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# Introduction

*B*READ AND CIRCUSES IS A PEJORATIVE PHRASE, BUT who would give up either? The term *folklore* is often used derogatorily; but in a recent, elite university class I got *no* “yeses” to this question: would a world without urban legends be a better world? And who among us is not proud, sometimes, to merge into “the masses,” or at least this or that “mass”?

The works that most epitomize the contemporary genre of popular science—books by John Barrow, Daniel Dennett, Brian Greene, or Stephen Hawking—are not read by “the masses” but instead by the proverbial “serious reader” who maintains a generalized philosophical or nerdy interest in science. The very notion of the popular is relative, begging the question, how popular? The book you are now reading, though designed to be complete in itself, is also a companion to a previous work, *The Ancient Mythology of Modern Science: A Mythologist Looks (Seriously) at Popular Science Writing* (Schrempp 2012a). In that work I critically analyze the arguments put forward in major books by writers like those just mentioned, who form what might be termed (oxymoronically for sure) the elite of the popular science genre. What remains for consideration is a vast, variegated, fascinating landscape of science popularizing. It would be a great mistake to limit one’s gaze to the elite realm, which forms only one small part of the venture.

The strategies of science popularizing—or science domestication—that I focus on in the chapters in this book have all been selected with a folklorist’s eye for traditional gestures and genres that have always radiated power and appeal; these include major oral narrative genres (myth, epic, legend, folktale) as well as other orally inspired forms (such as proverb, sermon, and local religious visions and rituals/spectacles).<sup>1</sup> For some time, however, folklorists have recognized that research on such genres today frequently leads, imperceptibly, into popular cultural transformations of them, whether in film, literature, or food fashions. I should be clear, therefore, that the folkloristic slant I bring to the topic of popular science is less interested in claiming the emergence of “new forms of folklore” than in calling attention to the persistence of folkloric form, idiom, and worldview within the increasingly important dimension of popular consciousness defined by the impact of

science. My project is thus similar in spirit to what Sandra Dolby (2005) has accomplished in her study of folkloric patterns in contemporary self-help literature, although my study will consider a wider range of artifacts, for books are only one among many media of science popularizing I will consider. Dolby's analysis might be seen, in turn, as a new development within a longer scholarly tradition, advocated by Richard Dorson, among others, of identifying continuities of folklore in realms lying outside traditional oral circulation. My specific concern within this longer tradition will be to identify folkloric inspiration, form, and process in the popular exposition and promotion of science.

"The masses" is a notoriously difficult concept, one I use loosely, evocatively, and provocatively. Three major qualifications should be kept in mind throughout. The first is that the notion of "the masses" is fraught with moral, aesthetic, and political ambivalence, as well as intrinsic reversibility (as are its opposites, "the elite," "the sophisticated"). The masses are low in status but also the basis of all power and often rhapsodized with populist sentiment. The second point is illustrated by a quirk in the term itself, namely, that "the masses" is (are?) plural, in a sense contradicting the direction in which the term seems to be headed—that is, a merging of members into a unitary heap. It will quickly become apparent that we are dealing with more than one mass (and it is probably fair to say that all human beings, if not all living things, belong to a plurality of "lumping" categories). In most cases we are dealing with a polarity straddling a vast borderland. What I mean by "the masses" in this book can most safely be expressed privatively: the works of science popularizing considered here are directed toward audiences whose members lie mostly outside the first circle of devotees of elite popular science literature.

The third point is a combination of the first two: specifically, that some masses are in another respect also elites. Certain artists and critics, most famously Leo Tolstoy, conclude that the greatest art will necessarily be understandable by anyone; in other words, the highest art will necessarily be "low." On this last point, consider the topic of chapter 9, British playwright Tom Stoppard's *Jumpers*. Stoppard is among the very finest writers of dramatic dialogue, backed by a distinguished national/cultural theater tradition; yet much of the dialogue of this play, and certainly the genre-frame, resemble the detective novel, a socially unpretentious literary form radiating the broadest popular appeal. Some of the protagonists are university philosophers, but the action takes place around their activities as amateur acrobats ("jumpers"); and the play opens at a party in which a scantily clad woman swings trapeze-like back and forth above a partying crowd—a sort of circus without a tent. Stoppard's plot also directs attention toward a mission to

explore the moon. The mission is made possible by sophisticated technology that, however, also makes possible the real-time viewing of the chosen few space explorers by mass audiences. Moreover, Stoppard's depiction of the technological conquest is punctuated by old, popular romantic songs about the newly demythologized moon. *Jumpers* ruminates on moral quandaries posed by advanced scientific achievement pursued through Falstaffian belly-laughs. If someone wants to claim that *Jumpers* re-contextualizes elite scientific issues not for the masses but for a different elite—a literary elite—I will not argue, though I will point out that Stoppard's elitism inheres at least in part in an impeccable ear for the power of the vulgate.

