," citing examples as far back as 1654 (859).

7. For example, Greek physician Hippocrates believed that all diseases could be attributed to built-up gases in the internal organs, stating that "It is best for flatulence to pass without noise and breaking than to be intercepted and accumulated internally" (Nibbelink 2008, 83) and Greek philosopher and mathematician Pythagoras forbade the consumption of beans among his disciples (5). Roman emperor Claudius (10 B.C.–A.D. 54) considered passing a law that legalized farting at banquets "out of concern for people's health" (83). Flatulence was a familiar motif in medieval Christianity and storytelling (Allen 1997), and reformer Martin Luther preached that the Devil could not stand the smell of rotten odors and suggested that any mortal man could beat him by baring their rear and farting directly into Satan's nostrils should he appear (Dawson 1998, 90) — as Jim Dawson writes, "the word *pumpernickel* comes from 'devil's fart' in German. *Pumpern* means 'to fart' and *nickel* is a 'devil' or 'goblin,'" and "The idea ... was that dark, heavy pumpernickel bread could 'produce outbursts of flatulence as powerful as those of the Devil himself'" (1998, 91). In many early

tales of fartlore, it was believed that the Devil produced flammable flatulence. Flatulence sporadically appeared in social customs and literature by the Middle Ages. In 16<sup>th</sup> century France, farting was used as a “ritualized signal for the advent of spring” through the utterance of the “Great Fart of Dehibernation” (Bailey 1996, 51). For an in-depth overview of the history and role of flatulence in the Middle Ages, see Allen (2007). Literature often incorporated flatulence or scatological themes. German literature and customs have long incorporated scatological themes (Dundes 1984; Rollfinke and Rollfinke 1986; Pilipp 1997), but by no means represent the only nationality that robustly engaged in the dissemination of fartlore. English author and poet Geoffrey Chaucer made flatulence a lingering part of several of his famed stories, including the *Canterbury Tales* (see Hasenfratz 1996); Irish satirist Jonathan Swift, author of *Gulliver’s Travels*, was criticized by some of his contemporaries for overusing flatulence as a humorous ploy in his works; American author and literary icon Mark Twain published “1601” in 1880 (anonymously until 1906, mind you), which features a fictional dialogue about flatulence between several historical figures. In 1781, Benjamin Franklin wrote a letter to the Royal Academy of Brussels in which he challenged their scientists to create a drug that would “render the natural discharges of wind from our bodies not only inoffensive, but agreeable as perfumes” and gushed about the pleasure that would befall society if everyone could freely express their “scentiments” without embarrassment (Rabkin and Silver 1991, 128-29). The French entertainer Joseph Pujol, better known as *Le Pétomane*, made a career as a professional “flatulist” and toured the world for over twenty years, headlining at the Moulin Rouge numerous times (Allen 2007; Bart 1995; Nibbelink 2008; Rabkin and Silverman 1991).

8. Nevertheless, it bears noting that the Knapps most certainly broke ground in proposing fartlore as a worthwhile category of children’s folklore.

9. For example, one might say that something “stinks like shit” to express a malodorous scent.

10. To this point, a telling statistic is that on a nine item “Disgust Scale” administered by sociological researchers, the highest ranking item was “You see a bowel movement left unflushed in a public toilet” (Rozin et al. 1993, 585).

11. See Sklar (1994) and Young (1994) for an overview of bodylore and its relationship to the interpretation of the self in society.

12. I realize that this decision may disappoint some readers. For those that this is the case, I recommend Legman (1968: 858-65) whose collection contains ample annotation and interpretation. For less-analytical, but more descriptive collections of fartlore, see Knapp and Knapp (1976, 211-16) or Sherman and Weisskopf (1995, 55-58).

13. Throughout my fieldwork (including the cross-referencing of other scholars’ work), I did not see any reportage on females playing this game, which is why I occasionally use masculine modifiers in my description of this game. No sexism is intended.

14. For an example of sexual and aggressive folklore that occasionally incorporates flatulence within the narrative structure, see Bronner (1981, 91-109,

114-15n5). For commentary on the historical assumption of humor as being sexual and aggressive, see Oring (1987, 277).

15. One joke that I collected followed the common question-answer/ riddle formula to pose a homophobic joke, Q: How do you seat four gay guys on one barstool? A: Turn it upside down. Another example, though less homophobic, is nevertheless “anal-oriented” and includes wordplay, Q: What does *Star Trek* and toilet paper have in common? A: They both circle around Uranus looking for Klingons!

16. The Opies report the use of “pull my finger” — which is usually the impetus for a prank in which pulling the peer’s finger “releases” a fart — as a component of a joke stanza collected from schoolchildren (1959, 61). This may suggest a correlation.

17. While the sneeze correlation to flatulence is relevant, so too are the connections between the flatulence taboo and more acceptable but nonetheless restricted actions such as belching/ burping, hiccupping, or nose-dripping/ blowing one’s nose in an inappropriate setting. All of these emissions and bodily functions have been folklorized due to their audible and visual components, but are clearly seen as more acceptable — perhaps because they are derived from the mouth instead of the anus.

18. “Latrinalia” is more-commonly known as bathroom graffiti today to non-folklorists.

