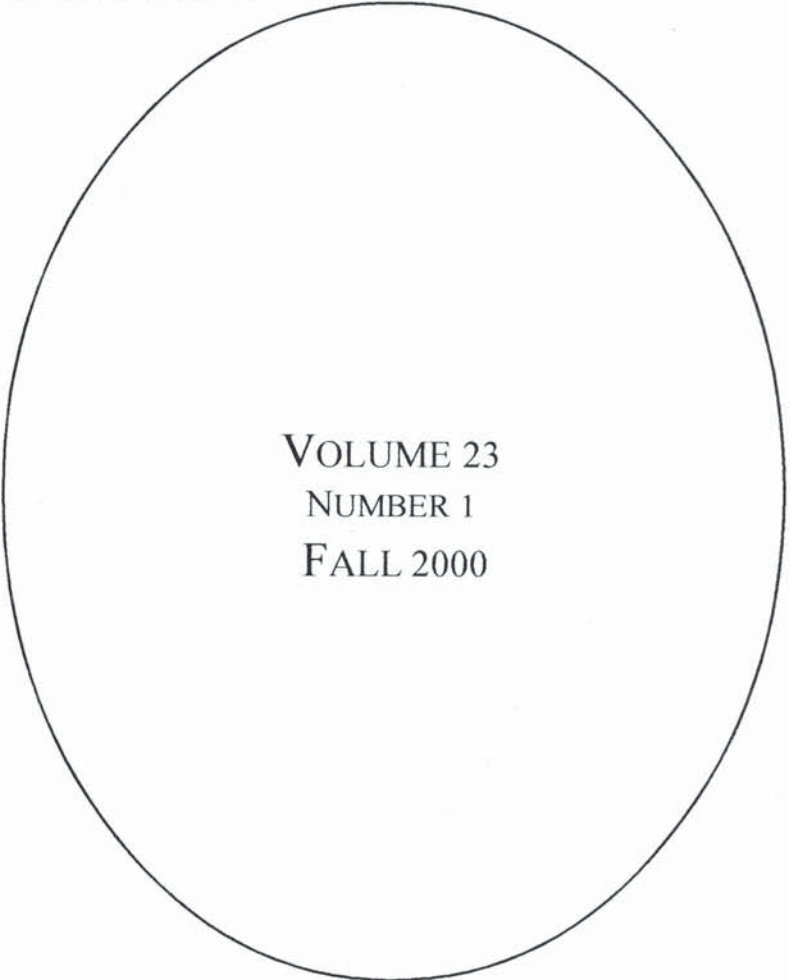


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ON THE COVER: REPRODUCTION OF THE COVER OF W.W. NEWELL'S
GAMES AND SONGS OF AMERICAN CHILDREN.

FROM THE EDITOR

I am sitting here, writing this, in anticipation of another hurricane season in eastern North Carolina. That's not the worst of it, however; just a week ago, the first full week in June, I bulk mailed the spring 2000 issue of *CFR* out to the USA addresses, and the ones that must be mailed to non-USA addresses are still on the work table to my right. I am obviously behind on the spring issue and, at this point (it won't last, of course) ahead on the fall one.

I am pleased to be publishing Jay Mechling's "Don't Play with Your Food" in this issue. Jay is one of the founding members of the Children's Folklore Section and is always both interesting and informative whether speaking at a conference or writing for publication. In this case, he takes a well-known phrase, "Don't play with your food," and examines it in its cultural contexts. The second essay, "'Unaware to her Ears': When the Storyteller Cannot Speak," from regular contributor, Elizabeth Wein, is a fascinating look at traditional narration in a very non-traditional context. There are some interesting connections that could be made between Wein's essay and JoAnn Conrad's "Bedtime Stories" in *CFR* 21.1 (1998): 43-53. Rounding out this volume is some commentary about "truce terms" gleaned from the e-mail network established by Julia C. Bishop, National Centre for English Cultural Tradition, University of Sheffield.

There will be a Children's Folklore Section sponsored session, "'The Monstrous Child': Folklore Responds to Columbine and Adolescence," at the AFS meetings in Columbus, October 2000, and we will also have the section meeting there—again, an early morning meeting.

Please do two things. One, send your articles to *CFR*; we are always looking for materials, and we don't have that large a backlog. Two, have your libraries subscribe; the rate is the same for them—\$10.00 per year—as it is for individual subscriptions. It's a good deal.

See you in Columbus.

DON'T PLAY WITH YOUR FOOD

JAY MECHLING

Is there a person alive who hasn't been told at some time, "Don't play with your food"? If eating is a human universal and if play is a human universal, then playing with food very likely is a human universal. I have not scoured the ethnographic literature for evidence of this claim, though the scarcity of references to playing with food in the work of anthropologists and other ethnographers could mean no more than the fact that playing with food is one of those everyday, mundane experiences that ethnographers fail to record and report. Playing with food hits the triviality barrier (Sutton-Smith, "Psychology of Childlore" 1-8).

Perhaps its very triviality recommends food play to our attention. The topic, of course, lies at the intersection of two very powerful human practices—eating and playing—so it would be surprising, indeed, if this inquiry did not arrive at some nontrivial observations. My aim in this essay is to begin mapping the territory called "playing with food," both for folklorists and for the interdisciplinary field called "play studies." I focus here on children's playing with food, but the discussion necessarily leads me to considering the continuities between children's and adults' play with food. Folklorists of children's cultures long ago had to deal with the question, "when does childhood end?" For good reasons we became comfortable with defining children's folklore as including the folklore of adolescence, and since that folklore continues through college age, folklorists of children find themselves slipping into the study of the folklore of young adults.

Playing with food has received some unsystematic attention, and a goal of this essay is to draw more attention to the phenomenon and to link some previously unconnected ideas. Toward those ends, I shall first review briefly the theoretical perspectives that underlie this inquiry and then offer the beginnings of a mapping of children's food play. I close the essay with a discussion of the diverse meanings and functions of playing with food, favoring Sutton-Smith's model of play as a form of "adaptive variability" (*Ambiguity of Play*). First, though, we need some theory.

The Eating Body, the Playing Body

Over the past two decades, at least, culture critics have found it very productive to begin with the human body as a complex, polysemic "text" for understanding how we inscribe social and cultural concerns onto the body. As Mary Douglas puts it, we are always studying "the two bodies," the "body" that is the society and the "body" that a human possesses. The human body works as a very apt model of the society. The body is a bounded system, with clear zones "outside" and "inside" its boundaries. Since the body is a system, change in one part of the system affects every other part. Moreover, there are things that pass across these boundaries. Air, food, drink, mother's milk, and other non-food materials—usually labeled "dirt"—cross the boundary from outside to inside, and a number of materials (urine, feces, milk, semen, menstrual blood, non-menstrual blood, saliva, tears, sweat, snot, flatulence, and some minor excreta) cross the boundary from inside to outside. Gaps in the boundaries, the "holes" in our bodies where things cross over in one direction or another, are liminal zones, hence dangerous. Cultures "police" these zones, creating elaborate rules surrounding what materials can flow where and how those materials and movements must be done so as to minimize the danger. Thus, societies have taboos (or, at least, approved preferences) regarding food, drink, and other materials passing into the body, just as they have taboos and other rules or practices handling the danger of the excreta.

