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CONTENTS

FROM THE OUTGOING EDITOR	5
FROM THE INCOMING EDITOR	7
 2007 NEWELL PRIZE WINNER	
THE SHOEBOX MUSEUM: THE AESTHETICS AND ORGANIZATIONAL CONCEPTS OF CHILDREN <i>KRISTIANA WILLSEY</i>	9
NURSERY SCHOOL MUSEUM, MARTONVÁSÁR, HUNGARY <i>C.W. SULLIVAN III</i>	23
A REASSESSMENT OF CHILDREN'S FOLKLORE CLASSIFICATION <i>DANA HERCBERG</i>	25
NAMING GAMES AND BEYOND: REFERENCING IN CHILDREN'S VERBAL PLAY <i>JOHN HOLMES McDOWELL</i>	35
LEVITATION REVISITED <i>ELIZABETH TUCKER</i>	47
AN ECLECTIC SCHOOLTEACHER: DOROTHY HOWARD AS APPLIED FOLKLORIST <i>JAN ROSENBERG</i>	61
CHILDREN'S FOLKLORE SECTION: 2007 ANNUAL MEETING	69
NOTES AND ANNOUNCEMENTS	73
CONTRIBUTORS	75





FROM THE OUTGOING EDITOR

C.W. SULLIVAN III

Some 30 years ago, I volunteered to see if East Carolina University would fund the *Children's Folklore Newsletter*. *CFN* had been published once (by Tom Burns at the University of Pennsylvania), and at the publication of volume I, number 2, I became the official editor. Between volumes 10 and 13, *CFN* became *CFR*, the *Children's Folklore Review*, and eventually went to a once-a-year publication schedule. The volume you hold in your hands is volume 30.

The previous paragraph tells so little about what happened over those years. What stands out for me are the people who contributed their articles over the years to make *CFR* a fine journal of children's folklore, from established scholars who could have published their articles in other venues to beginning folklorists whom I have seen become established scholars. I do not need to name names; we are a small circle, and we all know who the others are.

As you can see, Libby Tucker and I are co-editors. That is very generous of her as she has done a great deal of work to secure funding and begin the labor that led to the publication of this volume. I may have supplied a few bits of worthwhile advice, but mostly I have stood on the sidelines and cheered her on. I really just wanted my name on the 30th volume for symmetry. The next volume will be edited, solo, by Dr. Elizabeth Tucker.

Am I glad to be stepping down? Yes and No. No because I have enjoyed the friendships that *CFR* has brought me. No because I have enjoyed reading and editing the articles that have appeared in *CFR*. Yes because as I sneak up on retirement, I will not have ECU to financially support *CFR*. And Yes because it is time, and may be well overdue time, to have a new hand at the helm. For lots of reasons, and none of them good ones, I do not think I generated nearly enough library subscriptions; at our rates, libraries ought to be willing to subscribe. Also, troglodyte and luddite that I am, I do not have the computer skills to do what needs be done to take *CFR* any farther into the 21st century that I have — and barely know what those skills would be.

Thank you, Libby, for taking over, and thank you all for allowing me the privilege of editing the *Children's Folklore Review* for all these years.

chip





FROM THE INCOMING EDITOR

ELIZABETH TUCKER

As this 30th volume of *Children's Folklore Review* goes to press, I want to thank Chip Sullivan for his outstanding dedication to the journal for the past thirty years. His hard work and generous outreach to children's folklore scholars around the world have resulted in a wonderful publication that has greatly benefited the development of children's folklore as a discipline. As the incoming editor of *CFR*, I have "big shoes" to fill. Chip's editorial shoes are so big that they qualify as seven-league boots! I am grateful for his co-editorship of this issue and will do my best to follow the fine example of editorial service that he has established.

Our first Binghamton University issue presents articles that examine familiar subjects in new ways. The winner of our William Wells Newell Prize, Kristiana Willsey, suggests that children's treasure boxes are more than collections of personal memorabilia; in their own right, they qualify as children's museums. Chip Sullivan's "Nursery School Museum, Martonvásár, Hungary" describes a unique museum about which many children's folklore scholars know very little. Dana Hercbergs's "Reassessment of Children's Folklore Classification" asks important questions about folklorists' perception of digitally mediated games and other pursuits that do not fit the genres most commonly recognized by folklorists of childhood. John McDowell's "Naming Games and Beyond" explores very young children's naming games and routines, enhancing our understanding of these children's creative self-expression. My own "Levitation Revisited" examines the origins of a well-established supernatural ritual that now thrives on the Internet's YouTube. And Jan Rosenberg's "An Eclectic Schoolteacher" takes a fresh look at Dorothy Howard, whose research helped to launch the field of children's folklore.

As these articles demonstrate, *Children's Folklore Review* will continue to publish exciting and innovative children's folklore scholarship. I hope to increase our number of subscribers and plan to include a book review section in our next issue. If you would like to suggest a book for review, please e-mail our new book review editor, Dana Hercbergs (hercberg@sas.upenn.edu). Comments and suggestions from all readers are welcome! I would be delighted to hear from you on e-mail at any time (ltucker@binghamton.edu). Thanks very much for your support of *CFR*.





THE SHOEBOX MUSEUM: THE AESTHETICS AND ORGANIZATIONAL CONCEPTS OF CHILDREN

KRISTIANA WILLSEY

Guests at the Smithsonian, the Louvre, or the Met go to see pieces that have been declared important and valuable repositories of meaning, beauty and culture by trustworthy authorities. Elegantly presented as final, finished objects for cultural consumption, exhibits in glass cases and behind velvet ropes are validated by hushed, reverent, paying audiences. Traditional museums simultaneously recognize importance and create it, through the frame of the museum itself. However, the notion that a particular space can confer significance upon objects, marking and raising them from their quotidian context, is not unique to adults or to fully accredited cultural authorities. If the museum is reserved for fixed, established, mature “high cultural” objects, how then does that often invisible, incompletely cultured class of individuals, children, recognize/create objects that are beautiful and meaningful to them? This paper considers children as intuitive curators, whose ready grasp of collection and containment as processes of sacralization both upsets and reinscribes the values of traditional museums: authority, publicity, permanence and presentation.

The children’s museum (meaning not museums designed by adults for children, but children’s own eclectic assemblages of treasures kept in shoe boxes, dresser drawers, under a loose floorboard, etc.) is here considered alongside of other (adult) critiques and parodies of traditional museums, specifically Dave Wilson’s Museum of Jurassic Technology and Rosamond Casey’s Museum of Ambient Disorders.¹ This is not because I believe that children’s assemblages are self-conscious, calculated and incisive attacks on the stultifying artificiality of traditional museums. Rather, I want to suggest that the artistic and philosophical projects of adults, which take up questions of permanence, authority, publicity and presentation, are inheritors of and modeled on the assemblages of children. This paper thus develops a novel conceptual framework for approaching children’s assemblages, with particular reference to one child’s museum: the “treasure chest” of nearly-five-year-old Ben Harding.² Drawing on ongoing research, my analysis is intended to be preliminary and suggestive, not argumentative or exhaustive. Most significantly, this is an argument for considering children’s material “folk” culture on an equal plane with the artistic, expressive “high” culture of adult intellectuals.

The word “assemblage” is used advisedly, to differentiate the specific and thematic collections children might have of rocks, dolls, baseball cards and so forth from my focus here, which is on those jumbled hodge-podges of rubber bands, vending machine prizes, feathers, pictures, costume jewelry, interesting pebbles, empty perfume bottles, matchbox cars, mysterious bits of machinery, and other unlikely treasures. The personally significant and the visually or tactilely appealing share quarters, not merely coincidentally but productively: “accumulation and layering promote a kind of benevolent contagion; the significance of one image is lent to another ... intensification [of meaning] springs





from a process of condensing and miniaturizing" (Turner 1999, 100). Kay Turner offers an adult parallel to the fragmentary and flexible shoebox museum with her research on the aesthetics of women's home altars: places in the home set apart as sacred and containing "Photos, candles, incense, ritual tools, potions, medicine bundles, shells, crystals, coins, momentos, knick-knacks, gifts, offerings, decorative effects, and even seemingly anomalous items, such as a jar of buttons or a door knob. Some of these things may remain fixed for a lifetime, while others may change. The aesthetic of relationship is a dynamic one: expanding, sometimes contracting, then again being replenished over time" (95). Children's assemblages are similarly fluid and subject to revision; the success of the shoebox museum relies upon its accessibility and its mutability, unlike the glassed-off, carded-and-catalogued permanence of traditional museums.

Alternative museums like Dave Wilson's Museum of Jurassic Technology and Rosamond Casey's Museum of Ambient Disorders criticize the stifling and unnecessary "noise," in Goffman's sense, of the museum space: the gilt frames

and velvet ropes intended to honor and elevate the art and artifacts are too prone to become themselves the object of reverence. The emphasis on presentation mediates and circumscribes what Wilson, Casey, and others see as the natural role of art: a genuine and reciprocal conversation between guests and exhibit. American artist Robert Smithson said famously, "Museums are tombs" (1996, 58). Best known for "earthworks" sculptures like his 1970 "Spiral Jetty," pieces designed to engage and interact with natural forces rather than resisting them, Smithson's criticism of the artificial abstraction of museums and galleries and the illusion of permanence is taken up as parody by alternative museums and conceptual art.

Dave Wilson's Museum of Jurassic Technology is a dimly lit, labyrinthine set of rooms with an air of genteel neglect, tucked away in a suburb of Los Angeles. The exhibits include a series of intricate dioramas depicting the American lifestyle of the mobile home, microscopic mosaics of flowers and birds composed from the scales on a butterfly's wing, a thick sheet of lead containing a species of bat which uses



Figure 1. "Hanging Basket." Courtesy of the Museum of Jurassic Technology.



Figure 2. "Rotten Luck." Courtesy of the Museum of Jurassic Technology.



sonar to move through solid objects, a collection of antique celluloid dice, and various other beautiful and bizarre images of dubious authenticity (figs. 1-2). As Lawrence Weschler exposes in his Pulitzer-prize finalist for nonfiction, *Mr. Wilson's Cabinet of Wonders*, the Museum is a tongue-in-cheek piece of conceptual art, a destabilization of authoritative truth. Wilson asks his guests to consider who has the authority to create meaning/significance, what devices (literally) frame it for audience consumption, and whether museum spaces recognize intrinsic value, create it, or both.

In a similar critical project, Rosamond Casey's gallery of sculptures, collectively titled *The Museum of Ambient Disorders*, questions the values of authority, permanence, publicity and presentation in order to strip away superfluities and argue for a more personal, unencumbered, egalitarian engagement with art. The exhibit "White Noise," a series of stoppered bottles supposedly containing sounds stored up by an old man in the process of losing his hearing, devotes equal measures of humor and sincerity to the question of how meaning might

be captured and preserved (fig. 3). Casey subtly satirizes the noble aim of traditional museums, which imagine not only that certain objects (which the curators will know on sight) act as receptacles of culture, beauty, or significance, but that the museum can protect them from the rude passage of time or ugly, inevitable change of episteme. Casey also pointedly takes on the issue of perspective and asks us to reevaluate who has the authority to distinguish between the worthy and the trivial. Putting an old man's reminiscences in a museum exhibit extends to them a weight they would hardly have independently. The personal is practically trivial by default; museums deal in the momentous, the universal, and the substantial. Or do they? Is the *Mona Lisa* in the Louvre because it's famous, or is the *Mona Lisa* famous because it's in the Louvre? Casey delights in these tangled relationships of significance and authority.

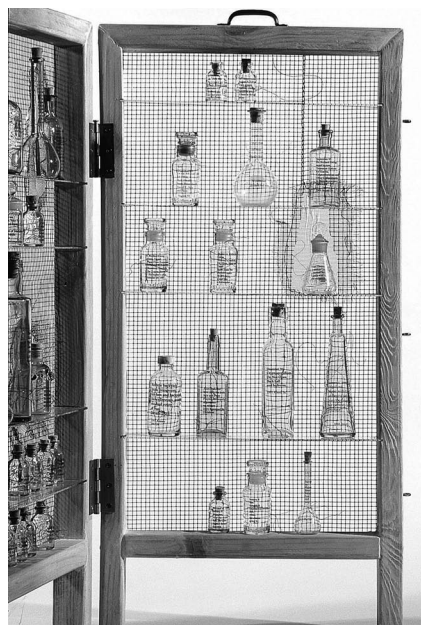


Figure 3. "White Noise." Courtesy of Rosamond Casey and the Virginia Quarterly Review.

Ben's museum (fig. 4) offers a neat entry point into these intellectual adult projects; his "treasure chest" is both an implicit challenge to the aims of traditional museums and an affirmation of them. Ben's museum is unquestionably personal/trivial; his treasures have only individual and idiosyncratic meaning, nothing (apparently) worthy of glass cases



Figure 4. Ben Harding's museum. Photograph by Kristiana Willsey.





or admission fees. They are physically trivial: small, often broken, frequently cheap and mass-produced. Presentation of artifacts in Ben's museum is nothing more polished or final than a jumble; the box is an open space within which any object can relate to any other. Turner's description of the home altar is equally applicable to children's assemblages: "power flows through the "thingliness" of the altar [or shoebox], its material reality ... images and objects that have no immediate affinity are nonetheless yoked together to forge new, interrelated meanings" (1999, 98). Connections and relationships are not tidily bound in programs or catalogues, but are literally up for grabs. Further, they are curated/validated by a child, someone with no cultural authority to declare meaning. But it remains that Ben's "treasure chest" is a space recognized and marked for the collection and containment of valuable and significant objects. It is in fact the ideal answer to Dave Wilson's question of who has the right to determine significance or Rosamond Casey's concern with the personal/trivial. Moreover, Ben's jumbled and evocative assemblage is reminiscent of the sculptures of surrealist artist Joseph Cornell, and an interesting dialogue emerges when we permit ourselves to consider the two on equal footing.

There is in Ben an air of the traditional curator, "discovering" objects worthy of collection and containment.

K: How do you know to put something in your pirate chest if you get something?

B: (long pause, seven seconds) I know. Put in my — I just think of doing that.

My question was essentially the critic Juan Suarez' query to Cornell's sculptures: "What makes certain objects laden with surrealist potential?" (2007, 148). The museum space suggests itself for a privileged few; the beauty and value of certain objects is — as the classic curator's task — recognized and exalted, albeit within the limited presentation sphere available to Ben. His explanation invokes the curator's sense of inherent existing value, visible to the sensitive eye of the collector. Ben, likewise, asserts, "Everything that is treasured, goes in my box." However, the corollary is of course that everything that enters the box becomes treasure. The objects are decontextualized and "framed"; meaning is created through placement and association.

An intrinsic quality of traditional museums is the impression of permanence and fixity of context, not just generally within the bound, framed world of art or history but within the specific museum or gallery: while exhibits travel, the Mona Lisa is practically synonymous with the Louvre. Authoritative adult museums fix significance and tie it to a particular place or time; generally agreed-upon interpretations of a famous painting or excavated artifact are written down in programs or memorized for tours. Children's assemblages, conversely, recognize objects as naturally and readily recontextualizable. The apparent disorder is purposeful and creative; as Lucy Lippard points out, "Fragmentation need not connote explosion, disintegration. It is also a component of networks, stratification, the interweaving of many dissimilar threads, and de-emphasis on





imposed meaning in favor of multiple interpretations” (qtd. in Turner 1999, 100). For instance, although a string of beads or an artificial rose retain the associations with a friend’s party or a relative’s wedding where Ben received them, these associations aren’t solidified or resistant to gathering new kinds of meaning. While showing me his treasures, Ben incorporates them easily into his games. A high-bouncer from a vending machine becomes enormous, an out-of-scale weapon in his lego-world:

B: (sound of rubber ball bouncing) “Ahhh! Bombs dropping on the ship!”

Later, Ben finds a purple latex snake, about an inch long, which (his mother explained in elided dialogue) came as part of a pirate game.

B: Oh here’s my snake! [...]

K: So this is kind of a pirate thing too?

B: Nuh-uh. Snakes are not pirates.

