

Introduction to Folklore II: Folk Genres and Analysis

2010-01-31 McCarl's "Occupational Folklore"

FOLK AND FINA 113

I LOVE THE CRAP OUT OF THIS ONE

- ✘ So far, most of the groups we have covered are ones you are born into
 - + We can argue about adopted ethnicity
 - + And certainly, people convert and adopt not only the religious tenets but the folk religious practices of a group
- ✘ But, this is where we start talking about voluntary participation in a group

WHAT IS 'OCCUPATIONAL FOLKLIFE'?

- ✘ “Occupation” implies a set of techniques and skills
- ✘ This set of skills occasions verbal forms – jargon, narrative – along with customs (rites of passage, rites of intensification) and material culture (costume, decoration, etc.)
- ✘ The occupation cannot be disentangled from the folk forms that it gives rise to

THE 'CANON OF WORK TECHNIQUE'

- ✘ Not an *explicit* skill-set, but an *implicit* standard against which a worker is measured
 - + “canon” from Gr. “kanon” → a reed, a unit of measurement
- ✘ This standard is created and controlled by the workers themselves
 - + Status in the group is determined by one’s mastery of the canon

SUBTLE DISTINCTION

- ✘ The issue of the canon is employed to define “good worker,” *not* (necessarily) a “good employee”
- ✘ Status among workers is not necessarily commensurate with rank as determined by managers
- ✘ Often, occupational lore is about tension between management and worker

WITHIN OCCUPATIONAL CULTURE

- ✘ The initiate might have (likely has) official training
- ✘ As yet does not have an understanding of the group's canon
- ✘ Contexts arise for negotiating and explaining canon
- ✘ Not done through direct pedagogy, but through informal means

CULTURAL SCENES

- ✘ A recurrent social situation in which two or more people share some aspect of their cultural knowledge or folklore
 - + Coffee breaks, drinks after work, downtime, mundane restorative work that allows for interaction (maintenance, etc.)
- ✘ Allows for evaluation of performance, employing narratives and insider (esoteric) lingo and jargon

(MORE)

- ✘ By connecting to previous narrated events, allows for continued evaluation of episodes not witnessed by (all) members present
 - + Thus: a 'tradition,' in as much as there is a sense of continuity with the past
- ✘ Storytelling becomes a cumulative experience, where each participant can contribute own experiences and critiques

LANGUAGE

- ✘ Jargon and joking build on both metaphor and insider knowledge
- ✘ Personalises the world through the occupational perspective
- ✘ Demonstrates an understanding of the canon
- ✘ Implicitly excludes those for whom the jargon makes no sense

rites of passage

- ✘ Discussed (loosely) already?
- ✘ Customs used to mark a transition in status within a group
 - + Including non-member to member, and member to ex-member
- ✘ Shifts in status occasion changes in rights, privileges, responsibilities
 - + Shall I go on about this? It's important, but if I've covered it already...

WHY THIS READING IS SO GOOD

- ✘ Forget “occupations” for a moment
- ✘ In all groups, we have an implied hierarchy based in part on the “deepness” of the understanding of the group itself
- ✘ The very concept of “elder” seems inherently connected to a concept of “mastering the canon”
- ✘ Take, for example, fan cultures, residence life, etc.

(MORE)

- ✘ The way this basic study of occupational folklife can be extended to other kinds of groups is extraordinary.
- ✘ Read it again, for funsies. It is really that awesome.

GO AWAY FROM THIS PLACE

- ✘ Read “Tending Bar at Brown’s” by Bell, from the *Reader*
- ✘ (I love the crap out of this one too)