19. Collected March 22, 2010 in New London, PA. Also seen on the wall was a limerick: When I get up to wipe my ass, I like to pass a little gas/ It clears my hole and dries the bowl/ And shows I got a lotta class. How cheeky!

20. Taking a psychoanalytic approach, Simon J. Bronner (2009, 56-63) hypothesizes that the Internet may serve as a virtual play frame for adolescents to symbolically “smear” one another from a sitting position.

21. Urbandictionary.com hosts many of these annotations and operates with a folk-moderated wiki interface. Unlike the average dictionary, urbandictionary.com celebrates and even encourages subversive and shocking definitions of folk neologisms. The posted definitions are then allotted a “thumbs up-thumbs down” rating system to allow site visitors to symbolically voice their approval or disapproval of a submitted description for all to see.

22. According to the infantile cloaca theory of psychoanalysis, “the female genitals and anus are conceived as a single opening ... and only later is it discovered that this region of the body contains two separate cavities and openings” (Legman 1968, 329). This may account for the emergence of the “queef” designation as a “vaginal fart.” Girls also refer to “period farts” as an excuse for flatulence during menstruation, again connoting the greater perception of inappropriateness for females to engage or acknowledge flatulence.

23. When I asked a small group of boys in their early adolescence if girls farted, one responded jokingly: “No, but they queef instead,” which demonstrates the gendered othering of the opposite sex by a male informant as a means to distance themselves from their own urges or desires.

24. I also collected a rhyming variation of the “silent but deadly” annotation as “silent but violent.”

25. If you want proof that flatulence is promoted as a “manly behavior,” look no further than Bobby Mercer’s *How Do You Light a Fart?: And 150 Other Essential Things Every Guy Should Know About Science* (2009), which submits a feminized presentation of science through the examination of supposedly masculine subjects such as belching, farting, and defecation. These “manly” acts are framed as topics that not only should be of interest to men, but information that they “should know about.”

26. Indeed, fartlore is perceived as being manly because it is aggressive, attention-getting, and dirty.

27. For additional reference to women’s interaction with scatological humor relating to flatulence, see Legman (1968, 860).

28. Certainly, this interpretation of human behavior has its share of detractors; in fact, one might even argue that psychoanalysis has more critics today than it does supporters due to its controversial suppositions. That said, a Freudian might argue in response that the vehement resistance to interpretations found in psychoanalysis underscore the individual’s strong desire to ignore their repressed infantile desires out of shame ... but I digress! As with any scholarship or theoretical approach, the success of an essay should rest on the ability of the researcher to effectively collect, annotate, and present evidence on their subject, whereupon the strength of their findings should be determined by readers on a case-by-case basis — and only after reading and reflecting upon the interpretations therein. The incorporation of psychoanalysis into the interpretations of folklore and allied fields should be held to the same standard of suspended judgment. After all, when we stop to consider the fact that fartlore comes from “talking out our asses” so to speak, even the skeptics must acknowledge that a psychoanalytic approach offers plausible explanations to the origins of scatological folklore in society. See Dundes (1987, 3-46) for an overview of the psychoanalytic approach and correlation to folklore. One of Alan Dundes’ greatest contributions to folkloristics is, in fact, is his development of the psychoanalytic method for interpreting folklore. For an excellent historical and contextual overview of Dundes’ contributions to folkloristics, as well as his psychoanalytic perspectives and argumentation, see Bronner (2007b). Those interested in scatological folklore will find particular value in the section dubbed by Bronner as “Theses on Feces” (352-81).

29. For more contemporary applications of this concept, see Dundes (1968, 101-04); Bronner (2009, 56-63).

30. Parents will often encourage their child to try and “make a poopie” if they hear them farting. This reinforces the idea that defecating is the positive outcome of properly dealing with bowel pressures. Recall the example of latrinalia that ends with “tried to shit, but only farted” — again, even in folklore, an awareness of the perception of failure due to the absence of fecal production is present.

31. As Simon Bronner pointed out to me during an emailed correspondence, Freud is often misunderstood as always equating the symbol of money to excrement; however, this is not accurate. Freud did tend to universalize the symbolic response, but anthropological psychoanalysts such as Alan Dundes (1968, 1984; 1987) and Michael Carroll (1987) considered cultural factors such

as the intensity of toilet training in a certain country as contextual factors in distinguishing the correlation.

32. If readers need further convincing, the *New Partridge Dictionary of Slang and Unconventional English* confirms that “cheek” has been popularly adapted to be used in reference to buttocks (Dalzell and Victor 2006, 378). See also Legman (1968, 814-21) for a discussion of how the buttocks have been incorporated into other neologisms or scatological humor out of concerns for social taboos.

33. See Leary (1977) on “bullshitting” as a form of narrative gesturing.

34. Similar tales have also surfaced in the collections of Brunvand (1981, 2002) and Legman (1968, 861).

35. For additional insight on the tendency for folkloristics to avoid conflict, see Bronner (1998).

36. Again, see my own personal story in note 4 for additional support to this claim.

37. See also Frank Hoffman’s motif index of Anglo-American erotica, which does some include some flatulence-related material, but is predominantly phallogentric.

