

Thus, though none of the Loose and Humorous Songs are Victorian folksong texts, the introduction is a valuable social document, providing good background for any future study of Victorian sexual folklore. And this is, I believe, the reason Lydia Fish included it in her outline.

## NOTES

1. Folklore Forum 8 (1975): 142-47.
2. Ibid., p. 144.
3. John W. Hales and Frederick J. Furnivall, eds., Bishop Percy's Folio Manuscript. Loose and Humorous Songs (London: N. Trübner, 1867). Hales did have his name removed from a later edition.
4. Ibid., vol. 1, p. iii. It is true that under the editors' names there appears "(Assisted by Prof. Child, . . . W. Chappell, . . . etc., etc.)" However, the edition is also dedicated to Child, and if Child were truly a co-editor, he would not have had the insolence to dedicate the collection to himself. And, since the editors added Child's name to their collection as a token of respect, it would be unlikely that they would extend him the dubious honor of placing his name at the head of such a controversial book.
5. David C. Fowler, A Literary History of the Popular Ballad (London: N. Trübner; Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1968), p. 132.
6. Hales and Furnivall, p. iii.
7. Ibid., p. v.
8. Ibid., pp. iii-iv.
9. Ibid., pp. v-vi.

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## A FOLK EUPHEMISM AND OTHER MATTERS

I. In his Hold Autumn in Your Hand, George Sessions Perry uses a folk euphemism and a folk-rhyme which are both indigenous to the rural America of mule- and horse-drawn farm implements as a metaphorical device to further the characterization of the novel's protagonist who is Sam Tucker, a Texas "tenant farmer" of the era of the Great Depression.<sup>1</sup> When a mule which Sam is driving "breaks wind," Sam is reminded of an "old jingle":

But the general spirit in the wagon was still high, for its occupants were going somewhere, and the mules kept a strong pace and broke wind

bravely at intervals, as good mules will. An old jingle ran through Sam's mind which said that a mule with this tendency would never tire, a man so constituted was the man to hire.<sup>2</sup>

The "old jingle," as Perry presents it, is a paraphrase of the folk-rhyme:

A fartin' mule'll never tire,  
And a fartin' man's the man to hire.

Perry also alludes to the folk-rhyme later in the novel to underscore the fact that Sam was a determined man and that he was capable of sustained physical labor:

As she walked away from the turned land, the finished land, Frisno Emma [a mule] broke wind thunderously, almost theatrically, and there was bravado and jauntiness in her manner, as if to say the three of them [Sam and the two mules] were equal to twice that task, and Sam slapped her neck and laughed and loved her.<sup>3</sup>

Perry's use of the euphemism "break wind" necessitates a paraphrase of the folk-rhyme, though he retains the rhyme words; the paraphrase of the folk-rhyme, however, retains the analogy between mules and men which is posited in the original.

Draft animals (both mules and horses) will, upon occasion, "break wind" as they work, especially when the work entails a sustained physical effort; likewise, a man will on occasion "break wind" when he must fully coordinate his body when working in a physically demanding situation. The analogy between mules and men, however, lies more deeply in the folk experience of rural America than the mere analogous phenomenon of "breaking wind" in physically demanding situations. The mule is bred for work, and the analogy implies that a "fartin' man" is, like the mule, bred for work, i.e., is a "natural-born" worker. Implicit in the analogy is the notion that a "fartin' man will never tire," that is, like the mule, he is capable of sustained physical labor.

Elsewhere in the folk experience of rural America (also used extensively by Perry in his novel), the traditional staples of diet for the farm laborer include molasses and beans, both prolific producers of intestinal gases; the latter is the basis for much folkloric material, including the following folk-rhyme which extols the gas-producing properties of beans:

Beans, beans, the musical fruit;  
The more you eat, the more you toot.

(Dried beans [of any sort] were not served, when I was a boy, without my maternal grandmother, Ossie A. Whipple of Posey Co., Indiana, reciting this rhyme, a rhyme known widely among both rural and non-rural residents of the county.) The total meaning of the analogy in the folk-rhyme lies in the total culture of the rural American farm laborer: the mule is bred for work and his diet produces excessive intestinal gases; the man who will work (i.e., the man to hire) also has a diet which produces excessive intestinal gases, i.e., he is a man

who comes from an environment in which a strict work ethic is dominant. A man who eats the staple of the farm laborer is the man to hire, as opposed to a man who "eats high on the hog," a man who is used to a "softer" life and who is not accustomed to sustained physical labor.

II. The principal draft animal in the "tenant farming" culture which Perry describes in his novel is the mule, and the mule is the animal of the analogy in Perry's variant of the folk-rhyme. However, in other areas of the country where the horse is the dominant draft animal (rather than the mule), the horse is the animal of the folk-rhyme:

A fartin' horse'll never tire,  
And a fartin' man's the man to hire.

This is a variant of the rhyme that I have heard from Reader Jackson Hedges (Posey Co., Indiana) and John Best (Harrison Co., Indiana). In addition to the full rhyme, I have also heard O. Stoy Hedges (Posey Co., Indiana) use a one-line variant:

A fartin' horse will never tire.

This was used in a context which implies the meaning of the full rhyme: "a fartin' man will never tire." I have also heard the one-line variant (with a horse as the animal of the analogy) from Windy French (Posey Co., Indiana; Mr. French knew the rhyme with both horse and mule variants), Red Darrington (an oilfield roughneck and driller who had worked from Oklahoma to West Virginia), and several other older farmers in Southwestern Indiana and Southeastern Illinois, an area where at least the first line of the rhyme seemed to be common knowledge among many of the older farming families.

III. Although Perry's variant of the folk-rhyme is used as a device of characterization in a novel set in Texas, his allusions to the rhyme (along with the language of the characters, other folkloric materials, an abundance of material peculiar to the culture of the Depression Era farm laborer, and Perry's reputation as a historian) indicate that rather widespread knowledge of the rhyme existed in Texas during the era in which the novel is set. Perry's variant occurs in a culture in which the mule is the dominant draft animal, while the Midwestern variants reflect a culture in which the horse is the dominant draft animal. Elmer J. Smith (Harrison Co., Indiana) once told me that "no self-respectin' man'd ever work a mule," which reflects in part the same cultural variation as the Midwestern version of the folk-rhyme; Mr. Smith, though he seemed to only vaguely recall having heard the rhyme, could not recall where he had heard it, for around the turn of the century he had worked horses from Indiana, across the upper plains states, and into Canada.

Perry uses the rhyme in describing a mule-oriented culture, but the rhyme seems to exist only outside the South, that area of the country with which mules are traditionally associated, and that area of the country which is traditionally held to have lagged behind the North in adopting the use of mechanized farm implements. The Frank C. Brown Collection of North Carolina Folklore contains

no entry for the rhyme nor for any of its variants, though the collection does contain entries from outside the Carolinas. I have also not been able to locate any individuals from the Carolinas who have knowledge of the rhyme, even among the older men who still plow their gardens with a mule-drawn walking plow.

## NOTES

1. (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, repr., 1975).
2. Ibid., p. 35.
3. Ibid., pp. 100-01.
4. (Durham: Duke University Press, 1952-64), 7 vols.

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