

---

# FOLK/HISTORY: AMERICAN TRADITIONS AND THE STUDY OF HISTORY, 1900- PRESENT

---

Anthony Bak Buccitelli, The Pennsylvania State University

## INTRODUCTORY ESSAY

---

"Memories are like plants: there are those that need to be quickly eliminated in order to help the others burgeon, transform, flower. Those plants that achieve their destiny, those flourishing plants have in some way forgotten themselves in order to transform: between the seeds or the cuttings from which they were born and what they have become there is hardly an apparent relationship anymore. In that sense, the flower is the seed's oblivion," Marc Augé wrote in his slim 2004 volume *Oblivion* (2004, 17). Though certainly not the first to employ a biological metaphor to describe the culture of human memory (see Hafstein 2001), Augé reminds us that memory is a selective and dialogic process, which entails just as much be forgotten as remembered.

This observation structures *Folk/History: American Traditions and the Study of History, 1900-Present* along two lines. First, it resurrects and elaborates perennial questions about the reliability of traditional expressive culture, or folklore, in the academic study of history. As a form of memory culture that is generally conceived of as existing outside of institutional contexts, and being transmitted through informal and frequently ephemeral means, it seems to resist many of the basic criteria for reliability as historical source materials. Yet, works such as Lawrence Levine's *Black Culture and Black Consciousness: Afro-American Folk Thought from Slavery to Freedom* (2007[1979]) and Gladys-Marie Fry's *Night Riders in Black Folk History* (2001 [1975]) have long shown otherwise. When the tools of folkloristics, which specializes in understanding the production of meaning through traditional practices, are applied to historical recordings of folk materials, these sources can yield rich bodies of cultural data that can help to expose the workings of oppressive social power, as well as the covert resistance articulated by members of marginalized groups.

Second, Augé's observation also calls attention to the role of memory in the present. It asks us to consider the process of selection and emphasis that shapes contemporary performances of tradition. These performances may be folk historical, in the sense that they are overtly concerned with representations of the past, or they may simply be traditional, in that they involve, in Richard Bauman's terms, "the situated production of generically informed discourse [that] indexes prior situational contexts in which the same generic conventions have guided discursive production" (2004, 3). But, in either case, they are legible in terms of the social frameworks that have structured the American historical experience: gender, sexuality, class, race, and ethnicity.

Thus, this course structures a study of traditional culture in the United States around a set of questions about the relationship between history, society, and vernacular creativity. It prompts students to

examine folkloric materials from three distinctive but interlinked vantage points. First, it helps them to examine recordings of folklore as historical source materials, expressions that can be read within their historical context as evidence of the social, intellectual, and cultural lives of individuals and communities in the past. In a similar vein, by extending these techniques of analysis to contemporary folk expressions, students learn how to examine present-day traditions in analogous ways. Bringing these two related techniques together, the course also encourages students to consider how these vernacular traditions are intertwined with the processes of social memory, not only the ways that the traditions themselves are remembered and transmitted by individuals, but also how they shape and are shaped by the social process of remembering history.

The course consists of four basic units. The introductory unit, "Studying Traditional Culture," asks students to consider the value of studying traditional culture as part of the study of American history. Unit one, "Race and Ethnicity in American Folklore," prompts students to ask questions about how socially remembered historical experiences, such as immigration or racist oppression, structure creative expression in the present. Finally, units two and three, "Gender and Sexuality in American Folklore" and "Occupational Folklore and Class in American History," ask students to examine traditional culture in both contemporaneous and historical contexts in order to understand how vernacular creative expressions can be used to respond to or resist applications of institutional or socially-sanctioned power.

### WORKS CITED

---

Augé, Marc. 2004 [1998]. *Oblivion*. Translated by Marjolijn de Jager. Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press.

Bauman, Richard. 2004. *A World of Others' Words: Cross-Cultural Perspectives on Intertextuality*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub.

Fry, Gladys-Marie. 2001 [1975]. *Night Riders in Black Folk History*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press.

Hafstein, Valdimar Tr. 2005 [2001]. Biological Metaphors in Folklore Scholarship: An Essay in the History of Ideas. In *Folklore: Critical Concepts in Literary and Cultural Studies*. Edited by Alan Dundes. London and New York: Routledge.

Levine, Lawrence W. 2007. *Black Culture and Black Consciousness: Afro-American Folk Thought from Slavery to Freedom*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

### SYLLABUS: AMERICAN FOLKLORE 1900-PRESENT

---

#### COURSE DESCRIPTION

Intimately woven into the fabric of everyday life, American traditions are studied both as texts, read as windows into cultural attitudes and practices, read as strategies by which people create or contest meaning. This course will introduce students to the role of traditional expressive culture in the life and history of the United States. As traditional expressions often place current issues into certain kinds of relationships with the past, these traditions will be approached through the larger frameworks of race, class, gender, and sexuality that have helped to shape American culture.

DELIVERY

Two 75-minute course blocks per week. Face-to-face instruction.