38. In other motif collections, flatulence and scatological themes are more-openly identifiable. For example, Hoffman (1973) identifies and indexes “Humor concerning defecation and breaking wind,” as tale-type X716. Simon J. Bronner also notes that Terrence Leslie Hansen’s *The Types of the Folktale in Cuba, Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic, and Spanish South America* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1957) includes tale type 1459, “Girlfriend is very beautiful but cannot control flatulence. Friend asks her to dance. As soon as she begins to dance, the whistle blows. Everybody looks for the fire.” (Bronner 1981, 114-15n5).

## WORKS CITED

- Ackerly, Janice. 2007. The Subversive World of New Zealand Children’s Playground Rhymes. *Journal of Folklore Research* 44(2/3): 205-25.
- Allen, Valerie. 2007. *On Farting: Language and Laughter in the Middle Ages*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Alvarez, W.C. 1942. What Causes Flatulence? *Journal of the American Medical Association* 120: 21.
- Bailey, Peter. 1996. Breaking the Sound Barrier: A Historian Listens to Noise. *Body Society* 2: 49-66.
- Bart, Benjamin. 1995. *The History of Farting*. Philadelphia, PA: Trans-Atlantic Publications.
- Bascom, William. 1954. Four Functions of Folklore. *Journal of American Folklore* 67: 333-49.
- Bourke, John G. 1891. *The Scatologic Rites of All Nations*. New York: William and Morrow.
- Brill, A.A. 1932. The Sense of Smell in the Neuroses and Psychoses. *Psychoanalytic Quarterly* Vol. 1: 7-42.

- Bronner, Simon J. 1981. Saturday Night in Greenville: An Interracial Tale-and-Music Session in Context. *Folklore Forum* 14(2): 85-120.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1985. What's Grosser than Gross? New Sick Joke Cycles. *Midwestern Journal of Language and Lore* 11: 39-49.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1988. *American Children's Folklore*. Atlanta, GA: August House Publishing.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1998. *Following Tradition: Folklore in the Discourse of American Culture*. Logan: Utah State University Press.
- \_\_\_\_\_, ed. 2005. *Manly Traditions: The Folk Roots of American Masculinities*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2007a. Analyzing the Ethnic Self: The *Hinkel Dreck* Theme in Pennsylvania-German Folk Narrative. *Columbia Journal of American Studies* 8: 20-54.
- \_\_\_\_\_, ed. 2007b. *The Meaning of Folklore: The Analytical Essays of Alan Dundes*. Logan: Utah State University Press.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2008. *Killing Tradition: Inside Hunting and Animal Rights Controversies*. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2009. Digitizing and Virtualizing Folklore. In *Folklore and the Internet: Vernacular Expression in a Digital World*, ed. Trevor J. Blank, 21-66. Logan: Utah State University Press.
- Brown, Norman O. 1959. *Life Against Death: The Psychoanalytical Meaning of History*. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press.
- Brunvand, Jan Harold. 1981. *The Vanishing Hitchhiker: American Urban Legends and Their Meanings*. New York: W.W. Norton & Co.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2002. *Encyclopedia of Urban Legends*. New York: W.W. Norton & Co.
- Carroll, Michael P. 1987. Praying the Rosary: The Anal-Erotic Origins of a Popular Catholic Devotion. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 26(4): 486-98.
- Dalzell, Tom and Terry Victor. 2006. *The New Partridge Dictionary of Slang and Unconventional English*, 9<sup>th</sup> edition. New York: Routledge Press.
- Dawson, Jim. 1998. *Who Cut the Cheese? A Cultural History of the Fart*. Berkeley, CA: Ten Speed Press.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2006. *Blame it on the Dog: A Modern History of the Fart*. Berkeley, CA: Ten Speed Press.
- Dirks, Martha. 1963. Teen-Age Folklore from Kansas. *Western Folklore* 22(2): 89-102.
- Douglas, Mary. 2002 [1966]. *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*. New York: Routledge.
- Drobnick, Jim, ed. 2006. *The Smell Culture Reader*. New York: Berg.
- Dundes, Alan. 1968. *Here I Sit — A Study of American Latrinalia*. *Papers of the Kroeber Anthropological Society* 34: 91-105.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1984. *Life Is Like a Chicken Coop Ladder. A Portrait of German Culture Through Folklore*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1987. *Parsing through Customs: Essays by a Freudian Folklorist*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2005. Folkloristics in the Twenty-First Century. *Journal of American Folklore* 118(470): 385-408.



