



DIGITAL FOLKLORE

The Folklore Society's Annual Conference 2024, in collaboration with
The Department of Digital Humanities, King's College London

28-30 June 2024

at King's College London, Strand Building, Strand, London WC2R 2LS, and online

PROGRAMME & ABSTRACTS



Digital Folklore, 28-30 June 2024

at King's College London, Strand Building, Strand, London WC2R 2LS, and online

Programme

Friday's proceedings take place in the Nash Lecture Theatre, Room K2.31

Saturday and Sunday parallel Sessions:

'A' Sessions in Nash Lecture Theatre (K2.31); 'B' Sessions in Room K2.40

Friday 28 June

12:30 Registration opens at Kings College London, Strand Building Strand, London WC2R 2LS:
Collect passes from Reception

13:30 Online meeting opens: link will be emailed

13:55 **Welcome:** Nash Lecture Theatre (Rm K2.31): a welcome to 'Digital Folklore,' by
Professor Stuart Dunn, Kings College London, Dept of Digital Humanities

14:00-15:30 **Session 1: Contextualising the Digital in Folklore** Chair: David Hopkin

Hannes Mandel: Digital Folklore *avant la lettre*: William John Thoms's mid-nineteenth-century social media network. [in person]

Kathleen Ragan: From Folktales to Facebook: A systems approach to the study of narrative across evolutionary time. [in person]

Stella Wisdom: Digital Disruption of Traditional Publishing and Broadcasting Channels: The rise, popularity and preservation of folklore zines, podcasts, livestreams and sound walks in the twenty-first century. [in person]

15:30-16:00 Break: refreshments in Room K2.40, where there will also be a display of books

16:00-17:00 **Session 2: Methodology** Chair: Matthew Cheeseman

Chris Douce & Tamara Lopez: The Folklore of Software Engineering: A methodology for study. [in person]

Gabriele de Seta: An Algorithmic Folklore: Vernacular creativity in times of everyday automation. [in person]

17:00-17:30 **Video Essay: Siobhan O'Reilly:** (Dis)Comfort and Liminal Spaces. [online]

17:30-19:00 Drinks Reception and presentation of the FLS Cootes Lake Medal for folklore research to Steve Roud, at KCL Bush House Exchange, 30 Aldwych, London WC2B 4BG.

Saturday 29 June

09:00 Registration opens at King's College London, Strand Building, Strand, London WC2R 2LS: collect passes from Reception. Online meeting opens: link will be emailed

09:30-11:00 Parallel Sessions: 'A' Sessions = Nash K2.31; 'B' Sessions = K2.40

Session 3A: Photography

Chair: Matthew Cheeseman

David Clarke & Andrew Robinson: In The Eye of the Beholder: Digital folklore and the Calvine UFO photograph. [online]

Dipti Rani Datta: Folk Photography in the Age of Social Media in Bangladesh: An introduction to the changing landscape. [online]

Daria Radchenko: Heaven as News Screen: Semiotic ideologies of natural phenomena on social media. [online]

Session 3B: From Analogue to Digital

Chair: Jessica Hemming

Meghna Choudhury: From Parchment to Pixels: Digital transformation of Indian oral narratives and reinterpretation of *The Panchatantra* in the digital landscape. [online]

Maryam Magaji: Remediation in Hausa Folktales on YouTube. [online]

Angelika Rüdiger: Monitoring the Transformations of Gwyn ap Nudd online. [in person]

11:00-11:30 Break: Refreshments will be served in the Somerset Room

11:30-13:00 Parallel Sessions: 'A' Sessions = Nash K2.31; 'B' Sessions = K2.40

Session 4A: The Weird and the Horrific

Chair: Helen Frisby

Dawn Brissenden: British Cryptids: The continuation of belief online. [in person]

Erika Kvistad: Imaginary Prisons: Maze horror and Minotaur horror in digital folklore. [online]

Afrodite-Lidia Nounanaki: AI-generated 'Scary Stories' and Creepypastas on TikTok: A new version of digital 'narratives'. [online]

Session 4B: Rituals and Celebrations

Chair: Paul Cowdell

Yinka Olusoga & Catherine Bannister: Playing in the Digital Posthuman: Culture, custom, and the 'entangled' child through a folklore lens. [in person]

Catherine Bannister, Fiona Scott, Shabana Roscoe & Yao Wang: 'It was definitely a Pokémon-themed Christmas that we had': How do children and families sacralise and desacralise elements of digital play during celebratory times? [in person]

Aušra Žičkienė: Round-Number Birthday Celebrations for Seniors In Lithuania: An audiovisual narrative online and contemporary musical folklore. [online]

13:00-14:00 Break: coffee/tea will be provided but not lunch: there are many places to eat nearby

Saturday 29 June (cont.)

14:00-15:30 Parallel Sessions: 'A' Sessions = Nash K2.31; 'B' Sessions = K2.40

Session 5A: Public Authority & Public Health

Chair: Nicolas Le Bigre

Simon Gall: The Institutional Harnessing of Vernacular Authority in Traumatic Times: The use of Scots language in NHS Grampian's online public health communications during the COVID-19 pandemic. [online]

Andrea Kitta: God Gave me an Immune System: Religious belief, anti-masking, and anti-vaccination sentiments online in the United States during COVID. [in person]

Hanna-Kaisa Lassila: Public Shaming and Vernacular Disciplining on Social Media as Entertainment. [online]

Session 5B: Memes

Chair: Catherine Bannister

Paul Cowdell: Memes: When the digital world put the human back into the non-material. [in person]

Tina Paphitis: Cheeky! The cultural and political history of some digital folklore. [in person]

Oleksandr Pankiev: (De)Constructing Hero Motifs in the Digital Folklore of the Russo-Ukrainian War. [in person]

15:30-16:00 Break: refreshments will be served in the Somerset Room

16:00-17:30 Parallel Sessions: 'A' Sessions = Nash K2.31; 'B' Sessions = K2.40

Session 6A: Conspiracy Theories

Chair: Sophia Kingshill

Diana Coles: Warming Pans and Moonbumps: Mythologising the royal family. [in person]

Tim Tangherlini: Parler Games: Conspiracy theory, conspiracy and insurrection. [online]

Marc Tutters: Folk Narratives of Distrust: On the socio-technical dynamics of conspiricization. [online]

Session 6B: Art and Aesthetics

Chair: Caroline Oates

Gunnella Þorgeirsdóttir: To Meme or not to Meme: How is the Question. [in person]

India Lawton: Little Red Riding Hood Online: Visual arts exploring the woods metaphor and the suppression of the female voice in the digital world. [in person]

Ruby Sage McGowan: Goblin Lore to Goblincore: How old stories inspired a new generation's online identity. [in person]

17:30 free to roam London and forage for food and fun

Sunday 30 June

09:00 Registration and online meeting open

09:30-11:00: Parallel Sessions: 'A' Sessions = Nash K2.31; 'B' Sessions = K2.40

Session 7A: Humour

Chair Stuart Dunn

Ian Brodie: Has TikTok Saved Jokes? The presence of joke-telling in short-form online video. [in person]

Drake Hansen: 'Your Flop Era Is Showing': Notes on the aesthetic creations of a camp TikTok community [in person]

Lauren (LG) Fadiman: 'To the FBI agent watching me through my phone': Social media, the surveillance imaginary, and the erotics of observation in a Twitter joke cycle. [in person]

Session 7B: Transforming Bodies & Sacrality

Chair: Paul Cowdell

Sophia Kingshill: Digital Dualism: The online Doppelgänger and its analogues. [in person]

Helen Frisby: Digital Deathways in Twenty-first Century Britain. [in person]

Sonia Prodan: Sacred (Online) Space: The journey of faith from offline to virtual veneration. [online]

11:00-11:30 Break: Refreshments will be served in the Somerset Room

11:30-13:00 (Nash, K2.31) **Session 8: Narrative Communities** Chair: Tina Paphitis

Nicolas Le Bigre: Emergent Folk Narrative Forms in Online Commentating. [in person]

Maria Isabel Lemos: Posting 'nos tradison:': Mapping diasporic digital networks and cultural flows. [online]

Francesca Padgett: Fandom Folklore: Exploring identity formation and community in fanfiction culture. [online]

13:00-13:05: Conference Closing words from Prof. David Hopkin, President of The Folklore Society

ABSTRACTS

(in order of appearance)

Friday 28 June

14:00-15:30 Session 1: Contextualising the Digital in Folklore

Hannes Mandel (Department of Germanic Studies, University of Texas at Austin)

Digital Folklore *avant la lettre*: William John Thoms's mid-nineteenth-century social media network.

My paper investigates the material basis of 'folklore' at the time of its conception by the English antiquarian William John Thoms. Contrary to most existing accounts, the concept was not an instant success: rather, it was only by means of a unique and strikingly modern journal project that Thoms eventually succeeded in actuating the circulation of both folklore and its designation. Precisely where one would have expected antiquated, backward-looking forms of knowledge perhaps, one discovers in the largely forgotten amateur Thoms a technology-savvy media expert, whose journal—enabled by the contemporary innovations of the railway and the Uniform Penny Post—is strongly reminiscent of modern-day internet phenomena (such as search engines, online communities, crowdsourcing, or user-generated content), yet predates all of these by about 150 years.

Biographical Note

Dr Hannes Mandel is an Assistant Professor of Instruction in the Department of Germanic Studies at the University of Texas at Austin. His research interests range between literary, cultural, and media studies, with a focus on the popular, anthropological, and epistemological dimensions of media. He holds an MA in European Media Studies from the University of Potsdam in Germany, and a PhD in Germanic Literature from Princeton University.