LEVEL AND PREREQUISITES

This course could be taught on the 300 or 400-level (i.e. advanced undergraduate or MA level). Prerequisites should include 100-level American Studies course or consent of instructor.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

At the conclusion of this course, students will be able to:

1. Discuss and apply the concepts and methods central to the study of traditional expressive culture, such as genre, text, context, and performance.
2. Contextualize and understand historical recordings of folklore with the appropriate attention both the historical specificity and ethnographic complexity.
3. Understand how social memories are built, manipulated, and practiced through traditional expressions.
4. Analyze how folklore can be used to create, mediate, or disrupt the power dynamics of everyday social relations through specific historical case studies.
5. Trace the broad contours of the history of United States history in the twentieth century, with emphasis on issues of race, ethnicity, immigration, gender, sexuality, and class.

TEXTS

The following book is available at the campus bookstore, or on Betterworldbooks.com, Alibris.com, or Amazon.com. All required/recommended texts will also be on reserve at campus library.

*Book:*

Radner, Joan (ed.). *Feminist Messages: Coding in Women's Folk Culture*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993.

*Articles (Available on courseware):*

Abrahams, Roger. "Playing the Dozens." *Journal of American Folklore* 75, no. 297. Symposium on Obscenity in Folklore (1962): 209-220.

Dresser, Norine. "The Case of the Missing Gerbil." *Western Folklore* 53, no. 3 (1994): 229-42.

Dundes, Alan "Who are the Folk?" in *Interpreting Folklore*. Edited by A. Dundes. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980.

Goodwin, Joseph P. "Humour and Conflict in the Gay World." *International Folklore Review: Folklore Studies from Overseas* 4, (1986): 96-99.

Herrera-Sobek, Maria. *Corridos and Canciones of Mica, Migra, and Coyotes: A Commentary on Undocumented Immigration*. In *Creative Ethnicity: Symbols and Strategies of Contemporary*

*Ethnic Life*. Edited by Stephen Stern and John Allen Cicala. Logan, UT: Utah State University Press, 1991.

Hom, Marlon. "Some Cantonese Folk Songs on the American Experience" *Western Folklore* 42, no. 2 (1983): 126-139.

Limon, Jose. Folklore, Social Conflict, and the United States-Mexico Border. In *Handbook of American Folklore*. Edited by Richard Dorson. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1983.

Morrison, Amanda. "Musical Trafficking: Urban Youth and The Narcocorrido-Hardcore Rap Nexus" *Western Folklore* 67, no. 4 (2008): 379-396.

Murray, Stephen. "The Art of Gay Insulting." *Anthropological Linguistics* 21, no. 5 (1979): 211-23.

Neely, Charles. "Why the Irish Came to America." *Journal of American Folklore* 46 no. 179 (1933): 90-91.

Kibby, Marjorie. "Email Forwardables: Folklore in the Age of the Internet." *New Media & Society* 7, no. 6 (2005): 770-90.

Turner, Pat. "Church's Fried Chicken and The Klan: A Rhetorical Analysis of Rumor in the Black Community." *Western Folklore* 46 (1987): 294-306.

*And Short Selections from:*

Addams, Jane. *The Long Road of Woman's Memory*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2002.

Abrahams, Roger. *African-American Folktales: Stories from Black Traditions in the New World*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1985.

Azzolina, David Sean. "The Circle Always Grew: Folklore and Gay Identity, 1945-1960." PhD Diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1996.

Baker, Ronald L. *Homeless, Friendless, and Penniless: The WPA Interviews with Former Slaves Living in Indiana*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000.

Bennett, Gillian. *Bodies: Sex, Violence, Disease, and Death in Contemporary Legend*. University of Mississippi Press, 2009.

Brunvand, Jan Harold. *The Study of American Folklore: An Introduction*. New York, London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1998.

Dorson, Richard. *American Folklore and the Historian*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1971.

Dundes, Alan and Carl Pagter. *Work Hard and You Shall Be Rewarded: Urban Folklore from the Paperwork Empire*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1992 [1975].

Fry, Gladys Marie. *Night Riders in Black Folk History*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000 [1975].

Glassie, Henry. *Irish Folk History: Tales from the North*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1982.

Glassie, Henry. *Irish Folktales*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1985.

Green, Archie. *Wobblies, Pile Butts, and Other Heroes: Laborlore Explorations*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993.

Mathias, Elizabeth and Richard Raspa (eds.) *Italian Folktales in America: The Verbal Art of Immigrant Women*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1985.

McManus, Edward C. *Irish Tales: A Collection of Tales from Mary Ware Dunne of Fitchburg, Massachusetts*. Bloomington, IN: Rooftop Publishing, 2006.

Paredes, Américo. *With a Pistol in His Hand: A Border Ballad and Its Hero*. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2000 [1958].

O'Sullivan, Sean. *Legends from Ireland*. London: Batsford, 1977. **(LI)** *The Folklore of Ireland*. London: B.T. Batsford Ltd., 1974. **(FLI)** *Folktales of Ireland*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999. **(FTI)**

Toelken, Barre. *The Dynamics of Folklore*. Logan, UT: Utah State University Press, 1996.