- Dundes, Alan, and Carl R. Pagter. 1978. *Work Hard and You Shall Be Rewarded: Urban Folklore from the Paperwork Empire*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1987. *When You're Up to Your Ass in Alligators: More Urban Folklore from the Paperwork Empire*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press.
- Ellis, Bill. 2001. A Model for Collecting and Interpreting World Trade Center Disaster Jokes. *New Directions in Folklore*. 5 October. <https://scholarworks.iu.edu/dspace/handle/2022/3876/> (accessed April 4, 2010).
- Ferenczi, Sandor. 1913. *Further Contributions to the Theory and Technique of Psychoanalysis*. New York: Ford Press.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1956 [1914]. The Ontogenesis of the Interest in Money. In *Sex in Psychoanalysis*, ed. Sandor Ferenczi, 269-79. New York: Dover Publications.
- Freud, Sigmund. 1976 [1905a]. *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*. New York: Basic Books.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1913. Foreword. In *The Scatological Rites of All Nations*, ed. John G. Bourke. New York: William and Morrow.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1924. The Passing of the Oedipus Complex. *International Journal of Psycho-analysis* 5: 419-24.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1932. The Acquisition and Control of Fire. In *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XXII (1932-1936): New Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis and Other Works*, 183-194. London: Hogarth Press and Institute for Psychoanalysis.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2007 [1905b]. *Wit and Its Relation to the Unconscious*, trans. A. A. Brill. New York.
- Gaignebet, Claude. 1974. *Le Folklore Obscène des Enfants* [The Obscene Folklore of Children]. Paris, France: G.-P. Maisonneuve et Larose.
- Goffman, Erving. 1967. *Interaction Ritual: Essays on Face-to-Face Behavior*. Garden City, NY: Anchor Books.
- Hasenfratz, Robert. 1996. The Science of Flatulence: Possible Sources for the "Summoner's Tale." *The Chaucer Review* 30(3): 241-61.
- Hoffman, Frank. 1973. *Analytical Survey of Anglo-American Traditional Erotica*. Bowling Green, OH: Popular Press.
- Hufford, David J. 1970. Editor's Preface. *Keystone Folklore Quarterly* 15: 55-58.
- Inglis, David. 2000. *A Sociological History of Excretory Experience: Defacatory Manners and Toiletry Technologies*. Lewistown, NY: The Edwin Mellen Press.
- Jansen, William Hugh. 1979. The Surpriser Surprised: A Modern Legend. In *Readings in American Folklore*, ed. Jan Harold Brunvand, 61-90.. New York: W.W. Norton & Co. Originally printed in *Folklore Forum* 6: 1-24.
- Jones, Ernest. 1948 [1913]. *Essays in Applied Psycho-Analysis*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Jones, Michael Owen. 2000. What's Disgusting, Why, and What Does It Matter? *Journal of Folklore Research* 37(1): 53-71.
- Kotzwinkle, William and Glenn Murray. 2001. *Walter, the Farting Dog*. Berkeley, CA: Frog Books.
- Knapp, Mary and Herbert Knapp. 1976. *One Potato, Two Potato: The Folklore of American Children*. New York: W.W. Norton & Co.



- Largey, Gale Peter and David Rodney Watson. 1972. The Sociology of Odors. *American Journal of Sociology* 77(6): 1021-34.
- Leary, James P. 1977. White Guys' Stories of the Night Street. *Journal of the Folklore Institute* 14(1/2): 59-71.
- Legman, Gershon. 1964. *The Horn Book: Studies in Erotic Folklore and Bibliography*. New York: University Books.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1982 [1968]. *No Laughing Matter: An Analysis of Sexual Humor*. Volumes I and 2. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2006 [1975]. *Rationale of the Dirty Joke: An Analysis of Sexual Humor*. New York: Simon and Schuster.
- Levine, Lawrence W. 1988. *Highbrow/ Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Lytle, Donald. 2003. *Play and Educational Theory and Practice*. Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger Publishers.
- Mechling, Jay. 2004. *On My Honor: Boy Scouts and the Making of American Youth*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Meley, Patricia M. 1991. Adolescent Legend Trips as Teenage Cultural Response: A Study of Lore in Context. *Children's Folklore Review* 14: 5-24.
- Mercer, Bobby. 2009. *How Do You Light a Fart?: And 150 Other Essential Things Every Guy Should Know About Science*. Cincinnati, OH: Adams Media.
- Mills, Kelly. 2008. What a Relief: School Did Not Ban Farting. *Strollerderby: The Mother of All Blogs*. 8 February. <http://www.babble.com/CS/blogs/strollerderby/archive/2008/02/08/what-a-relief-school-did-not-ban-farting.aspx> (accessed April 17, 2010).
- Nibbelink, Don D. 2008. *Fearsome Folklore of Farting*. Berkeley, CA: Frog Books.
- Opie, Iona and Peter Opie. 2001 [1959]. *The Lore and Language of Schoolchildren*. New York: New York Review of Books.
- Orientalia, Acta. 2008. Abode of the Soul of Humans, Animals and Objects in Mongolian Folk Belief. *Akadémiai Kiadó* 4(3): 467-75.
- Oring, Elliot. 1976. Three Functions of Folklore: Traditional Functionalism as Explanation in Folkloristics. *Journal of American Studies* 89: 67-80.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1987. Jokes and the Discourse on Disaster. *Journal of American Folklore* 100(397): 276-86.
- Pilipp, Frank. 1997. Scatological Reality and Humor in Martin Walser's "The Inner Man." *South Atlantic Review* 62(1): 65-78.
- Praeger, Dave. 2007. *Poop Culture: How America is Shaped by Its Grossest National Product*. Port Townsend, WA: Feral House.
- Rabkin, Eric S. and Eugene Silverman. 1991. *It's a Gas: A Study of Flatulence*. Columbus, OH: Xenos Books.
- Rollfinke, Dieter and Jacqueline. 1986. *The Call of Human Nature: The Role of Scatology in Modern German Literature*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press.
- Rozin, Paul, Jonathan Haidt, and Clark R. McCauley. 1993. Disgust. In, eds., *Handbook of Emotions*, ed. Michael Lewis and Jeannette M. Haviland, 575-94. New York: The Guildford Press.