We tend to create metaphors around the body, we tend to make metaphors about the society (the "social body"), and—most important—we tend to carry these metaphors from one realm to the other. Many of our everyday metaphors and commonsense understandings are based in our experiences of and with our bodies (Lakoff and Johnson). When we think about our bodies and talk about our bodies we often are thinking and talking about our society, and the metaphors we use in the one realm (e.g., binary oppositions such as CLEAN/DIRTY, GOOD/BAD, MORAL/IMMORAL, SAFE/DANGEROUS) often bleed into the other. This way of thinking about the "two bodies" that are always with us makes food a powerful, universal symbol.

The child's body works as an especially powerful, condensed symbol of the society for adults because we project so many of our own fears and anxieties on children. Put differently, children's bodies become in our public discourse the site for a great many ideological struggles, including such diverse issues as abortion, animal rights, violence, drugs, and "values." Children's bodies become another site of struggle when children resist the power of adults. The struggle begins early and over precisely the danger zones mentioned above—that is, over adults' attempts to control the child's body by socializing its eating, urinating, and defecating. Later, of course, the struggle over the child's body moves on to limiting movements, clothing style, hair, body ornamentation, smoking, ingesting drugs, sexual activities, and the like. I shall have more to say about the struggle over food, below, but for now let us recognize simply that the child's body carries a great deal of symbolic weight in adult discourse.

As our collective strategy for bringing order and meaning to our lives, culture handles dangerous materials like food in two related ways—through ritual and through play. The ritual strategies aim to tame and domesticate the dangerous material, sometimes through avoidance altogether and sometimes through ritual treatment and transformation of the dangerous material (Babcock-Abrahams 167–81). Our food taboo against eating dogs and the centrality of the bread in the Christian Eucharist exemplify the two strategies.

But playing with a dangerous substance is just as common a human strategy for taming a substance's power, and from a sociobiological point of view play certainly precedes ritual. From the sociobiological perspective, playing with food can be dangerous. As in all play, valuable calories are being expended and defensive attention is distracted during the play with food, but ethnologists are discovering, nonetheless, that a wide range of animals play with their food, and sometimes in extremely cruel ways (DeLong NP). Human play with food may require abundance, for it is a luxury to take the chance of "wasting" food during play.

Play certainly precedes ritual in the case of children, and the clash between the moods of ritual and of play are no more salient than in the adult's injunction to the child, "Don't play with your food!" Gregory Bateson would have been able to do so much with

that injunction; it touches on so many issues that interested him, from the nature of play to the role of the double-bind in communication. Later I want to "Gregory" that injunction (as his daughter, Mary Catherine Bateson, calls the process of engaging in the thought experiment of wondering how her father would think about some puzzle). In what follows I take a Batesonian approach to play. The essence of play lies in the paradox of its special, framing metamessage: "This is play." That metamessage governs the meanings of the various communications (messages) exchanged within the play frame. But, says Bateson, we face "two peculiarities of play: (a) that the messages or signals exchanged in play are in a certain sense untrue or not meant; and (b) that that which is denoted by these signals is nonexistent" (Bateson 183). As Bateson says, using an animal playfight as his example, "the playful nip denotes the bite, but it does not denote what would be denoted by the bite" (Bateson 180). Several decades' worth of play research (plus Erving Goffman's *Frame Analysis*) have helped us refine the Batesonian approach to play, keeping the fundamental notion of frame (and message and metamessage), but also paying more attention to power (and especially to its inequalities in a frame) than did Bateson. Goffman sees all social reality as a confidence game, so with Goffman any romantic notion about the voluntariness of and the experience of equality in the play frame must be suspect forever.

The injunction, "Don't play with your food!", immediately sets up a power struggle over the definition of the human activity immediately preceding the injunction. The adult is trying to bring order—one might even say ritual order—to the dangerous activity of eating, while the child is doing, well, doing what? The injunction is not technically a double-bind communication, but there is plenty of ambiguity here. What constitutes "playing" with your food? For the child, the operational definition becomes clear; playing with your food is what you are doing just before the adult says, "Don't play with your food!" But the adults are also pushing their food around on their plates, and they manipulated and transformed the food in preparing it for the table. What is so dangerous and wrong about playing with your food?

Playing with Food: A Map of the Territory

Based on my own experience, my lengthy ethnographic work with a troop of Boy Scouts, some collecting of food play accounts from my students and colleagues, some scholarly attention to children's foodplay, and mass mediated accounts of playing with food, I shall survey here some of the various ways children, adolescents, and young adults play with food. Later, I attempt to answer the more difficult "Why?" question. I confess at the outset that I had planned on creating a tidy "typology" of types of foodplay for this descriptive section, but the list got messier and messier, which might be an important point about the ways play with food invades all sorts of categories of play.

Let us begin with the individual. The play can begin in our imaginations, as John Caughey and others have taught us. We can dream about food, we can daydream about food, we can anticipate food in our mind's eye, and if we are hungry enough we can experience hallucinations about food; from a Batesonian perspective these dreams and fantasies have a family resemblance to play. These sorts of imaginings might not quite count as play, but (keeping in mind Bateson's family resemblance point) it is only a short step to imaging food as part of imaginative play, as in a child's tea party where the table and china are there but the tea and cookies must be imagined (well, the hot tea, anyway, but other fluids can be substituted for real tea and the cookies can be real). Eating is a common activity in the imaginative play of children, alone or in groups.

The food in imaginary play can be more material than imaginary, as children typically convert some materials in their play space into other objects (Bronner 251-71). Children play with food through the proxy materials of clay, mud, blocks (converted into cakes), and more. Our older grandson at age three loved to play that a string of colorful plastic Mardi Gras beads coiled and piled were a birthday cake, which we would sing over and then pretend to "cut" into servings. Slowly, commercial culture created for kids catches up with such children's folk play, marketing manufactured plastic play food, cooking utensils, and ranges to add adult-desirable "realism" to the play with food. We thought we had found the perfect present for our grandson when we bought him a plastic

birthday cake with a plastic knife to "cut" the cake into the four quarters held together by Velcro, but somehow that toy cake never held the fascination and pleasure of the pile of Mardi Gras beads that had become, in his imagination, a birthday cake.

The "Easy Bake" oven appeared in the 1950s and revolutionized one sort of children's imaginary play with food; now the child (a girl, of course) could actually bake small cakes and cupcakes in this oven heated by a common electric light bulb. The Easy Bake oven has been a toy hit for 40 years, even though it represents the typical adult, commercial impulse to move children's imaginary play from the truly imaginary to the "real." Plastic food replaces the wooden block that could be a hamburger in the imagination, real cupcakes from the Easy Bake oven replace the imaginary cakes served with imaginary tea. Still, the children manage to survive this attempt by adults to control and channel the imagination, and the resilient child is perfectly comfortable moving from one level of the imaginary/real to the other, often converting the "real" thing into a new imaginary one, as when the plastic porkchop becomes a handgun.

So imaginary play with food is the first large category of foodplay. But children also play with "real" food. Our first experiences with manipulating food occurs very early, as it has been observed that children can play with the breast's nipple. Certainly the introduction of solid food into the infant's diet presents the occasion for playing with the food—that is, for using the food for purposes other than its instrumental purpose of nutrition. Children play with feces, food, and dirt (even if it comes in the sanitized version of Play-Doh), and a Freudian viewpoint added to Bateson would see these as variations on the single play with feces and the issue of mastery (Freud, 168–75). Playing with food, moving it from order to disorder and back to order, is part of a larger set of developmental themes in children's lives. Eventually, the acquisition of language leads to children's speech play with the names of food, such as "bug juice" for the Kool-Aid served at camps and schools (Opie and Opie 162–67).