Kathleen Ragan (Independent Scholar)

From Folktales to Facebook: A systems approach to the study of narrative across evolutionary time.

Interest in understanding digital communication and the emerging computer-mediated world compels a deeper, broader understanding of communication across all eras of human thought. The systems approach proposed here expands the traditional idea of tale-as-process to include all parts of the Storytelling System in a comprehensive, interactive, information-inheritance system. This approach enables one to elicit data from digital collections of oral folk narratives, thus adding on millennia of perspective and enabling comparisons across the whole arc of human thought from the oral, to the literate, to the digital era. One can examine information storage, structure, transmission, and concepts across all three eras of human thought. In doing so, one can perceive the re-invention of aspects of the oral in the digital and identify how the digital is departing from previous thought. With computer-mediated thought, we are beginning to engage in thought in a very distinctive way. There is no other discipline looking at computer-mediated thought with anything like a perspective spanning the oral,

literate, and computer-mediated eras, a perspective that folk narrative researchers can offer through the combination of big data, systems thinking, and folk narratives.

Biographical Note

Dr Kathleen Ragan holds a PhD from Macquarie University, Sydney, Australia (Thesis: *Folktales in an Evolutionary Context*). Currently, she is an Independent Scholar. Her research crosses multiple interdisciplinary boundaries: Narrative/folklore/folktale and fairy tale studies, oral/literary/electronic communication mediums, cognitive studies, quantitative analysis, systems analysis, and Women's Studies.

Books published: *Fearless Girls, Wise Women and Beloved Sisters, Heroines in Folktales from Around the World; Outfoxing Fear, Folktales from Around the World; Why We Tell Stories: A Human Survival Tool from Folktales to Facebook*. Two academic publications representative of my work are: 'What Happened to the Heroine in Folktales: An Analysis by Gender of a Multi-Cultural Sample of Published Folktales Collected from Storytellers' (*Marvels and Tales*. Vol 23.2, 2009, pp 227-247); and 'Asymmetry in Male and Female Storyteller Priorities: An analysis by gender sample of published folk narratives collected from storytellers worldwide' (*Politics and Culture*, 2010, pp.1-22).

Stella Wisdom (British Library)

Digital Disruption of Traditional Publishing and Broadcasting Channels: The rise, popularity and preservation of folklore zines, podcasts, livestreams and sound walks in the twenty first century.

In the twenty first century technological developments have produced digital devices, tools and platforms, which have disrupted traditional publishing and broadcasting models; empowering independent writers, musicians and artists to build online audiences, to disseminate and monetize their work. This paper argues that ubiquitous and accessible digital technologies have been used to revive interest in British folklore, leading to a surge in innovative activities including the production of podcasts, zines, livestreams and sound walks.

The speaker will examine the impact crowdfunding platforms such as Kickstarter and Patreon have had enabling creatives to generate funds for their projects. How makers including practitioners of traditional crafts and folklore zinesters use social media to showcase their talents on Instagram and sell their wares via Etsy. Plus this paper will reflect on the rise of streaming services and digital opportunities for folk musicians and film makers, while they may not provide lucrative royalties, recommendation algorithms have transformed discoverability and audience reach.

However, despite new technologies providing many opportunities, there are risks and challenges including digital preservation. How much of this current wave of born digital creativity will be archived and available for future folklorists?

Biographical Note

Stella Wisdom is Digital Curator for Contemporary British Collections at the British Library, their research interests explore innovative and creative re-use of digitised archives, and the curation of born digital collections including emerging formats. In 2023 Stella co-curated the British Library's Digital Storytelling exhibition, which showcased electronic literature and interactive narratives.

Friday 28 June:

16:00-17:00 Session 2: Methodology

Chris Douce and Tamara Lopez (School of Computing and Communications, Open University)

The Folklore of Software Engineering: A methodology for study.

Stories and storytelling is an important and yet under researched dimension of software engineering practice. It can be considered from a number of different perspectives: the use of storytelling to help gather software requirements (as embodied within the notion of a ‘user story’), the way in which stories are shared between groups of engineers, and how folk tales and stories, which are often enacted in online platforms and blogs, can help to maintain, and promote a shared engineering culture. Questions that relate to these themes are: what folk tales have shaped, guided, or inspired practicing software engineers, and which tales are dominant? How do tales cross the boundaries of on- and off-line spaces? During this presentation, qualitative exploratory research is outlined. Software engineers are asked to share tales and stories that have a significant personal and professional resonance. Drawing on the work of Propp and the practices of ethnography, life writing and biography, a creative reflexive approach is applied to understand the role of folk tales in software engineering and the development of a collective professional identity. The presentation concludes by highlighting the resonance that exists between the fantastical elements within popular folk tales and the notion of software being intangible digital ‘magic’ that helps to solve practical real-world problems.

Biographical Note

Dr Chris Douce and **Dr Tamara Lopez** are lecturers in the School of Computing and Communications. Chris has previously performed research into accessibility of digital learning environments and the maintenance of software. He is a former software engineer and a current literature student. Tamara has carried out research into software engineering communities and has an interest in developer practices and developer identity.

Gabriele de Seta, Gabriele (University of Bergen)

An Algorithmic Folklore: Vernacular creativity in times of everyday automation

Throughout decades of technological change in internet protocols and digital platforms, the production and circulation of online content genres like e-mail chains, viral videos, exploitable images and cospasta has been consistently theorized as a continuation and expansion of vernacular creativity—a digital folklore. Recent advancements in machine learning applications have brought new forms of automation to the forefront of online interactions, exposing users of social media platforms and apps to different and unfamiliar kinds of algorithmic logics, which range from the curatorial biases of recommender systems and content analytics to the expansive possibilities offered by large language models and synthetic media. All these forms of automation are not only shaping how content circulates, but also how it is produced, and this is already evident in new genres of vernacular creativity that emerge in response to algorithmic tools and their logics. In this presentation, I formalize a definition of algorithmic folklore - the outcome of vernacular creative practices grounded in new forms of collaboration between human users and automated systems - and sketch a typology of the sort of content that is likely to dominate digital ecosystems to come.

Biographical Note: Gabriele de Seta is, technically, a sociologist. He holds a PhD from the Hong Kong Polytechnic University and was a Postdoctoral Fellow at the Institute of Ethnology, Academia Sinica in Taipei. Gabriele is currently a Postdoctoral Researcher at the University of Bergen, where he is part of the ERC-funded project 'Machine Vision in Everyday Life'. His research work, grounded on ethnographic engagement across multiple sites, focuses on digital media practices, sociotechnical entanglements and vernacular creativity in the Chinese-speaking world. He is also interested in experimental music, internet art, and collaborative intersections between anthropology and art practice.

17:00-17:30 Siobhan Scarlett O'Reilly (University of Brighton)

(Dis) Comfort and Liminal Spaces (Video Essay).

This research will focus on the rise in popularity of what is known as 'liminal spaces' in internet culture and the impact this content has on the communities that engage with it. Turner (1974) describes liminality as a transitional space between two other locations or states of being. Liminal space is frequently used in horror films such as *The Shining* as a motif or ghost-like character. However, this motif has developed into an aesthetic genre, with online communities collaborating to make creepypastas and online content to encourage a sense of nostalgic (dis)comfort for the viewer. The internet aesthetic known as a 'Liminal Space' is usually a low-quality analogue photograph of a location. Typically, these are abandoned and void of people. Within communities engaging with these images, people report a slightly unsettling feeling, haunted by the past but comfortingly familiar (Pitre, 2022). People engaging with the content often report being part of minority groups, such as neurodivergent and disabled communities.

Fan Studies scholars such as Jenkins (2006) have focused on understanding fan behaviours in groups with a set purpose and an individual text, such as *Star-Trek*. This video essay will push further by focusing on platforms like TikTok and Tumblr and content that attract younger users who consume online content daily, often without specific intentions. Although they engage in fannish behaviour towards Liminal Space aesthetic, they do not necessarily consider themselves part of a fandom. There has been an increase in the number of young people looking for comfort; be that an eery comfort and escaping online from an uncertain world in tandem with the rapid growth of the internet and Web 2.0. Analogue imaginaries of Liminal Space aesthetics are a popular area they are escaping to.

'The Backrooms' will be used as a case study to explore the popularity and reach 'liminal



spaces' have. It will also be used to analyse the aesthetic's connection to the history of analogue horror as a genre. 'The Backrooms' was originally a photo posted on 4Chan's /x/ board in May 2019. It has since become the most well-known liminal space where online users have created storylines, games, films, and rules. A24 is currently producing a feature-length film using The Backrooms as the film's focus (Grobar, 2023).

References

Grobar, M. (2023,). Deadline. 'The Backrooms' Horror Film Based On Viral Shorts By 17-Year-Old Kane Parsons In Works At A24, Atomic Monster, Chernin & 21 Laps. <https://deadline.com/2023/02/the-backrooms-a24-developing-feature-based-on-viral-horror-shorts-1235249413/>

Jenkins, H. (2006). *Convergence culture: Where old and new media collide*. New York University Press.

Pitre, J. (2022). *The Eerie Comfort of Liminal Spaces*.

<https://www.theatlantic.com/culture/archive/2022/11/liminal-space-internet-aesthetic/671945/>

Turner, V. (1974). *Liminal to Liminoid, in Play, Flow, and Ritual: An Essay in Comparative Symbolology*. Rice Institute Pamphlet - Rice University Studies, 60(3), 53–92.

