

*Folklore Rules: A Fun, Quick, and Useful Introduction to the Field of Academic Folklore Studies.* By Lynne S. McNeill. Logan: Utah State University Press, 2013. xvi + 94, preface, illustrations, notes.

This concise introduction to the study of folklore offers an appealing alternative to existing folklore textbooks. Lynne McNeill's talent for teaching undergraduates is clear in this eloquently written text, which presents the fundamentals of folklore study in a uniquely engaging way. This will be an excellent text for college folklore courses, especially those in which students explore specific forms of folklore and would benefit from learning the basics.

Last year, while co-editing *New York State Folklife: A Reader* with Ellen McHale, I considered the importance of making a book's language accessible. One of the New York Folklore Society's goals has always been to give folklore back to the people, using easily understandable terms. Similarly, it makes sense for university professors to give undergraduates who are just beginning to study folklore a textbook that makes the field understandable and enjoyable. If these students get "hooked" on folklore, as many of us have, they can move on to more elaborate texts and issues.

*Folklore Rules* has a clear, consistent structure that will work very well for student readers. Following a short preface and an explanation for instructors, there are four chapters: "What is Folklore?," "What Do Folklorists Do?," "Types of Folklore," and "Types of Folk Groups," as well as a conclusion, "What Do I Do Now?" Each chapter includes a "So What?" section that clarifies meaning and relevance, as well as bibliographic citations and notes.

In "For the Instructor," McNeill addresses a key question: is it all right for a folklore class to be fun? Students may, after hearing long, dry explanations, "find themselves looking around, going, 'Hey, I thought this was a folklore class! Isn't it supposed to be fun and easy?'" (xv). Her answer to this question is that "folklore is fun and yes, its complexities and depths and nuances and difficulties need to be addressed and comprehended, but let's be honest: it should be fun first, to let students know why exactly they'll want to spend the rest of their lives (or at least the rest of the semester) thinking about all the complexities" (xv). I heartily agree with this answer, which reminds me why I chose folklore as my field of study several decades ago.

In the first two chapters, McNeill defines the field and explains what folklorists do. Her avoidance of long, complex definitions is refreshing; why should students have to wrestle with folklore's identity crisis when they are learning the field's fundamentals? Instead of listing multiple definitions, she focuses on folk and lore, variation and tradition. To clarify the folklorist's role, she notes that people continually ask folklorists "Tell us a story!" but never ask criminologists "Commit us a crime!" (21). Going into commendable depth in applying the crime analogy, she explains how folklorists pursue public and academic folklore.

In chapter three, "Types of Folklore," McNeill explores "Things We Say," "Things We Do," "Things We Make," and "Things We Believe." Within these categories she covers much significant material; in the belief section, for example, she considers Bigfoot, the Old Hag, and other legendary creatures. This chapter's notes are, like the notes in the other chapters, both information-rich and humorous. Regarding Bigfoot, for example, she states in note 32, "No, I do not know if Bigfoot really exists—sorry. That's beyond the scope of my expertise as a folklorist" (64).

The fourth chapter, "Types of Folk Groups," includes sections devoted to occupational and religious groups, as well as groups of children and groups of people interacting online. While all of these sections are very well presented, the last two are especially interesting and thought-provoking. Since McNeill has been one of the leaders in the relatively new field of digital folklore studies, it is not surprising that her presentation of digital culture here is outstanding and intriguing. I especially like her inclusion of such memes as "Chase all the strings!" and "Trip all the legends!"

The conclusion, "What Do I Do Now?," could be longer, but perhaps it is long enough for a book of this size. Here McNeill makes the important point that "thinking like a folklorist involves being both genuinely engaged in and consciously aware of your own cultural contexts—at the same time" (90). Folklore certainly rules! In this very useful, entertaining book, McNeill has proven that its reign is strong.

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