Individual children sometimes play with food by altering it to resemble something else. Biting a piece of bread into the shape of a toy gun or chewing eye holes and holes for the nose and mouth in a piece of bologna to wear it as a mask transform the food into

something else, and then the transformed object gets consumed. Children learn from peers the different ways to eat an Oreo cookie, which might include biting the circle into the form of a square. Mashed potatoes and gravy on the plate become erupting volcanoes, and eating a cup of ice cream can be turned into the excavation of a construction site. Bronner highlights this fundamental customary behavior by children, the manipulation of objects and their imaginative transformation into something else. Ethnographers do report some of this play with food objects, as in Smith's example of the child who carries a banana around as her "baby" and the creation of mud "bananas." The use of foodstuffs (usually "raw" as opposed to "cooked") is an important sort of children's play with food, but note that in many cases this is not "real" eating, that is, there is no danger here surrounding food's passing from the outside to the inside; nor is there much danger of "wasting" the food. The stakes get higher the closer we get to eating.

By the way, adults have found a clever way of trying to socialize even this sort of play with food. As in other areas of children's folklore, the adults have appropriated the folklore and commodified it, turning it into a product to be sold back to the kids. Adults have created children's cookbooks with instructions for transforming familiar food into something else, including "gross" something else (Porter; Elffers), and adults have marketed kits for children to bake cakes with gummy worms and other "gross" things in them.

Children's play with food can be very social. Food makes a wonderful prop in the "improvisational performance" we see in children's imaginative play (Sawyer). Reifel's look at play in a school cafeteria and Holmes's study of play during a kindergarten snacktime show how the framed setting of a meal or snack can induce several sorts of play, including some play with the food itself. Sharing food is an important gesture in the ecology of the child's friendship group, but so is refusing to share.

Humans sometimes play with food with their pets. I reported several sorts of food play with pets in my essay ("Banana Cannon" 312-23) arguing that the "folk dyad" can consist of a human and a non-human animal, and children quite often include pets in their imaginary and real play with food.

Children and adolescents also practice dirty, forbidden, "dark" play with food. Sutton-Smith and Kelly-Byrne, Gary Alan Fine, and others alert us to the range of play that we might call dark, dirty, forbidden. Playing with "disgust" is an important form of children's forbidden play with food. Folklorists are quite accustomed to understanding the role of disgust ("that's gross") in children's folklore. Sometimes other children are the audience for the disgusting performance, and one paradox of this play is that the child is both disgusted and delighted by the performance. Consider the food=pus equation in some children's play with food. Pubescents and early adolescents play by filling the mouth with mashed potatoes and pushing with both hands on the cheeks so that the potatoes extrude from the pursed lips like a pimple (a "zit" in teen parlance) being popped. At the Boy Scout camp I have studied for many years, a variant of the P, B & J (peanut butter and jelly) sandwich is the P, B & P (peanut butter and pus, that is, mayonnaise) sandwich. Sociobiological and functionalist explanations of disgust do not quite explain disgust as a human response to some foods; as Jones points out, disgust also has aesthetic and moral dimensions, a point to which we shall return below.

Stealing food can be a form of play. When prompted, college students will offer stories about ways to steal a roommate's food without the roommate's knowledge, such as drawing a spoon across the peanut butter or ice cream in precisely the pattern one found the surface. The famous game of "banana time" recounted by Donald Roy, after all, involved the stylized "stealing" of one worker's banana by another, a much more public and stylized version of the play of stealing another's food. Children and adolescents are capable of the same sort of stylized stealing of food as part of a game or practical joke.

Practical jokes involving food can be played within the play frame, or the play frame of the practical joke can be used to "mask" real aggression (Sutton-Smith and Kelly-Byrne). Jorgensen's essay on children's pranks and teases mentions a few practical jokes involving food, but anyone who has spent time watching children and, especially, adolescents taking meals together can provide more examples. Unscrewing the top of a salt or sugar shaker, replacing salt with sugar, and more elaborate practical jokes assault people

by violating their taken-for-granted frame for the proper food in its proper place. The meanings of this play, again, depend entirely on the frame. If the participants have a high-context relationship that includes "permission to joke," then the prank reinforces the metamessage about the relationship between the participants. How one takes a practical joke is a test of group membership. The practical joking can escalate, sometimes into a full foodfight.

Large foodfights in public places are a form of forbidden play. School cafeterias, camp dining halls, and college residence halls can be the sites for foodfights. Of course, like any framed playfighting, foodfights can break frame and turn nasty. Contrary to the gospel according to the Three Stooges, foodfights may be more common in private, dyadic relationships than in larger groups of near strangers. These more private, intimate foodfights do not count as forbidden play because the metamessage of the play frame confirms a close, trusting relationship.

The dyadic foodfight can slip into erotic play. The spontaneous foodfight that gathers momentum in the cafe kitchen scene in the film, *Fried Green Tomatoes* is intensely erotic, and there are a few other instances of erotic foodfights in film. Actually, erotic play with food can begin solo. Ever since Philip Roth's character, Portnoy, had that beef liver on the end of his penis in the afternoon and at the end of his fork for dinner, it was been acceptable to talk about solitary erotic play with food. Boys learn to masturbate with a variety of food items; there is nothing as fertile as the imagination of a horny adolescent boy in search of a slippery substance. Boys masturbate with meat, with banana peels, and with melons. Food products double as a penis for the masturbation by girls and, in some circumstance, by boys. Carrots and cucumbers present themselves as suitable tools, but bananas have qualities that make them more suitably symbolic penises than actual dildoes. Sausages draw our attention, and folk speech recognizes the metaphoric equivalencies, through such euphemisms as "stuff the sausage" and "hide the salami." Dyads might have their own erotic play with food, extending the repertoire from carrots and liver to chocolate syrup, whipped cream, honey, pudding, ice cream, and so on. There is a theme here making a metaphorical equivalence between sex and dessert, and the polysemic uses of the term "hunger" cross the realms of food, sex, and commodity consumption.

Sugar and chocolate, especially, have traditional associations with love, romance, and sex (Mechling and Mechling 19–32).

The examples so far have been of “dirty” or “forbidden” play with food. What of “dark play” with food, play that puts the players in danger? Young children probably do not engage in dark play, but teenagers can and do seek the thrill of dark play with food. Mushroom hunting carries danger, as does a diabetic’s eating chocolate cake. Eating disorders are perhaps the best known examples of dangerous play with food. Many would not want to call these pathologies “play,” but I see no reason to pull back from that attribution. Eating disorders are not solitary play in one sense; some practices (such as the bulimic’s self-induced vomiting) might be very private, but there is always an “audience” for the result, which is “thinness” (Bordo; Hesse-Biber).

I cannot claim to have created, here an exhaustive list of play with food. I have meant merely to suggest the range of sorts of play, and I count on the reader and future researchers to provide more examples prompted by my list. Far more important to the enterprise of using children’s folklore and customary behavior to understand their lives is the interpretive move. We see that children and adolescents play with food in a number of ways. Now we must ask, “why?”

Don’t Play with your Food!

As I promised, I now want to return to the injunction with which this essay began and “Gregory” that command. I shall draw from Bateson’s work, but also from Sutton-Smith’s recent work on the “rhetorics of play”—namely, rhetorics of play as progress, as fate, as power, as identity, as the imaginary, as about the self, and as frivolous. Sutton-Smith seeks to uncover and warn us about the ideological package we are accepting when we use each rhetoric to talk about play, and he provides a way of thinking about play that I find promising in thinking about foodplay (*Ambiguity of Play*).

Why do children play with food, and why do parents in our society admonish children, “Don’t play with your food”? Let’s begin with the children’s play.