Biographical Note

Siobhan Scarlett O'Reilly is a PhD researcher at The University of Brighton. She holds a Master's Degree in Global Film and Television, a Postgraduate Certificate in Screenwriting and a BA (Hons) in Philosophy. Her thesis is a photo-elicitation study of liminal space photography online and its impact on well-being.

Saturday 29 June

09:30-11:00 Parallel Sessions: 'A' Sessions = Nash K2.31; 'B' Sessions = K2.40

Session 3A: Photography

David Clarke and Andrew Robinson (Centre for Contemporary Legend, Sheffield Hallam University)

In The Eye of the Beholder: Digital folklore and the Calvine UFO photograph.

This paper examines and critiques the development and transmission via online communities of a visual rumour legend exploring the complex intertwining narratives that surround the 'Calvine UFO' legend following the publication of the only known image of this sighting in August 2022.

Described variously as 'the most spectacular UFO photo ever' or 'a clever hoax,' the Calvine photograph purportedly shows a UFO shadowed by a military jet above the Scottish Highlands in the summer of 1990. The online dialectic that followed its publication in MailOnline covered the whole spectrum of belief and disbelief as actors from the UFO community took positions on the truth or falsity of the image. For a time '#CalvineUFO' trended on Twitter and new variants of the narrative emerged online, all based on contrasting interpretations of this single image with protagonists interpreting ambiguous visual evidence to suit their own prejudices and needs. In online contexts, this leads to the rapid development of new folkloric narratives and the sharing of conspiracy theories, deliberately deceptive claims and bizarre interpretations that often do more to obfuscate than reveal.

Biographical Notes

Dr David Clarke and **Dr Andrew Robinson** co-founded the Centre for Contemporary Legend (CCL) research group at Sheffield Halam University with Dr Diane Rodgers. From 2008-13 Dr Clarke acted as curator for The National Archives open government project that oversaw the release of the Ministry of Defence UFO archive. His most recent book, *UFO Drawings at The National Archives*, was published in 2017 by Four Corners Books. He is currently writing a new title, *The Folklore of the Space Age*, to coincide with NASA's plan to return humans to the surface of the moon in 2026. Website: <https://drdavidclarke.co.uk/>

Andrew Robinson's art practice investigates expressions of identity and material culture through a visual anthropology of people, place, and trace, applying creative strategies that integrate still and moving imagery with text, audio, and found materials. His research interests include the visual representation of vernacular English custom and tradition; the folklore, myth and legend associated with photographs and photographers and photography in print and archive. Recent publications include chapters in *Behind the Mask: Vernacular Culture in the Time of COVID* (Utah State University Press, 2023) and *Folklore and Nation in Britain and Ireland* (Routledge 2021) Website – www.anthology.co.uk; Linktree – www.linktr.ee/anthology.co.uk

Dipti Rani Datta (Oriental Art Department of the Faculty of Fine Art, University of Dhaka, Bangladesh)

Folk Photography on the Age of Social Media in Bangladesh: An introduction to the changing landscape.

In this research, those people are addressed as folk photographers who are not designated as photography artists or not involved with any earning sources through photography. Folk generally used to go to photo-studio to capture the official photo or to keep their loving memory for themselves. The mobile devices create a great opportunity for folk to explore the visual language. Social media, such as Facebook, is a platform that generates a massive scope for folk to exhibit their photographic interests and aesthetics. As the medium of capturing photographs is being changed from photo studios to personal devices, the exhibition zone is also changing. Private space is transforming into public space through social media. What kind of qualitative changes are being made by this kind of shift? What do folk want to show about themselves? In the digital era, folk get the chance to explore their taste and create their archives in public. I'll examine the character of the folk photographer, the changing landscape of photographic taste, way of expression, and visual language through social media-based folk photography. To understand the changing mood of folk photography this research contextually will be conducted in a village in Bangladesh.

Biographical Note

Dipti Rani Datta is a faculty member at the Oriental Art Department of the Faculty of Fine Art, University of Dhaka, Bangladesh. As a writer, she has the power of keen observation of socio-political reality. Her art-related writings open the new windows that always keep knocking on the door of our thought process. She started her query on 'Folk Art' from her MFA dissertation. From global and local contexts, she is seeking the answers to the globally and spatially raised questions which are not just disciplinary issues but also will help to way out from economic crisis for the specific communities. She always drives people to an uncomfortable existing truth and reality, before which one must let her/himself see the innerzone. She always keeps questioning each static phenomenon and definition through her work. She published her writings in various journals, daily, periodicals, and catalogues regularly. The following links will help to understand her research interest, area, and work:

<https://univdhaka.academia.edu/DiptiRaniDatta> https://www.du.ac.bd/body/faculty_details/OARTS/2071.

Daria Radchenko (RANEPa, Moscow)

Heaven as News Screen: Semiotic ideologies of natural phenomena on social media.

During the Russian-Ukrainian armed conflict on social media frequently appear posts which contain photographs of natural phenomena like specific forms of clouds or colour of sunsets,

and short texts interpreting these as signs of heavenly support. At first glance, this semiotic practice is quite traditional and dating back for centuries; today, folklore narratives of heavenly signs prophesying wars and disasters (especially World War II) are still being transmitted in many Russian regions. However, in our case the usual genre of the story about heavenly signs is transformed: its verbal part is significantly reduced - sometimes to the point of indicating the time and place of photography—and the visual part that appears is framed as 'objective' evidence of what is happening. The status of news text is supported by the way such posts are distributed: as a rule, messages of this kind are created by users, but published in patriotic groups and social media channels through their administrators, turning from an author's text into a message on behalf of the channel. In proposed paper I'll analyze the structure of Internet texts about heavenly signs, related (and conflicting) semiotic ideologies and discuss the communicative forms of their verification and challenge by social media users.

Biographical Note

Dr Daria Radchenko (PhD in Cultural Studies, 2005) holds the position of senior researcher at Laboratory of Theoretical Folklore Studies of Institute of Social Sciences (RANEPA, Moscow, Russia), where she is working on the long-term project on the folklore of social media. She is also the vice-director of the Centre for Urban Anthropology at KB Strelka since 2015, leading the area of applied digital research. Since 2006 she has been working in the field of internet folklore and digital anthropology with a special interest in transmission of vernacular texts and has published over 90 papers on these topics.

Saturday 29 June

09:30-11:00 Session 3B: From Analogue to Digital

Meghna Choudhury (Department of Folklore Research, Gauhati University, Guwahati)

From Parchment to Pixels: Digital transformation of Indian oral narratives and reinterpretation of *The Panchatantra* in the digital landscape.

Indian oral narratives, with their timeless wisdom and embedded values, embody the principles of the Indian Knowledge System (IKS) of community-based knowledge transmission through oral traditions. The digital transformation of these folk narratives forms the core of this paper, which delves into the interplay between IKS, folklore and digital communities. Focusing on the timeless collection of fables, *The Panchatantra*, this paper explores how folk narratives are navigating the digital age and finding new life within online communities. These communities, through discussions, creative retellings, and educational resources, not only preserve *The Panchatantra* but also reinterpret it for contemporary audiences. Focusing on *The Panchatantra*, this paper examines how social media platforms, storytelling apps, and educational websites are reimagining and disseminating these classic tales. This paper investigates the challenges and opportunities associated with the digitalization of folklore. While addressing concerns about potential cultural appropriation and dilution, the paper emphasises the positive aspects of wider accessibility, increased engagement, and cross-cultural dialogue facilitated by social media. This paper sheds light on the potential of digital platforms to not only preserve but also revitalize the folklore heritage, ensuring its continued relevance and impact for future generations.

Biographical Note

Dr Meghna Choudhury is currently an Assistant Professor at the Department of Folklore Research in Gauhati University, Guwahati (India). Born in Assam, India, Dr Choudhury earned Dual Masters Degrees in Life Sciences and, Journalism & Mass Communication from Gauhati University. She completed her PhD on the topic 'Folklore in Cinema: A Study of the Films of Dr. Bhabendra Nath Saikia' from Gauhati University. Her areas of interest include Folk Literature, Folk Communication Systems, Cultural Ecology and Film Criticism. She moved into academia after serving for 8 years as a Public Relations Officer for the State Government of Assam (India). Since 2022, she has been teaching undergraduate, postgraduate and PhD students, as well as conducting research. She has presented a number of papers on her areas of interest in national and international conferences. Besides these, she has published research papers in different journals officially listed by the University Grants Commission in India. She has also completed research projects on Folklore and Mass Communication. Dr Meghna Choudhury is an award-winning and published author with a few widely popular fiction titles in Assamese language to her credit. As a hobby, she is also into documentary filmmaking and has won accolades at the national level. Currently she has been researching into aspects of the Indian Knowledge System with special emphasis upon Oral Literature of India. She is also a well-known orator who delivers lectures on 'Indian Knowledge System and Folklore' at symposiums and workshops organized for students and teachers.

Maryam Magaji (Department of English and Literary Studies, University of Abuja, Nigeria)

Remediation in Hausa Folktales on YouTube.

The advent of technology, particularly television, ended oral storytelling practices in several communities, including the Hausa community in northern Nigeria. The new medium offered a more captivating experience than that found in dimly lit chambers or a new bride's compound. Subsequently, the emergence of YouTube, replacing the television, further distanced the Hausa youth from contact with Hausa folktales and the acquisition of significant moral lessons embedded within the tales. Studies on Nigerian folklore and social media have shown that social media channels sustain culture, they have shown that social media plays a pivotal role in Nigerian youth's apathy to their culture and that it allows the Hausa youth to create social media proverbs. These studies have overlooked the way new media refashion old ones over time. This paper employs the concept of Remediation to analyse the adaptations of European folktales translated into Hausa, as well as the occurrence of indigenous Hausa tales on two YouTube channels—Hausa Cartoon and Prince Toons TV. The paper argues that the mediated environment of YouTube provides the Hausa youth with a sense of immediacy similar to that of experiencing a folktale such that they cannot differentiate between the translated European tales and the indigenous Hausa folktales.