- Samuelson, Sue. 1995. A Review of Distinctive Adolescent Genres. *Children's Folklore Review* 17(2): 13-31.
- Sherman, Josepha and T.K.F. Weisskoff. 1995. *Greasy Grimy Gopher's Guts: The Subversive Folklore of Childhood*. Atlanta, GA: August House Publishing.
- Sidoli, Mara. 1996. Farting as a Defence Against Unspeakable Dread. *Journal of Analytical Psychology* 41: 165-78.
- Sklar, Deidre. 1994. Can Bodylore Be Brought to Its Senses? *Journal of American Folklore* 107(423): 9-22.
- Smyth, Willie. 1986. Challenger Jokes and the Humor of Disaster. *Western Folklore* 45(4): 243-60.
- Sutton-Smith, Brian, Jay Mechling, Thomas W. Johnson, and Felicia R. McMahon, eds. 1999. *Children's Folklore: A Source Book*. Logan: Utah State University Press.
- Thompson, Stith. 1960 [1932-36; 1955-58]. *The Motif-Index of Folk Literature*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Tucker, Elizabeth. 2007. *Campus Legends: A Handbook*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2009. "Go to Bed, Now You're Dead": Suffocation Songs and Breath Control Games." *Children's Folklore Review* 31: 45-57.
- Weinberg, Martin S. and Colin J. Williams. 2005. Fecal Matters: Habitus, Embodiments, and Deviance. *Social Problems* 52(3): 315-36.
- Young, Katharine. 1994. Whose Body? An Introduction to Bodylore, *Journal of American Folklore* 107(423): 3-8.

## BOOK REVIEWS

### **Pleasures and Perils: Girls' Sexuality in a Caribbean Consumer Culture.**

By Debra Curtis. [The Rutgers Series in Childhood Studies]. (New Brunswick, NJ.: Rutgers University Press, 2009. Pp. vii-222, 4 black and white photographs, notes, index.)

TRACY CARPENTER

*Pleasures and Perils* is an ethnography of adolescent sexuality, globalization and consumer culture on Nevis, a small Caribbean island. In this study, Curtis highlights the fluidity and complexity of adolescent sexuality as influenced by globalization and localized cultural norms. The notion of commodity erotics in Nevis — the conflation of sexual practices and commodity desire — renders a continuum that ranges from the exchange of sex to meet the family's basic needs, to sex for personal consumption. Commodity erotics also measure the sexual value of commodities, like sexy lingerie, designer clothing and jewelry, which produce sexual desirability. Curtis's study of Nevis offers a snapshot of globalization by focusing on popular culture influences on conceptions of adolescent sexuality in a society that has undergone rapid socio-economic and technological changes over the past two decades.

The first islands in the Caribbean to be colonized by Europeans, the Federation of St. Kitts and Nevis achieved full independence in 1983. The islands were established as major sugar producers until the industry was dismantled in 2005. The growth of tourism and offshore financing necessitated advancements in infrastructure and increased access to technology and electronic goods, including televisions, cable, video, and the Internet. Curtis asserts that prior to the emancipation of slaves in 1834, the plantation culture generated a permissive sexual system, which was later challenged by Protestant missionaries. According to Curtis, ideological tensions between traditional sexual systems and Protestant morality have been compounded by the influx of global popular culture and shaped sexual subjectivities.

Curtis, a cultural anthropologist, conducted fieldwork in a Nevisian village over six months in 2003. Personal history interviews, focus groups and surveys assessed sexual practices, leisure activities, and consumerism. She observed public health centers and analyzed music videos from Black Entertainment Television (BET), imported movies and television shows, local radio programs, soca, reggae, hip hop music, and sex education materials. Curtis also incorporated coming-of-age stories with young Nevisian women as a counterpoint to the teenage girls' reported sexual practices, reproducing their words in the Nevisian dialect throughout the text.

The author highlights the multidimensionality of sexuality in Nevis by drawing attention to conflicting religious, traditional, and global discourses. The majority of Nevisians regularly attend church and participate in religious activities, while

teenage girls have unlimited access to television and the Internet at home. Curtis states that marriage is not a common practice in Nevis and that sexual exclusivity is rare. She suggests that living arrangements like single parent homes, common-law marriages, and visiting marriages (in which the spouses live in separate households and visit each other) contradict a fundamental Christian discourse that espouses sexual virtue, corporeal control and chastity. While older Nevisians denounce global influences, the government has imported American sexual education programs to address teenage pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases in a society that does not openly discuss sex and stigmatizes girls' use of condoms.

Curtis asserts that various global imports have influenced female codification. Teenage girls' identification with the imported images and lyrics from music videos, fashion magazines and sexual scripts — like materialism and masculinity — expressed in hip hop and Caribbean music, translates into female desire for sexual pleasure and commodities in exchange for sex. The consideration of female pleasure contradicts the prevalence of female sexual pain resulting from the widespread threat of sexual crimes that goes unaddressed by law enforcement, legal and medical authorities. This pervasive threat in women's everyday experiences and the desire for sexual agency may underlie girls' explicit requests for commodities and cash in exchange for sex or families' accepting cash settlements rather than prosecuting rapists. According to Curtis, women's traditional use of sex to meet their basic household needs set a precedent for contemporary teenage girls' exchanging of sex for personal effects, such as car rides, compact discs, jewelry, and lingerie. The interaction between commodities and female pleasure amidst tradition, religion and globalization reveal the complex nature of sexual subjectivity, which is equally determined by social regulation and self-construction, and highlights malleability of subject formation.