K: (laughter) No, snakes are clearly not pirates, Ben. What kind of a thing is this?

B: (playing with legos) Propeller — I am a propeller. It’s a propeller — snake.

K: It’s a propeller snake?

B: Yeah, propeller snakes live in propellers. They live, and they never get chopped up.

The simultaneity of the lego game-world and the toy snake creates a new and exciting scenario for Ben; what begins as an experimental linguistic juxtaposition (“I am a propeller. It’s a propeller — snake”) suggests a cogent and appealing little narrative. And in fact, Ben did offer an answer (of sorts) to my question. The snake is an *available* “kind of thing,” an object with unlimited potentially intriguing contexts. This fluidity of significance that Ben takes for granted strikes at a central notion of traditional museums: that meaning can be extracted, distilled, and preserved in the hermetic vault of a circumscribed authoritative space. Rather they are valued for “their capacity to derail automatized perception and trigger unpredictable trains of association” (Suarez 2007, 147). Analyzing the work of surrealist artists, Suarez explicitly connects their treatment of objects to that of children:

As Walter Benjamin was fond of pointing out, childhood vision has not yet been reduced by purposive rationality and is therefore more alert to the enigmatic quality of objects and to the webs of association in which they exist. It multiplies and transforms the object world instead of freezing it into routine: ‘[The child’s drawers] must become arsenal and zoo; crime museum and crypt. To ‘tidy up’ would be to demolish an edifice full of prickly chestnuts that are spiky clubs, tin foil that is hoarded silver, bricks that are coffins, cacti that are totem





poles, and copper pennies that are shields.’ To see as a child is to see as a surrealist, fully attentive to the complexity of matter.” (2007, 166)

And, it would appear, to see as a surrealist is to see as a child — Suarez goes on to describe Joseph Cornell’s “intense fascination with children” in his art (2007, 167), and biographical data offers further interesting angles. Cornell lived with his parents for most of his adult life, and had a “professed distaste for shocking subject matter and overt sexual references” (Suarez 2007, 142). In other words, there was something childlike about him, or at least enamored of the Victorian image of the child. Suarez moreover frames artistic and ideological developments within a model of human maturation: “Hence to see like a child is, in a way, to see with the untutored eye of the new visual technologies at the time. Cornell’s, and the surrealist’s, early years were a period when the emergent mass media had not yet [. . .] streamlined their grammar and style” (2007, 167). Suarez invokes a unilinear view of culture similar to that of Alice Bertha Gomme and other proponents of cultural evolution. Surrealism is described as the infancy of modernity, and children are asked to stand in for a previous historical period. In this case, though, their vision is romanticized and the adult artist is imagined as channeling or inheriting the child’s (productive, positive) understanding of objects.

Underlying these surrealist sculptures, in Suarez’ analysis, is a belief in the ‘naturalness’ of the surrealist perspective; it is self-consciously aligned with an idea of children as *unconscious* artists. We don’t need to deal with how deliberate or sophisticated children’s awareness of their assemblages actually is, because successful surrealist art is imagined as returning to that “innocent” appreciation of the objects: “rather than create, it recontextualizes and therefore reinterprets the given” (Suarez 2007, 147). This conception of the artist as unconscious, rather than creative, suggests the familiar folkloristic notion of the “passive bearer,” evidence of how seamlessly the usually disassociated disciplines of folklore and fine art can converse.

Even the museum shell itself, the box that recognizes and creates the objects within it as significant and valuable, is subject to revision/recontextualization. Initially Ben’s “treasure chest” was a Christmas gift containing only pirate-themed goodies: doubloons, fake beads, an activity book and so forth. However, with a child’s sensitivity to the richness of language, Ben knew that “treasure” refers to both material and immaterial wealth: what was given to him as a place for gold, he transforms into a vessel for another kind of riches: memories, associations, family ties.

Concerning this openness to recontextualization, it is significant that Ben’s museum, unlike most museums designed for adults, is entirely hands-on. His artifacts are sensuously diverse, appreciated for the rich and varied stimuli they provide. The objects’ value is described in physical and tactile terms:

K: What do you like about this, this marble?

B: Marble? I like to roll it down.





Likewise the aerosol bottle of lavender-scented liquid, which is both viscerally and olfactorily appealing, has a place in the museum. The coins were dumped out and sifted through for the music of metal ringing against metal. Thus the availability of the objects to be made significant in novel ways requires that their presentation be informal (no glass cases) and personal, involving the fullness of sensory awareness particular to children.

A brief note on methodology: because I had never met Ben and I wanted him (and his mother) to be comfortable with what I was doing, I chose to interview Ben in his mother's presence. I don't know in what way this altered the answers he gave me and I will need to do further research with other children to get a more informed sense of how private these assemblages really are. One complication that immediately emerged, though, was that I was a friend of his mother's, manifestly an adult, and therefore was given self-consciously adult-oriented answers. I don't think it was coincidental, for instance, that Ben spoke first about the money in his treasure chest, the piggy-bank component of the collection, as that which he knew adults valued and which I, an adult, would be most impressed by:

K: Where'd you get the marble?

B: I don't remember. But this is all my money that I keep in here, I got lots and lots. And I got this [a flattened souvenir penny] from the children's museum, um, (sing-song intonation) it's right heeere, it's a mummy, and this is all my money, that I really like and, (coins falling, indecipherable) this is my money so my mommy can buy stuff for me.

My attempts to turn the discussion towards the more unusual and personal objects were, more often than not, unsuccessful, but Ben was eager to show off his "lots and lots" of money, emphasizing his role as an important and productive member of the household. The money was being elevated for my/adult benefit and recognition, not necessarily according to Ben's own understanding. Not all the things Ben called money were what adults consider legal tender; they also included foreign coins, toy money, or likely-looking pieces of metal. In fact Ben explicitly referred to a flattened, stamped souvenir penny (something which has been transformed from currency into a toy) as "money." Similarly his phonetic approximations of "money" and experimentation with different articles ("it's a mummy") underscore that, for Ben, this was a semi-foreign cultural category.

Knowing that I was there with my audio recorder to talk to him about important things, Ben wanted to represent himself as capable and mature, helping his mother to take care of him (an endearing posturing I imagine his mother encouraged). I am not suggesting that the money was not special to Ben, but rather that he represented it in a way particularly keyed to an adult audience. It's also likely that part of his appreciation for it comes from his sense that this is an adult thing — adulthood seeming as foreign and exotic as his coin from Barbados, as distant and improbable a role as a pirate whose gold doubloons have a place alongside the currency of other grown-ups.





A struggle to translate his sense of relationship into mine manifests itself elsewhere in the interview, when I ask Ben to explain more about why he organized his treasures the way he did:

B: It's a flower.

K: Why is it with your pirate treasure?

B: I put things in that is not apposed to go in there.

K: Why aren't they supposed to go in there?

B: Because I got them some other place and I don't want them to go in there. So I (indecipherable) Legos especially don't go in pirate boxes. (exploding noises) Fuse bomb! Digging in the Fuse! (flying noises) And this is apposed to go.

K: So why does the rose go with the pirate stuff?

B: Because, I wanted it to go, it didn't you know it didn't go with pirate stuff.

Newly conceiving of his treasures from my (adult) perspective, Ben sees that his groupings are not "appropriate;" Ben is aware of his sense of relatedness as deviant or dispreferred: he "put[s] things in that is not apposed to go in there." When I pressed him, he gave an explanation of one kind of adult/appropriate category: "I got them in some other place." Things from the same place are like objects; shared context creates meaning. His diverse assemblage of objects from multiple contexts is difficult for him to explain, as he switches between aesthetics; he "wanted it to go," but *I* know, "it didn't go with the pirate stuff." He is aware of, but resistant to, adult concepts of organization; instead "the accumulation of things, and their ability to resonate against each other, completely overcomes the subject's ability to set them in order" (Suarez 2007, 145).

Though Ben's museum is unconcerned with formal presentation or public display and requires only the authoritative curatorship of Ben himself, there is one crucial level at which his museum is no different than any elegantly presented, culturally validated, and permanently contextualized museum space. Underlying Ben's museum, as it does more polished and authoritative venues, is the troubling sense of inevitable change, transition, and loss. Suarez's description of Cornell's art — "The endless symbolic resonances and flights of association in which he indulges are attempts to bind the primary alterity of the material world" — could equally be applied to the assemblage of the not-quite-five-year-old Ben (2007, 145). Ben repeatedly gives rationales for his treasures in terms of protection and preservation, saying "then I um, put it in there, just to be safe. So it could be safe." He explains that he keeps things in the box "because I don't want it to get lost, all my toys from there get lost. So I wanna keep those in there so they won't get lost." And he becomes actively outraged when his mother proposed mixing his organizational schemas, specifically because it would pose a threat to the fragile order he has managed to sort out for himself:

M: Would you ever put your lego in the pirate chest —

B: NOOOO!





M: No?

B: (quietly) Lost.

M: It would get lost —

B: NO, Don't DARE, DARE, W, DARE. Don't even THINK about that!

This sense of his treasures as threatened is not only literal, but also symbolic. These are not only tactilely pleasing objects but, more significantly, *narrative* objects, vessels for memory and association. Turner discusses the dual roles of women's altars as both aesthetically appealing and personally resonant: "if the first authentic goal of an altar is to represent relationship, then the primary artistic move is to set potent images in relation to one another" (1999, 96). By "representing relationship," the objects in Ben's museum also represent the threat of losing the people with whom they are connected. It emerged in our conversation that Ben's objects were disproportionately gifts from family:

K: Do these things go together? Do these pictures [one of a ship his mother sailed on, the other of a smoke column from his firefighter father] go together?

B: No. My dad gave me that one, and my mom gave me that one.

M: Do you remember who gave it to you?

B: (fiercely) UNCLEMICHAEL! He's my uncle definitely.

M: Do you remember where you got those orange beads?

B: From Nanny.

K: Why do you like it [the picture from his father]?

B: Because it reminds me of my dad, he lives in California! (clenched teeth, impatient)

K: Why did you put it in here with your treasure?

B: I didn't even know it was in there. So I didn't, know that it was in there. (fiercely)

This relationship between gift and giver is articulated by Robert Armstrong in his analysis of what he calls "works of affecting presence," specifically museum exhibits and other objects of cultural worship: "Such things are not, at base, symbols of something else ... they *are* whatever they are. ... [They] own certain characteristics that cause them to be treated more like persons than like things" (1981, 5). In other words, human contact humanizes things. My mother's sweater *is* my mother, and when I eat from my grandmother's china she is serving me. The exhibits in Ben's museum likewise "exist in a state of tension between these two poles: being subject and being object" (Armstrong 1981, 6). They are simultaneously physical things under his control and intermediaries for independent humans whose actions he cannot predict or protect.

This crosses into very personal territory, and several interesting things emerged from these exchanges. In the first place, there's a kind of sympathetic ritual involved in the objects' capture and containment. To keep the objects safe is to keep the people safe, or at least one's own memories and understanding of them. It also becomes clear from Ben's tone of voice and metalinguistic gestures that



these aren't things he is comfortable talking about. In fact the reason that some of these explanations were given to his mother, rather than me (and only grudgingly at that) is because she had the authority to push when Ben was evasive. In the case of the picture from his father, Ben denies the significance. Though I want to respect the statements of my informant, his discomfort, repetition, and general unwillingness to speak about personal and emotional associations make it hard to believe the picture isn't a valued part of his treasure chest. These are obviously things that are not only personal, but also sensitive. There is something simultaneously valuable and upsetting about these reminders of uncertain (and in his father's case, geographically distant) relationships. As Suarez says, "this is why objects combine anxiety and fascination; why, even though they evoke danger, they are also obsessively revisited" (2007, 149). The treasures both offer a kind of security and remind their collector that security is impossible.

Ben's wariness regarding the personal narratives invested in his treasures adds another dimension to our consideration of his assemblage as a museum. "Museum" is a term typically reserved for public display; significance is validated by the collective appreciation of an audience. This is part of the definition of "museum" Rosamond Casey's Museum of Ambient Disorders takes apart, specifically with the exhibit "Bob's Flashback," which sets apart a childhood memory within an internet forward (fig. 5). The exhibit combines all the elements of triviality that typically would label it as unfit for museum-consumption: it is

transient, gone the second the window closes. Besides this it is clearly not processed for a presentation; Casey returns to the issue of permanence and preservation by pressing this casual fragment of a conversation — typos, awkward grammar and spelling intact — between blocks of glass, like insects in honey. But above all it is personal, of no real significance to anyone other than Bob. It is this hard line between the personal and the significant that Casey seems particularly interested in; while Bob's revelation is unique to him, the genuineness of his emotion and the thrill of recollection is universally accessible.

Casey asserts that the personal is not antithetical to a museum exhibit; rather it is a prerequisite to that connection which is the appropriate work of museums. Just as "White Noise" privileges the personal by reminding us that meaning and history are individually created, Bob's conversation



Figure 5. "Bob's Flashback." Courtesy of Rosamond Casey and the Virginia Quarterly Review.



is museum-worthy not in spite of its personal/trivial nature, but because of it. Similarly, the privacy of Ben's assemblage is a mark of its sincerity. Its very personalness is what elevates it from the everyday; if it were not personally important, it would not be in his box of treasures, a bounded space outside of the ordinary.

K: Do you like talking about your box?

B: (pause) No. I don't know.

K: How come?

B: Because it's too — treasured-ous! (shooting noises)

M: Are you saying it's because it's treasure — and it's special? (To me: I know sometimes he doesn't like to talk about things that are special to him.)

B: Yes I do. I do[nt.]

K: [You] like to talk to things that are special to you [Ben?]

B:

[No.]

Though I can't really know whether Ben's problematic explanation is a function of emotional discomfort, mere boredom, frustration at my inability to understand or his inability to express it effectively, this is clearly a difficult subject for him. Ben's reticence regarding the personal significance of his objects in fact resonates with Joseph Cornell's surrealist structures:

a body of work that is as meticulously crafted as it is mystifyingly opaque, they consistently bypass that on the other side of art, the personal and the symbolic, Cornell merely gives us things — bits of obtrusively unreadable matter in odd combination. His constructions infuse quotidian things with cultural density and human circumstance and therefore lift them from their immediate materiality; yet at the same time, they simultaneously reassert them as matter — blunt remains that symbol and sense can never exhaust (Suarez 143).

Though Ben's museum is perhaps not "meticulously crafted," and probably not intentionally mystifyingly, it's worth considering that Suarez's critical analyses are only possible because Cornell was not much more forthcoming about the intention of his art than Ben is about the motivations for his collection. There's a surprising and appealing symmetry between Ben Harding's treasure chest and Cornell's surrealist sculptures — the latter suggests an inheritance of and refinement on the intuitive curatorship of children.

Moreover, as many questions and complications as Ben's assemblage raises for the typical museum, it also demonstrates a canny grasp of how to establish and defend the significance of things adults would not recognize by adopting a very 'adult' method: put it all together in a safe, closed, box. As Candice Gouchard says in Turner, "the process of acquiring objects that begin to have meaning both in and of themselves and in relation to events or people or places or ideas ... begins





to have a power of its own that exceeds the power of the individual object ... *accumulation describes the process of empowerment both for the individual and for the space that [the] altar [or shoebox] ... occupies*" (1999, 100, my emphasis). It is not only the objects in a museum that assemblage throws into conversation; the curator and the museum space are wrapped up in the process as well. If putting an ordinary object in a frame lends it significance, then it also creates significance for the framer — something children, among the least powerful members of society, are quick to appreciate. Underlying Ben's treasure chest is an alignment with that most integral conceit of museum work — that to possess anything is to possess importance, that collection itself is an act of empowerment.

NOTES

1. Discussions of Rosamond Casey draw on an unpublished 2006 paper.
2. Names of participants have been changed.

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NURSERY SCHOOL MUSEUM, MARTONVÁSÁR, HUNGARY

C.W. SULLIVAN III

The Brunszvik family of Martonvásár, Hungary, is famous for its connection and friendship with Ludwig von Beethoven, but on my visit there, while I was spending the spring on a Fulbright at Debrecen University, I discovered a very interesting Nursery School Museum. Most of what follows is paraphrased from the official handouts at the museum; all quotations come from the *Visitor's Guide*.

