



## Digital Folklore

UNPLUGGED EP 9

*Dr. Sara Cleto & Dr. Brittany Warman*

<https://digitalfolklore.fm>

### **[Intro music begins]**

Perry Carpenter:

Hi. I'm Perry Carpenter, one of the hosts of the Digital Folklore podcast, and this is Digital Folklore Unplugged. Unplugged episodes are where we ditch all the fancy production and narrative elements and we bring you the raw, or only slightly edited, interviews with our folklore experts. On today's show, Mason and I got to speak with Dr. Sara Cleto and Dr. Brittany Warman from The Carterhaugh School of Folklore and the Fantastic.

Dr. Brittany Warman:

I'm Dr. Brittany Warman.

Dr. Sara Cleto:

And I'm Dr. Sara Cleto.

Dr. Brittany Warman:

And together we are The Carterhaugh School of Folklore and the Fantastic, an online school dedicated to bringing folklore outside of the academy.

Perry Carpenter:

You'll hear early on that we were interviewing them primarily as part of our Why is Old Tech Spooky episode from last season, and so we touched on themes of the gothic, nostalgia, and things like that. But we didn't stop there. Sara and Brittany are a wealth of knowledge. They run a school for folklore studies, and they love to share their wisdom and passion for all things folklore. So we couldn't help ourselves. We jumped into questions around folklore basics, terminology, transmission, categorization, social issues, and how studying folklore enriches our lives.

Okay, let's get unplugged.



## Digital Folklore

UNPLUGGED EP 9

*Dr. Sara Cleto & Dr. Brittany Warman*

<https://digitalfolklore.fm>

### **[Transition to main interview]**

Dr. Brittany Warman:

We earned our PhDs in folklore from the Ohio State University in 2018.

Dr. Sara Cleto:

And we earned our master's in folklore from George Mason University in 2012 somehow.

Perry Carpenter:

And you should definitely take the show on the road. I think you guys work well together. You should maybe-

Mason Amadeus:

Right?

Perry Carpenter:

...do something based off of that.

Dr. Sara Cleto:

We have heard this before.

Perry Carpenter:

Yeah. So here's the thing I want to dig into. One of the episodes that we are planning, in conjunction with another podcast called Imaginary Worlds, is the concept of analog horror. Why, when we look at old VHS tapes and CRT monitors and this older technology, why do we feel this sense of dread and intrigue? And as I was reading some of your descriptions about crumbling castles and things that are a



## Digital Folklore

UNPLUGGED EP 9

*Dr. Sara Cleto & Dr. Brittany Warman*

<https://digitalfolklore.fm>

little bit tattered that were once really clean, representing gothic, it started to click in. Is the nostalgia that comes with a show like Stranger Things, is that a modern gothic take?

Dr. Sara Cleto:

That's a really good question. I do think it's playing with similar ideas at the very least. And I think you could make a good case that something like Stranger Things is at least gothic adjacent, if not full on gothic itself. So where I would start with this, Brittany might dive in somewhere else, but there's a scholar of the gothic named Fred Botting, and his explanation for the gothic is basically that it is the past coming back to haunt the present. So if you think of it in terms of old technology that is crumbling, we maybe don't have ways to access it quite so readily anymore, you can definitely think of that as a newer vehicle for potentially exploring the gothic. But where we diverge from this, take it Brittany.

Dr. Brittany Warman:

So where we diverge from this is that we would go a little more specific and say that it's not just any past, it's the folkloric past more often than not. It's these ideas of superstition and monsters and things like that that come back and break through our modern world, our civilized world, our world of rational thinking and remain even though we tell ourselves that we've moved on beyond that.

Dr. Sara Cleto:

Yeah, this feeling that we should be past it and that is ye old stuff and we're more evolved. But the idea that it's still there with us lurking underneath the surface, getting ready to erupt at any time, that's the gothic.

Dr. Brittany Warman:

Yes. That's what we feel is the gothic, and that's why we see it so often interact with folklore and why that's so fascinating and needs to be discussed more, we think.

Perry Carpenter:



## Digital Folklore

UNPLUGGED EP 9

*Dr. Sara Cleto & Dr. Brittany Warman*

<https://digitalfolklore.fm>

Yeah.

Dr. Sara Cleto:

And also, I mean to bring it back around to technology, I mean you can see why old technology is so often like a vehicle for gothic or for sometimes horror that splits from gothic a little bit. But because it's stuff that we are theoretically past, but that used to be so integral, that used to be something we interacted with all the time but that now is inaccessible, and that creates the space for it to potentially become gothic.

Dr. Brittany Warman:

I also think there's a really cool connection with the idea of these things decaying, like film not being as good as it once was, audio going out, the colors and picture isn't as good as it used to be.

Dr. Sara Cleto:

Static.

Dr. Brittany Warman:

Yeah. Everyone is always worried about losing material because it's on old formats, and that seems very gothic to me too.

Dr. Sara Cleto:

And very folkloric.

Dr. Brittany Warman:

Yeah. Just that sense of decay and loss, I guess.

Perry Carpenter:



## Digital Folklore

UNPLUGGED EP 9

*Dr. Sara Cleto & Dr. Brittany Warman*

<https://digitalfolklore.fm>

Well, is there also the fact that we misremember the glory of some of this old stuff too as... when you look at it?

Dr. Sara Cleto:

Oh, hell yeah.

Perry Carpenter:

You pop in a VHS tape that you used to remember is the height of technology and it being crystal clear picture and you're like, "Oh, 480p sucked. I can see all these lines. I can see the equivalent of pixels now, and that's jarring compared to what I'm used to."

Dr. Brittany Warman:

Mm-hmm. Yeah, and it can be a little bit creepy, too, because you're not used to it anymore. You're primed for something very different and then don't get that. And when you see that's this older technology trying to work, there's definitely potential for a feeling of uncanniness, which is definitely part of the gothic as well.

Dr. Sara Cleto:

Which dovetails with what you were saying just a minute ago, Perry, about remembering it in this golden, nostalgic sort of way. And then when the experience of revisiting it doesn't match up to your memories of it, that dissonance can open us up to all kinds of things, like the gothic.

Dr. Brittany Warman:

It also makes me think of... So the gothic's heyday, when it really got started as a mode of literature and art and things like that, was around the same time that the romantic movement was going on in England and people... Part of the romantic movement was this fascination with the way things used to be, this lost culture, these lost things that we want to go back to, that we want to reconnect with. And I think



## Digital Folklore

UNPLUGGED EP 9

*Dr. Sara Cleto & Dr. Brittany Warman*

<https://digitalfolklore.fm>

that is coming out in the gothic. I think there's a reason they were popular at the same time. It has a lot to do with a reaction to the enlightenment and things like that, but I just think that's fascinating.

Dr. Sara Cleto:

And I think it's also noteworthy that when the gothic surged again about a hundred years later at the end of the 1800s, beginning of the 19th century, that was a time with a lot of very, very quick technological change. And a lot of gothic stuff explicitly engaged with ideas of new technology, so it all goes together.

Perry Carpenter:

Maybe that's something to dig into. So I think we touched a little bit on the uncanny piece of this, so we could probably dig in a little bit more there. But there's also that grappling with change piece, because I think one of the things that Mason and I really want to bring out of some of these things, and you heard it in that first episode, is so much of the folklore that exists is a reaction to some inflection point within culture, some low-grade thing that's irritating society in some way. What are some of the low-grade things that would create a gothic anything?

