

Introduction

The Challenge of the Folkloresque

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IN 2005, I WAS INVITED TO GIVE a lecture about the exceedingly popular Japanese animated film *Spirited Away* (2001).¹ Specifically, I was asked to explain the Japanese folklore in the movie. Chock-full of deities and demons, physical transformations, ritual purifications, and magic spells, the story feels as if it has been told before, as if the events and characters are adapted from age-old narratives and beliefs. But when I sat down to prepare my lecture, I was at a loss. Where *was* the folklore in the movie? The filmmakers were clearly influenced by Japanese (and European) folklore, and it was a pleasure to puzzle out some of the allusions. But these allusions were fuzzy: characters and actions on the screen pointed only vaguely, if at all, to actual referents outside the film. Similarly, although the narrative structure itself felt resonant, it too did not directly reference any specific tales but seemed a skillful cobbling together of many. In short, the film was infused with a folklore-like familiarity and seemed weighty because of folkloric roots, but at the same time it was not beholden to any single tradition.

Of course, the movie itself is not folklore. As a commercially created product, it exists in a fixed form that neither exhibits variation through time and space nor changes with each performance. Like most commercial films, it was shared with people through formal, institutional channels rather than the informal, person-to-person modes most commonly associated with folklore. And although the narrative and imagery of *Spirited Away* may be influenced by myths, legends, folktales, and beliefs, the film is by no means a retelling of traditional narratives. At the same time, however, neither is it wholly “fictional” or invented from scratch. Indeed, when I finally gave my lecture, I found myself struggling for appropriate language to describe this subtle but compelling phenomenon in which folklore is vaguely referenced for its power to connect to something beyond the product itself. How can we characterize the hazily allusive quality that infuses certain popular

creations, this *sense of folklore*? As I prepared my lecture, the word that struck me as most appropriate was *folkloresque*.

In the years since that lecture, the folkloresque has haunted me. Conspicuous uses of folklore within popular culture are pervasive, perhaps even more so (or at least more noticeable) with the recent proliferation of new media platforms and other technological advances. In discussing the folkloresque with colleagues and students, I discovered that the idea resonated with others in ways I had not conceived of myself, and that it might provide a meaningful heuristic for broadening our understandings of both folklore and popular culture and the symbiotic relationship between the two. In the pages that follow, I attempt to delineate this emerging concept and also try to plant some theoretical seeds with the hope that they will flourish or mutate in the work of others.

The chapters that follow this introduction further take up the exploration of the folkloresque through specific studies. In some cases, the ideas presented in those chapters do not dovetail with what I set out here, or with each other, but that is one of the objectives of this project: the folkloresque is a concept in progress, ripe for dialogue and dialectic. The goal of this book is not to create monolithic understandings or definitions; rather, we hope to stimulate a conversation that will challenge us all to rethink categories that perhaps have begun to outlive their value but that we still hold onto for convenience because they are part of our academic tradition and our shared vocabulary. And that is why I hope this new word, *folkloresque*, will become part of the lexicon. Particularly now, as expressive culture is increasingly influenced by Internet-driven communication, digital media, and global commercial forces, the questions raised here are all the more urgent—and the folkloresque is all the more relevant. While I write this from the perspective of a folklorist, I hope the ideas set forth here will resonate with scholars of popular culture, the media, and cultural studies as well.

IN A WORD

We propose the folkloresque as a heuristic tool, a kind of conceptual crowbar, to pry open the black box of how folklore functions in a world of cultural and artistic expression increasingly dominated by forms of commercial and mass production labeled “popular culture.” It is a tool that encourages us to reenvision categories such as *folklore* and *popular culture*, to explore how they mutually influence each other, and to productively problematize distinctions between them. While the term *folkloresque* has been used on occasion with various meanings in previous scholarship, as far as I

know nobody has ever systematically delineated it or attempted to develop it for its interpretive potential—but that is what we would like to do here and in the rest of this book.²

Simply put, the folkloresque is popular culture’s own (emic) perception and performance of folklore. That is, it refers to creative, often commercial products or texts (e.g., films, graphic novels, video games) that give the impression to the consumer (viewer, reader, listener, player) that they derive directly from existing folkloric traditions. In fact, however, a folkloresque product is rarely based on any single vernacular item or tradition; usually it has been consciously cobbled together from a range of folkloric elements, often mixed with newly created elements, to appear as if it emerged organically from a specific source. In some cases the *form* rather than the *contents* provides this veneer of folklore; the folkloresque can reference folklore in either *langue* or *parole* or both. In addition, the folkloresque concept includes products that, while clearly born through commercial processes, explicitly or self-consciously showcase their relationship with folklore by alluding to folk knowledge or jargon or including characters labeled as folklorists. In short, the folkloresque signals popular culture’s recognition that folklore is a valuable brand.

A common aspect of a folkloresque item of popular culture is that it is imbued with a sense of “authenticity” (as perceived by the consumer and/or creator) derived from association with “real” folklore. This capacity to connect an item to an established body of tradition has the effect of validating the work in which it appears, increasing its appeal to popular audiences. Because the folkloresque is often part of mass-mediated popular culture, in many cases it leads to greater exposure to a wider audience for local and culture-specific traditions; in some cases this inspires a feedback loop in which the folkloresque version of the item is (re)incorporated into the folk cultural milieu that it references.

The *Oxford English Dictionary* explains that the suffix “-esque” is used to express a sense of something “resembling the style” or “partaking of the characteristics of” (*Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed., s.v. “-esque”). It articulates a connection with the root word to which it is affixed but at the same time keeps this connection indistinct. It also has the related function, as in “picturesque,” of implying that something is *worthy* of the root word to which the suffix is attached: worthy of being a picture, for example, or worthy of being folklore.³ So the term *folkloresque* articulates three related meanings: (1) that an item (or element of an item) is in the “style” of folklore; (2) that it is connected to something beyond/before itself, to some tradition or folkloric source existing outside the popular culture context;

and (3) that the product itself is potentially of folkloric value, connected in some way with processes of folklore creation and transmission.

Folk Culture: *See* Popular Culture

Let this suffice for the moment as a (relatively) concise description of the folkloresque. It will, of course, get more complex. But before proceeding I want to set out what I mean by *popular culture*, which, like so many other key terms, is a moving target. Building on the work of theorists such as, but certainly not limited to, Raymond Williams, the Frankfurt School, Louis Althusser, Antonio Gramsci, E. P. Thomson, Pierre Bourdieu, Stuart Hall, and the Birmingham School, the discourse on popular culture today is wide ranging and all the more significant within the context of globalization and rapid technological change. Popular culture scholarship is often located under wider academic rubrics—of cultural studies, media studies, and communication—but it also bleeds into economics, political science, sociology, anthropology, comparative literature, film studies and, of course, folkloristics. Popular culture, as Chris Rojek explains, “is a field dealing with a) relations of power; b) social transformations, expressed at economic, social, political, aesthetic and subcultural levels; and c) the system of coding and representation of popular and cultural data” (Rojek 2012, 1).

Rojek is describing the discipline of popular culture studies here, but *popular culture* also signifies the subject of study: a “culture” of production and consumption in which discourses, practices, and things (narratives, games, images, toys, and the like) are created and shared (or, more likely, sold). Like *folklore*, the term itself is often taken for granted, banded about with ease and an assumption of collective understanding, and yet it is almost impossible to pin down. It is a floating signifier, open to varied interpretations and infused with different meanings by different actors in different contexts.