Biographical Note:

Dr Maryam Yusuf Magaji is a senior lecturer in the Department of English and Literary Studies, University of Abuja, Nigeria. She holds a PhD in Oral Literature from the University of Ibadan, Nigeria. Her research bias is on Oral Literature, Gender, and Performance Studies. She has been awarded three grants for her research: the Firebird Foundation for Anthropological Research Grant (2017); the American Council of Learned Societies' African Humanities Program's Dissertation Completion Grant (2018); and the American Council of Learned Societies' African Humanities Program's Post-doctoral Research Grant (2021). Her articles have appeared in the *International Journal on Studies in English Language and Literature*, *Ahyu*, and a host of other reputable learned journals. Her creative works such as poems have appeared in *ANA Review*.

Angelika Heike Rüdiger (Philipp-Matthäus-Hahn Schule, Nürtingen, Germany)

Monitoring the Transformations of Gwyn ap Nudd online.

Gwyn ap Nudd, also known as king of the Welsh fairies, is a supernatural character first appearing in Welsh saga poetry. At the end of the nineteenth century, Sir John Rhÿs who was in search of a Celtic Hades transformed him into a God of Carnage, conflated him with Pluto/Hades and the Celtic God Cernunnos, but also with various other characters from mythology and Arthurian romance. In the early twentieth century Gerald Gardner who is sometimes called 'the father of Wicca' used Rhÿs' ideas and addressed Gwyn as the 'Old God of Hunting and of Death.' [1] In this guise Gwyn ap Nudd plays an important role in today's neopagan movement. But the transformations of Gwyn have not come to a stop. The internet provides an excellent tool to detect and follow new developments in the neo-pagan field in a kind of real-time-mode. Books, iconographic pictures, blogs, (music) videos, and all sort of devotionals enable us to monitor new syncretism Gwyn is subjected to (e.g. with the Green Man), and to analyse what ideas by Rhÿs and others have been transmitted most effectively and have the greatest impact on the present representation of Gwyn ap Nudd.

[1] (Rüdiger, Angelika H. 2012. 'Gwyn ap Nudd: Transfigurations of a character on the way from medieval literature to neo-pagan beliefs' *Gramarye*, 2, pp. 29-47.)

Biographical note

Dr Angelika H. Rüdiger holds a first degree in chemistry (Dr. rerum nat.) by the University Braunschweig, and currently teaches physics and chemistry at the Philipp-Matthäus-Hahn Schule, Nürtingen, Germany. She did an MA in the Department of Welsh, University of Bangor with a thesis entitled 'Gwyn ap Nudd. Transfiguration of a character on the way from Medieval Literature to Neo-Pagan Beliefs,' and in 2022 she received her PhD with the thesis 'Y Tylwyth Teg. An Analysis of a Literary Motif' by Bangor University and continues researching fairy folklore as independent scholar.

Saturday 29 June

11:30-13:00 Session 4A: The Weird and the Horrific

Dawn Brissenden (De Montfort University)

British Cryptids: The continuation of belief online.

This presentation will explore the evolution of British cryptids from oral tradition into contemporary digital representations, especially through social media. Its principal focus will interrogate media to demonstrate how folkloric creatures presently endure in digital cultures. It will explore the origins and meanings of folkloric creatures from British culture manifest in contemporary forms of media while considering their wider role and relationship regarding issues of social fears and panic. The study will outline and identify the principal reasons these creatures have been adapted into traditional primary media sources and then reimaged on social media sites. The overarching contribution of the thesis to the field of media and communication studies is through its examination of how, and in what ways, social media can be used as a tool for the preservation and remediation of traditional folkloric creatures. It will also consider the motivations of those sharing content online and how such traditions may have been altered in order to fit contemporary digital platforms.

Biographical Note

Dawn Brissenden is a doctoral research student at De Montfort University focussing on the transmission of folklore into the modern age, specifically through the exploration of British cryptids in the media and digital spaces. She is specifically interested in understanding what the continuation of belief and changing transmission of folklore says about society and the re-enchantment of the world.

Erika Kvistad (University of South-Eastern Norway)

Imaginary Prisons: Maze horror and minotaur horror in digital folklore.

If we find ourselves trapped in a labyrinth, should we be afraid of the minotaur who might be stalking us around the corner, or of the endless monotony of the space itself? This paper explores the ways this question is asked in digital horror folklore, and suggests that it is central to understanding how collaborative horror storytelling works.

Collaborative horror storytelling traditions on the internet—like the SCP Foundation or the Backrooms—often imagine infinite, empty spaces, spaces generated without human agency at non-human scales. But these story-worlds almost always hold a creative tension between two fundamentally incompatible forms of horror: the horror of the space itself (which we could call maze horror), and the horror of what might wait for us within them (minotaur horror). As a storytelling tradition grows and expands, individual contributors tend to fill the empty space with monsters of their own creation, replacing maze horror with minotaur horror until, as Tumblr user onion-souls laments, it ‘gets worn down by [...] overpopulation of the universe with entities.’

In this paper, I explore the appeal and the fragility of maze horror in digital horror folklore. Is it possible, within a collaborative narrative tradition, to tell stories about infinity, monotony and emptiness—stories that are in some way anti-narrative—or will these stories inevitably become subject to overpopulation by minotaurs?

Biographical Note

Dr Erika Kvistad is a literature and media scholar working on digital horror narratives. Her previous publications in this area include work on haunted spaces on the internet, Gothic interactive fiction games, and horror webcomics, and, most recently, the early-2000s horror hoax YouTube series *In the Dark*. She is Associate Professor of English at the University of South-Eastern Norway.

Aphrodite-Lidia Nounanaki (University of the Aegean, and Hellenic Folklore Research Centre, Academy of Athens)

AI generated ‘scary stories’ and creepypastas on TikTok: a new version of digital ‘narratives.’

Due to its innovative functions, TikTok allows users to renegotiate even narrative genres, whose dissemination with more ‘traditional’ features on other platforms seems to be waning. One of the most special and popular features of the platform is the widespread use of AI technology. Therefore, next to all kinds of themed videos that are created using AI on TikTok, there is a large production of such with scary themes as well. This means that since the platform enables its users to leverage AI and create videos and images that are highly realistic, yet completely artisanal, this feature ‘inspires’ users to create scary stories that are rendered in a multimedia way as well. Thus, a new manifestation of scary stories and creepypastas is

created that does not resemble those we have known until now. In this presentation, I aim to speak about AI creepypastas and other 'scary stories' concerning their morphological characteristics, their themes, and their reception by the users who watch them.

Biographical Note

Dr Aphrodite-Lidia Nounanaki holds a PhD on Folklore Studies from the Pedagogical Department of Primary Education, National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, the title of which is: *Greek Contemporary Legends on the Internet*. Her research interests revolve mainly around digital folklore and the diffusion of contemporary popular narratives through the internet, social media and in the digital world. Her current research includes digital humour (e.g., memes), but mostly focuses on issues of the occult (contemporary legends, conspiracy theories, ghost lore, creepypasta) and their diffusion through the internet and social media. She has participated in various Greek and international conferences and publications. She is also conducting post-doctoral research at the University of the Aegean on 'The function of myth in the conspiratorial way of thinking,' and works at the Hellenic Folklore Research Centre, Academy of Athens, on a digitization and documentation program.

Saturday 29 June

11:30-13:00 Session 4B: Rituals and Celebrations

Yinka Olusoga and Catherine Bannister (University of Sheffield)

Playing in the Digital Posthuman: Culture, custom, and the 'entangled' child through a folklore lens.

This paper builds on research from the Play Observatory project (The University of Sheffield and UCL) exploring children's play during the COVID-19 pandemic, and the emergent field of posthuman folklore to 'untangle' the identity of the 'entangled' digital / mediated child through the lens of custom and children's peer cultures.

Informed by the posthumanist concept of 'entanglement' (Barad, 2007) in liminal times and in liminal spaces, and the theory of 'transfer of ritual' (Radde-Antweiler, 2006), it considers the emergent possibilities and practices for custom and ritual and for different emergent becomings of children across digital and non-digital spaces.

The authors draw on examples of play contributed by children and families to the Play Observatory project between 2020 - 2022 in which children demonstrate their playful approaches to problem-solving in crisis times. We see how they have adapted and co-created online and hybrid spaces, habitual play practices, celebrations, customs and rituals, for themselves and others, blending established tradition and contemporary media and digital interests. Through these entanglements with the human and more-than-human we suggest they have become emergent leaders of family and community experiences addressing power relationship imbalances. This has particular relevance for neurodiverse children who are a focus within this paper.

References: Barad, K. (2007) Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning. Durham: Duke University Press.

Radde-Antweiler, K. (2006) Rituals online: transferring and designing rituals. Online-Heidelberg Journal of Religions on the Internet (2.1).

Biographical Notes

Dr Yinka Olusoga is a Lecturer in Education based in the School of Education at the University of Sheffield, and Course Director of the BA in Education, Culture and Childhood. Her research focuses on children's play and cultural worlds, now and in the past. She is interested in children's creative and digital literacies and in intergenerational play and storytelling. Yinka is Director of the British Academy Research Project 'Childhoods and Play: The Iona and Peter Opie Archive'. Her work addresses issues of visibility, diversity and representation of children and play in the historical record, and she promotes children's creative engagement with archives and histories of childhood experience.