Vansina, Jan. *Oral Tradition as History*. Madison, WI: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1985.

Yeh, Chiou-Ling. *Making an American Festival: Chinese New Year in San Francisco's Chinatown*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press 2008.

## ASSIGNMENTS<sup>i</sup>

---

You will be given four types of assignments in this course: homework exercises, an oral presentation, an annotated bibliography, and three essays. Some of this work will not be graded, but that does not mean it is unimportant. Students who prepare diligently for class, participate actively, and take the homework exercises and discussion seriously generally learn more and write better final papers than those who do not.

## PAPERS

Your final grade in the course will be determined primarily by the quality of your papers. The best way to produce strong papers is to take homework assignments, readings, and class discussions seriously. The first two papers will focus mainly on working with concepts in the course readings. The final paper will be an original piece of research that will represent your individual progress through the course.

**Paper 1:** This paper asks you to combine the general theoretical perspectives of important scholars of folklore/folk history with a close critical examination of African American folklore as both text and performance. As such, this paper serves as a general introduction to a broad basic methodology for the scholarly study of folklore.

**Paper 2:** This paper asks you to consider the question of function in the folklore of ethnic and gender communities as a way to better understand the interrelationship between culture and society, as well as to examine the ways that people can use folklore to remember or respond to historical circumstances.

**Final Paper:** This paper represents the culmination of your work in this course. It should bring together your general knowledge of folklore, folklore methodology, and folklore theory in a sustained examination of an original topic that you have developed throughout the course.

#### ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Before the final paper is due, you will be required to submit an annotated bibliography of the main sources you will use for your paper (or a fieldwork report if you have chosen to do field study). Since the goal of an annotated bibliography is to provide a quick reference guide to your research sources, you should begin assembling this bibliography early in the semester so that it can serve as a reference for all of the reading and research you will do throughout the term.

For the bibliography assignment, you will have to submit a list of 15-20 scholarly sources that are relevant to the topic you are developing. Each source should include full bibliographic information (in Chicago 15<sup>th</sup> edition citation style). Also, you should include a short (~100-word) description of the source.

Sources can include: journal articles, book chapters (from edited volumes), books, archival sources, or newspaper/magazine articles (as primary sources only). Please do not include internet sources, unless they are from reputable electronic journals (such as *Cultural Analysis* or *NDiF*) or you are developing a topic that includes internet folklore.

You can find a large collection of folklore research resources on the instructor's website at: <http://folklorehandbook.blogspot.com>

**Personal Connections and Fieldwork:** Since this course deals with American traditions, many of you may find that you have direct experience with or connections to the topic of the course. If you have these connections in either your immediate or distant family or friend group, you are encouraged to use them in your research. If you are interested in interviewing friends or family members about their traditional lives or expressions, contact me early in the term to discuss possibilities and approaches. *Suitable and thoroughly documented fieldwork may be substituted for a portion of the annotated bibliography or other course requirements at the discretion of the instructor.*

If you intend to do fieldwork, you will have to submit a fieldwork report. This report should report each text/performance you record from your informants in the following format:

<b>Genre:</b> Legend—American,	<b>Informant:</b>
<b>Recorded:</b> Chicago, IL	Name, 28, Male
	American
	Marketing Director
	<b>Languages Spoken:</b>

	English
	<b>Collected:</b>
	Boston, MA
	10/31/04

**Item:** [Give the full text, a picture, musical annotation, a description of the performance, etc.]

**Informant Account:** [Give a 1-3 paragraph explanation of the relevant contextual information or information provided by the informant that is relevant for understanding the performance or text]

**Field Notes:** [In 1-3 paragraphs, note your observations about the performance. You might want to comment on your understanding of the dynamics of the performance situation or your interpretation of the informant's meaning]

**Annotation:** [Find at least one written reference to this tradition. Record the full bibliographic information and give a short description of the source. This may not be possible for all sources, such as family traditions. I can help you with this piece in the weeks leading up to this deadline.]

#### CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

Toward the end of the term, we will hold a mini-academic conference where you will have a chance to present the research for your final paper to the class. These presentations will follow the standard conference model of a 10-minute oral presentation followed by a 5-minute question period. The goal of these presentations is to generate discussion and feedback on your research as you prepare the final paper. If you have been doing personal interviewing, it will also give you the opportunity to present your fieldwork for peer review. More information about this assignment will be distributed later in the term.

#### HOMEWORK EXERCISES

You will periodically be assigned brief homework exercises that will help you work with the readings, generate ideas for your papers, or practice skills that you will use in discussion or when writing your papers. Your homework exercises will not receive grades, but your performance on these assignments may affect your participation adjustment (see below). A typical homework assignment might be to produce a 1-2 paragraph response to an analytical prompt related to the daily reading assignment; similarly, it might also be to complete a similar response begun during a class meeting as a way to help you solidify the ideas and arguments you generated during class discussion. These assignments will be given at the discretion of the instructor, but are generally used no more than six times throughout the term. The submission of your proposed research topic at the end of the first month of class will also be counted as a homework assignment.