Theresa Brunsszvik, a close friend of Beethoven's, was one of the best educated and most well-informed women of her time, and she became one of the pioneers of nursery school education in Europe. The nursery school she established in Buda, then the capital of Hungary, in 1828 was not only the first in Hungary but the first in all of Central Europe. Through her influence, the first nursery schools were later opened in Austria and Southern Germany.

The exhibit is divided into three parts. The first part includes a picture of the house in Buda where Teresa opened the first nursery school, and there is also a model of the school based on the original inventory and written descriptions. The teaching materials show that the children there were taught to read, write, and count in German. The teaching aids were developed by the German nursery school specialist Friedrich Fröbel and became widespread in Hungary during the latter half of the nineteenth century.

The second part of the exhibit focuses on nursery education in the latter part of the nineteenth century and the first part of the twentieth. Until the 1870s, only men taught in these schools, and their classes ranged from 60 to 100 students. This part of the exhibit contains toys and teaching aids made by teachers and students from local products. There are dolls made of rags and "maize" cobs, toy soldiers, building blocks, and more. There is also an inkwell, a goose-feather pen, and a "clapper" to set the rhythm of physical exercises. Private nursery schools using the Montessori method became popular after about 1910.

The third part of the exhibit looks at nursery education from the end of World War II through the 1960s when it became normal practice for children to be at school all day. During the early years of Communist rule, the nursery school "was the first stage in socialist education." In the early years after the war, there were no toys in the schools, and children had to bring chairs or stools on which to sit. After 1960, Hungarian schools began to regain their earlier status. The Museum is working to move to a larger building and create exhibits covering nursery education from 1960 to 1990.

To say that this material is fascinating is an understatement; the Fulbrighters who went on this trip (sponsored by the Hungarian Fulbright Commission) spent more time and displayed more interest in the Nursery School Museum than in any other part of the Brunszvik Estate. Should you be in Budapest, the Brunszvik Estate is an easy day trip and well worth the effort.





A REASSESSMENT OF CHILDREN'S FOLKLORE CLASSIFICATION

DANA HERCBERGS

In his magnum opus, *The Ambiguity of Play* (1997), psychologist and children's folklore scholar Brian Sutton-Smith traces the concept of play from older to more contemporary associations and argues that underlying every prominent definition of play is a rhetoric, a Kuhnian paradigm informing the research questions and objectives of studies about play. Sutton-Smith defines a rhetoric as "a persuasive discourse, or an implicit narrative, wittingly or unwittingly adopted by members of a particular affiliation to persuade others of the veracity and worthwhileness of their beliefs" (8). For instance, among the oldest rhetorics identified by the author is the concept of play as fate, associated with games of chance that, by virtue of uncertain outcomes, mimic the belief that humans are controlled by destiny and other forces (9). On the other hand, play's association with progress has dominated theories of animal and child development for about two hundred years, impacting the way educators see "playful imitation as a form of children's socialization and moral, social and cognitive growth" (9). Other notions of play identified by Sutton-Smith include frivolity, power and identity. I mention these examples to illustrate the contribution of such a foray into the history of ideas, namely, to prompt us to consider our own disciplinary assumptions and boundaries.

Aided by Sutton-Smith's work, and after reviewing some of the key studies on children's games and lore in the last one hundred years,¹ in the present essay I identify a 'rhetoric of play' that applies both to the academic study of children's games and to their popular perception: that is, the nostalgic lament of the transition from outdoor, group and physical games to indoor, solitary and digitally mediated games. This dichotomy is not only implicated in determining what qualifies as suitable material for the folkloristic study of children's play; it also echoes adult concerns that children have less opportunity for 'free' outdoor recreation than they themselves had.²

Children's play is increasingly associated with solitary indoor entertainment rather than with street play among peers (Sutton-Smith 1986, 170), a point that both academics and general observers find disturbing. Valentine's *Public Space and the Culture of Childhood* (2004) confirms that parents in the United Kingdom lament their children's lack of access to the outdoor play of their own youth, while at the same time giving reasons to be concerned about child safety, traffic and stranger dangers being two factors that limit outdoor play. These concerns appear in scholarship at least as early as the 1980s in studies of children's play spaces, both in adult-controlled play programs and in more child-derived play areas in urban and rural environments (Moore 1986, Dargan and Zeitlin 1990, Olwig and Gulløv 2003, Hörschelmann and Schäfer 2005, Kraftl, Horton and Tucker 2007).

Paralleling these studies, a nostalgic baby-boomer generation is spawning a revival of its own childhood culture in publications on popular pastimes of the 1950s and 1960s (for example, Dankner and Tartakover 1996). Books include the





"unlikely bestseller" (Williams 2007, 9) *The Dangerous Book for Boys*, written by Irish brothers Conn and Hal Iggulden (2006), and websites like "Nostalgia Online," an Israeli forum with an accompanying book of games and other amusements.³ In the Israeli case, which has been the focus of my own research, there are even manuals and revivals of traditional games by television campaigns and game manufacturers (Zuk 2007). These projects and others are geared variably towards adults and children, their resurgence encouraging interaction and reconnection across the generation gap. One might call it a folk revival worthy of study in itself.

Similarly, when we survey recent academic publications on children's folklore, we continue to see an emphasis on the familiar genres.⁴ A noteworthy example is the edited volume *Children's Folklore: A Source Book* (Sutton-Smith et al. 1995), with case studies dealing with outdoor games (Beresin 75-92), "Songs, Poems, and Riddles" (Sullivan 145-60), "Tales and Legends" (Tucker 193-212), and "Teases and Pranks" (Jorgensen 213-24). More recent examples are *Play Today in the Primary School Playground* (Bishop and Curtis 2001) and *At Play in Belfast: Children's Folklore and Identities in Northern Ireland* (Lanclos 2003), both focusing on school playground games and lore. What seems clear from this brief survey is the academic and popular convergence in valuing, dare I say idealizing the familiar, "classic" forms of play. But the work of folklorists should not stop here.

If scholars have tended to privilege outdoor recreation, youth cultures and oral traditions (McNamee 1998, Mechling 2000), they can no longer ignore, for instance, the impact that computer and video games have on young people and their implications for learning in a digitally mediated society, especially as these indoor games are much more dominant and popular than before in game history. On the other hand, the burgeoning literature on computer and video games, which tends to focus on "the negative effects of playing [them]" and their potential for learning and achievement in the workplace" (Yee 2006a, 3, Yee 2006b, Suellentrop 2007, 63), could stand to benefit from ethnographic assessments in the vein of Gary Alan Fine's work on role playing games of the *Dungeons and Dragons* variety (1983). Such role playing games are the precursors to MMORPG's, or massively multi-user online role playing games, suggesting that such activities are not so different from one another.

I am not suggesting that qualitative studies have not been done in other fields; on the contrary, studies of digital games address a variety of subjects including gender preferences (Hayes 2007), character formation (Hayes 2007, Yee 2006a), perceptions of the fluidity of identity (Turkle 1995), and virtual community affiliation (Yee 2006a). Journals dedicated to the subject, like *Game Studies* (since 2001)⁵ and *Games and Culture* (since 2006), and a number of conferences (see Raessens 2006, 52) provide platforms for these discussions. What I do envision, however, is a fruitful give-and-take whereby folklorists can adapt their schemas of what qualifies as children's folklore to address these forms of play. Folklorists, who are, after all, adept at identifying the parameters of new and changing generic forms of human expression (for example, Tucker 2002-3), can contribute to a more nuanced understanding of what is going on in these framed activities. For instance, through ethnographic research folklorists can evaluate the extent





to which children and teens who from a young age engage in mass-mediated digital gaming experience it as hyper-reality or a simulation of reality (Baudrillard 1983, 38 in Rodaway 1995, 246). Indeed, folklorists' specialization in identifying the devices that key alternate frames of discourse and behavior as separate from ordinary reality equips us amply for exploring these terrains. By rethinking and expanding our concept of what qualifies as children's folklore, we can contribute new perspectives on play, peer interaction, and identity issues while staying abreast of these developments.

To move us towards a more inclusive schema of children's activities, I propose looking critically at a defining feature of our field: genres. Much of folklore scholarship has been defined by genres (Harris 1995, 509), and to a great extent they have defined the subfield of children's folklore. In this essay I will revisit Roger Abrahams' genre classification in "The Complex Relations of Simple Forms" (1976), in light of three authors' works on children's folklore — works that have bent the genre frame and argued going beyond it. Next, rather than propose yet another model for classifying children's folklore genres, I will show that our existing models could accommodate current research and suggest questions for future studies. This is not so much a prescriptive statement as it is a formulation of an observed trend that ought to aid our thinking about the direction the field is going.

Abrahams' Classification of Folklore Genres

Abrahams explains the usefulness of generic classification in "The Complex Relations of Simple Forms" (1976) thus: "We point to the genres because by naming certain patterns of expression we are able to talk about the traditional forms and the conventional contents of artistic representation, as well as the patterns of expectation which both the artist and audience carry into the aesthetic transaction" (193). Abrahams devised a continuum for depicting the relations among the various genres of folklore according to performer-audience interaction that each genre involves (199). On one end of the continuum are placed the most spontaneous conversational utterances such as superstitions and proverbs, which express traditional knowledge applied to solve a specific conflict. The relationship between 'performer' and 'audience' in the conversational genres is direct; for instance, a proverb teller is the performer of the folk item, while the recipient of its embedded wisdom is cast in the role of the audience. The middle of the continuum involves slightly more removed interactions: it contains genres of 'play' ranging from riddling and joking to spectator sports and debates and concludes with festivals and rituals, folk drama where traditional role playing involves a high degree of formality and where the resolution of the conflict is predetermined (208). Towards the second half of the continuum, where involvement is "primarily through vicarious identification," are the fictive genres such as fables, epics, ballads and other familiar narrative forms. Finally, the scheme ends with the most planned and 'static' forms that "present us with a *fait accompli*, an embodied resolution" (209). The static end of the continuum includes folk painting, folk sculpture, and folk design.





While this model accounts for performer-audience interaction only, through which it elucidates the relationships among the genres in an accessible and convincing way, its shortcoming as far as play is concerned is that it does not account for interaction, identification or engrossment in the static genres themselves, some of which are placed outside of the realm of folklore — what Abrahams calls “a product of technology” (213) — nor does it make room for considering the figurative and dynamic play world to which that they may give rise.⁶ And yet, folklorists have demonstrated the imaginative capacity of children when playing with mass-produced toys.

For instance, in *Toys As Culture* (1986) Sutton-Smith tests the belief that manufactured toys inhibit children's imagination as opposed to natural toys or “open-ended toys” which some parents in the study advocate. He concludes that “There is no evidence that the modern child either is or is not more creative with his current ‘plastic’ play things than were his predecessors with bits of wood or stones” (11). Rather, he argues that toys are an agency for the imagination, and that the older children get, the more playful imagination dominates the toys, transforming them to make them suitable for their plans. In other words, the child controls the toys rather than the other way around (204). Similarly, Beresin challenges us to consider whether a mass-produced action figure does not also constitute a folk toy (1997, 799). Instead of dismissing it as outside the realm of folklore, Beresin emphasizes that “it is only the unused toy ... divorced from both a performance context and ludic tradition — that may not become an actual folk toy” (799). Indeed, toys can be used to act out a new set of conflicts as well as resolutions, both in group and in solitary activities, for not only do children engage in individual play earlier in their life than they do in social play, but there are circumstances where children are perfectly capable of amusing themselves in the absence of playmates. Jeannie B. Thomas reveals in a chapter on playing with dolls how one boy cast his Barbie, Ken, and a handful of G.I. Joe dolls in television show scenarios. She writes, “By using television's Cleaver family as a model, he created and manipulated a positive family through his dolls.” In Thomas's interpretation, “his play extended his concerns about family and became a way of addressing family issues and comforting himself about them” (2003, 135). Further, in this boy's play Barbie was transformed to Godzilla and a cowboy, and the G.I. Joes into fashion critics (135).

Another significant aspect of toys relates to the relationship that players develop with them. Sutton-Smith argues that children can come to identify with toys to an extent that they shape their sense of self for a long time, and as they endure such ‘life companions’ may have a “prognostic destiny in the subsequent life of the child” (1986, 216); this observation is in line with Kirshenblatt-Gimblett's work “Objects of Memory” (1989) on the function and meaning that material culture holds for individual life review. Play with toys as a solitary rather than group activity is missing in Abrahams' discussion and should also be taken into account.

The above statements about toys as static objects that are nevertheless incorporated into the interactive play world of children, not only in the moment of playing but over the course of the life span, or part of it, support the inclusion of toys, including mass produced ones, by virtue of the dynamic play world they





spawn, in the children's folklore repertoire. This is especially relevant considering that at times toys are marketed in relation — and in complement to — television programs or other games, thus tying the products together in “dominating imaginative schemas” (Sutton-Smith 1986, 204) whence players draw inspiration and access models of behavior for the play world they (re)constitute with these toys. As televised narratives become prominent in children's play schemes, Sutton-Smith ventures that “[players] will not be over-determined by the particular commercial, but the range of what they will think about is increasingly influenced, even confined by what they see on television” (190). In the author's example, cowboy films frame play with hats and sticks but other objects seen as fitting the schema will be incorporated if available; for instance, water pistols may be used as weapons in a re-enacted battle game. A related anecdote I have heard comes from a player of the computer game SIM CITY who, upon venturing out to the “real world,” felt an urge to direct people to perform different tasks, as he would do in the game.

This point is made explicit in Gary Alan Fine's book *Shared Fantasy*, which demonstrates that role playing games (of the board game variety) can serve as a keying device for leaping to an alternative world where players identify with their character to an extent even they sometimes find disturbing. Fine shows that the engrossment of players in the games corresponds with the attachment they develop to their characters. He writes:

Games are quintessential examples for frame analysis because of their capacity for inducing engrossment ... The significance of gaming resides in the shared nature of the engrossment ... and in the supportive recognition that others are equally engrossed (1983, 182).

As “shared fantasy,” gaming enables role-play and immersion in a manner that Abrahams attributes to play genres like festival and folk drama, but Fine's statement is equally attributable to the experience of video gaming. Identity, role-play and engrossment are aspects of play that consume game manufacturers and social science researchers alike. Thus, as both children and adults identify with and make creative use of ‘static genres’ (for example, Handelman 1990, Turkle 1995), and players of a wider age range now constitute an entirely new leisure subculture of gamers (Mayra 2006), these genres present valuable avenues of folkloristic research. Further, questions about gaming behavior must now take account of the shift from age-based peer groups to multi-generational gaming communities, a reality which troubles the conception of children's folklore as a body of traditions “performed by children without the influence of adult supervision or formal instruction” (Grider 1997, 123) and of childhood as a state delimited by biological age.

Reassessment

Given that “a great deal of children's play is now associated with toys [and other mediated games] and with their relatively solitary play condition, than with street





play among their peers" (Sutton-Smith 1986, 170), it is only fitting that folklorists should apply their expertise to the study of play behavior and group dynamics to non-traditional genres. I propose that if we extended Abrahams' genre continuum to include toys, manufactured games, role-playing, video and computer games, we would dissolve the dichotomy between outdoor peer-group play and isolated playing and replace it with a dynamic relation among familiar and emergent forms. For as video gaming consoles might isolate children from one another physically, they bear the potential to expand their virtual community by connecting players online. Indeed, the digital game industry's aim of "total immersion" ⁷ might place some traditional games and computer games on the same experiential plane with comparable physical and cognitive engagement. As one article reports, a 10 year-old boy who learned to play marbles at a workshop compared it to "being inside a video game" (Williams 2007, 9), a reversal that echoes Baudrillard's formulation of the hyper-real as a system of signs with the loss of original referents (1983, 2-5 in Rodaway 1995, 246-7. See also Turkle 1995 on the mediation of reality in malls, television and MUDs).⁸

The increasingly porous boundaries between 'real' and 'virtual' worlds extend also to the perception of self — Frans Mayra writes about the "identity-forming potentials" that digital games carry as a leisure form in late industrial societies:

The fascinations of an unexplored world, unsolved puzzles, or unlocked but nevertheless attainable skill level can be very compelling indeed. They do not only show us something new, but they grant us something new in ourselves — a new venue or potential for self-realization. When flying a griffin high over the lands in World of Warcraft, I in a sense become something new, a subject transformed and redefined by its capacity to engage in this kind of fantastic action (2006, 104-105).