The sociobiological, functionalist explanation of foodplay

doesn't seem to have much to recommend it. It is difficult to imagine a satisfactory sociobiological explanation for playing with food, yet many mammals do it. Indeed, why would taking risks (like waste) with food have any evolutionary advantage? In much of the play with food, some food is lost to consumption altogether. Animal play theorists used to focus on flexibility, on the ability of play to create a repertoire of responses to the environment, in this explanation of the functions of play. Perhaps children's playing with food is anticipatory socialization for the adult activities of preparing food for consumption. But that seems like a very risky use of food for training the child. As Sutton-Smith observes, Fagen and other leading theorists on play are now giving more power to "the role of aesthetic factors in evolution" (*Ambiguity of Play* 34). Searching for developmental or evolutionary functions of food play, therefore, must conclude that we are in the presence of expressive, rather than instrumental behavior.

If children's foodplay is expressive behavior, then we need to understand the "pleasures" involved in playing with food. The play theories employing a rhetoric of "the self in play," explains Sutton-Smith, favor "the psychology of the individual player," purposely ignoring the social aspects of play (*Ambiguity of Play* 173). Of course, as Sutton-Smith notes, this perspective is, itself, a product of social and historical forces, such as the individualism, secularization, commodification, and psychologization of our modern period. This approach would have us focus on the experience of playing with food, on how the play delivers "fun," perhaps the experience of "flow" coined and studied by Csikszentmihalyi and his colleagues. The problem is that children (and teenagers, for that matter) are notoriously poor at being able to describe why something is "fun." It would take very ingenious questioning for the folklorist to discover, for example, why it is "fun" to mix the rice and peas on your plate, or bite off the bottom of a sugar cone and suck the melting ice cream from the bottom of the cone. "Fun" often derives from the juxtaposition of "sense" and "nonsense," so that taking the "commonsensical" way of eating food and disrupting the ordinary into some form of nonsense complicates the meaning of the act of eating. The nonsense might actually reinforce the legitimacy of the common sense, just as cheating paradoxically strengthens belief in the legitimacy of the game frame,

but even that function does not lessen the impact of the transgressive "frivolity" (another rhetoric of play examined by Sutton-Smith) of the play.

Some of the child's pleasure in expressive food play derives from its social nature. Folklorists and others who study the foodways of high context communities usually view play with food as a form of discourse about identity. We see food as a powerful symbolic element in a performance of its identity. The very fact that the participants establish and maintain a frame communicates to them something about their relationship. There is an implied intimacy in eating together, an act even more intimate than conversing (we can "make nice" with strangers or with people we dislike, but eat with them?). Maybe this intimacy and implied trust are products of the danger of the activity, that is, the danger of having food and drink cross our body boundaries. In any case, a group's using a shared meal as a signal of identity builds on this frame of trust and intimacy. Foodways are among the last things to disappear as ethnic groups become assimilated, so powerful is food as an ethnic marker. Family gatherings and celebrations, festivals, holidays, and other stylized performances of identity almost require the appropriate food. Children understand this use of eating from a very early age.

Children also learn how the consumption of food can be part of the performance of identity. Certainly children learn the role of food in family, ethnic, and other group identities, but I mean here the use of food to mark the distinction between child and adult. Children take some pride and pleasure in performing their identities as children distinct from adults. Some foods are childish, approved as such by adults. This happens on the folk level at the family table, but it is also evident in the commercial culture of commodities. Children constitute a market, and a stroll through the grocery store will enlighten even the most unobservant adult to what degree children are a market segment for distinct foods. These are the foods advertised on children's television—consume these programs, consume these advertised toys, consume these foods, consume these foods to get these toys.

We see, then, that the child can find multiple pleasures in playing with food. The drives impelling the foodplay are part psychological and part cultural in some combination we still can't quite

sort out. We know that children will play with food under just about any circumstance, just as we know that the adult caretakers will often issue the injunction: "Don't play with your food!" Why do those adults do that?

Adults send mixed messages about whether they want children to take food "seriously." On the one hand, most adult caretakers usually take seriously their responsibility for the child's health, which includes making sure the child eats "healthy" food. But adults tend to go beyond the pure biological necessity of eating and tend in our culture to turn food into a fetish; that is to say, adults place a symbolic value on food far beyond its real value to the health of the child. Like toys (Sutton-Smith, *Toys as Culture*), food is a "gift" that bears many messages, including "I love you." Parents of all social classes use food as rewards and punishments, just as some parents use the giving and withholding of love as reward and punishment. Adult caretakers attempt to socialize the child by bringing seemingly arbitrary order to the act of eating. The rules of eating must seem to the child to emerge very slowly and unsystematically. Sit here when you eat; sit up straight when you eat; want to see "restaurant behavior"; use your fork, not your fingers; don't blow bubbles in your milk; chew with your mouth closed; I know you're hungry but it's not dinnertime yet (we eat according to the clock, not the sensation of hunger); we eat dessert after we've eaten the meal; eat that outside; don't play with your food.

Children understand quickly the fetish value of food, so they understand quickly the value of food as a resource for taking power in a social situation. Parents can give and withhold food treats, but you can't make a child eat. To "take food seriously," as so much communication from the adults seems to suggest, is to make food the center of a power struggle between child and adult, with consequences ranging from the minor to extreme eating disorders.

With each other as the audience for the performance of disgusting eating, children are playing with power. They are playing with the power of the eating, they are playing with the power to disgust another person, and they are playing with the power of dark or dangerous play. When adults are the intended audience for the child's performance of disgusting behavior with food, the child most likely intends to shock the sensibilities (nice word) of

the adults, one of the few ways children can have any power over adults. Disgusting play with food, in these cases, serves as a move in what Sutton-Smith calls the "antithetical" nature of children's play, whereby the child resists, undermines, subverts, and otherwise works against the adult versions of reality, propriety, and order.

I said that adults send mixed messages. If the first is to take food "seriously," the second is that it is good to play with your food. Adults "play" with food all the time with and in the presence of children. Cooking and other ways of manipulating food can resemble play. Adults commonly link play and "creativity" in their talking with children about an assortment of activities, and some of these activities include preparing and serving food. Apparently the play is to end with the presentation of the food, and the task of getting the food from the plate to the mouth should be purely instrumental. And then a child watches an adult eat a lobster. Mixed messages.

Play with Your Food!

Sutton-Smith declines to offer a definition of play. Although he finds defects in each of the seven rhetorics he examines, he assures us that each also tells some truths about play, that the best we might hope for is that a "melange of metaphors" might point toward "the possibility of a truth yet to be discovered" (*Ambiguity of Play* 218). He favors an understanding of play variability as analogous to the notion of "adaptive variability" to be found in evolutionary theory and in recent developments in cognitive science (*Ambiguity of Play* 229-30), and I think Bateson would approve of working on a consilience between understanding biological systems (like the brain) and social systems like play.

It was reading Stephen Jay Gould's *Full House*, by Sutton-Smith's account, that led him to see a parallel between the three basic principles of evolutionary variability—quirkiness, redundancy, and flexibility—and the basic qualities of play (*Ambiguity of Play* 222-23). Evolution, as any reader of Gould's essays and books knows by now, does not necessarily progress. Some adaptations work out splendidly; some create monsters or lead to extinction. There is no way of knowing in advance what traits will

be needed for survival and reproduction. Thus, natural selection creates the circumstances favoring variability as the best hedge against future exigencies.