#### GRADING AND EVALUATION

Your final grade will be calculated as follows:

Paper 1:	10%
Paper 2:	15%

Annotated Bibliography	
/Fieldwork Report:	20%
Conference Presentation:	15%
Final Paper:	40%

You must complete all graded assignments to pass the course. Your final grade may also be adjusted to reflect your attendance and participation as described below.

**Late and Missed Assignments:** Unless you make other arrangements with me in advance, graded assignments will be penalized by one-third of a letter grade for each day they are late. Papers are considered one day late if they are submitted after 11:59pm on the due date.

Homework exercises will not receive grades, but these must still be turned in on time. If you are habitually late with your assignments, you will be unable to participate fully in the class.

**Participation and Attendance:** Your regular attendance and participation are essential both to your own learning and to your classmates' learning. Consequently, your final grade may be adjusted up or down by one-third of a letter grade to account for the quality of your participation and ungraded work over the course of the semester.

You may miss three classes without penalty. I ordinarily do not distinguish between excused and unexcused absences, so please save your absences for when you need them. If you exceed the number of allowed absences, your course grade may be lowered as follows:

<u>Number of absences</u>	<u>Final grade penalty</u>
4	1/3 of a letter
5	2/3 of a letter
6	full letter
7	1 1/3 letters
8	1 2/3 letters
9	F

If you have a special obligation that will require you to miss several classes (e.g., varsity athletics, religious observances), please talk with me at the beginning of the semester. Missed conference appointments will be counted as absences.

## COURSE MEETINGS

---

### **General Outline of a Course Meeting:**

Each 75-minute course meeting will generally follow the same basic structure:

10 minutes – Attendance, housekeeping, general questions from students.

20-30 minutes – Brief lecture on a topic in folklore theory and method, the study of specific folk traditions, or on general or specific topics in United States history.



30-40 minutes – Class discussion of assigned reading, in the context of the lecture or previous discussions.

5-10 minutes – Wrap-up discussion or short written response.

Occasionally, a planned lecture or discussion, such as the performance and context exercise in the second course meeting, will require a full 75-minute period to complete. In this case, the week's lecture content will be delivered in the remaining 75-minute period of the week.

## COURSE SCHEDULE

---

(This schedule is subject to revision)

### INTRODUCTION: Studying Traditional Culture

**Class One: What is Folklore? And Who are the Folk?**

*Reading:* Dundes; Brunvand "The Field of Folklore"

**Class Two: Methods of Study: Genres, Texts, Context, and Performance**

*Reading:* Brunvand (pp. 23-25, 74-8); Toelken

**Class Three: Tradition and History: What Does Folklore Tell Us about the Past and the Present?**

*Reading:* Dorson, Vansina

*Due:* Position Statement Homework Assignment

### UNIT ONE: Race and Ethnicity in American Folklore

#### Part One: African-American Experience and Traditional Life

**Class Four: Brother Rabbit and Old Master: Tricksters, Dupes, and the Balance of Power in Black Folklore**

*Reading:* Abrahams 1985

**Class Five: After Slavery: Race and Memory in the Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century**

*Reading:* Baker, Fry

**Class Six: Government Conspiracies and Affirmative Actions: Case Studies in Race and Folklore in the Late 20<sup>th</sup> Century**

*Reading:* Turner

**Class Seven: From the Dozens to MC Battles: Black Verbal Dueling in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century and Beyond**

*Reading:* Abrahams 1962, Abrahams 1985 "The Signifying Monkey" and "The Sinking of the Titanic"

#### Part Two: Immigration and Folklore in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century

*1. Migration and Social Memory*

**Class Eight: The White Rat: Irish Folklore and the Memory of Emigration**

*Reading:* Neely, Glassie, McManus, O'Sullivan

*Due:* Paper One

**Class Nine: Songs of Gold Mountain: Cantonese Poems and Exclusion in the Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century**

*Reading:* Hom

**Class Ten: Women on the Move: Italian Women and Personal Experience Narratives**

*Reading:* Mathias and Raspa

*2. Case Study: Folk Songs and Life on the Border*

**Class Eleven: Mexican American History, Folklore, and Border Identity in the Twentieth Century**

*Reading:* Paredes, Limon

**10/12 NO CLASS \*\* Monday Schedule\*\***

**Class Twelve: New Problems, New Answers: Corridos, Canciones, and Undocumented Immigration in the Late 20<sup>th</sup> Century**

*Reading:* Herrera-Sobek

**Class Thirteen: Narco-Corridos: Mexican Americans, Hip-Hop, and Resistance in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

*Reading:* Morrison

*3. Ethnic Folklore and the Politics of the Festival*

**Class Fourteen: Folklore as Strategic "Integration": The Ethnic Festival and Ethnic Power for Irish, Italian, and Chinese Americans**

*Reading:* Yeh

**Class Fifteen: Guest Lecture**

**UNIT TWO: Gender and Sexuality in American Folklore**

**Part One: American Women's Folklore and Female Power**

**Class Sixteen: Hidden Power: Coding in Women's Folk Speech**

*Reading:* Radner and Lanser, *Feminist Messages*, 1-30.