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For some, even popular science writing of the elite variety raises concerns about the dilution of science; in the realm we are about to enter, believe me, it gets worse. At the same time, however, there are other intellectual and moral pitfalls to which mass popular science is often less susceptible than the elite forms. Most important, in mass popular science there is typically more transparency about intentions, especially regarding the line at which the science ends and the edification and entertainment begin, and about what non-scientists “really want” from science. In mass popular science we tend to have obvious mythologizing rather than subtle mythologizing; which of these holds greater potential for misleading readers?

On the matter of aesthetic merit, too, I would choose mass popular science (or at least those instances considered here) over elite popular science—although perhaps this is only what one should expect, considering the kinds of talent that are drawn to the two. Putting aside the science, the products considered in the present book are creative and really *fun*. They have “slipped the surly bonds” of gravitas that hold the universe of elite popular science together. Imagine a continuum of strategies for combining science and art: on one end lies an undisguised attempt to use a popular art form as a familiar *vehicle* to carry a new message, while at the other end lies a heady, premature claim to offer a *synthesis* that heals the great divide between science and art, possibly with intimations of offering something higher than science alone. We encounter more of the former strategy in mass popular science and more of the latter in elite popular science. In my judgment, the former more accurately portrays where we really are (still) on the relation of science and art, or, as C. P. Snow famously phrased it, between the “two cultures.”

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As noted, the object of analysis in this book can be defined privatively, but that is not enough. If this book is not about science popularizing at the

philosophical or the nerdy level, what it *is* about is science popularization at the level of the universal and the everyday. Here the grab is sought in the quotidian anxieties, challenges, failures, and blissful moments immediately recognized by everyone—from the search for self-confidence to the experience of wonder at the immensity of the starry sky above. What unifies the chapters in this book, then, is a new deployment, specifically in the realm of science exposition, of the standard folklorist's creed: that the everyday world—the one in which most of us live most of the time—is full of richness, variety, and creativity. My claim is that attempts at science exposition at this level invariably draw in folkloric genres, strategies, or idioms that are already geared to it. This book contains ten chapters, each of which is an essay exploring an instance of science popularization that operates at, or is rooted in, the quotidian round. The instances are very diverse, and since each essay is shaped in response to the particular topic, so are the essays. Because they deal with popularizing strategies that can be brought to the surface quite directly, the first five essays are fairly short. The strategies analyzed in the remaining five essays require more probing and, in some cases, historical contextualization; hence these chapters are longer.

Quantitative analysis is a hallmark of science, and the first step is measurement, which presents special problems for the realms we most entrust to science: the very large and the very small. If the challenge for scientists is to develop instruments capable of such measurement, the challenge for science popularizers is to keep those magnitudes tied to everyday experience, which, impelled by everyday needs as computed in familiar scales, is similarly full of calculations of size, extent, and relative value. The problem, in other words, is that of relating the astro- and the nano- to finger-arithmetic. Starting with a souvenir brochure from Hoover Dam, I explore in chapter 1, "Formulas of Conversion," a set of stock expressions tapped often in discussions of monumental architecture, signaled by the formula "that's enough X to Y" (for example, "enough concrete . . . to build a 4-foot-wide sidewalk around the Earth at the Equator").<sup>2</sup> I pursue the formula in two opposite directions. On one hand, I suggest that the strategy has folk roots in the rough-and-ready, yet highly artistic, conversion formulas at the center of many proverbs: "a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush," "an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure," or "a picture is worth a thousand words" (the last example famously analyzed by Wolfgang Mieder [2004a]). In the other direction, I pursue the formula's progressive elaboration until it reaches realms of science popularizing that might be termed elite.