We can, however, find some common threads that tie together many of these meanings. Often, for example, popular culture is associated with entertainment and frivolity, posited as escapism in distinction to more serious forms of cultural expression.⁴ It can be interpreted in opposition to so-called high culture or Culture with a capital C, as the culture of the nonelite classes, of people in the “mainstream”—that is, the culture (and sometimes subculture) of the common folk. Similarly, popular culture may be associated with mass culture, which tends to imply a dependence on facilities for mass production and mass distribution and less reliance on personal or intracommunity interaction. Mass cultural content is often transmitted through the conduits of *mass* media, including television, movies, the Internet, comics,

popular literature, and so on. Finally, popular culture also overlaps with notions of consumer culture, forcing us to think in terms of commodification and to explore questions of production, consumption, market forces, and consumer choice.

Of course, many of these categories are blurry to start with, and all the more vexing within the current maelstrom of technological innovation. The boundaries, for example, between mass media and personal expression are so commonly permeated as to be all but meaningless (where, for example, does Twitter, YouTube, or Instagram fit in?). So for the purposes of this essay, let me suggest an open-ended understanding of popular culture that takes all of these factors into consideration—but only as general orientations. Within this tentative characterization, I would emphasize most significantly the commercial factor, the orientation toward commodification and monetary exchange value; perhaps we can think of popular culture as a set of processes and products that exists within a commercial-industrial structure and are oriented toward financial remuneration—to making money.

By stressing this last point—the profit motive—we also establish a meaningful counter-distinction to similar forms of cultural expression usually labeled *folklore*. Defining folklore, of course, opens up a whole other (related) can of worms, something I would assiduously like to avoid in this limited space. But I do want to suggest that the processes and products of folklore tend to be oriented toward *informal, unofficial, noncommercial, noninstitutional* modes of production, transmission, and consumption. Even in contexts in which traditionality, aesthetics, and the dynamics of “small-group” or face-to-face communication are questionable, we can usually still maintain that the processes and products of folklore are rarely created with official, institutional, or commercial sanction and mass sales or major profit in mind.⁵

I propose these distinctions and orientations with deliberate tentativeness, because in fact studying the folkloresque is intended to peel back the layers that have gone into establishing such orientations in the first place. Another reason for setting out to blur the boundaries between folklore and popular culture is because, realistically speaking, they are already blurred. In the opening paragraph of a recent monograph on “pop culture,” for example, anthropologist Shirley A. Fedorak (2009, 1) declares that “popular culture is the culture of our everyday lives. Human groups have always created music, folktales, festivals and artwork in an attempt to make sense of and celebrate their world.” Of course, these examples—to say nothing of the reference to “everyday lives”—are precisely what folklorists have long studied. In the index of Fedorak’s book there is no entry for “folklore” itself, but under the heading “folk culture” are the words “*See* popular culture.”

(155). It is imperative for folklorists to engage with popular culture discourse because, it seems, folklore is already seen as popular culture.

And this brings me back to the folkloresque as a bridge concept that links these not-so-disparate fields of inquiry. To be sure, folklorists have historically been concerned with popular culture, mass media, and commercialism, but often only to stake territorial claims or discuss questions of distinction or origins. It is time now to revisit these issues with a neutral tone that accepts the processes of popular and commercial culture as contingent on and indeed continuous with the processes of folklore. While the folkloresque is conceptually related to older theoretical conceptions of folklorism (*folklorismus*) and even fakelore, I want to stress from the outset that it is by no means a pejorative term; rather, it is an inclusive concept for productive analysis of the ways motifs, folk ideas, and images operate within the production of commercial products.

FAKELORE AND FOLKLORISM

In 1950, when Richard Dorson first introduced the term *fakelore*, he set off a firestorm of controversy and inspired questions about authenticity and authority, literary and commercial production, the role of academic folklorists and, ultimately, the *selling* of folklore. I quote from his original article in the *American Mercury*:

In recent years folklore has boomed mightily, and reached a wide audience through best-selling books, concert and cabaret folksingers, even Walt Disney cartoons. But far from fulfilling its high promise, the study has been falsified, abused and exploited, and the public deluded with Paul Bunyan nonsense and claptrap collections. Without stirring from the library, money-writers have successfully peddled synthetic hero-books and saccharine folk tales as the stories of the people. Americans may be insufficiently posted on their history and culture, as the famous New York *Times* survey indicated, but their knowledge of these subjects is erudition, compared with what they know about their own folklore. (Dorson 1950, 335)

From a contemporary perspective, Dorson's polemic reeks of an elitist academic-centric view of folklore, and certainly must be understood within the specific context and period of its production.⁶ At the same time, however, his allusions to "best-selling books" and "Walt Disney cartoons" still resonate with the uses of folklore in popular culture today. Such appropriation fits neatly within the rubric of the folkloresque, but the questions of interest are not whether something is spurious or genuine, fake or real,

but rather, what is it that Disney and these "money-writers" do so "successfully"? Or, for that matter, how and why is the "public deluded"? By exploring these questions, we reveal the workings of cultural production, both commercial and otherwise, and, more important, get a sense of the motivations and everyday lives of the people doing the consuming.

If folklorists study people (= folk), then it is critical to explore what people think of *as* folklore—regardless of how a folklorist might categorize it. Even if Disney, Paul Bunyan, or Dorson's "claptrap collections" are not classifiable as folklore (by a folklorist), they are certainly a form of popular culture that people identify with folklore—exactly what we are calling the folkloresque. Whether or not the product in question can be traced back to an oral tradition or to some other "genuine" source is less important than the fact that people *feel* it is folkloric.

My aim here is not to disparage Dorson or dredge up an old debate, but simply to note that the folkloresque allows us to boldly study Paul Bunyan narratives, for example, without having to make disclaimers about their provenance. Certainly one of the more fascinating aspects of their study is exactly what Dorson was wary of: that they were fabricated and promulgated for commercial purposes but somehow found their way into the popular imagination. Dorson was critical of people deceptively passing off invented items as real folklore, but he himself did not necessarily dismiss such texts as meaningless—his point seems to be that they are just not a subject of study for academic folklorists. In contrast, my own point (and I suspect Dorson might concur) is that these very products, the folkloresque, should now be a subject of serious study. One might argue, then, that the folkloresque is nothing more than a contemporary relabeling of "fakelore," but the very act of relabeling asserts that these products, and the processes associated with them, are as culturally revealing and valuable as "genuine" folklore.

The folkloresque similarly dovetails with the discourses on folklorism and folklorismus that began emerging in the 1960s (most notably in Europe) and inspired critical thinking about commercial and political (re)contextualizations of folklore. In 1984, Hermann Bausinger characterized folklorismus as "the use of material or stylistic elements of folklore in a context which is foreign to the original tradition" (translated and quoted by Šmidchens 1999, 52). Today we are immediately struck with the impossibility of determining when a context is "foreign" or a tradition "original" and, as Guntilis Šmidchens points out, "the distinction 'primary tradition vs. folklorism' is based more on the beliefs of folklorists than the European folklore traditions to which it is usually applied. The processes and conduits

of transmission, reception, and variation in so-called folklore and folklorism are in fact too similar to warrant separate terminology on this basis” (Šmidchens 1999, 53).

