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On Folklore's Appeal:
<u>A Personal Essay</u>

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Abstract: *Popular perceptions of disciplinary folklore are necessarily different from academic ones. This article argues that taking these differing perceptions seriously, and actively engaging with them, is critical to ensuring the continued relevance of academic folklore study. Examining several examples of popular thinking about what folklore is reveals important areas for scholarly intervention, ones which pay due respect to both academic and non-academic expectations and understandings. To this end, the methods and insights of public folklorists can be brought to bear on academic publishing and disciplinary engagement with non-academics.*

The Grudge 2 (Shimizu 2006) is a horror film set in Tokyo that focuses on the vengeful ghost of a murdered woman named Kayako. In a laughably hammy scene the main characters, Eason and Aubrey, are discussing how to deal with the supernatural antagonist. They have found Kayako's journal, which contains clues to her mysterious past, including her mother's role as an *itako,* or shaman. Unable to decipher part of the journal, Eason declares, "I have a friend. He's really into folklore. I think he can help us."

In conversations with friends and colleagues I have often referenced Eason's comment, which I find both amusing and fascinating. This representation of folklore, and of a "folklorist" character, is typical of popular culture treatments of these topics (see Tolbert 2016 for a discussion of similar representations in a popular video game series). Importantly, this is not necessarily a wholly inaccurate representation: many folklorists do indeed study supernatural traditions. But the explicit equation of folklore, and the people who study it, with a particular type of content is especially interesting from the perspective of folkloristics, a field that is

famously broad in its approach to human cultures. This paper focuses on popular discourses in several media that reflect similar attitudes, and in this way serves to prefigure the larger project of an upcoming volume on the topic of the "folkloresque" (Foster and Tolbert 2016). That volume explores in detail popular perceptions of folklore's substance, form, and function. Here, I hope to call attention, in general terms, to the existence of these perceptions and their implications for the discipline on the level of research and publishing. I also suggest some ways in which academic folklorists might take the insights gleaned from a consideration of these attitudes and apply them in their interactions with an interested but sometimes excluded public. I do so not because such popular expectations should dictate what happens within the discipline, but because both disciplinary and non-disciplinary interests could be served by open discussion and even collaboration.

Public folklorists have, of course, long excelled at this type of exchange in their work as "*cultural brokers . . .* [mediating] among multiple parties—cultural institutions, artists, academic disciplines, traditional communities, and audiences" (Baron 2010, 67, original emphasis). The present essay is directed squarely at academic folklorists in the United States, who would benefit from adapting some of the strategies employed in public sector work to reach audiences outside of the academy. Throughout this essay I use the term *public* largely in reference to the interface of professional and non-professional interests and actors, the actual engagement and collaboration between folklorists and community members. I use *popular* to refer to popular culture in general and to those discourses percolating through film, media, and non-specialist literary works that talk back to the discipline and its materials and that construct representations of it that may differ from how it conceives of itself. These categories are not mutually exclusive, but they are sufficiently distinct that they merit separate treatment here.

Folklore, of course, is not the only field that faces these issues. Archaeologist K. Anne Pyburn (2008) highlights a similar set of concerns facing that discipline. Pyburn laments what she sees as a lack of honesty in public archaeology, noting that

public archaeologists often avoid engagement with the public by claiming that the people whose heritage they are unearthing are not interested in archaeological study. "But," she asks, "if the public is not interested in what we are doing, then what are we doing? What exactly is the point of digging up the material remains of the past, now that we know we are not going to collect the truth that will make us free, nor will our efforts accrue much to 'the good of all mankind?'" (202).

Pyburn goes on to reject the "hype" surrounding contemporary archaeological study, which, she argues, is concocted primarily as a means to sell magazines and generate public interest in archaeological research. The ultimate example of this strategy for garnering interest, Pyburn says, is Indiana Jones, the filmic archaeologist hero whose adventures exoticize non-Westerners even as they present "archaeology" in an unrealistic and potentially damaging light. She writes, "My problem with this sort of entertainment is that it naturalizes a sort of exoticism that is inherently elitist" (2008, 204).