Dr Catherine Bannister was a researcher on the Play Observatory project which brought together academics from University College London and The University of Sheffield to collect examples of children's play in pandemic times. Her interests include children's play and peer cultures, and ritual for and by children, including the ceremonies of uniformed youth organisations. Her book *Scouting and Guiding in Britain: The ritual socialisation of young people*, was published in 2022.

Catherine Bannister, Fiona Scott, Shabana Roscoe (Sheffield University) and **Yao Wang** (Newcastle University)

'It was definitely a Pokémon themed Christmas that we had': How do children and families sacralise and desacralise elements of digital play during celebratory times?

In a postdigital era (Jayemanne et al., 2016), with technology embedded in many UK families' habitual routines, digital play practices can now hold significance in relation to family celebrations, routines and rituals. As digital spaces expand and complicate children's social and cultural contexts, digital and media interests may be incorporated into established calendar customs, like New Year's Eve, serving diverse functions; or prompt 'new' family customs like Friday movie nights. They may even set the theme for celebrations such as Christmas, or birthdays, with games as gifts. Conversely, some families may indicate an event's significance by excluding digital play, prioritising non-digital, material play.

This paper centres around the divergent practices and attitudes that children and families hold regarding digital play's role in family celebrations, routines and rituals. It draws on data from the UK arm of the international RITEC (Responsible Innovation in Technology for Children) project investigating children's digital play and well-being, and on Durkheimian notions of the profane and sacred to explore children's experiences of, and adult mediation of, digital play at special times. It suggests that parents' perceptions of digital play - and its value (or lack of) - can inform its designation as sacred or profane practice, enhancing or detracting from 'sacred' occasions.

References

Jayemanne, D., Apperley, T.H. and Nansen, B. (2016) 'Postdigital interfaces and the aesthetics of recruitment,' *Transactions of the Digital Games Research Association*, 2(3), 145-172.
<http://todigra.org/index.php/todigra/article/view/56/104>

Biographical Notes

Dr Catherine Bannister was a researcher on the LEGO funded RITEC project at The University of Sheffield exploring children's digital play and wellbeing. Her research interests include children's play and lore, and the ceremonies and traditions of youth organisations.

Dr Fiona Scott is a Lecturer in Digital Literacies in The School of Education at The University of Sheffield in the United Kingdom, where she is Director of the [Literacies and Language Research Cluster](#). She specialises in research and teaching focused on the digital lives of children. Fiona's research focuses on children's engagements with digital technologies and digital texts, particularly in the context of families and communities. She has collaborated with a range of external partners in research, including LEGO and CBeebies. She is an Editor of the *Journal of Early Childhood Literacy*. She also frequently shares expertise through invited media appearances, including national and regional television and radio (BBC News Channel, BBC Radio 5 Live) and articles aimed at public engagement, such as her recent piece in [The Conversation](#).

Dr Shabana Roscoe is a Research Associate on the LEGO funded RITEC project at The University of Sheffield. She specialises in research with children and young people, and is an experienced ethnographer, primarily working with qualitative techniques.

Dr Yao Wang is Lecturer in Intercultural Communication in the School of Education, Communication and Language Sciences, Newcastle University, UK. Her research focuses on the experiences of mobile groups both within and across borders. Particularly, she has a long-term commitment to researching the life experiences of internal migrant children in China. She also studies international student mobility. Her research interests extend to the impact of digital technology on education, communication and society, including the effects of digital play on children's well-being and technology-assisted learning.

Aušra Žičkienė (Institute of Lithuanian Literature and Folklore, Vilnius)

Round-Number Birthday Celebrations for Seniors In Lithuania: An audiovisual narrative online and contemporary musical folklore.

This paper explores the phenomenon of contemporary musical folklore within the context of round-number birthday celebrations for seniors (50 years and older), focusing on audiovisual material available online. These celebrations go beyond mere parties for enjoyment; they constitute a genre with rich, repetitive, and ritualized actions imbued with explicit or implicit symbolic meanings. Today, the publication of audiovisual material on the Internet has become an integral part of this genre. The material available online takes various forms: filmed birthday celebrations of common people within family, kinship, or close community settings; specially edited audiovisual narratives reflecting the highlights of the celebration; greetings from relatives of the jubilarians, often commissioned by television broadcasts or podcasts (each greeting typically includes a song, as requested by the clients); online greeting 'postcards' invariably accompanied by a carefully chosen song; etc. Birthday greeting songs come from a diverse range of sources, including professional or self-taught composers, as well as relatives and well-wishers of the jubilees. The internet is replete with audio clips of such songs, and there are commercial services available for creating and uploading personalized greeting songs online. This presentation aims to elucidate the connections between contemporary rituals and contemporary musical folklore in online audiovisual narratives that are saturated with specific cultural information. Through analysis of these materials, we can gain insights into the evolving nature of celebratory practices, modern rituals and the role of music within them.

Biographical Note

Dr Aušra Žičkienė, an ethnomusicologist, serves as a scientific researcher at the Institute of Lithuanian Literature and Folklore, Vilnius. She defended her Ph.D. thesis 'Lithuanian Laments in the Context of

Northeast European Lament Culture' in 2001. Her current interests include historical research on traditional music, singing as an activity and a process, the study of musical behaviour, the role of songs and singing in the rituals of contemporary communities. ausra.zickiene@liti.lt

Saturday 29 June

14:00-15:30 Session 5A: Public Authority & Public Health

Simon Gall (Independent scholar)

The Institutional Harnessing of Vernacular Authority in Traumatic Times: The use of Scots language in NHS Grampian's online public health communications during the COVID-19 pandemic.

During the first and second covid lockdowns, a significant number of social media users with a connection to, or resident in, the North-East of Scotland began creating and sharing North-East Scots language posts, urging their audiences to follow the public health measures. Locally known as Doric, this vernacular, and largely orally transmitted, language featured prominently in written and spoken communications by actors as diverse as the local police force, the local NHS Health Board, large and small businesses, local internet celebrities, and individual users. These communications were often very popular with audiences who engaged and used them in myriad ways.

Intrigued to see what I understood as an emerging phenomenon, I began collecting these posts and interviewing some of those who made the communications to better understand the contexts in which they were made. As a case study, this paper will focus on items in my collection that pertain to NHS Grampian, drawing on my interview with a Communications staff member to explore her ideas and opinions around the institution's uses of vernacular language during the pandemic.

Biographical Note

Simon Gall is an ethnologist based in the North-East of Scotland whose research interests include family folklore, uses of Scots language, Christmas garden illuminations, and public folklore. He holds an MLitt with Distinction in Ethnology and Folklore from the Elphinstone Institute, University of Aberdeen.

Andrea Kitta (East Carolina University)

God Gave Me an Immune System: Religious belief, anti-masking, and anti-vaccination sentiments online in the United States during COVID.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, many outspoken religious groups declared that they didn't need masks or vaccines because they were protected by God and the immune system He designed. This conflict between science and religion is not new, but highlights one area of vaccine hesitancy that is often misunderstood. In this presentation, I'll explore the logic and belief of the intersection of religion, freedom, and the COVID-19 vaccine via public posts and memes. In media interviews, most outlets have assumed that smaller groups, such as the Amish or Jehovah's Witnesses, are the most likely culprits instead of larger group like Catholics and Evangelical Christians. Even though the leaders of these denominations support vaccination, their followers often use otherwise dismissed arguments to justify their personal

beliefs, demonstrating themselves as 'true believers.' Historically, rejecting what church leaders say would have caused rejection from the group, however, in this brave new world, individuals justify their personal belief systems over the official belief systems.

Biographical Note

Prof. Andrea Kitta is a folklorist and professor at East Carolina University where she specializes in folklore and medicine, legends, conspiracy theories, belief, and the supernatural. Her monograph, *Vaccinations and Public Concern in History: Legend, Rumor, and Risk Perception*, won the Brian McConnell Book Award in 2012. Dr Kitta's 2019 book, *The Kiss of Death: Contagion, Contamination, and Folklore*, won the Chicago Folklore Prize and Brian McConnell Book Award in 2020. She is a fellow of the American Folklore Society and serves on several committees dedicated to the promotion of folklore as an academic discipline.

Hanna-Kaisa Lassila (University of Turku)

Public Shaming and Vernacular Disciplining on Social Media as Entertainment.

In my doctoral research I examine gendered practices of public shaming on social media as vernacular disciplining. Public shaming on social media is a popular tool for disciplining others, whether random individuals, public figures, or corporations, for a variety of transgressions and norm violations. There are many examples of public shaming working as an effective punishment, moving from online to offline spaces. However, not all public shaming on social media aims at direct punishment, but functions as what is sometimes described as 'light-hearted' fun and entertainment. There seems to be a constant flow of content in which more or less anonymous instances of norm violations that are deemed humorous are collected and circulated on various social media platforms for everyday amusement. In my paper, I explore the relationship between entertainment and vernacular disciplining through public shaming on social media, using examples from my doctoral research.

Biographical Note

Hanna-Kaisa Lassila (she/her) has a master's degree in folkloristics from the University of Turku, Finland, and is a doctoral researcher in folkloristics at the University of Turku.

Saturday 29 June

14:00-15:30 Session 5B: Memes

Paul Cowdell (University of Hertfordshire)

Memes: When the digital world put the human back into the non-material.