Dr. Sara Cleto:

Another really good question.

Dr. Brittany Warman:

Yeah.

Perry Carpenter:

What is gothic a reaction to, I guess, would be a better way of asking that.

Dr. Brittany Warman:



## Digital Folklore

UNPLUGGED EP 9

*Dr. Sara Cleto & Dr. Brittany Warman*

<https://digitalfolklore.fm>

Well, to me, the gothic is always rooted in anxiety. And sometimes, those anxieties are small things, but sometimes they're really big things, too, that are really difficult to talk about. It's the kind of things that you don't want to bring up at the dinner table, like questions about sexuality, about colonialism, about racism and bigotry in all kinds of senses. And for the gothic, it seems like they use small things to talk about big things.

Dr. Sara Cleto:

Yeah. We actually just filmed a 10-episode course on vampires for a company called Wondrium, and we spent a lot of time talking specifically about, okay, what do we tell vampire stories? And most vampire stories, not all of them but a lot of them, are gothic. And the king of all vampire stories pretty much, Dracula, is hella gothic. It is peak gothic in so many ways. And all those things that Brittany said, things like anxieties around sexuality and romance, around race, about colonialism, about really any sort of anxiety, really, can be explored through the gothic and through folklore in all kinds of different ways. And it seems to get... They get entwined together very frequently.

Dr. Brittany Warman:

I think this applies to most of humanity. It's easier for us to tell a story about something than to confront it direct. And the gothic is all about doing that, and folklore is often all about doing that, finding ways to engage with the world in a personal and artistic way with a lot of other people.

Dr. Sara Cleto:

I'm halfway through rereading *The Castle of Otranto* right now, which I haven't read it years, and that is arguably the first gothic novel, or at least first supernatural gothic novel. And the family that it's about is just... They're absolutely bananas.

Dr. Brittany Warman:

Crazy. Ridiculous.



## Digital Folklore

UNPLUGGED EP 9

*Dr. Sara Cleto & Dr. Brittany Warman*

<https://digitalfolklore.fm>

Dr. Sara Cleto:

They're terrible. They treat each other terribly, especially the father figure. And he wants to marry this young girl even though he's already married and his wife is standing right there, and his son is just crushed by this giant helmet. It's all completely ridiculous and over the top, but it lets you explore like, "Okay, what happens if the family structure is destabilized?" This is a completely melodramatic way of thinking about the breakdown of the family unit, the breakdown of an aristocratic way of perceiving the world around you, in a way exploding all of the different institutions that we expect to hold society together.

And I do want to note at this point that it has been frequently argued that the gothic is ultimately a pretty conservative mode because at the end of the story, all of these things, all of these questions are usually resolved without anything changing. The status quo is reinstated. But there's this period of extreme instability in the middle where all of it is questioned that I find very interesting.

Dr. Brittany Warman:

Yes.

Dr. Sara Cleto:

And in a lot of more contemporary gothic literature, these institutions explode and then stay exploded. There is no reinstatement of the status quo in the same way.

Perry Carpenter:

That's really interesting. Yeah. Does that come back to, maybe in some of this earlier literature, the person writing it had a sense of helplessness or hopelessness of we can do all of this stuff, but it's all going to stay the same no matter what? So they saw that as realism. Or what do you think is the heart of that?

Dr. Sara Cleto:





## Digital Folklore

UNPLUGGED EP 9

*Dr. Sara Cleto & Dr. Brittany Warman*

<https://digitalfolklore.fm>

I think it varies depending on the person who told it. I'm thinking of Mary Shelley, who wrote Frankenstein and was incredibly radical for the time period. So I don't think that when she was writing Frankenstein, she was thinking, "Well, everything's always going to stay the same. Nothing will ever change." But I also don't know that Horace Walpole of the murderous, supernatural falling helmets was really envisioning a lot of social change himself. So.

Dr. Brittany Warman:

When you talked about Mary Shelley, I think that that is a good one to bring up because Mary Shelley... at the end of Frankenstein, there's a certain amount of restoration to the status quo because Frankenstein and the monster go off into the snowy tundra and are never seen again. But there's also an open-endedness there that she really doesn't shut it down completely.

Perry Carpenter:

Yeah. Having not read any of these recently, I'm wondering if there's almost then... if it's not a resolute "Oh my God, it's going to stay the same no matter what," then I'm wondering if it's wanting to unsettle the reader and say, "Imagine a world where all this stayed the same. Wouldn't that be horrible?" Isn't that the real horror?

Dr. Sara Cleto:

That's what we think.

Dr. Brittany Warman:

Yeah, I think so.

Dr. Sara Cleto:

And I think that's why when we come across a lot of the scholarly arguments that say, "No, the gothic is still conservative," I'm like, "Did you read that?"



## Digital Folklore

UNPLUGGED EP 9

*Dr. Sara Cleto & Dr. Brittany Warman*

<https://digitalfolklore.fm>

Dr. Brittany Warman:

Yeah. There's so much possibility, so much instability in here. And in a lot of them, it feels nightmarish at the end for nothing to change, but also sometimes nightmarish for things to change. But it's all about this unsettledness that never really completely dispels.

Mason Amadeus:

I was wondering, and it might be a little bit of a basic thing, but I was wondering for the sake of introducing the concept of gothic, which is something I don't know much about, my initial reaction, I imagine a lot of people's would be, that it's tied to that very specific aesthetic and architecture. And it's a medieval time in Europe, right? How much of gothic is married to an aesthetic and an architecture versus the other hallmarks of it as we've been talking about?

Perry Carpenter:

Yeah, and I want to get you to talk about space after that.

Dr. Brittany Warman:

Yes.

Dr. Sara Cleto:

We would love to.

Dr. Brittany Warman:

We would love to. Yeah. So to answer your question, Mason, the gothic is very difficult to define super precisely because there's just a lot of differing opinions about what makes something gothic. But what it ultimately comes down to is a bunch of things put together and reaching a critical mass where it tips over into gothic. So if you see things like decaying castles and fainting maidens and haunted houses-



## Digital Folklore

UNPLUGGED EP 9

*Dr. Sara Cleto & Dr. Brittany Warman*

<https://digitalfolklore.fm>

Dr. Sara Cleto:

Deep dark forests.

Dr. Brittany Warman:

Family secrets, curses, all that kind of stuff-

Dr. Sara Cleto:

Thread of the supernatural.

Dr. Brittany Warman:

Yes, of course. Once you reach that critical mass, the story really just tips over in there. And that's pretty much the only thing people can agree on when they're trying to define what the gothic is. We do like Fred Botting's idea that it's the past coming back to haunt the present. But again, we would take it even more specific and say that it's often related to folklore when that past comes back.

Dr. Sara Cleto:

The folkloric past coming back to haunt the present. And to complicate things further, everything that Brittany mentioned in that list, any one of those things or a couple of those things could show up in-

Dr. Brittany Warman:

Something else.

