



TALLMAN'S "YOU CAN ALMOST PICTURE IT"

FOLK 211 – Atlantic Canadian Folklore

2011-03-16



WHAT DID *YOU* THINK?

... and how does Hannah wish to proceed?

Aesthetics

- A sense or an apprehension of form with an attendant (perhaps implicit) understanding of what forms are pleasurable
 - The sense by which we measure “art”
- Fallacy: that an item’s artistic value speaks for itself, can be apprehended irrespective of context by the artistic person
- Rather: aesthetics is culturally conditioned and shaped by the context of performance
 - The individual item is put into the context of the life experience of the audience member and all his/her previous apprehensions of the artistic

Aesthetics (cont.)

- To begin to articulate “folk aesthetics” means to apprehend what, if anything, an individual has to say about what constitutes a “good” performance (story, construction of material culture, etc.)
- The folk, however intelligent, do not necessarily reflect critically on theoretical matters, certainly rarely in theoretical language
 - Cf. “vernacular theory” (Baker, McLaughlin, etc.)
- “The lack of an aesthetic vocabulary does not prevent aesthetic operation.” (Glassie)



Method

1. Observation of audience reaction to performances by various narrators, and subsequent interviewing of the audience
2. Collection and analysis of the active and passive repertoires of storytellers within the defined tradition
3. Concentration on the repertoire of a premier narrator who has selected certain kinds of narratives from the tradition, which is indicative his/her aesthetic response to the tradition
4. Interviews with the storyteller to determine his/her aesthetic

Robert Coffil, Blomidon, NS





Life on boats

- Since thirteen, profession has been sailing, fishing, ship's pilot, freighting, etc.
- Brief interlude as truck driver
- Worked with father and, particularly, older brother John
- John had reputation as storyteller
 - "A third" of Bob's repertoire came from John


Reputation

- Reputation is built upon flair for comic exaggeration, evocative description within his narratives
 - Has selected tall tales and exaggeration humor from the broader cultural repertoire
- In addition to set pieces, original and spontaneous instances of comic exaggeration contribute to his reputation as a talker
- Reputation also built, in part, on the breadth of his experience and potential for narrative (like in Bauman)



Self-reflection

- Does not necessarily recognize “favorites,” but does recognize choice opportunities for particular stories to arise and be performed
- Is very taken with comic, evocative description as a sign of a good storyteller
 - “Solid full of brass”




Contributions to a general understanding of folk aesthetics

1. Performance-conscious genres do not lend themselves to an appreciation of a specific item for its own sake divorced from any particular context
2. When the aesthetic is related intrinsically to context, this aesthetic is most often unspoken
3. Conversely, the more item-oriented and static a genre, the more explicit the aesthetic
4. The closer to professional status, the more explicit is that performer's aesthetic



Furthermore

- The appreciation for imagery suggests it is appreciated inasmuch as the audience can relate it to their own store of experience
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Go away now

- For next class, Tye's "Local Characters"