The notion of the meme took off rapidly after its 1976 coinage by naturalist Richard Dawkins, but not quite as he might have anticipated. Dawkins saw the meme as analogous to the gene, 'a unit of cultural transmission'. As it developed in his and others' work, this became more explicitly self-replicating and transmitting, like genes, and thus removed from human cultural agency. For some, the meme seemed little more than an attempt to sweep aside ideas and belief practices of which they disapproved. This seductive and reductive view of cultural transmission met a mixed response, from other scientists as much as from folklorists, yet at the same time the word was being reappropriated and reworked in practice. Against any such

sweeping supra-organic removal of culture from human agency, the meme was being applied as an emic digital concept for a practical human activity. This paper will review some of the scientific and folklore thinking around memes (eg Wolpert, Schrempp, Oring), as well as the way they continue to be used and developed in a way quite different to Dawkins's conception. Without self-replicating, they have acquired a life of their own.

Biographical Note

Dr Paul Cowdell is currently a Research Fellow at the University of Hertfordshire on the AHRC-funded 'Folklore Without Borders' network. He has written on ghost beliefs, among many other things, and has recently been working on the history and reception of folkloristics. A Council member of the Folklore Society and Associate Editor of its journal *Folklore*, he is on the editorial board of the *Folk Music Journal* and a Trustee of the Folklore Library and Archive.

Tina Paphitis (University of Bergen)

Cheeky! The cultural and political history of some digital folklore.

As the year 2014 progressed, a grassroots movement was beginning. It would come to epitomise and subvert an entire British sub-culture, satirize political figures, and cause cross-Atlantic tensions. The centre of this movement was an ostensive practice that espoused the joys of going for a faux-transgressive meal at the popular Afro-Portuguese-inspired South African restaurant chain Nando's. This paper explores the phenomenon of the 'Cheeky Nando's' meme as a form of cultural and political history from a vernacular perspective. Examining the meme's prevalence on social media and other online platforms, it will draw out its colloquialisms, materialities and performativities to understand how this online—and sometimes offline—practice reflected deeper engagements with broader social and political issues among online communities. We will see what happens when different online communities, with different cultural and vernacular references, digitally meet over a meme. The paper will, in turn, consider the afterlife of the meme, and how the sense or feeling of the meme was in turn appropriated by the political class as a means of performing 'the everyday'.

Biographical Note

Dr Tina Paphitis is Associate Professor in Cultural Studies at the University of Bergen, Norway, specialising in legends and landscapes of Britain and the Nordic region. Her interests include environmental and ecocritical folklore, experiential approaches to landscape, haunted and supernatural landscapes, and folklore and archaeology in literature. Her previous project at the University of Oslo (funded by the European Union's Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions) explored the role of digital folklore in diversifying heritage narratives of contemporary Norway and enhancing engagement with folklore archives.

Oleksandr Pankieiev (Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies, University of Alberta)

(De)Constructing Hero Motifs in the Digital Folklore of the Russo-Ukrainian War.

Extreme, life-threatening events in the life of any group have been known to provoke a rise in individual and group creativity. This happened when Russia launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022. The war became a very real symbolic factor influencing the physical and emotional connections shared by many Ukrainians living in Ukraine and abroad.

The folklore of Russia's war against Ukraine has been narrated and disseminated mostly using digital tools across different social media platforms. The most ubiquitous form of digital folklore produced over the course of the war has been memes. The rate and number of memes produced since the start of Russia's escalated invasion of Ukraine are unprecedented. New memes are being created and disseminated daily; some events cause a higher number of memes than others. This paper surveys how the images of heroes in memes have been constructed and what character features have been ascribed to them. As their image evolved throughout Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, different motifs emerged around them. The paper aims to show how those motifs have migrated from one cycle to another, and what types of folklore heroes those memes have constructed in the public imagination.

Biographical Note

Dr Oleksandr Pankieiev is the Editor-in-Chief of the Forum for Ukrainian Studies at the Contemporary Ukraine Studies Program, the Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies, University of Alberta. His main research interests include the history of Stepp (Southern) Ukraine, and Russia-Ukraine relations. He is also pursuing research in folklore, ethnography, digital humanities, and Ukrainian Canadian diaspora studies.

Saturday 29 June

16:00-17:30 Session 6A: Conspiracy Theories

Diana Coles (Independent scholar)

Warming Pans and Moonbumps: Mythologising the royal family.

The English (now British) royal family has always been a source of fascination to much of the populace and rumours, speculation and strange theories have always abounded. The development of social media has, in recent years, facilitated the spread of rumours that range from the probable to the possible to the utterly bizarre. The spread of these stories happens in spite of the fact that they are seldom, if ever, referenced and, not infrequently, in the face of probability, common sense and the laws of libel. This paper looks at some of the stories that proliferate on social media, looks at parallels from the past that we have knowledge of, and tries to establish, if possible, where the stories start. The use of the label 'false news' is nowadays thrown about widely and recklessly. Has this made it more difficult for people to distinguish between what is genuine 'gossip' and what is complete invention?

Biographical Note

Dr Diana Coles comes from a background in education and archaeology with a strong interest in the way ordinary people think and have thought. She is fascinated by how much things change but stay the same so that, often, things past that seem impenetrable, on closer examination take on complete familiarity.

Tim Tangherlini (Scandinavian Department, University of California at Berkeley)

Parler Games: Conspiracy theory, conspiracy and insurrection.

In this presentation, I take a computational folkloristic approach to understanding the emergent conspiracy to attack the Capitol on January 6th that developed on the social media platform Parler. Narrative frameworks driving conversations on that platform had, from the

days immediately subsequent to the 2020 election, two distinct yet overlapping topologies, the first redolent of conspiracy theories, where low probability connections between narrative domains combine to form a vast linked network of threats, and the second reminiscent of conspiracy, where people collaborate to develop a covert strategy to effect some (nefarious) end, here the overthrow of the Capitol. Using an interlocking set of NLP tools, we extract actants and their relationships to generate these graphs. Change point detection allows us to pinpoint moments when the conversations change, while an LLM-based topic modelling approach reduces the complexity of the relationships between actants. We find that the forum participants deployed many aspects of the QAnon world, where globalists, 'demonrats,' big tech, big pharma, the Chinese communist party, and other deep state actors colluded to rob patriotic Americans of their president. Leveraging appeals to God, country and patriotism, the participants quickly resolve to 'learn a lesson from BLM/Antifa' and stage a 'peaceful protest' at the Capitol to block certification of the vote. The planning is deliberate and aims to coordinate 'patriot' groups and militias; in the immediate aftermath of January 6, the conversations shift rapidly to assigning blame to BLM/Antifa infiltrators.

Biographical Note

Prof. Tim Tangherlini is Professor in the Scandinavian Department at University of California at Berkeley, and director of the graduate program in folklore. He also serves as the associate director of the Berkeley Institute for Data Science. He studies storytelling at internet scale, and develops methods for computational folkloristics. His current work focuses on legend, rumour, conspiracy and conspiracy theory.

Marc Tuters (Amsterdam School for Cultural Analysis (ASCA) & Open Intelligence Lab (OILab))

Folk Narratives of Distrust: On the socio-technical dynamics of conspiricization.

The aftermath of the pandemic brought a troubling new political phenomenon to the fore in which the affordances of social media supercharge age-old moral panics around 'folk devils' (Cohen 1972)—as we empirically observed in social media conspiracy theories surrounding 'Bill Gates' (Tuters & Willaert 2022). Drawing on methods developed in the latter research, this paper presents new empirical research (based on a large corpus of Twitter data), that shows how such folk narratives develop and spread in ways that also cut across typical left/right political distinctions—a phenomenon that researchers of conspiracy theory have referred to as 'coalitions of distrust' (Birchall & Knight 2023). While much has been written on how far-right movements exploit the growth of 'institutional distrust' as the basis of 'reactionary' political narratives (Müller 2016), distrust can also be considered as a 'normal' response to 'epistemic uncertainty' (Harambam 2023) or else as a 'blowback' from decades of economic, environmental and geopolitical policies designed to enrich 'elites' (Johnson 2000; Gilman & Blake 2021; Frank 2017). In this paper we discuss the socio-technical dynamics, which we refer to as 'conspiricization,' of how specific social media affordances (notably hashtags) create and sustain what we call 'folk narratives of distrust.'

Biographical Note

Dr Marc Tuters is an assistant professor in the New Media and Digital Culture Division of Media Studies at the Faculty of Humanities, affiliated with the Amsterdam School for Cultural Analysis (ASCA) and the Open Intelligence Lab (OILab), of which he is a co-founder. His research concerns radical political subcultures online, which he explores with colleagues at multi-yearly research schools

coordinated by the Digital Methods Initiative (DMI), with which he has also been long affiliated. His most important recent research contributions have been on radical right-wing political subcultures and online conspiracy theories. He is currently co-Investigator on a number of research networks including: 'Everything is Connected,' 'Trust in a Digital Society' and 'The Geopolitics of Propaganda'. Prior to his current research he was involved in the arts where he maintains an output, curating exhibitions on these same topics.

Saturday 29 June

16:00-17:30 Session 6B: Art and Aesthetics

Thorgeirsdóttir, Gunnella (University of Iceland)

To Meme or not to Meme: How is the Question.

Although memes seem to belong fully in the modern technological age, the idea of copying, changing and editing images to share a common sentiment (often in joke form) is far from new, as the 80's xerox lore showed us. What has changed in this century however is the easy availability of programs for the digital formatting of pictures (meme generators) along with an impossibly varied mode and space for sharing said images. This myriad of material is often based on jokes and ideas previously circled, such as first and second world war jokes having been rehashed and reformatted to meet the need for othering and coping with September eleventh, yet adapted to modern day imagery, more often than not from popular culture. The memes moreover present a largely visual mode of communication often across cultures, the image providing a short cut for the meaning. The image being imbued with folkloric meaning. This presentation will explore the basic concept of the meme as a dominant and visual mode for communicating, the way memes develop and are immediately adapted to meet different social circumstances and situations. The how and why an image can suddenly burgeon and to bloom online, inundating the internet until it is quickly surpassed by another.