Of course, instances of folklorism include narrative and performance as well as material culture. When discussing folklorism with my students, for example, I show them an object I purchased at a souvenir stand in Arizona: a handmade refrigerator magnet in the shape of a tiny Hopi ceramic pot. Does it matter, I ask them, that refrigerators (or magnets) were not part of “traditional” Hopi culture? Or would it make a difference if the product were not handmade in Arizona but rather mass produced in China? Bausinger (1986) significantly noted that dismissing cultural phenomena because they do not fit a narrow definition of folklore “avoided accurate description of the real world” (Šmidchens 1999, 57). Indeed, Hans Moser, the scholar credited with introducing folklorism into German folkloristic discourse, “urged his colleagues to study the seemingly fake in addition to ‘real’ folklore and folk cultures” (Bendix 1997a, 337). In a sense, the folkloresque represents a simultaneous broadening and refinement—and continuation—of the discourses created by these early pioneers.⁷

Folklorism also made an appearance in early twentieth-century Soviet scholarship; Mark Azadovsky invoked the word to imply “an awareness on the part of authors or folklore performers that they are dealing with people called the ‘folk’ and a thing called ‘folklore’” (Šmidchens 1999, 56). To be sure, folklorism is a slippery concept and has been defined in numerous ways. Gulnar Kendirbaeva, for example, describes it broadly as “the professional artistic creation of folklore in all its forms: in science and in pedagogy, on the stage, at festivals and during holidays (including ceremonies), in the mass media, in recordings and advertisements, in tourism, in crafts, and in everyday life” (Kendirbaeva 1994, 98). Šmidchens redefines folklorism through its function, as “denoting the conscious use of folklore as a symbol of ethnic, regional, or national culture” (Šmidchens 1999, 64). In my own work I have emphasized, like Azadovsky and Šmidchens, the critical role of *awareness* or *consciousness* in the production of folklorism (Foster 1998). And Dina Roginsky (2007) notes that folklore and folklorism are not mutually exclusive—that there can be “synchronization” between the two, with the same individuals participating in both modes of cultural production.

THE ODOR OF FOLKLORE

The discourse of folklorism productively broadens the field of inquiry, but at the same time cannot completely escape the binary trap of language in

which something called *folklore* is the source, the organic material, out of which something secondary (or artificial) is created. Inevitably, the quicksand of authenticity discourse sucks us back into a “preoccupation with the relationship of what is given to something that is posited as prior” (Bruner and Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1994, 459). Regina Bendix (1997b) and others (e.g., Bauman and Briggs 2003) have carefully demonstrated how the quest for authenticity has shaped the discipline of folklore studies, and there is no need to rehearse this history here. I simply note that the concept of the folkloresque, while it may not allow us to completely escape this binary, provides a new mechanism for exploring its structure. When people buy a folkloresque product, they often see in it a reference to something *they* consider folklore; unpacking the dynamics of the folkloresque, both with regard to its production and its perception, reveals the quality that makes something *seem* folkloric.

In a discussion of the way in which certain products are indelibly associated with their country of origin, cultural critic Koichi Iwabuchi introduces an idea he calls *cultural odor*: “the way in which cultural features of a country of origin and images or ideas of its national, in most cases stereotyped, way of life are associated *positively* with a particular product in the consumption process.” His point is not that all products reek of their country of origin, but that certain aspects of some products resonate symbolically with the consumer’s image of the country or culture in question. Borrowing this idea, we can describe certain popular culture products—those we are calling folkloresque—as emitting an odor of folklore, as it were, which “is strongly and affirmatively called to mind as the very appeal of the product” (Iwabuchi 2002, 27). Iwabuchi’s olfactory metaphor is helpful for thinking of the intangible properties of a product that can conjure up the symbolism and imagery associated, in this case, with folklore (an attractive foreign “country” in the world of popular culture). At the same time, however, it leaves us still struggling to isolate these properties.

And here is the crux of the problem. How do we know something is folklore, or that a popular culture product is folkloresque? “I shall not today attempt further to define the kinds of material I understand to be embraced within that shorthand description; and perhaps I could never succeed in intelligibly doing so. But I know it when I see it.”⁸ These are the notorious words of U.S. Supreme Court Justice Potter Stewart, and the “material” in question is “hard-core pornography.” But the statement could also apply to folklore—difficult, if not impossible, to define, but still somehow recognizable. In a popular culture product, the folkloresque is the retention of this character—an odor, an accent, a know-it-when-you-see-it quality—of folklore.

Assertions of recognizability without clear definition, like Justice Stewart's, are of course mired in subjectivity. But in many cases such subjective assessments are "popular," that is, shared by a large number of individuals, whether we call them a folk group or an "interpretive community" (Fish 1980), suggesting a consensus about the folkloric quality of a product. The study of the folkloresque allows us to examine the invisible philosophies and implicit ideologies that come together to create such a consensus within a given community. We are not interested in authenticity or origins but in the perception (and interpretation) of authenticity and origins. Etic analysis may highlight the inventedness of tradition and allow us to see that the very objectification of folklore is a product of modernity, but the folkloresque provides insight into the emic world of contemporary producers and consumers in which "folklore" itself is an "ethnic genre" (Ben-Amos 1976). Whereas both fakelore and folklorism tend to approach phenomena from a folkloric perspective, the folkloresque allows us to inhabit the other side of the problem and see the same phenomena from a popular culture perspective.

LITERATURE, FILM, NEW MEDIA

The conception of the folkloresque proposed here does not come out of the blue. If anything, we are simply labeling a phenomenon, and accompanying process of inquiry, that has long been brewing in folklore scholarship. As noted above, the ideas here clearly resonate with discussions of fakelore and folklorism. Others have already flagged the dynamics we want to highlight here: regarding contemporary "urban legends," for example, Jan Harold Brunvand notes that they have "migrated from *folklore* into *popular* culture where they became stereotyped, standardized, exploited, commodified, and repackaged in a number of ways" (Brunvand 2001, xxvii).⁹ Media scholars are also becoming interested in the dynamics of what Henry Jenkins has called "convergence culture": "where grassroots and corporate media intersect, where the power of the media producer and the power of the media consumer interact in unpredictable ways" (Jenkins 2006, 2). If we include literature and film in the popular culture mix, the folkloresque has already informed the development of contemporary folkloristics; we are merely identifying it as a particular type of cultural product well worth the attention of folklorists as well as popular culture scholars.

The relationship of folklore to literature, for example, has long been discussed in terms of remediation, allusion, borrowing, and intertextuality—concepts all relevant to the folkloresque. Frank de Caro and Rosan

Augusta Jordan describe what they term "re-situation" as "simply the process by which folklore is somehow taken from its position in a sociocultural context (de-situation) and placed into a literary or artistic context, whether by description, textual quotation, or some other means (such as the adaptation of a plot structure)" (de Caro and Jordan 2004, 6). Much of the scholarship on folklore in literature has focused on the use of proverbs and fairy tales, perhaps because such genres are most easily understood in terms of recontextualization.¹⁰

In distinguishing between folklore and literature, there can be a default tendency in some discussions to treat narrative folklore as oral, or at least as derived from oral sources. As Cristina Bacchilega (2012, 450) points out, however, "Not all oral traditions are folk, not all folk literature is oral, not all verbal art is literary or oral." Moreover, such distinctions are all the more problematic in an age of technology in which forms of firsthand immediate performance may be entirely textual (text messages, chat rooms, Twitter) and oral "face-to-face" communication may be mediated (Second Life, Skype), edited, or transmitted through time lags (YouTube, Vimeo). Clearly, divisions between oral and written, mass and personal, mediated and face-to-face have to be rethought. Bacchilega (2012, 450) notes that "interpreting uses of the folklore in contemporary literature and culture is now a well-established scholarly practice," but at the same time, "the association of folklore with old-fashioned rather than postmodern ways or subaltern knowledge persists." Probing the dynamics of the folkloresque, in contemporary culture as well as in the past, helps push folklore into postmodern scholarship.

