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Laughing in the Shadow: The Role of Humor in Ghost Story Telling

A thesis

presented to

the faculty of the Department of Curriculum and Instruction

East Tennessee State University

In partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree

Master of Arts in Reading and Storytelling Concentration

by

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May 2006

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ABSTRACT

Laughing in the Shadow: The Role of Humor in Ghost Story Telling

by

Melissa A. Bentley-Edwards

The ghost story concert is a popular modern form of presenting ghost stories to ticket buying audiences and is one of the last stomping grounds of the oral tradition. Attendees come to be scared but not terrified. Tellers employ humor to release tension during the tale. When does humor release tension while maintaining the momentum of the story? When does the humor employed deflate it into a comical tale and diffuse suspense altogether?

In an effort to answer these questions, four variants of a single story, *Tailypo*, were analyzed for the presence of tension and humor inducing stimuli employing Rothbart's diagram of *Schematic Representation of Affective Response to Sudden, Intense, or Discrepant Stimulation*. Rothbart's model has previously been applied to affective response to horror film; here it has been applied to oral storytelling.

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DEDICATION

I owe the success of this work to many people, especially to Brandon, who put our mutual goals on hold for two years while my education reigned supreme. Thank you to all who have supported me in my endeavor to complete this project, both for my own knowledge and the ever-growing studies of storytelling. A special thanks to my thesis committee and to NSN grant committee who allowed me to complete this work, Dr. Mary K Rothbart for permission to use her schematic diagram, Rounder Records for permission to use Jackie Torrence's recording, the storytellers who permitted me to use their recordings and analyze their art, particularly David Holt, Marilyn Kinsella and Jim May, to Peggy Helmick-Richardson, Mel Davenport, Al Irvine and Mary Hamilton for assistance with details at the 11th hour, gratitude to Jackie Torrence and Chuck Larkin for their ever-living contributions to the oral storytelling craft, and to the tellers who have helped me with my own along the way.

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¹ From “Incongruity, problem solving, and laughter.” By M. K. Rothbart, 1976, in *Humor and laughter: Theory, research and applications* A. J. Chapman and H.C. Foot. (Eds.). London: Wiley. Copyright 1976 by Rothbart. Reprinted with permission.

² From “Incongruity, problem solving, and laughter.” By M. K. Rothbart, 1976, in *Humor and laughter: Theory, research and applications* A. J. Chapman and H.C. Foot. (Eds.). London: Wiley. Copyright 1976 by Rothbart. Adapted with permission.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

“Have you heard about the man with a crook for a hand? He lives on the outskirts of town and walks along the road where young couples park. He KILLED a boy once. The boy’s girlfriend was a friend of my aunt’s. Do you want to hear the whole story?” It is likely that you have already heard some version of this urban legend. Such a tale is akin to the ghost stories told while sitting around a campfire or when snuggled in a sleeping bag at a friend’s house during a sleepover party. Perhaps you were the one manipulating the story to scare your friends into sleeplessness. If so, delight came in scaring the living daylights out of them, while you acted deadly serious about the situation at hand.

Traditionally, amateur storytellers in informal settings tell ghost stories as they attempt to scare people that they know well. When people recall hearing such stories, they often visualize campfire discussions and sleepover parties. Professional storytellers have created a less intimate event called the ghost story concert so that this genre can be shared en masse. Attendees purchase tickets, just as they would to a musical performance or theatrical event. Although the ghost story concert shares its story genre with the intimate occasion, there are unique challenges to thrilling a large audience comprised of persons the teller may never meet let alone know intimately. A teller cannot maintain eye contact with masses of people huddled on blankets in the darkness as the story unfolds. Public address equipment must be used so attendees can hear the tale, and this can physically impede the performer’s natural movements. When performing ghost stories, tellers sometimes conjure more laughs than frights. Other performers make listeners jump and screech with delight. No matter the method of delivery, or resulting reactions, the ghost

story concert is an evolution of the intimate tale telling event. The challenge a storyteller has in such a venue is to keep audiences crying out for more.

Problem Statement

A story told with the illusion of terror delivers thrills and chills. Humor is often present in suspenseful stories, but it exists to relieve tension. Although the oral tradition is the focus, ghost story concert attendees are usually literate peoples with the knowledge and experience of other forms of the terror and horror genres. Few can claim that they have never seen a scary movie, or read a thrilling and suspenseful novel. Therefore, the ghost story concerts audiences have a jaundiced perception of what elements will fill an evening at a ghost story concert. They expect entertainment equal to their experiences: books they have read and movies they have seen.

This expectation is precarious for storytellers. Purists have no desire to link performances in the oral tradition to the parameters of literary or cinematic storytelling. Others acknowledge audience expectations are based upon the pacing and imagery of literary and video forms, and they struggle to balance the oral art with modern influences. Regardless of a teller's instinct and inclinations in relating a tale using solely oral art standards or contemporary styling, all ghost stories must have a few basic elements. What makes or breaks a tale in the minds of audiences is whether the stories induced adequate but not excessive fear. Two comments oft iterated by story listeners are: "That wasn't scary" or "That's too scary for me." The first statement stems from a light and humorous tale. The second indicates the sensitivity a person has to the intensity and type of fear-inducing stimuli employed. If humor were placed appropriately for these listeners, the tension created by the tale would be adequately released allowing them to enjoy the story more easily. Understanding situations in which the use of humor creates release of tension instead of deflating it altogether is the focus of this research.

Significance

Understanding how to thrill an audience is key to the continued survival of the art of scary tale telling, as well as storytelling as a whole. Sobol (1999) called ghost storytelling “one of the last living refuges for traditional oral narrative in contemporary American popular culture (p. 137). One event organizer told Sobol, “We break even with Saturday night [the traditional night for ghost story concerts at festivals]. The rest is gravy” (p. 96). Crowds want to be scared, but only to a degree. Displeased attendees do not return the following year. Storytellers must have an audience. If modern society loses the oral tradition because audiences were not sufficiently nurtured, we deal a devastating blow to our sense of roots and history.

Tellers learn to enchant audiences in a variety of ways. Some seek advice from mentors in the storytelling movement; but those who germinated the seeds of that revival are aging and changing. Unlike our story characters, storytellers cannot live forever, a point proven to us in 2003 as we suffered the loss of Appalachian tellers Ray Hicks and Chuck Larkin, and again in 2004 with the passing of Jackie Torrence. Therefore, if apprentices within the tale-telling community, including myself, want to carry the torch into the future, we must also learn from parallel sources. Looking beyond our revival circle to other ripples spawned from the oral tradition, this study acknowledges that concert attendees are often better versed in the world of horror films and thriller novels than they are in oral scary tales. Burggraf (2000) studied viewers’ affective response to horror films. Her work is instrumental here and discussed further along in this paper.

The primary element that gauges listeners’ fright is their affective response to stimulation. Rothbart (1976) studied this response and created a diagram (*Figure 1*. Schematic representation of affective response to sudden, intense, or discrepant stimulation). The diagram

illustrates that any sudden and unexpected provocation or excitement (stimulus) that does not challenge the existing knowledge or cultural expectations (schema) held by the person who experiences the provocation, will result in tension release, such as a laugh or smile. If the stimulus challenges the knowledge or experience of the recipient, he or she will then make a decision. Is the stimulus threatening or dangerous? If so, the recipient of the stimulus will engage in a defensive reaction. One reaction would be to remove the danger. Another appropriate reaction would be to discern why the stimulus occurred (problem solving). If the problem of why and how a stimulus was present is resolved, the recipient can then release his tension which was caused by this sudden provocation.

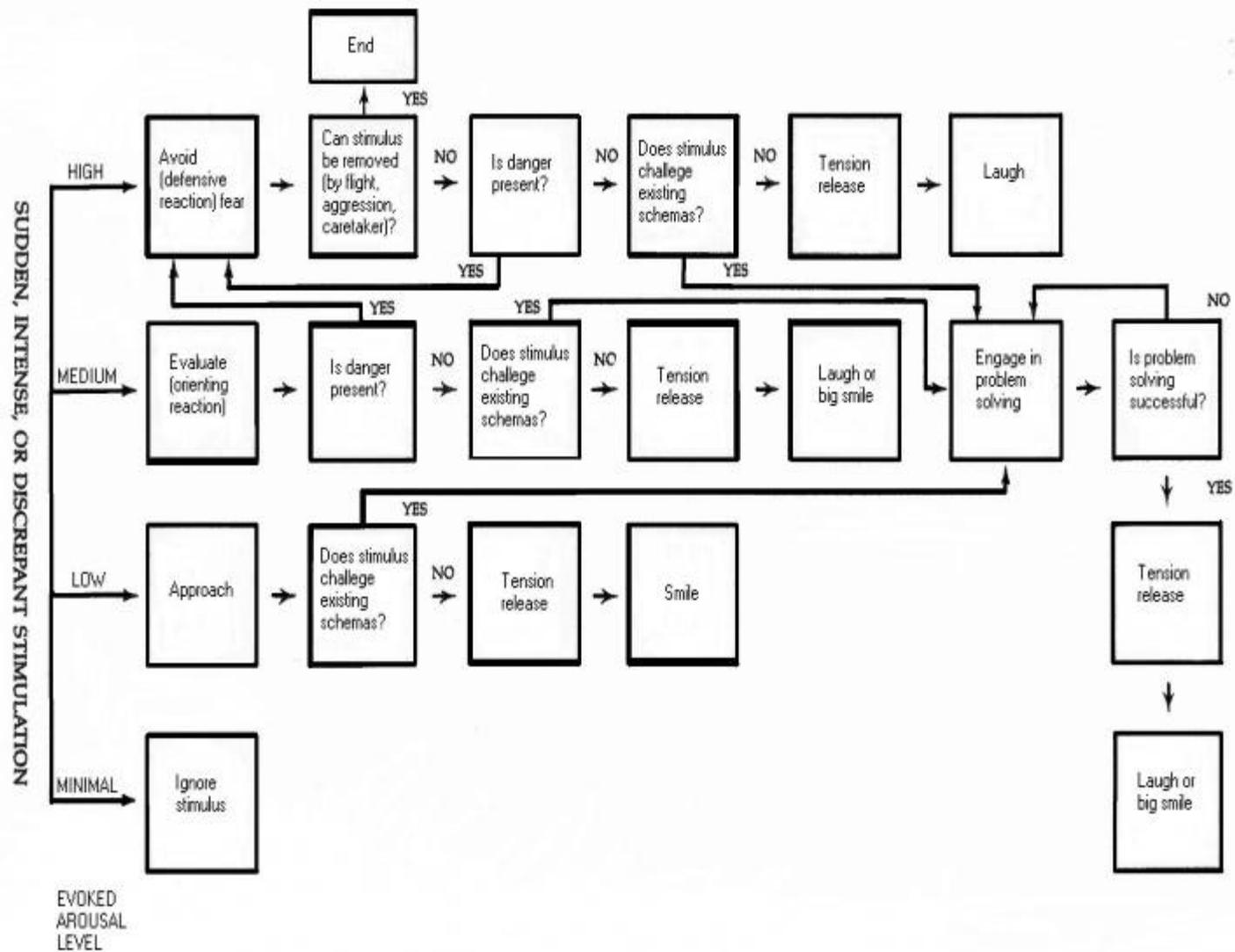


Figure 1. Schematic representation of affective response to sudden, intense, or discrepant stimulation

For example, I turned off a light in my home only to walk away and hear a sudden crash and see a flash of light in my periphery. My first reaction was fear as the stimulus was sudden and unexpected. I then began to problem solve. What was the sound? It was a broken globe from the light I'd just turned off. What was the flash of light? I discerned it was probably due to the globe hitting one of the bulbs in the fixture and causing a quick flash. Why did it happen? The nut, which held the globe in place, must have been loose. How did I know this? Two days earlier I'd seen that the globe was crooked. I had surmised the fixture was not installed properly and needed repair. Now that the globe had shattered I realized that a loose nut would also cause the globe to be misaligned. Did I then laugh? No. Why? Because part of my upbringing was based upon spiritual teachings and I wondered if there was something spiritually unsettled in the home. It was my first night in a new house. Scary movie images flashed through my head. Solutions of a spiritual nature came to mind. I took out my incense and smudged the house, said prayers, and rang chimes to clear the air of negativity. Only then did I go to bed and attempt to rest. Not until the next night had passed without incident could I laugh and smile about my reaction. Now I joke that there were two loose nuts in the house that night – one that failed to hold the globe in place and the other was the nut that feared that her newly purchased home was the next Amityville-style home of horror. *Figure 2*. Schematic representation of response to sudden crash and burst of light, illustrates my response to the stimulus, applying Rothbart's diagram to this event.

Rothbart placed the laugh or smile at the end of her continuum. Therefore, one might surmise that humor kills tension and removes fear. Yet, people do laugh and still feel the urgency of a threat. As a result, we ask, when does employed humor release tension and when is humor a momentum killer in an otherwise spine-chilling tale? Answering that two-tailed question is the purpose and focus of this study.

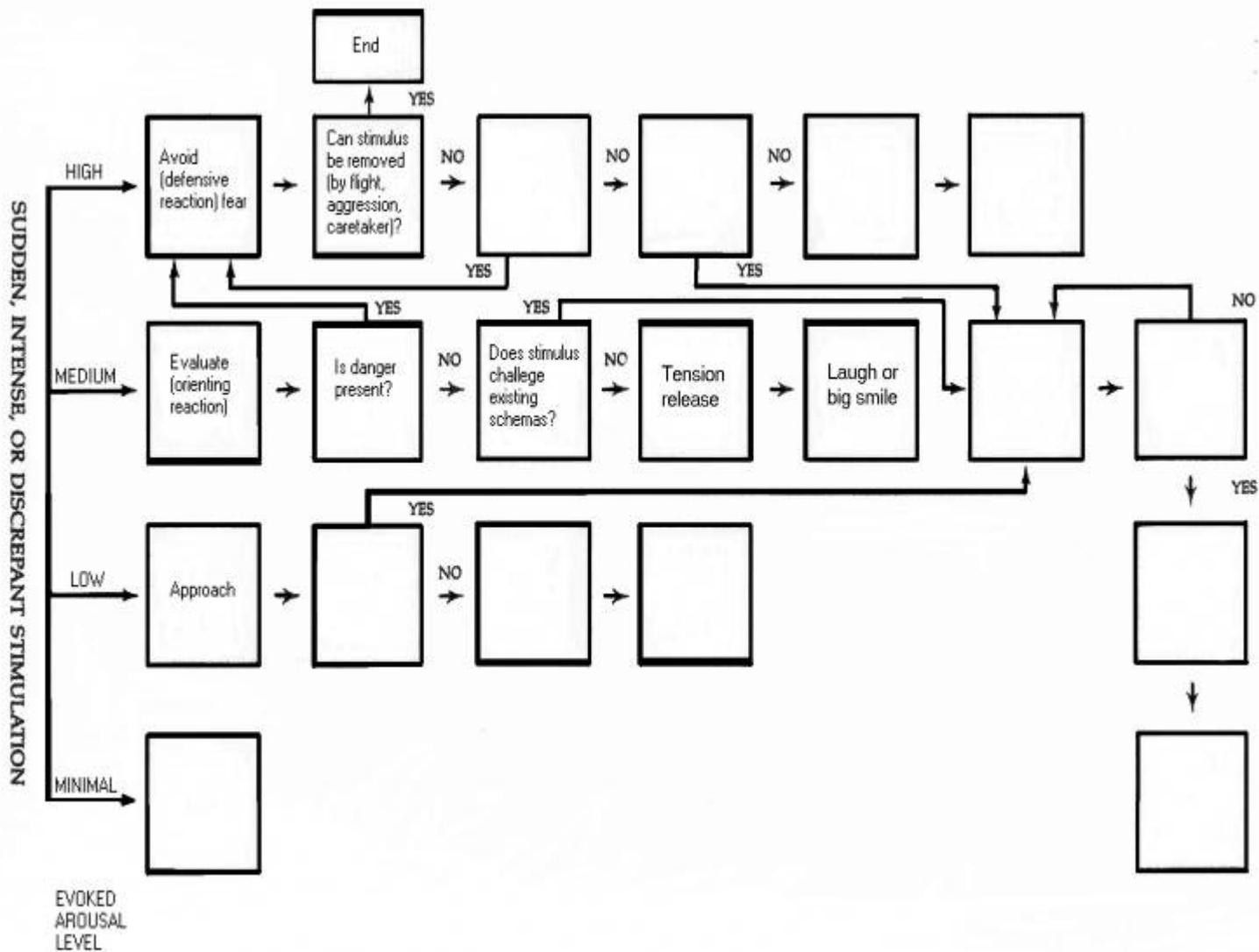


Figure 2. Schematic representation of response to sudden crash and burst of light

Methods

This study addresses the use of humor within stories oft told at ghost story concerts in relation to story context, delivery, and concert venue. Atmosphere is presumed to be a darkened concert hall, tent, city park or cemetery, depending upon the festival's geographic location and intention of the event organizers. Story content, however, is critical and it is the aim to illuminate the answers to these two significant queries through analysis of story content and delivery. First, when does employing humor in a scary tale successfully maintain suspense while temporarily relieving some of the tension within that story? Second, when does the presence of humor remove so much tension that the fear stimulus is deflated altogether?

Anyone can develop a theory as to why certain elements contribute to the appeal of a ghost story. However, only in testing that theory can one demonstrate its application and provide proven results. As a result, this study examines the traditional story *Tailypo* in four variants: one performed by David Holt called *Tailybone*, and three entitled *Tailypo*, told by Jackie Torrence, Marilyn Kinsella and Jim May. Transcripts of each recording are included in appendixes C, D, E and F, respectively. A transcript, being the simplest visual form to represent the spoken word, is not meant to take the place of a live storytelling experience as telling is an oral art.

Unfortunately, no unqualified source exists for stories to be evaluated by for their use of humor. As a result, the procedures, measure and methods employed by Burggraf (2000) in her study of *Affective Response to Horror Films* have been adopted to buttress the analysis of story variants. After all, fear and humor are subjective qualities and affective response to these stimuli is the best indicator of their perceived presence. Burggraf's study, along with the work which preceded hers in the field of affective response to film, is detailed in Chapter 2's section on the *Lessons from the Appeal of Film*.

Procedure

Each variant of *Tailypo* was examined extensively, first by noting the story content. Content analysis included examination of events in the story and images created by the teller. Do these images and events match what is socially and normally accepted? Or are they incongruent with what is accepted in American society? Did they create or alleviate tension? If tension was alleviated, was humor employed to do so? This analysis permitted ranking of these variants from least frightening to most scary by employing Rothbart's (*Figure 1*) diagram.

It is significant to note that though I did attempt to employ Burggraf's (2000) empirical testing procedures, they were eventually abandoned as too cumbersome for this study. As a result, I have included the directions for that study and the methodology in Appendix C, so that others may learn from my challenges. Alternatively, I relied solely upon analysis of the tales based upon Rothbart's (*Figure 1*) diagram in conjunction with my experience as a storytelling scholar.

Rothbart's (*Figure 1*) diagram, also employed by Burggraf (2000), illustrates the possible outcomes in affective response. If the stimulus used creates tension, and that stimulus tests the existing schema, or the knowledge and experiences of the protagonist and/or the story listener, the protagonist or story listener should act accordingly. Did the main character or story listener engage in observable problem solving? If not, tension has already been released or the tension remains until the problem of the stimulus is resolved. This diagram was employed to analyze each variant's content and provides the first stage of analysis for each story's presentation.

The second analytical focus is whether or not the teller is employing humor. If humor was not used, the tension created during the telling should remain. If humor is employed, does the momentum of the story carry it forward or has the tension dissipated in part or entirely?

Some vocal cues, sound effects, and linguistic stylings have been noted as part of this observation. However, the images of the story were the main focus of this analysis because images are building blocks of our judgments about events. In this case, the image is the picture created by the words of the storyteller, not the visualization of the listener independent of the teller's direction. Do the images invoke humor? If so, is this because they are incongruous with what is commonly believed or accepted, either culturally or within the structure developed so far in the discourse of the story?

The choice to focus on imagery in this analysis is best supported by Sawyer (1970):

I think stories must be acquired by long contemplation, by bringing the imagination to work, constantly, intelligently upon them. And finally, by that power to blow the breath of life into them. And the method? That of learning incident by incident, or picture by picture. Never word by word. (p. 142)

Frankly, I rarely recall any words used by a storyteller without also linking them to the images that I create mentally when hearing those verbal cues. These images remain with me long after the story has ended. Granted, my imagination surely varies from others'; nevertheless this part of the listener experience is notable in my critical assessment of a transitory art.

As the primary investigator I employed a final method of story analysis by audio taping audience responses during the listening portion of the study and noted participants' reactions to the story adaptations. As all listening was done during a single session, much like a ghost story concert, I believe my observations are consistent (as they were made by a single observer) and reasonable (as a storyteller also watches audience members responses during a tale telling). Even though their pencil and paper measures have been rejected in this study, I do refer to the observable reactions of this audience from time to time in the analysis portion of this study.

Application of Study

This research may be used in a variety of ways. Tellers may alter their understanding of their roles and responsibilities in relation to this genre. Promoters and event organizers may re-examine their expectations or methodology of presentation of ghost story concerts. Audience members may gain an appreciation of the efforts exerted by storytelling organizers and artists to create events that will duly thrill them. The overall goal of the study is to examine how humor is used in ghost story concert tales as a tension release while maintaining the momentum of the tale and create a rubric for story enthusiasts to consult when examining their own tales. Additionally, this rubric indicates how humor may be otherwise employed to create the pretense of fear, while poking fun at the genre and the fears audience members might exhibit.

