

Introduction to Folklore II: Folk Genres and Analysis

2010-03-21 Wilson's "Documenting Folklore"

FOLK AND FINA 113

FASCINATING, *FASCINATING* TRIVIA

- ✘ In years past I have tried teaching this much earlier in the semester (I think once the very first reading, and another time for the second week)
- ✘ Dilemma:
 - + You won't really get this until you have a grasp of "what folklore is"; but
 - + By the time you have a grasp of "what folklore is" this should all be familiar for you.
- ✘ Nevertheless: THIS IS A GOOD CHAPTER TO THINK ABOUT WHEN DOING YOUR ASSIGNMENTS

WHAT DID *YOU* THINK?

HIS POINT

- ✘ Folklore is not a set of items from a nostalgic past, but an ongoing process that exists among all groups
- ✘ It is esoteric, contingent, and contextual
 - + Esoteric: it belongs to the group
 - + Contingent: its potential performance is conditioned by a host of circumstances
 - + Contextual: its actual performance arises in relation to other events

DOCUMENTATION

- ✘ Folklorists, as a species, are still interested in “items”
- ✘ But we need the item to be put into the social and cultural context in order to better understand it
- ✘ Documentation is the act of providing the social and cultural context for an item, to make it relevant / accessible for future researchers

DOCUMENTATION IS IMPORTANT FOR TWO REASONS

✘ For the student:

- + without the exercise of collecting and then providing the information to make the item comprehensible, much of the concepts of folklore are abstract

✘ For the discipline as a whole:

- + items collected by students (and others) begin to form a critical mass of data upon which is the basis for the work of determining patterns, establishing histories, and developing theories

TRADITION-BEARER

- + A useful, albeit awkward term
- ✘ “Tradition” does not exist in and of itself, it is something deliberately passed along through communicative channels by actual people
- ✘ These people are the sources (informants, collaborators) that folklorists engage
- ✘ We can identify both *active* and *passive* tradition-bearers

TRADITION-BEARER (CONT.)

- ✘ Some groups have members with explicit responsibilities for tending to the tradition (elders, recognised practitioners of certain forms, etc.)
- ✘ Most groups have people who are actively engaged in enacting the tradition (e.g. women baking for the family, trappers, singers)
 - + Both of these are referred to as *active tradition bearers*
- ✘ Even people who do not enact the tradition, or no longer do so, or have yet to do so, may know it
 - + *Passive tradition bearers*

TRADITION-BEARER (CONT.)

- ✘ Generally, the more formal and/or established the sense of groupness, the more easily one can identify an *active* tradition bearer
 - + Family, ethnic group, occupation
 - ✘ Age and social status likely linked to tradition-bearer role
 - + Friendship groups
 - ✘ No one “leader” virtually everyone either active or passive

COLLECTING

- ✘ Ideally, always at the moment of performance: practically, one can “recreate” something like a natural context for performance
- ✘ Tools
 - + Verbal lore:
 - ✘ The interview
 - + Material lore:
 - ✘ The photograph
 - + Customary lore:
 - ✘ The ethnography (I guess the video camera too)

SOCIAL FUNCTION

- ✘ Why was this particular item employed? Why did it emerge at this moment of performance? What did it do?
- ✘ Sometimes it is implicit: sometimes it is not clear at all and requires follow-up
- ✘ The appropriateness (or inappropriateness) of an item at any given time is something that can be gleaned from performance context, audience reaction, your own personal reaction, etc.

CULTURAL BACKGROUND

- ✘ Why this form in the first place? How does this item enter the repertoire to be potentially something used at the moment of performance?
- ✘ Speaks a lot to the shared understanding of the group
- ✘ Also, required to explain the esoteric nature of some performances

GO AWAY FROM THIS PLACE

- ✘ Read “Documenting Folklore: The Annotation” by Oring, from the *Reader*