The examination of sexuality and economics among marginalized women is complicated by issues of representation and the limits of cultural relativism. The ethnography runs the risk of reproducing historical stereotypes of sexual pathology and fetishizing Nevisian girls. Despite her focus on globalization, the author isolates Nevis from a global context, which at times makes the girls' behavior appear bizarre and pathological. Overall, this ethnography of Nevis's explosive economic, technological, and social growth offers a valuable assessment of relationships between globalization and sexual discourse, global scripts and teenage behavior. Additionally, it offers a multidimensional perspective on the construction of sexual subjectivity, as it relates to culture, poverty and power that is useful to readers interested in Caribbean cultural studies, popular culture, sexuality studies, policy and public health. Curtis's interdisciplinary approach illustrates why considerations of culture and social change are fundamental to effective public policy and public health programs.

**Consuming Agency in Fairy Tales, Childlore, and Folkliterature.**

By Susan Honeyman. (New York: 2010. Pp. vii – 230, illustrations, preface, acknowledgements, introduction, notes, bibliography, index.)

BRANDI J. VENABLE

Readers will recognize some of the content in *Consuming Agency in Fairy Tales, Childlore, and Folkliterature* as a re-visitation of older works by Susan Honeyman, re-printed here as part of a more cohesive text. The book functions collectively as a statement about “the agency of young subjects through material relations” (5), or, how food is used to subjugate children. The socio-historical analysis and emphasis on the relationship between childhood and material objects (toys and food) in the fairy tales, lore, and literature presented in this book are restricted geographically to the United States. The discussion begins historically with the rise of consumer capitalism starting in the mid-19th century and continuing throughout the 20th century. With food as the thematic thread throughout the book, many of the chapters are playfully organized around a single tasty treat: gingerbread/honeycakes, candy, molasses, and spinach. According to Honeyman, these sweet temptations have a corrosive effect on young people’s agency as presented in the texts she analyzes, often favoring — and thus encouraging — children to adopt roles as objects, not subjects. Writing from the perspective of child-rights activism, Honeyman skillfully applies interdisciplinary methods to familiar texts (*The Wizard of Oz* and *The Velveteen Rabbit*, for example) in order to make a powerful argument about the manipulative nature of consumption for children.

Each chapter furnishes its own argument, addressing a specific topic concerning the relationship between childhood and consumption. The first chapter documents the marginalization of children with the rise of consumer culture. Referencing tales like *Pinocchio*, Honeyman focuses on puppetry and its implication for childhood agency. Next, she explores the temptation of food itself, and the socializing effect it has on children, analyzing such well-known texts as “Hansel and Gretel” and *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*. Halloween rituals and candy companies occupy the middle of the book, where the author demonstrates how childhood resistance is pacified by adults. In later chapters, the author covers gastronomic utopias to determine how food fantasies are used to control the hungry, and also highlights the historical progression of Popeye, his connection with spinach, and the equation of spinach with power. Honeyman also uses this space to address class bias in U.S. nutritional reforms. In conclusion, she contends that hunger allows for the body to be exploited. The pervasive struggle highlighted throughout this analysis of children’s tales and lore is one against hegemonic control, and Honeyman argues that, for children, this occurs through bodily hunger and temptation, encompassed in the lure of food.

In her introduction, Honeyman states that, “much of popular culture tends to be ignored in folklore scholarship,” but contends that many popular forms (such as the comic book) are aware of, and incorporate, folklore into their works (10). Her book acts as a vehicle for bridging distinct disciplinary categories, arguing that the issue of childhood agency and consumption is pertinent not just to one field of

study, but to many. Indeed, she makes a lofty attempt to tackle several key issues surrounding this topic, and the reader may find her/himself wishing the chapters were longer and referenced more texts. However, even if the argument is restricted by page numbers, the book should incite discussion across academic disciplines, bringing together folklorists and child-rights activists, cultural studies and children's literature scholars. For this reason, the book is invaluable to anyone interested in childhood studies, no matter what their academic or professional angle.

Overall, the book serves as an extensive study of childhood agency through food lore. While folklorists and cultural studies scholars may recognize references to Jay Mechling and Clifford Geertz, and to Roland Barthes and Antonio Gramsci, respectively, the book is also pertinent to child-rights activists. Honeyman, an Associate Professor of English and a cultural studies scholar, does not claim to be a strict folklorist, but she does argue for the importance of folklore to a variety of disciplines, including popular culture and cultural studies more generally. Folklorists hoping for an ethnographic approach to childhood studies should consult another resource; those more inclined toward textual analysis will enjoy Honeyman's decadent assortment of fairy tales, lore, and literature references. Because of its interdisciplinary nature, academics and professionals in the fields of folklore, childhood studies, children's literature, fairy tale studies, and cultural studies should find significant the arguments made in this book, relevant to their specific discipline. *Consuming Agency* is particularly useful to the student seeking to make connections across these fields.

**Children's Folklore: A Handbook.** By Elizabeth Tucker. (Westport, CT: 2008. Pp. 1-164, preface, introduction, glossary, bibliography, web resources, index.)