Many forms of religion and traditional wisdom offer models, regimens, and other practical guidance to individuals on how to achieve internal

coherence, self-control, and self-direction. In chapter 2, “Leonardo and Copernicus at Aspen,” I explore a modern variation on such practical guidance, specifically, the invocation of science heroes such as Leonardo da Vinci as personal role models in self-help books by motivational speaker Michael Gelb (1998, 2002). The same heroes tapped by elite popular science writers to elaborate the heroic story of science are tapped by Gelb in strategies that recall the traditional religious sermon, the folk-religious hagiography of the “patron saint,” and conjurations of sympathetic magic. Gelb’s final goal here is not the promotion of scientific understanding but the improvement of self-esteem, personal effectiveness, and corporate performance in the economic sphere.

The third chapter, “Opening the Two Totes,” carries in another direction one of the concerns of chapter 2, specifically, the modern form of ritual known as the conference. I compare impressions of two mega-conferences that might be seen as contemporary popularizations of the spirit of *mythos* and *logos*: one hosted by the Mythic Imagination Institute, the other by the Committee for Skeptical Inquiry (CSI), publishers of *Skeptical Inquirer* magazine. The former organization invokes “myth” as our salvation, the latter as our downfall; both, while having some academic input, are mainly populated by non-academics from various ways of life who are concerned about the drift of the contemporary worldview. I encountered at the CSI conference two mother-daughter pairs, the mother in each case solicitously shepherding the daughter through the different presentations. The scene was familiar because I have experienced numerous instances of parents introducing their children to a place of worship and its culture, and yet it was startling because the scene in this case occurred within an organization that tends to pass harsh judgment on traditional religious belief. Here was the battle of *mythos* and *logos* enacted not at the academic seminar table but among parents working through the most basic of all cultural quandaries, the one with which Plato opens his discussion of myth in the *Republic*—namely, what stories should we tell our children?

If chapter 2 deals with conferences organized to improve the cultural climate by confronting assumptions that derail life and diminish human potential, chapter 3 deals with anxieties about a deeper—indeed, the ultimate—defect of life: the predicament traditionally designated “the problem of evil.” The question of why there is evil in the world was a religious quandary before it became a topic of moral philosophy, and the reality of evil must have been a basic human experience as a condition for its becoming narrativized in religious mythology and then codified as a philosophical problem. In chapter 4, “Taking the Dawkins Challenge,” I consider the

ways the concept of the “meme,” born in a biological treatise on genetics and Darwinian evolution but now a familiar pop-culture buzzword (or meme), has been drawn into the problem of evil. Specifically, in some usages “meme” merges with “virus” to connote the spread not of any idea but specifically of morally harmful ideas. I argue that this particular mutation of the meme concept, by which Dawkins himself appears to be infected in some of his more socially-politically polemical works, has been influenced by a perspective (or “memplex”) that Dawkins stridently opposes—namely, religious worldviews that locate the source of evil in invasive demons that must be confronted through heroic free (and apparently meme-free) will. This particular mutation of the meme is thus of significance to folklorists primarily through its resonance with folk-religious ideas concerning the origin of evil; but it is also relevant to the traditional folkloristic interest in the dissemination of traditional motifs and forms. Jack Zipes’s (2006) theory of the evolution of the folktale genre, which I critique in this chapter, explicitly taps meme theory in confronting both the persistence of folklore forms and the problem of evil.

Issues from the previous three chapters—self-direction and self-control, anxieties about the prevailing worldview, living amid bad memes—converge in chapter 5, “The Biggest Losers.” Here I bring together two kinds or levels of mythology: the “high” mythology of the grand cosmogonic story, on one hand, and, on the other, the “low” mythology of unexamined everyday ideology and habit—the latter as exposed most famously by Roland Barthes in his modern classic, *Mythologies* (1995). I consider arguments made by Joel Primack and Nancy Ellen Abrams (2006; Abrams and Primack 2011), a physicist and public-policy attorney husband-wife team. They are troubled by the fact that science is popularly perceived as asking the public to give up the anthropocentric notion of cosmos as home—leaving us, in effect, alienated from the cosmos. As a remedy, Primack and Abrams argue that modern cosmology offers scientifically grounded substitutes for our old anthropocentric cravings; for example, although we are not the spatial center, we can still legitimately view ourselves as occurring at the center of cosmic time. In addition, they suggest ways in which varied and colorful mythico-religious imagery can be selectively salvaged and re-purposed in the presentation of science. Through such measures, they claim, we can retain the grand cosmogonic story, with ourselves at the center.

