



Rudolf Steiner – "Alchemy of the Everyday"

English 315
Introduction to Folklore and Folklife
Fall 2015
M/W 12:00-1:15

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course equips students with the tools to identify, document and analyze folklore's role in our everyday lives. Rather than simply a checklist of cultural artifacts or genres – stories, customs, handcrafts – we explore how folklore operates as an unofficial body of cultural knowledge and aesthetic practices, and as a communicative process that incorporates both continuity and creativity. This frees us from the notion that "the folk" are always situated elsewhere or in the past, by shifting our attention to the artistry and agency of those who perform and share folklore in specific contexts for specific purposes. We investigate, for example, how folklore adapts to changes in technology, and how it intersects in often unexpected ways with popular and elite cultures. We consider how folklore serves not only to create, maintain and express senses of identity among groups, but also to communicate social difference, tensions and resistance.

The topics that form the focus of our classes and assignments are all designed to demonstrate how folklore both shapes and reflects everyday experience in a globalized world. Fieldwork-based research projects encourage students to apply the concepts discussed in classes and readings to case studies of your own choosing. In the course of working through these assignments, you will discover how our definition of folklore as cultural knowledge, aesthetic practice, and communicative process plays out in real-life contexts.

We will begin by thinking through some of the core concepts of folklore study, e.g. concepts of group and group identity, the nature of tradition, its transmission, and circulation, the “doing” of folklore--the performance of traditional practices, and how folklorists work in the field. Then, we’ll move to explore seven case studies related to a particular form of folklore in its wider performance contexts. Writing is central to the academic discipline of folkloristics. As such, writing is one of the primary practices in which we will be engaged. In this course, you will learn to write ethnographically and practice skills in interviewing and observation.

COURSE LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By the end of the semester, you will:

- Be able to speak and write about core concepts within the contemporary study of folklore
- Understand the role of tradition in the contemporary world
- Think through how folklore works in the construction and maintenance of group and individual identities
- Write ethnographically
- Gain a foundation in folkloristics you can carry over into other courses in the folklore minor

ASSIGNMENTS

Reading Responses (RRs): I will post a reading response prompt each week we don’t have a longer assignment due. Over the course of the semester, you have to respond (~250 words) to five RR prompts. You may choose which five weeks you’d like to respond. Each RR prompt will be posted on myMason/Blackboard one week prior to its due date. RRs are designed to allow you to demonstrate your grasp of each week’s readings. You should submit each response to the course myMason/Blackboard site under “Assignments” by the beginning of class on the week it is assigned. I will grade each of your responses with a √+ (4 points), √ (3 points), or √- (2 points).

Family Folklore Analysis: In this assignment (~750 words), you will discuss and analyze an item of family folklore by using concepts of “group” and “tradition” from our course readings. See the assignment handout for more information.

Folklore Performance Analysis: The second longer assignment of the semester (~1000 words) will require you to conduct ethnographic fieldwork on campus by observing and analyzing the performance of folklore. See the assignment handout for more information.

Case Study Research Report: For your last project (~1250 words), you will be asked to explore in more depth one of the case studies we discuss in the last half of the course. You will discuss the given genre, its social/performance contexts, and situate its study within some larger scholarly discussion current in folkloristics. You will be required to incorporate outside library research and synthesize the sources you find with our course readings. We will conduct a library workshop at the beginning of your work on the project to help you find scholarly resources appropriate for your project.

READINGS

You are required to purchase two texts:

1. Martha Sims and Martine Stephens, *Living Folklore: An Introduction to the Study of People and Their Traditions 2nd Edition*, Logan, UT: Utah State University Press, 2011
2. Atiq Rahimi, *The Patience Stone*, New York: Vintage, 2011

All other readings will be posted to myMason/Blackboard.

GRADING

20%	RRs
20%	Family Folklore Analysis
25%	Folklore Performance Analysis
30%	Case Study Research Report
5%	Participation

95-100 A	80-82 B-	67-69 D+
90-94 A-	77-79 C+	63-66 D
87-89 B+	73-76 C	60-62 D-
83-86 B	70-72 C -	<59 F

COURSE POLICIES

Attendance: You are expected to attend every class. Arriving more than a few minutes late to class will constitute an unexcused absence for the day, no exceptions. You are allowed two absences during the course of the semester for illness, religious observance, etc. After your two "freebies," each subsequent absence will result in lowering your grade one level, e.g. from an "A" to "A-," etc.

Participation: Your participation is vital to successful completion of the course. Participation includes coming prepared to class, completing course readings, and regularly participating in class discussions. Participation also includes bringing hard copies of readings to class or being able to access electronic copies of each day's readings. Failure to consistently participate will result in a lowered final grade. Under no circumstances are you allowed to text or surf the Internet on your mobile phone or laptop in class. Failure to abide by this policy will result in an unexcused absence for the day, no exceptions.

Late Work: Late submissions will be accepted but will receive a penalty of one letter grade per calendar day (11:59 PM to 11:59 PM) late, including weekends and holidays.