This study is not meant to be absolute or considered to be a scientific empirical measure of the role of humor in storytelling. Storytelling is a complex and evolving art. The words of the story are only a fraction of what a tale provides an audience. Vocal cues and paralinguistic stylings alter the meanings of language. Anyone who ever said, “Okay” knows the nuances of intent can indicate a myriad of emotions and messages from “That’s what you think, but you’ll be sorry” and “You’re a nutjob, my friend, but I’m going along with you to a certain point” to “Back off before I tell you off” and “That’s fine. Really.” Furthermore, body language can affect a story in the same way. This polysemy transforms a tale to a far greater degree than humor does by itself when performing a story for an audience.

Limitations

Ghost stories are innumerable and the act of telling them is a boundless process. There simply is no possible way to be certain how many ghost stories or variants of a single tale exist and have been shared privately or in concert. This study focuses on four noteworthy adaptations

of one oral tale in the listening audience portion of this study, and two additional variants of this tale appear in Appendixes G and H and are discussed along with the study results. This story was selected not because I feel it is the best or most entertaining ghost story fare that I know. It was selected because it has been used so frequently in ghost story concerts and has been used at the National Storytelling Festival (NSF) several times.

As mentioned earlier, the storytellers who have made the revival of the oral tradition what it is today will not live as long as story characters can. The creator and “father” of the NSF, Mr. Jimmy Neil Smith, arranged for the audio tapes from all ghost stories told at that festival to be transferred to the Library of Congress American Folklife Center (AFC). The tapes are being duplicated from analog to digital format, and listened to – so content may be cataloged and available for public access well into the future. *Appendix A* contains a partial listing of ghost stories that have been told at the NSF and appear courtesy of Mr. Todd Harvey, Folklife Specialist (Reference) at the AFC. This listing is incomplete because at the time of this study the staff of the AFC had not yet completed the cataloging process. Nevertheless, *Tailypo* appears on this list twice and others are repeated as well, often by the same teller who performed the story years earlier. This is significant and suggests that, for whatever reason, there is something about *Tailypo* and other commonly repeated stories that “works” for the tellers and audience members alike. Even if a tale is effective in this setting, it is important to remember that no two tellers will ever share a story in exactly the same manner and, as discussed with the two additional variants of *Tailypo*, a single teller may also change how he or she presents a story. Because of the adaptability of story, it is important to realize that there is simply no way to be aware of all available variations of any folk tale. Four variants – two from women and two from men – is a reasonably balanced number to begin a listening study with, but it is by no means exhaustive.

The subjectivity of humor also limits this study. I am an American analyzing American tellers' variants of a tale. Humor certainly varies by culture and language especially when the words are the focus. Granted, scatological humor is funny to many regardless of their native language because gross bodily functions are something we all share. However, basic terms can be found humorous in parallel languages without the intent to be so. Ask anyone from the British Isles or Ireland to find something delightfully silly in the way Americans speak and I have no doubt a list will come to mind. An Irish friend who was sipping on a beverage in a city park once found himself trying not to spew it across the lawn when he heard a woman loudly searching around for her "fanny pack." Apparently where he's from a fanny pack is a women's sanitary device and is not normally spoken about candidly in mixed company. Likewise, most Americans, regardless of educational and social upbringing, feel uneasy or giggle when they hear the less-oft spoken and slightly out-of-date British phrase "Keep your pecker up--" even if we are aware that pecker in this instance means chin and has no sexual connotation.

The subjectivity of humor is also significant in that ghost story concerts are often a form of parody of scary events, with an air of camp to the delivery of the tales. Instead of employing humor and fear cues which cause appropriate affective response, ghost story concerts focus upon fearsome events and cues which used to frighten us as children. Part of what makes attending this concerts enjoyable is that we also reminisce about frights from days past, thus making the evening's events more of a stroll than a precarious walk through the shadow.

Textual analysis of an oral art form is an additional limitation to the work completed herein. Oral performance relies heavily upon the nuance of language and visual cues. Examining a story in print is divergent from listening to a tale in its original form. Transcription is inevitably a reductive activity. In transcribing these stories I've used a combination of commonly accepted

cues from theatre (vocal directions in parenthesis) and purposeful dialect spellings (such as po' for poor) and transliterate spellings ("Taaaaaiilypooooo" to indicate a long, drawn out calling of the name), new lines for each significant phrase break, and all capital letters for words shouted. Much of this convention comes from a combination of theatrical scripts and the work of Fine (1984). I have not attempted, however, to include paralinguistic features such as rise in intonation, falsetto or other similar vocal cues. That is the work of linguists, and is simply beyond the scope of my inquiry. This is not so much a linguistic study as it is a genre study. Likewise, the transcripts are void of kinesthetic features.

For practicality's sake, the primary reference material for this study is strictly audio performances, which in themselves have limitations. Studio recordings lack the natural energy and interrelationship between teller and audience. It is also noted that within a live performance, listeners might favor one variant of a story or another based upon the physical appearance and expressions of the tale teller. Demonstrative telling is a key element in the oral tradition, as well as the teller's skill with audience interaction. Yet, it is not logistically or financially practical to create a ghost story event in which the same tale is related multiple times. Thus, the setup of this study is one manageable method to compare adaptations of a popular ghost concert story.

Tailypo does not contain apparitions or even a single reference to ghosts. This is not unusual in contemporary storytelling, even if the performance events are billed as ghost story concerts. For clarification purposes, the term "ghost stories" is delineated in detail in the *Definition of Terms* section of this chapter. In spite of a lack of otherworldly spirits, it is undeniable that the jump tale – one that causes the listener to literally jump in his seat when surprised by the teller - is regularly featured at ghost story concerts. *Tailypo* is one of the cornerstones of the jump tale repertoire and is noted in Appendix A. Although *The Golden Arm*

(Twain, 1897) and *The Monkey's Paw* (Jacobs, 1902) are also repeated in ghost story concerts, *Tailypo* is the only one of the three created as an oral tale and not frequently present in literary anthologies. These facts justify the focus of the study around the story *Tailypo* as opposed to other stories listed.

Readers should recognize this study is merely an opening into the interconnectivity of the uses of humor and fear in telling ghost stories. Future study can perhaps address these issues of methodology and observer-event dynamics in storytelling research.

Review of Literature

In 1975, the NSF in Jonesborough, Tennessee held its first ghost story session in the old cemetery (Sobol, 1999, p. 94). Considered by many to be the center of America's storytelling revival, Jonesborough's festival is often imitated because of its success. Other venues followed in offering similar performances of the genre, and popularity grew exponentially.

In 1983, Corn Island Festival (Louisville, KY) saw upsurges in attendance by adding their ghost story concert. The festival had previously attracted a few hundred attendees, but audience numbers swelled to four thousand attendees for ghost story performances that year. The organizers were ill prepared for such a turnout (Sobol, 1999, p. 95), and catastrophe was in the offing, until a police car searched for the traffic-blocked professional tellers who were scheduled to appear. When Jackie Torrence was found and escorted to the stage, she replaced an unscheduled teller who had agreed to temporarily fill in. Pennington, the festival's organizer, told Sobol (1999):

The crowd was getting a bit antsy with the stories they were hearing. And we got Jackie on the stage at about ten o'clock or ten-fifteen. And of course she is capable at chilling someone at mid daylight. And they had come to be scared. And she just wiped the

audience out. And they went home happy (p. 95).

Akin to waiting for a reward that is never delivered, concert-goers feel cheated if they gear up to be scared and the fright never occurs. Pennington noted, “We were right on the verge of total disaster” (Sobol, 1999, p. 95). Four thousand disappointed audience members would have been a truly terrifying ending to the festival narrative.

Ghost Stories

There is no resolute agreement about the parameters for the art of ghost story telling, including: what to tell, how to tell it, how different venues result in specific audience reactions, or what a “true” ghost story is. “What to tell” concerns professional storytellers who present varied fare during ghost story concerts, thus creating frustration and confusion for audiences and event organizers. Helmick-Richardson (1993) acknowledged this, stating, “One thing all storytellers and their audiences agree on: these tales may vary from the humorous to the horrifying, but should never be boring” (p. 1). Tim Tingle and Doc Moore seemingly agree, as their ghost story material includes tales “from the humorous to the *deadly* serious” (Tingle, ¶ 22).

Webster’s Encyclopedic Unabridged Dictionary of the English Language (1996a) defines a ghost story as “a tale in which such elements as ghostly visitations and supernatural intervention are used to further the plot...” (p. 804). This definition is still quite broad, but most interestingly and significant to this study is the second half of the definition, which states that this type of tale requires a “chilling, suspenseful atmosphere.” Humor is not mentioned.

Helmick-Richardson (1993) reported she was, “raised in a family where ghost stories were told for amusement.” However amusing a story may appear on the surface, there are other reasons and subtleties to tale sharing which should be considered. Richard Young, when interviewed by Helmick-Richardson, expressed a psychological perspective and explained that

tales of the supernatural often serve an additional role of providing moral messages, especially for younger listeners. These stories, according to Young, "teach children what forms of behavior are acceptable and what are not" (p. 1). Sobol (personal communication, April 7, 2003) concurred, adding, "Ghost stories allow people to deal with the forbidden topics in their lives. They can get close to death and walk away unharmed."

Traditionally ghost stories were legends, told for true, as exemplified in the opening paragraph. Such tales pop up in a variety of locations each claiming to originate where the fearsome event originally occurred. The greatest confusion in the world of storytelling is that tellers no longer limit ghost stories to this genre. Some tell mythic or folktales with myriad of monsters and exciting action. Others offer personal stories with numinous connections or fearsome occurrences. Others share new stories about actual life experiences and events.

One type of popular ghostly tale speaks about unseen but heard inhabitants of buildings. Kathryn Tucker Windham has embraced this type of tale in her books, including *Encounters*, and Jeffery, the name she gave to "the 'something' that lives in our house in Selma" (Unverzagt, Summer/Fall, 1999, p. 4). Windham reasons that people are interested in the genre "because ghosts are something we are not really sure about. We have an explanation for almost everything else. Ghost stories stretch our imaginations; make us wonder...that's the fascination of them!" (Unverzagt, Summer/Fall, 1999, p. 5). A recent headline at CBS online read *Guardsmen Sense Ghostly Presence in New Orleans* after Hurricane Katrina battered the state (Yee, 2005). The story detailed a looming shadow and a little girl seen in a doorway, each viewed by different members of the National Guard who were on duty after the city was evacuated. Like it or not, ghost tales have a role in modern society, and they do not exist solely to taunt or tease sensible people who have purportedly seen spirits in the darkness or humor the tellers of the tales.

Occasionally, storytelling communities choose to not hold ghost story concerts due to the communities' preconceptions about sharing shadow tales. Sobol (1999) refers to the ghost story concert as the "traditional descent into the Underworld, with the storytellers as shamanic guides" where listeners and tellers "contemplate the lower, malevolent, and fearsome forms on the other side of the divide of life and death" (p. 137). This spiritual view of ghost storytelling may be far from what most audiences think about as they purchase tickets and prepare for the thrill, but not everyone ignores this aspect either. Often communities voice opposition to the genre or anticipated elements therein, due to religious and spiritual ramifications. I personally have been told by one employer that scary stories were acceptable and enjoyed by their students, but when telling please honor one request: "no witches, please."

Regardless of the objections elsewhere, ghost story concerts are held in many communities and festivals. In spite of the concerns several communities hold about the genre and concert forum, versus the traditional campfire venue, audiences do come – in droves. However, the presence of large audiences does not mean the storytelling community agrees upon what elements make a true ghost story or how it must be presented.

Shadow Tales

Carl Jung dedicated much study, writing and effort to the concepts of self-realization. Originally, his ideas stemmed from the teachings of Freud. Then Jung took his teacher's concepts of our main persona (or ego) and its unconscious counterparts in new directions. One personality element that Jung often focused upon was the shadow:

The shadow is an unconscious complex that is defined as the diametrical opposite of the conscious self, the ego. The shadow represents everything that the conscious person does not wish to acknowledge within themselves. For instance, someone who identifies as

being kind has a shadow that is harsh or unkind. Conversely, an individual who is brutal has a kind shadow. The shadow of persons who are convinced that they are ugly appears to be beautiful.

The shadow is not necessarily good or bad. It simply counterbalances some of the one-sided dimensions of our personality. Jung emphasized the importance of being aware of shadow material and incorporating it into conscious awareness. Otherwise we project these attributes onto others.

The shadow in dreams is often represented by dark figures of the same gender as the dreamer, such as gangsters or prostitutes or beggars or liars. (Wikipedia, 2006)

Staub de Laszlo (1993) furthered the definition of shadow as an unconscious aspect of the persona where unconscious means:

“...everything of which I know, but of which I am not at the moment thinking; everything of which I was once conscious but have now forgotten; everything perceived by my senses, but not noted by my conscious mind; everything which, involuntarily and without paying attention to it, I feel, think, remember, want, and do; all the future things that are taking shape in me and will sometime come to consciousness” (p. 70).

Jungian psychologists build upon Jung's work with the phenomenology of the stories of fairy tales and believe our dreams reveal our shadow nature (Bennet, 1966, p. 117). One Jungian, von Franz (1995), defined the shadow as “the personification of certain aspects of unconscious personality, which could be added to the ego complex by which, for various reasons are not” (p. 5). Therefore, the shadow part of our selves is not a conscious element, but still is part of our Self that may eventually come to light in our own self-realization. This unconscious facet of ourselves is still part of who we are, of how we think and act. Webster's (1996c) has one

definition of shadow as “to represent faintly or prophetically” (p. 1756). Thus, our shadow faintly represents a part of who we are, have been, or are becoming.

Although the term “shadow” was never employed by child psychologist Bettelheim in 1976 he stated that fairy tales “speak” to a child’s subconscious by giving form to his subconscious self without his awareness (p. 15). In doing so, tales take anxieties and dilemmas seriously and address the unconscious “fear that one is thought worthless; the love of life, and the fear of death” (p. 10). Now consider that we, even as adults with myriad coping skills, also each have our own shadow. Bettelheim addressed this challenge when he noted that “the older person might find it considerably more difficult to admit consciously his fear of being deserted by his parents or to face his oral greed” (p.15). Thus, the ghost story, most certainly a shadow tale, speaks to a listener’s anxious constructs without condescension.

Shadow tales also challenge the existing schema, be it cultural or individual, by offering a foreign stimulus with which an individual must test himself. As noted in Rothbart’s diagram, if the existing context of one’s life is challenged, a person either can remove the stimulus or resolve its presence. If an individual hears of a story where the protagonist resolves a situation that has challenged his or her cultural or individual life framework, it is entirely plausible that the story listener will be able to resolve a similar challenge were it to occur in daily life because his or her imagination had already dealt with the vicarious experience. The actual transference of vicarious experience to real-life events is not necessarily simple. However, a ghost story featuring conflicts that a person may never consciously encounter can still be beneficial by serving as a resolution example for that individual’s subconscious self.

Jung also went so far as to not only identify the individual shadow, but the collective unconscious and shadow as well. The collective refers to “a society, a people or to mankind in

general” (Staub de Laszlo, 1993, p. 306). A society’s shadow cannot be found in a single dream. Societies do have stories, however. Von Franz (1995) takes Jungian dream analysis and applied it to folk and fairy tales in the same manner stating that folk tales reveal the collective unconscious (including collective shadow) of the cultures from which they come (p. 14).

Modern American Collective Shadow: Terror

The word “terror” has been overused and misunderstood long before America’s current political conflicts came into focus. In the *Dictionary of Literary Themes and Motifs*, Schroeder (1988) offered that “the terms ‘horror’ and ‘terror’ are so close in meaning and connotation that they are often used interchangeably by authors and critics” (p. 622). Kaye (1985) stated the definition of terror is “cleaner, more profound, deriving as it does from the Latin *terrere*, to frighten” (as cited in Schroeder, 1988, p. 609) Schroeder pointed out that fear is the common thread in the definitions. Terror has extraordinary intensity, and although fear is a characteristic of both terror and horror, terror often turns into horror with appropriate stimulus. However, horror is produced by real, not imaginary dangers and is accompanied by less suspense (p. 623). For the purposes of this paper, terror and horror will be used interchangeably, as Schroeder acknowledges authors often do. This is done so here because a story listener’s subconscious and conscious fears are dealt with similarly when listening to a scary story as evidenced by Rothbart’s (*Figure 1*) diagram. Additionally, readers are not expected to accept a refined definition of either term when we have applied them indiscriminately for decades.

Americans, as a people, dealt with the awful news of September 11, 2001, and of the Columbine school shootings - two very real, terrifying, recent historical events. Even those who knew no one directly affected by these incidents participated in the collective pain. According to Fultz and Nelson (1993) “anticipated stress, and anticipated relief from that distress through

termination of the exposure, apparently attracts a person to viewing another's suffering" (p. 281). Whether we were attracted to the suffering of others or not, America went to war and everyday people began the inevitable, necessary path toward compensation and coping. In that process, stories have emerged which help us address our pain; TV, film and books all address our fear of unexpected attack in our national soil and in our institutions.

If one adult has difficulty in facing such challenges, imagine the cumulative need of a nation. In the 1960s Americans endured the assassinations of two Kennedy brothers and of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., the uprisings at the Chicago Democratic National Convention, racial violence and a long, unpopular undeclared war. Americans faced questions that needed resolution but that no single person could answer. As a result, the next decade began with many Americans questioning themselves and their politics. It is not coincidental that the ghost story revival began, in the mid-1970s. It was a direct response to the Vietnam conflict and the cultural and social tensions of that period (Sobol, 1999, p. 9). Some may say in 30 years we haven't come far, as we again are at war, this time continually looking over our shoulders in fear of terrorism.

Methods of Addressing Collective Shadow

Shadow confrontations often occur in places where such subjects may be paraded about and played with, often in jest. The ghost story concert offers such a venue, but this was not the first public vehicle for addressing the collective shadow. Art has always offered such vehicles, from Greek tragedies to the Grand Guignol in all of its extremes. The Grand Guignol³ reached its pinnacle in 1897. A former police superintendent Oscare Méténier, opened the Théâtre du Grand Guignol in Montmatre. The plays of the Grand Guignol were depended on suspense, sensation,

³ Guignol is the name of a French puppet known for his cruelty. He originated in Lyon and has been frequently compared with Punch of the commedia dell'arte. Guignol is also the generic name for the children's puppet theatre in France. (Pierron, 1996)

emotional suffering and violence (Pierron, 1996). Horror film, known for many of the same features, contributed to the decline of the Grand Guignol and its demise in 1962 (Zilber, 2003).

Film has since largely taken over the role of live theatre in the lives of many Americans. One of the first horror films was *Phantom of the Opera* (1925). A silent depiction of a diabolical beastly man of the subterranean sewers, the movie was based upon the novel *Le Fantôme de l'Opera* by Gaston Leroux (Internet Movie Database, Inc., 2004a). The world of horror pictures has grown steadily since.

Two of the most oft-depicted horror film characters were originally literary characters: Frankenstein and Dracula. The famous *Frankenstein* film, with unknown actor William Henry Pratt, a.k.a. Boris Karlof, cast as the pale green-fleshed, bolt-necked monster, was released in 1931, but it was not the first literary or screen image of the Monster. Although this image of Frankenstein's Monster was unique at the time, it now has become commonplace (Frankenstein Movies: Commentary and History, n.d.). In fact, Frankenstein's Monster (who is usually called solely by the name of his mythic creator) and Dracula have become so imbedded in our cultural mythos that their actions and images no longer embody the horrific archetype they once did. Hearing someone say, "I want to suck your bloooooood," is more apt to evoke shrieks of laughter.

The alteration of well-known villains from fearsome character to comic oddity changes the role of a horrific antagonist. New villains must be created to address the collective and individual fears in each society, for "our culture offers few and only shallow resources for symbolizing evil" (Alford as cited in Freeland, 2000, p.2). The 1980s and 90s offered Freddy Krueger in no fewer than seven *A Nightmare on Elm St.* films, and Jason rules in 10 *Friday the 13th* installments, resulting in *Freddy vs. Jason*, also known as *Nightmare On Elm Street 8; Friday the 13th Part 11* (Lee's Movie Info, 2004, chart). The AIDS epidemic spawned

collective reaction in a myriad of vampire novels and films, including Anne Rice's *Interview with a Vampire*. I would venture to guess that nearly everyone has seen a suspenseful movie that addresses the unspeakable. One popular dramatic film that did so quite effectively was the \$661.5 million dollar grossing film from 1999, *The Sixth Sense*, wherein a boy reveals that he "sees dead people" (Internet Movie Database, Inc., 2006).⁴ This is not considered to be a horror film by many, but the stylistic elements of horror film are present: otherworldly beings, blood and guts, suspense, and life-and-death situations that makes one fear for the protagonist's well-being and question the eerie line between this life and the next step (whatever that may be) and a surprise twist in the end.

Readers and movie-goers simply love the villains and monsters they have come to know well. This is where the appeal of horror films and novels comes into play as our individual and collective shadows are addressed. However, this illuminates the world of ghost story appeal and expectations only so far. The most basic question is: What is so appealing about being scared - especially in a time when daily life seems to offer more than enough fearsome focus of its own?

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Fear Appeal Theories

There are several theories as to why there is an appeal to experiencing fear -- be it real,

⁴ Financials are given in US dollars and represent box office receipts only. (Internet Movie Database, Inc., 2006)

imagined, or simulated. One may be surprised to think of fear as a pleasurable experience. Yet, many buy ghost story concert tickets with excited anticipation for the stories they will hear. Some even begin practicing scary laughter (bwwwwaaaaahahaha!) and sneaking up on each other and yelling “Boo!” hours before the event. Audience members attend these concerts for the thrill and fear appeal.

