

Introduction to Folklore II: Folk Genres and Analysis

2010-02-28 Toelken's "Ballads and Folksongs"

FOLK AND FINA 113

Toelken, “Ballad and Folksong”

WHAT DID YOU THINK?

SONG AND FOLKSONG

× Song

- + Musical and poetic expression of feelings or ideas

× *Folksong*:

- + Song passed along, rephrased, or used by others for whom it also functions as a way of articulating shared attitudes or feelings
- + Typically loses a direct connection with its maker
- + “Becomes the ward of those who sing it”

SONG AND FOLKSONG (CONT.)

- ✘ Adapted to fit expectations of the group
- ✘ Not “memorised” but “recomposed”
 - + Allows for individual interpretation
 - + Allows for variation, addition, contraction
 - + Allows for idiosyncratic performance
 - + Allows for temporary rights to performance

VARIATION

- ✘ Songs some in group performance tend to be stable
- ✘ Songs sung solo tend to vary
 - + But, songs that rely on wordplay (obscene songs, etc.) require a certain invariance

CONTEMPORARY CONTEXTS

- ✘ Professionalization of music means most song exposure does not emerge from intimate contexts but from strangers
- ✘ Mass-production implies less variance from performance to performance (including, of course, the invariance of the record)
- ✘ BUT, there has always been blend between folk and popular music

FOLK, POPULAR, AND ELITE CULTURE

- ✘ We tend to distinguish these three as absolutes
- ✘ There is always interchange between them
- ✘ Especially as
 - + Popular turns to folk for untapped marketable forms
 - + Elite turns to folk for nationalistic impulses

DISTINCTIONS

- ✘ Distinguished by manner of support
 - + Folk: supported by audience and performers themselves
 - + Popular: supported by market
 - + Elite: supported by patronage
- ✘ Distinguished by aesthetic:
 - + Folk: vernacular expectations for performance
 - + Popular: fashionable (hegemonic) expectations
 - + Elite: appeal to eternal realities, critical apparatus

DISTINCTIONS (CONT.)

- ✘ Distinguished by permanence of performance
 - + Folk: ephemeral
 - + Popular: transient
 - + Elite: considered permanent achievement
- ✘ Distinguished by perceived time-depth
 - + Folk: “traditional”
 - + Popular: “contemporary”
 - + Elite: “eternal”

DISTINCTIONS (CONT.)

- ✘ Distinguished by audience/performer distance
 - + Folk: notional, immediate
 - + Popular: mediated, spatio-temporal
 - + Elite: immediate, highly structured division
- ✘ Nevertheless, there is fluid motion between them
 - + What is folk can enter the popular, can be enshrined by protected by patrons
 - + Similarly, what is popular or elite can be absorbed by folk as part of their intragroup communication

EXAMPLES

- ✘ Fair Thomas and Lord Annet
- ✘ Captain Wedderburn

GO AWAY FROM THIS PLACE

- ✘ Read “Oral Formulas in the Country Blues” by
Barnie, from the *Reader*