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Review

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duced his style to bald, jargon-ridden statements of principles. His subject matter is important because its emotional power is still vital in Oglala communities. Some of that emotional power should have animated the book's style.

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## Theoretical Works

*Text and Context: The Social Anthropology of Tradition.* Edited by Ravindra K. Jain. (Philadelphia: Institute for the Study of Human Issues, 1977. Pp. x + 237, introduction, notes, bibliographic references, notes on contributors, index. \$13.75)

This is the second volume in a series entitled "ASA Essays in Social Anthropology," general editor: Edwin Ardener. This book of essays by eight contributors, and some other titles in the general series, arose from a 1973 conference of the Association of Social Anthropologists held at St. John's College, Oxford. The conference session from which this volume emerged was entitled "The Anthropology of Literary and Oral Sources," which seems to be a more accurate description of these essays than the one finally placed on the title page. Jain's introduction to this volume makes it plain that the folks at this gathering were not concerned with the usual type of motifs-in-great-literature presentation which follows a time-worn groove we can all recite by heart: consider literary work X; it has all these folklore things in it; isn't that interesting? This strategy has many difficulties, aside from the overarching puzzle it contains. (The puzzle is: Why would someone go to all that trouble to make a study the upshot of which is that this "folklore" stuff is interesting?)

Among the problems in such a strategy is that it encourages the old colonialist mentality, which in this case would take the form of "us" intelligent, enlightened, and civilized literati (and friends or appreciators) being conceived as in opposition to "them" persons in another culture (international colonialism), or, "them" persons in that odd folk culture in our neighborhood (backyard colonialism). Another difficulty such a strategy includes is the understanding of that which has been designated as "folklore" as being "oral tradition," which is then conceived as opposed to literature which is of course nonoral tradition. This is a difficulty for several reasons. First of all, the attempt to correctly describe (notice I did not say "define") "folklore" as being "oral tradition" is a dead end for it leads to a contradiction. If we begin with the maxim that "folklore is what folklorists study," and then ask for a correct description of what they study, we will find that they have for the most part been studying written-out materials which they call texts. Therefore, "folklore" is not "oral tradition" but written materials, and the study of "folklore" has been pretty much the study of written materials, of "literate-ure," in contradiction to the folklorists' claim that they study oral tradition. It is

the proponents of folkloristics who have actually begun to study the living processes of “oral tradition,” but then this group of scholars, because they don’t want to be known as students of “folklore” (which, judging by what folklorists have actually studied, is a set of literary texts, usually regarded colonially), describe themselves as “students of folkloristics,” or even with more devilish terminology to be mentioned only in quick passage by, for example, the editor of our journal in the special paragraph that introduced his tenure (1976, 89:405–406), else a spell were to fall upon us all. But then we (even editors) are all “folk,” and subject to the “speak-of-the-devil” syndrome; that is to say, we are all human beings with a great deal in common with every other normal human. Secondly, reduction of live oral tradition to literary texts which are then studied as literature, and not as oral tradition, is perhaps an easy technique to practice. But it is about as effective as attempting to study the life of lions by studying the works of some lion taxidermists. But maybe that is the real secret goal of many folklorists (preserving “folk” literature). One might identify such a person as a closet Homer.

The present volume of essays is an important continuation of the now well-entrenched tendency within our discipline to overcome and overthrow such conceptions and uncritical habits that have burdened us with “interesting colonialism.” Having seen folklore as “what folklorists study,” and noted that it is an inconsistent activity, we now may depart from that strategy. In its place we find reason to hope in that students of folkloristics propose to study various universal (common to all societies) behavioral patterns of the species *homo sapiens*. These patterns include those for storytelling, music making, and many other activities. Such a sublimated folkloristics, or whatever it will finally be named, instead of being somewhere near the caboose as it is now, will become the most important of the sciences of man, for it is these universal processes that make us recognizably human. I wish to indicate briefly how each essay in this set is a contribution to the continuing effort to be rid of long-disconfirmed habits in our studies.

