Theorizing Folklore 1: Tradition and Transmission  
English 7350.01 and 7350.02; CompStd 7350.01 (section code 7410)

WeFr 9:35AM - 10:55AM  
Derby Hall 0038

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This course examines the transmission of cultural forms through time and space across social networks. Reviewing some of the principal approaches in folklore and related disciplines, we pay special attention to the tension between conservation and innovation, fixity and process. We look also at the interplay of conscious intentions and valuations with more inattentive or habitual forms of practice. As an extension of this dynamic, we look at the concept of tradition itself as a keyword of Western modernity, which circulates between general and scholarly usage and picks up ever more ideological baggage in the process. (We will do this first in order to clarify the stakes involved in speaking of tradition at all.) Finally, we'll run through a quick history of the "traditional" in modernity: its proliferations, codifications, reifications, revitalizations, and appropriations.

Readings include theoretical texts as well as ethnographic case studies from a variety of cultural and social settings. They are intended to open up avenues of inquiry for you rather than to give you mastery of a particular theoretical tradition. Students will share in sustaining discussion and write a research paper on a topic relevant to their own interests. This course fulfills the core theory requirement of the Graduate Interdisciplinary Specialization in Folklore. For more information, see http://cfs.asc.ohio-state.edu/grad_options.

REQUIRED READINGS
Please bring the readings with you to class as far as possible!

Books ordered at SBX:


Online readings:
Most readings will be found online through the journal or book title in the OSU library catalogue. (Note that journals are sometimes in multiple repositories depending on the year of publication.) Readings marked CARMEN are in fact in Carmen, under Content.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

All assignments must be completed as described below for a passing grade. Students enrolled in English 7350.02 will do all the required work except for the individual research project.

1. Course participation. 50%
   - being present and on time and awake in class, having relevant contributions to make in discussion. This entails having read the assigned texts and having read, considered, and occasionally contributed to the discussion on Carmen beyond the required minimum:
   - opening discussions on three class dates by posting three points for discussion on Carmen by 9 PM on the evening before the relevant session. (Please email me with your three chosen dates; first come first serve.)
   - sustaining discussions on three class dates by posting a substantive comment/followup after the relevant session, by midnight of the same date. What struck you and how might you clarify it? What did we miss and what questions remained open? Where might we go from here?
   - responses on Carmen to other students’ posted project drafts. You must comment with ideas or suggestions to three students after each of the three draft postings, responding to different students each time. (You’re welcome to do more, of course.) Due the Friday after the Monday posting of drafts.

2. Individual project. 50%

A report on the career of a cultural object as it is constructed, transmitted, and valorized. (See pp. 9-10 for details.)

   - 9/3. One page introducing your object as precisely as you can and laying out what makes it interesting to examine in the framework of tradition. Post to Carmen discussion page.
   - 10/1. First iteration: ca. 5 double-spaced pages. Post to Carmen discussion page.

**SCHEDULE**

**I. CLEARING THE AIR**

**8/22**  **Introduction**

**8/24**  **Tradition as keyword**
*CARMEN*

Chapter 1. Dorothy Noyes, ”The Social Base of Folklore,” 13-39.
Chapter 3. Amy Shuman and Galit Hasan-Rokem, ”The Poetics of Folklore,” 55-74.

**8/29**  **Tradition versus modernity**


**8/31**  **Tradition versus authorship and creativity**


*9/3 Project topic due by 9 AM*
Tradition versus alienation

Read

Tradition versus history

Read

Due
*Project comments*

II. HOW FORMS WORK

The robustness of forms

Read
Propp

Extra
Dorothy Noyes, "Fairytale Economics: Scarcity, Risk, Choice." CARMEN

Generating texts: the oral-formulaic approach

Read

Extra

From entextualization to inscription

Read

Extra

The historic-geographic method

Read
"Cupid and Psyche" from Apuleius to Afghanistan. Texts and commentaries on CARMEN

Extra
9/26 **Recentering comparativism** (No class meeting-I am in Turkey)


9/28 **No class**--will be made up with film night

Read Read Paredes and prepare your draft for Monday

10/1 **1st project iteration due by 9 AM**

10/3 **Comparison from above and below**


10/5 **Identity and intimacy**


Film Adela Peeva, dir. *Whose Is this Song?* 2003.