In film and other forms of visual and mass media, connections with folklore have also been well rehearsed. In 1994, Linda Dégh stressed that "it is not enough to recognize that mass media play a role in folklore transmission. It is closer to the truth to admit that the media have become part of folklore" (Dégh 1994, 25). More recently Mikel Koven (2008) has argued stridently for the importance of analyzing the role of folklore in films in a way that goes beyond what he aptly and disparagingly calls "motif spotting"³ (3). And Pauline Greenhill notes, "Folkloristic scholarship concerning intersections of folklore and film has greatly expanded since the beginning of the twenty-first-century" (Greenhill 2012, 484).¹¹ Furthermore, as emerging technologies and fresh (often unimagined) apps and forms of entertainment increasingly dominate popular culture production, folkloristics has also begun to explore video games (e.g., Miller 2008), the Internet (de Vos 2012; Foster 2012; Frank 2011), and all manifestations of digital culture (Blank 2009, 2012).

One approach to popular culture has been to use folklore methodologies to examine processes on the Internet and elsewhere that exhibit traditionality, variation, artistic communication, and other familiar orientations. Accordingly, it is not surprising that folklorists have been particularly interested in fan culture and audience studies.¹² But the tools of folklore have much more to offer in the emerging media environment; as Kiri Miller notes with regard to digital gaming, “Folklorists’ approaches to the nature of storytelling and play are quite different from those of most digital game theorists; their ethnographic orientation, their experience with variable texts and performance practices, and their disciplinary emphasis on representations of the past in the present could bring new perspectives to this material” (Miller 2008, 258). Moreover, as S. Elizabeth Bird points out: “Certain popular cultural forms succeed because they act like folklore” (Bird 2006, 346). And as others have stated simply, “Commodified culture is multifaceted, complex, and as likely to be a site for social meaning as any other” (Goldstein et al. 2007, 173).

My aim here is not to offer a survey of folkloric engagement with popular culture but simply to note that it has been happening for a very long time. The study of the folkloresque emerges out of, and builds on, this engagement. But it also suggests a specific type of engagement; my own characterization of the folkloresque does not refer to *all* interactions between folklore and popular culture, nor does it conflate popular culture with folklore (although this is a valuable experiment). For example, I am not (or at least not explicitly) talking about fan studies or the folkloric processes by which popular culture and mass media are used by communities and individuals—such as Robert Glenn Howard’s (2008) powerful concept of the “vernacular web.” We accept that social media, and all the other interactive experiences of the Internet, are nothing if not folkloric. But the folkloresque, in a sense, refers to just the opposite: popular and commercial processes in which folklore is used by companies and individuals. That is, we are concerned with how producers/consumers of popular culture interpret folklore and consciously draw on it for the sense of authenticity and authority it offers. In this sense, the folkloresque can be thought of as a specific genre of popular culture.

INTEGRATION, PORTRAYAL, PARODY

At least, this is a starting point. Again, we offer this book as an initial foray, but also as a challenge to others to more fully explore some of the directions we embark upon. With that in mind, I would like to suggest three

major categories of the folkloresque: *integration*, *portrayal*, and *parody*. These three types of folkloresque expression provide entrance into broader and deeper discussions; accordingly, this is the way we have organized the book itself—in three sections, each drawing on one of these broad concepts as a governing theme for the chapters it contains. Most important, however, I want to qualify these categories from the start by saying that they are not necessarily the only possible categories. Moreover, there is no question that they overlap with each other. But they do serve, I hope, as convenient conversation starters—because the goal is to start a conversation.

Integration

This line of inquiry considers how popular cultural producers *integrate* or stitch together folkloric motifs and forms to make a product that appears to be inspired directly by one or more specific traditions. The folkloresque of this mode works through the mechanisms of allusion and pastiche, a hodgepodge suturing of bits and pieces of other things to create a coherent new whole. Here we may start with “motif spotting,” tale-type labeling, or sifting out tradition from invention, but the point is not simply to identify sources. Rather, it is imperative to look carefully at the diverse, complex, and creative ways that authors, screenwriters, video game creators, and other artists infuse their works with specific elements from diverse traditions, and also to explore the reasons for and effects of this borrowing.

One good example of integration is the film *Spirited Away*, mentioned above. But the dynamics of integration inform all sorts of popular culture phenomena, such as the ongoing American obsession with zombies and vampires, or contemporary fiction and films such as *The Lord of the Rings*, *Harry Potter*, and the *Twilight* series. But this form of the folkloresque also characterizes more classic examples—the “fairy tales” of Hans Christian Andersen, for instance, or, for that matter, Paul Bunyan lore. What value is added through this process of borrowing and cobbling together, and what does it reveal about the cultural context and values of a given moment? Within this form of the folkloresque, older folkloric and newly created elements are exposed to mutual contamination; the folkloresque may not be folklore but it is also not completely invented.

The use of folklore in this way, in terms of both form and content, can be unconscious (part of the folklore-creative process itself) or it can be very much an intentional act. An example of the purposeful way in which folklore can be appreciated, manipulated, and reinvented is the classic text of *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, complete with its witches and wizards and magical spells. It is no coincidence that L. Frank Baum introduces his work

by invoking the influence of “folk lore, legends, myths and fairy tales,” and then asserting that his own book “aspires to being a modernized fairy tale, in which the wonderment and joy are retained and the heart-aches and nightmares are left out” (Baum 1900, 5).

With the proliferation of digital technology, folkloric elements and references increasingly animate video games and Internet sites; indeed, it seems as if explicitly folkloric characters and motifs are often the driving force behind many of the most popular video games and role-playing games (RPGs), which in turn are at the heart of a multibillion-dollar global industry. In these contexts, folklore is frequently identified as such, by the word *folklore* or a related generic term (i.e., *myth, legend, fairy tale*), and explicitly and strategically deployed to imbue products with meaning through association. The notion of the folkloresque, then, opens up a new way to consider the contact zone between the traditional and the commercial and between the culturally specific and the transnational metaculture of the global popular arena.

In a sense, we can think of folkloresque of the integration type as a process of *bricolage* by which commercial interests cannibalize folklore, extracting component parts and reassembling them in a product that retains a *connection* to folklore, or *seems* folkloric, or has the *style* of folklore—and, most important, *sells* because of this perceived relationship. This relationship works through a metonymic process, whereby the folkloric element generates meaning by its connection to a broader tradition.¹³ And this connection with folklore in turn serves as the “value added” aspect of the product. The way consumers receive a folkloresque product depends on the particular interpretive community or folk group of which they are a part. Although they may recognize an item as a commercial construct, perhaps created by a single author or producer, they might assume that the product is based on or representative of (“real”) folklore. This assumption is particularly significant when a popular culture item crosses cultural or national borders. To older Japanese consumers, for example, the “monsters” of the Pokémon franchise are invented within a commercial context; for consumers from America and Europe, these same products often become associated with “Japanese folklore.” Thinking of such commercial products as folkloresque inspires a fresh, nonpejorative approach that treats them not as derivative or corrupt but as part of an ongoing creative process.

