

***Passing Strange and Wonderful: Aesthetics, Nature, and Culture.* By Yi-Fu TUAN. (Washington: Shearwater, 1993. Pp. xii + 289, notes, acknowledgments, index.)**

Gerald L. Pocius

Volume 18, Number 2, 1996

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1087590ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1087590ar>

[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

Pocius, G. L. (1996). Review of [*Passing Strange and Wonderful: Aesthetics, Nature, and Culture.* By Yi-Fu TUAN. (Washington: Shearwater, 1993. Pp. xii + 289, notes, acknowledgments, index.)]. *Ethnologies*, 18(2), 213–216.  
<https://doi.org/10.7202/1087590ar>

folk-art collectors only. They have obviously neglected to consult recent scholarship, especially that focused on Newfoundland hooked-mat making (Lynch 1980; Pocius 1979). These studies describe past and present rug makers who have often applied motifs on their rugs from a great number of combined design sources, such as patterns available by mail order or from their next-door neighbour. One has only to gaze at the biblical passages amidst wildflowers found on the hooked rugs of Sister Ann Ameen of Bay Roberts, Newfoundland, to realize the potential of spontaneous folk art in the 1990s (Gard 1994; Johnson 1995).

### References Cited

- Gard, Peter. 1994. Sister Act. *Canadian Art Spring*: 46-49.
- Johnson, Bruce. 1995. *Faith and Works: The Hooked Mats of Sister Ann Ameen*. St. John's: Art Gallery of Newfoundland and Labrador.
- Laverty, Paula. 1994. *Grenfell Mats*. New York: Hudson River Press.
- Lynch, Colleen. 1980. *The Fabric of their Lives: Hooked and Poked Mats of Newfoundland and Labrador*. St. John's: Memorial University Art Gallery.
- Pocius, Gerald L. 1979. Hooked Rugs in Newfoundland: The Representation of Social Structure in Design. *Journal of American Folklore* 92:273-284.

**Cynthia Boyd**

St. John's, Newfoundland

---

*Passing Strange and Wonderful: Aesthetics, Nature, and Culture.*  
By Yi-Fu TUAN. (Washington: Shearwater, 1993. Pp. xii + 289, notes, acknowledgments, index.)

*Passing Strange and Wonderful* is one more example of how Yi-Fu Tuan, a cultural geographer, has consistently dealt with issues that are at the heart of what folklorists also investigate. Over twenty years ago, the publication of Tuan's *Topophilia* (1974) and, soon after, his *Space and Place* (1977) revolutionized the way

material-culture researchers approached objects. Indeed, the issue of space soon became an analytical construct in oral genres as well (e.g., Nicolaisen 1980; Moreira 1995). Tuan has examined a wide range of topics, often building on these initial studies of landscapes and space. Contrasting his study of how humans become attached to certain places (1974), he became intrigued with those spaces we often fear (1979). But his writing in the past few years has taken him in new directions; one example: the emotional attachment of human beings to pets (1984), obviously a timely topic as evidenced by current concerns ranging from the Animal Rights Movement to the BBC's hit TV program, "Pets Win Prizes."

Tuan's latest book centres first and foremost on the issue of aesthetics: how those things that are pleasing and beautiful permeate much of daily life. This concern with the aesthetic brings him first to questions of sensory pleasures. One might argue that folkloristics in one of its redefinitions as "artistic communication" might be more profitably thought of as the study of what pleases the senses — that we folklorists are fundamentally students of delight. We study fun! While anthropologists have increasingly realized how important this sensory realm is (e.g., Stoller 1989), folklorists are sometimes still mired in social-science quagmires and find sensory topics too "unscientific."

Tuan moves on to consider broader aesthetic issues, again grappling with fundamental concerns that folklorists often shy away from: in this case, whether there is a cross-cultural aesthetic. Tuan surveys peoples as diverse as Australian Aborigines, Chinese, medieval Europeans, and contemporary Americans, to raise questions about what commonalities link the aesthetic experience of cultures so distant in space or time.