Where did the concepts of fear appeal and relief from fear come from? The theories evolved from study of fear within a tale – be it Greek tragedy, horror film, thriller novel, or ghost story. As a story construct, fear is fabricated or false fear. All ghost story elements are fantastic. The fantastic elements remind audience that they are safe and can cope with whatever the story dishes out. No sane story participant thinks he or she is truly in danger, fighting evil for his or her life while participating in the story exchange. Listeners use objective distance for safety. Yet, if the created distance is too great, the thrill of the event is diffused and audiences are unsatisfied.

Aristotle’s theory of *Catharsis* developed in regard to the stimuli of Greek tragedies. Aristotle noted that “Tragedy depicts ways in which good people cope or are damaged by the limitations life can pose for them” (as cited in Freeland, 2000, p. 5). The hook that transfixes audiences of Greek drama is that tragedy is often absolutely unavoidable and inescapable, due to a character flaw or fateful event that cannot be changed or avoided. Audiences watch the tragic events unfold and feel enormous pity for the protagonist who has no alternative except to stay the course of predestined events. Some may feel that watching tragedy unfold would be unappealing. However, Mills (1993) wrote that the purging of fear and pity leaves “the viewer...feeling less negative than before” (p. 256).

McCauley (1998) applied *Catharsis Theory* to horror films and developed three hypotheses to explain horror film appeal. First, those with emotion to purge find drama to be

rewarding. Second, filmgoers leave a horror film with reduced levels of fear and disgust. Finally, their enjoyment should be proportional to the degree of fear and disgust reduction (pp. 144-162).

Berlyne (1967) and Sharp (1988) supported another concept of fear appeal called *Arousal Theory*. Sharp described fear-stimulated arousal saying, “Suspense, fear and emotion rush as adrenaline drops into the circulatory system, the skin tingles, vivid images pulsate into our consciousness and a heightened awareness tells us our entire nervous systems has kicked into high gear” (p. 10). Sharp’s theory comes into play when we have a “close call” in a risky situation and live to tell about it, largely unscathed. Watching characters slip through the hands of fate is a common event in action and horror films alike and adept storytellers can create equivalent suspense with properly orchestrated tellings.

In ghost story concerts tellers and listeners alike choose to confront the unknown. Why would one consciously choose to do this? Heller (1987) hypothesized that a horror thriller offers “controlled contact with symbolic representations of the culturally forbidden and affirming that control” (p. 72). The culturally forbidden refers to challenges to what is culturally acceptable, or the same schema depicted by Rothbart’s diagram and mirror’s Jung’s definition of the shadow. Just like the teen who wears apparel her parents would never approve of, story listeners play around with social and cultural mores as they assert personal control in their lives.

Freeland concurs with Heller, adding that emotions are part of our cognitive outlook and that emotional arousal accompanies audience members’ interpretation and thinking about a film (2000, p. 9). Thus, a well-told story includes an emotional buy-in for audience members. However, listeners each may buy into something different within the same story. The teller, playwright, or screenwriter may want audiences to focus on the actions of the antagonist and protagonist; but will the audience follow the lead of the story crafter? Freeland (2000)

acknowledged this buy-in variable. No matter what the personal intention of a teller might be a teller must understand that the emotional journey of his or her listeners may not match the intent.

Theories of Humor

Perhaps one of the greatest challenges to defining the role of humor in ghost storytelling is that perception is involved in all levels of storytelling and listening. Humor is nearly as slippery a term to define as “ghost story.” It is employed in a variety of contexts which, at first glance, may seem to have no relevance to story concerts. Webster’s (1996b) defined humor in no less than 13 ways, the first being: “a comic, absurd or incongruous quality causing amusement” (p. 932). The term “comic” and “amusement” appear to be in conflict with the darkened venue and eerie tales a person would expect at a ghost story concert. Yet, absurdity and incongruity do align with scary tale fare. Of course, a tale about a one-eyed monster chasing someone running through the woods is absurd and incongruous with what we accept and expect for the front page of any daily news-focused paper. That would be amusing and comical.

To understand the role of humor in storytelling, we must first understand what is considered to be humorous in general and how one can make an event, comment or character seem humorous. Plato and Aristotle espoused *Superiority Theory*, believing that humor stems from one’s amusement at the foolishness and inferiority of others (as cited in Morreall, 1987, p. 3). Two centuries after, Hobbes (1651) supported their theory adding:

Sudden Glory, is the passion which maketh those Grimaces called laughter; and is caused either by some sudden act of their own, that pleaseth them; or by the apprehension of some deformed thing in another, by comparison whereof they suddenly applaud themselves (as cited in Bending, 1999, ¶ 4).

Hutcheson wrote his own theory that “Comic genius” is an author’s ability to use

“inappropriate” metaphors and similes to trigger ideas that clash with each other (as cited in Morreall, 1987, p. 26). This was the first attempt at a theory of incongruity. David Hartley took a more broad-based approach, supporting Hobbes by noting that we often laugh at mistakes of children, foreigners, and rustics. Hartley called this response to other’s failings *Incongruency Theory* and surmised that surprise, inconsistencies, and improprieties cause laughter. He then created his own *Relief Theory*, stating that sometimes dissipation of fear or other negative emotions results in laughter. Hartley also added humor has an element of irrationality in that, “People are always looking for the humorous aspect of their experience thereby disqualifying themselves from the search for truth” (as cited in Morreall, 1987, p. 41). The concept of challenging accepted societal actions (Hartley called “mistakes”) resulting in laughter follows Rothbart (*Figure 1*) without noting that such errors need release from the tension they cause.

Psychology of Humor

Adult humor usually serves a purpose, such as providing comic relief by the telling of sick jokes after a tragedy. Mindness (1987), a behavior scientist at Antioch University, defined a “panorama of humor” with the range as follows: 1. Nonsense and wordplay; 2. Comic Relief (with four sub-headings including ribaldry, scatology, sick humor and degrading or hostile humor [e.g. ethnic humor]); 3. Social satire; 4. Philosophical humor or comic vision; 5. Self-directed humor; 6. Creation, destruction, and re-creation in the structure of humor (p. 83). Mindness stated that in its most sophisticated form, comic relief is the “meat and potatoes of comedy, for it contains the categories that evoke the greatest amount of laughter” from the most people (p. 87). Mindness offered the following after the space shuttle Challenger tragedy:

Q. What does NASA stand for?

A. Need another seven astronauts.

Q. Where did the space shuttle crew spend their holiday?

A. All over Florida. (p. 87).

Why would a person laugh at these jokes? Social etiquette dictates that decent people are not supposed to be callous in regard to death. Mindness countered:

But we [are]. We [are], for at heart we are natural creatures, not civilized ones, and we all possess improper drives. By airing and sharing them in jest, we relieve ourselves in a relatively harmless manner, while forming bonds of communion (p. 88).

Decent people also should not harbor lustful impulses, be curious about another's anal functions, disease, or deformity, or put others down because of their ethnic background or any other characteristics that show their differences from the perceiver. Mindness (1987) called humor that makes fun of disease, deformity, and death or suffering as a form of comic relief "sick humor" (p. 87). Such macabre humor helps one cope with situations that are unacceptable to be curious about, as mentioned above, and also help assert one's control – the same control mechanism we access as we confrontation our shadow.

The first person to author a sociological study of sick humor was Obrdlik. In 1942, he authored *Gallows Humor – A Sociological Phenomenon*, based upon his experiences in Czechoslovakia during Nazi occupation. Obrdlik concluded that oppressed people use humor to make the intensity of their situation feel temporary. They also compensate for being unable to physically fight back by offering humor as a type of resistance against their oppression.

Perhaps it is the story listener's subconscious need to fight against the image of the antagonistic in the tale that allows the listener to enjoy sick humor at the antagonist's expense within a story. Therefore, the actions of the protagonist are seen as just, even when they would otherwise be inappropriate in reality. Additionally, having such events unfold in "just a story"

can offer additional distance in dealing with antagonistic sources. No other coping device, besides flight, creates more necessary distance from a fearsome object or event and its emotional recipient than humor (Mindness, 1987).

Comic relief is the “relief from the basic controls...from the civilizing process...” and that in acting as a fool, children especially “recapture their primal freedom...allowing their minds, their tongues, and their limbs to play around in delicious disengagement” (Mindness, 1987, p. 85). Of course, no terror tale goes so far as to interpolate “knock knock” jokes, but words are played with, often by the antagonist as he wreaks havoc. Spencer made the first shift from philosophical arguments to scientifically based ideas. His *Relief Theory* was based upon the concept that laughter is a psychological phenomenon stemming from the biological need to release nervous energy (as cited in Morreall, 1987, p. 102).

Henri Bergson, 1859-1941, wrote that all laughter is inherently social. He concluded that for something to be funny it must be human or related to human nature. For example, if you see a dog sitting in the driver’s seat of a car waiting for its owner, you may laugh. What you are truly amused by is the fact that the dog appears to be ready to drive the vehicle once the owner returns. Morreall challenged Bergson’s idea when he noted, “If I find a bowling ball in my refrigerator, I may find this incongruous situation funny, even though I do not see the ball as a person” (as cited in Provine, 2000, p. 17) However, perhaps Morreall is laughing about how a person might play such a joke upon him or how odd it must have been to smuggle a bowling ball into his house without his knowledge and leave it in his fridge.

Be it for biological need, such as releasing nervous tension, or because a story character does something uniquely human, laughter serves multiple purposes in story. It is my contention that in ghost stories humor is present to offer release from tension as the story proceeds along a

rising arc, or as Jackie Torrence preferred, aiming for the pinnacle moment in the tale. Excessive or misplaced humor deflates the tension and shifts the focus of the story to the humorous instead of the deadly serious moments the teller is aiming at.

CHAPTER 2

FOUNDATIONS OF FEAR AND HUMOR IN GHOST STORY TELLING

Storytellers Neimi and Ellis (2001) defined difficult stories as “any story whose content makes it challenging to tell or uncomfortable to hear” (p. 7). Ghost stories fit into this category not only due to the sensitivity to the stories’ characters, events, and challenges of telling them, but also for emotional and psychological reasons. The emotional safety of a performance venue, and stories presented therein continue to fuel discussion in storytelling circles. Sobol stated ghost stories contain a representational pallet, which allows tellers to express the unnamable – terror. The concert is a safe setting created to suspend a listener’s belief just long enough to “goose” them before they are safely returned to reality. (Personal communication, April 7, 2003)

Tellers know that scary stories are highly emotional. They seek to entertain without causing emotional damage. How do we know what fearful elements audience members like so that we may better meet their needs? How does one know if humor is balancing a situation, even if it is “just a story”? Von Franz (1995) mentions one self-test to discern if you have kept your sense of humor during an emotional situation. She stated that if your sense of humor is no longer present (in a situation), “one can be sure that an emotional fire has caught one somewhere and then one is in danger of falling for the principle of evil” (pp. 181-182). Granted, most of us have little concern about “falling for the principal of evil” when telling a story, but von Franz illustrates her point well. Other than viewing the body language of an audience in the darkness of a concert, listening for audible feedback, or asking oneself mid-telling, “Can I laugh about the events in this tale?” I would venture to guess that tellers are usually not aware of how to evaluate a story’s emotional impact upon listeners. (Tellers certainly cannot dig out Rothbart’s diagram and consult it during a story event.) Additionally, if tellers rely heavily upon fear appeal theory

to guide their choices, they may not find adequate answers either. Why? Because there are flaws to the theories they would rely upon.

Flaws in Fear Appeal Theory

To analyze fear, one must be able to acknowledge the existence of fear and label what created the fear response. Burggraf (2000) stated that individuals might not be able to describe why they like horror, because some fears are unconscious societal fears (p. 15). As a result, tellers cannot rely on audiences to point out what these unconscious societal fears are and the very nature of dealing with our shadow is certainly an unconscious construct.

Relief Theory does not address the fact that relief does not always occur at the end of a film or story. Sometimes relief is a long time coming. Consider nightmares. John Mack (1970) defined *nightmare* as a “type of severe anxiety dream in which the level of anxiety reaches overwhelming proportions” (as cited in Heller, 1987, p. 173). Heller added that these dreams are “responses to immediate conflicts in the dreamer’s life – often an insecurity...or life change” (p. 173). If a nightmare ensues after a ghost story concert, perhaps the story helped remove a repressed anxiety. Although a nightmare is not pleasurable by any account, it is plausible that having one may lead to the resolution of a deeper conflict. Does that make the catalyst inherently negative? Only the dreamer would know, and may not come to an evaluation for a long while after the event. If relief comes after a nightmare, is the relief welcome? Should a dreamer be grateful? I would venture to guess that no one who has had a nightmare, or helped calm a child, who has awakened from one, would consider gratitude a natural or typical response to the event.

The arguments over the role and existence of nightmares after traumatic events (including ghost stories for some) highlight the fact that people have no desire to be truly terrified. Yet, we regularly seek entertainment that is fearful in nature. Von Franz (1995) noted that evil and fear of

the unknown (including illness, death, and monsters) are elements that one can either choose to fight or flee from. But why seek evil or the unknown? Von Franz indicated that the appeal of fear “[h]as about it something divine, which is shown in its attractive numinosity and our desire to hear about it” (p. 125). She continued, noting that if a monster is the personification of evil, it is also a non-personal, non-human, “super-natural” entity, as terrifying as it is attractive (p. 125).

Employing Rothbart’s (*Figure 1*) diagram, we see that relief from tension occurs when a problem has been solved or when an unexpected stimulus fails to challenge our existing schema or our daily expectations and experiences. What role does humor employed within a story have in fear relief theory if all release is not acknowledged until the end of the tale? Burggraf (2000) noted that relief theory usually does not focus on purgation of the viewer’s own emotion but rather upon relief from induced emotions (p. 14). In other words, although the stimulus has been removed or fear of it is abated, if the listener has other emotional fears at the time, listening to a story and laughing a bit will not necessarily affect this listener’s view of his or her life situation.

Burggraf (2000) further states that arousal theory needs adaptation by positing an optimum level of arousal beyond which it becomes unpleasant. Burggraf acknowledged that the “inverted-u relationship between arousal and enjoyment” seems never to have been demonstrated scientifically before her study (p. 16). However, storytellers commonly observe excessive negative stimuli resulting in reduced enjoyment of a story. I have seen children cover their ears and duck their heads in anticipation of what fearsome event may occur next in a tale. I am aware that by employing humor and other tension releases I can gauge a listener’s personal arousal levels to negative stimuli and allow such listeners to enjoy of high arousal story as a result.

Fear as Life Tool

A variety of monsters are manifest within shadow tales and as a result, some seek to

avoid the stimulus altogether in an effort to avoid calamity. However, fear has an important role to play in our lives. What happens if an already fearful child faces an aggressive antagonist who is foreign to him? To reach an answer, Biblow showed a film with aggressive content to children. Those who had “a rich fantasy life” responded with a marked decrease in aggressive behavior (as cited in Bettelheim, 1976, pp. 122-123). Yet, well-meaning adults often censor a monster tale because they want to decrease anxiety for children. Bettelheim cautioned that “if all fairytale monsters must be friendly,” children will not rid themselves of their monsters, even if the worst monster a child encounters is “the monster he feels or fears himself to be” (1976, p. 120). Therefore, ghost story inhabitants should not be like Casper, so that we can address our personal battles with our shadow selves. In this case, fear may be a positive life tool.

No mentally healthy individual would say that true fear is an enjoyable state, yet much of American media and entertainment focus upon fear. If there is no appeal to this form of fear, why is it predominant? Although the creator of the award winning documentary *Bowling for Columbine* (2002), Michael Moore, is a controversial spokesman, he had a valid point when he noted fear is an essential staple of life. Moore (2004) cited the importance of fear, stating:

There are things we need to be afraid of. Fear is a good thing. Fear is part of our self-preservation mechanism. I'm not saying that fear is a bad thing. It's just that we're being so bombarded with everything, that we're supposed to be afraid of everything, that we lost our fear compass. We don't know what the real threats are. We can't distinguish anymore between the real threats and the unreal threats.” (as cited in Topel, 2004, ¶3)

Americans also use story, in the form of literature, as a life tool. Burke stated that readers search for knowledge that will function as “equipment for living” (1935/1954/1965/1984; 1941/1967, p. 293-304). Though Burke focused upon written discourse, he did point at extending

application to nonverbal and extraverbal media (e.g. architecture, music, films, etc.) as well (Brummett, 1985, p. 247). Story has addressed emotional and psychological needs of readers and listeners for centuries.

Like a fairytale construct, one of the most popular fear-eliciting novels of all time, Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, came from a dream. The tale was so eerie, so terrible that when Lord Byron first heard it, he fled the room "shrieking in horror" (Coghill, 2001, p. 3). Be it via Burkean, Jungian, or any other, form of analysis, *Frankenstein* has fueled research for over a century. Written in a period where mechanisms were taking over the work and lives of many as industrialism flourished, the story addressed the collective societal fears of man-as-machine and man's role in creation.

If a storyteller should not make all shadow tales fear-free events, what can a teller present to audiences that will be perceived as a "good" shadow story? Perhaps knowing what viewers appreciate in other modes of group shadow tale experiences can offer adequate illumination.

Lessons from the Appeal of Film

Tamborini and Stiff (1987) found via exit interviews after a horror film that audience members rated the appeal of the film based upon how exciting and scary the movie was. Daniels (1975) noted "the appeal of the macabre is dependent in large measure on the way in which it violates decorum" (p. 3). Again, the permissible means of testing social mores determines what is exciting and appealing for audiences.

Burggraf conducted two studies to examine fear appeal based upon previous theories of arousal, catharsis, and relief. She tested the "hypothesis that enjoyment of horror is greater for groups rather than for individual viewers and to test the hypothesis that the film soundtrack may increase enjoyment of horror by providing cues for the fictional unreality of the violence of the

screen” (2000, p. 21). Burggraf predicted that group viewing enjoyment, using same sex groupings, would be higher than individual enjoyment and that variations of affective reactions within a group would be small, based upon Festinger’s (1950) finding that attitudes and values within groups have the same common goals and social reality (as cited in Burggraf, 2000, p. 23).

Burggraf’s (2000) results showed that males found all experiences more enjoyable than the females, and that in relation to Excitement, Disgust, and Fright there was no significant difference between the sexes in the ratings given. Not surprisingly, empathic viewers enjoyed the film less overall and disproved the theory that high empathy equals high enjoyment (p. 32). Burggraf also noted that the presence of other viewers did affect the affective responses of participants, stating that it lead to greater enjoyment, less fright, and less disgust than with the same stimulus experienced alone (p. 35).

Burggraf’s (2000) Study 1 implies that arousal does not correspond to either Delight or Disgust and that overall, the rating of Disgusting and Frightening was about equal to enjoyment. It also suggested that “fright is an amalgam of arousal and negative affect; in this amalgam the arousal is a positive contribution to enjoyment but the fright partialled of arousal actually detracts from enjoyment” (p. 34). In other words, even though the enjoyment of fright stems from arousal, fright still is negative enough that enjoyment cannot be fully appreciated due to the presence of the fright component. However, the study showed that seeing gore was considered more disgusting than simply hearing it and there was no support for the hypothesis that the inclusion of a soundtrack increases enjoyment by indicating the unreality of the film (p. 35).

Burggraf’s (2000) second study discerned affective responses during horror movie clips in addition to afterward. Recalling that Zillmann’s Relief Theory (1994, 1998) claimed that horror movie appeal, as other types of negative affect entertainment, rests on viewers’

anticipation of relief from the negative affect they experience during the event, Burggraf conducted her own testing. She used all female groupings, visual and auditory stimuli, and showed two different segments of film. Each clip was stopped half way through for viewers to fill out an affective response questionnaire and completed written measurements after the clips ended. Contrary to relief theory, Burggraf found a significant negative correlation between Frightened/ Disgusted on the scale at the midpoint of the clip and Enjoy at the end (p. 49). In fact, high levels of negative affect may have inhibited enjoyment (p. 50).

Burggraf (2000) concluded that excitement yields enjoyment. Fright and Disgust are not enjoyable. Excitement in fright suppresses its negative relation to enjoyment and small negative affect from fright/disgust suppresses some positive relation to enjoyment (p. 52). As for the social aspect of enjoyment, a safety frame did *not* yield a positive experience of negative emotions. Instead, the emotional reactions of participants during the film were the same reactions that they stated at the end of the film. This is contrary to Zillmann's (1994, 1998) relief theory and McCauley's (1998) reward theory (p. 63). As a result, Burggraf offers a new reward theory; stating disgust and fright are decomposed into an arousal component that contributes positively to enjoyment and a negative hedonic component that reduces enjoyment. Simply, audiences enjoy some disgust and fright, but excess arousal equals reduced enjoyment of a film (p. 66-67).

Present Manifestations and Future of Genre

American media provides a constant transfusion of anxiety-producing stimuli. It is no wonder that all vehicles that help Americans cope are popular. However, some of these coping mechanisms are not terrifying characters and events. The modern enthusiast of ghostly tales can also access spirit via television. Fans of television mediums, such as John Edward and Sylvia Brown, regularly hear tales of loved-ones communicating from beyond. John Edward had every

show in his January 2004 tour of Australia sell out, even with tickets costing \$75 each (Conneeley, 2004). Sylvia Browne wrote *Adventures of a Psychic*⁵ (with Antoinette May) which appears on the Independent Book Publisher's Hall of Fame list of best-selling books independently published in the last 20 years (Kremer, 2004). Obviously, audiences are seeking and finding tales that address the shadow in all seriousness, with humor functioning as relief, not as the vehicle to relay the tale.

