

English 4396
Senior Seminar
Festival, Ritual, Folk, and Society

MW 5:30 – 7

Carl Lindahl

The course will focus on festivals and celebrations as observed both in past eras and in the present day. These feasts will serve as a device for illuminating the development of folkloric, anthropological, and literary perspectives from the 17th century forward. Beginning with a survey of syncretism in the development of the Western church calendar, the course will move forward in time to discuss the “discovery” of “popular culture” in the Early Modern period, and from there trace festive studies as expressions of concerns of specific cultural contexts. The second half of the course will focus on particular festivities currently enacted – Halloween, Dawili, Thanksgiving, Bodhi Day, La Guadalupana – all of which will be celebrated live in Houston during the fall term. Students will perform their final assignment on one of these contemporary festivities. Throughout the course, we will illustrate different approaches to “reading” festivals, sometimes through viewing videos depicting such events as Dominican Carnival, Cajun Mardi Gras, and the Padstow Hobby Horse.

The course would offer a way of encapsulating the recent history of folklore and literary studies, as well as of introducing students to ethnographic techniques.

Readings/Texts: Include segments of the following

Henry Brand and John Ellis, *Observations on Popular Antiquities* [aka *The Popular Antiquities of Great Britain*]

E.K. Chambers, *The Medieval Stage*

James G. Frazer, *The Golden Bough*

Arnold Van Gannep, *The Rites of Passage*

Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process*

Clifford Geertz, “Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight”

M.M. Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*

Hugo G. Nutini, *Todos Santos in Rural Tlaxcala*

Susan Davis, *Parades and Power*

Writing Requirements and other assignments:

One term project incorporating two papers. The first a library research project focusing on one particular festive enactment, the second a field research project involving ethnographic observation and interviews.

Area covered: folklore, ethnography, anthropology, culture and literature (particularly of the Medieval, Renaissance, Romantic, Victorian, and Modern British periods)