Taking these phenomena into consideration — attachment to toys and fantasy role play characters and the meaning they hold for players' identities — expands folklorists' treatment of games and play forms not traditionally considered under the rubric of children's folklore. Presumably on account of these transformations, Bishop and Curtis incorporate the role of imagination in their own "Classification of play traditions" according to whether genres possess high verbal, physical, or imaginative content (2001, 14). Although 'games with playthings,' 'making things' and 'collecting things' are placed at the "High physical content" end of the chart, the authors acknowledge that there is room for moving genres around. For instance, rhymes may be used independently or to supplement ball-bouncing games, thus moving the game from 'high verbal content' to 'games with playthings' under the category of 'high physical content.' (15). In addition, they include a "high imaginative content" category that includes role enactment and acting games, thus enabling us to insert manufactured games like *Dungeons and Dragons* here. Like Abrahams, Bishop and Curtis are aware that some categories may cross over and even change (15).





Expanding the above schema of traditional children's play activities by drawing a line connecting toys to role-playing and video games, we are posing a relation between these forms and various levels of immersion and identification. If we included toys and digital games in the genre continuum, we would be in a better position to explore the relationships between existing and emergent forms of play from the point of view of physical and cognitive immersion. We may find a surprising reversal in children's play via what I call globalized gaming: as children become more physically isolated in their play, their virtual community is geographically expanded by games that connect players online. As we seek to assess children's deprivation from outdoor recreation and its consequences, we might begin by asking how children experience their reality by using immersion to connect physical and cognitive games involving static objects such as dolls or toys to genres with elements that are similar to 'acting,' to fantasy role-playing games and to digital virtual reality games, where "total immersion" occurs. Perhaps focusing on the role of empathy in these activities can complement the ongoing biological research on mirror neurons' connection to empathy.

As the boundaries between virtual and real, work and play blur (Yee 2006b), and these forms of mediation may be present to a degree that is unsettling to folklorists, we might ask what genres of traditional artistic expression grow out of the digital world and what communities grow out of it.⁹ The meanings generated by new configurations of community, through references to gaming experiences and the creation of new verbal expressions, are among the phenomena to which folklorists are attuned. I suggest the following questions to generate future research: how might we reconsider the significance of Bateson's frame analysis for digital gaming? What might research from a bodylore perspective (Young 1994) discover about players' internalization and mimicry of their avatars' movements and reactions to emotionally powerful situations in the game world? If there is a scientific basis for research on the "mirror neurons," which claims that they work the same way whether you act or see someone else acting, what is the difference between playing with a favorite doll or watching a personally crafted avatar perform an action? And how might role playing function in each case to resolve conflict, both in the game world and in person-to-person situations? Finally, as 25% of users of MMORPGs (massively multi-user online graphical environments) are teenagers (Yee 2006a, 16), what distinguishes their performance from those of adults in terms of acquired skills, their preferences for making online friends, and their experience of the world?

These questions about children's play touch on the most fascinating issues in social science research today. Abrahams presented a framework for thinking about role-distance and the variability of involvement in folklore genres. At this stage of the game, folklorists' forays into these play forms should yield fruitful insights into the competences that young people are developing through their play and the way these culturally-mediated forms of learning interact with the brain's capacity to master a set of skills that were untapped two generations ago. Our growing expertise in these activities will aid our critical assessment of the changes taking place in children's play, learning, peer interaction and identity formation.





NOTES

1. See Schwartzman's *Transformations* (1978) for a thorough look at anthropological play scholarship until that period.
2. I refer to a commonly-articulated perception I have encountered in my research among Palestinian and Israeli residents of Jerusalem as well as in casual conversations elsewhere, rather than identifying a complete historical transition in this or other milieus. Jerusalemites consulted about the popular pastimes of children and teens since the 1940s expressed the cliché that for youth today the computer has replaced the pastimes of their parents and grandparents. Concurrently, however, the children and teens consulted in this research continue to exhibit traditional knowledge, for instance of certain games, lore and plants, even as they engage in more mediated digital activities such as cell phone, video and computer games.
3. <http://www.nostal.co.il/>
4. See McDowell 1983.
5. The "first academic, peer-reviewed (online) journal dedicated to computer game research" (Raessens 2006, 52)
6. Approaching the far left end of the spectrum, where audience involvement with the performer becomes increasingly vicarious, the genre or product of the performance displaces the performer and itself becomes the object of interaction.
7. See Levy and Croal 2006.
8. We may interpret this as demonstrating the prominence of digitally-mediated "dominating imaginative schemas" in the lives of an increasing number of children.
9. I would like to thank John McDowell for articulating these issues.

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NAMING GAMES AND BEYOND: REFERENCING IN CHILDREN'S VERBAL PLAY

JOHN HOLMES McDOWELL

- What's the difference between an elephant and a loaf of bread?
- I don't know.
- Remind me not to send you to the grocery store.
(Traditional interrogative routine)

Children are, among other things, little thinking machines. Childhood is a period of intense mental activity wherein the child's innate cognitive capacities work upon the raw data of sensory experience, guided by interpretive codes drawn from the ambient culture, to fashion serviceable portraits of reality capturing the possibilities of the moment but always evolving through time. With only a small stretch of the imagination, we can picture young children as mad-cap scientists, boldly trying out theories, testing hypotheses, and adjusting their notions as to what is going on as new data arrives. It is a conspicuous fact that a considerable portion of this mental work is accomplished in settings of pleasurable social intercourse, frequently through the framework of play, and it is this dimension of the child's mental development that I want to address in this paper. Specifically, I want to highlight a thread of children's verbal play that pursues the linguistic theme of referencing, that is, the naming, describing, and evoking of objects, and follow this thread progressively from an initial moment, when the interlocutors are adult care-takers or older siblings, to a subsequent moment when the child becomes empowered as the agent of play and the interlocutors are its juvenile playmates. Culling material from research I have done with children's verbal play and verbal art over the years, I will describe and analyze the transformation of "the naming game" and "the animal voices game" of late infancy to "the riddling game" of the primary school years.

There is a cluster of significant propositions at stake in this incursion into the mental development of children. One piece is the emergence of agency in the young child. We are accustomed to thinking of children in the first two years of life as being essentially passive recipients of communicative gestures originating from adults, older siblings, and other older children in their environments. A trend in current research throws this assumption into doubt (Dissanayake 2001; Meltzoff 2007), and I hope to contribute to the questioning of the young child's passivity — let's call it the passivity paradigm — by showing how children as young as 12-16 months assert their agency in acquiring active control over familiar playful routines. Two crucial developments can be observed here: first, the child rather quickly becomes the initiator of the sequence, and second, before long, the child learns to subvert the routine's logic by deliberately supplying "suspect" or "wrong" contributions.

A second proposition of interest in this analysis is the centrality of play, and particularly verbal play, in the development of children's cognition and the child's





realization of self. Adults have often exhibited impatience with children at play, and children's play frequently departs from adult canons of perspicacity. We have numerous accounts of attempts to limit, contain, and sometimes even exterminate the play of children, which seems to always find outlets that circumvent these adult-imposed measures (Sutton-Smith 1995). The materials at hand for this study underscore the utilitarian dimensions of play, enabling us to see the arenas of children's play as vital, engaging, and rewarding learning environments. Obviously, not all children's play is verbal, but the materials for this study affirm verbal play as key among the arenas of children's play, one that absorbs a great deal of the child's time and energy, and one that is readily accessible to close inspection by those of us who seek to understand the mind of the child.

At last, the approach I will elaborate in this paper — we could call it the agency paradigm — proposes a specific understanding of human nature and human society, since the prototype we will isolate in children's verbal play can be projected well beyond childhood; indeed, it can serve as a template for the continuously evolving human personality. In this vision of things, we are all, throughout our entire lives, interacting with others, often in playful modes, and in the process calibrating our conjectures on the way things work. This process may be more dramatic in childhood, where the learning curve takes us from zero to socially competent in the space of just a handful of years. And it is possible that the child's processing of reality is qualitatively different from what happens later in life. For instance, close observation of children's play suggests that children possess a freedom to toy with cultural codes that diminishes as the person approaches and enters adulthood. The child's delight in "silliness" and a striking capacity for metaphorical thought and expression are two indices suggestive of age-defined difference. But the larger linkage remains, I believe, foregrounding the child's acquisition of agency and understanding through social play as a universally human enterprise.

The Naming Game

Visualize this familiar scene: a young child is seated on an adult's lap, with a picture-book in hand. The child is in the early stages of language acquisition — it has a small vocabulary but cannot piece together much in the way of phrases as of yet. The adult pauses over images on the page to inquire of the child: "What's this?" The naming game begins with this pointing and questioning. Catherine Garvey (1984: 62-71) sees in these collaborations a key conceptual maneuver, "the ability to indicate an entity for attention, for either one's own or another's benefit," and she locates it early in the second year of life. In order for the naming game to run smoothly, the child must realize that specific items can be isolated and named; hence, the naming game, in its opening gambit, is an adult-initiated rehearsal of essential cognitive skills.

In this basic version, the naming game evinces a patterned set of participant turns. A round of the game begins when the adult points and inquires, "What's this?" The child might respond with a possible label; if it does and the answer is deemed to be correct, the adult will confirm the child's response and perhaps





repeat it. If the child does not respond, the adult is likely to provide the intended label: “A horse” (for example). Garvey (1984, 63) describes a pattern of increasing demand: “the caregiver becomes more exacting as the child learns to respond: at first, any response will be accepted, then any vocalization, then only the correct label.” Through this series of approximations, adult and child participate in an activity initiated and controlled by the adult; the child’s role is restricted to that of acquiring and articulating the appropriate responses. The child is an active player but the passivity paradigm accounts adequately for what is happening here — culture is being inculcated from adult to child.

But Garvey (1984, 63) anticipates the next version of the game: “the child, once he learns the sequence of moves, often exchanges roles and begins to lead the game himself.” Before long, and under the right circumstances — a good comfort level, for example — the child is likely to seize the initiative, perhaps pointing at an object pictured and looking at the adult in expectation of an answer, or reproducing the interrogative move, “What’s this?” This reversal of roles installs the child as initiator of a round of play, and shifts the adult into the more limited role of responder. In this vignette, we can perceive the assumption of agency in the very young child, perhaps, as Garvey suggests, early in its second year of life. The child has learned not only how to respond appropriately but also how to perform the complementary role in the game. This mastery allows the child to select which objects to isolate and name, and also to bend the adult’s behavior to its will. There has been a shift from responder to instigator, and the child’s options have expanded. We are viewing in sharp profile the acquisition of agency.

The Animal Voices Game

This game is also familiar to most of us in the United States and probably is played in many other places as well. It consists of a question/response sequence geared to connecting an animal voice, as culturally coded, to the name of the appropriate species. The game can be played in two orders, either by giving the name of the species and inquiring what it “says,” or by giving the voicing of the species and asking for the species label. Here is a sample pair:

- 1
“What does the cow say?”
“Moo.”
- 2
“Who says (goes) ‘Moo’?”
“A (the) cow.”

This game is typically played with the familiar animals from the barnyard and home — cow, cat, dog, horse, pig, etc. These are also the animals most frequently encountered in picture books for children, thus providing a link to the naming game discussed above. More exotic animals can be introduced to add further interest, and as with any other game, this one can be pushed to its limits and beyond through the inclusion of fanciful options — the otter, the dinosaur, the unicorn.





As with the naming game, the animal voices game facilitates pleasing episodes of fruitful collaboration between infants and their adult caregivers. In both games, a pattern of interaction is specified and complementary roles are defined. A further continuity between the two games is the focus upon isolating and identifying significant phenomena in the child's world. And, in the voicing game's second order, the child is once again called upon to supply the needed label in response to a stimulus, in this instance not the visual representation of the object but its cultural-coded voicing. The naming game offers the delight of visual images contained in books; the voicing game has no such need of props and offers the special pleasures of imitating animal voices and provisionally, taking on their identities.

So how does the child take possession of this second routine? A first stage, obviously, is being able to adequately connect the voice to the animal, and to successfully reproduce the animal's voice. This latter achievement is often accomplished with some verve, affording the child a space for artistic elaboration. In this stage, the child acquires the knowledge to respond in culturally appropriate ways; we are seeing the transfer of cultural (and verbal) competence from adult to child. But two additional stages lie ahead and these will launch the child into an expanded zone of personal agency.

The second stage emerges when the child learns to initiate the animal voices game, shifting the original stipulation of roles as we saw with the naming game. The child initiates a round of animal voices, now selecting which of the orders to employ and selecting as well the sequence of animals to deploy. The child's range of options has increased, and the choices made in this expanded zone of operation carry a sense of this particular child's take on the process: the child has acquired space to develop and project a unique sense of self. I propose that a third stage emerges when the child attains sufficient mastery over the game to introduce fanciful choices — like the otter, dinosaur, or unicorn — or to subvert the integrity of the game by supplying, deliberately, the wrong voicing or species label. This third stage features a striking degree of agency — not only has the child seized the initiative in the turn-taking arena and exerted a peremptory control over the game's sequence, but it now pretends to drive the game to hilarious wreckage by violating the game's basic constitution, which depends upon a constant and predictable set of linkages between voicings and species labels.

In both of these games, the naming game and the animal voices game, what begins as a coordinated interaction steered by adult initiative gradually transforms into a child-initiated routine that follows the stipulated rules of play or, in the perversion of the voicing game, subverts these rules. The child's scope for asserting agency is at first restricted to mastering its allotted role and performing effectively in that role. But as time elapses and the child becomes more familiar with these games, the scope for asserting agency is greatly expanded to the point where the child becomes the master of the game and its adult interlocutor fills a reduced role as respondent to the child's prodding. In the next sections, we will observe a similar dynamic and conceptual arena but now in the setting of child-to-child discourse, as the child carries these same interests and energies into its juvenile play group, with riddling as the chosen game.





Naming and Describing

John Lyons (1977, 225) notes that “the distinction between referring to an individual by name and referring to the same individual by means of a descriptive noun-phrase is something that the child only gradually acquires.” We have seen a progression from mere naming to evoking through voice in the transition from the naming game to the animal voices game. But imitation of voices does not require the verbal equipment that producing descriptive noun-phrases does. As the child enters more deeply into the referencing project, referencing through descriptive language becomes a central quest in the process of acquiring language. Continuing the theme of this paper, I want to show how involvement in playful activities, and indeed, how a renewed commitment to interrogative routines, enter into the expansion of social, verbal, and cognitive capacities, affording the pre-school, kindergarten, and primary-school child additional vehicles for the realization and expression of self.

As adults we take for granted describing an object or event as a strategy of evocation that works in tandem with naming. But this skill, like so many others going into the basics of conversing and socializing, must be learned and practiced in the apprenticeship phase as children observe and begin to reproduce the verbal moves in their social environments. Catherine Garvey (1984, 69) tells us that young children have difficulty producing adequate descriptions when “it is necessary to use a referring expression that unambiguously selects a referent from among others that differ from it on one or more dimensions of attributes.” Evocation through description is no easy task; the ideal description will locate some unique feature of the intended referent, and one that will register with the interlocutor.

The skills that go into describing expand upon the skills that go into naming. Once a range of objects, events, and persons can be effectively named, a supporting vocabulary of descriptive terms and phrases must be perfected so that precise reference can be accomplished. It is one of the miracles of human language that objects not present and even fanciful objects can be named, referenced, and brought into focus. Children master this magic in significant degree through the playful activities discussed in this paper. I want to turn now to the challenges to be met in forging effective descriptions, and explore, in particular, how these challenges are addressed in the interrogative routines known as riddling. We leave behind, for the most part, the realm of adult-child communication, since riddling is mostly practiced, in the contemporary United States at least, in peer-group settings. We shall discover in this batch of material a progression familiar from the two games already considered, from a phase of mastery to a phase of subversion, as children in the primary-school years graduate from descriptive routines to true riddles.