MICHELE D. CASTLEMAN

Elizabeth Tucker's *Children's Folklore: A Handbook* (2009) is an introductory guide to the "traditional knowledge shared by a group of two or more children, usually without the involvement of adults" (p. 1). The Handbook is a comprehensive survey that considers both historical approaches and recent developments in the study of children's folklore. According to Tucker, its purpose is to "provide an overview of children's folklore since the late 1800s" within the major genres (p.vii). She defines and provides examples of riddles, jokes, rhymes, taunts, songs, cheers, games, pranks, narratives, rituals and material culture. The vast majority of the folktales incorporated in the survey are from English-speaking countries, although occasional Indo-European lore and personal narratives are included as well. Tucker generally provides the context for each sample — the time and place it was recorded, the age of the children involved, and the source where it appears — and a few brief analytical statements. Tucker notes that her Handbook emphasizes "nature lore and imaginative, dangerous, and sexually oriented games" more than previous surveys have (p. 2). She regularly interprets the case studies for their sexual content or for their implications about gender, race and power relations, as well as for other matters of cultural significance.

Tucker's discussions of dirty jokes, boy/girl games, and her attention to routines of victimization and to online forums for the transmission of children's folklore make this a noteworthy handbook. She also includes helpful references that could initiate more extensive research on the part of the reader. Some of the most common citations are to the works of Brian Sutton-Smith, Iona and Peter Opie, William Wells Newell and some other recognizable names in the field. In addition, the use of internet-derived children's folklore material as well as the inclusion of a list of web resources in the appendix emphasizes emerging trends and avenues of research. The Handbook suggests further sources for investigation, including Youtube.com videos, movies and children's books.

In Chapter Two: Definitions and Classifications, Tucker's exploration of the terms and categories of children's folklore are usually accompanied by a brief listing of examples of each tale-type or game. These descriptions could be overwhelming if the reader is not already familiar with the subject. For example, Tucker mentions William Wells Newell's study of "Call-Ball" and describes it as resembling "the contemporary game of Spud" (p. 34), which may not be familiar to all readers. In addition, some of the broader definitions to key terms like "Childhood" and "Folklore" could be explored in greater depth. One of the potential difficulties with the Handbook is the separation between the Definitions and Classifications (Chapter Two) and the Examples and Texts (Chapter Three) sections. The division between the definitions and the detailed case studies is inconvenient when examining ethnic jokes as well as other topics and genres included in both chapters, since the reader must flip back and forth between them to understand the items in their full analytic and ethnographic context. Readers could be better served if the definition and examples were paired together in a single chapter, as it would aid them in distinguishing among the categories of children's folklore.

In the Scholarship and Approaches section (Chapter Four), Tucker describes past children's folklore research and lists potential lenses for future research, including the perspectives of performance, psychoanalysis, gender studies, spatial analysis, the supernatural, violence studies and cross-cultural research. She highlights Sutton-Smith's seven rhetorics of fate, power, communal identity, etc. as "possible directions for a new science of play for our current era" (p. 104). Despite this, the Handbook lacks information on ethnographic methods in children's folklore research. In its place, the Contexts section (Chapter Five) lists autobiographies, children's literature, film, television, toys, games and dolls as recommended media for exploring children's folklore without presenting the reader with rigorous methodologies for data collection among children and youth. As such, this presentation of sources would be beneficial to new folklore students who are not ready to go out in the field or who have limited time to analyze children's folklore texts. *Children's Folklore: A Handbook* provides a strong introduction to types of, and studies about, children's folklore. Tucker's attention to sexuality, violence and to the technological dispersion of children's folklore makes this a timely text to assign or recommend to novice or undergraduate students interested in the subject.



## CHILDREN'S FOLKLORE SECTION: 2009 ANNUAL MEETING

The Children's Folklore Section of the American Folklore Society met on October 24, 2009 at the Boise Centre in Boise, Idaho.

Priscilla Ord opened the meeting at 12:25 P.M. She explained the absence of minutes and noted that there was a problem with our meeting having been placed opposite the Fellows' Lunch. This schedule conflict meant that a number of our prominent members could not attend our meeting. We must ask for different timing next year. [Editor's note: we requested and received a time for the Section meeting in the fall of 2010 that does not conflict with the Fellows' gathering].

Priscilla then gave the Section's Financial Report. She noted that some items were missing, including bills from *Children's Folklore Review* [Editor's note: almost all of the journal's expenses were covered by Binghamton University). Irene Chagall had requested reimbursement of approximately \$25.00 for Aesop mailings. Money was coming in for memberships and miscellaneous items, including sale of Aesop Accolade seals. A representative from the University of South Dakota Press had placed some large orders.

There was also a Section Administrative Fee. A question arose whether Life Memberships were still available. The Newell Fund benefited from an anonymous gift and an estate bequest. There was no winner of the Newell Prize this year. In years when there is a winner, that individual receives \$100 plus publication in *Children's Folklore Review*.

There was some discussion of the Opie Fund. When Peter Opie died, to avoid taxes his library was sent to the Bodleian Library at Oxford University. We sent \$2000 to help with cataloguing. Since they had extra funds, they returned our contribution of about \$200.

There was also some discussion of how to get more people to come to the Children's Folklore Section meeting at AFS. Could we plan an "event": play games and serve ice cream? [Editor's note: such a event has been planned for our meeting in the fall of 2010]. We could also have a silent auction around the theme of children's folklore.