Fantastic literature appeals to a phenomenally broad market just now. Harry Potter books have sold more than 100 million copies worldwide, in 42 different languages, with just over 49 million copies sold in the U.S. alone (*Harry Potter Book Sales*, 2004). Audiences are clearly enamored with this genre – whether they realize it allows them to explore their shadow or not. Within the wide cloak of fantasy loom thriller, horror, terror, and detective tales. The contemporary horror novel, like the oral tradition, relies upon motifs that are oft repeated. Stephen King, one of America's best known horror authors, has used almost every horror motif in his work. Dealings with the demon, the demon's familiars, or monsters; focus on children who are either evil, possessed, or have extraordinary powers; a haunted location such as a home; some variation of vampire legend are the most common motifs. The modern horror novel always deals “with the unexplainable presence of evil in contemporary society” (Schroeder, 1988, p. 633). British author, Iles surmises that “without terror we become passive victims who peacefully sit and wait for our deaths” (as cited in Schroeder, 1988, p. 1266). Readers may not agree with Iles. However, I surmise that most would agree that empathy with the tale's protagonist is key in experiencing excitement, fear, or ennui while immersed in a storyline.

Kaye (1985) espoused that to invoke terror, character, not plot, must reign in a tale.

⁵ Originally *My Guide, Myself: The Psychic Odyssey of Sylvia Browne* by New American Literary Trade

Without it, he asserts, a writer “might just as well hide in a closet and yell ‘Boo!’ at passersby” as occurs in “most modern horror literature and cinema.” Kaye adds that when empathy exists, a reader “becomes susceptible to those calculated manipulations that a master fabulist must devise in order to invoke a sense of wonder and terror” (p. 611). I believe empathy for or identification with the protagonist can drive interest-level in an oral tale as well.

Creation of Suspense

The distance between teller and listener was the focus of Comisky and Bryant (Fall 1982) when they studied factors generating suspense. They acknowledged that most theories of suspenseful drama were “primarily historical, descriptive and speculative” – in an effort to have an accurate modern frame of reference, Comisky and Bryant set out to test what makes a drama suspenseful (p. 49). The study required the men to play 6 minutes and 50 seconds of the film *Death of a Peasant*, and measured the variations of audience disposition toward the protagonist of the story by having participants mark their responses on an affective ratings scale (where ratings were 0 was “not at all” and numbered in increments of 10 to 100 being “extremely” present response) (p 55). The results of the study indicated that:

...low levels of perceived outcome-certainty were required to produce high levels of suspense. The more convinced audience members are that the protagonist is in genuine peril and is about to succumb to the opposing forces with which he/she is in conflict, up to the point of total subjective certainty of defeat, the more suspenseful is the presentation. (p 57)

In other words, if the audience felt the protagonist was in a truly tragic situation where he would not and could not prevail, their perception of suspense was heightened.

It is suspense that keeps empathic readers flipping pages, viewers watching a film, and

listeners in their seats at a storytelling concert. Stein (1995) listed several plot choices that create suspense. They are: “prospective danger to a character, an actually immediate danger to a character, an unwanted confrontation, a confrontation wanted by one character and not by the other, an old fear about to become a present reality [and], a life crisis that requires an immediate action” (p. 98).

Stein (1995) further stated that it is a writer’s duty to create “a situation that cries for a resolution and then to act irresponsibly...prolonging and exacerbating the reader’s desperate need for resolution” (p. 98).

Stein (1995) said to accomplish this one should:

[Not] eliminate a prospective danger to a character; [do not] let the character overcome the immediate danger without facing an even greater danger; ...hold off any [unwanted] confrontation as long as possible;...make the situation worse than the character anticipated;...prolong the crisis. (p. 98)

Stein was not alone in supporting this premise of engaging a reader. Dahl, famed author of *James and the Giant Peach* and *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, had four rules for creative writing, the last of which is quite similar to Stein’s premise:

1. Make your readers laugh (which he did using funny names, literary devices such as alliteration and onomatopoeia, and employing circumstances that were nearly implausible);
2. Make your readers squirm (horrible foods and disgusting behavior were two mainstays of his craft);
3. Enthrall your readers (by taking ordinary events and objects and doing something extraordinary with them) and
4. Keep them tense and excited (by building the atmosphere and keeping momentum going) so the reader will remain on knife’s edge. (New Dimensions Media, n.d., VHS)

Comisky and Bryant (Fall 1982) did not investigate how humor would affect the outcome. Therefore, it would be conjecture to surmise whether interjected humor would relieve the tension while maintaining suspense in this genre of film. This still leaves us with the questions of when does humor in a story offer tension release and when does it deconstruct the suspense altogether?

Ghost Tales and the Humor Within

Although humor has its place in ghost stories and horror tales, a ghost story is “a little different than telling a joke. Ghost story telling has some special requirements...(it) cannot be told effectively in broad daylight. Darkness or semi-darkness is essential” (PageWise, Inc., 2002, ¶3). Additionally, listener interest is created by associating their present setting with the story offered (PageWise, Inc., 2002, ¶7).

Humor usually is not showcased when advertising a ghost story concert. The 2003 Tejas Storytelling Festival ad copy reflected Webster’s definition when it promised “two hours of spine-chilling suspense” wherein the “stories get spookier and spookier as the night goes on” (Tejas Storytelling Association, 2003). Irvine, key member of the Mid-Atlantic Storytellers, also defines ghost stories by the fright element stating, “Scaring us is one of the things we expect” (1999, 1).

Irvine (1999) added:

I once listened to someone tell a personal story in a dramatic, lively fashion – complete with character voices and vivid acting out of motions. The telling would have greatly enhanced a folk tale, but completely ruined this story. The entire story felt artificial and fake. All I could think throughout the telling was “no one talk about their own life like this.” The teller did not understand the critical distinction between genres of stories.

Folktales, ghost stories, personal stories all have their own, unique sets of rules that we must learn if we want to tell them. (p. 3)

The *National Storytelling Journal* featured an article by Lee (Fall 1985) entitled *Anatomy of a Ghost Story*. Lee delineated the differences between “real storytelling” and oral interpretation of literature but chose to not address the role of humor in “ghostlore” when he set up the article (p. 13). Lee addressed how to make audience members “jump” while listening to his tale, mentioning humor, briefly, stating that when he’s telling a ghost story, following the jump and after an “appropriate pause,” he inserts a humorous line. This line is “needed to relieve the tension” (p.16). He also stated that the relief comes as a laugh and, with it, “the audience can thus regain its balance” (p. 16). Lee’s attention to maintaining the immediacy of the tale and aura of the supernatural far outweighs his attention to humor. This seems to indicate that Lee feels listener interest is a primary construct for ghostlore tellings and humor is secondary.

Knowing we have the choice to engage in shadow tales gives story listeners, cinema buffs, and readers one thing: Hope. “Whereas materialists would say that death is final, the writer of supernatural fiction can suggest other possibilities: ghosts that walk; heavens or hells to rejoice or sweat in; second chances via reincarnation; or flights of the soul through the universe” (Bleiler, 1985, Introduction, p. xiii). These and other alternatives to the finality of death can be found aurally and audio-visually in a variety of media. The demand may never wane. Why else should we be equipped for life, if hope no longer held sway?

Horror films, horror novels, and ghost stories are fear-juggling experiences. In the end, perhaps the way we access the genre, or why, is not important. Perhaps what is most significant is that we enjoy ourselves, through whatever approach to the genre appeals to each of us. Enthusiasts want to be scared. We also want to control the amount of fear we experience. This

brings us back to the focus of this study: When does employing humor in a scary tale successfully maintain suspense of while temporarily relieving some of the mounting tension within that story, thus keeping a listener from experiencing true fear? Also, when does the presence of humor remove so much tension that the fear stimulus is deflated altogether, defeating the purpose of simulating fearful events in a controlled atmosphere?

CHAPTER 3

METHODS AND ANALYSIS

This study was conducted in three phases. In the first phase, I, as principal investigator, listened to, transcribed and evaluated four variants of a single ghost story for the presence of fear-eliciting events and cues. These events and cues were correlated with Rothbart's diagram (*Figure 1*), and demonstrate the mental journey a story listener takes when hearing a story. When I refer to Rothbart's diagram within this chapter, I employ her terminology: sudden, intense or discrepant stimulation, minimal to high stimulus (and the corresponding step along her continuum) problem solving, challenging existing schema, tension release and ending in a laugh or big smile. In the second phase, I also went back and analyzed how each story event could be perceived. Was it humorous or fearsome, or was it simply exposition and back-story? This evaluation was completed by asking simple questions. Was the event, phrase, or embedded image incongruent with expectations raised by the prior flow of discourse? If so, it may be a humorous moment. Was tension rising or alleviated? If it was alleviated, how was that accomplished? These questions and notations of fear and humor cues appear together in this chapter's section *Phase One and Two: Analysis of Variants*. In the third, and final, phase of this study I observed a student audience while they listened to these story variants. I audio-taped their listening session and noted their physical and audible responses to what they heard on a blank transcript of each variant. Their reactions hinted at their perceptions of the tales, realizing, as noted in the study's limitations, that studio recorded versions of *Tailypo* are not as enticing, immediate, or real as an authentic ghost story concert. The results of this observation appear in the section of this chapter entitled *Phase Three: Observations of Listening Session and Audio Analysis*. This chapter culminates with a discussion of my findings.

Phase One and Two: Analysis of Variants

What follows is a description of the story events of each variant along with my own critical responses and perceptions. If the story events and paralinguistic vocal cues raise tension, the tale is perceived as being suspenseful. However, a single observer's impressions or prejudices should not determine whether a tale is dubbed as "scary" or "humorous." If the teller's comments or inflections, or those of the characters in the story, are incongruent with audience expectations, such comments and actions are considered humorous and deflate the tension of the tale. In commencing this study, I presumed that a rising arc of tension results in the scariest stories. Likewise, empathy for the protagonist's fight against a worthy antagonist also adds tension to the story and solidifies the evaluation of a tale as being scary or not.

To elucidate my observations of each variant I have included excerpts from each teller's story transcript. As noted in the opening chapter, in transcribing these stories I've used a combination of commonly accepted cues from theatre (vocal directions in parenthesis) and purposeful dialect spellings (such as po' for poor) and transliterate spellings ("Taaaaaiilypooooo" to indicate a long, drawn out calling of the name), new lines for each significant phrase break, and all capital letters for words shouted. Much of this convention comes from a combination of theatrical scripts and the work of Fine (1994). I have not attempted, however, to include paralinguistic features such as rise in intonation, falsetto, or other similar vocal cues. That is the work of linguists, and although I'm certain has impact upon the telling of a story, it is simply beyond the scope of my inquiry. This is not so much a linguistic study as it is a genre study. Likewise, the transcripts are void of kinesthetic features. For practicality's sake, the reference recordings for this study are strictly audio performances. Additionally, when citing a portion of a teller's transcript, I have noted what page in this study the text is found, as noting a

moment on an audio recording is less practical for readers' use.

Tailypo was chosen because it is popular at ghost story concerts around the nation, has been featured in Jonesborough, TN, at the NSF's ghost story concerts--even though no ghosts appear in the story per se, and because it was readily available on audio cassette as told by four noteworthy storytellers. In the tale, the protagonist is usually a hungry old man living in an old cabin in the woods. A creature enters his home and the old man lops off its tail with a sharp object (such as a hatchet). He cooks the tail and eats it. Later that night the creature returns and moans for its tail asking over and over, "Where is my tailypo?" Each variant of the story has a slightly different resolution. In general, the creature retrieves its tail and the listener is left to assume how --probably by killing the old man, although those exact words are rarely spoken.

Finally, in conducting this study, I did not ask the teller if his or her version of *Tailypo* was meant to be frightening. It is possible that the story was meant to be momentarily thrilling but not scary overall. However, because this tale is common in ghost story concerts, I proceeded with the presumption that some level of frightful delight was the aim of sharing the tale.

Holt's Variant

David Holt is a skilled Grammy Award-winning musician and it is expected that his music is paired with his storytelling. However, in his telling of *Tailybone* it seems that the lively music overshadows the story itself. Perhaps this is why I felt it was the least frightening of the four variants.

Holt's protagonist, true to standards, is an old man in a one-room house located in the woods. Like any other forest-dwelling family, the man is known to eat the game he kills, including deer or rabbit. Unlike the presumed life of most modern Americans, the old man's home is badly in need of repair, especially the floorboards that are full of holes. The image of

this man is noteworthy because listeners are apt to feel some pity if not empathy for his miserable existence. Perhaps some may find the exposition to be poking fun at a stereotype, but for me, the image is all too plausible to be amusing. Holt takes 95 words, about 8% of the story, to relay this exposition before overt humor or tension is used to draw in his listeners. Then, the action begins:

Now, one cold, dark and windy night,

That old man was sittin' up by that fireplace cookin' a pot of beans and listenin' to the wind howlin' through the trees outside. (*begin screeching of violin to symbolize the sounds he heard*)

He was just kinda lost in his thoughts,

Watching those (*pause*) beans begin to boil an' the fire burn down low

When all of a sudden, as he looked down and saw some kind of animal's paw start to come up through the floorboards in the house

That was a hole he shoulda fixed way last summer but (*pause*) too late now.

That thing was comin' in. (*Appendix C, p. 107*)

Holt's narrative draws upon his country, folksy image and persona, dropping final consonants, employing common language, and speaking in a thoughtful, almost slow cadence.

This approach allows us to relax and sets us up for potential frights.

The first tension cue is the sound of the violin as it symbolizes the howling wind outside. Instead of building upon this cue, Holt lulls us back into the mundane details of the man's typical evening, when "When all of a sudden" Holt alerts us to the first appearance of a critter. Sudden it is, so much so that we are caught somewhat by surprise by the change in tempo. The lack of fear eliciting cues prior to this statement prevents anticipatory tension from rising in an arc. Instead,

we think, “Okay, so he’s an old man in a cabin. Maybe something will happen later at night,” instead of the anticipatory, “Oh no. Here it comes.” As a result, we may not jump or be startled with surprise, as we are complacent, passively listening to the tale. The protagonist’s reaction, in relation to Rothbart’s diagram in addition to Holt’s sudden change in tempo does offer enough of the unexpected. The old man arousal level is medium on the Rothbart scale, causing him to evaluate the critter’s appearance in his home. Although the man is surprised, he does not react as if the critter is of grave danger to his existence. The man’s existing schema – the life of a person in the woods – acknowledges that critters do pop into homes. As story listeners, we accept this flow of events and begin to feel a low level of anxiety because the critter’s appearance, and Holt’s change in tempo, is unexpected. Thus, the tension has begun to rise in the required arc as the story continues.

It is noteworthy that Holt’s comment “too late now” is an amusing aside that would work well to alleviate tension if we were further along the arc. However, the phrase “That thing was comin’ in” is far more urgent and disturbing than the appearance of one critter’s paw has been. The cue that captivates listeners, because of the proximity and reality of the possible threat the creature holds, does not come until after Holt states: “too late now.” As a result, adding this aside offers little tension relief at all.

“That thing” that came into the old man’s cabin has “big pointy teeth,” “big fiery red eyes,” and is the size of a dog (p 107). However, its most unique feature is its long creepy tail, whose description apparently defies the use of descriptors, as Holt uses none, sidestepping the opportunity to scare or captivate his listeners.

In some stories, withholding the physical details of a gruesome or disgusting creature is a preferred technique, as the mind can create more hideous images than most tellers can detail in a

few words. Storyteller Pasini Beekman (1998) is adept at this approach. In her description of Dame Ragnell, for instance, for her adaptation of the character's tale, *Dame Ragnell and How She Delivered the King's Nephew*, Pasini Beekman states Ragnell was "hideous beyond compare." However, in such cases the image of the beast or gruesome character has been alluded to far enough in advance so that we can imagine the scale of her deformities and we nod in agreement that "hideous beyond compare" is as bad as things can get.

Holt does not have the benefit of a story where the descriptors are alluded to adequately in advance, and instead, he says, "...but it had a tail like... Well, like nothin' he'd ever seen before" (p 107). I, like the old man, have also never viewed many things this world has to offer, but I do not imagine that such things are repulsive or troublesome by nature. Therefore, Holt's words evoke an image of something unusual or different more than of a critter that we should be afraid of. In fact, I laughed when Holt said this line. I presume that Holt meant for this line to be a tension release because we expect a descriptor of something vile, as opposed to an innocuous bit about the unusual. Still, as a listener, I would have preferred to continue along this arc of tension instead experiencing relief at this juncture.

Danger is not overt at this point in the story, although the appearance of something new and unusual may be challenging to the existing schema for the protagonist, presuming that most old men in the woods do see creatures from time to time, the challenge is that this creature is new and unusual. Following Rothbart, if the stimulus does challenge one's schema, the next course of action is to engage in problem solving. Thus, the man proceeds in a manner consistent with his fear at this point:

Well, he slowly reached out and picked up a little hatchet he had behind the fireplace and raised it up over his head

When that thing come in the room (*end violin sound*)

He **CHOPPED AT IT** (*discordant banjo string sound*).

(*Breathy*) And he chopped its tail right off.

Well, that **THING LET OUT AN AWFUL YELL!** (*screech of violin stings*)

And went runnin' back out the floorboards of the house. (p. 108)

The use of the word “well” to begin an idea does not build tension. Instead, “well” functions much like a conjunction between one event and the next, pulling the listener along. The fact that Holt begins three lines or phrases in quick succession with this word creates monotony and although the word had no semantic significance (similarly to saying “um”) the repetition of it fails to keep the tension as alive as it could be. Instead it lulls the listener back into a non-reactive state, and as a result the tension is either deflated or stalled (depending upon the skill of delivery up to this point) at a time when the arc of tension should be continually rising, inviting us to move to the edge of our seats.

The old man’s problem is resolved by attacking the creature, and asserting his supremacy in the situation. According to Rothbart’s diagram (*Figure 1*) if the problem solving is successful, tension is released and the man should soon exhibit his pleasure by laughing or smiling. Holt’s old man does not do this. As listeners, we may fill in the laugh or smile at this juncture, partially from relief and from our surprise at the man’s actions when we were not anticipating the man’s threat as he has.

After the creature leaves, the man cooks up the tail and eats it, resulting in a stomach ache. This image is revolting but not tension-inducing. Then, the old man retires for the evening and falls asleep. None of these events, no matter how sudden to the novice listener, is out of line with social frameworks. (Reason states, “Of course if you eat ‘mystery meat’ you’ll end up with

digestive issues!") Therefore, there is no lasting suspense or humor at this point in the story. It is possible that Holt means for tension to be present, however. Convention says that the protagonist often lets down his guard too early in horror films and ghost stories, after all. Though, events later in the story indicate to me that Holt wanted the old man's guard to go down in a much more noticeable fashion later in the tale.

Later, the man awakes to hear scratching outside his home, again signified by the violin. Following Rothbart, he must evaluate the situation and orient himself. Realizing the sound is probably an animal that can be scared off by mere human presence, he yells, "Get outta here!" The man yells once again for the critter to leave, and the creature responds with the same demand. The man continues to attempt to remove the stimulus. Because his actions have proven fruitless, he turns to his caretakers, his oddly named dogs, to eradicate the nuisance.

However, instead of remaining at a high level of tension until we know the result of the chase, Holt plays a song that better signifies a hoedown than a life-threatening hunt. We tap our toes, and all threat to the protagonist is lost and Holt's tension arc has halted again. If that was not enough of a tension release, Holt goes even further adding, "He knew they weren't mean dogs. He didn't even worry. He closed that door and went right on back to bed, crawled up in the bed and went right to sleep" (p. 109-110). The pan-Indo-European traditional story structure of a triad of events leading to resolution has conditioned us to at least be subconsciously aware that the story is incomplete at this point. And although the protagonist is no longer afraid, we maintain our own arc of tension, instead of following the protagonist's lead. We wonder when the next rise in tension will occur as we continue to the pinnacle of the tale.

Shortly, Holt's old man hears the creature's cry again. Holt's tone strains with urgency: "This time it was above the door. Somethin' was tryin' to come in through the door!" Holt is

obviously attempting to continue upward toward the climax of the story, but his effort seems calculated and formulaic, lacking the craftsmanship and finesse of his musical execution. I feel that tension is at too low a level at this point. Other listeners may not turn such a jaded view upon Holt's methodology. Predictably, the dogs are sent out again to the hoedown tune, and once more the man returns to bed in spite of the fact that he can no longer hear his dogs barking. Holt tries to retain some tension when he indicates the old man's apprehension, stating, "Well, it kind concerned the man but he figured maybe they'd gotten that thing down in a hole and he couldn't hear 'em," followed by several comments that the man had a rough time going back to sleep (p. 110). However, a teller cannot hold on to a tension he has already released.

Midnight arrives and way off in the woods, the creature begins its painful request again. Because the creature is so far away, it is hard to believe it is any threat even though the man is scared enough to again call his dogs:

He said, ""Ino, Uno, and Cumptico-Calico! Get that thing!"

But all he heard was the sound of that wind.

He called them again (*dog theme music begins again behind the screeching of the wind sound*), "Iknow, Ooknow, Cometogo Calico!"

But that thing (*begin horror film-type sound of violin shimmering*) had taken those dogs down to the woods and lost 'em or killed 'em." (*Harsh violin draw. End of sound effects.*)

Well, old man got outta bed. He didn't know what to do. The first thing he did was go around and close all the shutters on the windows and bar 'em tight. And then he built up a big ol' roaring' fire in the fireplace so nothin' could come down through the chimney.

