

**Living with Stories: Telling, Re-Telling and Remembering.
Edited by William Schneider. (Logan: Utah State University
Press, 2008. Pp. 175, illustrations, photos, notes, bibliographies,
index, ISBN 978-0-87421-689-9)**

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Volume 32, numéro 2, 2010

Tourisme culturel
Cultural Tourism

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1006318ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/1006318ar>

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Éditeur(s)

Association Canadienne d'Ethnologie et de Folklore

ISSN

1481-5974 (imprimé)

1708-0401 (numérique)

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Citer ce compte rendu

Butler, K. (2010). Compte rendu de [Living with Stories: Telling, Re-Telling and Remembering. Edited by William Schneider. (Logan: Utah State University Press, 2008. Pp. 175, illustrations, photos, notes, bibliographies, index, ISBN 978-0-87421-689-9)]. *Ethnologies*, 32(2), 307-309.
<https://doi.org/10.7202/1006318ar>

qui, dès sa parution originale en anglais en 2005, s'est imposé comme un incontournable dans le domaine. On ne peut que s'en réjouir.

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There can be no doubt that it is difficult to speak comprehensively about a book which contains a variety of essays from a selection of authors, but the task is made even more complicated when these works are drawn from different academic fields. While many different approaches are used in *Living with Stories: Telling, Retelling and Remembering*, all of the writings are drawn together by a shared interest in narrative. Showcasing work by scholars in the areas of folklore, history and anthropology, the book seeks to determine not only what makes people relate narratives, but even more importantly, the process by which they are repeated and the forces which might change them.

Diverse topics are brought together in this book under the collective heading of oral history, which editor William Schneider explores in his introduction, noting the long-standing prejudice in many academic fields against this kind of account, which "couldn't be proven by empirical evidence" (3) and thus, was merely the poor cousin of written documentary sources. Within the covers of this work, however, the fluidity of oral history is understood and actively embraced. This book recognizes that the purpose of these accounts is not necessarily to relate history exactly as events occurred, but to relate events in a culturally

relevant way which is appropriate for a particular context. As Schneider notes, "Each telling adds new dimensions to our understanding and interpretation" (7).

Of course, in such a collection as this, some pieces will be stronger than others and some will appeal more to particular individuals. I found Holly Cusack-McVeigh's examination of a Yupik etiological narrative to be particularly interesting as it traces the way in which a narrative was used to educate her, as an outsider, in the ways of Yupik culture. Similarly, Aron Crowell and Estelle Oozevaseuk's collaborative ethnography of Yupik narrative is intriguing for showing the way in which narrative seeks to teach morals about appropriate conduct rather than attempting to give an accurate history of the St. Lawrence Island epidemic of 1878-1880. An accurate transcription of the narrative in both Yupik and English gives the flavour of the storytelling style and underlines the different styles which storytelling takes in different cultures.

In addition, *Living with Stories* recognizes the different forms which narrative can take – that it is not merely storytelling for an audience. For instance, Kirin Narayan examines women's songs in India in the context of wedding celebrations, looking at how they are transmitted and the importance they have in relationships between women. Joanne Mulcahy takes narrative to the everyday level, examining the role of metaphor in the narratives told by Eva Castellanoz as she seeks to inspire others. Sherna Gluck, however, examines narrative as a way of talking about political history, namely with reference to Palestinian women's narratives. She notes that these narratives vary depending on the political realities at the time of telling, reflecting just one of the many influences which may shape the narratives we relate. Of all the essays in this book, I feel that Gluck's is the weakest, though this may merely reflect my own academic interests as a folklorist, as opposed to Gluck's as an historian. So much space must be devoted to providing the political context for these narratives that I feel the actual stories and the people that tell them have become somewhat lost. While context of all varieties is undoubtedly valuable, indeed essential, to understanding narratives, in this instance, an appropriate balance does not seem to have been struck.

Lorraine McConaghy's approach is very different to others in this book, providing an account of the use of life histories in a museum

outreach program. In the context of the other academic papers, such a practical study is refreshing, near the close of the book, as she outlines the way in which taking on the persona of another person can give one a different window into someone else's life. Outlining both the strengths and weaknesses of such a project may provide ideas and inspiration for those working in the public sector.

As disparate as these approaches may seem, they are drawn together through the occasion on which they were all first delivered in 2004 – a meeting of the U.S. Oral History Association. In addition to the delivery of the papers, a discussion was also included between Schneider, the author, and another academic who could bring further insight to the topic. These discussions are included in this book, rendered as more or less transcriptions of the conversations. While these discussions add a great deal of interest to the papers, lifting the topic back into the realm of people rather than paper, they seem frustratingly brief, each only occupying a few pages. The reader is thus left with a feeling that the conversation has been cut short and wishing to hear more. That said, these discussions provide a unifying force for the book as a whole and even provide some of the most touching and insightful moments of the book, such as when folklorist Barre Tolken speaks about his family's interest in whaling songs as a kind of cultural memory which is still important to him and his relatives though they have not been whaling for generations. Narayan sees a similarity with her own work in the way in which singing songs can be seen as an “imaginative participation” (97) in the experiences or way of life of one's ancestors.

Living with Stories is an exciting addition to narrative scholarship, which is made stronger by its diverse topics and approaches. It is a work which clearly understands the role narratives play, that they have the ability to shape a culture, while at the same time being reshaped themselves to respond to the needs of that culture. This collaborative effort will hopefully increase academic respect for oral history studies by clearly demonstrating that creating and telling stories “is the way we draw from the past to make sense of the present and the future” (15).

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