We should give these ideas more thought during the year and come up with suggestions.

Section members agreed that we should have two panels again for next year; the two we had this year fitted together very well.

The editor of *Children's Folklore Review* requested a proofreader, and Kristi Willsey agreed to do the job. Thank you, Kristi!

The meeting was adjourned at 1:26 P.M.

*Submitted by Carole Carpenter*

## NOTES AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

### **Newell Prize**

The Children's Folklore Section of the American Folklore Society annually offers the William Wells Newell Prize (which includes a cash award) for the best student essay on a topic in children's folklore. Students must submit their own papers, and published papers are eligible. Instructors are asked to encourage students with eligible papers to enter the competition.

Papers must be typed, double-spaced, and on white paper or a Word document. On the first page, include the author's name, academic address, home address, telephone numbers, and e-mail address. Deadline for this coming year's competition is September 1, 2009. Submit papers or write for more information to Dr. C.W. Sullivan III, English Department, East Carolina University, Greenville, NC, 27858-4353; electronic submissions should go to [sullivanc@ecu.edu](mailto:sullivanc@ecu.edu).

### **Book Reviews**

*Children's Folklore Review* is seeking book review submissions for its next issue, to be published in October of 2011. This is an excellent opportunity for graduate students interested in building their writing credentials and demonstrating breadth in folklore, literature, and childhood studies. Books are selected for review in *Children's Folklore Review* according to their relevance to the field of children's folklore and their year of publication (within the past two years). If you would like to request a book for review, please contact the book review editor, Dana Hercborgs ([hercborgs@yahoo.com](mailto:hercborgs@yahoo.com)). Book reviews should not exceed 750 words.

## CONTRIBUTORS

**Robert Baron** directs the Folk Arts Program of the New York State Council on the Arts (NYSCA) and has served as Folklore Administrator of the National Endowment for the Humanities and as a museum educator at The Brooklyn Museum. His publications include *Public Folklore*, edited with Nick Spitzer, *Creolization as Cultural Creativity* (ed. with Ana Cara, to be published in 2011), and a number of articles about Black Atlantic folklore, the history of folklore studies, public folklore, and museum studies. Baron has been a Non-Resident Fellow in the W.E.B. Du Bois Institute for African and African American Research at Harvard, a Fulbright Senior Specialist in Finland and the Philippines, and a Smithsonian Fellow in Museum Practice. In 2002, he received the Benjamin A. Botkin Award for Outstanding Achievement in Public Folklore from the American Folklore Society. He holds a Ph.D. in Folklore and Folklife from the University of Pennsylvania.

**Trevor J. Blank**, the winner of this year's William Wells Newell Prize, is a doctoral candidate in the American Studies program at the Pennsylvania State University, Harrisburg. He is the editor of *Folklore and the Internet: Vernacular Expression in a Digital World* (Logan: Utah State University Press 2009) and has published numerous articles, reviews, and presentations on a variety of topics about American folklore and folklife. Currently, he serves as the editor to the online journal, *New Directions in Folklore*.

**Tracy Carpenter** is affiliated with Strayer University.

**Michele D. Castleman** is a doctoral candidate in the Department of Teaching and Learning, focusing on young adult and children's literature at the Ohio State University. Her research explores the re-presentations and significance of the characters of myth in contemporarily-set children's novels.

**Alisa Clapp-Itnyre** is Associate Professor of English at Indiana University East, Richmond, Indiana, where she teaches children's literature, young-adult literature, and various other literature and writing courses. She has served on committees for the Children's Literature Association and is the Executive Secretary to the Midwest Victorian Studies Association. Her publications include *Angelic Airs, Subversive Songs: Music as Social Discourse in the Victorian Novel* (Ohio University Press, 2002); articles on Tennyson, Eliot, and Hardy; and various children's literature articles on the Nancy Drew series, Civil War YA novels, and other subjects. Her most recent scholarship is on nineteenth-century children's hymns.

**Dana Hercbergs**, the book review editor for *Children's Folklore Review*, is a visiting Assistant Professor in the Program for Israel Studies and the Department

## CONTRIBUTORS

of Anthropology at the University of Calgary in Canada. Her research centers on transnational practices of tourism and migrant communities in Israel/Palestine and North America.

**Jacqueline Thursby** is Professor of Folklore and English at Brigham Young University. Her previous books include *Mother's Table, Father's Chair: Cultural Narratives of Basque American Women* (Utah State University Press, 1999). A humanities interdisciplinary scholar, Thursby lives in Provo, Utah, with her husband and two cats, Max and Molly.

**Brandi J. Venable** is an M.A. student in the Department of Popular Culture at Bowling Green State University. She is currently working on her thesis, tentatively titled, "Feed Me! Insatiable Children and the Monsters Who Want to Devour Them: Consumption in Clive Barker's *The Thief of Always* and Neil Gaiman's *Coraline*."

**Kristiana M. Willsey**, a doctoral candidate at Indiana University, is the assistant editor of *Children's Folklore Review*. In 2007 she won the William Wells Newell Prize for her essay "The Shoebox Museum: The Aesthetics and Organizational Concepts of Children," published in volume 30 of *Children's Folklore Review*.