

***Women and Tradition: A Neglected Group of Folklorists.* By Carmen Blacker and Hilda Ellis Davidson, eds. (Durham, NC: Carolina Academic Press, 2000. Pp. 285, photographs, index, k ISBN 0890897395.)**

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Women and Tradition: A Neglected Group of Folklorists. By Carmen Blacker and Hilda Ellis Davidson, eds. (Durham, NC: Carolina Academic Press, 2000. Pp. 285, photographs, index, ISBN 0890897395.)

The title of this text is misleading, the introduction fails to illuminate the work, and the whole book lacks unity of perspective or direction. However, it's not a complete failure; most of the individual essays are good, and a few are excellent.

When one skims the list on the cover of the alleged "neglected group of folklorists" considered, one could hardly fail to be taken aback by the inclusion as "neglected" scholars of Zora Neale Hurston (who is practically an academic field by herself!), Katherine Briggs, and Margaret Murray. I googled "Zora Neale Hurston folklorist" on July 5th, 2003 and got 1420 hits; "Margaret Murray folklorist", 563; and "Katherine Briggs folklorist", 113. For comparative purposes, I also googled "Richard Dorson folklorist", and netted 225 hits. That two of the above three "neglected" women have a bigger internet profile than their near-contemporary, anything-but-neglected male counterpart further problematises the use of that expression.

Some other subjects in this book, including Theo Brown, Violet Alford, Ruth Tongue, and Christina Hole, while not exactly household names, would be familiar to anyone who has taken even a cursory glance at British folkloristics. Of the earlier scholars, Anne McVicar Grant, Charlotte Burne, and Alice Gomme received some attention from Dorson in *The British Folklorists* (1968). Indeed, with the exemption of Mary Alicia Owen and Hurston, the subjects are British. The piece on Owen — an exemplary brief intellectual biography by Lauren Greenwood — shows that her work was published and known in late-nineteenth century Britain. The real outlier, in fact, is Hurston. Her removal would have allowed for some harmony in the subjects selected; all the other women, in different ways, influenced the direction of folklore studies in Britain. Perhaps Hurston was flown in by the American publisher, hoping to draw interest from a U.S. audience.

Compounding these problems is the introduction. It begins with a combination of banal essentialism: "Women possess a special knack, compounded of tact and sympathy, of persuading old or shy people to tell what they recall of events or customs..."(3); and misleading anachronism:

Now the danger [of loss of traditions] comes from memories so clogged with the fortunes of characters in television soap operas that traditional tales are pushed out of mind. Often the old become ashamed of their memories; Clothilde Balfour tells how one of her informants, an old woman of Lincolnshire, had herself in her young days observed the rites she described, but "would not confess it within hearing of her grandchildren, whose indifference and disbelief shocked her greatly" [Balfour 1891: 149] (3-4).

A good editor would certainly have caught such absurdities as the authors' apparently blaming the reticence of a late nineteenth century woman on television; none is listed.

The introduction as a whole does not provide a focus, and so the book really doesn't hang together. Some of the pieces are pretty straight biography; others, like Georgina Boyes' fine examination of Alicia Bertha Gomme, do a great deal to help the reader understand the subject's place as a woman and a scholar. Certainly, no individual woman in this collection (again, with the exception of Hurston, and possibly also of Margaret Murray) has been the subject of a sympathetic contemporary reevaluation. While most of the studies do work towards contemporary reevaluation, Jacqueline Simpson's piece on Murray, for example, is highly critical of her research and writing (as others have been). Recent studies by Donald H. Frew have addressed head-on the academic dismissal of Murray's work (see e.g. 1998; see also Simpson's rejoinder 2000), but Simpson does not include them.

I have always felt that reviewers should criticise work in its own terms, rather than for not doing what they wanted it to. And yet in the absence of any indication as to how the subjects were chosen, I wonder why there are only American and British women. I had hoped for a few more real discoveries, like Diane Tye's (1997) fine evaluation of the "undisciplined ethnographer" and local weekly newspaper columnist Jean D. Heffernan. Certainly, there are a few unfamiliar faces here, some tantalising material, and several estimable studies; too bad there wasn't more of all three.

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Corvées et quêtes. Un parcours au Canada français. Par Jeanne Pomerleau, préface de Jocelyne Mathieu (Montréal : Éditions Hurtubise HMH, Cahiers du Québec, collection Ethnologie, 2002. 430 p., ISBN 2-89428-590-6.)

L'ouvrage de Jeanne Pomerleau constitue un essai ethnographique sur le sujet des corvées et des quêtes qui ont eu cours chez les Francophones d'Amérique du Nord. À notre connaissance, il s'agit de la première synthèse systématique sur ce thème. Construit dans une seule intention descriptive, l'ouvrage s'appuie sur une documentation abondante de nature factuelle, puisée surtout dans des sources de première main, écrites et orales. L'un des plus grands mérites de cet ouvrage est de rassembler sous un même couvert la description minutieuse des principales corvées et quêtes. L'entreprise rigoureuse couronne d'ailleurs une dizaine d'années de recherche d'une auteure expérimentée. Jeanne Pomerleau cumule plusieurs titres de la même facture qui recensent des métiers disparus, inusités ou des aspects des travaux de la vie d'autrefois tels que : *Métiers ambulants d'autrefois* (1990) ; *Arts et métiers de nos ancêtres, 1650-1950* (1994) ; *Les chercheurs de trésors* (1996) ; *Gens de métiers et d'aventures* (2001).

L'ouvrage comprend deux parties. La première traite des corvées en cinq chapitres de longueur inégale. À l'exception du premier chapitre qui donne un aperçu général des catégories de corvées, chacun est divisé selon un type de corvées. La seconde partie comporte sept brefs chapitres qui portent sur une quête particulière (la Guignolée, la quête de l'Enfant-Jésus, la Chandeleur, le Mardi gras, la mi-carême, la quête du bedeau et l'Halloween). L'information sur les corvées est présentée judicieusement selon un regroupement typologique, ce qui fait l'une des grandes forces de l'ouvrage. La description de chaque type de corvées respecte l'ordre qu'elles occupaient dans le cycle annuel.