The situation Pyburn describes bears comparison with the dynamics between academic and popular understanding of folklore. Folklorists too must recognize that public and popular understandings of their work do not necessarily align with academic realities. And certainly, as is true of all disciplines, one of folklore's first duties should be to discourage *any* discourses that promote stereotypes, downplay or glorify colonialism and oppression, or obscure historical processes and events in favor of reproducing narratives of Western cultural superiority. But while disciplinary folklore does perhaps have much in common with public archaeology as Pyburn describes it, there is one crucial difference: we have no Indiana Jones.[1]

Let me clarify: while folklore has often been represented in popular media, we have no direct analogue to the Indiana Jones figure. We have no singular human icon who symbolizes (accurately or not) what we do. We have scattered representations, but no Indy. This has both positive and negative implications. On the positive side, there is no pervasive model of folklore study that permeates all of

popular culture. Folklorists are not portrayed as Nazi-fighters or tomb raiders. They are not generally pictured within popular culture as white male adventurers because, with few exceptions, they are generally not pictured at all. They certainly are not represented in the iconic way that Harrison Ford's whip-cracking fedora-wearing Nazi-puncher is. There is space, in other words, for creative interpretation—space that professional folklorists could productively occupy.

Perhaps the most obvious negative result of this situation is a general lack of extra-disciplinary interest in folklorists' actual research, which can make it difficult to justify that research to grant committees and other such bodies comprised of non-specialists. But a lack of interest in folklorists' *research* does not mean a lack of interest in *folklore*—and this is the point at which I diverge from Pyburn's largely negative assessment of the situation facing archaeology. Academic folklore may have no Indy, but it has lots of cool *stuff*. While popular understandings of what folklore "is" may differ widely from disciplinary ones, folklorists are fortunate to have popular audiences with preexisting interests in their topics. This means there is no real need of an Indiana Jones figure for folklore (at least, again, not a singular, iconic, Harrison Ford-level one). In fact, this is a situation that provides ample opportunity to generate hype of a positive kind—which academic folklore does need—while simultaneously challenging the kinds of oppressive, exoticizing discourses that Pyburn rightly rejects.

"Traditionalist Views"

In the remainder of this paper I consider some popular understandings of folklore that have surfaced recently, as well as their implications for academic folklorists. Although I refer throughout to the important article by Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (1998), I do not point to a crisis facing the discipline, real or rhetorical. Rather my purpose here is to call (or recall) attention to what non-academics think folklore is, as well as what they think about folklorists; and to contrast these views with the ever-expanding, boundary-defying conceptions of

folklore study within the discipline—with what Kirshenblatt-Gimblett calls "topic drift" (1998, 282). I echo Kirshenblatt-Gimblett's arguments that we must "take common usage as seriously as we do specialized understandings, even when they are at great variance" and that "common usage today preserves specialized understandings from the past" (296).

At its outset the professional study of folklore was focused on preserving the vanishing lore of the countryside (Abrahams 1993, 11–13). Concomitant with this desire to protect disappearing cultures was the romanticization of the largely rural population, viewed as living relics and bastions of antiquated wisdom (4). While disciplinary folklore has left these attitudes far behind, they can still be seen in contemporary popular cultural portrayals of folklore. This situation is thoughtfully addressed by Catherine Tosenberger (2010), who says of the popular television show *Supernatural* (Kripke 2005-2013): "The series both reproduces and subverts popular discourses about folklore, often setting traditionalist views against more nuanced, postmodern understandings of folk material, folk groups, and folklore research" (Tosenberger 1.2). These traditionalist views dominate in popular representations of folklore, which make use of folklore, as many scholars have noted, as a source of narrative material (e.g., Sullivan 2001, 279; Koven 2003, 181). Frequently folklore is depicted explicitly as a body of material, of *lore*, held by a given group of people and framed as having startling real-world ramifications despite its status as "just" folklore. In popular usage folklore frequently connotes a kind of mysticism. It involves ancient stories, folk remedies, quite often a concern with the supernatural; and all of these things are hidden within the antiquated, rustic, pre-modern beliefs of people positioned, somehow, outside the bounds of normal, respectable, modern society (though the details of this vary—the dispenser of lore may be a hyper-educated British librarian, for instance, or even just an ancient tome handed down from father to son) (Holl-Jensen and Tolbert 2016; Tolbert 2016).