Portrayal

This category of the folkloresque is an expression of the “commonsense” image of folklore within popular culture. Through this optic, we examine

the ways in which folklorists as people and folkloristics as a discipline are portrayed. In many popular cultural products, for example, folklorists are depicted as experts on esoteric traditions, adventurer figures with special knowledge or insight into mysterious worlds. Sometimes they are portrayed as armchair ethnologists surrounded by piles of thick, old, obscure books. In one common narrative type, the arcane knowledge of the folklorist—usually of no use to anybody—suddenly becomes the key to solving a mystery or crime. This folkloresque image of the folklorist can be found, for example, in the film *Candyman* (1992) or more recently in *Fatal Frame*, a horror video game series in which folklorists are portrayed as collectors of dangerous supernatural lore whose presence can unleash ghostly horror but whose knowledge is also needed to save the day.

Folklore as a discipline is also often portrayed in a similarly ambivalent light, as an archaic and esoteric field of study, at once irrelevant to modern life and at the same time spiritually potent. Generally speaking, the popular culture image of folkloristics (and folklorists) is one or two generations behind the reality of what contemporary folklorists actually do. As Robert Glenn Howard put it in a recent interview, “I wish it weren’t true, but a lot of people imagine ‘folklore’ as ‘old stuff.’ But that just isn’t the case” (Owens 2013). Many folklorists today, like Howard, are deeply engaged in the study of emerging technology, social networking, and other cutting-edge phenomena, but such research does not easily mesh with popular culture images of the discipline. There is a time lag between the professional world and the popular culture world, between academic inception and vernacular reception. This sort of disconnect between the reality of an academic (or perhaps any) profession and its vernacular image may be common, but it is particularly meaningful in the case of folkloristics, which after all takes as its subject the study of the vernacular.

The folkloresque of the portrayal genre, then, reminds us not of what folklore is but of the popular culture *image* of what folklore is. Not surprisingly, for example, there is a popular action role-playing video game called simply *Folklore*, that begins in a clichéd folkloric setting in a small Irish village and includes all sorts of supernatural creatures and mysteries.¹⁴ Television, too, is chock-full of portrayals of folkloristics, folklorists, and folkloric concepts—everything from *MythBusters* to *Supernatural* to a series on NewTV simply called *The Folklorist*, described as “exploring the iconic and lesser-known historical occurrences in our world’s history.”¹⁵ Such portrayals reveal a great deal about the values, worldviews, and assumptions of producers and consumers, and also about the particular culture(s) in which the producing and consuming is performed. Folkloresque portrayals

also have “real-world” consequences: many students come to the academic study of folklore, or at least take an introductory class in the subject, because of their early exposure to folkloresque images of the field and its subject matter.

Parody

The third broad category of the folkloresque, which I am calling *parody*, is particularly complex. By parody, I do not necessarily mean a comical or humorous product, but rather one that seems self-consciously and often self-referentially imitative of folklore. Folkloresque parody reflects a seemingly intentional appropriation of folkloric motifs and structures for the purpose of caricature or similar modes of critical commentary. The Greek *para* can mean both “against” and “alongside of,” and literary theorists suggest that parody is simultaneously a form of ridicule and of homage (Chatman 2001, 33). Whether it is mocking or celebratory, a common characteristic of folkloresque parody is its evident awareness of its own derivativeness. Indeed, the parodic folkloresque is often characterized by an explicit self-referential quality, a kind of insider/outsider knowledge into which the audience is invited to enter; although I call this category “parody,” it could just as easily be glossed as “metacommentary.”

Parody of this sort may express a critique of the source material (that is, folklore); it may comment on itself as a popular culture product; or it may self-reflexively offer a send-up of popular cultural uses of folklore (that is, the folkloresque). It is no coincidence that parody has often been considered a postmodern form (e.g., Rose 1993), and certainly the parodic folkloresque presumes a readership/audience with a sophisticated awareness of the popular culture product being critiqued in addition to familiarity with the folkloric elements invoked to enact the parody. An example of this approach is *Enchanted*, Disney’s 2007 movie in which already-clichéd Disney appropriations of traditional fairy tales are imaginatively combined to create a romantic comedy that plays with both popular culture and folkloric conventions. Similarly, the classic *Princess Bride* (1987) and the entire *Shrek* franchise—from the children’s books to the DreamWorks films—operate in a parodic folkloresque fashion.

I would add that the recent spate of filmic reworkings of traditional folktales, including *Red Riding Hood* (2011), *Mirror Mirror* (2012), *Jack the Giant Slayer* (2013), and *Maleficent* (2014) might all be analyzed productively through the lens of the parodic folkloresque as commentaries on contemporary American culture that work their critique not only through reference to a known folkloric precedent but through highlighting their difference to this

earlier “text.” In one sense, such film productions might simply be considered “updated” versions of existing folklore. If, however, as Seymour Chatman has asserted, “it is only by imitating another text, an original which the reader can recognize or consult, that stylistic parody arises” (Chatman 2001, 35), then such folkloresque products also problematize the stability of the “original” folkloric source. In addition, they provide entertainment on a number of levels. Just like so-called post-tourists, who “almost delight in the inauthenticity of the normal tourist experience” because “they know that there is no authentic tourist experience, that there are merely a series of games or texts that can be played” (Urry 2002, 11), there are certainly “post-consumers” who take great pleasure in the multileveled irony of the parodic folkloresque.

The parodic folkloresque is simultaneously a form of metafolklore and also a popular culture appropriation of the power of folklore and its assumed association with “authentic” tradition. The Internet is a vital—and vexingly complex—hive of such folkloresque activity: popular culture products not only constantly reference folklore, but new forms of folklore (e.g., Photoshop folklore and image macros) make reference to themselves and to other popular culture products in an endless cycle of parody and commentary that is often aware of its own cyclicity. Perhaps it is no coincidence that the phrase “I am aware of all Internet traditions” has itself become a well-circulating meme.

I should add a critical caveat to the suggestion that parody is self-aware and conscious of its appropriation of folkloric elements and structures. Ultimately, parody is in the eye of the beholder. In some cases a producer may be completely unaware of the derivative nature of the product and it is left to the savvy consumer to discern the folkloric borrowing that went into its creation. As a close reader of texts within the context of their production, such a consumer can find critical commentary in the particular choices made by the producer, despite (or because of) a lack of intention on the producer’s part. That is, the parodic folkloresque emerges not only in the act of creation but also through practices of consumption and interpretation (e.g., see Schrempf’s chapter 11 in this volume).

APPROACHING THE FOLKLORESQUE

To reiterate, the three forms of the folkloresque suggested here are overlapping, intersecting, and by no means mutually exclusive; I offer them only as very provisional categories within which to consider certain phenomena. I wish I could suggest a grand theory that could be applied to these three different types and also to diverse case studies. But as is perhaps already

evident, the folkloresque is as varied as folklore and popular culture, and any attempt at a grand theory would be meaninglessly reductive. So in the next few pages I simply gesture to a number of possible directions or foci that could be pursued within, or complementary to, any of the three categories mentioned above.