An earlier wave of popular science writers, led by Steven Weinberg, had called for heroic, stoic acceptance of Copernican de-centering, but Primack and Abrams preach instead a search for substitute ways to satisfy our anthropocentric cravings. I argue that this high-mythology shift parallels a shift

that has taken place in the (Barthesian) low mythology of the same period, evident especially in the marketing of popular diet plans: from heroic “no pain, no gain” regimes to more moderate methods of appetite control based on colorful, texture-y, “sensible” substitutes of lighter (that is, “lite”) nutritional fare. In what is perhaps a broader shift of worldview, strategies for controlling our lofty cosmic yearnings thus resonate intriguingly with broadly circulating low mythologies arising around the everyday problem of reining in our personal girth. This microcosm-macrocosm parallel newly inflects a very old mythological conceit, one that assumes there are formal and/or functional sympathies between the universe and the human body.

Chapter 6, “It’s a Wonderfully Conflicted Life,” examines four science films made in the late 1950s and early 1960s by Hollywood director Frank Capra: *Our Mr. Sun*, *Hemo the Magnificent*, *The Unchained Goddess*, and *The Strange Case of the Cosmic Rays*. With the prophetic motto “education through entertainment,” these films were a staple of grade-school science education (with reportedly 1,600 copies of each film in circulation). The films recycled the formulas, gimmicks, and populist sentiment of Capra’s earlier films (including *It’s a Wonderful Life*, *Lost Horizon*, and *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*). At the heart of Capra’s filmic argument is the conflict between science and religion, and much has been made of the subtle and unsubtle strategies he taps in these films to present science and religion as compatible. By contrast, I argue that not two but three entities are juxtaposed in these films—science, religion, and mythology—and that mythology “takes the fall” for religion by, in effect, representing the parts of religion that cannot be harmonized with science. The mythology Capra creates, through the new form of animism known as animation, presages the sort of archaico-modernistic superhero fare now common in children’s television. I explore the films as a twentieth-century popularization of attitudes toward religion, superstition, idolatry, and mythology that developed during the eighteenth-century philosophical Enlightenment and were carried into the nineteenth century by the very thinkers who (however inadequately) made folklore an object of social analysis. Indeed, Capra’s triad of mythology, religion, and science is none other than E. B. Tylor’s three grand evolutionary stages of Savagery, Barbarism, and Civilization. With the “Ode to Joy” from Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony as recurrent musical background, Capra’s science films all conclude with triumphant visions of science, its origins and growth, and its promise for humanity—thus adding a scientific stamp to the populist optimism that is Capra’s cinematic signature.

Popular science, in fact, often works by offering stirring visions to the reader-viewer, and in the next chapter I explore other cosmic visions offered



in the name of science—in this case, visions inspired less by the heroic story of science than by momentary, personal epiphanies concerning the human place in the cosmos. In chapter 7, “Departures from Earth I,” I consider a moment of sublimity conjured by Carl Sagan around a photograph of the Earth taken from the edge of the solar system by the *Voyager* space probe. I juxtapose Sagan’s cosmic epiphany with a parallel moment described by Garrison Keillor in one of his Lake Wobegon monologues. Keillor similarly attributes his own cosmic vision to a departure from earth, but of a more humble sort: a Ferris wheel ride at the state fair. Sagan’s vision is portentous, elaborate, and loquacious, while Keillor’s is personal and set out in local-color plain speech—his monologues amounting to literarily honed personal experience narratives (on this genre, see Dolby Stahl [1989]). But otherwise Sagan and Keillor offer, point for point, the same vision. Sagan presents his vision as though it were made possible by science. But by juxtaposing Sagan’s epiphany with Keillor’s and with other literary renditions of small-town cosmic visions, I present an alternative take in which Sagan’s vision emerges as a tweaking of a cosmic epiphany rooted in human cognition and culture in general rather than as a possibility opened by science. To put it differently, I explore the folk roots of Sagan’s high-tech epiphany.

But not all is harmony in the cosmos. To exemplify the converse—the moment of literarily created cosmic disharmony—I analyze in chapter 8, “Departures from Earth II,” an article written for the *Atlantic Monthly* by ace disaster writer William Langewiesche about the tragedy of the space shuttle *Columbia*, emphasizing the ways he conjures, through excursions into the physics and engineering behind space flight, a sense of not just human but also cosmic conflict and pathos. His middle-brow treatise, energized by the appeal of astronauts as national heroes, draws upon popular genres ranging from detective novels to the biblical story of Genesis. Scientific visions of cosmic disharmony, like those of harmony, are developed out of literary traditions with folk-religious roots.