**Class Seventeen: The Devil Baby Legend and the Power of Ethnic Women in the Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century**

*Reading:* Addams

**Class Eighteen: Subverting Domesticity in Women's Folk Culture**

*Reading:* Yocom, *Feminist Messages*, 127-154.

**Class Nineteen: Female Verbal Strategies in Hip Hop**

*Reading:* Keyes, *Feminist Messages*, 203-220.

**Part Two: Folklore and Sexual Identity in American History**

**Class Twenty: Gay Codes and Folklife Before Stonewall**

*Reading:* Azzolina

**Class Twenty-One: Verbal Dueling in Gay Communities and the Politics of Being "Out"**

*Reading:* Murray, Goodwin

*Due:* Paper Two

**Class Twenty-Two: Fearing the Rainbow: Contemporary Legends and Homophobia**

*Reading:* Dresser, Bennett

**Class Twenty-Three: Student Presentations**

*Due:* Annotated Bibliography/Fieldwork Report for the Final Paper

**NO CLASS \*\*FALL BREAK\*\***

**Class Twenty-Four: Student Presentations**

**UNIT THREE: Occupational Folklore and Class in American History**

**Class Twenty-Five: Student Presentations/ Wobblies, Finks and Home Front Harassment: Labor Folklore and Social Power in the Twentieth Century**

*Reading:* Green

**Class Twenty-Six: Nerdlore: Folklore, Corporate Culture, and the Rise of Technology**

*Reading:* Dundes and Pagter, Kibby

**Class Twenty-Seven: Closing Sequences: Folklore in a World of Technology**

*Due:* Final Paper

## APPENDIX A: SAMPLE TEACHING EXERCISE

---

### *The Devil and the Farmer's Wife: Understanding Performance and Context in Folklore*

---

*For students who have little or no exposure to the study of traditional expressive culture, one of the most difficult aspects to understand is the dynamic relationship between situational context, the act of performance, and the creation of performative meaning. For folklorists, it is commonplace to accept the notion that no folk cultural production, even those within verbal genres such as folktale, legend, or proverb, can be examined strictly as text: it must also be understood to operate within a specific situation of utterance or performance, in which the social and aesthetic dimensions of the scene, the surrounding discourse, and the history of performances within the genre or type all bear on the creation of situational meaning (See, for example, Hymes 1975; Bauman 1984 [1977]; Briggs 1988; Briggs and Bauman 1992; Berger and Del Negro 2002; Buccitelli 2012).*

*The ability to understand and successfully apply performance analysis is one of the major conceptual tools required for the study of folklore and history. In cases where historical records can provide a rich enough set of situational data, performance analysis can greatly enhance the nuanced understanding of how vernacular actors were making use of traditional expression to create meaning in response to their historical circumstances. Even in cases where little or no situational or contextual data exists in the historical record, a performance perspective still calls students' attention to the fact that a particular recording of a traditionalized text or expression does not necessarily have a single, fixed meaning that runs across its historical expressions. Rather, each recording represents a tension between the performer's memory of past performances, as well as her/his understanding of the history of the tradition, and her/his contemporary desire for personal expression. The study of folklore and history, then, necessarily takes place in the interstices between social memory and individual selection and emphasis in performance. Thus, in addition to an understanding of performance and context, students must also have a basic understanding of the role of genre and the nature of social transmission and remembering of traditional expressions in order to be able to engage in a meaningful study of folklore and history.*

*The exercise presented here as appendix A is designed to provide a real-world example of the techniques and possibilities of performance analysis in cases where it is not possible to have the students observe and analyze a contextualized performance of folklore under other circumstances. This exercise falls in the first or second week of course meetings, and follows directly on the heels of a mixture of lecture and discussion with students about other key concepts in folklore studies, including genre, context, and tradition.*

*The exercise is presented to students as a kind of case study for them to analyze. The students are given handout 1, which contains the text of a folk ballad, "The Devil and the Farmer's Wife," recorded in Vermont from a singer named Guy Livingston. The handout contains only the lyrics of the ballad. The students are asked to read the lyrics to themselves and think about what meaning these lyrics convey. This is followed by a class discussion of the lyrics, which generally brings out the rather overt misogynistic tone conveyed in the lyrics themselves.*

*In the second part of the exercise, students are given handout 2, which contains an excerpt from the full interview in which the ballad was recorded from Livingston by a fieldworker with the Vermont Folklife Center (Vermont Folklife Center 1992). The students then listen to a sound recording of the actual interview and follow along on the transcript. The group discussion that follows unfolds several strains of analysis. First, it calls the students' attention to the ways in which Livingston tries to avoid performing the ballad for his interviewer. For example, he defers performance by saying that he is not a good singer, then, he agrees to recite it, and, eventually, to sing it with the tune. In thinking about why*