As both Tosenberger and Kirshenblatt-Gimblett indicate, then, there is a considerable gap between academic "uses" of folklore and popular ones. But a crucial difference between the situation Kirshenblatt-Gimblett identifies and the one I am discussing is that "folklore's crisis" involves, primarily, a set of negative assumptions about folklore and folkloristics and the field's precarious position in light of changing technologies and the breaking-down of disciplinary boundaries. She traces the development of folklore studies and notes its alignment with cultural evolutionary theories, with positivistic conceptions of elite versus folk culture and a concern with cultural survivals. One result of this aspect of disciplinary history, she argues, is that the term "folklore" itself has gained largely negative connotations which, together with the vanishing nature of its subject, threaten the continued existence of the discipline (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998, 297–303).

Conversely, the material of folklore is often the focus of massive popular interest, expressed through and transmitted by Internet communities, fan-produced works connected to major intellectual properties, and countless other media which fall within the (admittedly problematic) rubric of popular culture. This is not to say that the problems Kirshenblatt-Gimblett notes are immaterial or nonexistent: on the contrary, the situation she identifies has, if anything, gotten worse in the seventeen years since her article was published. Despite this, popular interest in particular types of folkloric materials persists, and acknowledging and engaging with this interest may be one way to counteract some of the negative processes Kirshenblatt-Gimblett highlights.

Folklore and its Meanings

Probing the popular meanings attached to folkloric materials can reveal a great deal about the other issues with which folklorists have grappled for so long. In such diverse arenas as the world music scene, popular literary fiction, film, television and electronic media which explicitly refer to folklore, the issues that form the core of contemporary folkloristic inquiry—authenticity, invented

traditions, romanticism, and commodification, among others—are clearly at play, and are often foregrounded in ways that suggest a deeper reflexivity than has sometimes been attributed to popular culture (see Tolbert 2016). Moreover, while scholars view these concepts with suspicion, non-specialists may consider them to be wholly positive institutions that validate, for instance, their local history or ethnic heritage (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998, 296).

My own experiences entering the discipline aptly illustrate the romantic impulses and outmoded understanding of folklore that Kirshenblatt-Gimblett and Tosenberger identify. As an undergraduate I studied abroad in Ireland, where I took courses on such topics as the Mythological, Ulster, and Finn Cycles of Irish myth and legend and the Welsh Mabinogion. In Ireland I started down the long road that would eventually lead me to academic folklore—and it was a path littered with mistakes and misconceptions. Consider the following passage from my undergraduate thesis. The project was purportedly a creative one, rather than an academic work (though it struggled toward the latter), and it reads, like most popular discourses on folklore, much like the work of a nineteenth-century antiquarian:

> There was a time when the darkness really did conceal monsters and demons and ghosts. Outside the circle of firelight was a world populated by unknown creatures that made crops fail and ships sink and lightning arc across the sky. The unknown could be a source of terror, but it was also a source of wonder. Not only monsters lurked in the dark places. Fairies flickered through the trees, gods thundered across the sky in magnificent chariots or disguised themselves as animals or even mortal men, and the Fair Folk sang their quiet songs and promised men eternal youth.
>
> These stories were told by a people who lived with the world in a way that is difficult to imagine today. Today a wide chasm of

> disbelief and disillusionment separates society from the natural world. There's a lot of good in technology and social progress, but the more we know, the less we can imagine. Clearly a static society can't long survive, but a society that advances at the cost of wonder is doing itself a great wrong. (Tolbert 2005, 5)