Motifs

As outlined above, integration, portrayal, and parody are modes by which popular cultural products purposefully articulate a relationship with folklore: either through direct reference to a single existing tradition or through a creative amalgam of elements from multiple traditions. One way to understand the dynamics of this *referencing* is through returning to the old folkloric study of motifs. Certain popular culture texts, such as *The Lord of the Rings* or *Game of Thrones*, seem to evoke entirely “believable” worlds. Such examples are successful not because they are fabricated from scratch, but precisely because they are informed by tried-and-true motifs; indeed they achieve “truthiness,” as Stephen Colbert might put it, because of the creator’s skillful (conscious or unconscious) cobbling together and/or embedding of familiar motifs into the fictional realms of Middle Earth or Westeros and Essos. As Sharon R. Sherman points out about J.R.R. Tolkien’s work, for example, “Precisely because the tales are so closely based on myth, folktales, and epic, and populated with ogres, witches, and elves, they have struck a familiar chord with readers and viewers” (Sherman 2004, 292). Their “authenticity” comes from their connection to “authentic” folklore, by which I mean their use of motifs and narratives found in earlier storytelling traditions and often (though by no means exclusively) oral forms of transmission.

Some of the elements that go into such popular cultural works are actually recorded in the tale-type indexes or Stith Thompson’s encyclopedic motif index. This latter work in particular represents a massive experiment in deconstruction, breaking narratives down to, as it were, a molecular level: “If an attempt is made to reduce the traditional narrative material of the whole earth to order (as, for example, the scientists have done with the worldwide phenomena of biology) it must be by means of a classification of single motifs—those details out of which full-fledged narratives are composed. It is these simple elements which can form a common basis for a systematic arrangement of the whole body of traditional literature” (Thompson 1955, 9).

Thompson explains that “sometimes the interest of a student of traditional narrative may be centered on a certain type of character in a tale,

sometimes on an action, sometimes on attendant circumstances of the action” (Thompson 1955, 10). If the index extracts these motifs from the folkloric texts in which they are embedded, the folkloresque within popular culture then reassembles them in different configurations or in conjunction with motifs from other fields (science fiction, for example) into new and, if successful, saleable commercial products. In crude but accurate terms, we might call this a kind of “chop-shop” operation, by which still-useful parts are removed from old vehicles and repackaged for sale in a competitive market. Approaching the folkloresque through the study of motifs, therefore, should not stop at simply identifying their usage; it should push toward redefining what a motif is in the first place, and also understanding the processes by which popular culture producers draw on their cultural meanings. The goal is to understand how the chop shop works.

Indexical

It is no coincidence that Thompson calls his opus an “index.” On one level, an index is simply an ordered list for the purpose of keeping records and providing access to materials. But the notion of indexicality suggests a significant referential connection between two “things” and is of theoretic importance in philosophical, semiotic, and linguistic discourse. Most famously, perhaps, the semiotic of Charles Peirce posits a tripartite structure of signs made up of what he calls *icon*, *index*, and *symbol*. Peirce stresses that an indexical sign, particularly the kind he classifies as *deictic* or *referential*, is characterized by “the sense that there is a direct continuity between the sign and its object; for example, as the way a pointing finger draws an imaginary line to the object it refers to” (Liszka 1996, 38).

Within a popular culture text or product, then, the perceived folkloric motif (whether literally indexed by Thompson or not) can be thought of as an indexical sign that points directly to a particular tradition and therefore stimulates the consumer to mentally or emotionally access all that he or she knows about that tradition. It is the contiguity here, the “real relation” (Colapietro 1989, 16) between the motif (sign) within the text and the tradition (object) outside the text, that draws the folkloric into the popular culture product. Although Peirce’s system is thick with specific terminology, his notion of indexicality might be one productive way for further exploring the processes through which the folkloresque enacts an association with folklore and, even more abstractly, how it inspires a sense of that elusive quality we call “authenticity.”¹⁶

The Database

Building on the notion of motifs and indexes, whether literal or semiotic, we can develop a more contemporarily relevant metaphor for understanding this indexing process: the database. Popular culture theorist Azuma Hiroki (2009) suggests that postmodern consumers of Japanese popular culture—specifically manga and anime—interact with products and information through what he calls “database consumption.” He argues that in the 1990s consumers began to understand narratives in terms of their component parts rather than in terms of the stories that went with them. He suggests that they viewed products as drawing on a database containing “settings,” by which he means characters, traits, physical attributes, superpowers—in a word (which he does not actually use): *motifs*.

While Azuma’s argument is specific to the Japanese historical situation, his suggestion of the database as a model for a popular culture worldview, I think, extremely relevant to the concept of the folkloresque. Metaphorically, if not literally, producers access a database of characteristics and elements proven to be loved by fans and assemble them to construct a new product that will, presumably, resonate with what consumers are already familiar with. In this view of the world, folklore—or in Thompson’s words, “the traditional narrative material of the whole earth”—becomes nothing more than a massive database containing component parts for constructing or augmenting any number of commercially viable products—from comics to toys to video games.

One effect of constructing a popular culture product with folkloric components is that it instills the new product with durability. That is, a popular culture item or event is usually “popular” only for a short time: what is all the rage today may be completely forgotten tomorrow. In contrast, folklore is often characterized by traditionality, the notion that it retains (or appears to retain) a certain amount of stability over time and across space. By reaching into the massive database of folklore, popular culture producers draw on the presumed longevity of tradition and invest their products with staying power, the folkloric referent suggesting that the product transcends the fleeting moment of its present popularity. The folkloresque is a meaningful form of popular culture because popular culture dreams of being folklore.

Indeed, within certain popular culture products, tradition (however we define it) is evoked as an agent of authority.¹⁷ By referencing folklore or folkloric elements, a popular culture product draws on “the empowering force of the discursive deployment of vernacular authority” (Howard 2013, 75). Robert Glenn Howard explains that “the concept of vernacular

authority is based on the idea that any claim to be supported by tradition asserts power because it seeks to garner trust from an audience by appealing to the aggregate volition of other individuals across space and through time” (Howard 2013, 80). Although Howard is not speaking here of popular culture per se, “vernacular authority” is central to the selling power of the folkloresque because it invests the ephemeral commercial product with a more trustworthy, authorized, and “authentic” (as perceived by the consumer) *raison d’être* based on its (perceived) connection to tradition.

Plagiarism, Intellectual Property, Ownership

Certainly, then, the accessing of a motif database in order to assemble a new popular culture product inspires abstract questions about origins and originality, and touches on postmodern concepts of hyperreality and simulacra, in which reality and its representation may be seamlessly blended. It also raises more practical concerns about copyright and intellectual property laws. At one level, perhaps all processes of folklore are comparable to processes of plagiarism: both can entail imitation, borrowing, recontextualization, and the presenting of something old as if it were new. If folklore is characterized by versions and variants, “multiple existence in time and space” (Dundes and Pagter 1987, 268), then certainly—as with plagiarism—originality is always in question.