Dr. Sara Cleto:

... a story, yeah, and it wouldn't necessarily be gothic at all. Not all stories that happen to have a castle in them are gothic. Not even every vampire story is necessarily gothic. It really is that sheer accumulation of stuff that makes it gothic, which sounds ridiculous, but another key thing about the gothic is that it is



## Digital Folklore

UNPLUGGED EP 9

*Dr. Sara Cleto & Dr. Brittany Warman*

<https://digitalfolklore.fm>

a mode of excess. There's too much. There are too many feelings. There's too much stuff. There's too much melodrama. It's completely over the top, and that excessiveness is part of what makes it gothic.

Mason Amadeus:

So the overwhelming is a major part of that.

Dr. Brittany Warman:

Absolutely.

Dr. Sara Cleto:

Yeah, I really think so.

Mason Amadeus:

Interesting.

Dr. Sara Cleto:

It's weird, and it's very funny when contemporary authors play with that or point it out or parody it. It just really opens the field for all sorts of really, really funny things.

Mason Amadeus:

I'm curious what you mean by that, being not familiar with the genre.

Dr. Sara Cleto:

What I was thinking of was one of my favorite vampire books that I think is pretty gothic called Sunshine by Robin McKinley. And it is set in a world that is pretty post-apocalyptic. It's not what we think of as classic gothic. It's not really moldering castles and dungeons and stuff. It's a world that has coffee shops. The protagonist is a baker who works in a coffee shop.



## Digital Folklore

UNPLUGGED EP 9

*Dr. Sara Cleto & Dr. Brittany Warman*

<https://digitalfolklore.fm>

And at one point, supernatural high jinks ensue and she wakes up in this room that she thinks of as a fever dream of the Castle of Otranto because it's so full of just gothic stuff that she's like, "Am I hallucinating? What the hell? What am I looking at? Who made this? This is ridiculous." So it is a peak gothic space that has been inserted into a more contemporary gothic text literally to make fun of the old aesthetic while continuing to use that aesthetic in other ways. There's a techno gothic decay aesthetic that dominates a lot of the rest of the book, but there's this weird Horace Walpole throwback that I just find incredibly hilarious.

Dr. Brittany Warman:

Which interestingly, is a pretty good segue into talking about the future and gothic and space and sci-fi what happens when they merge, because the gothic absolutely can exist in space. It's not the exact same kind of things. Instead of a castle, we might get a Death Star. Instead of a coffin, you might get a chamber that you have to sleep in or anything like that. Instead of running through a dark forest, you're running through the maze-like labyrinth of a spaceship. But all of these things can be twisted to fit in with a more futuristic, space kind of setting.

Perry Carpenter:

So crumbling spaceships like Star Wars would be more gothic versus Star Trek, which is everything is gleaming and new and-

Dr. Sara Cleto:

Yeah,

Dr. Brittany Warman:

Very much. Yeah.

Perry Carpenter:



## Digital Folklore

UNPLUGGED EP 9

*Dr. Sara Cleto & Dr. Brittany Warman*

<https://digitalfolklore.fm>

What about cyberpunk, like Blade Runner type of stuff, where you have this encroaching newness on the oldness?

Dr. Sara Cleto:

I think it's a little different, but sometimes played with similar ideas. I don't tend to think of it in quite full on gothic terms, whereas there are things from Star Wars where I'm just like, "Are you guys even kidding around? This is the most gothic (censored) I've ever seen." It's so funny.

Perry Carpenter:

Yeah, as soon as you brought that up, it clicked into place. It's like, "Oh, yeah."

Dr. Brittany Warman:

Yes. I mean, it really is. It's really funny to watch it through that lens and thinking about how over the top and melodramatic and full of feelings it is.

Dr. Sara Cleto:

And family drama.

Dr. Brittany Warman:

Yes.

Dr. Sara Cleto:

With family secrets.

Dr. Brittany Warman:

Yes, all kinds of secrets that are revealed.



## Digital Folklore

UNPLUGGED EP 9

*Dr. Sara Cleto & Dr. Brittany Warman*

<https://digitalfolklore.fm>

Dr. Sara Cleto:

Mm-hmm.

Dr. Brittany Warman:

I love it. But yeah. And you said the ruined spaceship, the ruined Death Star in the most recent film... Well, maybe not the most recent film, the-

Dr. Sara Cleto:

Episode IX, I think?

Dr. Brittany Warman:

Episode IX, yeah, where you see them... There's a battle or a fight on the ruined Death Star. And that's just probably the peak where they really just embrace the whole thing.

Perry Carpenter:

Yeah, it's just completely skeletal structure. And yeah, that's amazing.

Dr. Sara Cleto:

Super gothic. And there are other examples of it too. Star Wars is probably by far the most famous one that we could throw out there, but there's a book we're going to read in the upcoming class called Sabella that has a vampire on this planet called Novo Mars, which isn't even actually Mars but is a planet in another system. And it's honestly one of the most gothic things I've ever read in my entire life even though it's all taking place in outer space with space shuttles and hopping between these different planets. It has a very sci-fi aesthetic, but it's just ridiculously, intensely gothic in terms of the aesthetic, the way that the heroine dresses, the kinds of issues that come up about family and sexuality and being super tortured and enclosed and all kinds of threats. It's very, very gothic. So there are many different stories that do this. Even though we almost never think of outer space as being gothic, it can be.



## Digital Folklore

UNPLUGGED EP 9

*Dr. Sara Cleto & Dr. Brittany Warman*

<https://digitalfolklore.fm>

Dr. Brittany Warman:

Another good one that comes up often in scholarship is the movie Alien.

Dr. Sara Cleto:

Yeah.

Dr. Brittany Warman:

That is a story that is very claustrophobic-feeling. There's a lot of dread. There's a lot of discussion about things like gender bubbling below the surface. Even though it seems like a alien monster movie, it is definitely dealing with some of the same kinds of things. You can tell even in the way it's lit in many scenes.

Dr. Sara Cleto:

Mm-hmm. For sure.

Perry Carpenter:

Yeah. So flashing back then, when you think about some of the markers of gothic, like the excess, the looking back and seeing things crumbling and all these ideas of encroaching and grappling with social issues and all of that, one of the things that somebody suggested to us, and this was not a folklorist but it may make sense, is that when we think about old technology bridging into where we are now, there's not only some of the nostalgia and the looking back and then realizing that things weren't as perfect and having this uncanniness and looking at old technology and seeing how it's more faded and the colors aren't as bright as we thought and everything else, but there's also this tipping point that we hit as a society between everything being "I need to pull this off the shelf and plug it in," to more on-demand and more 24-hour news cycles and all of this other stuff. When we think about some of the social issues that may make one of these genres spring up, or one of these folkloric expression styles spring up, do you see those types of tipping points as being critical, or is that a red herring?





## Digital Folklore

UNPLUGGED EP 9

*Dr. Sara Cleto & Dr. Brittany Warman*

<https://digitalfolklore.fm>

Dr. Brittany Warman:

I mean, when I think about when the gothic has really been popular, there were things that directly precipitated it. So like I mentioned before, when it was first getting going at the end of the 1700s, there was romanticism, which was a direct reaction to the enlightenment and a rejection of the purely rational mind in favor of mystery and feelings and such. And so that was definitely responding to something very particular.