This passage explicitly contrasts the sterile present with the culturally rich past, equating "disbelief and disillusionment" with "progress" and "wonder" with the "natural world" and a simpler, now vanished, folk. At the time, of course, I had no idea of the world of theoretical baggage I was conjuring up; I was merely interested in talking about the *content* of a particular body of folklore (a word that was not yet even fully a part of my vocabulary) and why it mattered to me. But this example is fairly typical of extra-disciplinary uses of folklore. As Mikel Koven notes, "often when popular culture forms *do* folklore, they use all of it, every bit they can get their hands on, regardless of original context, so that the results are often an undifferentiated quagmire that does little to explore the people being represented" (Koven 2008, 33, original emphasis). Such an argument rightly reflects disciplinary concerns with identity, context, representation, and other theoretical issues. But building on Koven's insights, I suggest that these popular texts, however problematic from a scholarly perspective, have important meanings for both the creators of popular culture and their audiences (see Holl-Jensen and Tolbert 2016).

Similar examples are not difficult to find. Barnes and Noble's website, which features a "Mythology & Folklore" section located within the larger Social Sciences category ("Mythology & Folklore, Social Sciences" 2013), clearly illustrates the type of content popular audiences often expect when these terms are invoked. When I visited this section of the website while writing this essay, the first five texts displayed were telling: *Greek Legends and Stories* by M.V. Seton-Williams (2000); *Aesop's Illustrated Fables* (2013); Edith Hamilton's *Mythology* (1942); *Bulfinch's Mythology* (2013); and *The Story of King Arthur and his Knights* by Howard Pyle

(2012). Also included on the front page were books by Joseph Campbell, collections of folk narratives from various parts of the world, and ancient Greek epics.[2] These are not cutting-edge theoretical works examining, for instance, the performativity of gender in contemporary American roadside diners; they are, for the most part, collections of narratives, and most fall squarely within the old generic confines of legend and myth.

In similar vein, Amazon.com's page for Michael Dylan Foster's study of Japanese *yokai* (2009) reveals some of the interests and expectations that may distinguish specialist and non-specialist readerships. This book, which earned the American Folklore Society's Chicago Folklore Prize, was panned by some Amazon.com reviewers as boring, overly academic (!), and lacking sufficient *yokai* content. One reviewer wrote:

> Ohhhh my godddd!!! The typical kind of stuff to come out from Academic press. Boring and somniferous stuff to the extreme. Why that? Because nothing creative inside it, nothing beautiful, no Yokai stories by people, no magic, nothing to marvel about or to be happy with. In short: an exclusively cold, analytical and "scholarly" treatment of that subject. "Yokai for Robots" would have been a more suitable title for that one. Serious studies? Well, indeed, some people like to call that kind of stuff in such a way... But (according to my taste), a very dull, dry, boring and disappointing book. (Bourgault 2013)

In this comment we see, quite overtly, a concern with *stuff*, and also with feelings: stories, magic, creativity, and beauty, all things felt to be lacking from scholarly discourses in general. Scholarly analysis is explicitly problematized on the basis of its "cold, analytical and 'scholarly' treatment" of its subject matter; it is rejected, in other words, precisely because it is scholarly. Texts by folklorists dealing with other topics of less interest to popular audiences—such as the aforementioned gender

roles in American diners—would likely not be reviewed in these terms, because they do not appear on the popular radar at all. But this work, dealing with a topic of considerable interest to popular audiences (i.e., Japanese monsters), comes under the scrutiny of readers who find it does not live up to their expectations of how this material should be addressed.[3]

As a final example of popular perceptions of folklore, consider the recent television series, simply titled *The Folklorist* (Horrigan 2012), which plainly reflects the traditionalist views Tosenberger identifies:

To view click the video above or follow the link to http://youtu.be/rKTVhSgr-X4.