Riddling Games

Successful describing depends upon the ability to frame what John Searle (1969, 86) calls “the unique identifying description,” a verbal proposition or set of





propositions that sets the intended referent apart from all other possible referents. John Lyons (1977, 180) views this ability in terms of the “referencing expression” that allows the hearer “to pick out the actual referent from the class of potential referents.” In the early stages of riddling, as early as the fourth year of life, children build verbal exchanges ideally suited to testing and confirming appropriate describing strategies. These riddling initiates imitate the riddle technique, with its question-answer sequence, before they have mastered the subtleties of what folklorists know as the block element, that piece of deception at the heart of the true riddle.

Brian Sutton-Smith (1972) writes about the pre-riddle, which he defines as a puzzling question with an arbitrary answer, as one way to enter the riddling game before its logic is fully understood. I have written about what I call the descriptive routine (McDowell 1979), which offers another solution to this problem — in the descriptive routine, the child presents a transparent description in hopes of eliciting the name of the described object. The descriptive routine manifests as a joint exercise in the evocation of absent referents through their identifying descriptions. As younger children seek to enter the riddling arena, and as their slightly older peers seek to sustain a flagging session, riddles of transparent description make their appearance. Like Sutton-Smith’s pre-riddle, descriptive routines allow initiates to secure a space in the performance protocol — their productions pass as tokens of the game — even if these formulations fail to include the special conceptual twist of the genre.

But to characterize descriptive routines as flawed tokens of the genre is to miss their positive contributions to the child’s developing mastery over the social and cognitive skills entailed in their construction. I prefer to see them as a legitimate forum of verbal intrigue, slanted toward the straightforward reproduction of cultural knowledge, as was the case with the child’s initial encounters with the naming game and the animal voices game. When children produce descriptive routines, they are engaged in a search for proper descriptive strategies. The proof of success in this endeavor is the capacity to call to mind the name of an object simply by describing it. For children at this stage of development, this outcome is remarkable and rewarding in itself.

There are multiple techniques used by children in producing descriptive riddles. I will draw upon field data I gathered in the mid 1970s among Mexican American kids in Austin, Texas, to illustrate some of these options. One is to describe through reference to the object’s salient physical properties. Consider the following cluster:

What’s red? *A rose.*
What has five sides and lives in the sea? *A starfish.*
What’s square and it gots a point on the top? *A house.*
What gots a lot of colors when it rains? *A rainbow.*
It’s in a circle, gots little sticks, and they got something planted?
A tree.





As generally is done in riddling, one child enunciates the query and then leaves an interlude for the other child or children to announce the solution. If the respondents are not forthcoming with the solution, the child who began the routines provides it.

Three features immediately are striking as we contemplate this cluster of descriptive riddles. First, it is clear that these opening queries are spontaneously formulated. One advantage of this style of riddling for the neophyte is this ready-to-hand quality of the material — there is no requirement to carefully keep in mind a complicated ploy, as in true riddles. Second, these quick formulations seize on the basic perceptual categories such as color, form, extension, and so forth. They foster the perfection of an objective lexicon that can be applied across the spectrum of experience. These routines exhibit a strong empirical orientation to the world. And third, there are degrees of acuity evident in these descriptions both with regards to amount of detail and clarity. The first example can be seen as too broad in its descriptor, since any number of objects possess redness; the next item, describing the starfish, comes much closer to the desired quality of uniqueness in the descriptor.

The quest for clear articulation in identifying descriptions is evident in the following exchange, where an older child improves upon the query of a younger peer:

— Oh, what's red and white,
red and white and doesn't do nothing,
and has a stick down its side,
and the red and white thing is against the stick?
— I don't know.
— Flag.
— To a pole,
red, white, and blue, stuck on to a big pole.

Here the younger child inadvertently produces something closer to a true riddle, by concealing the intended referent of his description, a riddling tactic akin to what Roger Abrahams (1972) refers to as “the scrambled gestalt.” The older child creates a better description by eliminating the excess verbiage, replacing the word “stick” with the more appropriate “pole,” and adding the missing element “blue.”

Ironic Descriptions

As in the naming game and the animal voices game, the riddling game opens into a sophisticated twist on basic procedures as children gain mastery over technique; but in riddling, this additional twist is required in order to reproduce satisfactory examples of the genre. The riddle proper, unlike the puzzling pre-riddle or the empirical descriptive routine, pivots on the block element, that kernel of linguistic or conceptual sleight of hand that is deliberately introduced to temporarily separate the query from its solution. The riddle appears to be a venture much like the naming game or the animal voices game, in which an identifying description





launches a search for an intended referent. But right off there is something odd about these descriptions. Perhaps they contain a contradiction in terms, as in this example:

What has eyes but cannot see?

This is a problematic description because it appears to challenge its own grounds of plausibility; Robert Georges and Alan Dundes (1963) term this strategy “privational.”

Other riddle queries are not inherently contradictory but instead lead to a state of semantic indeterminacy:

What has four wheels and flies?

A thousand lights in a dish, what is it?

These descriptions do not readily evoke their intended referents. In fact, to solve such riddles the child must set aside the apparent drift of the description in order to locate the intended referent. This technique is present in the most famous riddle in the English language tradition:

What’s black and white and red all over?

In order to hit on “a newspaper,” the child must resist the sequence of color terms to hear “read” rather than “red.”

Riddles like these, the true riddles of riddling, offer a furtive act of description in the guise of an obvious one. Their identifying descriptions are deliberately skewed to the opaque, to odd semantic nuances and fortuitous homophonic equivalences. They qualify as extensions of the naming game, but the quest here is for illicit rather than sanctioned modes of description. Children in their seventh and eighth years of age specialize in these excursions into a shifty world of verbal intrigue. The descriptions in true riddles add word play, metaphor, and anomaly to the child’s bag of tricks. They accomplish the magic of actually describing while appearing not to describe.

Riddling at this level amounts to a deconstruction of the act of referencing, revealing that naming systems are only approximate and tentative. Riddles built on word play, like this one,

What has four wheels and flies? *A garbage truck*

point to limitations in the verbal code, its often duplicitous matching of sound and sense and its sometimes ambiguous structures of logic. Such riddles exploit these wrinkles in the code to produce descriptions with a curious semantics; they invite awareness of the arbitrary and conventional status of natural languages, of their incompleteness and imperfection, their relativity.





Riddles based on metaphoric connections assess another sort of code limitation, the poverty of conventional systems of thought in comparison to the wealth of sensory experience. Let's return to one of my favorite children's riddles:

A thousand lights in a dish, what is it? *The stars in the night sky.*

Riddles like this one propose innovative arrangements of objects in our fields of experience based on the use of valid but unorthodox criteria. They reveal that conventional forms of classification, acquired with such persistence by the younger child, are in fact skeletal. These riddles momentarily bring into focus alternative visions of the cosmic order — the set of concave objects (dishes, the night panorama) and the set of points of light (stars, lights in a dish). The child correctly concludes that these phantom conceptual regimes are less pragmatic than the conventional ones, but it delights in highlighting their impeccable if impractical logics.

Finally, riddles based on anomaly contribute their special flair to children's riddling.

How many balls of string would it take to reach the moon?
One big one.

What do kangaroos have that nobody else has? *Baby kangaroos.*

What is taller sitting than standing? *A dog.*

Here we have neither word play nor fresh comparison. Instead, these riddles find their block element in real-world observations that run counter to our conventional patterns of thought. Their message, it seems, is that the world of experience is far more replete than our systems for classifying and codifying it can ever be.

Conclusion

In her AFS paper presented in Québec City, 2007, Katharine Schramm looks closely at what she calls "nascent folklore," which she positions as early manifestations of Laurie McGonnagill's "protolore," the first stirrings of conventionalized artistic expression among preschoolers (McGonnagill 1993). Schramm's infants are in the preverbal stage, for the most part, yet their gurgles and coos, facial expressions, squirms, and wiggles indicate that they are already tuned into communicative networks and anxious to assert themselves as players in these arenas. What I have tried to do here is sketch out lines of continuity between the expressive profiles described by McGonnagill and Schramm and the robust activation of creative energies that we celebrate as children's folklore (McDowell 1995). I have no doubt that we can systematically trace this progression in artistic competence, and I offer this paper as an initial stab at marking out a consolidation of agency and expertise in one specific zone of communicative competence.





The concern here has been to construct a longitudinal portrait of the young person's indoctrination into the naming and referencing of things. Naming and referencing are undoubtedly crucial pieces in the acquisition of basic cultural competence, so they offer an important arena for observing how children gain mastery over materials and instruments of their culture. We have concerned ourselves with playful activities centered on naming — the naming game, the animal voices game, and riddling games. Play, it appears, is a vital forum in the process of learning how to be a person in a society. These playful activities in one phase are places where children can absorb, try out, and perfect the naming and referencing practices of their communities. In another, subsequent phase, the newly-mastered maneuvers can be inspected for subversive potential — the possibility of odd animal voices, or of unconventional modes of description.

Becoming a person in society entails developing a sense of self, and these naming games provide opportunities for expressing the genius of self, from the toddler phase into early adolescence. One step is seizing control over an interactive routine; another is directing the game to the child's preferred style and content; a third is using the game to challenge received structures of cultural coding. I hope to have demonstrated in this paper that children's play with naming and referencing is a wonderful arena to observe the acquisition of culture and the realization of self. I propose, in conclusion, that this play is more than that — that it is, as well, an essential zone of personal engagement and growth.

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LEVITATION REVISITED

ELIZABETH TUCKER

One intriguing but understudied form of children's folklore is levitation, a ritual in which several preadolescents or adolescents lift a friend with only a few fingers of each hand. Sometimes the individual who gets lifted lies on the floor; other times he or she stands or sits in a chair. Records and studies since the seventeenth century have identified this process as a "spell," an "inchantment," a "curiosity," a "game," a "trick," a "procedure," or an "activity."¹ In my 1984 study of children's levitation and trance sessions, I suggest, using Mary Douglas's definition of ritual as symbolic action, "The presence of certain symbolic elements [in levitation], over a wide span of time and space, creates a sense of ritualistic potency" (1973,126). Revisiting the subject of my earlier study, I find that further investigation of levitation's history enhances our understanding of its meaning. Both solemn and playful, patterned and open-ended, levitation rituals teach us important lessons about children's, adolescents', and adults' behavior and needs.

Levitation rituals range from relatively simple lifting exercises to combinations of lifting with chants and storytelling about death and resurrection. Children's resurrection games have been documented but not studied in depth by folklorists. It seems necessary to make these games part of the lineage of levitation rituals and to identify some small but interesting parallels between these rituals and medieval mystery plays. William Wells Newell, author of *Games and Songs of American Children*, originally published in 1883, notes that some children's game-rhymes reflect "deeply mediaeval religious conceptions" (1963, 5). While we cannot know how children learned about levitation over a long period of time, we have enough information to make some educated guesses about the ritual's development since the Middle Ages. More importantly, we can ask why this ritual has been so exciting and meaningful for children in different parts of the world for longer than three centuries.

Before turning to examples of levitation rituals, we should briefly examine their structure. In her study "Mary Whales, I Believe in You': Myth and Ritual Subdued" (1978), Janet Langlois examines relationships between myth and ritual and between legend and game. As the central character of a legend about a car accident, Mary Whales (known to other groups of children as Bloody Mary) behaves passively; she gets killed and scratched and then, as a ghost, disappears. Langlois argues, "The ritual Mary Whales ... appears in the mirror through the actions of the game players, who know the circumstances of her death previous to their interaction with her" (8-9). When summoned in a mirror, Mary Whales becomes active, scratching the faces of children who, also behaving actively, dare to summon her (9). Similarly, levitation often follows legend-telling about a young person's death; some stories describe a murder committed by the young person who is about to be lifted, while others describe the young person's own death (Tucker 1977, 412; Freed 1994, 36). Within the fictive frame of legend-telling, the liftee is either active (a murderer) or passive (a murder victim). During the ritual





itself, distinctions between active and passive roles fit a consistent pattern. Those who lift take an active role. Eager to achieve something amazing, they hope to exercise a mysterious power. The liftee, on the other hand, plays a passive role. Lying on the ground or sitting in a chair, she or he waits to be raised by helpful friends. The lifters' and liftee's goals complement each other. If all goes well, one person will feel the excitement of rising, while the others will enjoy the satisfaction of having made that rising possible. Later in this essay I will examine metaphors associated with raising and rising, which deserve careful consideration.

The first mention of a levitation ritual, practiced by four French girls, appears in an entry in the *Diary of Samuel Pepys* in 1665. Pepys does not use the term "levitation"; instead, he identifies what he learned from his friend John Brisbane as one of a number of "inchantments and spells" (Latham and Matthews 1972, 177). Iona and Peter Opie refer to Pepys's description in their *Lore and Language of Schoolchildren*, commenting that they themselves practiced the levitation "trick" with friends at school (1959, 309-10). Mary and Herbert Knapp describe both the "procedure" of levitation and the related phenomenon of trance, which involves rubbing a child's temples while telling a scary story, in *One Potato, Two Potato: The Secret Education of American Children* (1976, 252). My 1984 essay about levitation and trance sessions, based on fieldwork with children in Indiana and interviews with college students in New York, suggests that levitation and trance sessions represent an important aspect of young people's development. Usually occurring in private spaces and in girls' groups, these rituals help children set limits "upon worrisome developmental horrors that they all share" (133).

Shaari Freed's essay "Spooky Activities and Group Loyalty" (1994) concurs with the conclusions of my essay and introduces other insights related to both levitation and Ouija board play. Referring to five stages of children's growth in interpersonal awareness introduced by psychologists Robert L. Selman, Dan Jaquette, and Debra Redman Lavin (1977), Freed notes that children in the third stage of development, between the ages of seven and fourteen, engage in "intimate-mutual sharing" that builds group loyalty (36). She suggests that "the state of arousal involved in these rituals needs to be more carefully examined" and that "children, as well as adults, seek out arousal" (38-39). In this analysis, the term "arousal" means excitement or pleasurable stimulation. I agree that we should carefully consider why children enjoy performing levitation rituals and that we should remember that children are not the only seekers of this kind of thrill.

Besides occurring during sleepovers and camping trips, levitation takes place on school playgrounds, during gym classes, and during youth group meetings. Both boys and girls practice levitation, and adults sometimes lead the ritual. Adults' participation in levitation reminds us that play appeals to adults as well as young people. Brian Sutton-Smith's "paradigm of the Playful Person" fits this situation very well (1994, 20-21). Many folklorists of childhood, including myself, have tended to view the "childhood underground" as child-to-child communication with little adult involvement, but adults' participation tends to be important. If an adult friend of Samuel Pepys had not watched four little girls lifting a boy in Bordeaux, we would have had no seventeenth-century record of this fascinating form of children's folklore.





Girls, Boys, and Adults

When I started collecting descriptions of levitation as part of my dissertation research in 1976, I was not surprised to find that these accounts came from girls. My own childhood introduction to this ritual took place in an all-girl group of sixth-graders in Washington, D.C., in the spring of 1960. Before I went to my first slumber party — an eagerly anticipated event — another girl who was planning to go to the party had told me it might be possible to lift someone “like magic,” with several girls lifting a friend using only two fingers of each hand. At the slumber party, we tried to lift our friend Valerie in this exciting way. Nothing amazing happened; we could not get Valerie off the ground. I vividly remember, however, how hard we tried to lift Valerie and how intriguing the whole process seemed. Our slumber party games and rituals took place late at night, free from parents’ prying eyes. Sixteen years later, armed with folkloristic theory and a copy of the Opies’ *Lore and Language of Schoolchildren*, I looked for rituals similar to the ones I had learned and read.

