

***Something out of Nothing, the Work of George Cockayne.* By Stephen Inglis (Ottawa: National Museum of Man, Mercury Series, Canadian Center for Folk Culture Studies, paper no. 46, 1983)**

Cora Greenway

Volume 6, Number 1-2, 1984

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1081240ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1081240ar>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

Association Canadienne d'Ethnologie et de Folklore

ISSN

1481-5974 (print)

1708-0401 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this review

Greenway, C. (1984). Review of [*Something out of Nothing, the Work of George Cockayne*. By Stephen Inglis (Ottawa: National Museum of Man, Mercury Series, Canadian Center for Folk Culture Studies, paper no. 46, 1983)]. *Ethnologies*, 6(1-2), 158–159. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1081240ar>

pied puisse entrer dans le fameux soulier, ou encore se font arracher les yeux par des pigeons, en punition de leur méchanceté.

Soulignons l'intérêt de l'étude inédite d'Archer Taylor, celle de Paul Delarue, qui prouve une fois pour toutes qu'en France, « la petite pantoufle de verre » de Charles Perrault n'était pas en « vair » mais bel et bien en verre, n'en déplaît à Balzac, Littré et autres lexicographes ! Enfin, le volume se termine par la transcription fidèle d'une authentique performance orale, vivante et spontanée, pendant laquelle les membres d'une famille italienne racontent Cendrillon, chacun interrompant allégrement son voisin pour imposer sa propre version.

Dans ce *Cinderella*, Alan Dundes préconise ainsi une approche éclectique du conte folklorique, et n'écarte à priori aucune méthode d'analyse. Selon lui, le véritable folkloriste doit être à la fois un anthropologue averti et un littéraire. Dans cette optique, Dundes déplore que la critique littéraire se prive si souvent, délibérément, de l'enrichissement que pourrait lui apporter l'étude des sources orales. Les précieuses introductions de Dundes, ainsi que les notes savantes qui accompagnent chacun des essais de cet ouvrage, qu'elles transforment souvent en un véritable cours théorique de folklore, rendent ce volume accessible aux non initiés. Nous attendons avec impatience qu'Alan Dundes nous offre d'autres « folklore casebooks » de la qualité de ce *Cendrillon*.

André E. ELBAZ  
Carleton University  
Ottawa, Ont.

**Something out of Nothing, the Work of George Cockayne**

By Stephen Inglis  
(Ottawa : National Museum of Man, Mercury Series, Canadian Center for Folk Culture Studies, paper no. 46, 1983)

The study of folk art in Canada is fairly recent. Folk art is sometimes described as "straightforward, elemental or honest" in contrast to the elite arts, the fine arts. The folk artist may be termed a retirement artist, simple or visionary, but also eccentric or even intellectually impaired. A serious effort to understand what motivates the folk artist has rarely been made. This is not surprising when one considers that, in 18<sup>th</sup> century England until the founding of the Society of Artists in 1760 great artists were still classed as "upper servants." What hope for the folk artist !

Another problem is that folk art itself has not been properly defined. Classification in three groups has been tried : the ethnic arts comprising costumes, decorative materials brought over by Europeans ; the pioneer arts where settlers decorated objects of daily use to give them a more pleasing appearance such as quilts, butter molds or gameboards ; a miscellany of paintings, carvings, paper cuttings, etc. It is a loose division which allows for many an article or object to be classed as folk art that does not rightly belong there.

Stephen Inglis, the author of "Something out of Nothing, the work of George Cockayne" has used a fresh approach in his study of the work of Cockayne. He felt it was important to consider the artist and his entire output, instead of a few selected pieces. As people grow and change, so does their work. And George Cockayne proved an interesting subject.

The study is divided in two parts. In the first section Mr. Inglis discusses the Folk Artist : his objects, his space, his market and draws conclusions from them. We meet George Cockayne, born in Stockport, England in 1906, orphaned as a child, arriving in Canada in 1922 to work as a "farm slave" near Belleville, Ontario. Unsuccessfully he tries to make his fortune out West, ending up in 1938 on a "rock and bush" farm in Hastings County, Ontario. After paying for the property, he has just a few dollars

left. However, as George Cockayne says: "I think it's a privilege to be poor, as long as you've got a few brains to make something out of nothing."

The second part of the study consists of a catalogue of Cockayne's work. Each item is photographed, documented and enlivened by Cockayne's observations. He liked to potter around and collect anything that might come in useful at a later date. He recycled everything with artful inventiveness. I am thinking of No. 37 "Horse head". This carved horse's head has real teeth. They are George's \$ 50.00 teeth, "a lovely set of teeth, but I could never wear them".

A carved and painted board depicts the house of his neighbours who were killed on the railway track in the winter of 1973. Two crows fly over the house "meaning they died, get the idea . . . that man was my neighbour for thirty-five years, think of all the memories." Mr. Inglis has carefully noted Cockayne's speech pattern and reading the text is like listening to a tape. George Cockayne's down-to-earth philosophy, his sense of humour, his cheerful acceptance of life and his innovative capacity of "making use of things" shine through the study. At first he did not sign his work, but when he found people paid money for his carvings, he decided to add a signature. Sometimes this takes the form of a line, "this is a Cockayne" or to go one better "this is another Cockayne".

George Cockayne is losing his sight and how long he will be able to continue his bachelor existence on the farm is uncertain. Some of his carvings serve as markers so he can find his way around the property. His carving days may soon be over, but his spirit can not be dimmed.

His work is difficult to define. Some of it is crude, some humorous like the "First Lady" who serves as a doorpost and some very fine like the woman's body carved on a shelf bracket in the 1930's. As Jean-François Blanchette, Head, Material Culture Research, says

in his foreword: "This book is eloquent testimony that progress in the study of folk art will depend on our considerations not only of the works in this genre, but also of the artists at work and of the forces underlying the relationship between artist and creations."

Stephen Inglis' sensitive approach to a folk artist and his work is a moving example of how we should look at the bright world of folk art.

Cora GREENAWAY  
Dartmouth, Nova Scotia

### **Folktales of the Canadian Sephardim**

*By André E. Elbaz, ed.*

*(Toronto: Fitzhenry and Whiteside, 1983, Pp. 192)*

This volume presents 80 authentic oral tales selected from a larger collection of 341 narratives collected by the editor from Moroccan-born Sephardim in Quebec, Montreal, Ottawa, and Toronto. The 43 informants, 31 men and 12 women ranging in age from 30 to 84 years, narrated their tales in Judeo-Arabic, French, Judeo-Spanish, or Hebrew, in descending order of frequency. *Folktales of the Canadian Sephardim* is an English version of the original French manuscript attractively illustrated by R. Benchetrit. It includes a short glossary of non-English terms used in the texts, a selected bibliography, an index of informations, type and motif indices, as well as a brief general index.

According to the author, 15,000 Moroccan Sephardim made their way to Canada in the 1960s and 1970s from important urban centres as well as from the mountains of the High Atlas. Three distinct cultures had contributed to give form to the Moroccan Sephardic community in its native land: the surrounding Arabo-Berber majority, with the longest impact; the French, due to the colonial presence and that of the Alliance Israélite Universelle; and lastly