



# BAUMAN "BELSNICKLING IN A NOVA SCOTIA ISLAND COMMUNITY"

FOLK 211 – Atlantic Canadian Folklore

2011-03-07



# WHAT DID YOU THINK?

... and how do Maggie and Rebecca wish to proceed?

# Belsnickling

- A form of mumming or mummering
- Christmas time *or* twelve days of Christmas *or* entire Christmas season
- A “house visit” wherein members of the community, in disguise, arrive at a house, sometimes perform a play, play games, are fed and given drink, etc.
- Related to trick or treating, Mi-Careme

# Woodcut of UK Mumming



# Romanian Mumming



# Newfoundland Mumming



# Acadian Mi-Careme



# The LaHave Islands

- Off the South Shore of Nova Scotia, just south of Bridgewater, at the mouth of the LaHave river
- LaHave (on the mainland) was once the Acadian capital
- <http://goo.gl/maps/AXxG>





# Disguises

- Inside-out clothing
- Masks: canvas with nose extensions, decorated eye-sockets, pointy hats
- Variation: animal masks, replete with horns
- Rough transvestitism
- Old boots, gloves, horns and bells
- Disguising voice (rough or effeminate)
  - Variation (NL) breathing in while talking

# Acting “foolish”

- Clumsy dancing
- Out-of tune singing
- Sexual license (flirting, stealing hugs, etc.)
- Carnavalesque: related to carnival, literally a focus on the flesh (a festival of meat)
- *Liminal* behaviour
  - Liminal – from Latin “liminus” meaning “intel, threshold”
  - The space between two rooms, spaces, etc.

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- Foolish, antisocial behaviour was
    - Protected by anonymity of disguise
    - Allowed for by nature of the custom
  - Unsocialised, licentious behaviour

# Inquisition of children

- Isolated community begat fairly intense fear of strangers
- Belsnickles presented as bogeymen, frightening figures, throughout rest of year
- “Have you been good this year? Will you be good next year?”
  - Children rewarded with candy
- Like Santa at the mall, if you live in psychoville



# Interaction with adults

- Adults attempt to guess identities
  - Identities remained concealed
- Request for and provision of “brouse” (treats)
  - Cookies, cakes, later oranges

# Liminal nature of belsnickles

- Late adolescent to early adulthood men
- Typically unmarried
- Transitioning from childhood to positions of responsibility
  - By assuming the mumming disguises, the belsnickles were able to put off all semblance of social identity to the fullest possible extent. In fact, they went beyond mere anonymity to complete reversal of their social and human status.”



# Functions of belsnickling

- Just read the last three pages: they are awesome.



# Go away now

- For next class, Narváez's "Tricks and Fun"