

able. Some publishers are actively courting folklorists to write for children and increasing numbers are doing so for pleasure and profit. Recycling the past makes money, but carries with it decided ethical obligations. With respect to intangible heritage—much of which technically falls under the rubric of folklore—this obligation is not only to a specific source, but also to the culture being represented and to the overall oral tradition. Authors as well as publishers need to make the effort to promote intangible cultural conservation through judicious use and management of this ubiquitous but all too commonly misused resource. Wherever necessary, the industry ought to seek the advice of folklore professionals to ensure that their processes and products meet the requisite standards. Tales certainly need to be told to be appreciated; but they first must be appreciated to be told to their best advantage.

Carole H. Carpenter is an Associate Professor and 1994-95 J.P. Roberts Chair in Canadian Studies at York University. She is a folklorist and currently President of the Children's Folklore Section of the American Folklore Society.

ORAL POETRY FROM THE TRIBE CALLED CHILDREN

Doctor Knickerbocker and Other Rhymes: A Canadian Collection. David Booth. Illus. Maryann Kovalski. Kids Can Press, 1993. 71 pages, \$16.95 cloth. ISBN 1-55074-079-2. **Folk Rhymes from around the World.** Ed. Evelyn Neaman. Illus. Sally J.K. Davies. Pacific Educational Press, 1992. 54 pages, \$12.95 paper. ISBN 0-88865-081-7.

Children's play enriches otherwise mundane tasks or tedious rules. "Clean your room" is bearable when there are lions and tigers nipping at your heels or if the toy box is a trapdoor which leads to outer space. "Peter, Peter, if you're able/Get your elbows off the table" makes transgression fun and etiquette palatable. Rhymes and chants also heighten the childhood challenge to be the best—to skip longer and faster than anybody else in the schoolyard. Cat calls, action songs, taunts, tongue-twisters—are language play, and a means of antagonizing the enemy and defending oneself or one's friend.

These two collections of childhood rhymes elicit in me the playful child as well as the teacher. They compare beautifully—one is educational in intent, while the other is partly the result of an educational exercise. For the latter, *Knickerbocker*, David Booth and his son collected verses "during recess, on the bus, after four" as well as from books. Larry Swartz and his grade five students are thanked for "their help in discovering all the rhymes on their playground." Conversely, in *Folk Rhymes*, a publication of the Alternatives to Racism Society, formal research is emphasized and the book is more widely culturally representative. Notes accompanying each rhyme and section contribute to the sense of a teaching book. When *Folk Rhymes* was completed, the author used it

as a model for a Vancouver grade three classroom to “make their own collection of folk rhymes.” Though both books can be used as teaching resources, or as models for class anthologies, each expresses different (and ultimately complementary) ideas about how children learn. These books have aesthetic qualities (production, selection, illustration, the relationship of text to illustration), and make educational implications about childhood and learning.

Folk Rhymes is a collection of oral poetry from twenty countries, including Canada. We are told that the riddles, tongue-twisters, and skipping rhymes will appeal to children aged six to ten. “Each rhyme is presented in its original language, in a transliteration for sound appreciation, and in an English translation.” The transliterations are pseudo-linguistic versions of the rhymes. Unfortunately, without adhering to a uniform linguistic system, the possibility of mispronunciation is so great as to undermine the exercise. The German rhyme “Aina, Daina,” for instance, transliterated as “Ain-a, dain-a, tin-ten-fass” from the original “Ene, dene, Tintenfais” can be variously mispronounced. I like Neaman’s idea, however, and wonder if actual phonemes might be used.

I enjoyed the playful subtleties of the rhymes. “Rocketship” in Spanish reads “Tito, Tito/Con su capotito/Subió al cielo/Y dió un gritito.” (“Tito, Tito/With his little cape/Climbed to heaven/And gave a little shout.”) The play on “Tito” is lost in the English translation, but like other good art, this seemingly innocent poem is interpretable and enjoyable on different levels. The illustrations, softly pencilled on textured Japanese paper, are as gentle as the rhymes themselves. The cover is coloured. The illustrations do not create a separate narrative but complement the text with drawings of children (a quick survey shows equal numbers of girls and boys), adults (women outnumber men), realistically drawn animals and domestic items. A sense of activity pervades the drawings. I particularly enjoyed the young girl with her back to us, arms crossed, leaning against an imaginary wall. She is “it” and is reciting “Akar Bakar” before she runs to find her friends. The English translations read well and it is my feeling that care and attention in translating (or in some cases years of chanting in translation), have resulted in catchy verses. The various cultural expressions are quite wonderful.

My major complaint about this collection is that Native culture is not represented. I first thought “Mother’s Song,” from the Okanagan Valley in British Columbia, was an Indian song. The illustration, however, suggests an oriental family. How unfortunate that Neaman settled for ambiguity. Unbelievable that a book of oral poetry, expressly created to be culturally inclusive, ignores the culture of *the* traditionally oral people of Canada. And upon whose land Vancouver is partly situated—perhaps the very building where this book is published. Neaman’s neighbours, the Indian nations of the west coast—Bella Coola, Coast Salish, Haida, Kwakiutl, Nootka, Tlingit, Tsimshian—could and should have been consulted. I hope that other UBC publications in this series correct this omission.