*Livingston is so reluctant to sing the song, students begin to pay attention to the social dynamics of the performance situation. Second, as they juxtapose the bawdy, sexist tone of the song with the fact that Livingston was engaging in a solo performance for a female interviewer that he seems not to know well, students see a clear example of how the social configuration of an audience can shape a performance of folklore. Despite the interviewer's clear interest in the song and her encouragement of Livingston, his performance remains uneasy and halting. Third, as this becomes clear, some of the surrounding discourse in the interview is illuminated in turn. The fact, for instance, that Livingston initially refused to perform a song that featured violence against a woman, and that directly after singing the bawdy song, he refused to join in the interviewer's praise of it, hint at Livingston's discomfort with the social situation. Finally, as the discussion progresses to the final bit of dialogue, students are able to interpret Livingston's seemingly meaningless digression into how he learned the song. In that section, Livingston reveals that he learned the bawdy song from his uncle who was a saloon singer. Although he mentions that his uncle was uneducated, he stresses that it was the combination of his uncle's poverty and infirmity that led him into that profession and hence to that song. Thus, by following this analysis, students can now also identify Livingston's possible motivation for telling this seemingly trivial story: he is trying to explain to a female interviewer, who he is clearly trying not to offend, why he and his uncle knew a sexist song.*

*In the third and final part of this exercise, students are shown handout 3, which juxtaposes a short section of Livingston's performance with several other recorded versions of the ballad, which they are asked to compare and contrast. Students immediately note that, in contrast to the other versions, Livingston's lyrics present a slightly more charitable view of women as well. This generally leads the discussants to speculate that Livingston may have also chosen to sing the least offensive lyrics available to him in that situation. Thus, now coming full circle, the class is able to identify not only how a performance might affect or be affected by a social situation, they can also see several fairly direct ways that Livingston appears to be attempting to create or control meaning through his aesthetic and discursive choices.*

*While this exercise generally takes the better part of a one hour and fifteen minute class period, it is both an engaging puzzle for the students to unfold and a very productive demonstration of the immense amount of information that can be gleaned from a single performative situation when the proper attention is paid to the social and cultural contexts and to the interactional and aesthetic features of the situation. After the conclusion of the exercise, I stress to the students that such a rich performance analysis may not always be possible when working with historical sources, but that the dynamics that they have identified are always in the background of any recording of traditional expressions. Therefore, they must always remember to read their sources with the aim of uncovering these same elements within them.*

## WORKS CITED

---

Bauman, Richard. 1984 [1977]. *Verbal Art as Performance*. Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press.

Berger, Harris M., and Giovanna P. Del Negro. 2002. Toward New Perspectives on Verbal Art as Performance. Special Issue of *Journal of American Folklore* no. 115 (455):1-98

Briggs, Charles L. 1988. *Competence in Performance: The Creativity of Tradition in Mexicano Verbal Art*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Briggs, Charles L., and Richard Bauman. 1992. "Genre, Intertextuality, and Social Power." *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology* no. 2:131-172.

Buccitelli, Anthony Bak. 2012. "Performance 2.0: Observations toward a Theory of the Digital Performance of Folklore." In *Folk Culture in The Digital Age: The Emergent Dynamics of Human Interaction*, edited by Trevor J. Blank, 60-84. Logan, Utah): Utah State University Press.

Hymes, Dell. 1975. "Breakthrough into Performance." In *Folklore: Performance and Communication*, edited by Dan Ben-Amos and Kenneth S. Goldstein, 11-74. The Hague: Mouton.

Vermont Folklife Center. 1992. Mad River Valley Project Collection, VFC1991.0004, TC1992.0016, Guy Livingston, Fayston, VT Interview by Jane C. Beck 02/13/1992

FOLK/HISTORY: AMERICAN TRADITIONS AND THE STUDY OF HISTORY, 1900-PRESENT  
- HANDOUT 1

---

**The Devil and the Farmer's Wife: (Recorded from Guy Livingston in Fayston, VT)**

Oh he hitched up his pig and he hitched up his cow, onnomeydonomeyralley  
 He hitched up his pig and he hitched up the cow, onnomedonomeyralley,  
 He hitched up his pig and he hitched up his cow, and he plowed us his land to the devil knows  
 how,  
 With a right leg, left leg, upper leg, under leg, onodemonomeyralley.

The devil he came along one say, onodemonomeyralley.  
 The devil he came along one say, onodemonomeyralley.  
 The devil he came along one say, he said to come to take your son away,  
 With a right leg, left leg, upper leg, under leg, onodemonomeyralley.

Pray mister devil don't take my son, onodemonomeyralley.  
 Pray mister devil don't take my son, onodemonomeyralley.  
 Pray mister devil don't take my son for if you do I'll be all undone  
 With a right leg, left leg, upper leg, under leg, onodemonomeyralley.

Pray mister devil pray take my wife, onodemonomeyralley.  
 Oh mister devil pray take me wife, onodemonomeyralley.  
 Oh mister devil pray take me wife, she's \_\_\_\_\_ and scolded me all of her life,  
 With a right leg, left leg, upper leg, under leg, onodemonomeyralley.

