

Dylan and Tolbert have compiled an excellent volume that contributes to folklore and related disciplines. My only major critique is that there could be more exploration of the political-economy of communication and its implications for the study of the folkloresque. The critique of Dorson's coining of "fakelore," for example, tends to focus merely on the artificiality of the boundary between pop and folk. Although these boundaries are tenuous, this criticism glosses over the more trenchant criticism that Dorson was providing. Mainly, Dorson was concerned with ways the major media corporations use folklore as mass marketing—especially as a commercialization that supports an unreflective, chauvinistic nationalism. Despite the problems with Dorson's idea of fakelore, those interested in the folkloresque could provide deeper analysis of the politics of culture while also exploring the implications of the folkloresque in the less savory aspect of mass culture, including corporate appropriation of traditional culture, propaganda, jingoism, and various ideological uses of traditional expressive culture. It is here where the more nefarious definitional demons lurk.

*Work Cited*

Welsch, Roger L. Welsch. 1968. "A Note on Definitions." *The Journal of American Folklore* 81.321 (262-4).

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Moira Marsh. *Practically Joking*. 2015. Boulder: University Press of Colorado. 194 pages. ISBN 978-0-87421-983-8 (paperback).

In *Practically Joking*, Moira Marsh examines the vernacular art form that is the practical joke, illuminating the "easily disparaged" genre to reveal "a lively expressive play tradition that includes both sophistication and intellectual satisfaction" (3). In the concluding pages of the text, Marsh worries that readers will object to the book because it "challenges dearly held beliefs about joking" and humor, yet the text doesn't so much aggressively attack any dearly held beliefs about joking as it appeals to readers to think about humor and the practical joke through the critical lens of the ethnographer (97). Rather than simply taking the practical joke at face value, enjoying it as merely a means of creating laughter, or as a vehicle for cruelty (a dynamic of practical joking that Marsh directly addresses), Marsh clears a path for the critical evaluation of the practical joke from its definition and structure to the implied social situations in which it is generally seen as appropriate to partake in this form of play.

In her first two chapters, Marsh diagrams the basic elements of practical joking including the target (arguably the most important ingredient in the joke recipe), a script, and unilateral play. Subsequent chapters unravel the complex relationships between jokes, truth, and morality, and lead into a discussion of the various humor support strategies that targets may utilize in order to achieve a successful practical joke. Among these strategies are laughter, self-deprecation such as “I can’t believe I fell for this,” and praise for the joker’s cleverness and creativity in actively transgressing against normal or established behaviors (97). Marsh goes on to explore how practical jokes, pranks, hazing, and initiation rituals are dependent on certain social relationships, while further examining the effects that these types of play have on the specific social settings in which these instances of play occur. *Practically Joking* concludes with a recounting of individual jokes played on unwitting participants, including the researcher herself.

Marsh does a fantastic job of breaking down the vernacular of a subject that is little known to those outside of the folklore community. Chances are some readers of *Practically Joking* will approach the text with knowledge of the practical joke that does not go beyond being either the orchestrator of a practical joke or the unwilling target of such a scheme, yet someone as unfamiliar with humor research as myself can easily grasp the concepts that Marsh traces throughout the text. One such example of this synthesis, her deconstruction of Henry Bergson’s theory concerning the moral of practical jokes, clearly and concisely expounds habitual behavior as a vulnerability that opens targets to practical jokes, while providing a solid scaffold upon which she constructs her examples. The accessibility of *Practically Joking* opens up humor research to individuals who may not have been aware of this particular scholarship’s existence, let alone folklore scholarship as a whole, creating a visibility beyond the academic community and garnering more interest in the study of folklore and its many sub genres.

One considerable shortcoming of *Practically Joking* is the datedness of much of the source material used by Marsh. Because the major sources for her research are “forty-two interviews with jokers and joke targets...conducted...between 1986 and 1988” as well as in 2005, it is understandable that a fair amount of the source material is not as up-to-date as it could be (4). It seems that this book can and will serve as a point of reference for those looking to conduct future humor research, which Marsh herself hints at in her concluding chapter, stating that “This chapter is not so much the conclusion of one book as the beginning of another-one that someone else might write” (174).

That “someone” that Marsh references could easily be a fellow folklorist interested in researching the genre of humor, or possibly a student of either anthropology or literary studies. *Practically Joking* will certainly appeal to those within the academy, and the educated public, so long as they have a genuine interest in the study of humor and approach the text with a playfully open mind.

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