If I had had a chance to talk with Bill Ellis in 1976, I would have learned that an all-boy group was experimenting with levitation two years after I discovered it myself. In June of 2007, knowing that I was trying to learn more about levitation, Ellis kindly sent me this e-mail:

I don’t know a reference for this, but I know that on the playground in Portsmouth, Ohio, ca. 1962, when I saw this done, the pressing on the head was certainly a part of the ritual. As I recall, two “lifters” took the two fingers (forefingers IIRC) and simultaneously pressed down on the levitated person’s forehead, then immediately put these fingers under the back and upper leg of the person and lifted up. The person did indeed come right up with no apparent effort. All the participants and spectators were male 7th graders. I don’t recall any rhyme or narration of spooky stories. It was one of those things, like “knocking yourself out” by hyperventilating that went the rounds of preadolescent kids like wildfire, then next week was gone.

Ellis aptly identifies the transience of such preadolescent pursuits. Both he and I briefly tried to levitate our friends in single-sex groups, then moved on to other amusements. Unlike my girlfriends, who chose a place and time conducive to secrecy, his group performed the levitation ritual outside in a playground supervised by adults. The fact that they did this outdoors proves the Opies’ point that levitation is a “curiosity” that excites wonder but does not always require seclusion (1959, 309).

A year ago I learned about another context for levitation from a cousin of mine who lives in rural Maine.² As a teenager during the late 1950s, my cousin Martha learned levitation from the adult leader of her Presbyterian youth group. She recalls:





I think we all had the “lifters” put their hands on the subject’s head and press down for a few seconds, then say “five” and then do the two-finger lift trick and the subject becomes light and lifts very easily.

Martha’s focus on numbers — two fingers, “say ‘five’” — typifies the exactitude of this ritual. For the ritual to succeed, participants must use the right number of fingers (usually two) and follow any other numerical prescription that has become traditional in their peer group.

Another former member of Martha’s youth group, Bob, offered a slightly different formula for levitation’s success:

Seems to me four people put their hands alternately on a person sitting in a straight chair and pressed down for say 20 seconds. Then those four removed their hands and each put their two fore-fingers together. Two of the four put their forefingers under the sitting person’s knees and the other two put their forefingers under the sitter’s armpits — then lifted — oh I forgot — all four attempted the lift BEFORE pressing down on the sitter’s head and could not lift that person.³

Bob’s version of the youth group ritual resembles Martha’s in its reliance on the number two and its multiple, four. It differs significantly from Martha’s, though, because it introduces an element of magic (cause leading to effect beyond rational rules). Examination of available source material helps to explain how adults’ and children’s interest in magic adds to levitation’s meaning.

Magic

Since our earliest information about levitation comes from Samuel Pepys, who calls it a “spell” or “enchantment,” we should consider the contents of early books of spells. One especially popular spell book, the *Petit Albert*, known in Latin as *Alberti Parvi Lucii Libellus de Mirabilibus Naturae Acarnis*, circulated in Europe in written and printed versions. There is some debate about the time that the *Petit Albert* originated; the version that I found is *Secrets Merveilleux de la Magic Naturelle et Cabalistique du Petit Albert* (1776). This book’s introduction mentions science, magic, ancient Hebrew sages, and diabolism. In its “love spell” section are directions for helping a young girl or widow see the man she will marry: put a little tree branch under the pillow, then rub the girl’s or woman’s temples with a little blood from a bird called *huppe*. At bedtime, the girl or woman should say what she wants to see; that night she will see her future husband (25). Rubbing the head to produce a new state of mind in which a vision appears seems similar to pressing the head to make lifting possible. The French spell, however, only addresses a vision or state of mind. To learn about lifting the body, we must turn to later source material.

Information about levitation’s history can be found in Sir David Brewster’s *Letters on Natural Magic Addressed to Sir Walter Scott* (1843). The tenth letter in this book addresses the “remarkable power of lifting heavy persons when the





lungs are inflated.” Brewster includes this experiment among a number of others practiced by Samson, a traveling performer from Germany. During the nineteenth century, such demonstrations of amazing capabilities were popular in England. Brewster states, “One of the most remarkable and inexplicable experiments relative to the strength of the human frame is “that in which a heavy man is raised with the greatest facility, when he is lifted up the instant that his own lungs and those of the persons who raise him are inflated with air” (232). Note the emphasis on a mysterious element that is hard to explain: simultaneous inflation of all participants’ lungs with air.

This mysterious inflation of lungs resembles the emphasis on careful head-pressing that dominates the descriptions I collected from youth group members in rural Maine. Both head-pressing and lung-inflating seem crucial for the rituals’ success. Beyond rational explanations, magic seems to account for what happens. As in the Maine youth group’s recollections, the numbers two and four figure prominently in how the nineteenth-century British ritual works. There are exactly four lifters, and lifting takes place at the intake of the second breath. Also noteworthy is Brewster’s choice of words to describe what happens when the liftee rises up: “To his own surprise and that of his bearers, he rises with the greatest facility, as if he were no heavier than a feather” (1843, 233). This description documents use of the currently popular phrase “light as a feather,” which may have accompanied earlier levitation demonstrations.

Demonstrators of this experiment traveled around Europe toward the middle of the nineteenth century. Brewster explains that lifting heavy persons in this fashion had first occurred in England a few years before under the direction of “Major H.,” who had seen the experiment performed “at a large party at Venice under the direction of an officer of the American navy” (1843, 232). This traveling military officer had a major impact (pardon the pun) on people’s familiarity with the lifting ritual, and other adult travelers almost certainly did so as well.

One reason for the fast-growing popularity of lifting rituals in the mid-nineteenth century was the growth of spiritualism in the United States and Europe. The spiritualist movement began in the United States with the well-publicized rappings experienced by Kate and Margaret Fox in the 1840s. As news of the Fox sisters and other apparent mediums spread, people became increasingly eager to witness marvels. Besides quasi-magical lifting of heavy people, raising and turning of tables became exciting events for groups of people to watch. Not everyone who observed such demonstrations believed in what seemed to be happening, but spiritualism’s emphasis on occult powers encouraged suspension of disbelief.

How did “levitation” become a well known word in England? The *Oxford English Dictionary*, which defines one form of levitation as “the action or process of rising, or raising (a body) from the ground by ‘spiritualistic’ means,” lists an 1874 quotation from George Eliot as its earliest literary evidence of this term’s use. Eliot’s *Legend of Jubal* includes the lines “On all points he adopts the latest views;/ Takes for the key of universal Mind/ The ‘levitation’ of stout gentlemen” (1874, 191). Eliot’s focus on lifting overweight gentlemen suggests that she has seen or at least read about the kind of experiment that Sir David Brewster describes. Samuel Pepys’s diary also emphasizes the marvelousness of lifting someone heavy,





describing four little French girls lifting “the cook of the house, a very lusty fellow, as Sir G. Carteret’s Cooke, who is very big” (Latham and Matthews 1972, 178). The mysteriousness of successfully lifting a heavy person seems to explain much of levitation’s appeal from the seventeenth to the nineteenth century.

Late nineteenth-century magicians also helped to make “levitation” a household word. The well-known British magician John Nevil Maskelyne (1829-1917) introduced levitation as an on-stage performance and perfected his levitation methods over a period of almost thirty years. In his most elaborate performance, “The Entranced Fakir,” which took place in 1901, Maskelyne passed a metal hoop around the body of a white-bearded fakir who floated high above his own sarcophagus. According to Jim Steinmeyer, author of *Hiding the Elephant: How Magicians Invented the Impossible and Learned to Disappear* (2003), this performance surprised and confounded proud third- and fourth-generation magicians (165). Spectators with no experience in illusionists’ techniques were deeply impressed by this polished demonstration of levitation, which seemed both convincing and difficult to disprove.

Children watched magicians’ performances, and it was common for magicians to invite children from their audiences to come up on stage to examine floating performers. The famous American illusionist Howard Thurston, who was born in Columbus, Ohio, in 1869, invited a little boy to make cards on a deck rise by pulling his father’s hair; on another occasion, he asked a little boy to touch a golden ring on the finger of a beautiful princess who seemed to be floating above the stage (Steinmeyer 2003, 14-15). Children who participated in such exciting performances probably told their friends all about what happened; some of these children probably imitated the magician’s actions too. It seems likely that magicians’ levitation performances influenced children’s play in this way, and it is also likely that the term “levitation” entered the childhood underground partly because of magicians’ influence.

Resurrection

There is, however, more to levitation than secular magic. The earliest record of the ritual in Samuel Pepys’s diary includes a chant in French:

Voicy un Corps mort
Royde comme un Baston
Froid comme Marbre
Leger comme un Esprit,
Levons te au nom de Jesus Christ (Latham and Matthews 1972, 177).

My translation follows:

Here is a dead body
Stiff as a stick
Cold as marble
Light as a spirit,
We raise you in the name of Jesus Christ.





It must have been poignant for Samuel Pepys to hear this chant on July 31, 1665, when the Great Plague was sweeping through London. Three centuries earlier, in the mid-1300s, 24 million people had died of the plague in France, Germany, Italy, and Scandinavia. According to Frederick Cartwright, author of *Disease and History* (1972), "In southern France mortality was so great that the Pope consecrated the river Rhone at Avignon, so that corpses flung into the river might be considered to have received Christian burial" (37). Did this terrible epidemic become part of children's play and games between the thirteenth and the seventeenth century? We do not know; however, it seems certain that the enormous number of deaths frightened children and increased their awareness of the thin line between life and death.⁴

Death, burial, resurrection, and other serious subjects have emerged in European children's play and games over a relatively long period of time. In their study of "Pretending Games," Iona and Peter Opie note that children in sixteenth-century Holland imitated weddings, christenings, and religious processions; similarly, in eighteenth-century France, children imitated clerics' processions, soldiers' marches, and other kinds of movement (1969, 330-31). Other twentieth-century folklorists have documented interesting games in which a child plays the part of a dead person. Leea Virtanen's *Children's Lore* (1978) includes an account of Finnish children's imitation of the dead and of priests who bless them. Virtanen quotes from the recollections of a girl who grew up in a rural environment:

We often played this game; I was dead and was in a coffin, which we made out of chairs laid flat and covered with newspaper. This boy, my only playmate, was always the priest. He blessed me and sang a hymn (88).

This rather sad and quiet game reflects children's interest in what happens to people's bodies after death but lacks the excitement offered by hiding and chasing games. Norman Douglas, author of *London Street Games* (1931), describes the game Dead Man's Rise, also known as Dead Man's Dark Scenery or Coat, in which one child hides, covered with other players' coats. When the other players call "Dead Man Rise," the child who has been hiding starts to run after the others. The last player that he finds becomes "it" for the next round of the game (5, 60). A similar game played outdoors is "Green Man Rise-O, a very old game" according to Douglas (59). One of Douglas's young informants explains this game's rules as follows:

The way we play the game of greenman one of us lay down and cover his self with grass and the others run out and hide then they say greenman greenman rise up then he gets up and tries to catch them and the last one thats cort goes it [sic] (59).

Whether or not the hider goes by the name of "dead man," games of this kind demonstrate an interest in transition from death to life.

Mary and Herbert Knapp describe the game Pray for the Dead in their book *One Potato, Two Potato* (1976). They explain that in this game, played in the fall, one child buries him- or herself in leaves. Others kneel next to this child's "grave"





and chant, "Pray for the dead and the dead will pray for you." After a period of chanting, "The buried child slowly stirs, then suddenly explodes from the leaves. The others run away screaming. Whoever the ghost catches is It next time" (252). There is a difference between the outcome of *Dead Man's Rise* and that of *Green Man Rise-O*: instead of rising from the dead, the deceased person becomes a frightening ghost that will relentlessly pursue other children. This emphasis on ghosts fits the fall season, during which, especially on Halloween, ghosts supposedly walk among living people.

Since imitative play and games involving death and resurrection have been popular in relatively recent times, it seems worthwhile to investigate possible antecedents. The prominence of the Christian religion in medieval Europe made liturgical dramas focal points of community life. Early in the thirteenth century, a papal edict forbade priests to act in such dramas, giving rise to miracle plays about lives of the saints and then mystery plays based on Bible stories. According to Peter Happé, author of *English Mystery Plays* (1975), "Around the betrayal of Christ, his Death and Resurrection are centred the essential truths of Christianity" (24). Both Jesus's own resurrection and his resurrection of his friend Lazarus are climactic events of mystery plays written in England in the fourteen and fifteenth centuries. Four mystery play cycles have survived the ravages of the intervening years: the cycles of York, Towneley, Chester, and *Ludus Coventriae*. Performed on the feast of Corpus Christi, mystery plays served the dual purpose of instruction and worship (Happé 1975, 11).

Given the small number of mystery play manuscripts and the lack of a time machine to travel back to the Middle Ages and investigate how children responded to the plays, I cannot prove that young people's play was influenced by performances of Christ's and Lazarus's resurrections. I do, however, believe that children in England, France, and other European countries where mystery play performances occurred would have enjoyed scenes in which someone who appeared to be dead rose from the grave. We know that children watched these performances, since mystery plays involved the whole community. In England, guild members performed mystery play scenes on wagons that they rolled from one place to another. Medievalist Pamela M. King explains that the York cycle in the 1460s and 1470s "was made up of forty-seven pageants, performed on wagons which stopped in sequence at each of twelve stations around the city, with around 14,000 lines of spoken dialogue, and involving a huge cast of characters, including twenty-four men capable of taking on the role of the adult Christ" (2006, 7). Such exciting, mobile performances would have gotten children's attention and provided an intriguing model for imitation.

There is a small but interesting linguistic similarity between the chant in Pepys's diary and some of the lines in the Towneley cycle of mystery plays, written in 1450. In "Lazarus" from Towneley manuscript 31, Maria [Mary Magdalene] tells Jesus, "Lorde, mekill sorrow may men se/ Of my sister here an me//We are heavy as any lede,/ For our broder that thus is dede" (Happé 1975, 402). Similarly, in "The Resurrection" from Towneley manuscript 26, Maria expresses joy at Christ's rising through proverbial comparison: "I am as light as leyfe on tre,/For ioyfull sight that I can se,/For well I wote that it was he,/ My Lord Ihesu/He that





betrayed that fre./Sore may he rew" (Happé 1975, 100). Perhaps emphasis on such comparisons in mystery plays encouraged children to create similar lines when enacting resurrection scenes. On the other hand, lines such as "Stiff as a stick/Cold as marble/Light as a spirit" and "Light as a feather, stiff as a board" may simply reflect well-known proverbial comparisons in French and English.

It is also interesting to note that both medieval English mystery plays and relatively recent levitation rituals focus on determining whether the person who will rise up is actually dead. In "Lazarus" of the Towneley manuscript, Jesus talks with his disciple Peter about their friend Lazarus. Peter suggests that Lazarus needs his sleep, but Jesus replies, 'I say you sekerly he is dede' (Happé 1975, 401). Similarly, in the play "Christ's Appearance to the Disciples" from the Ludus Coventriae manuscript 38, the disciple Thomas (generally known as "doubting Thomas" to Christians) insists upon touching Christ's wounds to make sure that Christ has truly triumphed over death. Thomas states, "I xal never be-leve that he is qwyk and sownde/In trewth whyl I knowe that he was dede on rood" (Happé 1975, 41). Once he sees and touches Jesus, Thomas proclaims in Latin, "*Quod mortuus et sepultus nunc resurrexit*" (Happé 1975, 42).

Recent examples of children's levitation rituals similarly focus on whether or not someone has died. Simon J. Bronner includes an example collected from a 29-year-old female college student in 1987, in *American Children's Folklore* (1988). This student remembered using the following words as a prelude to levitation between sixth and eighth grade:

I think he's dead
I know he's dead
He feels dead
He looks dead
He looks dead
He looks dead
He is dead (167).

Note that the word "dead" appears in each line, driving home the point that the chant explores various modes of perceiving the end of life. I collected variants of this chant in New York while doing the research for my 1984 essay on girls' levitation at slumber parties. In Indiana eight years earlier, I had heard other descriptions with a similar emphasis. In 1976, ten-year-old Betsy explained that "somebody makes up a real spooky story and says that you're dead, and then you say, 'Okay, now that you're dead let's rise you from the grave,' and it feels like you're floating when they lift you up" (Tucker 1977, 412). In that description and in others, the word "dead" signals the start of levitation.