From Gould's principles of evolutionary variability and from recent research in brain science, Sutton-Smith reasons that play—as quirky, redundant, and flexible as it is—may provide a relatively safe model for the challenges we humans face every day, from our needs for food and shelter to our complex needs for sociality. In short, play “may be an invention meant to model such natural selection processes” (*Ambiguity of Play* 229). The higher developed play in humans (as opposed to the lower order play of animals) thus “engenders variable contingencies” (uncertainties and risks) for the purpose exercising selective control over them in fictive and factual terms. “Play” is a mastery process, (as Erikson said) “creatively derived from the exigencies of the evolutionary predicament” (*Ambiguity of Play* 229). Of course, Sutton-Smith recognizes that this evolutionary explanation for the origins and our continuing embrace of play provides only the substrata for the other qualities of play that make it so interesting and human—its “metacommunicative and perhaps even its structural dialectics” (*Ambiguity of Play* 230). So much of play's adaptive variability is accidental; but in many cases it is a lovely accident.

Where does this leave us with thinking about play with food? I see at least two ways in which playing with food might provide the materials of adaptive variability that keep it energized. First, play with food keeps all options open. Humans are born remarkably “world open” (Berger and Luckmann), capable of a range of behavior far more variable than any society settles into. Culture narrows our options, socializing us into eating certain foods, avoiding others, and using these differences as symbolic categories. Play with food, as I see it, resists this narrowing by culture. American children don't eat real worms; they eat gummy worms. But they could eat real worms, or beetles, or ants. Play with food deconstructs it, destroys its cultural shaping, returns it to something primordial, only to be shaped again by the player.

Second, I believe that my examples of play with food demonstrate that the evolution of culture has demanded that we have an aesthetic dimension to our manipulating and consuming food. As Sutton-Smith notes, this seems to be the direction of theories about

animal play, and it makes good sense to understand our childish playing with food as productive experimentation with what is pleasing to our eyes, noses, touch, and taste. Play with food is usually "about" aesthetics. Playing with food exercises those aesthetic relationships with food. Even the simplest food can be "beautiful" or "nice" by folk aesthetic standards.

Like Sutton-Smith, I am reluctant to declare that there is one core meaning to human play with food. Our play with food is very contextual. I think it also may provide some very functional "adaptive variability," and I have suggested two ways that playing with food helps maintain the quirkiness, redundancy, and flexibility we need for dealing with this most important and most powerful material. Ultimately, I favor the "melange of metaphors" approach to understanding food play; it describes fairly the polysemy of play. Aesthetic playing with food is a quintessentially human activity, and I hope this essay has convinced more than a few adult readers that children's playing with food is (as Martha Stewart says) "a good thing."

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"UNAWARE TO HER EARS":
WHEN THE STORYTELLER CANNOT SPEAK
ELIZABETH E. WEIN

Jared Wein, a young man who is under continual nursing care in a rehabilitation facility in Philadelphia, is diagnosed as a spastic quadriplegic. He suffered a severe head injury in an automobile accident that occurred over twenty years ago and, as a consequence, has very little motor control. The effects of his injury are continually fascinating; most of the damage was to his left brain, and consequently it is the right side of his body and those left brain-oriented activities that are most impaired. His right brain seems to function as if it were intact; he remains creative and sensitive. He can remember and recognize people from both his present and his past, and is continually constructing fantasy worlds and possibilities for himself, while he is often unable to remember simple mathematical functions or even what year it is. Though he is able to vocalize at will he cannot talk, and communicates by pointing to letters written on a board or else by typing messages on an electronic communicator. And though the only limb he has control over is his left arm, Jared is able to express his needs and desires in a way that is both articulate and inventive.

Jared's "stories" are typical of his creativity. His case is unique; he was injured when he was eleven, was in a coma for a year, and basically has "learned" very little since that time. Both his short-term memory and his attention span are very poor, and although he was twenty-one when these tales were collected (1987-88), his interests and tastes were, and are, generally those of an adolescent or eleven-year-old. He was still attending high school when these stories were recorded, and his peers were generally in their teens. Many of the disabled, particularly the mentally disabled, do in a way "lose" their adulthood—their disabilities and the attention they command makes them childlike. Because of Jared's short attention span, Jared's tales, when compared with the stories in Brian Sutton-Smith's *The Folkstories of Children*, are usually no more consistent or structured than those of a four-year-old. Yet Jared has inevitably picked up pieces of information since his accident, and inevitably matured in his own way (he graduated from high school in 1989—with a real diploma, not merely a certificate

of completion). The stories Jared told at twenty-one reflected his present condition, but were usually closely related to his past.

What is remarkable about Jared's stories is that, despite his inability to actually speak, he manages to make use of as many paralinguistic devices as are available to him. When spelling out a story to a "listener," Jared can yell wordlessly, moan, laugh or pretend to cry depending on what is called for in the context of his story (this is still true today). He also makes use of gestures, imitating actions to the best of his ability (such as drinking or sleeping), rolling his eyes, raising his eyebrows, smiling, frowning, grimacing, etc. But most interesting of all, since Jared is unable to use his words orally and cannot use modulations in his voice to shape the meaning of those words, he has developed an elaborate system of punctuation. Punctuation is the most important dramatization device that is available to him. His spelling boards are outfitted with the usual periods, commas and quotation marks that are commonly used in written language, and his various electronic communication devices are also equipped with dashes, parentheses, asterisks and dollar signs. For some unfathomable reason none of the devices Jared used in 1987 and 1988 were equipped with lower case letters, so that all Jared's written messages were communicated or printed in block capitals. Besides punctuation, Jared also manipulates spelling and the actual position of his words as they are printed out in order to make his messages more expressive.

In preparing Jared's printed stories for presentation, I have edited some obvious mistakes, such as the final letter of a line appearing on the following line of text. The spelling "errors" (which are often purposeful) I have not changed. Where the story is printed (Jared's communicator printed on a strip of paper similar to a cash register tape), I have maintained the position of the words as they appear on the tape.

I have collected stories from Jared using both his electronic communicator and his spelling board. The two experiences can be very different. When he is using his communicator, it is difficult to see what Jared is saying, because the keys are very small and because he constantly backs up and changes or corrects what he has already written. Thus, when he is using his communicator, the "listener" or "audience" finds it easiest to wait until he has printed

out the message, then read it out loud to Jared, as if repeating what Jared has said—much the same way a listener reinforces a story told by a small child. During this reiteration, Jared adds appropriate gestures, noises and facial expressions—or, as is sometimes the case, he is so overwhelmed by his own wit that he can do nothing but laugh as the message is read to him.

These are typical examples of Jared's printed stories:

- (1) "JARED WEIN, A NORMAL,
AVERAGE TEENAGER
WAS LIEING ON HIS
SOFA, LEFT TO GRANDMA
WHEN HIS SISTER
COMES HOME FROM SCHOOL
...

NOW, RIGHT THEN,
THE DOOR STARTS TO
SHUFFLE! -UNAWARE TO
HER EARS, AS IT WAS,
...

-THE TWILIGHT ZONE

- (2) "NOT TOO LONG AGO,
IN A CHARITY WITH
MANY PLANETS CIRCLING
AROUND IN IT, AND
IN THE MANY-PLANETS
WERE MANY ◇◇A' SHRUB-
BERY◇◇ AND MANY
ANIMALS AND M-A-N-Y,
M-A-N-Y ANIMALS-OF-
LIFES WHICH CONSITTED
OF MOSTLY LIONS, TIGERS,
AND BEARS -OH-MY-

Jared often forgets to close quotations or parenthetical phrases. Careful readers will not miss the references to Monty Python or *The Wizard of Oz*. It takes Jared about fifteen minutes to produce stories of this length.