In an essay on the categorization of space in Hindu rituals, Das quite correctly insists that one must gain an understanding of native systems of classification if one wishes to grasp the way native rituals are organized. This simple fact has often been overlooked by scholars from all the human sciences in their haste to take to the “field.” The solution that Das finds for this general problem in the particular case under study, Hindu fire ritual, is in the form of a manual written by the practitioners of this particular ceremony. This is an admirable beginning. But the manual dates from 1892. And Das states (p. 10) that “We are not concerned immediately with the relation between the rules as laid down in the texts and their observance in practice.” Furthermore, “obviously there will be many variations. . . .” So we seem to be back into the frying pan—that is, the study returns again to the strategy of imposing nonnative classifications in studying the target native practice. That this is indeed occurring subtly throughout the essay can be seen at various additional points. A solid example (p. 17) is a remark about “folk myths,” surely not a part of that native classification system.

The essay by Herzfeld begins with a claim that “Oral tradition, by its very nature, is commonly inaccessible to the methods of diachronic analysis” (p. 29). But this study is supposed to be concerned with a “rare exception” to that general rule, a series of “texts” of “*The song* . . . generically known as *the ‘swallow song’*” (emphasis added). We are not given any evidence why the set of texts somebody selected and chose as “*the swallow song texts*” are an exception to this general rule. Moreover, as the study unfolds, at crucial points Herzfeld often claims that *thus* some particular structural opposition must exist in the data being considered. It is often not clear what evidence there is, or why the particular evidence given, makes it the

case that all these instances of *thus* and *therefore* signal conclusions well supported by relevant premises. The last section of this essay (pp. 42–46) is a useful contribution to the important question of classification and taxonomy. Herzfeld gives a nice critique of the use of terms such as *corrupt text*, or *archetype*, in older methods for studying “oral tradition” which were based on philological techniques for studying manuscripts. Yet Herzfeld appears to be unaware of earlier more complete critiques of this same matter. To indicate only a few items one might consult: see *JAF* 82(1969), 313–328; several of the essays in the special issue of *JAF* 84(1971), no. 331; and *JAF* 86(1973), 114–130. After 1973, representative works are: *Folklore*, 87(1976), 192–200; and Jones’s *The Hand Made Object and Its Maker* (University of California: Los Angeles, 1975). In general, contributors to the current volume seem not to have any experience with relevant recent extensive theoretical literature arising principally from the work of members of the American Folklore Society. Herzfeld concisely summarizes the foundation upon which his study is based (see p. 45). The question that remains with Herzfeld’s essay is whether he has avoided his own criticisms. I suspect that he has not, but that is a matter for later discussion.

The third essay, by Ossio, concerns a book by a seventeenth-century Peruvian Indian, Felipe Guaman Poma de Ayala, in which Poma ostensibly gives in 1,179 pages an account of the origin of the world, and continuing the account until the author’s present, all of which is supposedly for the benefit of the Spanish king to whom it is addressed. This is a marvelous set of phenomena in which to try one’s hand at conceiving and testing improved hypotheses for the issues that form the title of this volume. Ossio argues that Poma’s book is really a strong and admirable metaphysical or mythic account of Andean cosmology and eschatology, written by a knowledgeable native to try to educate the Spanish, instead of being an incompetent piece of history written by a stupid Indian. Moreover, Ossio urges that it be judged as myth, and not as history. *Myth* was an infelicitous choice by an essayist trying to break the colonialist mentality. Yet Ossio’s main point seems to stand. Consider that much of what passes for scientific history, at least in the United States, is nationalistic metaphysics. Consult almost any high school U.S. history textbook for an example.