Then he went around and barred the front door shut. And then he remembered that hole where that thing had come in earlier during the night

And he got some old rags and stuffed them tight down in that hole.

And then he got a big rock he used for a doorstep in the summer and put it over on top of the rags so nothing could come up through the floor-

But he couldn't sleep. (p. 111)

This is the first time in the story I began to truly feel tension and worry for the man, as he decides to get out of bed and close up the rickety house, to the best of his ability, and fix a roaring fire to keep the antagonist from entering through the typical openings in a home:

He just got that little hatchet and started walkin' around the room waitin' for that thing to come

Watin'

Watchin'

Listenin'

Walkin' (p. 112)

Tension mounts as we realize that, along with the protagonist, his resources for defense are limited at this point. The danger is present; it could not be removed by aggression. There are no animal helpers (dogs) to intervene, and the man has not outwardly considered flight to remove himself from the situation. This creates a high level of stimulation, as noted in Rothbart's diagram, and thus a high arousal level for the protagonist.

What he figured was alllll night long he was so tired,

He figured if the sun was comin' up, well, he'd be safe

So he went over to the winda to open it up and look out

He opened the shutter and it kinda creaked when he opened it (*creek sound effect*)

And he looked out.

And sure enough, the sun was coming up

He felt so goood.

When he closed that shutter, just went back over to the bed and ahhh,

Just fell right down in the bed, (p. 112)

Story listeners also feel secure at this point in the story, not anticipating that anything will happen to the man at daybreak.

Suddenly, Holt harshly draws his bow and indicates that the noise originates at the foot of the old man's bed. Again the creature requests, "I want my Tailybone." The man, in fear, says, "I ain't got your old tailybone." The creature emphatically states, "You got my tailybone!" and pounces on the old man. Frantic fiddle playing indicates a scuffle and Holt shouts, "IT SCRATCHED HIM TO PIECES!" Followed by an abrupt, story-ending punch line, "And some say, that thing got its tailybone" (p. 112).

The rapid unfolding of events at the end of Holt's story is sure to catch listeners unaware, but the swift resolution is unsatisfying. We simply do not have time to grapple with the tension of the final story events and enjoy the relief of it, especially when the protagonist, for whom we've been set up to have some pity, is a victim with no recourse. Perhaps if Holt added that the creature was still out there and might come after them; listeners might be left with a sense of urgency that this resolution does not hold. Instead, we laugh at his punch line and the story ends.

Holt's variant relies heavily upon a medium level of stimulation as noted in Rothbart's diagram. Each time the story circles back to a confrontation between the protagonist and antagonist, the man resolves the situation, albeit temporarily, and tension is released. This flow of events is adequate to keep the tale moving forward but not urgent enough to challenge us as

tale listeners. We get everything we expect from the story: three attempts to derail the man and a climax at the end, even if it is weaker than we hoped for. The lack of discrepancy between the tale's structure and our expectations keeps our overall excitement of the telling at a minimal level and may even result ennui instead of the thrill we hoped for.

Torrence's Variant

The audiotape of Torrence's *Tailypo* is not the only variant of this story she ever recorded. *Appendix G* details a transcript of a later, and in my opinion, scarier version of the story. Unfortunately, the only available clip of that variant was an online video. Using a video variant with three audio versions might result in an evaluation of the recording medium instead of the story itself, and to remain consistent, this segment of the study uses her earlier audio taped version as transcribed in *Appendix D*.

Torrence's protagonist is also an old man living in the woods, but her emphasis that he lived "all alone" evokes a sad image that we respond to with pity, that is, until we learn the details about his living conditions:

(Matter of fact) He was a little lazy,

So *he* never made repairs on the cabin. Sometimes, when you looked though the ceiling of the cabin, you could see the Staaars because there were - *HOLES* - in the ceiling.

There were *holes* in the walls

And there were *HOLES* in the floor.

This man didn't care. He *liked* to look through the holes in the ceiling,

And he *liked* to look through the holes in the wall,

And you know, he *liked* to look through the holes in the floor. (*Appendix D*, p. 113-114)

Because Torrence's old man doesn't care, and as a result, our pity for his shabby home and solitary lifestyle also diminishes. This is an interesting approach. In hindsight, it seems she was foreshadowing the appropriateness of his fate early on – as his laziness is a bit loathsome – and as a result, we have less compassion for him and are less affected by his demise.

One night, as he was sitting, gazing in the fire,

He just happened to look through one of the holes in the floor.

And *there*, beneath the floor, one of the holes - LOOKED back at him.

Whoo! What is that!

Now, all of a sudden, those *two great big red eyes* had two little ears

And these two little eaaaars, had a little nooose, and a *mouth* – that had teeth!

Aaa-aaand the teeth w-were inside a-a great big heeeead,

Aaand the head had a neck, and a bodyyy

And before you knew it,

It was a crittah standing on the floor besiiide that man. (p.114)

The image of the critter inviting itself inside the man's home is humorous because these events are surprising and unlikely. The man looks down at his self-invited guest and exclaims, "Oooh!," and we laugh yet again – for the same reasons as before -- even as the uncomely critter draws its long tail into the home behind it.

The man moans, "ew" at the sight of the tail but the critter counters with a growl, again encouraging laughter – as most of us never considered the feelings of the beast in such stories and the incongruence of his reaction catches us by surprise. The critter looks around the shabby home, exclaims, "EWWW!" and begins to leave this place, so vile that the creature would rather be outside. This fast-paced exchange between the vile critter and lazy old man results in laughter

because no one would expect a critter to be so disgusted by a human's dwelling that it would want to leave. Our amusement continues until the offended old man cuts off the critter's tail with a "CHUMPPPP!" The sudden, intense, and discrepant stimulation of the tail amputation catches us by surprise, and halts our laughter. After the poor critter yells, "YEEEOO!" stunned, we hear the man, getting in the last words with "Serves him right!" as he hangs the critter's tail on a nail above the fireplace. Tension caused by the old man's amputation of the tail is released when the creature leaves and he admonishes, "Serves him right!" (p. 116). We nod, thinking, "Well, that takes care of that."

The momentary suspense has deflated to a low-level tension as we ponder the old man's sudden decision to sever the critter's tail. Savvy listeners expect repercussions even as the old man returns to his fire, becomes sleepy, and blows out his candles. Tension rises when he is about to fall asleep and he hears a strange sound deep in the woods – the critter calling for its tailypo. The man sits up in bed, a bit alarmed, until he realizes his defense is to sic his dogs on the beast. "Serves him right!" the old man grumbles before returning to sleep (p. 117). Again, the protagonist is no longer afraid and we laugh at his superiority in the situation. However, knowing his superiority cannot last, we ponder, "When will this become a scary story? What will happen next?" thus creating tension on a new level.

The old man wakes a short time later to hear the critter calling for its tailypo from outside of his cabin window. Proximity of the threat, combined with the protagonist's realization that his dogs were not successful in removing the antagonistic beast, causes tension to rise. The man notes how dark the cabin is; and the noise is now heard just outside of his window:

AND THAT MAN set up in bed, he said, "ut oh. Them houn' dogs didn't git that crittahr. What will I do?"

Heh. No siiiir. Heh. Them houn' dogs didn' git the crittah. The Crittah – got the houn' dogs.

“Oh no,” said the man. (*nervously*) “Whaat will I do?” (p. 118)

We cringe as the old man feels something in his bed and hears the whispering of “Tailypo, Tailypo...” The intensity is high for protagonist. We wonder if the stimulus, the critter, can be removed. The old man is defenseless as he is paralyzed by fear and his caretakers, his dogs, are gone. Danger is most certainly present. We, and the old man, wonder what can be done and we are so caught up in this problem solving mode that we jump as the critter yells, “YOU! Got my tailypo,” laughing, partly at ourselves for jumping, but also at the old man who worriedly yells out the solution: “It’s down, by the fireplace, Go over there and get it. Go over there and get it!” (p. 118) Tension is released in part by our laughter but largely because the problem solving technique is successful. The critter does retrieve the tail and disappears. Torrence’s old man survives and the creature escapes.

The proximity of the critter, its sudden shout of “YOU!” were critical in making tension rise once again. In addition to our relief that the problem solving was successful, the event’s incongruence with everyday life makes us laugh. We are further amused that the creature jumps from the old man’s bed, grabs its severed tail, and dashes off. Although we are more apt to laugh at Torrence’s variant than at Holt’s, her pacing of the story allows us to evaluate the story events and each rise and release in tension much more effectively. The stimulation is more intense and follows Rothbart’s (*Figure 1*) continuum more closely. For these reasons, her variant is scarier.

Kinsella’s Variant

Marilyn Kinsella took a slightly different approach to her narrative, immediately immersing us into the setting of the tale by describing the darkness and gloom of night:

The story I'm gonna tell you,
comes from the swamps (*using reverb to echo her voice, end of music*)
from the daaaark places...
the gloooooom places... (*Appendix E, p. 120*)

Her vocal inflections and pacing, assisted by electronic enhancement, create tension right away. They emphasize the notion that swamps, darkness, and gloom are inherently spooky. Danger is present from the onset. However, because the stimulation is low-level, as there is no dangerous force in proximity, we may ignore her suspense-building tactic. At most, we may smile or laugh once we have discerned that there is nothing out of the ordinary that should concern us at this very moment.

Kinsella then introduces the creature. Her description of its hopping and dancing makes us laugh, evoking an image more closely associated with children's TV comrade Barney than a fearsome monster:

(regular voice) And out of this swamp comes the most curious critter,
with a great looong taiiil behind
and when a Tailypo comes outa that swamp well he's a just a hoppin' and a dancin'
why he dances to the right --and the tailypo's left
and the dances to the left --and the tailypo's right (p. 120)

Our laughter comes because this creature is the antithesis of the threat prepared for us by the opening. This laughter allows Kinsella's next line to be incongruent with our expectations of story events, and our response follows right along with the creature's as a result:

He's just a hoppin' and a dancin' havin' himself a good ole time when all of a sudden he
looks up on the mountain

and he *sees* a cabin (p. 120)

Kinsella's use of the indicative phrase "when all of a sudden" alerts us to a rapid change in tone and tension within a story. However, the tension created by seeing a cabin is a minor tension as it does not challenge the existing schema (cabins most certainly do exist near swamps), and there is no threat to the beast or to us as tale listeners.

Instead, Kinsella's creature is excited over the prospect of meeting the cabin's owner-occupant because, "Why Tailypo ain't never seen no cabin before" (p. 121). The use of the double negative alerts us to the fact this is indeed an uneducated swamp creature that we have been laughing with. Just as we have shifted our thoughts away from the tension related to the description of the dark and gloomy night in favor of the images of the fun-loving beast, we again create our own tension through expectation, wondering, "Uh-oh, now what is the poor dumb fool going to get himself into?" Then the dancing, dopey creature heads up the hill, sniffing and scratching around.

Hearing the scratching, an old man titters, "Who is that?" and we giggle, not at the question, but at the incongruity of the silly, frail voice belonging to an old man, and not an old woman. It is unclear if the man's voice stems from Kinsella being a woman, or if she intended for him to sound feminine. We pause momentarily and cease chuckling when we realize the man sees, "Eyes, eyes, eyes!" but return to smiles as Kinsella releases the tension, with: "Well, if you can call those things eyes" (p. 121).

There is no fear in the man (or for him) when he goes to the door to ask the critter why it is there. However, before the poor thing can answer, the old man returns with a butcher knife. We jump with surprise when he chops off its tail, "blood and bone" (p. 121). Shocked, we cringe at hearing this descriptor, and we shudder again a few seconds later when we hear that the old

man cooks up the tail and eats it, “blood and bone.” Before revulsion turns our minds away from wanting to hear more, Kinsella relieves the tension with another aside, “I wouldn’t a *et* that tail” allowing us to concur, nod, and nervously chuckle. Kinsella adds to this much-needed tension release, when she explains that the creature had run off and the man returned to bed (p. 122).

Kinsella returns to descriptors of the darkness, making sure to cue that something scary is coming up by whispering, elongating her vowels and slowing her cadence. Then she changes pace, tone, and volume to describe the plaintive wail of the beast:

Well, it wasn’t long before a moon started to riiiise up over that hill

And just as it got to its highest point

It hid behind a Taalllll Oak Tree.

(whispering) and there was darkness eeeevery wheeeeere....

And if you listened,

Listened reeeaaal careful

*(louder)*There Was a Sound

A Sound coming in out of the swamp on little cat’s feet...

(using reverb to enhance echo of voice) Tailypooooo... I wantttt My TAAAAailypoooo

And THAT SOUND!

THAT SOUND!

It HURT! (p. 122)

This section of the tale proceeded in a manner that we can easily keep pace with and accept. Unfortunately and unfathomably, Kinsella then informs us that the sound of the creature’s wail is suddenly located outside the man’s cabin. Despite this inexplicably disjointed movement, we return to the edge of our seats as the old man queries, “Who is that?” (p. 122).

Just as in Holt and Torrence's variants, the man removes the threat by calling his dogs to chase the creature instead of confronting it himself. This fight response employs Rothbart's (*Figure 1*) stimulus removal tactic reserved for the highest levels of arousal and stimulation. Even if we do not feel the same urgency felt by the old man, we accept this action logically. We are soon relieved to hear that our formerly-playful, now wailing creature pal dives into the swamp head first -- "if you can call that thing a head"-- to escape capture as the old man goes back to sleep.

Kinsella details the darkness (the moon, clouds, darkness, and sounds) building upon previously accepted tension. However, we giggle soon after, not because the creature asks for its "tailypo" but unexpectedly and atypically, it playfully adds, "I'm a comin' closer. I'm comin' closer." We are not quite as surprised this time at the inexplicably fast movement of the critter when Kinsella tells us, "Well, it wasn't long before that sound was standin' right at the foot of that old man's bed" (p. 123).

"Who is that?" again the man questions as he calls to the dogs to remove the threat from his proximity:

Well, this time the hound dogs jumped up like greased lightning

They *took hold* of that Tailypo and off all four of them went

Urrrr Urrr Urrrrrr

All the way downwwwn

To the swamp.

Hmmmm

Where that most curious critter liiiives.

Now the old man waited for his dogs to come back, but mind you

They never came back.

So he went on to bed (p. 124).

We are aware that the man's choice is not wise and easily follow the arc of tension when, for a fourth time, Kinsella invokes the night, with a few changes in scene; now, there is no light, only darkness, and the wailing is no longer painfully loud. This time, it "seeps in from the swamp" only to land on the old man's chest (p. 125). The proximity of the threat raises tension to a new height and nervously, we draw a deep breath as the man asks for the last time, "Who is that?" and reaches instinctively to his dogs, who have not returned. Tension escalates as the man wonders where his dogs are. The story pauses. He asks, "Where's my dogs?" We listen when he asks a third time, "Where's myyy doooogs?" Due to the creature's proximity, the fact the man has been unsuccessful at removing it, and because the creature is potentially fatally dangerous to the old man, fear grips us. Kinsella saves us from being lost to our emotional disturbance when her creature quips, "Where's my Tailypo?" and laughter ensues as we are again relieved (p. 125).

Narration returns as Kinsella smooths over the fearsome parts, "Now the people, That lived in that valley, They said they never saw that old man again" (p. 126) but some tension remains as she adds that when conditions are right (clouds over the full moon, wind whispering) if we listen, we will hear, "Tailypo. I got my Tailypo." It is her unspoken resolution of the story that makes us excited as we wonder what really happened to the man and smile knowing that our dancing and hopping beastly friend is safe in the woods with its tailypo.

Kinsella's decision to alter the story to essentially being from the point of view of the beast has affected the dynamics of the story a great deal. We identify with this fun-loving, dancing, hopping, simple-minded creature, and this empathic link makes us feel his fear as he is maimed, chased by dogs, and scared off. As the story ends, we are relieved, not because the old

man got what was coming to him (for harming our pal) but because we know that the creature is still out there, free to dance around again. Our identification with this beast is consistent with American movie-goers falling in love with the characters Frankenstein and Dracula – both unacceptable peers in daily life but great antagonists turned to unlikely heroes of story.

May's Variant

May approaches this story by having his creature call, “Tailypo? Tailypo?” before he narrates (Appendix F, p. 127). Much like a campfire ghost story telling, May then invites us to listen to a supposedly true tale. May's decision to fall in line with tall-tale telling convention catches our attention before he describes an abandoned cabin in the woods whose logs are now rotten. As he describes the wind, he adds that if one listens carefully that we may still hear, “Tailypo, Tailypo” in the night. Perhaps owing more to this approach than any other technique he employs, May's variant is the scariest of the four versions studied.

After his rhetorical invitation to listen, May changes tonality and content to an everyday conversational narrative, alerting us to the true beginning of the story. He too describes an old man living in a cabin with his dogs sleeping under his bed. May's protagonist has not been to town in a long time and as a result his diet now consisted of:

just beans.

Beans when he got up in the morning

Beans for dinner.

Beans for supper.

Beans.

He was getting' tired of those beans. (p. 128)

Because May repeats the word “beans” 6 times, we laugh at the silliness of the repetition

as well as the implied scatological humor, as we understand the consequences of legume consumption. Although this humor is not a tension release, it does catch our attention and keep us focused upon the events yet to come.

As the man cooks he daydreams of a carnivorous repast. Within this day-dream state, he looks notices an old hole in his floorboard that he had been meaning to chink up. None of these events are extraordinary and we develop empathy for the man. May exudes temporal calm as he winds his way to the first jump of the story:

When you chink up a hole, you put a -- piece of wood or a stone there and you pack mud around it, to keep the critters from getting' in.

Well, he was looking down there thinking about

just about what sIze rock he would need,

when he saw (breathy) two, red, fiery eyes,

looking at 'im out of that hole.

And while he was lookin' at them eyes

(Shouting) A CRITTER JUMPED OUTTA THERE! (p. 128)

Because we were lulled by May's day dream cadence, tone, and description, we jump when he shouts. Tension rises at the sudden presence of a beast that is the size of a dog and has a rat-like tail. The creature's proximity and our lack of a parallel creature in our experiences cause tension to rise further. Arousal is elevated as the man calls his oddly-named dogs to go after the critter and they give chase around the table until "kthunk!" The old man cuts off the critter's tail. However, because May has made us jump once prior, the amputation of tale is not as sudden or unexpected as the event seemed in Torrence's telling. (Naturally, it might be more so for those who have not already listened to and analyzed three other variants of the story as well.)

The moment after the tail severing is a brief respite from the action as the beast, who yells “Ow!!” heads toward the door. The man races him to it, and opens the door just in time for the critter to escape, dogs close behind. We pause and release our tension as the action halts. The man stands a long time on his porch and listens for his dogs’ baying to become distant.

When May’s old man goes back inside, he takes the “bloody stump” of a tail and goes back to cooking. We cringe as we understand the man’s thought process as he glances at the beans, then the tail, and at the beans again. May has set us up to anticipate what happens next, but nevertheless, we are dismayed as the man picks up the tail, flours it and cooks it up even though he does not consume it, knowing the event is impending. This anticipation creates a new level of tension for what is to come.

Once the dogs have returned and the man has eaten his beans, he notices his hunger remains. Only at that time does he devour the hideous flesh:

So, he *picked* it up, and he held it *hiiiiigh* over his head,

and he just kinda let that

Loooong tail,

that looong greasy tail, just kinda slIIIIId e down his throat. (p. 130)

We understand a hungry person might go so far, even if the idea is unsettling. That unsettled feeling, combined with our awareness that the story is not complete, keeps the tension from deflating even though the man’s next action is to go to bed for the night.

May’s old man wakes suddenly, but is unsure why, thinking it was “just a dream” that roused him from slumber and he settles back down. It is then that he hears a mournful cry of the creature calling for his “tailypo.” May’s protagonist choose to eliminate the threat and he calls his dogs and again they take chase. The man waits a long time and the dogs return “real tired”

and, we relax a bit. However, before we become complacent, and the protagonist can return to his slumber, the crying for “tailypo” has moved closer to the cabin. The proximity of the sound and the weariness of the dogs makes our arousal level begin to climb from medium to high. The man calls his dogs a third and final time, as they dutifully wobble out the door in pursuit. When the dogs fail to return, tension rises further as May emphasizes that the creature must have lost them “or worse” (p. 131). This news leaves us on edge as the man, now unable to sleep, paces the floor. He hears:

Scrrrraaaaatch! Scrrrraaaaatch!

He jumped right under those blankets

Put ‘em over his head

And he waited (p. 132)

The idea of a grown man cowering under blankets is comical to a degree and some tension is dissipated as we laugh. However, because the man’s tension level remains, we are still quite attentive as the sound is next heard by the hole in the floorboard, followed by the foot of the bed. Truly enthralled, we might say, “Oh no” as the man pulls his blankets down to his eyes so that he may peer over the edges at the source of the sound. We giggle nervously, shake our heads, or even cover our ears in nervous anticipation as the man sees the creature coming up over the foot of the bed saying, “Tailypo? You know, and I know, I gotta HAVE my tailypo” (p 132). The emphasis of “HAVE” is a surprise as May’s voice crescendos and we are startled once again, with the jump offering a much needed release.

May breaks the story spell by following with: “And that’s the story of Tailypo” (p. 133). This ending statement creates one more degree of distance from the unsettling bit of the tale to the present reality without being too abrupt or flippant. For each of these reasons I feel that

May's adaptation is the scariest of the four variants examined here.

Phase Three: Observations of Listening Session and Audio Analysis

I mentioned previously that the listening study audience members ate, drank, and fidgeted around during a large portion of the study. That does not indicate that significant observations were not made about their interest or reactions to the variants; they were just fewer in number.