When Jared is "speaking" directly to a "listener," using an alphabet board, he can add dramatization devices as the story progresses, like any normal storyteller. However, he is more easily distracted and will often lose track of what he has already said. It especially distracts him if someone is writing down what he is saying, because he wants to be able to see the transcription and to make sure his words are being put down exactly as he "said" them. The following is an example of a story session in which Jared was using his alphabet board:

Storytaker: Can you tell me a story?

Jared: WELL, I HAVE (IN THE CLOSE FUTURE) MARRIED
[here Jared grins and pauses for a long time]

Storytaker: Married who?

Jared [grinning]: JESSICA RABBIT.

Jared's grandmother adds: Bill says she's already Roger Rabbit's wife so you can't be married to her, and I say you can't be married to her 'cause she's a 'Toon. Two very good reasons why you can't be married to her.

Jared: WE WENT INTO [he pauses, gazes into the distance, waves and vocalizes: "aannh," gently] THE TOON COUNTRY WHERE YOU CAN MARRY ANYONE, AROUND ANYBODY.

Storytaker: Is that it?

Jared: AND [dreamily raising eyebrows, smiling] WE MET [again raising eyebrows] WHO, BUT ROGER RABBIT.

This exchange took about five minutes.

Because it takes Jared so long to say anything, he is more likely to be interrupted than another person telling a story of the same length. There is constant activity in the halls of the several nursing facilities where Jared has lived since his accident; music is piped through an intercom system. The following story was printed on Jared's electronic communicator:

~DID YOU EVER HEAR
OF

(At this point a nurse came in to give Jared medication.)

WALTER HAMINGFORD?
WELL, WALTER HAMI.
WAS A SELLER-BIRTY [celebrity]
THAT LEAVED OFF

(Here Jared was distracted by operatic marching music on the intercom. He laughed and nodded his head in time to the music.)

IN THE MIDST OF THE
1300'S TOO DUE IN
THE FIVE-TEAN*S...

(Here a tenor aria began on the music system. Jared broke off the story and pretended to sing.)

HE WAS A RUSSIAN, AND
HE WAS GAY!!!

"Is there more?" I asked. Jared rolled his eyes and gestured with a wave of his hand as if to say, "forget it." He was certainly trying to perform; he started off in true form with a pert abbreviation and an awful pun. But the distractions were too great. The performance possibilities of the background music overshadowed the performance possibilities of a disconnected story that was being constantly interrupted.

Left to his own devices, given his electronic communicator and an uninterrupted block of time, Jared can produce coherent and poetic pieces of writing. One afternoon Jared and several others were sitting in the parking lot of the nursing home where they lived at the time; no one was watching Jared as he typed. The slip of paper that bore this passage was about to blow away but was rescued by another resident of the home:

"-THE WORLD IS A JIG-SAW-
PUZZLE, AND ALL OF THE

PEOPLE ARE PIECES TO IT..."

*

-THE UNIVERSE IS A
JUMBO-JIGSAW-PUZZLE
AND ALL OF THE STARS AND
PLANETS ARE THE PIECES
TO THE GAME! -

THINK
ABOUT
IT...

Poetry or philosophy or perhaps a quotation—who knows where or why he came up with that? It is truly remarkable that this comes from the same mind that made up the incoherent story of Walter Hamingford (this fragment is actually about a year older than the story of Walter Hamingford).

There is a series of messages from 1987 that clearly illustrate Jared's storytelling strategies and capabilities. All three of these were produced on his electronic communicator. Before Jared's debilitating accident, he was studying magician's tricks and had given several magic shows at children's birthday parties (recall that he was only eleven when he was injured!). "Merlin the Magician" (or "M.T.M.") is a recent creation, however. "Shipped to the facts" is a corruption of "hip to the facts."

(1)

-BY JARED
WEIN

"OH, YES, N-O-W I'V
GOT MY MAGIC DOWN TO
A QUEW! -FOR TO SEE,
I TRANSFIGURED I WAS
A LITTLE BIT RUSTY AT
MY MAGIC TO GET
SHIPPED TO MY FACTS.
OH, B-U-T I CAN'T
WAIT UNTIL MY MAGIC-
TEACHER COMES!!! OH,
HE'S N-O-T REALLY
MY M.T.! HE'S REALLY

"MERLIN THE MAGICIAN!"

(2)

+I SHOULD HAVE MY
MAGIC...IT'S A DEEP,
DARK SECRET THAT ONLY
TWO KNOW, IN A SECRET
HOUSE! HA, HA, HA,
HA, HA! Z! Z!"

MY MAGIC BY MERLIN,
THAT IS, ALL IS LOST!
LOST, LOST, LOST! Z!
I'M

SO

SAD, SAD, SAD!!!!—!!!
22'S

<THEEE
MAGIC
<THEEE
MAGIC-NUMBER!!!\$\$\$=

(3)

I CAN'T LIVE AT THIS
NURSINGHOME...
-OR, BETTER YET, GO TO
(THIS) PART OF
-WILLIAM PENN SCHOOL!!!-
*I WANT MY MAGICIAN-
SELF, BUT CAN'T!?! -
WHY???

IN OTHER WORDS I CAN'T
"LIVE" AT A NURSINGHOME,
ESPECIALLY THIS 1...
(HEATHERBANK'S THE NAME)

I'M A MAGICIAN, AND
A YOUNG MAGIC-MAN
LIVES WITH ONE-ANOTHER
MAGICIANS!! -GO ASK M.T.M.

These messages illustrate beautifully Jared's use of punctuation and word position. In the first example Jared starts off by signing himself "-BY JARED WEIN," which is a typical way for him to frame his stories. In another example (not quoted here) he finishes, "-BY JARED W." But more typically, Jared introduces a story by asking a question. The following examples were all printed stories, except for the first, which was told on the alphabet board (with frequent bursts of laughter from the storyteller):

(1) "DO YOU KNOW FUT AZMER? WELL, HE'S THE FASTEST, WELLEST BOOK-EDITOR IN WHOLE CHINA. HE CAN RUN A MILE-IN 200 FORLONGS -THAT'S 2 SECONDS ONLY, AMAZING, AIN'T IT!! AT HALF-PAST-SIX, HE BROKE (THE) RECORD* OF KIND, FIND, KIND MOTHER! WICH IS THE BEST, BEST, BEST MOST BESTEST AWARD TO WIN IN THE OLYMPICS SINCE ATOM-...

(2) "DO YOU KNOW THE SEVEN SEEKERS FOR (THE, THE, THE, THE, THE) THE CAVE OF THE DIAMOND!!! WELL, I HAVE AND (AND, AND, AND) I (YOU KNOW ME, JARED WEIN!!!) - WELL, TO GET US UP TO DATE WITH THE CAVE A-N-D THE BLACK-DIAMOND, WE TAKE US TO GLORIANNA WHO IS THE LAST PERSON TO BE REMINING IN THE SGLORIOS-PIT-OF-DOOMS

- (3) "BUT, MY MOMMY IS DEAD!
-YOU SEE? SHE DIED
FROM AN AIREO-PLANE,
OVER BOSTON, MISSOURI
BY BURNING HER FEET
ON THE AIRPORT-RAILS
AS SHE ASKED THE PILOT
IF SHE COULD
(ROLL) HER POOR, DOMESTIC
FEET OUT ON THE RUNWAY!
"YES..." OUR PILOT
REPLIED!
"BUT, DON'T YOU

Unfortunately, this completely fabricated story (Jared's mother died in an automobile accident in 1978) was interrupted by Jared's being taken to dinner. It is virtually impossible to get Jared to continue a story once he has been away from it for longer than half an hour.