It is easy to imagine disciplinary folklorists rolling their eyes at this claim to folkloristic authority with its costumed storyteller and one-dimensional view of folklore. But regardless of scholarly reservations, the show has won several awards, including a local Emmy in 2012 for its original promotional video, another in 2013 for its host, John Horrigan, and a third in 2014 in the category of "Outstanding Historical Program" ("History" 2015). Something here resonates, then, and aside

from the clear difference in terminology, there is little about the show that should cause alarm among "actual" folklorists. But if this use of the term "folklorist" rankles professionals who call themselves by that name, there is nothing preventing them from answering this portrayal with one of their own, equally accessible to non-scholars but reflecting contemporary theories and trends in the discipline. And professional folklorists, with their tendencies toward populism (Hufford 1998, 302), reflexivity, and ethnographic collaboration, can at least appreciate the sentiment with which Horrigan ends the first episode: "We are the folklorists. And this is the new history" (Horrigan 2012).

The point I hope to make with these examples is that non-academics, who also, of course, lay entirely reasonable claim to the content of what is generally called folklore, often want very different things from their folklore than scholars are prepared to give. Scholars are accustomed to theorizing and to challenging accepted discourses and received knowledge. Non-academics, of course, think critically as well, but it seems that, in many cases, they do not expect complex cultural theory when they pick up a book purportedly about Japanese monsters (or Celtic folklore, or contemporary legends, or any other topic). They want examples. They want to learn *about* a topic—which, of course, is necessary before any further analysis or criticism can occur.

Lest I sound critical of popular usages, which is the opposite of my intent, I must point out again that I was once of like mind. I entered the field with a great deal more interest in monsters *qua* monsters than in performance theory, ethnopoetics, or disciplinary history. I was far more influenced by popular discourses on folklore—Tosenberger's traditionalist views—than by academic theories or models of expressive culture (of which, in fact, I knew nothing before I officially enrolled in a graduate program in folklore). My experience may be unique, but I suspect that it is not. Popular representations of folklore and folklorists like those cited above are ubiquitous and easily accessible (Holl-Jensen and Tolbert 2016); they are also entertaining. But on entering the field, new folklorists must

have their interests realigned with disciplinary concerns. Only then can they truly begin to understand the processes underlying the thing(s) confusingly called folklore. The focus shifts to culture as a construction, at which moment those processes start to become apparent. Popular perceptions make way for disciplinary ones. New folklorists are converted, and on their bookshelves (at least, on mine), monster encyclopedias and tale collections must make room for theory-driven studies that offer more criticism and fewer creatures (though to be sure, the monsters do not disappear). In the process they may forget how things look from outside the discipline, a perspective that contrasts starkly with their new emic one.

Bridging the Gap

We have, then, a dilemma of sorts—though by no means a crisis. Folklore as popularly understood is often a very different beast from that known to disciplinary folklorists. How then should scholars deal with the many popular perceptions of folklore that seldom, if ever, connect in explicit ways with our actual ongoing concerns with performativity, identity, reflexivity, and the rest?

As Dorothy Noyes has so convincingly argued, "We need to learn to live with the ambivalence of the middle position" (2008, 39)—that is, with our location between the "provincial" and the globalizing. The "humble theory" Noyes proposes recognizes our location between the academic makers of "grand theory" and the producers of the forms of expressive culture that inspire our interest in the first place. I would extend Noyes' argument to include not only the "practitioners" of folklore—the people who generate the traditional expressive forms that professional folklorists study—but the creators and audiences of popular culture forms as well, particularly when these comment directly on the material of folklore. The popular views on folklore thus expressed are not threats to the field and should not be viewed with suspicion by scholars (though they may, of course, reflect problematic ideologies and stereotypes). On the contrary, they should be considered together as constituting a potential area for increased dialogue between academics

and non-academics. But this is easier said than done. Discussing the public/academic folklore divide, Abrahams observed,

> Those making scholarly arguments tailor their presentations with an assumption of audience knowledge of how these materials were studied in the past and what modes of explanation have been imposed upon them. The public presenter can presume much less about audience knowledge or appropriate modes of presentation. They must develop strategies of presentation by which professional insights are conveyed without recourse to the shorthand communication made possible through the development of professional jargon. ([1992] 2007, 21)

The same problem of differential knowledge separates academic folklorists from popular audiences interested in the subjects of folkloristic inquiry. Academic folklorists must likewise consider the differing understandings of and engagement with folkloric texts by their various audiences.[4]