The devil he stuffed her into his sack, onodemonomeyralley.  
 The devil he stuffed her into his sack, onodemonomeyralley.  
 The devil he stuffed her into his sack, and he went down the road with a pack on his back,  
 With a right leg, left leg, upper leg, under leg, onodemonomeyralley.

The devil he came to a great big ditch, onodemonomeyralley.  
 The devil he came to a great big ditch, onodemonomeyralley.  
 The devil he came to a great big ditch, and said get in you blamed old witch, with a right leg,  
 left leg, upper leg, under leg, onodemonomeyralley.

Nine little devils were standing there, onodemonomeyralley.  
 Nine little devils were standing there, onodemonomeyralley.  
 Nine little devils are standing there, she heisted their foot and kicked them into the fire with a  
 right leg, left leg, upper leg, under leg, onodemonomeyralley.

Nine little devils all rattle their chains, onodemonomeyralley.  
 Nine little devils all rattle their chains, onodemonomeyralley.  
 Nine little devils all rattle their chains, she heisted her foot, she kicked out their brains, with a  
 right leg, left leg, upper leg, under leg, onodemonomeyralley.

One little devil peaked over the wall, onodemonomeyralley.  
 One little devil peaked over the wall, onodemonomeyralley.  
 One little devil peaked over the walls, \_\_\_\_\_ to your \_\_\_\_\_ or she'll kill us all,

With a right leg, left leg, upper leg, under leg, onodemonomeyralley.

The devil he stuffed her into his sack, onodemonomeyralley.

The devil he stuffed her into his sack, onodemonomeyralley.

The devil he stuffed her into his sack and he carried her home with a pack on his back,

With a right leg, left leg, upper leg, under leg, onodemonomeyralley.

Oh, it shows that women are better than men, onodemonomeyralley.

It shows that women are better than men, onodemonomeyralley.

It shows that women are better than men, they can go through hell and back again

With a right leg, left leg, upper leg, under leg, onodemonomeyralley.

This is all of me tale to have to tell, onodemonomeyralley.

This is all in me tail that I have to tell, onodemonomeyralley.

This is all in me tail that I have to tell, she killed nineteen devils and conquered hell,

With a right leg, left leg, upper leg, under leg, onodemonomeyralley.



FOLK/HISTORY: AMERICAN TRADITIONS AND THE STUDY OF HISTORY, 1900-PRESENT  
- HANDOUT 2

---

**Performative Context Example:**

*Guy Livingston- The Devil and the Farmer's Wife*

**Place:** Fayston, Vermont (Recorded by the Vermont Folklife Center)

**Date:** February 13, 1992

**GL** And she was, this song was, her husband murdered her, or something. [14.46] And, this tune was to the, old, old oaken.

**GL** Old Oaken Bucket.

**GL** Old Oaken Bucket.

**JB** Ah ha.

**GL** I \_\_\_\_\_ it sometimes some ways, a lot of ways, but the, that's what it was and, I can't remember what something about it, from you know. [15.03]

**JB** You don't remember the.

**GL** Dragging around by the hair or something, but I don't remember the words.

**JB** Do you remember the title?

**GL** No. [15.13] If I, you know, and then.

**GL** Probably if he'd see some of the words in that it would.

**JB** I'll try.

**GL** I do know one old song clear through. [15.23]

**GL** Ha! Ha!

**JB** Well how about singing it?

**GL** Ha! I'm no singer.

**JB** Well let's hear it, recite.

**GL** Okay. It's about, there's about fourteen verses to it. See he hitched, now let's see, he hitched up his pig and he hitched up his cow and tugged land as the devil knows how, with a right leg, left leg, upper leg, under leg out \_\_\_\_\_ raleigh, the devil he came along one day, he said I come to take your son away, and was it, oh Mr. Devil don't take my son for if you do I'm all undone. Pray just Mr. Devil, pray take my wife cause she nagged and scolded me all my life, and right leg, left leg, upper leg, under leg, \_\_\_\_\_ raleigh, so the devil he stuffed her into his sack, and went down the road with a pack on his back, and when the devil he came to the ditch, he said get in you blamed old witch, and let's see, the right leg, left leg, upper leg, under leg \_\_\_\_\_ raleigh, [16.33] nine little devils was standing there, \_\_\_\_\_ raleigh, she, no, nine little devils were standing there, she, well I, I probably could write it down better than I can, and she lifted her leg and she kicked him into the fire with the right leg, left

leg, upper leg, under leg, \_\_\_\_\_ raleigh. Ha! I probably could sing it better but, you wouldn't like my singing.