- (4) "DID YOU EVER, EVER
HEAR OF AN ORANDIPUS???
- "WELL, TO KEEP
QUITE SERIOS, SUSIE
IS AN ORANDIPUS! AN
ORANDIPUS IS ANY
SORT OF CREATURE
THAT JUST STAYS IN
- ONE PLACE AND FUSS -

The "Orandipus" story contains two important keys to performance that Jared regularly uses in his stories. One is the opening quotation mark (often never closed); the other is rhyme. The final examples collected from Jared during 1987-1988 resemble poems rather than stories:

WEIN

(1)

“NOW, I S-H-I-T AND
MISHELLE PELLIS IS
GONNA’ COME SEE ME!”

WHAT’LL I DO???
- BESIDES POO...
WELL, WELL, WELL!
(SHE’S RICH) BUT,
I DON’T KNOW!?!

I
CAN
NOT
THINK
(RIGHT!)

Michelle Pellis was a friend of Jared’s when he was seven years old.

(2)

“WHEN WILL I GO
(WHERE) H-O-M-E?
BACK TO THE HEAVENLY
PLACE THAT EVERYONE
LOVES THEIR OWN!
OH ME, OH MY!!!
-NO NEED FOR ANY
QUESTIONS...

FOR QUESTIONS
AT THE LEAST!!! WHY?

*

WHY, I’M GOING HOME!

.....
“WOW, I’M FLYING UP
AND OUT OF THE FIRE-
PLACE!!!-GOSH-ER-
SNOCKLE-BLIPS!!!”

* * * * *

What is one to make of all this?

For one thing, storytelling—bizarre as Jared's stories may seem—is an important part of Jared's life. He is often left alone for long periods of time and tells stories to himself. He will also begin to tell a story to try to keep a visitor from leaving. It is easy to find psychological roots and reasons for Jared's storytelling; before his injury his creativity had many outlets, and now he is extremely limited in what he can do and in how he can express himself. These stories are an obvious outlet for Jared's creativity.

It is not so easy to analyze Jared's stories in terms of structure and content. According to Gilbert Botvin's structural analysis as cited in Sutton-Smith's *The Folkstories of Children*, the "very youngest children [tell] stories that [are] mainly beginnings and endings" (Sutton-Smith 3); Jared's stories tend to be mainly beginnings, with occasional other elements and few endings. His beginnings are usually plainly marked; he uses a set of what Botvin calls performance "keys" (after Goffman, 1974), including traditional verbal introductions ("Not too long ago . . ."; "Did you ever hear of . . ."; "Do you know . . ."; "Did you ever, ever hear of . . .") and syntactic markers that he has decided will indicate a story (opening quotation marks, the signature "by Jared Wein").

But most of Jared's stories are limited to two types of narrative elements as defined by Botvin. Jared's resolutions are almost consistently a state of "lack not liquidated" ("my magic by Merlin, that is, all is lost!"; "I want my magician-self, but can't!?!"; "What'll I do . . . I can not think (right!)"), and the rest of Jared's stories tend to be filled "non-action elements" such as delineation of character and background information (Sutton-Smith 5) ("he was a Russian, and he was gay . . ."; "He's the fastest, wellest book-editor in whole China"). In the introduction to *The Folkstories of Children*, Sutton-Smith writes: "Without a middle or development section there is very little sense of plot in the stories of the youngest children" (Sutton-Smith 6). This seems true of Jared's stories, but in looking at these "beginnings" one senses that, while a four-year-old could not tell a complete story, given the right conditions Jared could.

Another system used by Sutton-Smith for analyzing children's stories is that of Pierre Maranda and Elli Köngäs-Maranda; but because there is so little plot in Jared's stories, they are not well-

sued to this analysis. When classified in this system Jared's stories are on the lowest level; that is, there is a lack or deprivation to which no response is made. However, in Jared's stories the protagonist (often himself) is questioning his inability to make the required response: "I want my magician-self, but can't!?! Why???" This theme runs throughout Jared's stories and much of his everyday conversation. Unlike the young children who tell Maranda Level 1 stories, Jared is old enough and experienced enough to have learned that sometimes a lack cannot be liquidated; he has learned it both despite and because of his disabilities. Unlike the four-year-old, Jared is aware that not all lacks can be liquidated. But his own life is full of unresolved conflicts and unfulfilled desires, and these are reflected in his stories.

Jared's narratives are a reflection of his mind; they are fragmented, often incoherent, intricate, unfinished, tantalizing. They cannot be analyzed in terms of "normal" narrative structure and content because they are not normal. Yet, in a very normal way, like any other child—or adult, for that matter—Jared tells his stories in order to perform and to communicate. The wilder his syntax and spelling, the more forceful his hold on his audience; the audience is drawn in by his mental gymnastics. He does this on purpose, and he is constantly performing. Often Jared is not speaking directly to an audience; the "world is a jig-saw-puzzle" narrative was nearly lost because no one was watching as he produced it. But Jared does intend these epistles to be read, out loud and often, and he receives great pleasure in hearing them repeated. The performance in Jared's creation of these texts is as clearly intended for himself as for anyone else; he is often quite literally entertaining himself when he tells a story. And finally, Jared is able to exert true mastery and skill in the manipulation of his keyboard and of language. It is the only thing he *can* have mastery over. It is his single true skill, and he makes the most of it.

Epilogue

Since these stories were collected, Jared has acquired a computer. It might seem like the obvious answer to his need, but supplying Jared with the appropriate equipment, software and tutorials have

& CARING SOUL, WHO COULD THINK SMARTLY DUE TO SOME PEOPLE WHO COULD NOT THINK FOR THEMSELVES. HE HAD A MEMORY OF A GREAT MIND LIKE ALBERT EINSTEIN. HE HAD A BRAIN OF A BRILLIANT GROUNDHOG. ALTHOUGH, HE THOUGHT GREAT THOUGHTS HE WAS A SIMPLE DRAGON. HE DID GOOD DEEDS FOR THE CHILDREN OF THE TOWN IN WHICH HE LIVED, GUARDED & PROTECTED. HE WOULD HELP THEM WITH THEIR HOMEWORK, AFTER SCHOOL AND SOMETIMES IN THE MORNING.

OFTEN HE LIKED TO PLAY GAMES WITH THEM TO MAKE THE TIME PASS AWAY FAST ENOUGH SO THAT THEY WOULD BE ON TIME READY FOR SCHOOL.

THE CHILDREN, THEY CATCH AND THROUGH THE BALL WHILE THE DRAGON THREW THE BASES. WHAT A TEAM, WHAT A SIGHT 1 ONE COULD IMAGINE!!

1999

THE GALAXY WAS EMPTY SO ALL THE GODS HAD TO FILL IN EXTRA COMPARTMENTS AND COLORS INTO THE HEAVENS OF PEACE. IT WAS THE HEAVENS OF PEACE BECAUSE THE GOOD LORD OF ANGELS IN THE GALAXY MADE THE GYPIES DANCE AND SING THEIR SONGS AND PLAY THEIR HARPS. THEIR HARPS BROUGHT BEAUTIFUL MELODIES THROUGHOUT THE HEAVENS AND THAT WAS ALL THERE WAS TO LISTEN TO. THE GYPSIES DANCE MADE THE

SKIES SPARKLE WITH MANY
DIFERENT COLORS. THE MÚSIC
CALMED THE HEAVENS AND A RAIN-
BOW APPEARED ACROSS THE AIR
LIKE BUGS-BUNNY HAD ALWAYS SAID
IN HIS CARTOONS “THAT’S ALL
FOLKS.”

