

ers, whose complexity and aesthetic appeal restore the tale to a “crossover audience” (p. 256). By reimagining how to tell the Cinderella tale through visual cues, they challenge the technology of the book as well (p. 266).

Jan Van Coillie, like Verheij (in Part I), works on the Dutch tradition, this time surveying illustrations of Cinderella in Holland and Flanders, 1850–present. Over that sweeping period, Coillie researched about 80 editions from which to draw conclusions about how Cinderella looks in Dutch history. Despite illustrators exerting artistic license after 1850, he argues, clichés about the character forged by repetition of scenes and postures over time reinforced the traditional binaries of a modest girl and her vain stepsisters.

Monika Woźniak examines “characteristics of Polish visual patterns of the tale” (p. 302) from the early twentieth century to the fall of the Soviet Union, with occasional reference to more modern pieces. Since Disney films were not shown to Polish audiences until the 1990s, Poland has a unique iconographic tradition with its own clichés about and nationalist interest in Cinderella. While there exists no folkloric tradition of Cinderella in that culture, Perrault’s fairy-tale heroine was adapted in print books to look like an industrious Polish peasant (p. 310).

Agata Hołobut, also a scholar of the Polish tradition, surveys posters for opera and ballet performances of the Cinderella tale. Reading 46 examples from 1906 to 2013 for their aesthetic and narrative interest, rather than for the various ideologies they reflect, Hołobut catalogs the ways in which designers tend to characterize the Cinderella of the stage: as a tale of class and advancement, as an illustration of a particular definition of femininity, or in terms of the living art through which the story is told (e.g., depicting feet to publicize Prokofiev’s ballet).

Xenia Mitrokhina begins her discussion of the Russian tale with the late nineteenth-century translation of the Grimms into Russian, which introduced a host of Cinderella *skazki* (fairy tales). But her essay aims to trace Cinderella’s “striking transformations” into a proletarian heroine with a strong work ethic at the

hands of Soviet propagandists. Cinderella functioned as a “metaphor for upward social mobility in the Soviet Union,” but the film *The Shining Path* (dir. Grigori Aleksandrov, 1940) goes yet further, “veering the Soviet Cinderelliana in an unexpected direction” (p. 354) in which the beautiful heroine climbs from peasant to decorated Hero of Labor.

Jack Zipes’ extensive discussion of Cinderella’s legacy in global film highlights those movies, from George Méliès to Ericka Beckman, that punctuate the tradition with modern “faux-feminist” transformations of the plot (p. 361). This essay ends the volume on the somber note that, through all her permutations, right up to Branagh’s 2015 *Cinderella*, cinematic Cinderella remains bound to a “traditional patriarchal narrative” (p. 360), an underdog “doomed perpetually to suffer persecution and to triumph happily” (p. 387).

The eclectic essays in *Cinderella across Cultures* bring together an impressive collection of writers/texts/artists that plant Cinderella’s feet firmly on earth in a variety of sociopolitical contexts. The bibliographies that accompany several essays will be welcome introductions to those corpuses for the uninitiated. Though the essays vary in quality, few scholars within fairy/folktale, cultural, and feminist/queer studies will not find a new tradition, medium of interest, or unexpected queering in this nuanced and highly readable volume. If there remains more de-theologizing and de-colonizing to be done on the critical tradition (queering interpretations of the classics, surveying traditions in Asia and South America, discovering Cinderella’s African iterations), this volume is an excellent start.

Joking Asides: The Theory, Analysis, and Aesthetics of Humor. By Elliott Oring. (Logan: Utah State University Press, 2016. Pp. xiii + 282, preface, afterword, notes, works cited, index.)

MOIRA MARSH
Indiana University

Folklorists and humor scholars live in separate theoretical worlds, for the most part. Folklorists

have remained largely unaware of recent theoretical and experimental research results in humor studies—as if humor theory ended with Freud—while humor scholars, most of whom have disciplinary homes in linguistics, psychology, or literary studies, have neglected folk humor and rarely consider jokes as performances or as historical and aesthetic objects. With *Joking Asides*, Elliott Oring continues his almost one-man project of bridging this disciplinary gap, a project begun with his earlier volumes *Engaging Humor* (University of Illinois Press, 2003) and *Jokes and Their Relations* (University Press of Kentucky, 1992). Five of the essays in this volume were previously published, but the remaining seven are entirely new.