Biographical Note

Dr Gunnella Thorgeirsdottir is an Icelandic folklorist with a specialization in Japanese culture. Her research focuses mainly on ritual, vernacular belief, tradition and the liminal in modern popular culture. Academically she graduated from the University of Iceland with a degree in folkloristics, then the University of Sheffield with a degree nominally in English cultural tradition, and finally with a PhD from both Sheffield and Kokugakuin University in Japanese traditional beliefs and culture. Currently she is to be found lecturing part-time in Japanese popular culture at the University of Iceland whilst also focusing on independent research. Alongside folkloric research she is also an avid Viking-era living history participator, of course purely for the purported sake of academic research.

India Lawton (Department of Art and Music, Solent University)

Little Red Riding Hood Online: Visual arts exploring the woods metaphor and the suppression of the female voice in the digital world.

Fairy tales often depict women journeying alone in woods, facing dangers as metaphors for life's challenges. These woods symbolise an experiential realm cautioning against straying from societal expectations (Brownmiller, 1976). Zipes (1986) interprets the woods in Little Red Riding Hood as a space for self-discovery, where encounters with the big bad wolf signify self-identification within male desire, reinforcing traditional gender dynamics.

The digital world, like the mythical woods of experience, provides liberation whilst also pressuring users to conform to societal expectations, our image belonging to the society in which we live (Groys, 2023). Both realms (woods and online world) exhibit persistent themes of self-objectification and silencing women, with online harassment disproportionately affecting women. Women adhering to societal norms online reinforce the expectation to remain 'seen and not heard,' while those who express opinions online are singled out by internet trolls, exacerbating the silencing effect (Beard, 2017).

In my artistic work, I delve into the metaphorical 'woods of experience' within the digital realm. While the online world offers opportunities for self-discovery, it has become a contemporary equivalent to the symbolic 'woods of experience.' This transformation echoes traditional anxieties, dark recesses, and modern-day trolls reminiscent of fairy tales. These digital spaces, much like their mythical counterparts, persist in stifling the female voice and perpetuating objectification, mirroring enduring societal struggles.

Please see my social media account which is an ongoing project placing my artwork back into the digital world here: https://www.instagram.com/thewoods_artproject/

Biographical Note

Following her graduation with a BA (Hons) in Photography from The Arts University Bournemouth, **India Lawton** pursued further studies, obtaining an MA in Photographic Studies from Westminster University, a Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) from Oxford Brookes University, and subsequently an MA in Education, also from Oxford Brookes University. India is a lecturer within the Department of Art and Music at Solent University, UK and a part-time research student at Solent University, where she is embarking on a practice-based photography PhD.

India's photographic work encompasses themes of trauma, personal experiences, family history, and more recently, the visualisation of others' experiences. Her work has been showcased in exhibitions at local, national, and international levels. She has also been sought after as a guest lecturer by various universities, and served as an art ambassador for British Art Show 8. www.indialawton.com

Ruby Sage McGowan, Ruby Sage (Independent Scholar)

Goblin Lore to Goblincore: How old stories inspired a new generation's online identity.

'Goblincore' is a term used by Generation Z to denote an internet subculture characterised by an appreciation for elements of nature often deemed unappealing: toads, soil, bugs, mushrooms, moss. Where online trends like 'Cottagecore' present nature through an idealised, humanist lens, 'Goblincore' highlights the chaos and degradation inherent to the ecological world. The aesthetic is exhibited through worn, baggy clothing in shades of green and brown; an online presence heavily featuring the outdoors; and collections of lost buttons, rusty nails, and bird skulls. Goblins of European folklore, connotated variously as faelike, mischievous, and demonic, occupy a moral between-space that allows them to serve as an uncategorizable representative for a generation undergoing a gender revolution, acute environmental uncertainty, and a dual inhabitation of the material and digital spheres. My presentation will compare goblin narratives with components of the 'Goblincore' movement, and explore the ways in which folkloric tradition is evolving through Generation Z's use of the internet. It will examine the significance of these forest-dwelling, human-thwarting creatures within the culture of a generation facing ecological crisis, and argue that 'Goblincore' is

evidence of Generation Z's drive to connect viscerally with a wildness often felt closer in folklore than in modernity.

Biographical Note

Ruby Sage McGowan is a Devon-based creative practitioner specialising in Celtic mythological studies, oral storytelling, and theatre-making. She received her MA in Poetics of Imagination from Schumacher College, and her BA in Writing for Performance at Central School of Speech and Drama. Previously, she completed the International Youth Initiative Programme in Sweden and the Myth Singers 1-year storytelling apprenticeship. Ruby's work explores the intersection of ancient myth, contemporary performance practice, ritual, and ecology. Recent projects include an all-night telling of *Gilgamesh*, an original play inspired by the life of W.B. Yeats (*The Will of the Wild Birds*), and an immersive, site-specific stage-adaptation of *The Mabinogion*. Ruby has appeared as a guest lecturer on the Poetics of Imagination MA, and delivered the presentation 'Of Bodies Changed to Other Forms: Ecological Alchemy in Shapeshifter Tales,' at the University of Bristol's 2023 Environment, Mythology, and Storytelling Symposium. Currently she is developing an adaptation of *The Tempest* inspired by Devon's Dart River, to be staged in Summer 2024.

Sunday 30 June

09:30-11:00 Session 7A: Humour

Ian Brodie (Cape Breton University)

Has TikTok Saved Jokes? The presence of joke-telling in short form online video.

Over the past thirty years it has been debatable how popular joke-telling—the performance of an entextual script specifically formulated to culminate in the revelation of an appropriate incongruity—has been as an active vernacular practice among adults born after 1965. The long arc of the Internet as first a textual medium and subsequently a text and image one has encouraged email forwarding and online inventories of jokes, while arguably taking a backseat to cartoons and image macros (memes) as its humour of choice. Stand-up comedy, which assumes a distinct and idiosyncratic repertoire, rebukes the performance of a received tradition and for the most part stylistically favours the anecdotal over the formulaic and entextual. However, with the rise of TikTok and its analogues (Instagram and Facebook reels), joke telling has re-emerged in the form of 'make me laugh' challenges, where neither the originality of the texts nor the transparent mechanisms of appropriate incongruity undermine the status of the teller as a 'funny person.' Such challenges allow for a range of jokes, from 'dad jokes' to explicitly racist, sexist, and homophobic blason popularies, within an 'induced natural context,' allowing folklorists to consider joke-telling in live performance.

Biographical note

Prof. Ian Brodie is a Professor of Folklore at Cape Breton University and author of *A Vulgar Art: A New Approach to Stand-up Comedy*. He researches the intersection of folk culture and mass media, ranging from local radio song contests to the supernatural in children's television. Ian currently serves as the President of both the Folklore Studies Association of Canada and the International Society for Contemporary Legend Research.

Drake Hansen (Utah State University, USA)

‘Your Flop Era Is Showing:’ Notes on the aesthetic creations of a camp TikTok community.

Since 2021, TikTok has played host to Floptok, a meme-sharing community of and for self-described ‘flops,’ known for loud, brash, and abrasive content, often with low-quality audio and visuals. Although many of their posts (Floptoks) are video varieties of the archetypal internet meme—variable text on a repeated visual—Floptoks can often be distinguished from other TikTok videos either by appearances of or references to the community’s ‘icons,’ a range of invented characters and real people including Deborah Ali-Williams, the real world director of a large Texan funeral home, or by backing music of pop songs heavily edited to feature hypersexual lyrics from rapper Cupcakke. By teasing apart some of these Floptoks using the framework from Limor Shifman’s 2013 paper and comparing and contrasting their content, forms, and stances through Elliott Oring’s 2016 definitions of humour forms, this paper will explore how Floptok operates—per Susan Sontag’s 1964 ‘Notes’—with a camp sensibility. Considering the anonymous, asynchronous, and depersonalized nature of platforms like TikTok, as well as the wider internet, Floptok becomes an exemplar of how the internet enables, for the first time, living folk groups whose core aesthetic realities are camp.

Biographical Note

Drake Hansen is currently studying for an MA in Folklore at Utah State University where he also works as a composition instructor. His primary research interests are the tensions between dress and costume in online spaces, digital folk communities, and Scottish Gaelic folk song. Beyond his graduate studies, he has worked with Utah Valley University to support equity in primary and secondary STEM education, and he has served on the board of the Grassroots Shakespeare Company as a performing artist, costumer, and grant writer.

Lauren (LG) Fadiman (Yale University)

‘To the FBI agent watching me through my phone:’ Social media, the surveillance imaginary, and the erotics of observation in a Twitter joke cycle.

In 2017, following the Vault 7 leak, which made the CIA’s domestic surveillance program visible—just as the FBI’s Patriot Act-endowed powers had been several years earlier—Twitter users began to meme mass surveillance, imagining deskbound federal agents developing emotional investments in the mundane lives of the Internet users they observe. Drawing from Bruno Latour’s description of the panopticon as a motif of both ‘total paranoia and total megalomania,’ and David Lyon’s observation that surveillance is not only something that individuals ‘negotiate, resist, [and] engage with,’ but also something they may ‘initiate and desire,’ I argue that via this joke cycle—which is mediated by the digital realm, but also takes the ambiguous architecture of the digital realm as its subject—we encounter U.S. surveillance subjects behaving in ways that go beyond what Lyon terms the ‘compliance/resistance binary.’ In these jokes, surveillance is imagined not as impersonal large-scale data accumulation and aggregation, but rather as a state-sanctioned form of parasociality and voyeurism. By framing the experience of mass surveillance as a form of (ironic) intimacy, Twitter humour about the FBI elides the boundary between the folk and the state, imagining how digital users may reclaim agency by becoming co-conspirators with the representatives of disciplinary institutions by wielding a kind of soft power to shift the balance between observer/observed—but at the same time deemphasizing the very real threat of the American

surveillance state as it is wielded against marginalized and vulnerable communities in the U.S. and abroad.