**JB** What's the tune? What's the tune?

**GL** Well I'll start over. [17.11] Let's see how was it. Oh he hitched up his rig and he hitched up his scowl, \_\_\_\_\_ raleigh, he hitched up his pig and he hitched up his cow, \_\_\_\_\_ raleigh, he hitched up his pig and he hitched up his cow and he plowed up his land and to the devil knows how, with the right leg, left leg, upper leg, under leg, onity vomity raleigh, the devil he came along one day, onity, vomity raleigh, the devil he came along one day, onity, vomity raleigh, the devil he came along one day he said I come to take your son away with a right leg, left leg, upper leg, under leg, onity, vomity, raleigh. [17.48] say Mr. Devil don't take my son, onity, vomity, raleigh, oh Mr. Devil don't take me son, onity, vomity, raleigh, oh Mr. Devil don't take my son, for if you do I'll be all undone, with a right leg, left leg, upper leg, under leg, onity, vomity raleigh. Well the devil he stuffed her into his sack, onity, vomity raleigh, the devil he stuffed her into this sack, ominty, vominty, raleigh, the devil he stuffed her into his sack, and he went down the road with a pack on his back, with a right leg, left leg, upper leg, under leg, ominty, vominty, raleigh, well the devil he came, and then the devil he came to a ditch, omnity, vominty raleigh, the devil he came to great big ditch, omnity, vominty, raleigh, the devil he came to a great big ditch, and said get in you blamed old witch, with a right leg, left leg, upper leg, under leg, omnity vominty raleigh. Oh nine little devils are standing there, omnity vominty raleigh, oh nine little devils are standing there, omnity vominty raleigh, nine little devils are standing there, she asked \_\_\_\_\_ and kicked them into the fire with a right leg, left leg, upper leg, under leg, omnity vominty raleigh. Oh nine little devils all rattle their chains, omnity vominty raleigh. Nine little devils all rattle their chains, omnity vominty raleigh, nine little devils all rattle their chains, he heisted her foot and she kicked out their brains, with a right leg, left leg, upper leg, under leg, ominty vominty raleigh. One little devil peaked over the wall, omnity vominty raleigh. One little devil peaked over the wall, ominty vominty raleigh, one little devil peaked over the walls, said take her back or she'll kill us all, with a right leg, left leg, upper leg, under leg, omnity vominty raleigh. The devil he stuffed her into his sack, omnity, vominty raleigh. The devil he stuffed her into his sack, ominty vominty raleigh, the devil he stuffed her into his sack, and carried her home with a pack on his back, with a right leg, left leg, upper leg, under leg, omnity vominty raleigh. This, it shows that women are better than men, ominty, vominty raleigh, it shows that women and better than men, omnity vominty raleigh. It shows that woman are better than men, they can go through hell and back again, with a right leg, left left, upper leg, under leg, omnity vominty raleigh. It shows that, this all of me tale that I have to tell, omnity vominty raleigh. It shows, all of my tale that I have to tell, omity vominty raleigh. It's all of my tales that I have to tell, he killed nineteen devils and conquered hell with a right left, left leg, upper leg, under leg, omnity vominty raleigh.

Now I heard that from, I think it was my mother's uncle, and I think he and his wife, or maybe one of the last old, well hillbillies, mountain people around. And neither one had, two big an education. [20.33] But they still talked with the old, accents and stuff. And they were always dirt poor, but the.

**JB** Great song, isn't it.

**GL** We used to visit them once in awhile, and he sang that, I happen, that was one I happen to remember.

**JB** Oh I love it.

**GL** And he and his half brother went up the Yukon gold strike.

**JB** I'll be darned. [20.50]

**GL** And, I guess they would of starved to death if they both, well untrained singers, but they got to singing around these saloons, and stuff and the others, they struck if enough, they got, they got enough to eat, to get back, you know. Enough so they could come back but he worked in a mine there, and had a cave in and it crushed his feet so the rest of his life he wore, his right shoe on left foot and the other on the right.

**JB** I'll be darned. [21.15] Did he come back here to Fayston?

**GL** Yeah. Yeah. Well, up to Waitsfield. Way way up. Up in back. Yup. And, but that one I remembered, he used to sing that, but that's the kind of, I guess they sang up in the Yukon you know.

FOLK/HISTORY: AMERICAN TRADITIONS AND THE STUDY OF HISTORY, 1900-PRESENT  
– HANDOUT 3

---

**Guy Livingston's Performance- "The Devil and the Farmer's Wife"**

Oh, it shows that women are better than men, onodemonomeyralley.

It shows that women are better than men, onodemonomeyralley.

It shows that women are better than men, they can go through hell and back again

With a right leg, left leg, upper leg, under leg, onodemonomeyralley.

**Child Ballad #278- "The Farmer's Cursed Wife" (The English and Scottish Popular Ballads 1882-1898)**

*Version A-* I have been a tormentor the whole of my life,  
But I neer was tormented so as with your wife.

*Version B-* O what to do wi her I canna weel tell;  
She's no fit for heaven, and she'll no bide in hell.

**Variant- "Killyburn Brae" (The Dubliners)**

Which proves that the women are worse than the men - Riful, riful, tidi foldey

Which proves that the women are worse than the men

When they go down to hell they are thrown out again.

---

<sup>i</sup> Although the content of the "Assignments" and "Grading and Evaluation" section is unique to this course, some of the language and structure of these sections has been adopted and modified from the WR100-150 syllabus template created by Joseph Bizup at Boston University's College of Arts and Sciences Writing Center.