The otherwise respectful attitude which pervades *Folk Rhymes* is blown to smithereens in *Knickerbocker*. One has the feeling that as many rudities, insults, descriptions of abused fruit and vegetables and bathroom jokes as could be tolerated by the adult censors were urged onto these pages by enthusiastic grade fives. I can only imagine the sort of collection the “rejected” 200 (out of 300) rhymes and chants comprise. It’s worth considering which collection truly represents the culture of that “tribe called children.” It’s very encouraging to see children’s work professionally published. Besides the many teachers and writers who assist children in creating classroom anthologies, I think of Fifth House Press’ publication of Cree legends written by indigenous children. I feel this excitement reading the first section of *Knickerbocker* as well.

Kieran Egan in *Primary Understanding: Education in Early Childhood* speaks of the importance of using children’s sense-making capacities in educational ways. A good example of how students’ cultural lives are significant to the educational process is seen in *Knickerbocker*, in especially the first section, “Out Loud, Right Now!: Contemporary schoolyard rhymes.” These oral poems combine word play, physical energy, and bawdy humour—imagine them dramatized! “Give me five/On the high side/Through the hole/Break the sticks/You make me sick.” Commercial jingles “When I eat my Smarties . . .” “Jingle bells, Batman smells . . .” are included, but again, Smarties and Kraft dinner are part of kids’ culture. These poems belong to children—that group of people with the energy to push language, form, and sense to its edgy, sometimes dangerous, extreme. They belong to children intent on inventing, renewing, and on expressing the complexity of their dark feelings. The rhymes, jokes and chants parody and ridicule the traditional culture which their generation inherits.

The disadvantage of the book is that these oral poems don’t belong on the page, so to speak. Their success lies in bellowing them threateningly at the enemy (parents, teachers, rivals), and in shocking those whom it would be most rewarding to shock. They are oral—that living unpinnable protoplasm of sense and nonsense and sound. I think of the Grimm brothers. Instead of preserving the oral culture of fairy tales by publishing them, as they’d hoped, compilation and publishing hastened their decline as oral stories. I can’t imagine a playground without bombastic threats and claims, but I wonder whether our concern with authoritative text threatens children’s right to own these poems in whatever forms and variations they choose. The press release worries me when it says “Spoken, sung and shouted for generations, these verses now are collected here for the voices of today and tomorrow.” *Knickerbocker* captures a moment in time and place, but must leave “today and tomorrow” to the schoolyard. I believe Booth recognizes this—*Knickerbocker* includes five versions of “Mary Had a Little Lamb,” not one of which is the traditional verse.

Kovalski’s black and white illustrations are a combination of historic nineteenth-century woodcuts and her own pen-and-ink drawings. The rounded script (hand lettering) of elementary students is enhanced by their placement on a

classroom blackboard. Kovalski uses the full page and is as artistically unencumbered by linear rationality as are the nonsense rhymes. But like nonsense verse, Kovalski's art has a logic its own. Recurring characters, nineteenth-century adverts, even the gargoyle with its running commentary create a consistency and a complementary narrative. Readers will want to see what the gent in the silk top hat or the barrel-shaped Victorian child is up to next. The old-fashioned illustrations are quaint but set into a context which makes them bizarre. Many are just plain funny—particularly, I think, to children. Booth/Kovalski use two full pages to convey the classroom joke about the teacher's underwear. It's dynamite!

My personal measuring gauge for literature (and for many things) is my desire to respond creatively, and I want to respond to these books—to add my own rhymes. But my response is also teacherly. In the course I teach on Literacy in the Junior Primary Classroom, I can imagine soliciting my students for their playground memories, or having them interview, collect, and record oral poetry from different communities. Listening to a culture's (be it children's or a nation's culture) oral poetry is a way of respecting that community. Compiling poems, songs, rhymes into a book is an extension of oral literacy and can be viewed as a recapitulation of the processes of literacy which, I hope, all children experience.

Each of these books serves to delight and to instruct, and each makes an educational contribution. *Folk Rhymes* uses schoolyard poems to encourage tolerance. Its "instructive" tone makes me feel—only slightly—that I'm being taught something that's good for me. *Knickerbocker*, with its off-beat humour and disrespectful tone, is too busy sticking out its linguistic tongue, too busy hurling insults and taunting. Even its black-and-white lines are sharp and sassy. It encourages multiplicity of expression, but mainly within the dominant Anglo-European community.

Knickerbocker needs to be culturally inclusive, and *Folk Rhymes* needs to play—to capture the spirit of the playground in its form and illustrations. While I understand the value of *Folk Rhymes*, I prefer the off-the-wall exuberance of *Knickerbocker*, which I believe is the more artistic of the two—and for that reason the more educational book. *Knickerbocker* dares its readers to respond, and response is what literature is about.

Cornelia Hoogland is a poet whose publications include *The Wire-thin Bride* (Turnstone, 1990), and *Marrying the Animals* (Brick, 1995). She is a professor of English in the Education Faculty at the University of Western Ontario.