During Holt's variant, there was laughter after, "And then like a fool, he ate it" suggesting the superiority theory was correct. Whenever the banjo music played in earnest as the dogs chased the creature into the woods, toes tapped and heads kept the beat. The semblance of fear was not present at these moments and for a large portion of the story.

When Torrence's critter said, "Ewwww" and the audience laughed. However, when Torrence's old man laughed and boasted, "He-he-hehhh. Haa-ha-haaa. I got that big ole long tail. Ha ha ha." They did not laugh with him. I presume this is because the tail was no prize to gloat over, and certainly not a trophy that any of us would covet. The first calling of "Whoooo'ss gooooot my taaaaaaily-poooooe?" did elicit a giggle – again, hinting at the superiority theory, because by now the entire audience was aware of what was to come. Knowing more than the protagonist could be aware of made the study audience superior to the character as well as the uninitiated listener. "Uh-oh" also elicited giggles but the shouted "YOU!" resulted in one light gasp at the moment most listeners would jump during the telling.

Like the reaction to the banjo music in Holt's telling of the tale, the lively bluegrass music that introduced Kinsella's telling caused audience members to tap their toes and get into the mood of what may come next. Kinsella's repetition of the sound: "Eyes! Eyes! Eyes!" caused a few to fidget, thinking they wouldn't hear anything suspenseful to come, but a few sentences later, Kinsella described how the man came back from the kitchen with "a *great big long*

BUTCHER KNIFE!!!” More than a few sat straight up in their seats, like soldiers at attention.

The phrase, “Why he *et* that taiil. Bloooooood and bone,” resulted in giggles. Perhaps it was the countrified word “*et*” or the gruesome “bloooooood and bone” that caused the laughter. But the second time “I w-wouldn’t a *et* that taiiil” resulted in more giggles.

After the midpoint Kinsella’s sound man added a bit of reverb: “. . . and there was daaarkness...everywhereeeere...” Another person giggled. Was it superiority theory again? There was nothing present to question the existing schema. However, the listener did largely know how the story would unfold (when the protagonist did not). More than likely, it was a release of tension brought on by the familiarity with the cue. Darkness by itself is not fearsome for most, but within the climax of a tale, especially with reverb, it cues us that something scary or horrible is about to occur. As a result, a tense listener might laugh to release their fear.

Jim May’s description of the old man eating the critter’s tale did yield the strongest physical response of the listening session as one listener made a grimace of disgust that lasted the entire phrase “that llllong greasy tail, just kinds slIIIIIde down his throat.” But the final line of the story elicited a giggle, as the creature stated emphatically, “GOT my Tailypo.” But in this case perhaps it was the surprise of that line that caused the giggle response.

Discussion

The most useful data generated by using a listening audience in this study was qualitative. I simply wanted to evaluate whether or not the audience agreed with my assessments. Independent of my influence their responses seemed to tally with my own. The respondents knew that the focus of my thesis was to study the role of humor in ghost story telling. As an audience, and strangers to me, they had no way of knowing my assumptions and beliefs. They could only evaluate their personal affective responses and leave with their own opinions.

After the listening portion of the study was completed, Delanna Reed, the professor who allowed me use of her classroom and students to conduct the study, also allowed me to stay in the room for a short while and discuss my assumptions and opinions with a few of the graduate storytelling students who stayed behind. When I told them why the stories appeared in the order they did and my opinion about the fear-levels the stories induce, my subjective assessments were seconded by that small cadre. One respondent, who found the story devoid of either frights or delights, went so far as to ask why include *Tailypo* in a ghost story concert at all.

For the at least some of the adults in this study's listening audience, and for myself, *Tailypo* lacks a jolt of intensity we desire in tales that truly excite or disgust us. I know that my greatest personal pleasure in hearing *Tailypo* in concert is watching audience members who've never heard it before and anticipating their jump as the tale reaches its peak. The story itself no longer holds any charm for me in any other way. I have become inured to key events, or story bones, which make up the skeleton of this tale. Yet, I long to hear a teller make those story bones dance for me as they do for an elementary school audience.

David Holt knows and employs all of the expected conventions to create a story tension arc and release tension at appropriate time to keep listeners interested and wanting more. However, it is important to note that over 800 words, or 2/3 of the tale has been spun when tension first drew me in as a story listener. This is the moment when the old man realized his main line of defense, his dogs, is gone, and that battening down the hatches is an ineffective defense when the creature came through the floorboards in the first place.

Why, when a teller performs all of the necessary steps to create an effective tale, does he still fail to entrance a listener? The variables that may be responsible are numerous: venue, mode of telling (in this case an audio tape), physical/kinesthetic cues, listener expectation and personal

perception details and prejudices that a storyteller can never anticipate or be expected to address.

Jackie Torrence had me with her and her characters from the start in her variant. It was funny, unusual, and I was enthralled with Torrence's skill in tonal changes, southern black linguistic stylings, and her pacing. However, even though I jumped when she cued me to, I was disappointed that she had not scared me enough. The overall impression this particular telling left me with was one of humor. Those images were simply stronger – most likely due to their incongruence with my listener expectations and with other versions that I have heard. As a result, I will always view this variant as a humorous tale.

Marilyn Kinsella's delightful dancing creature was unique and, as a result, the typical antagonist became the protagonist in my heart. I wanted him to get his tail back and be safe in the swamp and I inwardly cheered when the old man was frightened and appropriately distressed. Because Kinsella continually referenced the darkness and the night, that image was stronger for me in this telling than in Torrence's or Holt's variants. Likewise, my empathy for her protagonist (the Tailypo creature) kept me in suspense throughout the story. As a result, in spite of the Barney-like image of the swamp creature, I am left with an overall impression that Kinsella's variant was gloomier and scarier.

Jim May's variant reigns as the scariest of them all, however. He set the scene along with my past personal experiences of hearing scary tales from someone I knew well by assuring that the events happened in a real place where you might still hear the wind moaning, "Tailypo? Tailypooo?" His old man felt more plausible because he had forgotten about the one hole in his floor, as opposed to Torrence's protagonist who "liked" the holes he had all over his home. The critter remained an outsider instead of a swamp buddy I might want to watch dance, like Kinsella's Tailypo. Even though many of the details Holt employed matched May's characters,

right down to the names of the dogs, the lack of fiddle music made May's telling more numinous in my opinion. In the end, May's tale met my expectations more than the other teller's variants did in setting, characters, delivery, and outcome.

I believe my expectations and assumption weighed much more heavily than my awareness of storytelling conventions and the analysis of the transcripts when it came to choosing a variant that I preferred. Where does humor, fear appeal, and relief theory fit in my assumptions and expectations? I purchase tickets to ghost story concerts hoping to be scared, but admittedly, rarely expect any story I hear will meet my standards for fear appeal. I also fully expect that a teller who is capable of frightening his or her audience can also appropriately and skillfully employ humor as a tension release to ensure audiences are thrilled but not truly frightened. I do not want to be afraid to get into my vehicle on the way home or for days afterward. True terror is not an acceptable form of entertainment for anyone - ever. What do I absolutely not want out of a ghost story concert? I expect to avoid a night with too many jokes and not enough frights. A friend once said that a ghost story that promises much excitement and delivers little, including a lack of climax, is disappointing as a love affair that does the same. I concur.

CHAPTER 4

FUTURE STUDY

Appendices G and H offer two more variants of *Tailypo*, or *Tail Een Po*, as entitled by the late Chuck Larkin, which were not used in this study for the simple reason that there were no available audio cassette versions of the tales. They have been included herein so that tellers and story enthusiasts may read the transcripts and see how varied one tale can be. It is my belief that Jackie Torrence's variant in Appendix G is scarier and more serious in tone than the one that appears in Appendix D and was used for this study. I also believe that Larkin's variant is the scariest of them all because not only is the protagonist at the mercy of the beast, but his entire family was involved as well. If I, or another storytelling scholar, were to secure an audio taped version of these tales, it would be interesting to discover if the affective responses of listeners match my own assessment of these variants.

As noted in the limitations section of Chapter 1, this study relied upon studio recorded adaptations of a single story. A high quality, live recording of a teller sharing his or her variant of *Tailypo* would be a more authentic a medium to study, because it would hold the same tension and magical element of teller, venue, and audience combined. I have yet to know a teller who believes studio recordings are his or her best or most authentic work. Employing live recordings would add a level of reality to another study process not present here.

To generate more rigorous quantitative data in a future study, one might coordinate multiple listening sessions for a test audience to evaluate their affective responses to the variants of story as well as other oft-told tales from ghost story concerts. One might go so far as to ask storytelling concert-goers to rate stories at a live ghost storytelling event, just as Tamborini, Stiff, et al. (1987) did with film audiences.

Critics observe art in its natural element, without controls. Scientists use controlled environments to create results that should be repeatable. Storytellers and scholars of storytelling would benefit from a more scientific study model to help shape future directions of this ever-evolving art form. Whoever develops such a study most certainly would be making further strides toward the creation of a performance art canon. Until then, transcript analysis and performance observation must suffice as we aim to perfect our art – combining artist, audience and venue in an effort to entertain and to perpetuate the oral tradition.

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APPENDIXES

APPENDIX A

A Sampling of Ghost Stories From The National Storytelling Festival in Jonesborough, TN

Logged by the Library of Congress as of June, 2004

1980

| | |
|--|--------------------|
| Old Man's Story | Jackie Torrence |
| Conjure Wives | Unknown |
| Ghost's Gold, The | Heather Forest |
| Beware the Peg | Kendall Morse |
| Bill Skito | Kathryn Windham |
| Mary Culhane and the Dead Man | Connie Regan-Blake |
| Captain John Swain or The Monkey's Paw | Chuck Larkin |
| Great Black Bird, The | Cynthia Orr |
| Story About Apartments | Maggi Pierce |
| Russian Claw, The | Jay O'Callahan |

1981

| | |
|---------------------------|-----------------|
| Fiddler of Tennessee, The | David Holt |
| Two White Birds, The | Laura Simms |
| Jack Hammer | Kathryn Windham |
| Jokes | Lee Pennington |

| | |
|-----------------------------------|--------------------|
| Haunted Road in Jonesborough, The | Lee Pennington |
| Mr. Fox | Connie Regan-Blake |
| Story of Josiah Wilbarger, The | Gayle Ross |

1982

| | |
|---------------------------------|--------------------|
| Bill Skito | Kathryn Windham |
| Old Woman and the Skeleton, The | Connie Regan-Blake |
| Ghoul, The | The Folktellers |
| Woodcutter, The | Laura Simms |
| Monkey's Paw, The | Jackie Torrence |
| Magic Woman, The | Gayle Ross |
| Dancing Place, The | Gwenda Ledbetter |
| Dead Aaron | Mary Carter Smith |
| Lee Fang Fu | Maggi Pierce |
| Ghost's Gold, The | Heather Forest |

1983

| | |
|---------------------------------|--------------------------|
| Golden Arm, The | Jackie Torrence |
| Caico Coffin, The | Barbara Freeman |
| If You're Happy and You Know It | Ed Stivender |
| Girl Who Married a Ghost | Laura Simms |
| Dance on Fiddler's Mountain | Twelve Moon Storytellers |
| Turning Into a Witch | Barbara Freeman |

| | |
|--------------------------|--------------|
| Witch in the Forest, The | Muriel Bloch |
| Kee-Een Spirits | Doug Lipman |

1984

| | |
|-------------------------------|--------------------|
| Mary Culhane and the Dead Man | Connie Regan-Blake |
| Josiah Willbarger | Gayle Ross |
| House in Woodstock, NY | Laura Simms |

1992 - *Denotes stories at the College Street Tent, 10/03/92, from 1-2 p.m., 2:30-3:30 p.m.

| | |
|--------------------------|-------------------|
| Mountains* | Maggi Pierce |
| Peace on Earth* | Sally Rogers |
| Working Together* | Doug Lipman |
| Sharing the Same Breath* | Doug Lipman |
| Devil's Song, The* | Bobby McMillon |
| Bugger Story* | Bobby McMillon |
| Coconut Tale* | Jim May |
| Tailybone* | Jackie Torrence |
| Song of Ships | Gwenda Ledbetter |
| Death | Jon Spelman |
| Singing Bones, The | J. J. Reneaux (?) |
| Spectral Duck | Jim May |
| Thing, The | Bob Jenkins |
| Aaron Kelley | Mary Carter Smith |

| | |
|---------------------------------------|--------------------|
| Weeping Woman, The | Joe Hayes |
| Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar | Syd Lieberman |
| Lucinda | Lee Pennington |
| Tailybone | Alice McGill |
| Skeleton in the Cabin | Joseph Bruchac |
| Witch Woman & the Spinning Wheel, The | Diane Ferlatte |
| Snow Woman, The | Martin Rafe |
| Wife's Story, The | Milbre Burch |
| Hobb's House | Steve Sanfield |
| Two White Horses, The | Connie Regan-Blake |

APPENDIX B

Script for Story Listening Study

The listening study portion was conducted in conjunction with one ETSU teacher, Delanna Reed, who introduced the principal investigator (me/the author) to the classes prior to the listening session beginning. At that time, I introduced the focus and purpose of this thesis research, explained what data was being collected, why, and what will be done with the data. At that time the students had multiple opportunities to opt out of participating in the study. Full directions given to the listening audience appear in the script found in this Appendix.

Good morning (or afternoon, whichever is appropriate). As you have been told, I am Mel Edwards and I am working on my master's thesis. This thesis is also being sponsored by National Storytelling Network through a research grant. All findings will be available via ETSU's electronic thesis submissions, on my personal website: www.shadowguide.com, and in a final grant summary to NSN.

This research is being completed because currently there are no guidelines by which a teller may compare his/her ghost stories or scary tales for the presence of fear or humor inducing stimuli. It is my hope to create a beginning set of guidelines that any storyteller, story enthusiast or event organizer may use in evaluating a story for use in a ghost story concert.

Today I am asking for you to participate as a listening audience to four variants of a single tale and rating your responses to it. This story is called Tailypo, or Tailybone, and has been featured in ghost story concerts around the country for many years. It has also been featured several times here in Jonesborough, at the National Storytelling Festival.

Your instructor has asked that you participate as part of your learning for your appropriate class. No extra credit or other inducement will come from participating in this study.

You may, at any time, elect that your responses be completely excluded from my study. Additionally, if you have the need to leave the room and terminate your participation during the study, you will be permitted to do so, and the door will be re-opened when the study has been completed so that you may return to class. Otherwise, for the duration of the study, which should be 50 minutes to one hour, I ask that you turn off your cell phones and pagers, get in a comfortable position to listen to all four variants of this story and fill out the appropriate forms. You should also know that while you are listening to the stories, I will be making notes about any auditory responses to the stories, such as laughing, gasping or yawning. To assist me in doing this, I will also be audio taping this listening session. The audiotape is only to help me confirm any notes that I take and will not be heard by anyone else.

At this time, if there is anyone who wishes to be fully excluded from participation, please gather whatever belongings you would like with you for the duration of this study and exit. (P.I. will pause while anyone who feels they must leave may exit.)

Each of you, as participants, will be given a packet of numbered self-reporting response forms. The entire packet is yours to keep with you throughout the study. Every page in the packet will have the same number in the top right hand corner. That will be how I will refer to your responses when evaluating and reporting on them in my thesis. Each packet contains 15 pages which have writing on them, and 12 more are colored pages to separate your answer sheets. This is a total of 27 pages in all. The first page is a basic demographic questionnaire. Once I have handed out the packets, please read over the demographic questionnaire **ONLY** while I explain the purpose of the form and what will be done with the data. Please do not look ahead in the packet. (P.I. will then pass out packets.)

You will see that I am only asking for you to select an age range, your gender, graduate

or undergraduate standing, and your major course of study. Please do not include any other identifying information on this form or any of the self-reporting forms I have given to you. This basic data will be used to identify if there are any affective response trends between age, gender or educational groups only. This information will not be given out with your affective responses. There will be no way anyone can identify from the study which participants had which responses to the variants of the story because I will retain all original documents and not report information in that manner to anyone. Once the thesis has been published, I will retain all forms for ten years in case of inquiry into the validity of my findings. At the end of ten years, they will be shredded. You will notice that there is a place for you to indicate at the bottom of this form if you DO NOT want your responses to be included in the study. For confidentiality purposes, you may mark the box next to this statement with an X only. Because I have not asked for you to begin the demographic questionnaire, you may still elect to simply not fill out any of the paperwork and return the packet to me at the end of the listening session with no data on it. If you know that you are not interested in participation in the study but would like to remain in the room to listen to the stories and the steps of the study, you may do so and no writing will be requested of you. If you would like to participate in all of the data gathering steps the study but not include your responses in my thesis, please put an X in the box next to the exclusion request on this form at this time. (Pause, giving participants time to sign if necessary.) If at any time during this study you decide that you do not want your responses to be included in this study, you may simply place your packet of papers together, with this demographic form on top. Mark the request to have your responses to be excluded and your obligation to this study will be completed. Are there any questions at this time? (Pause, allowing for appropriate questions.)

At this time, those who are participating in the study should complete your demographics

questionnaire. When you have finished, please place this at the bottom of your packet of papers. (Pause until all have completed this step.)

Thank you. Now you will see an instruction sheet. Please follow along as I explain what information I will be seeking during this study and how you will be asked to record your responses. (Reading from example located on instruction sheet: Each self-response form has a series of lines - one for each of the eight affective responses you might be experiencing today. On these response evaluation lines, zero will equal no presence of a particular response, 5 will equal a moderate level of that response and 10 will equal a high level of this response. For example, one of the areas you will be asked to respond about is disinterest in the story. If your level of disinterest is high, you would select 10 on your response form. If your disinterest level is higher than moderate, or 5, on the line, but not strong enough in your opinion to be a level 10, simply indicate your level of disinterest by making an X on the line which would appropriately correspond to your level of disinterest. An X located closer to 5 would be more moderate. An X located closer to number 10 would be higher level of disinterest.) Are there any questions?

You will be asked to rate each story three times. Once part way through the story, once after listening to the entire tale, and a third time after hearing all four variants. In each case, you will use the same rating scale, but responding on a new form. All forms have been separated by a colored sheet of paper. This is done so that you will not be tempted to go back and change your responses or concentrate on the forms when you would normally be simply listening to the teller share the story.

In addition to these responses to Tailypo, I have included a base-line response form for you to complete before the story listening begins. Please place your instruction sheet at the bottom of your stack of papers and look at your base-line self-reported response form at this

time. You will see that there are eight affective responses I am asking you to rate. This is where you will indicate to me your response at this moment - not in relation to the stories themselves, but your current mind-set. Please respond by placing an X on each of the affective response value lines at this time. When you have completed, please place your response form at the bottom of your packet of papers. (Pause. Giving respondents time to answer their forms.)

In just a moment I will begin playing your first variant of Tailypo. You will have no need to take notes or do any work while listening to the story. Half way through the tale, the story will be paused for approximately one minute. During that time, you will be asked to rate your affective response to this particular version of the tale using the same format you just used for your base-line affective evaluation. When you have completed your response, again, please move your response form to the bottom of your stack of forms, leaving a blank colored paper on top. Then we will follow the same procedure at the end of the story, repeating these steps as necessary until you have listened to all four variants of Tailypo. At that time, you will be asked to look back in your memory of the listening experience and rate each tale one last time. As will all response forms, when completed, please place them at the bottom of the pile, revealing a colored page on top. Only remove the colored paper and respond to the next form when asked to do so. You may not go back at any time to change your answers. Simply give your most up-to-date answer on your look-back evaluation at the end of the listening session. Are there any questions at this time? END OF SCRIPT

Research Data

The research data was recorded by the participants on self-reported “evaluation of story” forms and a demographic questionnaire. The demographic questionnaire only included basic data: gender, age range, and whether the participant is a graduate or undergraduate and what

their major course of study was at ETSU.

The self-reported affective response forms had several lines for respondents to mark their perceived level of each affect. On these lines the value zero equaled no presence of measured affective response, 5 – or mid-way across the line – equaled moderate affective response and 10 indicated a high level of the measured affective response. The response to each of the following affects was measured: *excited, involved, frightened, disgusted, depressed, embarrassed, amused* and *disinterested*.

Respondents used this affective response evaluation form 13 times during the study: once pre-listening session, mid-listen to each of the four stories, at the end of listening to each story and once more as a look-back for each story. Participants evaluated their affective responses mid-way through each story because responses to a story may differ between this point and the end of the tale and scores should offer additional insight into which story elements elicit certain responses. The number 0 indicated no presence of response, 5 for moderate presence of affective state and 10 for high level of affective state. See example below:



Figure B1. Affective Response Measurement

The look-back evaluation was largely the same format as all other forms, however, the numbers 0, 5, and 10 were removed. This was done to see if there are any differences in responses between what they associate with the numbers on the lines and their assumed level of presence of the responses. Sample follows:

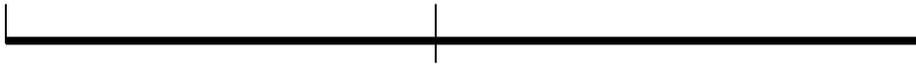


Figure B2. Affective Response Measurement on Look-Back Response Form

All self-evaluation forms and the demographic questionnaire are retained by the principal investigator and will continue to be for a period of ten years as required by the IRB.

Additionally, the audio recording of the participants' audible affective responses to the stories, as well as notes taken during the listening session, have also been retained in the same manner.