Continuing in somewhat different stride with the theme of astronauts and space exploration, chapter 9, “Goodbye Spooky Juney Moon,” presents the analysis of Tom Stoppard’s play *Jumpers* discussed above. Stoppard’s play is a multi-ring circus in which cosmic quandaries pursued through space exploration and mathematical paradoxes are juxtaposed with a pulpy scenario of crime investigation and a failing marriage. To this theatrical circus I bring a method of analysis developed originally around a traditional mythic story told by the Tsimshian people of the Northwest Coast of North America. The method was developed by anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss, whose career parallels Stoppard’s. Asking why a method that

seems to reveal something about a Tsimshian traditional myth should also do so for a modern science-infused theatrical farce, I explore the relationship among myth, ritual, and popular theater.

The tenth and final chapter, “Is Lucretius a God,” considers the first-century BCE Roman poet Lucretius’s epic *De Rerum Natura*, a landmark work of ancient science that remained influential as science through the Renaissance (nowadays it is more often read as literature). I argue that *De Rerum Natura* is not just an example of ancient science but also of ancient popular science. My focus is Lucretius’s strategies for convincing readers of the validity of materialistic atomism, especially his master plan of teaching and glorifying the new form of understanding by promoting it through the traditional genre of epic—replete with poetic meter, heroes, gods, shipwrecks, and invocations of the Muses. Like most epics, *De Rerum Natura* is set within a mythological cosmos—the worldview that the new atomistic understanding will directly challenge. Lucretius’s marvelous text is in fact one folkloric form employed to defeat others: specifically, epic—a genre that celebrates heroic human striving—employed to dislodge the assumptions that inhere in mythology and superstition or, as it is now termed, folk belief. The latter for Lucretius is epitomized in the supposition, in the story of Iphigeneia, that the sacrifice of this woman will enable the Greeks to voyage to Troy (Lucretius 1994:12 [80–102]).

Lucretius mythologizes in the service of demythologizing and in doing so largely adumbrates the basic strategies of persuasion popular science writers still adopt today. I develop this claim by revisiting the elite writers I treated in my earlier book and comparing their basic strategies to those of Lucretius. Although Lucretius lived in the era of “bread and circuses” (the phrase is from Juvenal), Lucretius himself in some respects would have to be categorized as elite. Certainly, his work was aimed at the literate minority of his time; moreover, the contemporary writers to whom I compare him form an elite (in the sense discussed above). However, in this chapter I do not (as I did in my earlier book) explore the larger, more complex arguments of the contemporary writers in question—of a sort that would be pursued by the “true believers” of popular science literature. Rather, I focus on their most basic and durable hooks and gimmicks, under the assumption that strategies hearty enough to call for comparison over a two-millennia span will tend toward universal popular appeal. Finally, regarding my earlier observations on the greater transparency of strategy in mass (over elite) popular science, we find in Lucretius a particularly candid depiction of one of the most persistent strategies of science popularizing in the face of anticipated reluctance from the audience; namely, science seduction through art:

My art is not without a purpose. Physicians, when they wish to treat children with a nasty dose of wormwood, first smear the rim of the cup with the sweet yellow fluid of honey . . .

In the same way our doctrine often seems unpalatable to those who have not handled it, and the masses shrink from it. That is why I have tried to administer my philosophy to you in the dulcet strains of poesy, to touch it with the sweet honey of the Muses. (ibid.:32–33 [1.926–58])

Distantly anachronistic comparison is methodologically treacherous. Nonetheless, I will argue that when one has isolated the expressive and persuasive strategies that link popular science writers of today with the roman epic poet Lucretius of the first century BCE, one will also sense the affinity of these strategies with the expressive forms that have always interested folklorists. The thought that it's all been done before is both intriguing and troubling; what does it mean that such a prescient summation of our present situation was set out by an epic bard two millennia ago? Perhaps the disconnection between the state of knowledge (or that part of knowledge we now call science) and lived experience simply must be accepted from here on out as part of the human condition—but a part toward which traditional folkloric genres and forms of expression will continue to play an active, domesticating role.

