

**Comment by Catherine Tosenberger on  
Sudha Rajagopalan's "Not just spooky:  
The collaborative aesthetics of Supernatural fandom on Runet"**

This is an interesting paper, and sets up some great possibilities for further research. As a folklorist, I am fascinated by depictions of folklore within popular culture, and the way fans negotiate these depictions through their own belief systems. This essay continues in the tradition of Mikel J. Koven's great article, "Have I got a monster for you!": Some thoughts on the Golem, The X-Files, and the Jewish horror movie," by discussing the ways in which fans respond to – and correct! – folklore presented on a television series. The author does a nice job of showing fans discussing and responding to the folklore on the series through their own lenses of knowledge and belief. This is a common, and understudied, practice throughout the Supernatural fandom.

However, I feel like the author has missed a major opportunity. The vast majority of fandom studies concerns English-language fan responses to English-language shows; fannish responses of non-English speakers, including Russians, have been neglected. Supernatural, as a show about American folklore – one that, as Julia M. Wright puts it, celebrates "immers[ion] in the local, not the multinational-driven culture of brand recognition and globalized consumerism" (Wright 2008: para. 15). Given this, the author has a unique opportunity to discuss how Russian fans, specifically, respond to Supernatural's depictions of American folklore and urban legends through the lens of their own Russian folk context. How do Russian fans respond to folklore and mythology presented on the show – and how does this differ from that of American fans? As it is, the author has given no indication as to why Russian fans, specifically, are under consideration, and how their cultural and geographic location affects their readings of the show. How do Russian fans bring their own culture-specific knowledge to bear on their interpretations of the show?

The conclusions the author draws about the way fans discuss the series, while very useful, could be applied to any group of fans in any locality. While the author discusses legends a bit – and reference to Elliott Oring's immensely important essay on folk narratives would help clarify terms – there is no attempt to link the American legends depicted on the show to forms found in Russia. How do Russian fans negotiate American legends such as Bloody Mary? The author discusses several fan remarks concerning the Bloody Mary ritual, but gives no indication whether this custom is practiced in Russia – surely that would affect Russian fans' understandings of the viability or wisdom of performing the ritual. A recent episode of the series featured a Leshy, a Russian forest spirit (in the show, the spirit originated in the Balkans) as the villain: how did Russian fans respond to this depiction of Russian folk beliefs?

Further, the show's depiction of Christianity is heavily influenced by Catholicism – not least because in the Anglo-American horror tradition, the accoutrements of Catholic Christianity are presented as being the most efficacious (not to mention picturesque) antidote to evil, even though Protestant denominations are more dominant in Anglo-American culture. How does this affect how Russian fans, who are coming from a context wherein Orthodox Christianity is dominant, articulate the theological and metaphysical issues raised on the show? The author also tosses around the word "Gothic" a lot, without ever fully explaining what is meant; the Russian literary Gothic developed along somewhat different lines than the British, and I would be interested to see, again, how this affects Russian fans' understandings of the series.

Another issue is that the author chooses only to focus solely upon analytical responses to the series. While this is fine, I think a mention of the vast amount of creative material produced by Supernatural fans would be in order here, since fans also use fan fiction, fan vids, etc., to comment on the folklore of the show. In the show, main characters Sam and Dean Winchester roam America hunting ghosts and monsters; American Supernatural fans often research their own local folklore and use it in

their fiction. Many fan stories feature Sam and Dean investigating crybaby bridges in Ohio, haunted inns in Massachusetts, or hoodoo practices in Mississippi; many also draw upon the folklore of their own ethnic communities. How do fans in Russia use folklore creatively in their responses to the show?

On that note, I strongly disagree with the author's statement that "online fandom is not different from offline fandom" (2). The source for this claim is Sam Ford's article on soap fandoms; while the Internet may not have radically changed soap fandoms – which are traditionally quite low on creative fannish production – it has had an enormous influence upon the functioning of other media fandoms. Henry Jenkins (*Convergence Culture*), and myself ("Homosexuality at the Online Hogwarts"), among many others, have discussed the ways in which the nature of online discourse has changed and shaped fandom interaction. The Internet has greatly affected the production and distribution of fannish responses, allowing far greater numbers of people, especially young people, to engage in participatory fandom, then ever before. Fan creative production, such as vidding and fan fiction, in particular, has been affected. In addition, *Supernatural* began airing in Russia a year after its North American debut; do fans use the Internet to catch up with the series, or do they confine their discussions to those episodes that have been aired on television in Russia?

I appreciated the author's distinction between different fan sites and the different communities that surround them; however, I felt this could be articulated more clearly. In English-language *Supernatural* fandom, for example, *Television Without Pity* is a vastly different space than *Livejournal*. Since *Livejournal* is owned by a Russian company, and has a large Russian-language contingent among its users, I would be interested in some discussion of Russian *Supernatural* fans on *Livejournal*.

In conclusion, I think this is an excellent start, but I'd love to see a study of Russian *Supernatural* fandom that is more clearly situated within a Russian cultural context, and how this affects fannish responses to the show.

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