And then when there was a resurgence of it at the end of the 1800s, it was a reaction to a lot of different things, but a lot of political things. The rapidly declining power of the British Empire was a big, big reason why people felt scared, why people felt like they were on the precipice of change, and maybe wanting to cling to those things and then realizing some of the things from the past are pretty scary when you look at them.

Perry Carpenter:

Yeah.

Dr. Sara Cleto:

Yeah.

Dr. Brittany Warman:

And now, I think that there are things in place that could signify some sort of gothic resurgence, but it would be a very different form. And I think that there's potential there, but I'm not sure what it would look like.

Dr. Sara Cleto:

I think some of the stuff that we're seeing with space gothic, that kind of thing, or more of a technology-heavy gothic could be the forms that it takes on. But yeah, the gothic often resurges in times of



## Digital Folklore

UNPLUGGED EP 9

*Dr. Sara Cleto & Dr. Brittany Warman*

<https://digitalfolklore.fm>

instability or times of rupture, so I would not be surprised if we saw some kind of technological gothic resurgence. I mean, who knows? We could be in the middle of one right now.

Dr. Brittany Warman:

Right. It also really has something to do with where we are right now. I think we're almost to the place where things are starting to get a little bit scary on the technology side, much like it was at the end of the 1800s for England. It seems like we're almost to the point where technology can get a little uncanny and scary. I'm thinking of things like self-driving cars or AI.

Dr. Sara Cleto:

I'm thinking of AI art.

Dr. Brittany Warman:

Yes, AI art.

Mason Amadeus:

Me too.

Dr. Brittany Warman:

Exactly. And that's a perfect example. And what does that mean for society? What does it mean for art? And these are the kinds of questions that the gothic is really good to try to come up with some sort of answer with.

Dr. Sara Cleto:

Yeah, I mean the gothic intersecting with art is a huge thing. I mean, think about something like *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and how these things can mingle. And then if you throw in technology in the form of AI art, if someone hasn't already written a story about that, that needs to happen immediately.



## Digital Folklore

UNPLUGGED EP 9

*Dr. Sara Cleto & Dr. Brittany Warman*

<https://digitalfolklore.fm>

Mason Amadeus:

It's interesting how both nebulous and concrete gothic seems to be in that there's all of these hallmarks, as discussed, but also you can't pin it down to a list of things. It's an aesthetic. It's tropes. It's motifs. I'm trying to think of the best way for someone who's just never heard of it to think of it. And I was wondering if either of you had a "If someone has no idea what gothic is, here's this thing." Here's a quick summary, or I don't know if that's possible.

Dr. Sara Cleto:

Oof. I mean, I feel like we could at least get them to think of the right vibe pretty quick. We could even say, "Have you ever read or seen a version of Dracula?" or "Think about where Dracula lives." And I'll let them think about that for a second and then be like, "That's probably the gothic." I feel like that's a fairly quick way into at least getting their brain in the right space.

Dr. Brittany Warman:

Right, because some of those things are just so culturally familiar. Even if you haven't read or seen anything to do with Dracula, you're probably still familiar with the character because he pops up on cereal boxes and advertisements and things like that. So you have at least a small idea of who he is and what he represents and what he looks like.

Dr. Sara Cleto:

Yeah. Or even say, "Think of the scariest haunted house that you could possibly imagine, the one that you absolutely wouldn't want to go into." And there, I feel like you could end up veering more into horror-

Dr. Brittany Warman:

Horror. Yeah.

Dr. Sara Cleto:



## Digital Folklore

UNPLUGGED EP 9

*Dr. Sara Cleto & Dr. Brittany Warman*

<https://digitalfolklore.fm>

... than the gothic. And those things are different, but it still might... Probably wouldn't work as well as Dracula, would it?

Dr. Brittany Warman:

Well, to me, the word I keep coming back to, to describe it is haunted. It's haunted by the past. It's haunted by family secrets you don't want to come out. It's that feeling of being haunted. So anything that you associate with that feeling, I think, gives a general impression of what the gothic is.

Dr. Sara Cleto:

The last thing that just popped into my head, there's an amazing writer named Angela Carter who wrote a bunch of gothic fairytales that we adore. They're so good. But she describes the gothic as tread glamour, and I always thought that was really good. It gives you that vibe in two words though. So go, Angela.

Mason Amadeus:

I really like that. That's awesome.

Dr. Sara Cleto:

Isn't that good?

Mason Amadeus:

Yeah.

Dr. Sara Cleto:

I wish I could take credit for it, but can't.

Mason Amadeus:



## Digital Folklore

UNPLUGGED EP 9

*Dr. Sara Cleto & Dr. Brittany Warman*

<https://digitalfolklore.fm>

It's a good pair of words. I have one more quick thing. I've just had a realization that perhaps dawned too late. Are either of you familiar with Sunless Seas or Fallen London? Sunless Seas was a bigger... It was a video game property, but it's very much Victorian gothic in the writing of it. And in talking about this, I was like, "The vibe that everything you're talking about really evoked these games." And I looked it up and they were like, "Oh yeah, it's very influenced by Victorian gothic." And I just didn't know if it was a touchstone for you at all.

Dr. Sara Cleto:

Sunless Seas and what's the other one?

Mason Amadeus:

Fallen London. They're choose your own adventure games, but it's all very text heavy and story-based.

Dr. Brittany Warman:

That's really cool.

Dr. Sara Cleto:

I think I've heard of Fallen London, but I haven't played it. But I've written both of those names down now.

Mason Amadeus:

Nice. They were some of my favorite things, and it didn't really hit me that it was... I just played them to play them. I was like, "This writing's really good, and this mood is really specific and hard to put a word to." And I think that word might've been gothic.

Dr. Sara Cleto:

Awesome.



## Digital Folklore

UNPLUGGED EP 9

*Dr. Sara Cleto & Dr. Brittany Warman*

<https://digitalfolklore.fm>

Perry Carpenter:

So Dracula, gothic. Twilight, not so much even though it has vampires.

Dr. Sara Cleto:

Pretty much.

Dr. Brittany Warman:

I mean, in the sense that there are vampires and that it's often cloudy in Seattle area, but...

Dr. Sara Cleto:

But the aesthetic isn't really.

Perry Carpenter:

I guess there are some scenes with castles, but yeah, the aesthetic isn't. It's more urban.

Dr. Brittany Warman:

It's just not there. Yeah.

Perry Carpenter:

Yeah. Urban fantasy.

Dr. Sara Cleto:

I mean, there are moments that edge closer into it. Yeah, when they actually bring in a castle, I think they go to Italy for a hot second or something, that's legit pretty gothic. But when they're hanging out in Forks, Seattle in a standard restaurant or something, that's really not gothic.

Perry Carpenter:



## Digital Folklore

UNPLUGGED EP 9

*Dr. Sara Cleto & Dr. Brittany Warman*

<https://digitalfolklore.fm>

Right. And then Discovery of Witches, I'm not sure if you've seen that, between somewhere?

Dr. Sara Cleto:

So I actually somehow have not read or seen that. I suspect the gothic quotient is there, if not through the roof.

Perry Carpenter:

It is higher. I mean, there's tons of location stuff in there between Italy and England and everywhere else. So.

Dr. Sara Cleto:

I was going to say it's set in Oxford, isn't it?

