
To call Michael Dylan Foster and Jeffrey A. Tolbert’s *The Folkloresque: Reframing Folklore in a Popular Culture World* thought provoking is a bit of an understatement. It is one of those rare academic tomes that strikes a responsive chord deep within the reader challenging her or his conceptualizations of the study of folklore, as well as the study of popular culture, through the discussion of how they “mutually influence each other,” as well as “how they productively problematize distinctions between them” (4).

What Foster and Tolbert have done in *The Folkloresque* is to create a groundbreaking theoretical perspective with which to analyze the intersection of folklore and popular culture. The most noteworthy aspect of this is the creation and development of their analytical concept of the folkloresque which is that it is at once thoroughly modern yet intrinsically rooted in the past.

In his introduction, “The Challenge of the Folkloresque,” Michael Dylan Foster explains what is meant by the term “folkloresque,” taking great pains to delineate the position occupied by folkloric elements that serve as integral aspects of various popular culture artifacts. According to Foster, the folkloresque entails the “perception and performance of folklore” (5). Additionally, folkloresque pertains to the consumer’s perception of whether or not the popular culture artifact has folkloric origins. In sum, three interrelated concepts unite to create the folkloresque. First, the artifact is perceived as possessing an element of folklore. Second, the artifact is thought to be linked to some external folkloric tradition. And third, the artifact is believed to possess value due to the perception that the artifact has a folkloric origin (5-6).


After discussing what the folkloresque entails, Foster then presents three categories of the folkloresque that will be used to organize the remaining chapters in the book. Each section highlights one of the categories of the folkloresque—integration, portrayal, and parody. Foster’s co-author, Jeffrey Tolbert, writes a brief introduction to each section in which he offers a brief explanation of the category and what the essays in that section say about that particular concept.

The first folkloresque concept presented is integration. The integration section deals with how particular folkloric themes are melded together through the use of pastiche and allusion in order to create a bricolage of folkloric motifs found in such popular culture artifacts as Neil Gaiman’s novels and Superman comics. Gaiman’s novels are filled with references to Celtic, Native American, Egyptian, and Norse mythology which highlight the significant role played by the mythological tradition in modern day storytelling. Mythological elements are also found in the development of comic heroes like Superman whose creation story is based, in part, on Greek mythology. The incorporation of mythic elements into the Superman story and Gaiman’s novels not only serves to inform their respective audiences of the role played by myths in modern day storytelling, but also how the mythic tradition continues to evolve and speak to modern day issues and concerns. Portrayal is the next folkloresque concept under discussion. In the portrayal section, the place and position occupied by the folkloresque, in relation to the entirety of popular culture, is assessed. In short, the concept of portrayal is concerned with ascertaining what folklore is, what purpose it serves in society, and why members of society should be mindful of folklore.

In the portrayal section there are essays discussing video games, Eamon Kelly’s storytelling, and the Harry Potter novels. The portrayal section focuses on how and why folklore is used in various contexts. For example, in the chapter on video games, players encounter legendary and occult figures that must be dealt in order to win *Fatal Frame*, while in
Eamon Kelly’s stories and the Harry Potter novels, the storylines would be nonexistent without the incorporation of the various legendary and mythological figures that drive the storylines. Thus, the use of legendary, occult, and mythological figures in the Harry Potter novels, Eamon Kelly’s stories, and *Fatal Frame* allows the aforementioned popular culture artifacts to possess more prestige than other popular culture artifacts that lack such folkloric elements.

A fitting conclusion to *The Folkloresque* is the section on parody as it builds upon the theoretical underpinnings from the sections on integration and portrayal. In order to understand parody in regards to the folkloresque, one must be cognizant of folkloric motifs, know what folklore is, and understand the role and power of folklore in society. In an effort to assess the place parody occupies in regards to discussions of the folkloresque, Foster and Tolbert analyze critiques of jokes and popular science writing to see how the folkloresque influences meta-humor and meta-commentary. Parody does not exist in a vacuum. It requires the folkloresque to achieve its purpose. Whether it is jokes about the Penn State sexual abuse scandal, jokes about other jokes, or the mythological elements found through popular science writing, parody draws upon common folkloric tropes in order to comment on society.

Foster and Tolbert’s *The Folkloresque* has managed to do what no other popular culture text has done in the twenty first century. What is meant by this is that despite the concept of the folkloresque coming to fruition in the new millennium, it possesses a refreshingly simple theoretical elegance that imbues it with a retro vibe that makes it seem like the folkloresque has been around for many decades. Another noteworthy aspect of *The Folkloresque: Reframing Folklore in a Popular Culture World* is that it begs for a sequel. In addition to serving as a pithy introduction to the concept of the folkloresque, the book’s eleven chapters entice the reader to delve a little deeper into the intersection of folklore and popular culture and to perpetuate the folkloresque dialogue generated.
by Foster and Tolbert. For example, branching off from the research on anime, what folklloresque concepts can be found in other feature films and television programs? Also, how does the folklloresque influence musical genres and eras? In addition to folk and neo-folk, what other genres and musical movements incorporate folklloresque elements in an effort to create a connection with their audience? What about popular culture ephemera and accoutrements? For instance, what debt of gratitude does Japan’s kawaii culture have to the folklloresque? Is there a global aspect of the folklloresque that can serve as an explanation of the worldwide appeal of Hello Kitty?

In conclusion, Foster and Tolbert’s The Folklloresque: Reframing Folklore in a Popular Culture World gives the field of cultural studies an invaluable present, namely a new theoretical concept with which to thoroughly enrich the scholarship of the study of both folklore and popular culture.

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The latest entry in Rowan & Littlefield’s always thought-provoking Contemporary American Literature series, Robert McParland’s Beyond Gatsby: How Fitzgerald, Hemingway, and Writers of the 1920s Shaped American Culture is a provocative, much-needed reminder of just how central a role art has played in shaping the modern American psyche.