Marvels and Metaphors

Levitation rituals offer young people a mysterious process that might (or might not) rely on magic. When it works, levitation seems marvelous and wonderful. In my 1984 essay I concluded that the act of lifting mattered more than symbolically bringing a dead person back to life: “If the attempt *worked*, [the girls] were happy, and that was the main thing” (130). My recent research supports that viewpoint. Kids want levitation to work and feel thrilled when it does.

In *Haunting Experiences*, Diane E. Goldstein suggests that testing supernatural evidence follows a pattern similar to application of the scientific method. Goldstein notes that “the spontaneous telling of a personal supernatural experience runs counter to one of the central principles of academic rationalist traditions — that supernatural belief would decline as education and technology increased” (2007, 60). In our current era, information science and technology have become prominent in people’s everyday lives. Rather than spurning the supernatural, however, many young people embrace it, seeking amazing experiences. This process begins in preadolescence and may continue into young and older adulthood.

To understand this process better, I talked with adolescents and spent time surfing the World Wide Web, watching movies, and reading summaries of episodes of certain television shows. Back in the 1970s and early 1980s, it was sufficient to talk with young people and watch them demonstrate what they knew. Now, in our complex cyberworld, we need to consider mass-cultural influences. In his recent essay “Seuss on the Loose: Children’s Folklore on the Internet,” C.W. Sullivan III reminds us that “children have ready access to the internet in ways that they do not have access to textbooks and folklore collections” (2006-2007, 36). Children’s and adolescents’ use of electronic media provides one of the most intriguing areas of study that folklorists can pursue today.

First, however, I talked with a group of young people with whom I met regularly. In the spring of 2007 I asked my 52 Introduction to Folklore students, most of whom were freshmen and sophomores, what they knew about levitation. All of the young women in the class knew about this ritual, and many of them had tried it. Five of the young men had not heard about levitation before; the others had either tried it or heard about it. The usual age for this ritual, my students said, was 10-13. Among the places where they had tried it were houses, playgrounds, gyms, and camps. All of the students called the ritual “Light as a Feather.” Eight out of ten small discussion groups cited sleepovers as the main setting. Seven groups mentioned chanting; one mentioned storytelling. All of the students who had tried levitation remembered how important it was for the ritual to succeed. Four of them admitted that they had tried levitation as college students, but most of the others viewed the ritual as “kid stuff.”

When I went online in the fall of 2007, I discovered that the interactive video website YouTube offers a plethora of videos in which kids chant “Light as a feather” before trying to lift each other. Recently, in July of 2008, YouTube listed 478 videos under the keywords “light as a feather.” Not all of these are about levitation; some are music videos, including the Lunachicks’ punk rock song “Light





as a Feather,” Chick Corea’s jazz piece by the same name, and Bob Marley’s “Misty Morning.” Many “Light as a Feather” videos on YouTube seem to have been filmed by teenagers who live in the United States, England, and the Caribbean. Among the settings for these videos are basements and living rooms of private homes, camps, schools, and playgrounds: very similar to the range of spaces that my college students described. In all the videos that I have viewed, the words “light as a feather, stiff as a board” comprise the only verbal part of the ritual. As might be expected in a medium that features films, action (in this case, lifting) seems very important. Some commentators on videos mention storytelling, but they do not give storytelling much attention.

It can be difficult to figure out the names, ages, and geographical areas of people who post videos on YouTube. Fortunately, the maker of one of the most popular “Light as a Feather” videos, which had been viewed 28,217 times by July 27, 2008, lists plenty of identifying information. Trace, aged 17, is a student at Del Norte High School in Albuquerque, New Mexico. Her video shows four teenagers chanting “light as a feather, stiff as a board” before raising a friend in a hooded sweatshirt up into the air. After the boy rises, a shocking image of the face of a monster with filmy white eyes appears on the screen.

This monster’s sudden appearance brings to mind metaphors associated with the word “raising.” Parents want to raise their children well: to “bring them up” from childhood to adulthood with success and pride. The parents’ role is active, while the children’s role is passive. During the process of child-raising, which strives toward an upward progression in maturity, parents may chide their children for causing trouble. Children may “raise a ruckus,” a phrase which suggests bringing something disruptive up from lower regions. Some teenagers have prided themselves on “raising hell”: doing something so disturbing that it makes people think of the devil’s domain. Most serious-sounding of all, the phrase “raising the devil” suggests demonic consequences for causing a disturbance or playing around with supernatural forces. In *Raising the Devil* (2000), Bill Ellis cites Christian minister Maxwell Whyte’s conclusion that demons do the lifting in levitation (54). Concern about punishment for chanting and summoning occult forces is certainly part of levitation’s mystique, although most of the young people with whom I have spoken have not seemed concerned about adverse consequences.

In fact, most “Light as a Feather” videos on YouTube seem playful and light-hearted. In many of these videos, kids laugh and joke. Some videographers enjoy poking fun at each other, as in the video that begins with the description “Cody, lameass. Everyone in biology used ONLY 2 fingers from each hand to lift him.” Several teens explain that they filmed “Light as a Feather, Stiff as a Board” because they felt bored (pun intended?) at home or at school. Comments on many of the videos include accounts of similar experiences, disputes about rules, and debates on diamagnetism and other scientific or pseudo-scientific explanations for the ritual’s success. Researchers who have the time and patience to sift through these reams of comments and view all the videos can get a great deal of information about this kind of interaction among young people.

Other relevant information comes from movies and television shows. Before the late 1980s, as far as I know, kids did not learn about levitation through movies





or TV. Since the beginning of the 1990s, the TV shows *Captain Planet*, *As Told by Ginger*, *The Girls Next Door*, and *South Park* have all had episodes in which levitation takes place. The 1987 movie *The Gate* includes a levitation scene; since the gate in question is a backyard gate to hell, the ritual's context suggests dangerous possibilities. Also threatening and mysterious are the circumstances that surround four young witches in the 1996 film *The Craft*, who perform acts of magic to torment fellow students at high school. In one of this movie's most exciting scenes, Sarah, Nancy, and Bonnie make Rochelle rise into the air by chanting "Light as a feather, stiff as a board." Bonnie's mother, worrying about what the girls are doing behind Bonnie's closed bedroom door, shouts "Are you getting high?" This line makes viewers laugh, because one of the girls *is* floating high above the floor.

This movie's exploitation of the double meaning of rising up high foregrounds the significance of altered states of consciousness. When I started revisiting the material I had collected before writing my 1984 essay, I noticed that the word "high" came up often. Deanne, for example, a ten-year-old girl in Indiana, had told me, "Well, you lay down, and you get real real real high, and you play that, uh, they step over you, make you real high, and say like if you wanta be a feather, they tell a story what you do, and everything" (Tucker 1977, 411). In my 1984 essay, I noted, in a tentative way, that this emphasis on "getting high" sounded like taking drugs (126). Now I see a clear relationship between levitation and mind-expanding experiences favored by teenagers. In *Aliens, Ghosts, and Cults* (2001), Bill Ellis observes that adolescents' supernatural experiences during legend trips resemble recreational drug use "in that both are 'trips' — deliberate escapes into altered states of being where conventional laws do not operate" (189). While preadolescents' and young teenagers' levitation experiments tend to be short, safe, and simple, they represent an early step toward new and exciting states of mind.

Amazing and delighting children, adolescents, and some adults, levitation rituals draw people together so that they can experiment with supernatural experiences. Since participants can choose to lift or to be lifted, either action or passivity is a socially acceptable option. When the ritual succeeds, levitation results in positive feelings. The lifters feel powerful, and the liftee feels "high." Beneath the surface of this brief ritual lie serious questions about the borderline between life and death, which is explored in stories about murder that precede the ritual. Metaphoric implications of the words "raising," "rising," and "high" enrich our understanding of participants' hopes and fears. As YouTube and other electronic sites continue to attract young video-makers, it will be fascinating to see how levitation performances develop in the future.





NOTES

I want to thank Janet Langlois and C.W. Sullivan III for their helpful comments.

1. The terms “spell” and “inchantment” appear in the diary of Samuel Pepys; “trick” and “curiosity” appear in the Opies’ *Lore and Language of Schoolchildren*. Mary and Herbert Knapp call levitation a “procedure” in their *One Potato, Two Potato: The Secret Education of American Children*, and Simon J. Bronner calls it an “activity” in his *American Children’s Folklore*. Bill Ellis uses the term “game” in *Raising the Devil*.

2. My cousin Martha, a resident of southern Maine, kindly provided me with this information on June 20, 2007.

3. Bob, also a resident of Maine, sent this information on June 20, 2007.

4. A recent study of children’s play in response to traumatic events is Ann Richman Beresin’s “Children’s Expressive Culture in Light of September 11, 2001 (2002). While there are no records of children’s responses to the tragic loss of so many people during the plague’s passage through Europe, we should note Sylvia Ann Grider’s point that “images of burials of corpses wrapped in winding sheets” were familiar to young survivors of the plague and that the contemporary image of a ghost in a white sheet may have originated during the plague years (114). In *Once Upon a Virus* (2004), Diane E. Goldstein describes a Canadian child in the midst of a game of tag saying “Tag, you’ve got AIDS” (1). This description, as well as the line “Barney died from HIV” in children’s song parodies of the early 1990s, shows how easily children’s concerns about epidemics become part of their games and songs.

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AN ECLECTIC SCHOOLTEACHER: DOROTHY HOWARD AS APPLIED FOLKLORIST

JAN ROSENBERG

I met Dorothy Gray Mills Howard (1902-1996) in 1983 at the annual meeting of the Association for the Anthropological Study of Play in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. She was dressed in a bright blue suit, her head framed by brilliant white hair. She was 80 years old. She was in attendance to receive an achievement award from TAASP. I recognized her by her name tag. I introduced myself, and we talked about the meeting, by which she was impressed. But she didn't understand why she was getting this award; perhaps she felt a kind of Texas humility.

My next contact with her was in 1989. I had been studying her writings and called her to talk about them. It was then that I learned she had had a hard time with institutions, naming some whose journals she felt had ripped her off. She gave me her blessing to study her published work. I didn't do so until 2000, when I received a Traditional Arts Growth (TAG) grant from the National Endowment for the Arts. Then I went to the University of North Texas, which was once the North Texas State College for Teachers. By this time Howard had passed away, and all of her work was available for study.

On my way to Denton, I drove over to Lone Oak, the place where Howard grew up. This small community had a convenience store and a church. Other than those gathering places, the community seemed empty, like a place people called home after a day at work, wherever that might be (Dallas? Garland? Fort Worth? Denton?).

The following is an examination of Dorothy Howard's work in light of the intersection of children's folklore and folklore and education. I will illustrate Howard's approaches to education and folklore with an eye on her progressive stance and child-centeredness. I will suggest that Howard be viewed as an educator and as a folklorist, a scholar of expressive culture and a guide through language arts in exploring the whole child. In other words, Dorothy Howard was a pioneer applied folklorist.

The work of Dorothy Howard has been thoughtfully chronicled by Sylvia Ann Grider (1994). In her *Children's Folklore Review* article, Grider outlines Howard's early journey as a teacher, beginning at age seventeen, when she was asked to take over the class of a teacher who had died during the Great Flu Epidemic, and ending with her position as professor at Frostburg State Teachers College (1944-1967), now known as Frostburg State University. She made a year-long stop in Australia, where she had a Fulbright Fellowship to document children's folklore in another English speaking country.

Pedagog in Embryo

Dorothy Gray Mills was born on 8 July 1902 and was reared in the Sabine Bottoms of east Texas. She went to school in the Bottoms region until she transferred





to a high school in Denton, Texas, approximately forty miles north of Dallas/Fort Worth. When asked to take over the class of a deceased teacher, Howard immediately latched on to the child-centeredness approach and asked the students to write her a letter about themselves to which she would respond individually. In this lesson she conveyed the form of letter writing, using the students' own interests.

Mills graduated from North Texas State Teachers College in 1923 with a B.S. in education and a permanent certificate to teach in Texas schools. In 1925 she married James Howard. She had two children and went east to teach school in New York and New Jersey, where she taught the middle grades, then moved to western Maryland to teach at Frostburg State Teachers' College.

As a progressive educator, she believed that the child develops naturally according to the way he or she perceives the whole environment. Very much in line with John Dewey (Dewey 1916), Howard was able to toe the curricular line with an individual's eye, using the experiences of her students.¹

For example, in Howard's essay "On Our Own In the Classroom" (1941), Danny is having trouble with her writing assignment. Howard reminds him of an earlier essay in which he wrote about his mother making spaghetti. Danny lights up and starts to tell how his mother made ravioli. Howard acts as his scribe until he feels more comfortable writing. In "The Bell Always Rang" (1940), the students play a game with the parts of speech until one student asks another how she spells her name. From there the students move into researching their surnames for historical information. The grammar lesson turns into a spelling lesson and a personal history excursion as students share information on their names.

Howard was progressive, though she didn't like to assign any label to herself, as she told me in 1989. She saw the child as she or he was, and this is a hallmark of the thinking of progressive education. Indeed, this educational approach involves a balance between the child and the environment, the lessons given, and the lessons experienced.

In fact, Howard and progressive educators were very much on the same level. According to historian of education Lawrence Cremin, progressive education embraced seven principles in a progressive learning situation:

1. Freedom to develop naturally
2. Interest, the motive of all work
3. Teacher as a guide, not as a task master
4. Scientific study or pupil development
5. Greater attention to all that affects the child
6. Cooperation between school and home to meet the needs of childlife
7. The progressive school a leader in educational movements (1961, 243-245)²

Howard followed each principle in a natural flow. She didn't follow a checklist of principles. For her, education and self were seamless. As a result, lessons could flow from one subject to another.





Howard made folklore part of the flow of education. In both “The Bell Always Rang” and “On Our Own,” it is clear that she applied lore to lessons. At Frostburg students documented their childlife by authoring autoethnographies (Ruffo 1951). This was a continuation of an approach to childlore that started in 1930. As she explains in her own autoethnography, *Dorothy’s World*:

One problem that soon became [Howard’s] great concern was the fact that most of the children, especially the boys, reached the junior high school grades ‘hating’ poetry. Looking for the causes, she learned that their elementary classroom experiences with poetry had included: (1) homework memory assignments of (2) poems chosen by the teacher (a woman) for (3) didactic purposes and (4) memorized as a chore to escape punishment.

Then one spring day at noon she stood at an open classroom pondering that problem, casually watching the children play on an unsupervised playground. Skip ropes were turning, marbles rolling, balls bouncing. Gradually she became aware of metaphoric rhythmic language accompanying the body movements of children.

By the time the bell rang calling the children in, she had counted on her fingers more than a dozen rhymes and formulae; and when the children came to class, rhymes, rhythms, and metaphors of the playground were discussed. The next day, self assigned homework was brought in and by week’s end the class had a collection of more than two hundred playground rhymes (1977, 287-288).

Although Howard had difficulty understanding why students didn’t like poetry, she located an infinite resource in her students’ expressive culture. In order to learn the lessons of the day, students supplied grist for the mill. From then on she relied on student culture to develop and execute her lessons.

Howard, the Folklorist

Howard learned of folklore around 1933, when she met with Walter Barnes, an English professor at New York University. She was introduced to Barnes through Howard’s sister, and she spent much time with him learning about this field that was new to her. He introduced her to the work of Gomme, Newell, and other collectors of children’s lore. Barnes suggested that Howard corral her collection into a doctoral dissertation, which she did, titling it “Folk Jingles of American Children: A Collection and Study of Rhymes Used by Children Today” (1938). And she continued to teach middle school.³

“Folk Jingles of American Children”

Howard’s dissertation “explores children’s rhyming traditions as unconscious literature that are an integral part of childlife; that parents recognize the





educational value of children's folk literature and that writers for children use as a model" ("Sixty Dirty Republikins" 1939). "Folk Jingles" was a national study in which Howard enlisted the aid of her colleagues in folklore and education, as well as children themselves across the United States. It was bold in its present-tense orientation, which enabled Howard to bridge the gap between armchair scholar and ethnographer (see Grider 1994).