Perry Carpenter:

Yeah, yeah. Well, it starts in Oxford and then goes throughout the EU as well, with lots of Romania and everywhere else in it. So a little bit. Lots of crumbling structures, but then also juxtaposed against modern England as well.

One other thing. I mean, Brittany talked about haunting. One of the... And I hate to pull on this analog thing one more time because I feel like I may be trying to go somewhere that we don't need to, but I just want to see if there's something here too. When you're talking about haunting from a folklore perspective and a sociological perspective or anthological perspective, we probably see that through a certain lens. I'm wondering if you could articulate what that is, because when we get to this analog piece, there are some tropes around haunted video game cartridges, haunted DVDs, haunted pieces of technology. Is there anything there that you see as particularly interesting to talk about?

Dr. Brittany Warman:



## Digital Folklore

UNPLUGGED EP 9

*Dr. Sara Cleto & Dr. Brittany Warman*

<https://digitalfolklore.fm>

Well, I mean, I was just had my mind blown by a video that came out recently that is about the internet game, or the internet sensation that wasn't actually a game, but was purported to be a game.

Dr. Sara Cleto:

A story about a game.

Dr. Brittany Warman:

Yeah.

Dr. Sara Cleto:

Yeah.

Dr. Brittany Warman:

It's called Kill Switch.

Dr. Sara Cleto:

So it's a creepypasta.

Dr. Brittany Warman:

Yeah, it's essentially a creepypasta. It was about a video game that had all this crazy... these ideas behind it and all these scary things associated with it. And what blew my mind about it is that it turns out it was actually written by one of my favorite authors, Catherynne Valente. And I was shocked and just delighted to discover this because it really took on a life of its own on the internet, and people added to the story and made up things to go with it. People tried to... They went on searches to find the last remaining copies of this game, and it was all made up. But when Valente talks about it, she doesn't claim ownership over it. She's like, "It went out of my hands. It became something of the internet."





## Digital Folklore

UNPLUGGED EP 9

*Dr. Sara Cleto & Dr. Brittany Warman*

<https://digitalfolklore.fm>

Perry Carpenter:

That's so cool.

Dr. Sara Cleto:

Because it really did go viral.

Dr. Brittany Warman:

Yeah. And I think that that's fascinating thing that can happen on the internet, because I mean the same... I was thinking about this when I was listening to the sample episode that you sent in the context of Slenderman. Again, you see that there was an actual author of Slenderman, somebody who came up with it first, but it didn't matter. And it went into folklore regardless of that fact.

Dr. Sara Cleto:

Yeah. Even if there was an author that you can pinpoint, which almost never happens in folklore, but in internet folklore sometimes you can, because it becomes folklore, it means there is no definitive author of the story anymore. There are a billion versions of Slenderman now. And even though Cat Valente wrote the original story about Kill Switch, it went viral and turned into many other stories that became its own internet legend.

And I wanted to add to what Brittany was saying about Kill Switch. Part of what made that stick, I think, as a viral story about older technology is that it was older technology, right? This video game apparently would erase itself. If you played it to the end, it would be gone and there was no way you could play it again. There's no way you could show it to anyone else and talk about it. I mean, talk about haunted art right there.

Dr. Brittany Warman:

Yes, exactly.



## Digital Folklore

UNPLUGGED EP 9

*Dr. Sara Cleto & Dr. Brittany Warman*

<https://digitalfolklore.fm>

Dr. Sara Cleto:

And then scarcity, the idea that the...

Dr. Brittany Warman:

There were only a few copies made.

Dr. Sara Cleto:

Yeah, the company had only made a very limited number. And even if you did have it, it would probably be hard to play because it was supposedly a video game from the '80s. So there's so much here about it being a story about old technology, and that collection of stories that it came from actually was all about old technology. You would probably get a huge kick out of it. Do you remember what it was called, Brittany? Was it Imaginarium something or...

Dr. Brittany Warman:

We can look it up. I think it's Invisible something.

Dr. Sara Cleto:

We can look it up and send it to you if you're interested.

Dr. Brittany Warman:

Invisible Cities, maybe?

Dr. Sara Cleto:

Maybe. But all of the stories were about old technology or weird technology that had supposedly profoundly influenced the course of how technology had developed, but was all forgotten. And of course, none of it was real, but all of these stories functioned on the basis that it was forgotten technology.



## Digital Folklore

UNPLUGGED EP 9

*Dr. Sara Cleto & Dr. Brittany Warman*

<https://digitalfolklore.fm>

Perry Carpenter:

I love that.

Mason Amadeus:

Yeah, that sounds like a fascinating read.

Perry Carpenter:

Yeah.

Dr. Brittany Warman:

Yeah.

Dr. Sara Cleto:

Yeah. It's real cool.

Dr. Brittany Warman:

It's great. It's really fantastic.

Perry Carpenter:

What I'm hoping is... We have another episode that's really going to be just a back to basics, the questions about folklore that people should have answered if they really want to study the topic. Because again, I think folklore is a term that we use as a society a lot, but without any kind of precision. And we create a lot of confusion and lot of misunderstandings because of that. I want to give people a chance to come up to speed and consider themselves on this journey with all of us. So the first thing I want to do is disambiguate some terms for us. When somebody says the word folklore, what does that mean from a discipline perspective?



## Digital Folklore

UNPLUGGED EP 9

*Dr. Sara Cleto & Dr. Brittany Warman*

<https://digitalfolklore.fm>

Dr. Sara Cleto:

Well, there are a billion different definitions of folklore at this point, and I think they all can offer something really interesting and worth hanging onto. I think it's Lynne McNeill who says that folklore is informal traditional culture, which I think is pretty good. It's pretty short and sweet and easy to hang on to.

This kills me. Our advisor said as a shorthand once, just off the cuff during a class that he was teaching, that folklore was stuff that went well with beer. And I just laughed. Could not stop laughing for five minutes. I'm like, "He's not wrong."

Perry Carpenter:

Right.

Dr. Brittany Warman:

He's not wrong. But yeah, another one that gets thrown out a lot is that it's artistic communication in small groups, that it's informal culture.

Dr. Sara Cleto:

That's Dan Ben-Amos.

Dr. Brittany Warman:

That's Dan Ben-Amos. Yes. And as far as what... As a discipline, I've heard us described as the child of English and anthropology. And to a certain extent, that's pretty true. We exist somewhere between those two disciplines, where we're looking at stories, but we're looking at the stories people tell each other informally around campfires and at lunch meetings and just things that people say in a variety of different places with different people. We're looking at the way that culture develops within very small groups, very simple ways of... Not simple ways. That's not fair.



## Digital Folklore

UNPLUGGED EP 9

*Dr. Sara Cleto & Dr. Brittany Warman*

<https://digitalfolklore.fm>

Dr. Sara Cleto:

I feel like it's often the stuff that people say and the stories they tell in context where they don't think it's important-

Dr. Brittany Warman:

Yes.

Dr. Sara Cleto:

... and when it doesn't matter.

Dr. Brittany Warman:

That's what I was going to say.

Dr. Sara Cleto:

Which conversely, means it really, really does matter-

Dr. Brittany Warman:

It does matter. Yes.

Dr. Sara Cleto:

... because it's what is most true to them when they feel like they're not editing, often when they feel like they're not performing. And of course, you can perform folklore. Folklore, you can perform folktales, or there are storytelling gatherings of all kinds. But I feel like if you really drill down, folklore is the fabric of everyday life. That's what Brittany and I often come back to and what we say.

