

I have been asked to write about our success teaching folklore. Our courses are very large. We draw one hundred students, one hundred and fifty; when larger lecture rooms are available, we draw more. Recently, one hundred and seventy students enrolled in our class. Had a larger lecture room been available earlier in the semester, the number would have been higher still. With pressure to produce high enrollments coming from deans and other administrators, faculty in Slavic departments and Slavic faculty in modern language departments across the nation are looking to folklore as the way to counter that pressure. The metafolklore of the situation is that folklore courses are magic and that anyone teaching such courses will easily attract many students. As with all folklore, there is truth to this belief-and also a great many things going on beneath the surface.

Our folklore courses are attractive to students because they have the same traits that characterize all well-taught courses. There is nothing inherently magic about them. As folklore restates the truth in ever-varying and situation-relevant ways, it is perhaps appropriate to restate the traits of good teaching in terms of folklore courses. In keeping with the folklore theme, I have selected three traits to discuss here:

- 1) a good teacher loves the subject and likes the subject; a good teacher of folklore loves the lore and likes the folk
- 2) a good teacher knows the subject
- 3) a good teacher loves the students and is seriously interested in their learning something from the course I will go through these points first addressing an audience that is new to folklore and folklore teaching. Then I will offer a few reflections that might be useful to folklore veterans.

1) Love of the subject.

I cannot overemphasize the importance of this trait of good teaching. In fact, as I will show below, it is this that has made folklore seem magical. Because folklore has not been mainstream in the past, it was selected by those people who truly loved it, who wanted to devote their lives to it even though it was not fashionable, did not offer the prospect of a good job, or any of the usual perquisites. For us, folklore is a passion, a love pursued against all odds. The passion shows and it infects students. Any good teacher loves his or her subject, whatever that subject may be.

For me personally, folklore meets my deep spiritual longings and brings me joy and wonder. I have a very strong drive toward the aesthetic and folk art, both verbal and material, satisfies that drive. Folklore is important on many levels for me. To give some more mundane examples, examining the contrasts between American and East Slavic culture through folklore

helped me understand why my parents practiced the child-rearing techniques which they did, techniques that were at odds with those of our American neighbors. Exploring military conflict through epic has helped me deal with the legacy of war into which I was born. My earliest memories are of mutilated people, of bombed-out buildings, the reality of my physical surroundings in Germany immediately after the Second World War. Epic has offered the means to express the horrors my very young eyes beheld. Only after I devoted about ten years to studying blind Ukrainian minstrels and their poetry did I realize that my desire to explore the role of the handicapped in society and the function that art played in their lives might have had something to do with growing up with a handicapped brother. I could go on, but the above is probably sufficient to make my point: a person who is going to teach folklore and teach it well should find deep meaning in the subject. For that person, folklore should elicit an emotional response. The reason for the response may become apparent only later, but the passion must be there. Frankly, a person enthralled by the beauty and the intricacy of linguistic phenomena is better off being a linguist and a person whose imagination is sparked by written literature is better off pursuing that field. Enthusiasm for the subject infects students and is vital to good teaching.

1a) Liking the subject. This is an integral part of the first point and a transition to point 2.

A successful folklorist who teaches folklore well likes the folk and likes talking to people. I love Ukrainian villages and I love talking to the little old women and the little old men. I do not care that there is no plumbing, that the electricity may not work or be turned off for hours at a stretch, that, frequently, there is no gas and you have to use wood or coal. The beauty of the Ukrainian countryside is one of those things that gives me the intense spiritual experience I mentioned earlier. Someone selecting folklore as a field does not have to love Ukrainian villages and Ukrainian peasants. That person can be interested Russian village life, or Polish or Bulgarian village life for that matter. That person can chose the folk of the city and study urban folklore. The key is genuine interest in the people the scholar works with, respect for them, faith that these people will offer valuable information, great insight. Many people are not comfortable talking to toothless grannies and unwilling to put up with the hardship of the village. They do not want to observe children for hours in order to collect children's lore. There is nothing wrong with that and those people who want to sit in archives and marvel at the work of Pushkin should chose that as their field. My choice is to marvel at the ingenuity of a folk loom and, because it does thrill me, conveying my delight to my students is an easy task.