Of course, I am not indicting folkloric processes as criminal or immoral; rather, I want to point out just the opposite, that in the cultural imaginary folklore is in part defined as those very materials and processes that fall outside intellectual property law. This freedom inspires creativity and fluid transmission, but it also means that folklore resides in an open-access domain where it is subject to easy appropriation. One university website explaining plagiarism, for example, warns students to “document any words, ideas, or other productions that originate somewhere outside of you.” It then explains that “there are, of course, certain things that do not need documentation or credit,” and these include, “things like folklore, common sense observations, myths, urban legends, and historical events.” (Purdue Online Writing Lab).¹⁸ The fact that folklore is considered common property—nobody *owns* it—is the very thing that allows the proliferation of versions and variants, the repeating of proverbs, the retelling of jokes, the teaching of techniques, the borrowing of patterns—indeed, all the processes through which expressive culture is transmitted from person to person, from culture to culture, from one generation to the next.¹⁹

But this is also one place that the folkloresque, as a manifestation of popular culture, is distinctly different. Creators of popular culture products

are free to “sample,” as it were, to borrow at will from folklore, literally or metaphorically riffing through motif indexes and databases to take whatever they can sell. Folklore belongs to everybody and therefore to nobody. But once something is sold—and patented, copyrighted, or trademarked—it is legally transformed into property and enters an entirely different realm of discourse. If folklore is public common property, then the folkloresque is private commercial property. I am not offering a conclusion here, but just suggesting that the folkloresque gives us a lever with which to pry open some of the conceptual and legal differences in how expressive cultural is understood in the contemporary world—a situation made all the more complex by the ongoing globalization of the cultural arena.

This also brings us back to more abstract notions of tradition. Dorothy Noyes suggests that tradition entails mutual responsibility: “The receiver must respect, but the giver must let go.” There must be “transmission of metaknowledge along with the practice itself: what it means, how it is to be used, everything that is shaven off when it is packaged as a product or an entry in a database” (Noyes 2009, 248). And therein lies one of the key distinctions between folklore and popular culture, for it is so often this metaknowledge, and the accompanying sense of responsibility on the part of the receiver (taker), that is shaved off in the packaging of a folkloresque product. Ultimately, the commercial producer’s responsibility is to the bottom line, not to the people and cultures who have contributed to the database.

OTHER TIMES, OTHER GENRES

Throughout this introduction I have mostly drawn on examples from relatively recent popular culture. But I want to stress that as a concept, the folkloresque’s heuristic value is not restricted to analysis of contemporary popular and commercial products but can be equally applied to older texts such as, for example, Victorian literature (see Manning’s chapter 3 in this volume). That is, folkloresque processes are not new.

Moreover, although most examples in the chapters that follow are verbal or performative, folkloresque analysis could just as readily be applied to all sorts of material and customary genres of folklore and folklife. If one characteristic of popular culture is its commercial orientation, it is not surprising that video games, films, popular literature, and other narrative formats also generate physical objects—costumes, figurines, posters, and other material culture forms of cross-platform marketing. Moreover, the folkloresque as *style* can be found in all sorts of commercial production; mass-produced

clothing, fabric patterns, ceramics, even architectural designs often not only borrow from folklore but make overt reference to specific traditions. Presumably, this connection attracts consumers not just aesthetically but also because it authenticates the product by linking it to something beyond the factories and industrial processes in which it was fabricated.

On a mundane level, the power of what I would call “the authenticity of the hand” is invoked throughout contemporary American (and other) society. How many products are marketed as “handmade,” “hand crafted” or even, as in a coffee shop I once visited, “hand stirred”? From a folkloresque perspective, what is important here is not whether there is truth in advertising, whether a human hand actually does the stirring, but why nostalgia for the handmade, for the personal *touch*, has become such a powerful selling point for everything from furniture to beer. The notion of “home-made” similarly pervades popular and commercial culture, with restaurants such as the ubiquitous Cracker Barrel chain basing their business strategy on customers’ desire for folksy decor and “homemade” comfort food.

It also goes without saying that the folkloresque might also be applied to all sorts of performance and arts, such as music and dance. Indeed, the so-called folk revival of the 1960s not only demonstrates the dynamic of the folkloresque but also indicates the real-world effects it can have. Contemporary notions of “folklorization” (see McDowell 2010) also fit within the framework proposed here. All this is to say that, by focusing primarily on verbal products, the essays in this collection represent only the tip of the iceberg. I hope, however, that they will provide models for approaching different genres, and that others will pursue these avenues.

A FOLKLORESQUE MANIFESTO

And this plea brings me to the penultimate section of this introduction, which I call, only somewhat facetiously, a *folkloresque manifesto*. The study of the folkloresque may open up a new set of inquiries but, more significant, it can help shape new attitudes toward these inquiries. Analyzing the folkloresque requires that we assume different perspectives (multiple perspectives), not lingering on origins or even folklore per se, but exploring perception, social value, and function as well as the agency of creators and consumers of popular culture. In order to be “popular,” popular culture must succeed: it must resonate in some meaningful way with its audiences, who are not merely receptors but active and highly critical participants. Consumers of a popular cultural product must “buy it”—literally and figuratively. Whatever shape it takes, the folkloresque suggests a metadiscursive dimension of

popular culture through which producers and consumers together engage in thoughtful evaluations of cultural forms that are the building blocks of new material.

No matter how explicitly commercial, a folkloresque product can end up being (re)appropriated by the “folk” (often of a different tradition or culture from the product producer), who repurpose its component parts, introducing them—or the product as a whole—into a new folk cultural context. Particularly within the current global marketplace, such circularity may be cross-cultural, with one culture attracted to the seemingly folkloric aspects of another culture’s commercial product. By conceiving of the relationship of folklore and the folkloresque as symbiotic or circular rather than oppositional, we can adjust our understanding of the relationship of the vernacular and the commercial, of the traditional and the innovative, and understand all of these manifestations as part of a complex and always shifting process of human creativity.

In essence, the relationship of folklore to the folkloresque is like a Möbius strip in which folk culture and popular culture are magically, paradoxically, two different sides of the same surface, never intersecting because they are always already intersecting. Intertextuality, transtextuality, mediation, remediation, and multipatform functionality suggest that genres of expression are temporary and porous, and that transmission and transformation between them is the rule rather than the exception. The present moment is particularly volatile: the very question of what defines a text or product can no longer be answered with certainty, and new platforms and modes of communication emerge every day. We stand on the fault line of a paradigm shift brought about by, among other things, globalization and advances in information technologies that indelibly affect cultural expression around the world.

For folklorists this is a moment of great urgency and opportunity: a chance to employ a particularly relevant kind of expertise within a range of critical, timely conversations. To get in on the ground floor of the emerging paradigm, however, we should remember that, despite its bearing on so many discourses, folkloristic research is often overlooked by other disciplines. Media and cultural studies theses regularly posit “new” ideas regarding the circulation of motifs and images (and memes) that have long been at the very heart of the folkloric project. Even concepts as academically vital and vital as Benedict Anderson’s “imagined communities” (Anderson 1991)—to say nothing of contemporary catch phrases such as “online communities” and “social networking”—are of course uncannily resonant with notions of “folk group” that folklorists have been working with for decades.²⁰

But the argument cuts both ways, and ultimately the onus is on folklorists to be heard—to work across disciplinary boundaries or to work with others to establish entirely new disciplines. The folkloresque is one small gesture in this direction: a new word that will operate as a hypertextual link between different realms of discourse. You may find the chapters that follow offer views that radically conflict with the ideas suggested in this introduction. They may define the folkloresque differently, or approach it from different perspectives or with different objectives. They may rely on the very binaries the concept of the folkloresque is meant to problematize, or they may understand popular culture and folklore in contradictory ways. But if the essays assembled here leave you longing for more attention to these issues, then they will have succeeded—because a lack of conformity is one of the goals of this book.