10/10 **Comparing instances, tracing trajectories**


10/12 **Sedimented conversations and other baggage in motion**


10/17 **Custody and authority**


Urban, Hugh. "The Torment of Secrecy: Ethical and Epistemological Problems in

**10/19** Resources for resistance

**10/24** Under and over the radar
Noyes, D. "Aesthetic is the Opposite of Anaesthetic: On Tradition and Attention."
Under submission to the *Journal of Folklore Research*. CARMEN

**10/26** No class: American Folklore Society Annual Meeting.
Read Foster for Monday

**III. THE HISTORY OF TRADITION IN MODERNITY**

**10/31** From belief to knowledge to entertainment
Read Foster

**11/2** Custom and codification

**11/5** 2d iteration due
11/7  Self-fashioning, national and mobile

11/9  Expansion, choice, abundance
Due  Comments on 2d drafts

Somewhere in here: Film night to see Mondovino (Jonathan Nossiter, 2004)

11/14  Revitalization and revival

11/16  Heritagization: identity and profit

11/21  No class Tgvg break
11/23  Read  Experience tradition! (Both large dinners and family dynamics are best left undeconstructed, c.f. Orvar Løfgren, "The Great Christmas Quarrel and Other Family Traditions.") Do also read Brown.
11/28  Appropriation and propertization
Read  Brown (see also his website http://web.williams.edu/go/native/)

11/30  Containment strategies

12/3  Now what? Virality vs. stickiness; preserving vs. remixing; style vs. stigma.

12/7 Final project in Carmen dropbox

COURSE POLICY BOILERPLATE

Office hours  T 1:30-3:30, W 1:30-3:30 at the Mershon Center, 104A, 1501 Neil Ave. (corner of 8th and Neil), 292-8683. Or by appointment or by telephone. Because I run around between offices and have a manic meeting schedule, it is always best to try me first by email, and even during regular office hours it’s helpful if you let me know when you’re coming. But I am always glad to see you.

Attendance is up to you, but affects your grade both directly (via your participation grade) and indirectly (via your ability to do the written work effectively). We need you here in the spirit as well as in the flesh. Announcements made at the beginning of class will not be repeated for latecomers, so it is also in your interest to arrive on time.

Plagiarism. Plagiarism is the representation of another’s works or ideas as one’s own: it includes the unacknowledged word for word use and/or paraphrasing of another person’s work, and/or the inappropriate unacknowledged use of another person’s ideas. All cases of suspected plagiarism, in accordance with university rules, will be reported to the Committee on Academic Misconduct. Especially when doing research on the Internet, be extremely careful to credit your sources appropriately (come to me if you are not certain how to do this). And bear in mind that it is much less work to do your own thinking than to plagiarize convincingly.

Class Cancellation. In the unlikely event of class cancellation due to emergency, I will contact you via email and request that a note on department letterhead be placed on the door. In addition, I will contact you as soon as possible following the cancellation to let you know what will be expected of you for our next class meeting.
Disability resources. The Office for Disability Services, located in 150 Pomerene Hall, offers services for students with documented disabilities. Contact the ODS at 2-3307. If you require accommodation to do the work of the course, please let me know immediately.

INDIVIDUAL PROJECTS

- 9/3. One page introducing your object as precisely as you can and laying out what makes it interesting to examine in the framework of tradition. Post to Carmen discussion page.
- 10/1. First iteration: ca. 5 double-spaced pages. Post to Carmen discussion page.
- 12/7. Final version: ca. 12 double-spaced pages of well-shaped and stylish prose plus appendix and bibliography. In Carmen dropbox.

Pick out a cultural object/practice—a text, performance, artifact, technique, routine, etc.—of limited complexity (i.e. a work, not a whole genre). Your project is to trace the career of this object as it is constructed, transmitted, and valorized across social time and space. Note that as the paper evolves your focus will probably shift and narrow. I’d like you to begin by thinking broadly, but you may then hone in where your data is richest or the questions most interesting.

You’re going to turn in successive drafts of a report on this object, gradually sketching it out and filling it in. You’ll begin by laying out questions and plans in the parts where you don’t yet have any information. Your grade depends on how completely, how energetically, and how insightfully you carry out the assignment. Each iteration will count towards the final grade.

With the final draft, please provide a 1-page appendix on the research and writing process. Where did you get stuck and how did you shift strategies? How did a focus emerge? What were you unable to figure out with the time and resources available, and what ideally would you like to do to go forward?

Here are some questions for you to play with:

What is it?
Describe it as a social practice and process in a specific milieu.
Describe it as an entity—a movable recognizable bounded pattern
What are the challenges of accommodating these two framings?
**What are the stakes?**
Who cares about it? What alliances and conflicts are created by their varied investments? Who doesn't seem to care but is imbricated in it anyway? What lineage does the tradition itself claim through citations and other indices--how does it authenticate and contextualize itself? What mythologies are attached to this object in origin legends, artistic or literary depictions, and other kinds of representation? What kinds of value, positive and negative, are attached to the object and how are they made to stick? What are the expected or observable effects of how the object is framed--what work is the object being made to do? What social factors seem to condition which agenda prevails?

**The career of the tradition**
When and how does it crystallize into something recognizable as the current object? How was it made transmissible or, alternatively, resistant to circulation? What is the relationship between the social label and the phenomenon (sometimes the name persists but the practice changes; sometimes the practice is socially relocated and persists in a new framework). Does it have inherent properties that constrain its fortunes? How does its point of emergence and its subsequent history constrain it? What old baggage does it carry? What has been lost? What has been introduced? How is it pushed towards codification, towards flexibility, towards transformation, towards fragmentation? When does it break down or change into something else, or how might it do so? Where is it headed?