2) Knowledge of the subject.

This is a given in all disciplines. Training in medicine, in mathematics, in literature, in linguistics is considered essential before venturing into the classroom to teach the subject to others. This given is sometimes overlooked when it comes to folklore. Although folklore is a recognized discipline with a long history in Europe, it is a relatively new field here. This

sometimes leads people to forget that, like all disciplines, folklore requires training in and knowledge of the extensive body of both primary and secondary sources. The other reason that people new to folklore may not realize the need for training, in that folklore, at first glance, can appear simple. The applicable metafolklore here is that the folk are simple and, therefore, anyone can be like the folk, can know folklore. It is true that we are all the folk. But there are many folk groups. Our own is that of the American academic. Each of us belongs to many other folk groups at the same time. Few of us, however, qualify for membership in the folk groups that produced the famous collections of Slavic folklore that we use in teaching our students. Even if we did, folkgroup membership is hardly sufficient qualification for teaching a course. It would be like saying that a diabetic with no medical training is qualified to teach a course on diabetes. Teaching a course on folklore, if it is going to be done well, requires years of studying the folklore, reading primary and secondary sources, going to the field to do one's own collecting. Only then does understanding come and only then does one have a body of knowledge worth conveying to students. Students, a folkgroup themselves, are not stupid. They can tell when a faculty member really knows the subject.

Neither the folk nor their lore is simple. Folklore has developed over millennia. It is extremely complex and hence its power. Any tale, song, ritual has so many meanings that it is impossible to even estimate their number. Tales vary and mutate; genres blur; descriptions of rituals become stories; stories told as true become fabulous and are then retold as real happenings that befell a neighbor or a friend. Teaching folklore requires knowing the field. Only then can the teacher convey its richness, its dynamism, its power. The vastness of the field is intimidating. I have been working in the field for a quarter of a century and am constantly reminded of how much more there is for me to learn. By the same token, the enormity of the field offers great possibilities. This is the other "magic" aspect of folklore. Because the field is so large, there is a high probability that there will be something in it for just about everyone, both every scholar and every student. Also, because folklore has not been a mainstream discipline in the United States, it offers a fresh approach to all sorts of areas, be it the phenomenon of language, the power of narrative, group dynamics, or expressions of spirituality. The fresh approach which folklore provides is one of the things that is making it so appealing now. I think that contemporary American society is especially hungry for new means of spiritual expression and folklore offers these and offers them in a variety of forms: narrative, ritual, sacred objects. But to draw on the possibilities of folklore for fresh expression, especially in the realm of the sacred, it is essential not to trivialize the field.

3) Caring for the students and helping them learn

Our students take our courses because they know they will learn something, not because they want an easy "A" or because they think they will improve their transcripts in some other way. We are not easy graders and no one in his right mind takes a course in Slavic Folktale or Slavic