Plagiarism: I will follow all university procedures on academic misconduct. Plagiarism will not be tolerated. I encourage you to consult GMU's Writing Center's guide to avoiding plagiarism (<http://writingcenter.gmu.edu/?p=499>). For more information on GMU's Honor Code and its requirements, see <http://honorcode.gmu.edu>.

Special Accommodations: Students with disabilities who believe they may need accommodations in this class are encouraged to contact the Student Disability Access Office (<http://ods.gmu.edu>) as soon as possible.

Availability and Office Hours: My preferred communication method is email. I will do my best to respond to each email within twenty-four hours. I am also more than happy to arrange a time to meet with you outside of class. Please email me to schedule an appointment.

COURSE WEBSITE

The syllabus, class schedule, and selected readings are posted on the course myMason/Blackboard site. Unless otherwise stated, all assignments should be posted under the "Assignments" tab of my/Mason Blackboard.

RESOURCES

I encourage you all to take advantage of resources at Mason for improving your writing. The Writing Center (<http://writingcenter.gmu.edu>) offers tutors who can assist you at any stage of the writing process. Their website also includes online resources to help with specific writing problems.

George Mason Libraries' folklore subject librarian, Jen Stevens (jsteven7@gmu.edu), has also compiled a library guide for folklore and mythology <http://infoguides.gmu.edu/folklore>.

You can find a detailed listing of resources at <http://ctfe.gmu.edu/teaching/student-support-resources-on-campus>.

COURSE SCHEDULE:

Aug. 31	COURSE INTRODUCTION
WEEK 1: Sept. 2 and 9	WHAT IS FOLKLORE? Read: Sims and Stephens, "Folklore," pp. 1-29. Fine, "The Kentucky Fried Rat" Write: RR #1
WEEK 2: Sept. 14 and 16	WHO ARE THE "FOLK"? Read: Sims and Stephens, "Groups," pp. 30-68. Lindquist, "'Locating' the Nation: Football Game Day and American Dreams in Central Ohio" Write: RR #2
WEEK 3 Sept. 21 and 23	TRADITION Read: Sims and Stephens, "Tradition," pp. 64-93 Schmitt, "Asserting Tradition: Rhetoric of Tradition and the Defense of Chief Illiniwek" Write: RR #3
WEEK 4 Sept. 28 and 30	PERFORMANCE Read: Sims and Stephens, "Performance," pp. 127-173. Toelken, "The Folk Performance" Write: RR #4
WEEK 5 Oct. 6 and 7	FIELDWORK IN FOLKLORE Read: Sims and Stephens, "Fieldwork and Ethnography," pp. 202-224. Emerson et al., "In the Field: Participating, Observing, and Jotting

	<p>Notes"</p> <p>Write: Family Folklore Analysis Due</p>
Oct. 13 and 14	CLASS CANCELLED
<p>WEEK 6</p> <p>Oct. 19 and 21</p>	<p>CASE STUDY 1: RUMORS ABOUT TERRORISM, IMMIGRATION, AND RACE</p> <p>Read: Fine and Ellis, selections from <i>The Global Grapevine</i></p> <p>Write: RR #5</p>
<p>WEEK 7</p> <p>Oct. 26 and 28</p>	<p>CASE STUDY 2: AFGHAN FOLKTALES</p> <p>Read: Oring, "Folk Narratives"</p> <p>Baghban, "Khastakumar and Bibinigar"</p> <p>Write: RR #6</p>
<p>WEEK 8</p> <p>Nov. 2</p>	<p>CASE STUDY 2: AFGHAN FOLKTALES (CONT.)</p> <p>Read: Rahimi, <i>The Patience Stone</i></p> <p>Write: Performance Analysis Due</p>
Nov. 4	LIBRARY WORKSHOP
<p>WEEK 9</p> <p>Nov. 9 and 11</p>	<p>CASE STUDY 3: WESTERN APACHE SPEECH PLAY</p> <p>Read: McDowell, "Speech play"</p> <p>Selections from Basso, <i>Portraits of "The Whiteman"</i> and "Stalking with Stories"</p> <p>Write: RR #7</p>
<p>WEEK 10</p> <p>Nov. 16 and</p>	<p>CASE STUDY 4: NEO-PAGAN RITUAL</p> <p>Read: Sims and Stephens, "Ritual"</p>

18	<p>Magliocco, "Ritual: Between the Worlds"</p> <p>Write: RR #8</p>
<p>WEEK 11</p> <p>Nov. 23 and 30</p>	<p>CASE STUDY 5: TURKISH POTTERY</p> <p>Read: Bronner, "Folk Objects"</p> <p>Glassie, selections from "The Potter's Art"</p> <p>Write: RR #9</p>
<p>WEEK 12</p> <p>Dec. 2 and 7</p>	<p>CASE STUDY 6: INTERNET MEMES</p> <p>Read: Buccitelli, "Performance 2.0: Observations Towards a Theory of the Digital Performance of Folklore"</p> <p>McNeil, "The End of the Internet: A Folk Response to the Provision of Infinite Choice"</p> <p>Write: RR #10</p>
Dec. 9	<p>COURSE WRAP UP</p> <p>Write: Case Study Research Report Due</p>