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Before closing this introduction, I would like to add a further note about the relation of *Science, Bread, and Circuses* (*SB&C*) to the book that preceded it, *The Ancient Mythology of Modern Science* (*AMMS*). While *Science, Bread, and Circuses*, as noted, is complete in itself, one who chooses to read the two books as a pair will encounter a smattering of examples considered in the first book and then reconsidered, in a different context, in this one. The reconsideration in this book will always involve a shift toward the “mass” end of the audience spectrum; through such shifts the reader will catch a glimpse of the different levels at which science exposition can be pitched. For example, in popular science there is no emblem of science, its demands, and its payoff more persistent and powerful than the idea of the Copernican revolution. In *AMMS* I consider this hallowed emblem as used by elite popular science writers to tell the heroic story of science and as a symbol of the personal transformation that a commitment to science demands. In *SB&C* the Copernican revolution reappears in two contexts, both of which lead not further into science but away from it. As I describe in chapter 2 of *SB&C*, motivational speaker Michael Gelb also invokes Copernicus as a symbol of personal transformation, but of a kind disconnected from science and related instead to optimizing self-confidence

and personal performance. Tom Stoppard invokes the Copernican revolution as a sort of cosmic metaphor of shifts in public worldview taking place around him.

A second example involves the metaphor of the human mind as a society (made up of different brain functionaries: librarians, executives, facilitators, and so on). In *AMMS* I consider the use of this image as a heuristic metaphor in recent elite popular science about artificial intelligence research (emphasizing books by Marvin Minsky and Daniel Dennett), while in *SB&C* I consider its use by Frank Capra, through studio animation, to convey the brain biology of his time to the broadest possible television audience. Other than my own commentaries here and in *AMMS*, I know of no instance of these two levels or forms of science popularization, rooted in the same metaphor, being brought into the same discussion; and I suspect that bringing them together will not meet with an entirely sympathetic response from the elite realm. That absence confirms the reality of different kinds and levels of science popularization that proceed, in some instances at least, in relative autonomy from one another. In sum, through these and a smattering of other examples, one who chooses to read the books as a pair will learn something about the variety of science popularizations. This variety consists in part of the diversity of illustrations but also, and perhaps more interesting, of the same illustrations refashioned in different ways toward different levels of culture, audience, and human experience.

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The relationship of science and folklore should be—indeed, I believe already is, implicitly—at the very center of folkloristic inquiry. For the claimed authority of science forms the single most potent theme in the idea of modernity, an idea that more than any other has engendered and propelled the idea of folklore (mostly as antithesis and/or nemesis). There are, all folklorists know, many contending definitions of folklore; but the historically deepest and most resonant of these spring from, and give expression to, concern for the life of traditional expressive forms in a world that proclaims itself fundamentally changed and no longer in need of them. The challenges to that proclaimed new world are many. Most famously, Bruno Latour, in *We Have Never Been Modern* (1993), points to elite journalists' relentless insistence on the mixing of science and non-science, for example, and asserts that the new world is non-attainable or at least not yet attained. Richard Bauman and Charles Briggs (2003) carry Latour's critique into sociolinguistic theory, and through it into traditional expressive forms, by asking whether such theories escape the parochialism they conjure as their foil. A number of folkloristic works—Diane Goldstein's *Once upon a Virus*

(2004), for example—spring not so much from a criticism or critique of scientific language or method as from an insistence that speakers of this language will succeed in bettering the human condition only if they are willing to acknowledge vernacular ways of understanding and dealing with disease and proposed cures. My work is in sympathy with all of these works and others but focuses on what seems to me the most direct encounter possible between folklore and science; namely, attempts—meeting with results from silly to sublime—to rephrase and thus domesticate scientific findings and claims in folklorically imbued popular forms.

## NOTES

1. It is in part the breadth of expressive genres considered in this book that leads me to identify myself as a folklorist in this title, as compared with my previous book, in which I identified myself through my genre specialty—that is, as a mythologist. In the context of oral expressive forms, folklore is generally the broader term (though there are exceptions; e.g., in Boasian tradition, “myth” sometimes meant a group’s oral narrative stock generally). The fact that I identified myself as a mythologist in the previous book has to do with one other factor central to that book but only peripheral to this one. That is, contemporary elite popular science writers often invoke “myth” (either the term or specific examples from mythology) as a foil, against which they claim to demonstrate the superiority of science. This rhetorical tradition is an old one, practiced by philosophers from the earliest times before being taken up by scientists (cf. Brisson 2004). Part of my aim in *AMMS* in identifying myself as a mythologist was polemical, for one of my goals was to show that popular science writers practice the same forms of analysis and persuasion they point to pejoratively in mythology.

2. As I write this, a television commercial is airing that appeals to public eco-consciousness by offering a home water-filtration system and pointing out that each year Americans use enough plastic bottles to reach around the world 190 times at the Equator.