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E-CONTRIBUTIONS

Laurie and Winifred Bauer, linguists at Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand, posted a long note which began:

We are two linguists who have begun a study of the playground vocabulary of NZ schoolchildren, with the aim of looking for evidence of regional variation within NZ, and to gather data which may throw light on the interaction between conservative and innovative aspects of children's language.

After a more detailed discussion of their aims and methodology, they offered the following:

One of the items where the data is relatively manageable is truce terms. However, we have had reports of a number of truce terms in NZ which are not reported in material [available to us] on truce terms in other countries. . . . We would love to hear from anyone who has met any of the following truce terms elsewhere: pegs, nibs, flicks (sometimes flix, flixs), gates, bags, taxed, tags, and poison (which the Opies describe as not an "authentic" truce term). We would also be interested to learn whether fans and twigs are known outside those areas of the UK where the Opies report them.

There was considerable response to the Bauers' request. Ruth Wielgosz wrote:

In a state primary school I attended in West London (for the school year 1980-81), the truce term in use was "taxis." Since reading about other truce terms I had assumed that it was a corruption of "paxies." It is probably part of this "taxes/taxed it" trend.

Eve Harwood asked:

Is truce different from a "times" call when players take time out from play to discuss something with the expectation that play will resume?

Or is the truce declared as an ending to play?

A colleague of mine who grew up in Kentucky in the 1950s called this “kings X,” meaning roughly “time out.”

To which Marc Armitage replied:

The answer is yes. It certainly does not signify the end of play or giving in.

Some children do say “time out” but the older terms are more common, and it is interesting to see that your colleague mentions “kings x” because the most common term in use in England is “Kings.” A second term, “Crosses,” comes a close second and in some places, like most of Lincolnshire, the term used is “Cross kings.”

Carole Carpenter continued the discussion about “Kings X”:

“Kings X” in Toronto does not mean a truce or “Time Out” but rather “I give up” or a concession. I can vouch for that usage since the mid-70s through the present.

Winifred Bauer provided quite along response to Marc Armitage’s message and concluded:

The actual truce term question we asked was [in relation to the game of tag/tig/tiggy] “Is there a word which you can say to show that you are not playing for a short time, for instance because you need to tie up your shoelace?”

The most common answers we got (with the number of schools reporting them in brackets) were: fans (11, strictly localised); “poison(ed/ous)” (43); “twigs” (8, most in one locality); “nibs” (13, strictly localised); “pegs/pegged” (100, clearly the dominant term); “bags/bagsed” (26); “gates” (6, strictly localised); “safe” (5); “tax/tags” (8, most in one locality); “flicks/flixs” (5, most in one locality); “quits(ies)” (8, most in one locality); “time (out)” (34); “stop” (23); “not playing” (25); “wait (on/up)” (20); “not ready” (11). There was considerable overlap between some of these terms: “poison” and “bags” for ex-

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ample were very rarely the only truce terms reported; they were usually alternatives to "pegs." The last five terms in my list (time, stop, not playing, wait, not ready) were almost always (only two exceptions) alternatives to some term from the first group on the list. In some cases, the crossed finger gesture was reported as an obligatory accompaniment to whatever was said, but we are not sure how widespread this is, since our question focussed on the words and not the gestures, and we have no guarantee that all schools recorded the gesture where it was used.

Nicholas Fleischman added:

In case it's of interest, our usual term in Newcastle upon Tyne was "tiggys" (sp unknown) with crossed fingers. We also played a game called "tiggys on high," which perversely meant you could be caught on the ground, but not if you were off it.

And the discussion continues. To find out more about the distribution list, contact Dr. Julia C. Bishop at J.C.Bishop@sheffield.ac.uk

TO THE EDITOR

Dear Chip:

I enjoyed Donna Lanclos' paper, in the Spring 2000 issue of *Children's Folklore Review*, but am mystified by a remark she made on page 13: "They [the Opies] dismiss scatological or sexual materials as only used by 'ogre' or 'savage' children, first in *Lore and Language* [1959] (95-96), and additionally in Iona Opie's *People in the Playground* [1993] (26)." The "ogre" sentence, in *LLS*, is here taken out of context; it refers not to the vast majority but only to the rare child who presses pornographic rhymes upon his peers, usually having learnt them from his father and not understanding them at all.

In the 1950s, before the arrival of the permissive society, no general book could (along with television, radio, and the newspapers) include anything that was sexually explicit. Nor would children repeat such a rhyme to adults. By the 1970s and 80s, when I was visiting the local playground, the children were happy to recite any rude rhyme or story whatsoever, although wary of being overheard by a teacher. I cannot find anything in *The People in the Playground* to justify Donna Lanclos' remark, either on page 26 or else where. The Oxford University Press did not jib at anything: "fuck", "cunt", "penis", "Pull down your pants and suffocate the ants", sex with decaying corpses, and so on and on. What more does a modern folklorist want?

With best regards,

Sincerely, Iona Opie.

NOTES AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Children's Folklore Section of the American Folklore society annually offers the **W.W. Newell Prize** (which includes a cash award) for the best student essay on a topic in children's folklore. Students must submit their own papers, and published papers are eligible. Instructors are asked to encourage students with eligible papers to enter the competition.

Papers must be typed, double-spaced, and on white paper. On the first page include the author's name, academic address, home address, and telephone numbers. Deadline for each year's competition is September 1st. Submit papers or write for more information: Dr. C.W. Sullivan III, English Department, East Carolina University, Greenville, NC 27858-4353.

The April 2000 issue of *The Lion and the Unicorn* (24.2) was a special issue entitled "**Folklore in/and Children's Literature.**" The volume contained the following essays: "What if Your Grandmother Were an Ox? The Many Cinderellas of Southeast Asia," by Michael Levy; "'Déjà lu or déjà entendu'? Comparing a Japanese Fairy Tale with European Tales," by Rieko Okuhara; "Nappy Edges and Goldy Locks: African-American Daughters and the Politics of Hair," by Neal Lester; "Strong Women in Appalachian Folktales," by Tina Hanlon; "Mystery in a House," by Elizabeth Wein; "William Kurelek: Teller of Tales," Carole H. Carpenter; and "Ruth Sawyer: A Woman's Journey from Folklore to Children's Literature," by Betsy Hearne. The volume was guest edited and introduced by C.W. Sullivan III.

The Open University Press will be publishing a book containing selected papers from the State of Play Conference held in Sheffield in 1998, plus one additional paper, in February 2001. Below is a brief description of this book.

PLAY TODAY IN THE PRIMARY SCHOOL PLAYGROUND: LIFE, LEARNING AND CREATIVITY, Ed. by Julia C. Bishop and Mavis Curtis.

This book examines the free play of children in middle childhood, exploring their actual play activities in the school playground. It counters the widespread concern about the supposed decline in children's play with fresh evidence from Australia, Canada, France, Israel and Britain of the vibrancy, creativity and variety of free play activities, particularly in the school playground. The detailed case studies discuss the many aspects of children's play traditions, including the use of playground space, the ways in which children learn and adapt games and rhymes in multicultural and monocultural settings, children's creative and subversive use of mass media items, and gendered dimensions of play. Emphasis is on children's own perceptions, the importance of free play at a time when it is increasingly under threat, and the benefits that an informed appreciation of contemporary children's play can bring to teaching, the management of school playtime, and intercultural and intergenerational understanding.