Dr. Brittany Warman:

Yeah. I like that way of putting it.



## Digital Folklore

UNPLUGGED EP 9

*Dr. Sara Cleto & Dr. Brittany Warman*

<https://digitalfolklore.fm>

Perry Carpenter:

Fabric of everyday life. Yeah, that reminds me of the Zora Hurston folklores, the boiled-down juice of human living type of definitions, the fabric of everyday life.

Dr. Brittany Warman:

Yeah, I like that too.

Dr. Sara Cleto:

It's so good. Yeah.

Dr. Brittany Warman:

The only thing that I would... And fabric gets to it, but I think that what drew me to folklore was that these are the little artistic things that we do in life that people dismiss as not important, like Sara said. It's the ways that we honor the past and look to the future, but it's also... The ways we do that are through these artistic things, like telling stories, making music, having festivals, doing pottery.

Dr. Sara Cleto:

Cooking.

Dr. Brittany Warman:

Cooking. Yes. All of these things that express creativity that people dismiss as not important or not art in some way, but in reality mean probably more than a lot of art does in certain circumstances, anyway.

Perry Carpenter:

Yeah.

Dr. Sara Cleto:



## Digital Folklore

UNPLUGGED EP 9

*Dr. Sara Cleto & Dr. Brittany Warman*

<https://digitalfolklore.fm>

All of that reminds me of... So when I taught intro to folklore in a university context, one of the first big hills that I pretty much always had with my students was that they didn't think they had folklore. They thought everyone else had folklore. Cool people who lived in other countries and had cool traditions, they had folklore. But they did not believe that they had their own folklore. And one, of course they do. Everyone has folklore. But one of the easiest ways to cut through that and redirect them to their own folklore often was through foodways, so the folklore study of food, getting them to think about their family traditions around what they make and when.

Especially if you think, "Okay, tell me about your family's Thanksgiving or your family's Christmas." I'm like, "Well, my dad always has to make the turkey, but my sister's a vegetarian so stuff got weird. And then we had to add..." And before we know it, they've been going on for 15 minutes about all of these traditions and family politics and stories and intricacies. And then I'm like, "Still think you don't have any folklore?" And they're like, "Oh."

Mason Amadeus:

Nice.

I haven't heard that example before. I really like that.

Dr. Sara Cleto:

That was my go-to in the classroom. It always worked.

Perry Carpenter:

Yeah, like the regional stuff, if you go into one area of the country, everybody's about green bean casserole during this time of the year and another.

Dr. Sara Cleto:

And Brittany had that in her family, but we didn't have it in mine because my family wasn't originally from the South.



## Digital Folklore

UNPLUGGED EP 9

*Dr. Sara Cleto & Dr. Brittany Warman*

<https://digitalfolklore.fm>

Dr. Brittany Warman:

So my family was, so we had green casserole for sure.

Perry Carpenter:

Yeah, and I think I heard Lynne McNeill talking once, and she realized that up in the area that she lives in over in Utah, there's a thing that people do, which is anytime there's a funeral, they'll bring mashed potatoes. And people call it funeral potatoes.

Dr. Brittany Warman:

Funeral potatoes.

Dr. Sara Cleto:

Oh, gosh.

Perry Carpenter:

Other areas of the country, they just don't do that. So, I mean, as we're thinking about these terms that people use and they get confused, let me just throw out a grab bag of things and you can jump on one or two. We hear folklore. We hear folktale. We hear fairytales. We hear legends. We hear urban legends or contemporary legends. And then, of course, you talked about food and the way that people create maybe even fabrics and toys. And all of that are different kinds of folklore. How do we start to really understand or use those terms appropriately? Because I think some people... Also, Mason talked about myths and legends. I think for a lot of people, they just grab for a term and they come out with it and don't know how to apply that appropriately. How do we do that with more precision?

Dr. Brittany Warman:

This is a question that comes up a lot, and I think that for the three really big kinds of narrative folklore, we would divide them up as folktales, of which fairytales are a particular, and legends and myths. And





## Digital Folklore

UNPLUGGED EP 9

*Dr. Sara Cleto & Dr. Brittany Warman*

<https://digitalfolklore.fm>

then with folktales, everybody knows that they're fictional stories. They're commonly, fairytales anyway, commonly set in far-off lands with nondescript characters and non-specific things about the real world.

Dr. Sara Cleto:

They take place in once upon a time space.

Dr. Brittany Warman:

Exactly. With a myth, a myth is something, according to folklorists, that is a very sacred story. This is a story that commonly has something to do with the creation of the world or gods and goddesses or why the world is the way it is. And these stories are deeply true to people, so it's polar opposite of a folktale. Folktales, everybody knows they're not true. Mythology, there are people, or were people, in the world that deeply believed in these stories and these concepts.

So in the middle is legends. And legends are stories where you don't know if it's real or fake. It is a story where the question of belief must come up even if it's ultimately rejected. So you listen to a legend and you think, "Do I believe in this or not?"

Dr. Sara Cleto:

The legend invites you to wonder, "Did this really happen?" And you could come down either way. But because it entertains that question, that's why it falls in the middle. That's why it's a legend.

And legends are almost always rooted in real time, in real space. It could be the corner of Main Street and Elm or it could be Great Britain like, "Was King Arthur real?" That kind of thing. Or it could be Slenderman. But all of these invite you to wonder and speculate on whether or not they're true. So it sits right in the middle between the folktales, fairytales, and then the myths on the other end of the spectrum.

Dr. Brittany Warman:



## Digital Folklore

UNPLUGGED EP 9

*Dr. Sara Cleto & Dr. Brittany Warman*

<https://digitalfolklore.fm>

Right. And the other thing about legends is that they're often very local. You will hear a legend somewhere and somebody will say, "It happened just up the street." And then you'll go somewhere else and somebody will tell the exact same legend and say, "It happened just up this street."

And then there's also the idea that folklorists often refer to as FOAF, which is friend of a friend. Like, "This didn't happen to me, but I heard from Susie's uncle that this happened. And so therefore, it's got to be true because I believe Susie's a really smart person. Her uncle must be really smart." So that connection with legends is really strong.

Dr. Sara Cleto:

Yeah, a chain of tenuous credibility.

Perry Carpenter:

There's another thing that I think the general public doesn't know a lot about, which is categorization systems for folklore. I'm thinking like the ATU system for fairytales. Can you talk a little bit about that?

Dr. Brittany Warman:

Sure.

Dr. Sara Cleto:

Sure.

Dr. Brittany Warman:

Sure. So the ATU system isn't really as complicated as it sounds. Basically, there are a bunch of different versions of every fairytale we know. There is a Cinderella from China, a Cinderella from America, Cinderella from France, and all of these stories very clearly are Cinderella, but they all have different names. They're all from different places. They all have different little details to them depending on the context of where they were told.



## Digital Folklore

UNPLUGGED EP 9

*Dr. Sara Cleto & Dr. Brittany Warman*

<https://digitalfolklore.fm>

Dr. Sara Cleto:

All the shoes are different, that kind of thing.