Ritual and Family Life because it looks good to potential employers. They take our courses because we know the subject. They take them because we are good lecturers. I would be a fool to spend years on performance studies and not learn from the performers whom I have taped, interviewed, followed for years and years. I have learned what makes a good performer and I do my best to be one. Perhaps most importantly, we work hard to take teach our students skills that will be useful no matter where they go. Folklore, with its fluidity, is an excellent venue for developing critical thinking skills. We have students compare and contrast variants. We have them discuss critical interpretations of variants. We ask them to do cultural contrast. We have them discuss the questions at hand in sections (about 20 students per section) and in small groups (the sections are broken up into groups of 3-4 people so that the shy students get a better chance to talk and to contribute). We send students out on collection projects. We teach students writing skills. Our course can be taken for what is here called the second writing requirement and we take this option very seriously. Students write a first draft of some 10-12 pages. This draft is then extensively critiqued and the student writes a final draft of 20 pages. Even those students who do not chose the second writing requirement write essay exams and small papers of 2-3 pages every couple of weeks. These, too, are extensively critiqued to help students improve writing skills. Yes, this is all very labor-intensive and I have been blessed with excellent teaching assistants who have worked with the students on all of these skills. But everyone is willing to put in the effort because what we are doing is valuable. The students see that they are learning the things they need and the teaching assistants see that they are providing a truly worthwhile service, while learning a great deal themselves, and not just about teaching and grading, but also about writing. We have even provided a safety net for students. Because we work with them so closely, we soon see who the problem students are. When we spot a student who seems to be struggling more than he or she should, we call the dean or the appropriate university official. In short, we do all of the things that faculty are supposed to do.

The part above is perhaps useful to veteran folklorists as well as those new to the field. What may be of special interest to veterans, perhaps as a reminder, is that we have adapted our folklore courses and our teaching techniques over time so that they fit the sort of student we have in any given class. We did not do small group work some five or six years ago. However, this is something that students now do on the high school level and in other college courses. They are comfortable with this type of instruction, enjoy it, and profit from it and so we use it in our courses. Similarly, we have adjusted our writing assignments over time and changed the nature of the writing help we give because student needs have changed.

One thing I have tried to do all along is to make sure that every course teaches a few theoretical points that apply beyond Slavic and folklore. Just a couple of examples are showing students that human beings have a need for order, whatever that order might be. I have tried to show students that cultures are systems, that these systems differ one from the other, that every cultural system has an element of the chaotic or unsystematic. I like to work on showing the

power of the word, both oral and written, how narratives exert a centripetal force of sorts, how narrating an event gives it validity, encouraging people to believe something to be true. I like to show students that whatever theoretical point we are working with applies not just to our Slavic folklore data, but also to some aspect of their lives, usually something from American popular culture. I think this is especially important. It makes the course appealing to students. More important, it performs the invaluable service of teaching students to link the classroom to the real world. Too many of today's students view a college education as a test rather than an opportunity to gain skills and information. They think universities certify them rather than teaching them. If in one course they can be shown how to take the material learned and apply it, not just on an exam or a paper, but throughout life, this will make their whole college experience more meaningful and rewarding.

The magic of our courses is that we really and truly do a good job. We love folklore and teach it well. And folklore is an easy thing to love. Folklore is extremely old and extremely complex. Over the years, it has developed something for just about everyone. I may respond most strongly to stories of war and the poetry of the handicapped, but there is childlore, and funerals, and stories about the return of the dead, and various students have selected these as topics for dissertations, theses, papers. Other students have been attracted to gender issues as expressed in folktales or material culture, to memorates, true stories about setting up a community, to folklore themes that have enriched contemporary popular song, or modern literature. In that sense, there is a magic to folklore and, because of its complexity, students can easily find in folklore something that does touch their hearts. Faculty, too, might well find profound meaning. But, to yield its wealth, folklore must be approached with deference. So many tales and legends tell of gold turning to dung when the protagonist fails to treat the wealth he has been given with respect. Yes, this is the end of a millennium and everyone wants a quick fix and success without effort. But millenarian expectations work no better in folklore than in any other discipline. Students may come if they are attracted to a title, but if there is nothing behind that title, they will not stay. Students may come because they think a course is a gut, but does any of us really want to teach that kind of student? But folklore loved and respected is rich beyond anyone's imagination. It can inspire both the faculty member and the student. It can serve as the vehicle for teaching critical thinking and writing skills that will benefit a student his or her entire life. It can provide data for countless fascinating articles and books. It leads to adventure, discovery, and as so many tales tell us, you can drink and drink from its goblet and the goblet never runs dry. There is always so much more to drink, to experience.

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and those many other teaching assistants who contributed to her folklore courses but did not have a chance to review this article.