The types of views made explicit in *The Folklorist*, in the comments of the Amazon reviewer searching for beauty and mysticism in a scholarly work, and indeed in my own younger self's sloppy look at putatively "Celtic" legend all embody a certain romantic impulse. This is not the same romanticism that valorizes the rustic country folk, but it is a kind of romanticism nonetheless, one which seeks out particular kinds of materials and experiences that are visibly marked as different from secularized, demystified, modern life. But romanticism may not be such a bad thing, particularly if it encourages learning. As D.K. Wilgus observed more than forty years ago, folklorists presumably enter the field because of a deep interest in the subject, however defined (1973, 245). The materials so eagerly sought by popular television viewers, fans of science fiction and horror, and others interested in a particular model of folklore can and should be (and increasingly are) considered by

contemporary folklorists. It certainly benefits us, as Dundes has suggested, to study such materials with the tools of our discipline (1985, 16). But we can go further. As Noyes rightly argues, "The field has no purpose without engagement in the world, trying to understand and amend the social processes that created the F-word and other, far worse stigmas" (2008, 39). Using popular interests as a starting point, we can engage with the problematic aspects of romanticism by highlighting the historical processes that gave rise to them, encouraging a kind of "critical romanticism"—adapting Ray Cashman's concept of "critical nostalgia" (2006)—to invite non-specialists to consider, for instance, why this or that example of folklore is held up as representative of a particular culture and how that culture has come to be contrasted with the reader's own. Texts geared toward popular audiences can make use of the same kinds of cultural theory that scholars employ in academic works. The crucial thing is to key such writing to a non-specialist readership, eschewing alienating jargon while still honoring our disciplinary debts and our own interests as scholars (see Abrahams [1992] 2007, 21-22). On the other side of the equation, as scholars interested in the related processes of romanticism and the commodification of culture, working specifically with popular materials that reflect these processes may shed light on their complex interrelatedness and persistence in popular culture.[5]

Amazon reviewers are not tenure committees (or at least, not necessarily), and in practical terms folklorists simply have to grin and bear the knowledge that their goals as scholars do not always coincide with the interests of non-specialists. But if non-specialists are interested in folklore, understood somewhat parochially as "tales," legends, and the rest, and disciplinary folklorists are bothered by this, it is much better to light a candle than to curse the proverbial darkness. We are in a position, by virtue of our credentials and the pervasiveness of digital technologies, to address popular audiences directly, to work with filmmakers and television producers and other creators of popular culture to produce works which draw on folklore as material and simultaneously reflect disciplinary understandings of the

social significances of that material. Such work can answer both to our disciplinary needs—paying due respect to social theory and current research trends—and to popular interests.

Alternative formats for presenting our materials to non-academics have been little explored by academic folklorists, but these media—television documentaries, blogs, social networking platforms like Facebook—provide ample opportunity for direct engagement with a public eager to learn about our *stuff.* The model of our public sector colleagues, whose work necessarily involves the presentation of folkloric material to non-specialists with vested interests in that material, is invaluable here. In terms of publishing, books of the coffee table variety may be repellant to some, but I see nothing wrong with generating work that presents key ideas in an easily-digestible format. All scholars should be aware of perceived needs and popular interests, but folklorists in particular, who study people, work with people, record people, and write about people, should not ignore the things those people tell us about our own work—particularly when they do so as unambiguously as in the examples presented here.

What I ultimately suggest is not a return to a text-centric model of folklore study like that called for by Jones (1979); instead, I again suggest that the insights of public folklorists be brought to bear on academic publishing and disciplinary engagement with non-academics. As Abrahams reminds us, "Dorson's blast at fakelorists as those who would pervert the living traditions of others for commercial purposes should include those among us who publish that we may not perish without taking our informants' concerns into consideration in this publication" ([1992] 2007, 26). Abrahams is speaking here of folk artists and musicians, and folklorists' responsibility to the performers whose work they showcase; but his point holds with regard to other areas of folkloristic inquiry and to popular audiences which may not consist of our own informants but whose members still lay rightful claim to the materials of culture.