Dr. Brittany Warman:

Exactly, exactly. But they're all recognizably following the same folklore pattern. And so in order to think about this collection of stories, a system was devised to number them as opposed to prioritizing one title because obviously, all of these tales have different titles to different people in different languages. And so if you refer to them by a number, it was a shorthand way of talking about all of the tales and all of the different versions of a particular story.

Dr. Sara Cleto:

Yeah. And then, of course, we can subdivide them down from there. So for example, ATU 425 is search for the lost husband, and that broadly encompasses anything that looks like Beauty and the Beast. But then there's 425A, which looks more like Cupid and Psyche, and 425B, which has more of an emphasis on whatever's going on with the enchanted beast character, and then C, which is more like the traditional Beauty and the Beast story as we tend to hear today. And the numbers go on and the subdivisions go on. So it really is just a way of grouping these stories together by plots so that we can find them and talk about them coherently, a way of just organizing so many different versions of the same story while trying not to prioritize one over the other.

Of course, the ATU Index still really works way better for European folktales and fairytales. There have been efforts at expanding it. It's definitely not perfect, but that's at least part of the thought process behind why it's done that way.

Perry Carpenter:

Is there the equivalent of that or something that's striving to be that for contemporary legends or no?

Dr. Sara Cleto:



## Digital Folklore

UNPLUGGED EP 9

*Dr. Sara Cleto & Dr. Brittany Warman*

<https://digitalfolklore.fm>

As far as I know, I don't think there's one as comprehensive. But I will be perfectly honest that I am not super up to date on my legend research in the same way that I am with my fairytale stuff. So I'm not sure.

Dr. Brittany Warman:

No, I don't know of it, none that function in the same way.

Perry Carpenter:

Yeah, I've looked and haven't seen anything.

Dr. Sara Cleto:

Yeah, I don't think so, but I am not a hundred percent sure.

Dr. Brittany Warman:

Even as incomplete and western-prioritized as the ATU system is, it was still a huge undertaking that deserves a lot of respect because it was a enormous... It was a lot of work.

Dr. Sara Cleto:

It was a lot of work.

Dr. Brittany Warman:

It was enormous thing to do, so kudos to Aarne, Thompson... and Uther. Sorry.

Mason Amadeus:

Can't fathom taking on a project of that scale.

Dr. Brittany Warman:



## Digital Folklore

UNPLUGGED EP 9

*Dr. Sara Cleto & Dr. Brittany Warman*

<https://digitalfolklore.fm>

Yeah.

Dr. Sara Cleto:

No, it's mind-boggling.

Mason Amadeus:

I was thinking it'd be good to get you two speaking on the idea of not having an authoritative canon or a centralized version of stories too.

Dr. Sara Cleto:

Yes. For something to really be folklore, there need to be multiple coexisting versions of it, and no one version is ultimately correct. We very frequently get asked some version of like, "So what's the real version of Snow White? What's the oldest version? What's the most authentic version of Snow White?"

Dr. Brittany Warman:

The original.

Dr. Sara Cleto:

The original. Oh gosh, yeah. The thing is, to us, A, you're almost never going to be able to find it because it's from the oral tradition. We're never going to be able to know what the earliest, original who authored it version is. It's just not actually-

Dr. Brittany Warman:

The urtext.

Dr. Sara Cleto:



## Digital Folklore

UNPLUGGED EP 9

*Dr. Sara Cleto & Dr. Brittany Warman*

<https://digitalfolklore.fm>

The urtext. It's actually not possible for us to know that. And B, it's ultimately not really that interesting of a question. It sounds like it is, but it really isn't, at least to a folklorist. What we think is a lot more interesting is, okay, why are there so many versions of this story? Why do people keep telling this story over and over?

Dr. Brittany Warman:

Why does it resonate so strongly all over the world?

Dr. Sara Cleto:

Why does it resonate this strongly, and what can we learn from individual versions of it in their context? What is this woman over here in Spain telling this version of, I don't know, Sleeping Beauty or whatever? What does the story mean to her, and what does it say about her culture and her experience versus a dude telling the same story in Alabama, where a guy gets to be a Cinderella character or something? There are actually a lot of male Cinderellas, which is really interesting because culturally, we never hear those. So we think that wondering about the meaning of a particular version in a particular context is just way, way, way more interesting than trying to speculate about a question that we will never be able to answer and that wouldn't really tell you that much anyway.

Dr. Brittany Warman:

Folklorist used to be... In the beginning, there was a lot of effort to find the original story, so the urtexts. And gradually, folklore as a discipline just really moved away from that concept entirely.

Dr. Sara Cleto:

Yeah.

Mason Amadeus:

I do have a quick follow-up if it's not too much.



## Digital Folklore

UNPLUGGED EP 9

*Dr. Sara Cleto & Dr. Brittany Warman*

<https://digitalfolklore.fm>

Dr. Sara Cleto:

Yeah, sure.

Mason Amadeus:

And it was something with one of the episodes we're working on that I was trying to find out for myself. So it's something I'm not even super sure on. Perry, you helped out a lot with this. What thoughts do you have about folklore existing as something people take away from a piece of centralized media? So whether that's fan communities or people working together to solve a mystery or, for instance, the situation we're talking about was ARGs in a video game where it's like it's a mystery, somebody set it up, but it's solved by the community that surrounds it. And there's communication and meaning, and then their own stories they take away from it. Are there folkloric aspects to that kind of communication even if it's branched from a centralized thing?

Dr. Sara Cleto:

If I am following this, then absolutely. If you're talking about fan culture or particular subgroups, things like that, part of what makes them what they are is that they have their own folklore. They tell their own story. They have their own community experiences and language and interests and games and all of this stuff. So I think I would just say that yes, absolutely. If I understood that right.

Mason Amadeus:

Yeah, I think the main sticking point is for me is the fact that it is around something that is very centralized, has a single author, single point of publishing kind of thing.

Dr. Sara Cleto:

Oh, oh. Okay. Yeah, that makes a lot of sense. Yes. The version of this that I know best probably is fan culture, like a fan fiction culture or something. So say that you have a group of fanfic writers who all write about Game of Thrones or whatever. Game of Thrones is not a work of folklore. It is a single-



## Digital Folklore

UNPLUGGED EP 9

*Dr. Sara Cleto & Dr. Brittany Warman*

<https://digitalfolklore.fm>

authored fantasy series and TV series. But the stuff that comes out of that community, like the stuff they make together and create together as fans, thousand percent folklore.

Perry Carpenter:

Well, and even... And correct me on this if I'm overstating something. Let's say you had a thing, maybe it's even your school, and out of that is a community, like a Discord server or something like that. That would be a folk group that is centered around the study of folk studies, but some of the conversational shortcuts and the references that people use, all of that would be folklore output of that. Is that correct?

Dr. Sara Cleto:

Oh, yeah.

Perry Carpenter:

Cool. All right. I think you've set us on a good path there.

Dr. Sara Cleto:

Yeah. It might help to think about the concept of folk groups for this. And a folk group can be as little as two people or as many as a hundred or something or even more who all share something in particular. A family is a folk group, and their shared things that they're all related. Or a community of gamers who are all super passionate about one particular game are also a folk group because they hang out and they talk about that thing. So if you think of any of these communities as folk groups and their outputs as a kind of folklore, I think that framing might help.