In her studies of folk cultures Howard was aware of the transmission of expression. Like her teachers before her, Boas, Benedict, and Mead,⁴ Howard saw children as constituting a folk group with their own system of expressions, mores, and beliefs. Their culture stood three foot tall, and through Howard's studies she confirmed that children had a place on the cultural landscape.

She hoped that her schoolchildren would learn the fundamentals of language and that her students would grow to be the peacemakers of the world through their words. She had high expectations of her boys, her girls, and herself. Their training was very demanding, involving all of their senses in experiencing the world.

"Folk Jingles" is a breakthrough anthology. Howard combined fieldwork with older texts. The older text was her armchair. The fieldwork was that of the ethnographer who explored context as well as performance.

It is unfortunate that "Folk Jingles" is incomplete. Howard did not assign dates to the collection she made; therefore we don't have ethnographic chronology. What we do have is an incredibly variegated collection of taunts, jump rope rhymes, charms, autograph album rhymes, songs, chants, and plenty more. It is an exciting compilation because it explores childlife in the present tense on American soil. Most of the collections of childhood rhymes at that time came from overseas, with the exception of Newell and Barnes.

Folklore and Education: Australia

These intersections of lore, cultural dynamics, and the English language prepared Howard for her next step, documenting children's folklore in Australia. Originally she planned to document one group in one environment. But the Fulbright group asked that she document the whole of Down Under, and she spent a year doing fieldwork (Factor and Darien-Smith 2005), sharing her research in a variety of articles in the *Journal of American Folklore*, *Folklore*, *Southern Folklore*, and *Western Folklore*.

Even while Howard practiced this new craft of folklore, she still maintained her stance as a progressive educator. She wrote: "folklore has a justifiable place in the schools, not as a separate subject, or for the purpose of making folklorists out of children, or as an academic book exercise but as an integral part of a co-ordinated [sic] program for child growth and development where children become aware of the folklore process, what it is, and how it operates in their own lives and in their community, demonstrating . . . four ways to use folklore in the schools: as an introduction to poetry; as material for written composition work leading to classroom folklore archives; as a beginning step in creative writing, and fourth, as vital material for social studies" (1950, 106)





One thing shared between folklore and education here is the concept of *experience* that envelops the classroom and the field. In the educational sense, experience as defined by John Dewey (1916) is the interaction of the student and the environment (Biesta and Burbules 2003). In folklore, experience is marked by the creation of context and performance. In this light the creation of context is the creation of environment. The individual is the folk, and both folklore and education have attempted to create an environment in which the student, the folk, can thrive.

This is most visible in Howard's teaching style. For one thing, she needed to have her students trust her. Without trust there would be no way students could share their lore and be taken seriously. The same thing holds true with respect. Howard respected her students, and they in turn respected her. That enabled the creation of lessons that were homemade and in line with education's demands.

Of course teachers need training, and Howard's courses at Frostburg were designed to do just that. Students' autoethnographies and visits to museums offered lessons in transmission and preservation, as Howard told me in July of 1989. The transmission of lore was made understandable via folklife examples. Howard did not intend to make teachers folklorists. Rather she wanted to have them understand transmission as something not limited to learning a lesson. It was a way of understanding, knowing life. It was a way of becoming a better person and citizen.

Between 1955 and 1969 Howard published her Australia articles. She wrote an introduction to the Dover edition of Gomme's *Traditional Games of England, Scotland, and Ireland* (1964). She became more involved in the discipline of folklore, ever continuing to absorb and apply what she had learned in the 1930s.

Dorothy's World: An Autoethnography

During the 1960s and 1970s Howard practiced what she preached when it came to autoethnographies.⁵ *Dorothy's World* is an exploration of Howard's youngest years in Texas, 1902-1910 (1977). In the autoethnography she describes her family life, school, games, friends, and home as a whole. Howard wanted to do the autoethnography as a way of expressing herself, albeit in a style somewhat romanticized with age. Her book is a lengthy and detailed work that is considered a model for folklorists. I do not know if educators use this book as source material, but folklorists consider it seminal.

The book gives a very well rounded view of what childlife looked like in earlier times for an earlier age. It deals with oral tradition and with material culture. The lessons garnered from the book are powerful and eye-opening. *Dorothy's World* has been a success, with a wide readership now found on Amazon and Barnes and Noble, as well as Powell's in Portland, Oregon. It is no longer published by Prentice-Hall.





Howard as Applied Folklorist

Howard was a pioneering applied folklorist; she utilized childlore for furthering other purposes, primarily education. Benjamin Botkin, writing on applied folklore in 1953, was of the opinion that the “ultimate aim of applied folklore is the restoration to American life of the sense of community — a sense of thinking, feeling, and acting along similar though not the same lines” (Botkin 1953, 204). He had a sense of folklore as something that could be used in the creation of class and social programs: “Thus applied folklore goes beyond cultural history to cultural strategy, to the end of creating a favorable environment for the liberation of our creative energies and the flourishing of the folk arts among other social cooperative activities” (1953, 204). Although he didn’t look at the classroom *per se*, he instead explored a curriculum. Howard, on the other hand, infused lessons with lore and lore with lessons. Nothing was set aside, unless, as in “The Bell Always Rang,” lessons were shifted to accommodate new learning.

Howard was an applied folklorist in that she saw the ways folk culture could promote social harmony and excite learning. As far as can be told, Howard didn’t call herself an applied folklorist or even a folklorist. She was a teacher, an eclectic schoolteacher, a “mugwump pedagog” (*Dorothy’s World*). And she stayed true to her pedagogical roots throughout her days.⁵

Dorothy Howard’s work also lays bare a distinction between applied and public folklore. In acting out the latter, the public folklorist develops programs that celebrate and explore a particular theme, people, and folk cultures of communities and individuals while creating programs such as festivals, school assemblies, concerts, demonstrations, and exhibits to highlight those groups and themes.

Applied folklore helps people in need. Traditions are used to help others in one way or another. It is a kind of public folklore in that it focuses on the common good through traditions. But it is the application of traditional practices to enhance such activities as lessons that makes it what it is.

Howard as an applied folklorist utilized what was present in her students’ lives to create lessons. The students (except for the Frostburg students) were not ethnographers. They got the chance to work with materials with which they were familiar. On the one hand, students working with familiar expressions had a certain amount of control over their lessons. On the other hand, it was an astute instructor who looked to her students for answers about language, writing, and overall expression.

End Piece/End Peace ⁶

Dorothy Howard had keen insights into the unspoken literature of childhood. She knew the English language well enough to be able to identify traditional structure in children’s unwritten verse.

Howard was a maverick; there is no doubt about that. She was able to utilize student lore in a variety of learning situations (except math and science), and she gained the trust of her students so that they could be sure of themselves. As





a progressive educator, she was able to connect the class with the lore to create a meaningful experience. As a folklorist she understood how the transmission equation fit into the lives of children. As an applied folklorist, Howard understood how traditional culture could be used to support lessons of most all kinds. She believed that children's folklore had a wide variety of uses in the classroom, and she practiced what she preached.

NOTES

I would like to thank Sylvia Grider, Libby Tucker, Loretta Brockmeier, Diana Kelly-Byrne and Diane Sidener for their suggestions. All thanks, no blame.

1. Howard was teaching in a very challenging time for education. While small, unconsolidated schools were run essentially by the teacher and the school board, the larger schools, including urban schools, were working within a combination of outlined curriculum and progressive ideas. Howard taught in both unconsolidated and consolidated schools and was completely aware of the Progressive Movement.

2. The progressives' journal, *Progressive Education*, included this on the frontispiece of each number.

3. The doctorate in education was new at New York University. When Howard first tried for the Ph.D., she was told that her subject matter was not worthy of exploration. Barnes, as her champion, found a fit for Howard with the university's new Ed.D. program.

4. Howard doesn't specifically name what these scholars taught her, but she conveys a sense of awe at what they taught.

6. Dr. Howard called herself an "eclectic school teacher" in her autoethnographic writings, most of which are not dated.

7. Along I 30 between Texarkana and Dallas, there are a lot of communities that have their basis in northeast Texas agriculture: cotton, soy, vegetables. At the outset the community of Lone Oak looks fairly deserted, but it is just very small.

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CHILDREN'S FOLKLORE SECTION: 2007 ANNUAL MEETING

The Children's Folklore Section of the American Folklore Society met on October 19, 2007 at the Hilton Québec in Québec, Canada. Those present included Carole Carpenter (York University) Stephanie Crouch (University of Texas), Joseph Edgette (Widner University), Sean Galvin (LaGuardia Community College, City University of New York), Michael Jung (Arizona State University), John McDowell, Indiana University), Priscilla A. Ord (McDaniel College), Kate Schramm (Indiana University), Robert Smith (Southern Cross University, Australia), C. W. Sullivan III (East Carolina University), Jacqueline Thursby (Brigham Young University), Elizabeth Tucker (Binghamton University), and Robert Y. Walser (University of Aberdeen, Scotland)

In the absence of president of the section for a portion of the meeting, Priscilla Ord, president pro tempore, called the meeting to order, and those present introduced themselves.

Secretary's Report: The minutes of the 2006 section meeting in Milwaukee were distributed online. There were no amendments or corrections, so the minutes were approved as distributed.

Treasurer's Report: Priscilla reported that according to the records provided to her by Tim Lloyd, executive secretary of the American Folklore Society (AFS), the endowment had earned \$177.00, bringing the total value to \$11,982.00. Other income included \$946.00, from memberships, and \$16.50, from miscellaneous, for a total of \$1,139.50. Expenses included \$100 to the Newell Prize recipient and \$266.00 in management fees to AFS for a total of \$266.00. Income, less expenditures, was, therefore, \$773.50. Outstanding items for the 2006-2007 year yet to be paid are publishing and postage for Volume 29 of Children's Folklore Review and the dues for the editor's membership in CELJ (Council of Editors of Learned Journals).

Editor's Report: Chip Sullivan reported that Volume 29 of the Children's Folklore Review will be complete and in the mail before the end of 2007. It is currently a work-in-progress and will be the final issue he edits. After twenty-nine years of serving as editor, Chip is turning over the responsibility for editing the Children's Folklore Review to Elizabeth Tucker of Binghamton University. Libby is expecting to receive financial support from her department.





Aesop Prize Report: The 2006-2007 committee consisted of Brian Sturm (chair), Vicky Sworkin, Rosemary Vohs, Irene Chagall, and Robert Young Walser. Robert reported for the committee.

The 2007 Aesop Award winners were:

Lugalbanda: The Boy Who Got Caught Up in a War. Told by Kathy Henderson.
Illustrated by Jane Ray. Candlewick Press, 2006.

The Legend of Hong Kil Dong: The Robin Hood of Korea. Retold by Anne Sibley O'Brian. Charlesbridge, 2006.

The 2007 Aesop Accolades were:

Solomon and the Ant and Other Jewish Folktales. Retold by Sheldon Oberman.

Introduction and commentary by Peninnah Schram. Boyds Mills Press, 2006.

Tatanka and the Lakota People: A Creation Story. Illustrated by Donald F. Montileaux. South Dakota State Historical Press, 2006.

Newell Prize Report: Chip Sullivan indicated that there was a Newell Prize winner this year, but he did not provide the person's name. The Newell Prize, given by the Children's Folklore Section of the American Folklore Society for the best student essay on a topic in children's folklore has since been awarded to Kristiana Willsey for her paper, "The Shoebox Museum: The Aesthetics and Organizational Concepts of Children." The committee remarked on both the originality of the topic and the interesting way Ms. Willsey presented her analysis of the materials that students keep in shoeboxes, cookie tins, and other personal spaces. Kristiana is a student of John McDowell's at Indiana University and her paper will be published in Volume 30, 2007-2008 of Children's Folklore Review.

Carole Carpenter moved and Chip Sullivan seconded that, in addition to the \$100 award, the Newell Prize winner also be given a one-year membership in the section. The motion was passed unanimously.

Opie Prize Report: Without a designated contact person, there have been no nominations or submissions for the Opie Prize, a \$200 award to the author(s) of the best book published within the two previous years on children's folklore. Carole Carpenter (York University, carolec@yorku.ca <<mailto:carolec@yorku.ca>>) volunteered to chair the committee and receive nominations.

Children's Folklore Section Sessions: The section sponsored two sessions at the current AFS meeting. They were:

Contexts of Children's Folklore/Contextes du folklore des enfants

Carole H. Carpenter, chair

Patricia Haseltine (Providence University) Taming "Ancient" Chinese Dragons in
Early 20th- Century Western Children's Literature





Kate Schramm (Indiana University) Nascent Folklore: Socialization and the Formation of Protolore in Infants and Toddlers
Kristiana Willsey (Indiana University) The Shoebox Museum: Aesthetic Values and Organizational Concepts of Children
Carole H. Carpenter (York University) Children's Folklore in a Bubble-wrapped Childhood
John H. McDowell (Indiana University), discussant

Play as Intangible Cultural Heritage/Le jeu comme patrimoine culturel immatériel
Anna Beresin, chair
Dana Hercbergs (University of Pennsylvania) A Reassessment of Children's Folklore Generic Classification
Fernando Orejuela (Indiana University) Hip Hop as Children's Folklore: Exploring an Alternative Approach to the Hip Hop Culture Phenomenon
Anna Beresin (The University of the Arts) Drawing Happiness: Art and Children's Folklore, Philadelphia Style
John H. McDowell (Indiana University), discussant

Old Business: The major concern of those present was how to raise both interest and membership in the section. The following ideas were put forth:

- Take information about the section and its work to other appropriate organizations, such as IRA (International Reading Association), MLA (Modern Language Association), NCTE (National Council of Teachers of English), etc.
- Have John McDowell send out an email to all members welcoming them back to activity in the section.
- Make a one-page representation of the Children's Folklore Section on the AFS website.
- Have an auction or drawing of children's toys (or other items).

New Business: In order to have two sessions or panels at the 2008 AFS meeting in Louisville, KY, Priscilla asked for volunteers to chair the sessions.

Since the 2008 conference is to be held in Louisville, graduate students at the universities in the region should be notified. Universities in Illinois, Indiana, Kentucky, Ohio, and Tennessee were mentioned. It was also suggested that the section have or sponsor something along the line of an ice cream social with children's games as an event at the annual meeting.

Carole Carpenter announced the new Children's Studies Program, the only one of its kind, at York University, www.yorku.ca/human/csp





CFS: 2007 ANNUAL MEETING

The meeting was closed with expressed appreciation for the great work Chip Sullivan has done for so many years as editor of the Children's Folklore Review. He earned a standing ovation and long applause. In 2006 Chip received the CFS Life Achievement Award for his years of service as editor.

I wish to offer my sincere thanks to Jackie Thursby for serving as "scribe," while I had to conduct the meeting, and taking the time to draft the minutes for me.

Respectfully submitted,

Priscilla A. Ord

Priscilla A. Ord, Secretary/Treasurer
Children's Folklore Section, American Folklore Society





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. 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 (sullivanc@ecu.edu).

Book Reviews

Children's Folklore Review is seeking book review submissions for its next issue, to be published in October of 2009. 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 (hercborg@sas.upenn.edu). Book reviews should not exceed 750 words.

Silent Auction

At the American Folklore Society's 2009 meeting in Boise, Idaho, the Children's Folklore Section will hold a silent auction of books, toys, and other objects related to folklore of childhood. If you will be coming to the Boise meeting, please think about bringing an item for the silent auction table. Proceeds of this auction will benefit the Children's Folklore Section.





CONTRIBUTORS

Dana Hercbergs is a doctoral candidate in the Graduate Program in Folklore and Folklife at the University of Pennsylvania. Her dissertation explores children's folklore from the perspectives of Palestinians and Israelis living in Jerusalem, through both memories and contemporary experiences. Her research interests include cultural geography, healing traditions, and Arab-Jewish relations.

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