Story Listening Results

Storytellers learn early on that performances depend upon a triad of variables: the teller, the audience and the venue. The results of this study reflect the interconnectedness of these variables as well. The teller was present only in voice – via audio tape. The audience consisted of college students from East Tennessee State University and the venue one of their classrooms. I, as principal investigator, was also the emcee of sorts, telling the audience what was expected of them (see *Appendix B: Script for Story Listening Study*) for their participation and announcing each teller, but without fanfare or descriptivism – only by name.

There were unexpected challenges with the Story Listening portion of the study. The first was the fact that Jackie Torrence's tape wasn't cued properly. I sat in embarrassment as the tape was rewinding to its proper place and audience members shifted in their seats, breaking the spell of the pseudo-concert setup I'd envisioned. The second factor was something I'd not anticipated. Being a college class session I should have recalled that food and drink are not uncommon. Instead of laughter and other vocal cues to help me decipher what the audience liked, the popping of drink tops, the rustle of potato chip bags and the shifting of school bags was more

audible than anything else on my observer's tape. Simply put, most of the audience wasn't there to enjoy a concert or even get a better understanding of the study process. They were there to fulfill a class requirement. Yes, they had the option of not participating without penalty, but none did. They planned on putting in their time and noticeably many saw the listening session as such. This attitude was not conducive to full story engagement.

The largest challenge also was not fully anticipated but is indeed far more significant to the results of this study. Some simply misunderstood the directions. I know this to be the case for two reasons. First, a few marked their papers with a methodology not described in the script so deciphering their scores was a bit more arduous than it should have been. I cannot say with confidence that the score written down for each response is exactly as the recorder intended because I had no way to verify the marks on their paper or discuss it with them. I can state that all scores are within 1 point of what the recorder wanted to state as their score, however. The marks were off a little, but not dramatically enough to be off greater than 1 point. Yet if this were a scientific study, 1 point on a 10 point scale would be equal to a 10% possible deviation in scores. Scientists would throw the study out altogether for such a margin of error. Secondly, others also told me after the session that they had misunderstood the scale they were measuring their responses on. I'd explained that a zero on the scale meant that the particular response they were evaluating meant that they did not feel that response at all and a 10 on the scale meant they felt it intently. My choice of words and practice session had not made my intent clear enough. I found out that several chose 10 as their score for "disinterested" when they meant quite the opposite: they'd actually been highly interested. Thus, the numbers indicated by the study are not worth what I had hoped they would be – a true measure of the listening audience's affective responses to what was said by the tellers and how those words were used.

I have included the scores in this study because out of 22 participants, most did mark their papers according to the directions and also chose numbers on the scale that would be consistent with the type of story that they were listening to. If nothing else, it gives a small indication as to which variants of the story were strongest in each of the 8 affective response areas and some of the challenges tellers face as audience members rate their work.

Ratings

In spite of the difficulties with the data, quick analysis of the results shows several truths. First, as hypothesized, there is variation between scores recorded for all four tellers between what they were rated as at mid-listen, story end and in reflecting back upon the story after hearing all four variants. In some cases those scores were lowered, but not in all instances. There is no consistent pattern to the amount of points earned in each category, again emphasizing the ephemeral side of storytelling. It is with great caution that I note any superlatives in looking at the scores given the challenges with the initial data. Looking through the results from each teller's variant of the story, you will undoubtedly note that one teller must have garnered a higher score than his or her peers in each category. Does that mean Jim May, who scored highest in 5 out of 8 categories is the best teller for this story? Perhaps not. He was the final teller, and thus the freshest in their minds. His variant had many of the same details as David Holt's version: same protagonist, same setting, many of the same graphic or intense details about eating the critter's tale. However, Jim did not use music as is David's signature method of enhancing his tales.

David Holt was the first teller whose variant was played for the audience. I anticipated that being the first had pros and cons. It is advantageous to be the first person to tell a variant of a tale because it is completely new to more audience members. For example, every culture has

variations upon the Cinderella story, but don't we all evaluate what has come afterward against the first version we learned? The disadvantage is that it is hard to be the first one to "warm" an audience, especially if you're only present in audio. The audience doesn't get to enjoy to your smile, presence or personality. As a teller in this study, David could not change his cadence or delivery in any manner to meet the needs of his audience either simply because he was not there to see them or interact with his audience. As a result, it didn't surprise me that David scored highest in one category: Depressed. David's adaptation of the tale has an old man living a pitiful existence. That depressing image is bound to have stuck with listeners as each variant was told. The fiddle music which accompanied the tale further emphasized the commonality of the man and was bound to create associations with the financially meager mountain folk who would be associated with those tunes even if most of the music was lively in cadence.

The most amazing information I found in looking at that numbers was that Jackie Torrence earned a superlative score in none of the affective response categories. Now, Jackie had no way to recover and no recourse or known effect upon the audience when it was discovered that her cassette was miscued. Her tape was stopped mid-session in the same place in tale as the others and then played fully until its end. Yet, somehow, Jackie's telling was lost in the shuffle between David Holt's musically-enhanced telling and Jim May's final words. How is that possible? Certainly no one who ever heard or saw Jackie tell would say that she was a less capable or memorable teller than these two gentlemen. It is possible that her physical presence added more to her telling than any of us guessed.

Marilyn Kinsella suffered a similar fate in the testing. When all of the results were analyzed it revealed that she had two categories with scores slightly above her peers: disgusted and disinterested. Honestly, I cannot surmise why without conjecture. Her tailypo character was

not more gruesome or disgusting than the others. In fact, it was far less than Holt's or May's slimy-tailed dinner descriptive, and her voice had an extra suspenseful touch with the help of audio effects on top of her well-paced telling. My only clue came from hearing one respondent on the way out the door as the session ended. She said, "That one woman started to tell it differently and I got excited, but then, it just went back to 'taaaaaailypoooo'!" Her exasperation was evident. It is a sentiment I've heard from listeners before when they've gotten all caught up in a story and then discover it is a variant of one they already knew. However in this case, the audience members knew well in advance that all four tellers were presenting variants of a single story.

APPENDIX C

Transcript of *Tailybone* by David Holt

Once a long time ago down in the big woods of Tennessee
there lived an old man in a log cabin all by himself
now that cabin was just one room
and at one end of the cabin was a big ol' stone fireplace
and every evenin' the old man would cook whatever he'd caught on that big old open fire
now if he caught a rabbit or a deer or a fish, he'd just roast it right there.
If he didn't catch any meat, he'd just cook himself a big ol' pot of beans.
Now, one cold, dark and windy night,
That old man was sittin' up by that fireplace cookin' a pot of bean and listenin' to the wind
howlin' through the trees outside. (*begin screeching of violin to symbolize the sounds he heard*)
He was just kinda lost in his thoughts,
Watching those (*pause*) beans begin to boil an' the fire burn down low
When all of a sudden, as he looked down and saw some kind of animal's paw start to come up
through the floorboards in the house
That was a hole he shoulda fixed way last summer but (*pause*) too late now.
That thing was comin' in
It had BIG long pointy teeth
And BIG fiery red eyes
Why it was as big as a dog but had a tail like...
Well, like nothin' he'd ever seen before

Well, he slowly reached out and picked up a little hatchet he had behind the fireplace and raised it up over his head

when that thing came in the room (*end violin sound*)

He CHOPPED AT IT (*discordant banjo string sound*).

(*Breathy*) And he chopped its tail right off.

Well, that THING LET OUT AN AWFUL **YELL!** (*screech of violin strings*)

and went runnin' back out the floorboards of the house

Now that old man had lived in those woods his whole life and never seen a creature like that before

But there its old tail was, still sitting on the floor *wiggling*

He reached down and picked it up

it was a big ol' long thing and it didn't have any hair on it, just some big ol' spine-like things why it did have a lot of meat

he didn't have any meat for those beans so

he just dropped that tail into those beans.

And cooked it on down.

And then like a fool,

he ate it

Well, it tasted pretty good to him

in fact, he ate every bean in that pot but when he finished,

he realized he was getting an awful stomach ache

Well, he decided he better go to bed so he crawled on over to the bed, crawled into the bed put the covers up over his head , put his head down on the pillow

And he was just about to go to sleep

When he heard (*scratch sound effect*) a little scratching sound up the side of the house (*more scratching sound*) he raised up out of bed and he said,

Hya! Now go on, get up on out of heya. Getta get outa heya.

But all he heard was

(*distant sound effect*) tailybone, (*scratch*) tailybone (*scratch*) , I want my Taaaaily bone. (*more discordant scratching*)

Well, the old man figured someone was trying to play a trick up on him

Now, go on and get outta here, where ever you are just get on and go back home

But all he heard was

(*distant sound effect*) “Tailybone, (*scratch*) tailybone (*scratch*) , I want my Taaaaily bone.”
(*more discordant scratching*)

Well, the old man called his dogs, from up under the house he said,

“Ino, Uno, and Cumptico-Calico! Get that thing!”

And those dogs ran out from under the house and they chased that thing way back down to the woods. (*fiddle music – joyful*)

Well, the old man went to the door and his listened.

He could hear those dogs barking waaay down in the woods.

(*dog howl*) Ar ar ar ar RRRRR!

[TAPE STOPPED HERE FOR MID-STORY EVALUATION]

He knew they weren't mean dogs. He didn't even worry. He closed that door and went right on

back to bed. Crawled up in the bed and went right to sleep.

And he wasn't asleep long when he was awakened by a little scratching sound, (*scratch on violin strings*). This time it was above the door.

Somethin' was tryin' to come in through the door!

He sat up in bed. He said, "Now I told you to get up on outta here. Just go on. Go."

And all he heard was,

(*distant sound effect*) "Tailybone, (*scratch*) tailybone (*scratch*), I want my Taaaaily bone."

(*more discordant scratching*)

The old man called his dogs and he said,

"Ino, Uno, Cumptico-Calico! Get id of that thaang!

Well, those dogs ran out from neath under the house and they almost tore down the fence getting after that thang. (*Same fiddle music – joyful – from previous dog chase.*)

This time the old man when to the door and he listened and he could hear those dog barking waaay down in the woods

Ar ar ar ar rrrrf And they stopped!

Well, it kinda concerned the man but he figured maybe they'd gotten that thing down in a hole and he couldn't hear 'em.

This time when he closed the door, he locked it.

He crawled back up into bed

Why he tossed and turned a looong time.

Finally did go to sleep

But about midnight

He was awakened by what he thought was the sound of the wind (*begin screeching of violin to symbolize the sounds he heard*)

He sat up in bed and waaay down in the woods he could hear
(*distant sound effect*) “Tailybone, tailybone, I get my Taaaaily bone.” (*more discordant scratching*)

The old man set up in bed. He was kinda scared.

He said, ““Ino, Uno, Cumptico-Calico! Get that thing!”

But all he heard was the sound of that wind.

He called them again (*dog theme music begins again behind the screeching of the wind sound*),
“Ino, Uno, Cumptico-Calico!”

But that thing (*begin horror film type sound of violin shimmering*) had taken those dogs down to the woods and lost ‘em or killed ‘em.” (*Harsh violin draw. End of sound effects.*)

Well, old man got outta bed. He didn’t know what to do. The first thing he did was go around and close all the shutters on the windows and bar ‘em tight. And then he built up a big ol’ roaring’ fire in the fireplace so nothin’ could come down through the chimney.

Then he went around and barred the front door shut. And then he remembered that whole where that thing had come in earlier during the night

And he got some old rags and stuffed them tight down in that hole.

And then he got a big rock he used for a doorstep in the summer and put it over on top of the rags so nothing could come up through the floor-

But he couldn’t sleep.

He just got that little hatchet and started walkin’ around the room waitin’ for that thing to come

Wating’

Watchin’

Listenin’

Walking’

What he figured was alllll night long he was so tired,

He figured if the sun was comin’ up, well, he’d be safe

So he went over to the winda to open it up and look out

He opened the shutter and it kinda creaked when he opened it (*creek sound effect*)

And he looked out.

And sure enough, the sun was coming up

He felt so goood.

When he closed that shutter, just went back over to the bed and ahhh,

Just fell right down in the bed,

Pulled the covers up around his shoulders when he heard

(*Discordant bow draw over violin strings*) at the foot of the bed.

And it said,

“Tailybone, tailybone,

He said, “I ain’t got your old tailybone!”

The thing said, “You got my Taaaaily bone.”

And it *jumped (begin frantic violin playing)* On That Man!, and they say

IT SCRATCHED HIM TO PIECES! (*end violin playing*)

And some folks say, that thing got its tailybone.

APPENDIX D

Transcript of *Tailypo* by Jackie Torrence

Once upon a time, there lived a man

He lived in a cabin waaaaay back in the woods.

Now, this cabin was *one great big room*.

And in this *one great big room*, this *man* had his kitchen, his living room and his
bedroom.

Now, this poor man, lived in this one room cabin

Alllll alone.

(Matter of fact) He was a little lazy,

So He never made repairs on the cabin. Sometimes, when you looked though the ceiling of the
cabin, you could see the Staaars because there were - HOLES - in the ceiling.

There were *holes* in the walls

And there were HOLES in the floor.

This man didn't care. He *liked* to look through the holes in the ceiling,

And he *liked* to look through the holes in the wall,

And you know, he *liked* to look through the holes in the floor.

One night, as he was sitting, gazing in the fire,

He just happened to look through one of the holes in the floor.

And *there*, beneath the floor, one of the holes - LOOKED back at him.

The HOLE had TWOOO *great big red eyes*.

“Wooo!” said the man. “What is That?”

Now, all of a sudden, those *great big red eyes* had two little ears

And these two little eaaaars, had a little nooose, and a *mouth* – that had teeth!

Aaa-aaand the teeth w-were inside a-a great big heeeead,

Aaand the head had a neck, and a bodyyy

And before you knew it,

It was a crittah standing on the floor besiide that man.

And the man looked down at the critter and said

Oooh.

Now, this critter, started to pull loooooong, haaaaaaairy tail, through the hole in the floor.

And he pullllllled

And he pullllllled

And he pullllled.

And That Man looked at that long hairy tail and said, “ew.”

Well that critter kept pulling on that tale until he threw the tail out onto the floor and the man said, Woo!

The critter said, Grrrrowl

Well, the critter looked alll around the floor

He saw the holes in the floor.

He saw the holes in the wall.

He saw the Holes in the ceiling.

And the critter turned his nose up, and he said, “EWWW!”

He turned himself around

Put his head back down the hole in the floor, and the rest of his body, and when he was safe under the house, he started to pull his looooooong hairy tail

Down

Through the hole

In the floor.

Now, That made that man a little angry.

“I’ll not have a critter come up in my house and look around and not like it,” he said to himself.

So he leeeeeaned over to the fireplace

-Where he kept an axe

And he lifted that axe Hiiiiigh into the air and he came down with a

CHUMPPPP!

And it *cut* that critters tail half in two.

That poor old critter said YEEOO!

And that man said, Hhheehihihiheh! Seeerves him right!

That man took that tail and he rolllled the tail up

And he lifted it up into the air

He HUNG it on a nail

That *hung* over the fireplace

And he settled back in his chair, looked at that tail for a loong tiime,

And he laaaughed to himself Ha! A-huh. A-HUH! Serrrves him right!

(sigh)

Now, after a little while.... This man got a little sleepy.

So he said to himself, AAAAAow I think I'lllll *go to bed*.

So he got up, went around the room and blew out allll the candles

Then

He went over to the place that was his bedroom

(singsongy) took off his shoes and clooothes, put on his night shirt

and climbed into beeed.

Juuuust as he was getting ready to *fall* into a deep, deep sleep he heard something.

Waaaaaay down in the woods.

It was a straaange sound.

And he listened. And it sounded like,

“Taaaaailypoooo.

Taaaaailypoooo.

Iiiii wants myyy Taaaaailypoooo.”

And the man quickly set up in bed and he said,

“Woo. What was that?” And he listened,

and then he said to himself, “I know, I know, its that crittah, and he’s lookin’ for his tail. Well, he’ll not get it.

I’ll just send my hound dogs after ‘im.”

Now this old man had hound dogs that lived under the house, so he just reached over,

And he looked down through one of those holes

And he called to his hound dogs

“Houn’ dog. Hearee. Houn’ dogs. Heyar. Heyar. Go get that crittah. Go get that crittah. Heyar.

Gettem. Gettem. Gettem.”

And the hound dog went after that critter

Roof Roof Roof Ruff Roof Roof Ruff

And that old man said to himself, “Heh. Heh. Heh. Serrves him right.”

[TAPE STOPPED HERE FOR MID-STORY EVALUATION]

(big breath) Just as he started to put his head back on the pillow,
and fall back to sleep,

(Breathy) He heard another sound.

This time, it was just outside his window, and it sounded like

(louder) “Taaaaailypoooo.

Taaaaailypoooo. Iiii wants myyy Taaaaailypoooo.”

AND THAT MAN set up in bed, he said, “Ut oh. Them houn’ dogs didn’t git that crittahr. What will I do?”

Heh. No siiir. Heh. Them houn’ dogs didn’ git the crittah. The Crittah – got the houn’ dogs.

“Oh no,” said the man. (*nervously*) “Whaat will I do?”

And he looked aaaall around the house and it was darrk.

(breathy) All of a sudden down at the foot of the bed he heard a strange noise
and he could feel something slippin’ onto the bed and it was comin’ up toward
his face and it was whisprin’

“Taaaaailypoooo.

Taaaaailypoooo.

Iiii waaaants myyy...(*shout*) YOU’ve Got my Tailypo!

(Worriedly) And the old man said, “It’s down, by the fireplace, Go over there and get it. Go over there and get it!”

That critter leaped down off the bed, grabbed his tail, went down through the hole in the floor

and disappeared in the night

and NOBODY's ever seen that critter

Or his TAIL again.

And *that's* the *end* of *that*.

APPENDIX E

Transcript of *Tailypo* by Marilyn Kinsella

Teller's Notes

“From the dark places...the gloomy places...comes a most curious story. A creature from Primordial times get revenge. This was the first story I told, hence my storytelling name, Taleypo. Although it can be found in Botkins' *Treasure of American Folklore*, the version I tells is adapted from Dr. Jack Stokes [sic *Stokes' version*]” (Kinsella, 1988, cassette recording jacket)

Transcript

(Musical introduction- Lively banjo, bluegrass style)

The story I'm gonna tell you,

comes from the swamps *(using reverb to echo her voice, end of music)*

from the daaaark places...

the gloooooom places...

(regular voice) And out of this swamp comes the most curious critter,

with a great looong taiiil behind

and when a Tailypo comes outa that swamp well he's a just a hoppin' and a dancin'

why he dances to the right --and the tailypo's left

and the dances to the left --and the tailypo's right

He's just a hoppin' and a dancin' havin' himself a good ole time when all of a sudden he looks

up on the mountain

and he *sees* a cabin

(excitedly) Why Tailypo ain't never seen no cabin before
so he starts to climb up on top of that mountain.

And when he gets up to that cabin he starts in a *(sniffin sound)*

Sniffin' at the cracks in the walls

And scht scht scht, scratchin at the doors

Now, inside, there's an old man sleepin' on a cot

Old man wakes up

(Old man tittering voice) "Who is that? Who is that making all that sound?"

Old man looks out of a chink hole.

(Hauntingly) Eyes! Eyes! Eyes!

Well, if you can call those things eyes.

The old man went out, opened the door,

(Old man tittering voice) "How come? How come you must curious critter you're a hoppin' and
a dancin' and a sniffin' and a jumpin'? Why I show you!"

And with that the old man went back into the kitchen and he came back out with

A great big looong

BUTCHER KNIFE!

And he came up to that Tailypo and snip snap slip slap why he cut that Tailypo's taily cleeeeean
off. Blood and bone.

And he went back into the kitchen and got himself a fry pan and flip flop flippity flop

Why he Et that taiiil. Blooooood and bone.

Now I never met any of those swamp critters myself, mind you,

But I can tell you one thing!

I w-wouldn't a et that taaail.

(Sorrowful) And poor old Tailypo he just raaaan off into the woods on those little itty bitty legs
of his

(normal voice) Well...if you can Call those things leeegs.

And the old man went back to bed.

Aaaand heee slept.

Well, it wasn't long before a moon started to riiiise up over that hill

And just as it got to its highest point

It hid behind a Taallll Oak Tree.

(whispering) and there was darkness eeeevery wheeeere....

And if you listened,

Listened reeeaaal careful

*(louder)*There Was a Sound

A Sound coming in out of the swamp on little cat's feet...

(using reverb to enhance echo of voice) Tailypooooo... I wantttt My TAAAaailypoooo

And THAT SOUND!

THAT SOUND!

It HURT!

It wasn't long before that sound was standin' right outside that man's cabin.

(Old man's tittering voice) "Who is that? Who is that moanin' and groanin'? Why that sound,

that sound is a gray sound. Hhh! That sound ain't got no bottom to it."

And so the old man reached under his bed and called those three fine hound dogs of his

(Old man's tittering voice) "Here dogs!"

Up those old hound dogs chased-

Chased old Tailypo down to the woods!

And that old Tailypo ran and he ran and ran until he got to the swamp, dove straight in right in over his head.

(Normal voice) Well, if you can call that thing a head

And the old man just gathered up his dogs went back to bed

AND slept

aaaand he slept.

[TAPE STOPPED HERE FOR MID-STORY EVALUATION]

Now, you remember that moon I was tellin' you about?

That moon that was shinin' up there in the sky?

Well, there was a cloud, like a hand that came over that moooon..

and there was daaarkness...everywheeeeere....and if you listened you could hear a sound

"Tailypo? Tailypo?! I wantttt My TAAAaailypoooo. I'm a comin' closer. I'm a comin' closer."

Well, it wasn't long before that sound was standin' right at the foot of that old man's bed.