Dr. Brittany Warman:

I would also recommend looking up something that is... It was a couple of years ago now, but the concept of the folkloresque, which is basically the-





## Digital Folklore

UNPLUGGED EP 9

*Dr. Sara Cleto & Dr. Brittany Warman*

<https://digitalfolklore.fm>

Dr. Sara Cleto:

Hell, yeah.

Dr. Brittany Warman:

... the intersection of folklore and popular culture and how pop culture uses folklore and how it's not exactly folklore, but it's doing something with folklore. And I think that might be a fruitful way to think.

Dr. Sara Cleto:

It's folklorey.

Dr. Brittany Warman:

Well, it's folkloresque.

Dr. Sara Cleto:

Yeah.

Perry Carpenter:

Awesome. And if I remember, I think Trevor Blank wrote quite extensively about that early on too.

Dr. Brittany Warman:

Yes.

Dr. Sara Cleto:

That sounds right.

Perry Carpenter:



## Digital Folklore

UNPLUGGED EP 9

*Dr. Sara Cleto & Dr. Brittany Warman*

<https://digitalfolklore.fm>

All right, so then the last formal question from me then is, I mean, folklore is something that you've both given your lives to in a lot of ways. There's whole academic communities that surround that, and then also independents that surround that. What is it about folklore, and I don't mean this in a negative way but I'm just want to give you a chance to talk about the richness of it, what is it about folklore and the study thereof that makes it something worthy of people investing that much of their life into?

Dr. Brittany Warman:

Sara and I like to talk about folklore and why it's important by saying that it's a way of accessing a kind of everyday magic. Folklore, for us, is the little things in the world that don't seem that important, but really are, and can make or break the way that you experience something, how you understand big things like your family or your sexuality or race or anything like that. These little bits of folklore that you put together, that you interact with creatively, that you use to interact with tradition but also to make changes in your life and in the world of your group, I think all of that is a kind of magic. And I think that it deserves a close look.

Perry Carpenter:

I love that.

Dr. Sara Cleto:

Oh, that was really nice. And now, I'm going to ruin it.

Dr. Brittany Warman:

Oh, no.

Dr. Sara Cleto:

No, no. I love it, and I totally think that stands alone. But I would also add to that, that I totally agree with everything that Brittany just said, but folklore is also incredibly powerful because everybody has it. Everybody interacts with it. And part of what makes it so powerful is that a lot of people don't even



## Digital Folklore

UNPLUGGED EP 9

*Dr. Sara Cleto & Dr. Brittany Warman*

<https://digitalfolklore.fm>

know that they have it. They don't know what it is. They don't know how they interact with it and they don't know how-

Dr. Brittany Warman:

Or they dismiss it.

Dr. Sara Cleto:

Or they dismiss it. And also, how it can use you. So folklore, we love folklore. We love the study of folklore, but it can be used, we really do believe, in good, wonderful, incredible, affirming ways in the world and it can also be used to manipulate people and cause horrible problems, cause terrible-

Dr. Brittany Warman:

Absolutely.

Dr. Sara Cleto:

... beliefs and ideas to spread. And I think knowing what it is, knowing how to recognize this fabric or this thread that runs through everyone in so many different ways, it literally leaves us all together in this giant web, learning how to see it is really, really important.

Perry Carpenter:

That is so cool. We actually have an episode planned on the weaponization of folklore.

Dr. Sara Cleto:

That's really good. Yeah.

Perry Carpenter:

Yeah.



## Digital Folklore

UNPLUGGED EP 9

*Dr. Sara Cleto & Dr. Brittany Warman*

<https://digitalfolklore.fm>

Dr. Sara Cleto:

Yeah.

Dr. Brittany Warman:

It's important that people pay attention to that too. I know I wax poetic about the beauty and the magic and the art of it, but-

Dr. Sara Cleto:

But it's true. I mean, that is true.

Dr. Brittany Warman:

And, to be fair, is why we love it so much.

Perry Carpenter:

Right. Yeah.

Dr. Brittany Warman:

But-

Dr. Sara Cleto:

Yes.

Dr. Brittany Warman:

Which was the question, I will say.

Dr. Sara Cleto:



## Digital Folklore

UNPLUGGED EP 9

*Dr. Sara Cleto & Dr. Brittany Warman*

<https://digitalfolklore.fm>

No, your answer was really good.

Dr. Brittany Warman:

But there is that other aspect of it that definitely needs to be acknowledged as well.

Perry Carpenter:

Yeah. Well, the study of it is a study of us, and I think that that's super, super important. I was wanting to give you a chance to really get that out there because a lot of people do say, "Well, that's just a myth. That's just a fairytale. That's just a legend. That's just folklore." And I think we need to get rid of the just in front of it.

Dr. Brittany Warman:

Absolutely.

Dr. Sara Cleto:

Oh my gosh, yes.

Perry Carpenter:

And say, "No, this is significant because this is our story, our narrative, and it says something about us or something significant about the people from which it arose or something from the people that are trying to use it against another group of people."

Dr. Sara Cleto:

Yeah.

Dr. Brittany Warman:

Absolutely.



## Digital Folklore

UNPLUGGED EP 9

*Dr. Sara Cleto & Dr. Brittany Warman*

<https://digitalfolklore.fm>

Dr. Sara Cleto:

A thousand percent. And so for example, Brittany and I, we're folklorists, but one of our primary specializations is fairytales. And everything that you just said about the way that people don't recognize or minimize folklore, the volume is turned up even higher for fairytales because that's also coded as being feminine and for children and frivolous and silly. And we profoundly believe and know that fairytales are actually really, really important and really, really culturally powerful in so many different ways.

I mean, for example, the Nazis literally used it as propaganda very effectively. But it can also be used to open up new paths to seeing yourself reflected back at you in the fairytales and the folklore that you consume. It can be used in incredibly positive and empowering ways. But if we're stuck just going, "Oh, it's just a fairytale. It doesn't matter. It's just folklore. It doesn't matter," then none of this is seen. So we have to learn how to see it first.

Mason Amadeus:

I know there's more nuance to it, but also on its face, it's strange to be dismissive of, oh, how is that important? It's the story we tell our children who grow up to be the future. So-

Dr. Brittany Warman:

Right.

Dr. Sara Cleto:

I don't know.

Dr. Brittany Warman:

I don't know how that works either. I often thought that.

Dr. Sara Cleto:



## Digital Folklore

UNPLUGGED EP 9

*Dr. Sara Cleto & Dr. Brittany Warman*

<https://digitalfolklore.fm>

I don't know.

### **[Transition to outro]**

Perry Carpenter:

Thanks so much for listening, and thank you to our guests, Dr. Sara Cleto and Dr. Brittany Warman of The Carterhaugh School of Folklore and the Fantastic.

Check out our show notes for information about the school, Dr. Sara Cleto, Dr. Brittany Warman, and a ton of other fun and informative resources.

If you have any questions, feedback, ideas for a future episode, or anything else, you can reach us at [hello@8thlayermedia.com](mailto:hello@8thlayermedia.com). Or if you'd like information about sponsoring an episode, a few episodes, or an entire season, hit us up. We'd love to hear from you.

Digital folklore is created and produced by 8th Layer Media.

That's all for now. Thanks for listening.