“The Funj Mystique,” by Wendy James, is an inviting piece of ethnographic detective work. The goal of the piece is to answer the question: Who were the people known as the Funj, who apparently settled in part of the Sudan in A.D. 1504, yet presumably vanished like a star on a summer’s morning sometime in the nineteenth century? Where did they come from, who were they, and what happened to them? In dealing with these questions as they are relevant to the Funj, James works hard on the notion of ethnicity as a source for historical continuity, and she concludes by suggesting that the term may not be an ethnic reference at all. And in so doing, she succeeds in badly damaging the notion of ethnicity as a useful scientific term. Anyone who wants to continue to talk about ethnicity should be forced to read this essay.

Els Postel-Coster in “The Indonesian Novel as a Source of Anthropological Data” discusses a large body of novels written by native authors from West Sumatra. These works deal with themes of adjustment of native patterns of living to the push of progress in a modernizing society. The essay is primarily a search for a method for studying this body of literature, understood as anthropological data. Postel-Coster rejects several possible methods for performing such a task, and for good reasons. Among the losers are: these novels exhibit unconscious parallels between individual personalities and culture; these novels are documentaries; they are histories; they are reports of what happens in everyday life; they are a mirror of society; and

they house within them a kind of Lévi-Straussian germ (the hidden bacterium of opposition). What then *are* these novels and how shall they be studied? They are the ethnographic works of native anthropologists, says Postel-Coster, and we should become the students of these matters, not their controllers who force them into the passive role of informant to Bwana. Amen.

Students of Asian life will welcome Yamaguchi's "Kingship, Theatricality, and Marginal Reality in Japan," and Ward's "Readers and Audiences: An Exploration of Traditional Chinese Culture." Both deal with the traditions of theater—in the former essay understood as a symbolic system, and in the latter as performance. Yamaguchi presents a phenomenological (from the inside) account of his topic. Ward uses a cultural-historical approach, although with some amendments.

The last essay, "Literacy and Classification: On Turning the Tables," by Jack Goody, presents the interesting hypothesis that the common scholarly device of displaying humanistic data in tabular form may conceal methodological errors and biases. Even tables of oppositions seem to display such biases. The chief sin (p. 220) is that such tabular techniques apply fixed, graphic ways of thinking (remember literate-*ture*) to oral tradition, which is fluid, complex, relational, multichannel. Thus does Goody display his skill as a scholar of folkloristics.

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*Oral Poetry: Its Nature, Significance, and Social Context.* By Ruth Finnegan. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1977. Pp xii + 299, preface, bibliography, index, 4 plates. \$15.95)

This book is a wide-ranging study of oral poetry from a sociological viewpoint. Finnegan's chapters discuss the general nature of oral poetry, the main approaches to its study, the ways in which it is composed, style and performance, transmission and distribution, poets and their social roles, the role of the audience, and the relationship of oral poetry to society. As a result of examining a great amount of material from all over the world, she has come to distrust all-inclusive theories of oral poetry and rather stresses its great variety. She eschews concise definitions of terms such as "oral" and "poetry" and instead describes ranges of characteristics that are commonly associated with them. In fact, she draws no clear-cut line between oral and written literature and includes familiar hymns, Christmas carols, and popular songs transmitted by modern mass media within the scope of oral poetry. She thus seems to be defining as "oral" anything that is listened to rather than read. Some will find her definition of "oral" to be excessively broad, though it was evidently formed in reaction to other definitions that are too limited (for example, oral = traditional or composed during performance). While Finnegan is basically correct in seeing a continuity between oral and written literature, her approach probably opens the floodgates for all sorts of studies of "orality" in written poems, poetic dramas, and popular songs. Finnegan herself avoids a detailed discussion of these problems and sticks mainly to examples drawn from societies usually described by others as "folk" or "primitive." Other than a discussion of Marshall McLuhan's theories and a criticism of Albert Lord's pessimistic view of the effect of print on oral performance, her treatment of mass media is largely confined to some general remarks on the potential of radio and television as exten-