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October Part 5

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Wesley Van de Water

Oct 26, 2014



Ever since I started to study folklore, I've always been interested (and somewhat confused) by the complex ways that we view folklore. A printed collection of fairy tales is folklore as far as the material itself goes, but also not because it stems from one identifiable point of origin. For example, the Grimm Fairy Tales are folklore because they are a collection of German fairy tales, but also somewhat problematic because they were the tales as recorded and produced by the Grimm brothers.

With this project, I see a similar "issue" in regards to utilizing top-down sources. If we decide that sources like George Takei or Huffington Post are good sources for us to find this elusive trend of the year, are we placing more emphasis on the "stuff" or the source? If we choose to rely on some of these more prominent top-down entities, aren't we running the risk of only finding popular trends (folklore or otherwise) that they themselves find within their own networks?

I hope I'm making sense with this. I'm simply mulling over the inherent issue of depending on specific individuals and/or organizations as sources simply because the material has already been filtered at least once through their own criteria before they move it along.

Just something I've been thinking about.

← Reply



Prof. McNeill

Oct 27, 2014



Good questions. I feel like this week's readings (and last week's) that address the idea of a "cycle" rather than a "story" or "joke" (or other genre) help answer this. We are dealing more with the process of transmission when we're looking at online stuff. If we were to look at a single meme that George Takei posts, that might be too "stuff" oriented, as you put it. But if we look at the chain of evolution of that meme, identifying it as a general "type" (like Grumpy Cat or Afraid to Ask Andy) with lots of specific manifestations, we're tapping in to the cycle more than the item. You're right that top-down sources can only go so far. We can use them to highlight some elements of a cycle, but the whole cycle will need to be identifiable outside of that source, otherwise, we might be dealing with fakelore.

← Reply