



The Folkloresque: Reframing Folklore in a Popular Culture World

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The Folkloresque: Reframing Folklore in a Popular Culture World. Edited by Michael Dylan Foster and Jeffrey A. Tolbert. Logan: Utah State University Press, 2016. viii + 265 pp. Illus. \$27.95 (pbk), \$21.95 (e-book). ISBN 978-1-60732-417-1 (pbk), ISBN 978-1-60732-418-8 (e-book)

What does the bricolage of myths and legends in Neil Gaiman's novel *American Gods* (2001) have in common with J. K. Rowling's mock fairy-tale collection *The Tales of Beedle the Bard* (2008) and Junichi Sato's anime television series *Princess Tutu* (2003–2008), which mixes and reworks Japanese and European fairy tales? Michael Dylan Foster and Jeffrey A. Tolbert provide an answer: these are all examples of the folkloresque. In an energetic new approach to understanding the intersection between folklore and popular culture, Foster and Tolbert outline ways to critically examine the twilight zone of contemporary mass-market products like video games, films, graphic narratives, performances, and fiction that incorporate, retell, combine, and reinvent elements from traditional folklore genres without drawing on any specific vernacular traditions per se. Foster and Tolbert focus on the challenges involved in situating contemporary folklore meaningfully in relation to commercial factors and consumer culture. Both culturally and materially, everyday culture is commodified and reproduced in ways that complicate what 'folklore' means in the context of mass media and global capitalism.

Foster's introduction, 'The Challenge of the Folkloresque', is undoubtedly going to be one of the most read essays in contemporary folklore studies in the near future. Here, Foster forges a new discursive path in folklore studies by proclaiming 'a folkloresque manifesto' (25). Readers who have perceived a sense of stagnation and insularity in folklore studies in recent years will be particularly interested in learning how Foster imagines that the folkloresque will shake up the field and produce new ways of relating folklore studies to the social sciences and literary, media, and film studies. Readers who are sceptical of what is claimed to be new about this concept may be persuaded by the subsequent chapters, which contain a variety of illustrative and relevant examples of what the folkloresque may entail. Foster outlines the folkloresque as an inclusive 'heuristic tool' (4) and a 'bridge concept' (8) that spans various fields of inquiry. He briefly discusses related terms, such as 'fakelore' and 'folklorism', and considers the ways that these concepts construct the notion of authenticity, folk identity, and shared cultural consciousness, or, alternatively, lack thereof. In comparison, the concept of the folkloresque embraces ambiguity, hybridity, intertextuality, mixing, convergence, imitation, and multiplatform functionality as constituent parts of contemporary cultural products that reinvent and exploit themes, motifs, characters, and images from traditional folklore. The editors jointly invite readers to participate in a conversation about what the folkloresque is (and what it is not) and to explore the many venues, and possible limitations, of this new concept. From the various perspectives of folklore, literary, film, and media studies, *The Folkloresque: Reframing Folklore in a Popular Culture World* offers students and scholars something new to think about, not because the book provides ready definitions or fixed analytical frameworks, but because it points out connections and possible ways to approach the integration and interpretation of folkloric elements in contemporary popular culture. For example, Studio Ghibli productions such as *My Neighbor Totoro* (1988) and *Spirited Away* (2001) feature characters, motifs, and plot structures that are perceived to draw on traditional folktales, but these films' magical beings are amalgams of many traditions, not any in particular, and their nostalgia for *satoyama* landscapes (borderlands between mountains and arable land) and a simple, magical country life speaks to broader cultural concerns in post-industrialist societies. These Studio Ghibli films reflect cultural desires not only in contemporary Japan, but also, as their global commercial success demonstrates, in the rest of the industrialized world.

Foster and Tolbert propose three broad categories for surveying the folkloresque: integration, portrayal, and parody. Tolbert prefaces each section with a short introductory essay that situates the subject heading in relation to the folkloresque. The contributors in the section on integration analyse Studio Ghibli films, the works of Neil Gaiman, the inclusion of

pixies in fairy mythology, and comics as folklore. The next section, portrayal, includes chapters on the use of folklore and folklorists in horror narratives, Irish storyteller Eamon Kelly, and *The Tales of Beedle the Bard*. Finally, the section on parody has chapters on jokes and humorous responses to the 2011 scandal of widespread sexual abuse at Penn State University, jokes about jokes (meta-humour), the television series *Princess Tutu*, and folkloric elements in science writing. The chapters are well edited and of a length and variety that allow sufficient room for analytical detail. The editors and the majority of the contributors are, or have been, affiliated with the renowned folklore studies programme at Indiana University, Bloomington.

As Foster makes clear in the introduction, the contributing authors do not all share his and Tolbert's perception of the folkloresque. Rather, the collection of chapters allows readers to consider the scope and range of the folkloresque from several angles. This editorial approach makes the volume vibrant to read and less manifesto-like than one might expect with the launching of a new analytical concept. It is interesting to note, however, that none of the chapters, nor the 'manifesto' itself, considers the appropriation, remixing, reinvention, and commercialization of indigenous and minority cultures in contemporary popular culture. This omission does not detract from the book's tremendous value as a gateway into a new way of looking at the serendipitous overlap and rambunctious mixing of folkloric elements in commercialized popular culture, but rather as a reminder that folk culture exists on many socio-economic levels, and that some kinds of folk culture are more likely to be exploited commercially than others.

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Maths Meets Myths: Quantitative Approaches to Ancient Narratives. Edited by Ralph Kenna, Máirín MacCarron, and Pádraig MacCarron. Cham, Switzerland: Springer International Publishing, 2017. 228 pp. Illus. £78.00/\$109.00 (hbk). ISBN 978-3-31939-443-5

This title frames the work contained within as an effort to 'probe statistical information buried in folktales, fables, myths, legends, sagas, epics and histories' (2), separating itself from the digital humanities by a focus on analyses rather than methods. The volume primarily discusses the context linking tales rather than the text of the tales themselves, resulting in a historico-geographical approach driven by the meta-data of folklore corpora. Chapters are centred on three core themes: social networks, hierarchical relationships, and natural language processing.

Robin Dunbar's 'Cognitive and Network Constraints in Real Life and Literature' begins the examination of social networks through the psychology of storytelling, suggesting that the network structure of a folklore corpus is natural from the perspective of kinship. In particular, in examining theatre, social networks appear to matter, given that the connectivity of dialogue leads to connectivity of character. Next is the work of Ralph Kenna and Pádraig MacCarron, 'A Networks Approach to Mythological Epics', in which network properties are analysed macroscopically as comparable features of mythic storytelling. For example, the centrality of the character Beowulf renders related network properties meaningless. When Beowulf is excised from the network, as seen in historical and archaeological analyses, the properties become tractable in examining the historicity of the myth. Social networks of historical actors are next examined by Robert Gramsch et al. in 'Medieval Historical, Hagiographical and Biographical Networks', specifically character networks that have been transmuted into myth (e.g. via hagiography). Social networks of historical actors are found to imply knowledge about authorship, genre, and facets of their narrative structure. As with the prior chapter, comparison yields analysis comparable to humanities scholarship. Beyond character, mapping Irish authorial