Finally, Tuan moves on to investigate what he calls the aesthetic-moral state, how aesthetic values and ceremonies have led to the formation and sustenance of various political regimes: the T'ang Empire in China, Renaissance Venice, the Sun-King in France, and moral America. Tuan chooses a diverse number of themes from each of these cultures and points out how they permeated the public activities of their political structures.

Much of *Passing Strange and Wonderful* is provocative, rather than being grounded in extensive case studies. Tuan relies on secondary sources for his materials, and the conclusions he posits at times strike the reader expecting ethnographic data as sometimes questionable. Yet, such difficulties are to be expected when

a writer tries to make generalizations at the level that Tuan does. Perhaps our reliance on ethnographic minutiae has often hampered our abilities to see the broader sweep of cultures.

Which brings Tuan's book finally to the question of universals. Tuan argues that aesthetics are at the central core of all cultures and that, as such, some aspects of aesthetics can be discussed in universal terms. We are nervous about universals, unlike our folklore ancestors, those who asked the large questions about truth and beauty (Ben-Amos 1973). *Passing Strange and Wonderful*, finally, is important not so much for the answers it gives, but for the magnitude of the questions it raises. And that magnitude centres on the ability of humans to act aesthetically. If folkloristics is to survive into the 21st century, it seems that one of its few hopes for that survival is not to lose sight of its central interest in beauty. We are students of delight; to argue otherwise is to be dishonest. To move away from this focus only jeopardises the basis of our discipline — and our future.

### References Cited

- Ben-Amos, Dan. 1973. History of Folklore Studies: Why Do We Need It? *Journal of the Folklore Institute* 10:113-124.
- Nicolaisen, W. F. H. 1980. Space in Folk Narrative. In *Folklore on Two Continents: Essays in Honor of Linda Dégh*, ed. Nikolai Burkakoff and Carl Lindahl, pp. 11-18. Bloomington: Trickster Press.
- Moreira, James H. 1995. *Ballad Worlds: Structure, Meaning, and the Fictional Landscapes in Classical and Broadside Ballads in Oral Tradition*. Ph.D. thesis, Memorial University of Newfoundland.
- Stoller, Paul. 1989. *The Taste of Ethnographic Things: The Senses in Anthropology*, Contemporary Ethnography Series. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Tuan, Yi-Fu. 1974. *Topophilia: A Study of Environmental Perception, Attitudes, and Values*. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall.

Tuan, Yi-Fu. 1977. *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Tuan, Yi-Fu. 1979. *Landscapes of Fear*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Tuan, Yi-Fu. 1984. *Dominance and Affection: The Making of Pets*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

**Gerald L. Pocus**

*Memorial University of Newfoundland  
St. John's, Newfoundland*

---

*The Last Hurrah — A Man and His Music*. By Larry A. EWASHEN. 1994. Spirit Wrestlers Associates, R.R.#1, Site 2, Comp. B4, Castlegar, B.C. V1N 3H7.

The collection of Doukhobor hymns and popular songs by Nick N. Kalmakoff has gone through more than half a dozen versions of home-bound editions. Beginning in the 1950s I recall copies being circulated in my family in Saskatchewan and used regularly in sobranie gatherings during Sunday prayer services, funerals, or just social gatherings. Kalmakoff was eighteen years old when in 1927, living on farm near Canora, Saskatchewan, he attended his first Sunday service and this stimulated him to begin his own song collection. After retiring to Vancouver, in 1990 Nick made his last *Sbornik*.

As luck would have it, Doukhobor filmmaker, singer, and writer Larry A. Ewashen was on hand to record this "Last Hurrah," as Nick called it, in an interesting half-hour video documenting the process of collecting, typing, printing, cutting, binding, as well as seeing a sobranie in process in Vancouver. Nick's sources include selections that he found in Russia (brought over to Canada by the early Doukhobors in 1899), from singers in his province of