

and laughing in infants is considered as a system of tension-release, of relaxation, one that also enables the infant to stay orientated toward novel or incongruous stimulation, as well as to maintain organized behavior. Porteous speculates that laughing originated as a primitive protective response to startling, intolerable stimulation from which there was no escape. Then the "helplessness" of laughter—a way of relaxing the organism—might be more adaptive than the positive feedback of overstimulation, which would drive the organism to destruction. This perspective could be applied, for example, to the understanding of laughter in response to jokes. As one follows the paradigm shift (or script switch) of a joke, one is suddenly and perhaps inescapably trapped by its punch line. Laughter then incapacitates and modulates the stimulus of the joke, reordering a condition of equilibrium in the person.

Humor also contains a useful Newsletter section, edited by Lawrence Mintz, that carries news of conferences and other items of interest to the study of humor. Certainly there should be a respected place for this new journal, and one wishes it well. But I hope that it will also dare to forge original perspectives on what is indeed a domain of human creativity.

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A most interesting interdisciplinary journal to appear recently in international research circles is the journal *Play and Culture*. Formerly founded in 1974 as The Association for the Anthropological Study of Play, the Association for the Study of Play has been serving as a forum for exchanges of ideas and research findings on play, not only by anthropologists, but also by scholars in the fields of sociology, psychology, history, child development, physical education, leisure study, literature, and linguistics. As an international, multi-disciplinary organization, the association defines the scope of play study in the broadest sense to include competitive games, uncompetitive play, leisure and recreation activities; toys, sports, animal play, festivals, and dances. The association's stated policy is to "Further our understanding of the phenomenon of play in humans and in animals, and across various cultural, social, and activity settings."

Given the above objectives of the Association, the articles accepted for publication in *Play and Culture* have covered perspectives in behavioral, social, and biological sciences, in education, and in the humanities. Periodically, the association devotes a special issue to a specific topic or scope of research. An example of its scope can be seen in the volume under review, edited by Brian Sutton-Smith, with seven articles and a book review in the issue.

Three articles are results of play research conducted by European scholars. Birgitta Almqvist of the University of Uppsala, Sweden, presents in "Age and Gender Differences in Children's Christmas Requests" the findings on Swedish first-graders' and fourth-graders' toy preferences. Analysis of letters written to Santa Claus was used as a technique for understanding gender roles and identity. Despite efforts to curb sexism in Swedish schools and society at large, Almqvist found that, while girls preferred the more general toy items, boys still preferred masculine toys such as toy weapons. The older fourth-graders requested from Santa Claus more non-toy items than first-graders, who tended to request items in the toy category.

Rimmert Van der Kooij of the State University of Groningen, the Netherlands, in "Research on Children's Play," on the other hand, presents his classification system of play based on European literature on children's play. Also discussed are the Play Intensity Scale for studying normal and learning-impaired children, and the Mental Activity Scale for studying normal children. In his comparative study of German, Dutch, and Norwegian child-rearing styles, Van der Kooij found Dutch parents to be the least dominant.

Gisela Wegener-Spöhring of Georg-August Universität, Göttingen, took up the controversial issue of war toys and aggressiveness in children. In "War Toys and Aggressive Games," she presents the findings from her sample of 429 German fourth-graders. Although playing with war toys was a male thing and boys showed more aggressive behavior than girls, Wegener-Spöhring feels that in general adults tend to forget that to children at play, it's a "let's pretend" situation. Children should therefore be allowed to play creative, balanced games without intervention from adults who do not understand the dynamics of play.

Anthony D. Pellegrini's short but interesting article "Categorizing Children's Rough-and-Tumble Play" discusses the determinant of children's social competence from a study of the rough-and-tumble type of play. Pellegrini shows that, with sociable, popular children, this type of play served an affiliative function, whereas with unpopular, socially rejected children who had a limited concept of sociability, it was used as a milieu for dominance over other children.

Brian Sutton-Smith and May Ann Magee applied Victor Turner's concept of reversability to the study of videotaped playgroups of American nursery school children. Order, disorder, play as drama, play as a dreamlike heteroglossic flow of enactments, and players as performers are presented in "Reversible Childhood" as complex dimensions of children's play that show that children are more competent in managing their play life than is generally recognized by adults.

How play contributes to the formation of the self and of practical judgement, to learning about human limitations, and to learning about others are parts of the focus of "The Self and the Play Element in Culture" discussed by Brad Lowell Stone of Oglethorpe University. Stone also points out the compatibility of work and play and how the play element in culture has been covered over in modern society.

The last article, "Structure of Role Terminology in the MidRealm of the Society for Creative Anachronism" by Sylvia Sparkis of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, centers on a form of adult play participated in by members of the Society

for Creative Anachronism, a historical/fantasy/recreation organization. Sparkis' analysis of role terms and the members' ranking of roles indicates that to those who participate in this type of play, fun and responsibility are both connected to prestige. The most important feature attracting participants to this history-based play are the creation of historical roles and the enactment of these roles.

The book review in this issue is Dina and Joel Sherzer's edited book *Humor and Comedy in Puppety: Celebration in Popular Culture* (Bowling Green: Bowling Green University Press, 1987, reviewed by Regina Bendix).

The publication of *Play and Culture* by The Association for the Study of Play and the acceptance of selected papers presented at the association's annual meeting and other submitted articles testify to the fact that the association is forging ahead with vigor in its role as an international and multi-disciplinary forum for play scholars. Professional membership to the association (includes subscription to *Play and Culture*) is \$35.00 per year. Student/Retiree membership (includes subscription) is \$25.00 per year.

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- BENNETT, GILLIAN, PAUL S. SMITH and J[OHN] D. A. WIDDOWSON, editors. *Perspectives on Contemporary Legend*. Volume II. CECTAL Conference Papers Series No. 5. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1987. 207 pages. Paper £9.95; US\$16.50. ISBN 1-85075-118-8.
- BENNETT, GILLIAN and PAUL S. SMITH, editors. *Monsters with Iron Teeth*. Perspectives on Contemporary Legend. Volume III. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1988. 243 pages. Paper £9.95; US\$16.50. ISBN 1-85075-119-6.
- BENNETT, GILLIAN and PAUL S. SMITH, editors. *The Questing Beast*. Perspectives on Contemporary Legend. Volume IV. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1989. 252 pages. Paper £9.95; US\$16.50. ISBN 1-85075-120-X.

These three yearbooks follow a first volume (see review in *Asian Folklore Studies* 45: 306-308); a fifth volume is in preparation. All of them publish papers read at the "Contemporary Legend" annual meetings (Sheffield, England, 1982 ff.). Although dated 1987, 1988, and 1989, the three volumes just recently left the press; they appear to be so much alike in their content and general scholarly level, that, upon reading them, I decided they merit a joint review.

Together, the three volumes contain 38 papers, of which 17 could be termed "mini-monographs," each describing a tale-type and quoting one or more versions of it, with a little interpretation. The rest of the papers try to tackle this or that theoretical or quasi-theoretical question. From volume to volume, the grappling with the question of what is a "contemporary legend" or even a legend in general, and "does 'contemporary legend' exist at all?" (Vol. IV, p. 100) grows more prominent. Is this a writing on the wall, signaling a crisis? Is it a crisis that seems to stem from the shallow scholarly basis on which most of the papers in all four volumes rest?

As an exercise in the sociology of scholarship, this reviewer did some counting.