The first half of the book is devoted to the exposition and critique of five theories of humor, some familiar but others not, beginning with the chapter “What Freud Actually Said about Jokes.” Freud’s *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious* (1905; Norton, 1960) is a true classic in the sense that everyone has heard of it, but few have actually read it. Whether or not he is cited directly, Freud’s theories underlie the explanation, used almost universally in folkloristics and in any number of other fields, that jokes express unconscious fears and aggressions. Oring applies a close reading to Freud’s theory of jokes to show, quite convincingly, that it has been largely misunderstood and misapplied. The usual argument is that, like dreams, jokes express unconscious thoughts that are aggressive or obscene but inaccessible to the conscious mind. Freud theorized that dream-work hides unconscious wishes from conscious awareness, whereas, in Oring’s words, “when people produce a hostile joke, they usually know quite well what they are doing” (p. 11). In other words, joke-work provides only the thinnest of disguises, really just distractions and excuses that permit the underlying joke thoughts to be expressed in polite society. This chapter alone is worth the price of the book; anyone who would apply a Freudian (or Dundesian) analysis of jokes should first read and engage with this cogent argument.

For humor scholars, the runner-up to Freud in popularity is the semantic script theory of humor and its longer incarnation, the General

Theory of Verbal Humor (GTVH), both of which describe the mechanism of verbal jokes as lying in the conjunction of opposed semantic scripts. In chapter 2, Oring offers a careful critique of the failures of the GTVH, arguing instead for his own formulation that the basis of humor is a structure of ideas that he calls “appropriate incongruity,” where the joke presents an apparent incongruity that is nevertheless appropriate, if only spuriously so. Blending Theory, which stems from cognitive linguistics and argues that humor arises from the blending of two metaphorical domains, is subjected to the Oring treatment in chapter 3, and False-Belief Theory gets its turn in chapter 5. The latter proposes that humor arises from the recognition of false beliefs that are thereby eliminated to evolutionary advantage. Neither Blending Theory nor False-Belief Theory has won general acceptance in humor studies, and if Oring’s critique gets a wide reading, these theories are even more unlikely ever to be accepted.

A fifth approach, the Benign Violation Theory (BVT), may put up more of a fight, if only because it considers the emotional rather than the cognitive aspect of jokes. Benign Violation Theory holds that humor arises from an emotional incongruity rather than a cognitive one: something is funny if it is perceived as a violation of some kind but is nevertheless able to be viewed as normal or benign. Oring’s critiques of the theory are persuasive, especially the observation that it attributes feelings to joke tellers and audiences that cannot be verified independently. Although he does allow that emotional responses can amplify or reduce humor, Oring stands with those who find that humor is, at root, a cognitive affair. This reader, however, is persuaded that while current formulations of BVT are too reductionist, there are some classes of jokes in which emotional work is more important than cognition alone.

The reader who has stuck with the author through these five cogent and detailed criticisms of competing humor theories cannot but agree that the analysis of jokes is not as simple as it looks, even with something as apparently artless as “Why did the chicken cross the road?” Oring suggests that most theories depend on a single interpretation of a joke, when most jokes

are open to varied and even incompatible interpretations, and his own nuanced interpretations underscore this truth. He is also frequently witty, which makes up for the dryness of theoretical argument. "I am not a linguist," he admits in chapter 3, on Blending Theory, but continues that this "should not be construed in the same way as Richard Nixon's statement 'I am not a crook'" (p. 39). This theory seems to have pushed his personal humor buttons a good deal, because in the same chapter he says, apropos of asking why one interpretation of a metaphor is highlighted over another, "Why should I not interpret the statement 'That woman is a fox' to mean that she is hairy, short-legged, mates only in winter, and likes chicken?" (p. 38).

