Introduction to Folklore II: Folk Genres and Analysis

2010-02-07 Mechling's "Children's Folklore"

# FOLK AND FINA 113

# REASONS FOR THIS WEEK'S AWESOMENESS

a. Better than any other reading, it describes the idea of belonging to multiple folk groups both over the course of one's life and at any one given time

b. It messes with your mind about childhood: just because you were a child, that doesn't mean you know what it's like to be one any more

# THE POINT

We all think we know what it means to be a child. Studying the child, therefore, has layers of motive and meaning often not present in other folklore inquiry, since we tend to project our own childhood experiences upon others and may attempt to recapture an especially pleasant period in our lives. (91)

# THE CHILD

- In nineteenth century, tended to see childhood culture as equivalent to primitive culture
- Childhood became, effectively, "adulthood in potency," not something whole and meaningful in its own right
  - *Triviality barrier*
- "Childhood" not a cross-cultural constant but ethnocentric
- "The Invention of Childhood"

# METHOD

- Do not assume child = unsocialised adult
- Approaches children's folk cultures as if they were fully developed, complex, and autonomous
- Retains the same issues of exoteric understanding that is present to the study of all "other" cultures

# ALSO...

✖ Where to draw line?
  + Pubescence?
  + Entry into high school?
  + Entry into university?
  + Entry into work force?

✖ He never quite says it, but one could argue that throughout our lives there exist folk groups in which we participate that are largely akin to "childhood"

# FLOW OF GROUP MEMBERSHIP

- Family → Peers within family (siblings, cousins)
  - Allows for activities separate from parents
- Neighborhood
  - Allows for activities separate from family
- Schools
  - Under dominant setting, counter-cultures developed and maintained
  - But encourages / forces age-stratification
- Other organised activities
  - Age, possibly gender stratification

# (MORE)

- Institutions patterned on adult theories of child development
- Stratification also encourages certain genres over others
  - Cf. Contemporary Legend
- Also, folk groups emerge in informal settings
  - Mall, street corner, etc.

Autonomous children's folk cultures can emerge within informal groups as well as in groups highly structured by adults. (96)

# 4 TENSIONS FOUND IN CHILDREN'S FOLKLORE

* Order vs. disorder
* Hierarchy vs. equality
* Male vs. female
* Dynamic vs. conservative

# ORDER VS. DISORDER

- Children tend to desire orderliness and adults tend to impose an order upon children

- In *play*, which is understood as non-serious, non-consequential, antithetical activities can be experimented with
  - Cruelty, obscenity, danger

# ORDER VS. DISORDER (CONT.)

- Other forms allow for antithesis
  - Parody – using an established structure for subversive expression
  - Nonsense – subverting the very idea of clarity of meaning
  - Secrecy – coding of messages, retention of some control in under-privileged contexts

# HIERARCHY VS. EQUALITY

- Often employ folklore to create a feeling of egalitarian community against the structured world adults create for them
- Simultaneously, often highly hierarchical
  - Teases: a playful othering and marking of difference within and fostering egalitarian relationships
  - Taunts: a more deliberate othering and marking of difference within and fostering hierarchical relationships
- (Highly contextual: requires ethnographic interpretation)

# HIERARCHY VS. EQUALITY (CONT.)

* Playfighting
* "It" games
* Bagtag

* There are likely subtle differences along gender lines, although they too might be fading

# MALE VS. FEMALE

- Creation of gender identity
  - Through affiliation
  - Through non-affiliation
  - Through traditional modes of gender activity
- Occurs both at time when gender differences are being blurred but also when anxiety over the idea that it is a construct has arisen (post-1970s)

# DYNAMIC VS. CONSERVATIVE

- Simultaneously retains much of what went before it
- Plays with the form to allow for new applications
- Invites new forms
- Again, parody provides best example

# GO AWAY FROM THIS PLACE

× Read "Strategy in Counting Out" by Goldstein, from the *Reader*