Another helpful concept here is David Hufford's model of applied folklore (which he is careful to distinguish from public folklore) as that which addresses practical real-world problems (1998, 295). Rather than being a source of scholarly discomfort, Hufford argues that differences in official knowledge and alternative or folk beliefs are "a highly suggestive and fruitful place to begin to understand the interaction of official and folk traditions" (301). We can extend Hufford's argument—he is speaking of official versus folk medical knowledge—to official and "folk" understandings of folklore itself. The intersection of these understandings provides another avenue for applied folklore work.

An example of this type of work by academic folklorists was the public lecture entitled "Slender Man is Coming!" at Memorial University of Newfoundland's Grenfell Campus, presented on March 23rd, 2015 (Bodner et al. 2015). At the talk, four folklorists, including the author, presented their ongoing research on the Slender Man Internet meme and the larger Creepypasta genre of Internet folklore to an audience consisting of students and faculty as well as members of the local community. The Slender Man Mythos gained notoriety following the attempted murder of a twelve-year-old girl in Wisconsin in 2014 by two other young girls, who claimed they attacked their friend to please the Internet monster (Richmond 2014). The subsequent interest in the Internet legend provides folklorists with a unique opportunity to address pressing concerns about folklore and its real-world implications, which we attempted to do at the talk. John Bodner, the MUN folklorist who organized the event, later spoke with me about the need for academic folklorists to learn to respond to popular expectations and to adopt methods from public-sector work. For example, in addition to organizing the Slender Man event, Bodner has also worked with the local high school to educate students about what folklorists do.[6] Public outreach of this sort, presenting current events through the lens of academic folklore and illustrating in general terms the kinds of work folklorists actually do, is one way to bridge the divide between "official" and vernacular understandings of folklore and its meanings.

Taking the criticisms of popular readers into account, taking seriously the interests reflected in popular media about folklore, and turning some of our mental (and departmental) resources toward the kinds of material non-scholars are looking for would be mutually beneficial to a public eager for knowledge and to a discipline whose place in the university remains, as ever, uncertain.

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Notes

[1] I don't mean to suggest that all non-archaeologists assume that Indiana Jones is an accurate portrayal of real archaeologists. The point is that Indy is a dominant representation of archaeology *in popular culture*, and remains a fan favorite even some three decades after his heyday. Further, the Internet buzz as of this writing is that Disney is considering a remake (Fleming 2015).

[2] Notably, Kirshenblatt-Gimblett identified the same kinds of works in physical folklore sections seventeen years ago (1998, 281).

[3] Thanks to Michael Dylan Foster for allowing me to make use of his Amazon.com anecdote here, and for suggesting the possible reason why his book in particular received this type of criticism.

[4] I am aware that distinguishing academic from public/applied folklore in this way perpetuates a dichotomy that many folklorists have problematized. It's worth the risk if it encourages those folklorists ensconced in universities to adopt the techniques of public engagement that are required by public work. Interestingly, similar perceptions to those underlying this dichotomy impact the academic-popular divide I have addressed here. On this point, it's worth considering Archie Green's arguments for rejecting the term "applied folklore" in favor of "public folklore": "Within our discipline, 'applied folklore' connotes two constant levels of discourse, the first superior to the second: Pure academicians conduct research; polluting applicators apply their seers' findings. Teachers who gather arcane legends do serious work; public colleagues who assist citizens stranded in society's shallows do trivial work. Such distinctions are not only absurd, but they diminish all" (2007, 57). Perhaps as a result of this unfortunate dichotomy, popular representations do tend to position folklorists as collectors of "arcane legends."

[5] I am again indebted to Michael Dylan Foster for pointing out the link between romanticism and nostalgia, and for suggesting to me how romanticism itself may serve as a starting point to encourage popular audiences to engage critically with folklore texts and simultaneously provide important models for scholarly study.

[6] Originally the Slender Man presenters were also scheduled to speak at the local high school, but I and the other two American folklorists attending the talk, Trevor J. Blank and Andrea Kitta, were delayed overnight in Halifax due to weather, so John presented at the high school on his own.

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