So much for theory. Other chapters turn to specific sets of jokes, with varying success. "Framing Borat" examines the 2007 film of that name, which aroused a storm of protest for offending or demeaning everyone in sight. Oring argues that the film blurs fictional comedy and documentary frames, including what are effectively practical jokes on unsuspecting strangers, and that this blurring leaves much of the film's content outside of the safety of the humor frame. Arguments about offensive humor usually focus strictly on ethical questions, but this analysis, brief as it is, moves the debate along by examining the conceptual structures at work in the film.

In chapters 8 and 9, Oring turns his folklorist's eye to questions of genre in humor. "Listing toward Lists" surveys the phenomenon of "list jokes," popular on the Internet, in which individual entries ring the changes on a form and creatively extend it. For instance, "660: Approximate number of the Beast" makes little sense and inspires little amusement except in the context of a series of variations on the "Number of the Beast" theme. List jokes are contrasted to "joke lists," such as "100 Best Blond Jokes," which consist of multiple texts that work equally well independently. In "What Is a Narrative Joke?," Oring asks a question that seems obvious but soon reveals the imprecision in genre terms that are used to talk about jokes. Folklorists and others tend to call any joke in prose form a narrative joke (as opposed to a

riddle joke), but on close examination, many of them turn out not to be narratives at all. Oring identifies "true narrative jokes" as those in which the punch line completes the narrative line by revealing a previously hidden narrative function. This discussion is the preparation for an ambitious attempt to chronicle the history of the joke genre. Oring examines a corpus of 1,887 humorous texts in joke books, from the tenth-century *Philogelos* to the late twentieth-century *Bathroom Joke Book*, to determine whether the same joke types are evenly distributed over the centuries. They are not: before the nineteenth century, narrative jokes are uncommon and jokes in which hidden narrative functions are revealed in a punchline are entirely absent. If one disagrees with this result, Oring has clearly delineated a methodology that others can employ to test it.

Treating jokes as aesthetic objects is not new to folklorists (although Oring feels that even folklorists concentrate mostly on the content and meaning of jokes rather than literary analysis of joke forms). Similarly, in humor studies generally, questions of structure and ethics have occupied more attention than aesthetics have. Continuing the folklorist's interest in matters of joke form and genre, Oring's final two chapters are devoted to the proposition that jokes are an art form. "From the Ridiculous to the Sublime" enumerates the similarities and differences between jokes and art. "Contested Performance and Joke Aesthetics" analyzes and compares the performance styles and preferences of two accomplished joke tellers in the folkloristic tradition of analyzing individual style and performance, an approach that other scholars reserve for professional comics.

I have saved chapters 7 and 10 for last because, along with chapter 1 on Freud's joke theory, they constitute Oring's most consequential contributions in this book. Chapter 7, "Risky Business," scrutinizes several common explanations of why people living under repressive regimes tell political jokes against the regime despite the considerable danger they pose to both tellers and hearers. Readers will be very familiar with these theories: the jokes are ways of expressing the unspeakable; they are cathartic safety valves; they are revolutionary acts; and

so on. Oring demolishes each of these theories in turn, not necessarily to close the question forever but to show that propositions about jokes should be treated as hypotheses to be tested rather than undying truths. In chapter 10, Oring turns his attention to another set of assertions, this time about the so-called "Jewish joke." He describes how Jewish humor has become mythologized as something special or unique to this group: "What the *Kalevala* is for the Finns," he observes, "the joke would seem to be for the Jews" (p. 181). Again, the propositions will be familiar to many readers: that Jewish jokes are better and more numerous than other national humors; that they are essentially self-critical and masochistic, and acerbic but also defensive; that Jews rely on humor more than other peoples; and that Jewish humor is a survival mechanism for a suffering and op-

pressed people. Oring treats these claims not as truths, necessarily, but as hypotheses to be tested. Taking each one in turn, he lays out a methodology for doing just that.

The epigraph to the afterword of *Joking Asides* quotes Georg Christoph Lichtenberg: "The question is always whether in the end the spirit of contradiction is not on the whole more useful than unity in agreement" (p. 214). There could not be a more apt epigraph for Oring's work on humor. He never takes any theory at face value, no matter how popular or ingenious it is. Neither does he dismiss any theory that he disagrees with out of hand, but he seriously engages with all of them, with evidence and cogent, detailed argument. In the specific examples as well as in its general approach, this book is a model for all folklorists and humor scholars to follow.