(Old man's tittering voice) "Who is that? Who is that most curious shape? Why that shape is a gray shape. That shape ain't got no bottom to it."

And with that the old man

Reached under that bed for those three fine hound dogs

(Old man's tittering voice) "Here dogs!"

Well, this time the hound dogs jumped up like greased lightning

They *took hold* of that Tailypo and off all four of them went

Urrrr Urrr Urrrrrr

All the way downwwwn

To the swamp.

Hmmmm

Where that most curious critter liiiives.

Now the old man waited for his dogs to come back, but mind you

They never came back.

So he went on to bed

AND slept

And he slept

aaaand he slept.

Now I told you about that moon, and I told you about how it was shiining up there in the skyyy

And it was theree

But there weren't no light

Because all of the light had been gobbled up into the darkness

And *if* you listened

Listened real careful

There was a souuund.

Like a cloud seeepin' in from the swamp.

“Tailypo? Tailypo?! I wantttt My TAAAaailypoooo. I'mmmm a getting' closer. I'm a getting' closer, with the moon, With the *moon*”

the moon darked out.

It wasn't long before that sound was squattin' square dab on that old man's chest

“I wantttt My TAAAaailypoooo.”

Old man woke up.

(Old man's tittering voice) “W-who is thaaat? Whooo is that starin' down aaat me with them curiiious eeeyeballs?”

With that the old man reached under the bed for those three fine hound dogs of his

(Old man's tittering voice) “He-here dogs.”

Welll...dogs don't know. They just be.

(Old man's tittering voice) “Oooh. Wheere's my dogs?”

Everything stopped.

(Old man's tittering voice) “Wheere's my dogs?”

Everything listened.

(Old man's tittering voice) “Wheere's myyyy doooooogggssss?”

“Where's My TAAAaailypoooo?”

Now the people

That lived in that valley

They said they never saw that old man again

But they do say

That at night

When the moon is full

And there's a cloud like a hand that comes over that

Why they say there's a wind that whispers through those mountains

And if you listen real hard

You can hear

(using reverb to echo voice on mic) "TAAAaailypoooo. I got my Taaaailyypoooo."

APPENDIX F

Transcript of *Tailypo* by Jim May

(breathy and mournful) Tailypo? Taaaaailypoooo? I want my Tailypoooo.

(pause for one beat)

(Conversational) They say if you go down to Tennessee, back there in the woods, and if you find a place where a cabin used to be just a few rotted logs there on the ground, and a fieldstone chimney going up into the sky, that if you stay there late at night

and you listen to the sound of the wind comin' up in the tress

(vocalization of wind's whistle) whoooooooooo

Thatcha might hear

(breathy and mournful) Tailypo. Taaaaailypoooo. I got my Tailypoooo.

You see, there was an old man lived in that cabin a long time ago.

He lived there all alone except for three dogs:

Eeknow, Iknow and Cometogo Calico

and the dogs,

they lived under the bed.

Now when this story happened, the old man, he hadn't been to town for a long time.

In fact, he hadn't had any meat to eat for a long time –

just beans.

Beans when he got up in the morning

Beans for dinner.

Beans for supper.

Beans.

He was getting' tired of those beans.

(mournful) He was standing at the woodstove there one day, cookin' up a big pot of those beans, thinking about how he was tired of eatin' 'em, when he noticed a hole in the floorboard.

Now, he was looking at that hole thinking he had meant to chink up that hole,

When you chink up a hole, you put a -- piece of wood or a stone there and you pack mud around it, to keep the critters from getting' in.

Well, he was looking down there thinking about

just about what size rock he would need,

when he saw *(breathy)* two, red, fiery eyes,

looking at 'im out of that hole.

And while he was lookin' at them eyes

(Shouting) A CRITTER JUMPED OUTTA THERE!

He was about the size of a big dog with a long rat-like tail

"Iknow, Eeknow and Cometogo Calico,"

he called for those dogs.

The dogs, they jumped up, out from under the bed start chasin' that critter around and around that table.

The man went for that fireboard there, the fireplace, and took an axe.

Next time that critter came 'round that table

CA THUNK! *(dog-like howl)* Owwwwwww

(Breathy) He cut off its tail.

The critter – headed for the door.

The old man – old as he was – he made sure he got to the door first, to open it so that critter could get outta that cabin.

The dogs, they just chased it right down into the woods.

Right on its heEEls.

The old man, he sat there on the porch for a long time,

‘til he couldn’t hear the baying of those hounds.

and he went back into the house.

And there, laying on the floor, was that long rat-like tail

– with kinda a bloody stump end to it.

He went back to his cookin’ stirring up those beans,

Lookin’ down at that tail,

And then he started to think,

“I haven’t had any meat to eat for a long time.”

He looked back down at that tail, looked at the beans...

He picked up that tail. He kinda dabbed it in the flour tray there,

put it in the fryin’ pan with a hunk of lard

(breathy) and he cooked it up!

Later that night,

after the dogs had come back and gone on under the bed,

the man ate all those beans,

But he was still hungry

So, he looking into that frying pan and there was that long rat-like tail just kinda curled up all greasy in the bottom of the pan.

So, he *picked* it up, and he held it Hiiiigh over his head,

and he just kinda let that

Loooong tail,

that looong greasy tail, just kinda slIIIIide down his throat.

Well, he had a nice full stomach now.

So, he got into bed and he was fast asleep in no time.

But suddenly, suddenly he was awake,

Didja ever have it happen that suddenly in the middle of the night you were wide awake?

That's what happened to him.

There he was, sittin' bolt upright in the bed, not knowing what it was that had awakened 'im.

He looked under the bed. The dogs were snorin'.

So, he thought maybe it was just a dream.

He put his head – back down on the pillow,

and that's when he heard it.

Down in the woods.

(breathy and mournful) Tailypo? Taaaailypoooo?

I waaaaant my Tailypoooo.

(crackling voice/fearful) It was that critter callin' for its tail.

“Iknow, Eeknow and Cometogo Calico,” he called for the dogs.

The dogs came out from under that bed, out the door, after that (*breathy*) souuuuund.

That man, he waited a long time. The dogs did finally come back. They were real tired,

it was their second trip after that critter. (*panting heavily*) haaaH Haaaahaahaaaaaaa

They went under the bed and were asleep.

[TAPE STOPPED HERE FOR MID-STORY EVALUATION]

The old man, he got back into bed,

Put his head on the pillow

His eyelids were just getting' heavy

And he heard it again,

Closer to the cabin.

(*breathy and mournful*) "Tailypoooo? TaaaaailyPoooo?"

I waaaaant my Tailypoooo."

(scared) "Iknow, Eeknow and Cometogo Calico,"

he called for the dogs.

The dog, they kinda wobbled out the door and down into the woods.

(whispered) This time – the dogs n-e-v-e-r came back.

That critter had taken those dogs out there and lost 'em

Or worse.

Well, that old man

He couldn't sleep now

He was just too

Too worried and nervous

He kinda paced back on that flooooo

That when he heard it

Out in the porch

Scrrrraaaaatch! Scrrrraaaaatch!

He jumped right under those blankets

Put ‘em over his head

And he waited

Then he heard it down by the floorboard

Down there where he still had forgotten to patch up that hole

That open hole...

Scrrrraaaaatch! Scrrrraaaaatch!

And then he heard it

the foot of the bed

ScrrrraaaaAAAAatch!

He took those blankets

Took those blankets away from his head and kinda let them down below his eyes

And there he saw comin’ up

Over the foot of the bed

Those two red, *fiery* eyes

“TAAilypooOOO! TaaAAAailyPooOO! YOU KNOOOOW AND I KNOOOOW

(conversational) I gotta HAVE my Tailypo.”

Well, that was all that anyone heard from that old man

Or his dogs.

They just clean disappeared,

But they say,

If you go down there now,

Down to that woods down in Tennessee,

And you find that place where the

--- rotten logs are laying on the ground and that fieldstone chimney is going up into the night sky,

That if you stay there late at night,

and you hear that wind comin' up in the trees...

(whistling wind) whoooooooooo

thatcha might still hear...

(breathy and mournful) Tailypo? Taaaaailypoooo? Iiii

(conversational) GOT my Tailypo.

And that's the story of Tailypo.

APPENDIX G

Transcript of *Tailypo* by Jackie Torrence: Online Video Performance

Now the name of this story is... Tailypo.

Now once upon a time, livin' just down the road, not too far, from here, there was a man, and he lived in a house that was a disgrace to himself, his neighbors and everybody else.

His neighbors said, "This is a terrible house. You got holes in the ceiling and holes in the wall, and HOLES in the floor."

"That's right," he said, "and this is my house. I use the holes in the ceiling."

"For what?" they said.

"I can look up through them holes in the ceiling and see what kind of weather we're having."

"Oh, that's awful," they said. "What about the holes in the walls?"

(Laughing) "I use them holes. I can look through them holes and look down the road, and see who's coming to visit."

(Laughing nervously.) "Oh, my goodness! What about the holes in the floor?"

Why I can look up at the floor, 'round the chimney, and see if my hound dogs are playing.

Hoohoo! It's my house. Don't come here if you don't like it."

Well, one night,when it was very, very dark outside,and very, very cold,the old man sat by the fire place and watched the dogs play beneath the house. But all at once, out from under the house, through this hole in the floor came a critter. The critter had twooo loooong pointy ears, and a loooooong SNOUT of a nose, and little teeth with sharp points at the end of 'em and loooooong gray hair. Now this critter was very strange for it had one thing, a tail that was 25 feet long and he took that tail with him everywhere he went. Up through the hole, from under the

house came the critter. It looked up, and it looked down and it looked around and it said, “Oooh!” and then it pulled that tail from beneath the house and the tail went all around it.

And the man said, “Whoa!”

But the critter looked through the holes in the ceiling, and it looked through the holes in the wall and it looked through the holes in the floor and it said, “Ewwww.” (*look of disgust*) The critter did NOT like... what it saw so he turned around and put his head back through the floor, and started beneath the house again. When he reached up to grab that 25 foot tail, ‘cause it took it with him everywhere it went...

That old man said, “Oh no you won’t!”

The man reached over and he picked up an axe. And he lifted that axe into the air, and when he brought that axe down, it came right down on that critter’s CHUMP tail.

And that critter said, “Yeow!”

And the man said, “Heh ha haaaa! That’ll fix ya,” and he picked up that tail and he wrapped it around his hand and threw it on a nail. Well, he watched that tail aaaaaalllll night and he couldn’t help but say, “Heh he hehhhhh. Haa ha haaa. I got that big ole long tail. Ha ha ha.”

But he got sleepy. Now he got up and went into his room and he blew out alllll the candles and he put on his night shirt, and he slipped him doowwn inside the covers. And the minute his head hit that pillow, he went sound asleep. (*Loud snore like a bear growl.*)

But over in the night, as he slept, he heard somethin waaaay down in the woods, and it said, (*soft and distantly*) “Iiiiiiii waaaaaant myyyyyy taaaaaaaily-poooooe. Whooo’ss gooooot my taaaaaaaily-poooooe?”

Oh,” said that man. “It’s that critter. He’s down there goin’ on abouts he wants his tail. What am I gonna do? Oh...oh!” and he pulled the covers back over his head and said, “I’m so scared, I’ve

got to hide, I've got to hide. That critter's gonna come up here. Oh," he said, "I don't have nothing to worry about. That critter's gonna come up here, yeah, that critter's gonna come up here and I'm gonna SIC my hound dogs on 'im. Come on hound dogs, get up and get 'im. Sic'im. Sic'im! Get on. Get on, hound dogs. Get on!"

And the hound dogs woke up and the hound dogs said, "Woof. Ruff. Rrrrrurururffff. Rooh. Rooh. Rooh. Arararrooof," and off they went, and the man said, "Heh he hehhhh! Serves him right."

Well, after a loooooong time, that old man had fallen asleep again and he was sleepin' so good, but all at once he heard somethin. Somethin' in the rooom, beside the fireplace and it sounded like, "Whooo'ss gooooot my taaaaaaily-poooooe? Iiiiiiii waaaaaant myyyyyy taaaaaaily-poooooe."

"Oh," the man, he said, "He's comin'. He's comin'. What am I gonna do?" and he slipped back under the covers again. But beneath the covers...it was daaaaark..... daaaaark....daaaaark. And all of a sudden, the man heard, Whooo'ss gooooot myyyy.... YOU got my taily-poe!"

Why that ole tailypo grabbed that old man and that old man said, (*nervously*) "No no no! I don't have it. It's hangin' on that nail... hangin' on that nail" and the critter threw the man down, Ran over, Grabbed his tail, Down through that hole he went and nobody's seen that critter...or his tail, again.

And that's the end of that. (*Big smile.*)

APPENDIX H

Transcript of *Tail Een Po* by Chuck Larkin

Larkin's Notes to Readers

The version I first heard was many years ago in my childhood. In the early 70's I heard a similar version in the Cookville area of Tennessee.

Later I started telling this story as a jump story. I have no idea which images reflected in the story came from what I heard or what I created. After the popular published version involving an old man surfaced I had to readjust the front end set up in order to break the listeners free from the other variation during my telling of this version. Two interesting information nuggets are the definitions of the words "Een" [Irish Gael] meaning "dear one" and "Po" as a spoken abbreviation includes "Point or tip".

Taileenpo perhaps once meant the end of my dear tail. I have been told by a folklorist that this version is a transition version between the older Irish form and the popular published version of the old man in the mountain cabin that was published in the late 60s or early 70s. This is my copyrighted version and all have permission to retell and readapt as they wish or include in a collection. As said above this is an old folk tale that is now known as Tailypo and Tailybone.

Transcript

Today I'm going to share with you a true story. This occurred to a neighbor I knew. He rode the same school bus I rode. I lived on a farm out past the end of the school bus route on a dirt road and Augustine [we called him Aggie] lived on a farm near the Nassawanga creek about three miles toward town, just before the paved road began. Years later a writer apparently heard about what happened to Aggie and wrote a book with the story. But in the book he changed the

names, kind of changed what really happened and changed Aggie into an old man. First time I heard the book version I thought it sounded like what happened to my neighbor Aggie. As you hear what really happened to Aggie and if you know the other story this might help you later to think of an experience you had and how to change your adventure to write a story.

When I was in the fifth grade, when Aggie's story occurred, it was about 1937 in the period of the great depression. Nobody on the farms in those days had any cash money. We were so poor our Dalmatian dog only had one spot. In fact our house was so small our dog had to wag his tail up and down to keep from hitting the walls. My Momma used to bring home the butcher's aprons to wash but first she boiled the aprons in a big pot to make soup. Our pockets were made out of rubber so we could carry soup to school for lunch. To make coffee Momma also used to boil our coffee grounds over and over again until the coffee grinds bleached out white. Then we would bag the white coffee grounds and ship them up to the Yankees and sell them for grits. That's why even today Yankees don't like grits. I got my first pair of trouser pants when I went to the first grade. For shoes we painted our feet and laced up our toes. After sitting in the old time rough wooden chairs we would come home with holes in the seat of our pants. Momma would make us stand on our heads in order to sew up our pants. That's why a lot of old men my age have bald heads. We wore off the hair getting our one pair of pants sewed up. Well, let me tell Aggie's story.

Aggie lived in a log cabin. When people built a log cabin they started with one room about 16 feet by 16 feet. After they started living in the one room they would later build on additional rooms. Aggie's mom and dad slept on a homemade mattress back against the wall. Above their heads was a platform half way up the wall just big enough for Aggie's mattress with two poles holding the platform and a ladder to climb up and down. To the left of the bed was a

fireplace and to the right was one window. Across from the beds was the front door. This day Aggie was out in the garden chopping weeds with a big grubbing hoe. That's a long handle with a big flat steel head like a big number 7. As Aggie was swinging the hoe and digging up weeds he suddenly saw a whole head of cabbage disappear straight down into the ground. That surprised him because there were no varmints big enough to pull a whole head of cabbage under ground. In those days all your food to eat was growing in the garden and Aggie knew he had a problem. When he saw another great big watermelon disappear under ground he raced over and started swinging that huge hoe at the spot. Whatever was in the dirt turned and was digging down faster than Aggie could dig. He made one more swing as hard as he could and hit something and he could hear a squeal going deeper into the ground. When he cleared the dirt away from down in the big hole, he pulled out a bloody, muddy tip of a tail with no hair, about five inches long, pointed on the end and real thick and meaty where it was cut. Aggie carried it up to the pump. He was pumping up water to wash the tail tip off when the mailman came driving up. The mailman told the Sheriff this part of the story that Aggie told him. The mailman Bob Williams also told the Sheriff that there was no varmint that he'd ever seen with a tail like the one Aggie was washing off. His parents later told us what happened that night.

Aggie carried the tail in the house. His mom and dad had gone to town. His mom had a big pot of greens cooking in the fireplace. Aggie put the tail into the iron pot to cook with the greens and went back out into the garden to continue cutting out the weeds in the garden. He finished his chores about two hours later and washed up at the pump. After he went back into the cabin he could smell the cooked tail and that meat sure smelled good. His parents had not returned and Aggie had not eaten any meat for about nine days. The only meat the family ate was game they caught in traps and they had not caught any lately. Aggie fished the tail out of

the simmering water, wrapped it in a cloth because it was hot and carried it out behind the barn. He ate the whole tail and did not save any for his parents. He buried the bones in the ground.

It was late that night when Aggie woke up. Some noise had woke him, his parents and their three hound dogs. The dogs were growling and barking at the door. Aggie's daddy Orvile got up and let the dogs out. They took off after something that had been in the yard. Orvile closed the door and placed the locking bar down. Next he put a log on in the fireplace and stirred up the fire. Last he closed and locked down the big shutter over the window and went back to bed. Aggie and his folks listened to the dogs and they could hear them chasing something down into the Nassawanga swamp. Slowly their barks got fainter and fainter as they went deeper and deeper into the swamp. Aggie, up on his sleeping platform told his mom and dad what happened that day. His ma said that it was all right she didn't think she would have eaten meat from a varmint's tail that she didn't know. His paw said the same thing. After it got quiet they fell asleep.

The next time Aggie woke up, the fire in the fireplace had burned out. The inside of the cabin was dark, dark, dark. With the door and window shutters closed there was no light. Aggie wondered what woke him up and then way off in the distance he faintly heard what sounded like a voice. Slowly Aggie heard the voice coming a little closer and getting a little louder, a little closer a little louder. Then he realized the something outside in the dark, that was coming closer was whimpering "tail een po, tail een po where is my tail een po?" Aggie thought "oh oh time to get up, climb down and get in bed with my mommy and daddy.

[Good time to ask someone in the front of the audience. Does that make sense to you? Respond appropriately and continue.]

But when Aggie started to get up he found he was unable to move or speak. All he could

do was wiggle his fingers and toes and roll his eyes.

The voice came closer and louder "tail een po, tail een po where is my tail een po?" By this time Aggie's mom and dad were awake and they told us later that they could hear this eerie voice moaning "tail een po, tail een po where is my tail een po?" but they could not move or speak! Aggie thought "it's in the yard, that's a weird voice. I can feel goose bumps on my arms and down my back." "Tail een po, tail een po where is my tail een po?" Wham! Something hit the front door. "Tail een po, tail een po where is my tail een po?"

Aggie thought "I ain't scared. My daddy bolted the door, ain't nothing gone to get in." "Tail een po, tail een po where is my tail een po?" Then Aggie heard something big slowly dragging itself around the cabin toward the window now.

Quietly whimpering "tail een po, tail een po where's my tail een po?" "I ain't scared. My daddy closed and bolted the shutters over the window, ain't nothing gone to get in." "Tail een po, tail een po where's my tail een po?" Wham bam bam bam, it hit the window hard several times and still whispered with quiet fury "tail een po, tail een po where's my tail een po?" Now the thing was crawling slowly around the cabin until it reached the logs next to where Aggie's parents were frozen still. Aggie could hear it slowly creeping up the logs next to where he was sleeping. He could hear what sounded like claws sinking into the wood as the creature slowly crawled up over his head furiously whispering "tail een po, tail een po where's my tail een po?" "Well, I ain't scarred my daddy put thick strong overlapped shingles of oak wood on the roof, ain't nothing can get through that roof." The thing still whispered "tail een po, tail een po where's my tail een po?" Now Aggie could catch a small whiff of some distinct ghastly smell coming through tiny spaces between the logs. "Tail een po, tail een po where's my tail een po?" Now it's on the roof and, and, and it's heading for the chimney. "I ain't scared. Nothing can get

down that chimney well at least nothing that big." Then he heard this bizarre angry voice whispering and muttering "tail een po, tail een po where's my tail een po?"

"Oh oh that sounds like something is sliding and sliming down inside the chimney. It's in the fireplace." "Tail een po, tail een po where's my tail een po?" Well, it can't get up here on this platform. It can't climb a ladder. I ain't scared!" But then he could hear what sounded like claws on the bottom rungs of the ladder and he could feel the platform shake a little bit as something slowly climbed up the ladder. "Tail een po, tail een po where's my tail een po?" Aggie could feel a presence coming over the mattress at his feet. "Tail een po, tail een po where's my tail een po?"

Now it was right over his face. Aggie held his breath. The stench was horrible. Then two little red beady eyes opened up right above his face and quietly whimpered "tail een po, tail een po" then screaming "have you got my tail een po?"

The next morning all Aggie's parents found were his fingers and toes. After the thing ate the rest of Aggie it went over and unlocked the cabin door and left. A week later the three hounds were found several miles away in the next county and brought home. A few months later some hunters found a pile of bones that some say were Aggie's bones, out in the swamp.

AND THAT'S A TRUE STORY.

VITA

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