Biographical note

Lauren (LG) Fadiman is a practicing folklorist, whose writing on contemporary legends, conspiracy theories, and the cultural periphery can be found in *The Baffler*, *Current Affairs*, *Orion*, *Real Life*, and elsewhere. In 2021, she graduated Phi Beta Kappa with a degree in folklore and mythology from Harvard College, where her senior thesis—on the role of cell phones in contemporary folk culture, from viral moral panics to vernacular medical discourse—received the Thomas Temple Hoopes Prize, the College’s highest honour for undergraduate research. She is now completing a PhD in U.S. history at Yale University.

Sunday 30 June

09:30-11:00 Session 7B: Transforming Bodies & Sacrality

Sophia Kingshill (The Folklore Society)

Digital Dualism: The online Doppelgänger and its analogues.

Identity is always fluid: in the digitally mediated spectrum, it can flow and alter in ways we are only beginning to examine. Online, any of us can create a new self, an alias or avatar, that can perform on our behalf, but with opportunities come risks of misinterpretation and alienation.

The dread of being ‘possessed’ is ancient; more recent, perhaps, is the fear that the entity which possesses or takes us over may be self-created. While the concept of the double is old, the word ‘doppelgänger’ dates only from the eighteenth century. Originally, it meant the person who saw their double; later it became the double itself, a shift in meaning that flickers in and out of usage in folktale, literature and film.

There is a neurological dimension, in that there are authentic conditions in which a person sees themselves as a physically separate presence. We are now all familiar with that phenomenon on-screen. How that affects our ‘own’ identity is a question to which folklore may be able to propose some tentative answers.

Biographical note:

Sophia Kingshill is the author of *Mermaids* (Little Toller, 2015), a cultural history of sirens, selkies and other sea women. She is co-author of *The Fabled Coast* (Random House, 2012), an exploration of British sea and coastal legend, and *The Lore of Scotland* (Random House, 2009), with the late Jennifer Westwood. She is the Honorary Secretary of The Folklore Society, and has delivered papers at several FLS conferences.

Helen Frisby (Centre for Death and Society, University of Bath)

Digital Deathways in Twenty-First Century Britain.

Digital technology is not only transforming how we live – it’s transforming how we die, and even how we remember.

In this talk I will posit a general modern Western retreat from the gross materiality of death, dying and the dead, but suggest that this of itself is by no means anything new. Some of the digital technology which has enabled this retreat was already in mainstream use prior to the Covid-19 pandemic; however the pandemic has significantly accelerated and intensified such trends. Digital technologies are nowadays an established part of popular British ritualisations of death, dying and commemoration; indeed, and furthermore, they are also arguably reshaping the very nature of memory itself.

Biographical note

Dr Helen Frisby is a Trustee and Council Member of the Folklore Society, and a Visiting Research Fellow at the Centre for Death and Society, University of Bath. Her book *Traditions of Death and Burial* explores the history and folklore of funeral customs from the Norman Conquest to the present day.

Prodan, Sonia (Faculty of Letters, University of Bucharest)

Sacred (Online) Space: The journey of faith from offline to virtual veneration.

This paper delves into the complex phenomenon of transference, wherein traditional religious customs and practices, deeply rooted in the offline world, migrate to the digital realm. The study investigates the convergence of religion, belief systems in general, and technology, focusing on the metamorphosis of sacred rituals and communal traditions as they make their way into virtual space. By employing a comprehensive ethnographic approach, the research applies qualitative methods, such as non-participant observation and discourse analysis within online religious communities and spiritual guidance platforms. The aim is to unveil the intricate processes of adaptation and transformation that occur as individuals and communities navigate the transition from offline to online religious practices. The purpose of this research is to offer a deeper understanding of the evolving nature of technology and culture, highlighting the evolution of religious expression and the broader implications for the preservation and adaptation of cultural practices in an increasingly digital world.

Biographical Note

Sonia Prodan is a student currently pursuing a master's degree in Ethnology, Cultural Anthropology and Folklore. She holds a bachelor's degree in Ethnology, with a thesis that delved into the subject of conspiracy theories during the pandemic. Beyond her interest in the field of Cultural Studies, she also has earned a bachelor's degree in Psychology. Her academic repertoire further expands with a Master of Arts in Psychoanalysis, demonstrating a deep commitment to understanding the complexities of the human mind and behavior. Her interdisciplinary background allows her to better understand the convergence between cultural anthropology, psychology, and folklore. From exploring the complexities of human societies to delving into the nuances of the psyche, Sonia's academic journey is marked by a profound curiosity about the myriad ways in which individuals and communities shape and are shaped by their cultural contexts.

Sunday 30 June

11:30-13:00: Session 8: Narrative Communities

Nicolas Le Bigre (Elphinstone Institute, University of Aberdeen)

Emergent Folk Narrative Forms in Online Commentating.

Every day, users create vast amounts of online vernacular narrative content through the publication of comments on news websites, YouTube videos, social media sites, and more. In focusing on comments (rather than original posts, articles, videos, etc.), we see forms of folk narrative emerge that reflect cultural groups (whether extant physically or virtually) and which respond to the vicissitudes of existence in an interconnected but multifaceted world. Many comments perpetuate well beyond their original posting date, and we can witness the development of narrative forms while also considering these comments in specific global, local, and historic contexts (e.g. Covid lockdowns, etc.). Like all forms of folklore, comments reflect their creators, giving insight into their worldviews while demonstrating the innate everyday creative powers of human beings. Earnest comments sit next to punctuated outbursts, polemical screeds, parodies of popular forms of commentating, and elaborate wind-ups. Intertextual connections abound, with links to other forms of folk narrative in digital and in-person contexts. After considering some methodological and ethical difficulties of researching such dynamic online forms, this paper will consider several examples, arguing why exploring emergent morphologies and typologies in the digital realm is of use to Folklore and other disciplines.

Biographical Note

Nicolas Le Bigre is an archivist and lecturer in Ethnology and Folklore at the Elphinstone Institute, University of Aberdeen.

Maria Isabel Lemos (Universidade Nova de Lisboa / IELT-FCSH)

Posting ‘nos tradison:’ Mapping diasporic digital networks and cultural flows.

Indispensable to the analysis of contemporary societies, the digital universe is both a tool and locus of symbolic and identity production. This dual role is enhanced when it comes to diasporic ties and transnational identities, to which cyberspace emerges as a site for political agency and affirmation of both identity and the place of origin. This is the case of the Cape Verdean diaspora, whose culture of migration is rooted in the country’s history. Occupied and exploited by the Portuguese until the 1970s, and ravaged by the arid climate, Cape Verde is characterized by a *sui generis* Creole culture, the diaspora being responsible for part of the cultural production associated with the country, as well as for recreating its traditional practices. The digital thus represents a space of symbolic ties and promotion of culture, as well as a locus for cultural vindication and rapprochement. This analysis is concerned with mapping the circulation of traditional Cape Verdean tales and the activity of island storytellers on Facebook. The presented data was collected through multiple methodologies and in addition to the concern with linguistic and performative adaptations to cyberspace, this study prioritizes the audience scope and their cultural vindication through the traditional repertoire.

Biographical note

Maria Isabel Lemos is an anthropologist researching the politics and displays of culture within the scope of oral tradition, cultural heritage and literature. She is a collaborator of the Institute for Studies in Literature and Tradition (IELT), of the Working Group ‘Narrative Cultures’ (SIEF) and is a PhD candidate in the ‘Anthropology: Policies and Displays of Culture and Museology’ (ISCTE-IUL) program. She currently develops scientific research on traditional Cape Verdean narratives and their circulation in different social contexts, as well as their categorization as intangible cultural heritage. Between 2019 and 2024 Maria Isabel contributed to the development of research relating to cultural policies, oral

traditions and heritage studies through multiple published articles, conference communications and project initiatives

Francesca Padget (Independent Scholar)

Fandom Folklore: Exploring identity formation and community in fanfiction culture.

Fanfiction is a polarising term, dividing audiences into those familiar with the practice and those who are not. This research explores the sense of community formed among avid fanfiction consumers, to investigate the impact of fanfiction on personal identity. Employing a folkloric lens, fanfiction can be seen as a modern manifestation of oral storytelling, through its interactive nature and reciprocal dynamics. This paper reports fieldwork research that focuses on individuals' experiences with fanfiction, elucidating its role in shaping identity through certain social markers. By addressing the question of whether fanfiction does impact personal identity through self-exploration and personal growth, the study investigates how fanfiction uniquely contributes to the formation of a distinct identity within a community. In so doing, the study adds an empirical dimension by utilising a large survey of fanfiction consumers comprising qualitative (interviews) and quantitative (questionnaire) data. The motivation for and the contribution of the analysis is in uncovering novel insights into the ways fanfiction becomes lore, with fans as its folk, and the significant role it plays in identity formation within specific social contexts.

Biographical Note

Francesca Padget is a recent graduate of the MA Folklore Studies programme at the University of Hertfordshire. Their research typically focuses on East Asia, and they were recently published in EPOCH magazine with an article about Shangri-La.