

Extract from Sir Terry Pratchett in conversation with Dr. Jacqueline Simpson

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Terry Pratchett: We've been, not scathing I think about folklore, so I would like to ask you, what are the uses of folklore?

Jacqueline Simpson: To reconnect us with our past. To provide material for a lot of fun. To stimulate the imagination.

TP: Could I add one?

JS: Yes.

TP: To remind the kids that things were otherwise.

JS: Very true.

TP: That the human race did not pop out of the ground with iPods™. That things were different. This is why I think a study of history is vital because as I always say, if you don't know where you've come from, you don't know where you are, and if you don't know where you are, you have no idea where you are going.

JS: I think that some themes that are found in folktales, perhaps more in the big fairy tales rather than the local stories, but still, some of these themes help us to understand ourselves, to understand our fears, to give courage and hope, don't you think?

TP: Yes, yes, but also to make life more fun, but not fun, satisfying.

JS: Yes, yes.

TP: I think actually one of the nice things about folklore is that is in fact useless. It belongs to us, it doesn't cost anything, it changes, it moves, it disappears.

JS: And I may say that it is a delight to be a folklorist and to work on folklore because you never need worry whether the thing is true and accurate or not. As soon as you can prove that somebody has said it and somebody else has listened and repeated it, it doesn't matter a tinker's cuss whether it ever happened or not. Did King Alfred burn the cakes? Who the hell cares, the story's what matters.