Each chapter that follows may be read individually or in conjunction with the others. But if you find any of the ideas presented here insufficient—or, inversely, if you think they might apply meaningfully to other genres or other time periods—I hope you will continue the conversation with contributions that build on, contradict, and transcend the ones here. This book is also a call for scholars of popular culture, cultural studies, media, communications, literature, and film to take up the challenge of the folkloresque, to explore the symbiosis, and ultimately the inseparability, of commercial production and folk creativity—because the folkloresque is part of a critical discourse for the twenty-first century, and its interpretation sheds light not only on folklore and popular culture but on the dynamics of all cultural expression.

STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK

This book is divided into three sections based on the concepts outlined above—integration, portrayal, and parody. Each section opens with an introduction by my coeditor, Jeffrey A. Tolbert, explaining the specific chapters therein and indicating how they speak to each other and to the larger issues. Without duplicating that information, I briefly describe here the sections with the goal of showing how each provides insight into a specific form of the folkloresque and also suggests connections with the others.

The “Integration” section demonstrates how the folkloresque process of integration informs a variety of contemporary texts, from the Japanese animated films (Foster, chapter 1) that spurred my own interest in the subject to the contemporary work of popular writer Neil Gaiman (Evans, chapter 2). But this section also exemplifies the historical applicability of the concept through an exploration of eighteenth-century writings on fairy-lore (Manning, chapter 3) as well as the contingent relationship between popular

culture and folkloric discourses in the constellation of texts, products, and events surrounding Superman (Peretti, chapter 4).

The “Portrayal” section similarly explores a range of materials and contexts, from contemporary video games (Tolbert, chapter 5) to Irish storytelling (Buterbaugh, chapter 6) to the complex ways folklore is used within the *Harry Potter* world (Holl-Jensen and Tolbert, chapter 7). As these particular analyses highlight, the image of folklore and folklorists is a vital—if somewhat anachronistic—element of the popular cultural imaginary.

The final section, “Parody,” is perhaps the most challenging. It begins with two chapters on humor, one exploring the jokes circulating after a sexual abuse scandal (Blank, chapter 8) and the other analyzing sophisticated forms of metaphor and “joke metonyms” (Kelley, chapter 9). While humor seems a natural fit for a section on parody, these discussions also implicitly demonstrate that jokes, perhaps more than any other form of folklore, reveal the inherent porousness between folk and popular culture—clouding the very premises on which the concept of the folkloresque is built. But parody is not always about humor, and a chapter on a complex Japanese anime (Ellis, chapter 10) shows how the parodic folkloresque operates as a metacommentary on the processes of storytelling itself. And the final contribution, an analysis of popular science writing (Schrempf, chapter 11), takes the parodic folkloresque one step further, demonstrating not only that science and mythology are parallel in many ways but that, consciously or not, they may even parody each other. Ultimately, popular science itself is, in a sense, folkloresque.

The eleven chapters that follow take different, complementary, and sometimes contradictory approaches to the folkloresque. Although each one does not necessarily conform to all the ideas laid out in this introduction, they all participate in an increasingly meaningful and exciting conversation on the intersection, contrast, and fusion of folklore and popular culture. Of course, there are many other relevant texts, products, and genres we do not even touch upon here. But ultimately, we hope this book will be read in the spirit it is offered—with a decidedly forward-looking inconclusiveness.

NOTES

1. Directed by Miyazaki Hayao; Japanese title: *Sen to Chihiro no kamikakushi*.
2. For earlier usages, see Turner 1979; Chappell 2005. Both use the term differently from the delineation I am proposing here.
3. The *OED*’s first definition of “picturesque” is “like or having the elements of a picture” (*Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed., s.v. “picturesque”). I also want to acknowledge different academic usages of the “-esque” suffix, most famously Bakhtin’s “carnivalesque” and more recently folklorist Jack Santino’s “ritualesque.” See Bakhtin 1984; Santino 2011.

4. See, e.g., Smulyan’s discussion of her inability to convince her students that popular cultural forms are not “empty of ideology” (Smulyan 2007, 1).

5. Folklore as a concept is, of course, notoriously difficult to define, and this is not the place to explore its discursive history. For the purposes of the present discussion, however, I characterize folkloric items and events as generally unofficial, noninstitutional forms of expressive culture. No author or designer or professional artist dictates what is correct or incorrect; often the item in question is of anonymous origins and/or the shared property of a particular group—from a family or village to an online community or nation. Of course, none of this is cut and dried: this is less a definition than it is a set of tendencies or orientations (see Oring 1986). For “textbook” introductions to the concept and its (possible) definitions, see, e.g., Georges and Jones 1995; McNeill 2013; Oring 1986; Sims and Stephens 2011; Toelken 1996.

6. Indeed, Dorson (1950, 336) is very clear that for him “word of mouth” is key and “folklore by any definition requires the proof of oral vitality.” Moreover, he has carefully explained that his 1950 article (and its notorious neologism) “was intended as a rallying cry against the distortion of a serious subject” (Dorson 2005, 289) and emerged out of a desire to create a viable space for the study of folklore within American academia. See Dorson 1976, especially 1–29; 2005. For Dorson’s take on Paul Bunyan, see Dorson 1976, 291–336.

7. I am wary of oversimplifying the discourses and definitions of folklorism and folklorismus here. For a more nuanced treatment of these concepts, see Bendix 1988, 1997b. For a fascinating conversation about the subject, see “Floor Discussion” 1984.

8. *Jacobellis v. Ohio*, 378 U.S. 184 (1964) <http://caselaw.findlaw.com/us-supreme-court/378/184.html>.

9. See also, e.g., the essays in Narvaez and Laba 1986; also Bluestein 1994; Brunvand 2004. 10. Early discussions about the relationship of folklore and literature include Hoffman et al. 1957; Dundes 1965. For the use of proverbs in literature, see Haas 2011 and especially the voluminous work of Wolfgang Mieder (e.g., Bryan and Mieder 1997; Mieder 2008). For recent work on fairy tales, literature, television, and film, see Bacchilega 1997, 2013; Benson 2008; Greenhill and Matrix 2010; Greenhill and Rudy 2014; Short 2015; Smith 2007; Zipes 2009, 2010.

11. For an overview of the way in which folklorists have considered film in their work, see Koven 2008, especially 3–22; also Sherman 2004; Sherman and Koven 2007.

12. Indeed, connections between popular culture products and their assimilation into more informal folk cultural processes have received critical attention in so-called fanthropologies and other works on fan culture.

13. See Foley 1991 for discussion of this sort of metonymy within oral traditional epic performance.

14. The game is developed by Game Republic and published by Sony Entertainment for the PlayStation platform. The game was originally made in Japanese, in which it is titled *Folk Soul: Ushinawareta danshō*, which translates as *Folk Soul: Lost Traditions*.

15. <http://folklorist.newt.org> (accessed June 16, 2015).

16. For an introduction to Peirce’s semiotic and its specific relevance to folkloristics, see Chappell 1999.

17. For recent important discussions of tradition, see Blank and Howard 2013; Bronner 1998; Cashman, Mould, and Shukla 2011; Glassie 2003; Noyes 2009.

18. See <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/589/2/> (accessed July 4, 2014).

19. I am simplifying here, and we have to remember that folklore’s presumed position outside intellectual property and copyright laws can often be problematic. See, e.g., Brown

2003; also Handler 2003; Skrydstrup 2012. For a discussion of the correlation between folklore and plagiarism, see also Seeger 1962.

20. The lament of folkloristics as a minor, overlooked discipline is not confined to the United States; a very similar dynamic is found in my own area of research in Japan, where the scholarly relevance of folkloristics (*minzokugaku*) seems to be recognized only by folklorists.

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