

FOLK 323 Folklore and Popular Culture

Sept. 14 – Dec. 4, 2009
M & W, 10:05-11:20
CE 304

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Calendar description

Folk groups do not exist in vacuums: their members belong to multiple communities, defined as much by their participation in mediated events as by face-to-face interactions. This course examines the dissemination of folklore through mass media, explores the use of popular culture in folkloric forms, and challenges the initial premises that popular culture is a 'modern' and/or 'corrupting' influence on traditional societies.

Required Texts

- Bacon-Smith, Camille. 1992. *Enterprising Women: Television Fandom and the Creation of Popular Myth*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Fedorak, Shirley A. 2009. *Pop Culture: The Culture of Everyday Life*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Sherman, Sharon R. and Mikel J. Koven, eds. 2007. *Folklore/Cinema: Popular Film as Vernacular Culture*. Logan, UT: Utah State University Press.

Evaluation

Minor Assignment	25%
Major Essay and Presentation	50%
Final Exam (Take Home)	25%

The Progress through the Semester: An Explanation

Three things are affecting how the course will flow this term: the late start and the 'early' timing of Thanksgiving; one definite and one very likely trip out of town for me; and the availability of books through the CBU bookstore. I have tried to make the course make as much sense within those limitations, but (for example), my desire to get to *Folklore/Cinema* much earlier in the semester is foiled by it not being at the bookstore as I write this (the Friday before classes). Bear with me and things'll go great!

I will be out of town on the 21st of October. No one is clever enough to guest lecture for me, so hey – free class. (Actually, one person is more than clever enough to guest lecture for me, but she'll be out of town with me.) That gives you extra time to do your first assignment. The second to last week of term I should also be out of town for one if not both classes: extra time for your final assignment! See how much I care?

We begin with Fedorak's *Pop Culture*, reading it through fairly quickly but interspersing the beginning of Bacon-Smith's *Enterprising Women*. After a brief diversion (the *Pop Culture* chapter on "Gatherings" dovetails nicely into Roth's chapter from *Folklore/Cinema* on food events as depicted in film), we continue with *Enterprising Women* to the end. We then return to *Folklore/Cinema*. Your November is thus less intense than your September and October. If I'm in town for that penultimate week of classes, we'll have readings, but if not you're free and clear. I will know well ahead of time.

It should go without saying, but **I expect everyone to have read the readings by class time**. We will have some awkward, awkward silences if that is not the case. Upper-level courses are less about busy-work and more about personal responsibility. If you're insulted that I even wrote this, we'll get along great.

Facebook Group

I've started a Facebook group for this class, but really only so that there is one place for posting links to any online content you think may be of interest to the other members of the course, particularly for your presentations and assignments. For example, I will be posting YouTube links for some of the films discussed in *Folklore/Cinema*. Search for **CBU FOLK 323 – Folklore and Popular Culture (Fall 2009)**

Assignments

Minor Assignment – ‘Text’ (25%) – October 26th

Folklore in popular culture can take a variety of forms. For this assignment, you are asked to find some examples of folklore in popular culture or the use of popular culture in folklore (this may prove more difficult). Examples may include items from movies, television, books, the internet, etc. (any form of mass media is acceptable). A five page analysis should be attached to the example(s) and a brief informal presentation will be given in class. Your analysis should discuss why this is an example of folklore, and the possible motivations for the use of this item of folklore in that form. The write up also should include a bibliography with the citation of the examples. I will provide an example of potential forms for this assignment in class. There isn't one right way to do this assignment, creativity is acceptable! Although we won't be reading much from it yet, many of the essays in *Folklore/Cinema* might help get your juices flowing.

Major Essay and Presentation – ‘Context’ (50%) – November 30th

This paper is an ethnography of, and an interview with, someone who is a fan of a popular culture product or complex (television, film, fiction, music, etc.), which can be either a specific artist or creation (Miyazaki; *Firefly*; Brooks & Dunn) or a broader genre (anime; sci-fi; Country music). It is unlikely that you will find a fan culture as developed and intricate as the one Bacon-Smith describes, but you should nevertheless be able to find something on a smaller scale. (The essay topic can be discussed with the instructor if you are concerned.) You should address such topics as the history of his/her interest; their ideas and your reflections on hierarchy and status among fans; their communication of fandom through material culture or other creative activity; custom and ritual; coding; subversion; etc.

The essay should be approximately 12 pages, double spaced in 12 point font and 1 inch margins. A portion of the marks is allocated in this assignment for form, format, and grammar.

The presentation (November 30th and, if needed, December 2nd) will be ten to fifteen minutes, in which you summarise your findings. Any audio-visual material you require to illustrate your subject's fandom (either the original work or their own spin on it) can be presented at this time. Your final exams are based in part on you and your classmates' work (see below), and questions and discussion are actively encouraged.

Take-home exam – ‘Synthesis’ (25%) – December 15th

On the last day of class three questions will be distributed, of which you pick one and, in a short essay (5 to 7 pages) answer it using concepts of the course and examples from the readings, from your own research and from the presented work of your classmates. As an example of the type of question I will be asking you can look at the “Questions for Critical Consideration” in Fedorak (121-126), although my questions will not be limited to a particular genre.

By university regulation, take-home exams are due no earlier than the first day of the second week of exams, which is December 15th. **E-mail** your exams to me (ian_brodie@cbu.ca) in a Microsoft Word document on the 15th.

Course Breakdown and Reading Schedule

Ent. = Bacon-Smith

Pop = Fedorak

F/C = Sherman & Koven

Sept. 14 [Introduction and course discussion]	Sept. 16 Pop Introduction and Part I
Sept. 21 Pop Part II	Sept. 23 Ent. 1 & 2
Sept. 28 Pop Part III	Sept. 30 Ent. 3
Oct. 5 Pop Part IV and Conclusion	Oct. 7 F/C Roth
Oct. 12 Thanksgiving – No Class	Oct. 14 Ent. 4 & 5
Oct. 19 Ent. 6 & 7	Oct. 21 Off to Boise – No Class
Oct. 26 Minor assignment due In-class presentations	Oct. 28 Ent. 8 & 9
Nov. 2 Ent. 10 & 11	Nov. 4 F/C Blackford
Nov. 9 F/C Peterson	Nov. 11 Remembrance Day – No Class
Nov. 16 F/C Henderson	Nov. 18 F/C Laity
Nov. 23 [Possibly no class] F/C LeBlanc	Nov. 25 [Possibly no class] F/C Miller
Nov. 30 Final essay due Presentations	Dec. 2 Presentations and distribution of take-home exam question

http://www.youtube.com/view_play_list?p=2E6CD1CB898DD3A1&search_query=last+house+on+the+left