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As the boundaries of folklore as a discipline, and of disciplines in general, become more permeable, answering our often-asked question "yes, but is it folklore?" holds greater difficulties. This query's new context makes it more fraught than previously, but it nevertheless has the particular discursive qualities of all questions. And these attributes are not always as straightforward as they might initially seem.

A prime characteristic of questions is that they constrain answers. When asked by the more powerful of the less powerful (as when judges interrogate accused persons) they overdetermine the power of the questioner, because the interlocutor *must* respond. However, when asked by the less powerful of the more powerful, questions can be attempts to exercise some control over discourse. Feminist analysis has shown that women often use questions — and question-intonation — in mixed conversation as attempts to influence the choice of topics on the discursive floor, or other aspects of a discussion's direction, or simply to ensure they receive some response. Questions can also be asked rhetorically, in which case the speaker's assumption is that no right-thinking person could give any but the answer s/he expects. And like other discursive structures (most notably, verbal politeness, as examined by Penelope Brown and Stephen Levinson [1978], and coding, as discussed by Joan N. Radner and Susan Lanser [1993]), its "literal" text can deliberately or inadvertently trope, even obscure, other issues.

I periodically recall when the question "yes, but is it folklore?" was asked of my MUN M.A. thesis proposal, nearly twenty years ago. My repeatedly unsuccessful responses dealt with the question at hand, until somebody took pity on me and explained that the issue was not my intellectual/ideological framework, but instead my plan to conduct fieldwork in Ontario rather than in Newfoundland. "Yes, but is it folklore?" didn't have anything to do with the theoretical issues I had engaged; it was a way of obscuring issues of cultural, social, and economic power. No Newfoundland thesis topic, no fellowship. But I digress. Questions, including this one, engender — indeed, demand — dialogue. But when one is in a position of power and control, as a book reviewer is over the text s/he produces, questions don't necessarily constrain responses within the parameters they seem to define.

I will address each one of the above books in terms of how they might suggest possibilities for answering the question, "Yes, but is it folklore?" I'll also consider how the answers implied by each book might open up the discipline of folklore's possibilities in ways that do or don't constrain its current, though permeable, boundaries. These prospects concern taking account of cultural studies, extending audience research, considering reflexivity and autobiography as research, and attempting accountability and advocacy on research subjects' own terms.

I will begin with what is, as I see it, the most conventional of the four books, Alasuutari's *Researching Culture*. Its subtitle, *Qualitative Method and Cultural Studies* is somewhat misleading to those of us who were taught to see method in terms of actual modes of research — interviewing, participant observation, and so on. In fact this is what I would call a methodology text, exploring how to conceptualise questions and answers more than it does how to gather data to answer them. Though folklorists may find the author's initial suggestion that he wants to include quantitative methodology in cultural studies somewhat less than simpatico, they may feel more comfortable with his metaphor for qualitative research — the riddle.

Alasuutari traces a historical definition of cultural studies, focusing primarily on its European roots, and then discusses a series of systems for producing observations. Folklorists clearly use aspects of the modes he discusses, with the general exceptions of cross-tabulation and quantitative analysis. The final section on "unriddling" suggests ways that questions are usually constructed in cultural studies; however, the procedures it describes are quite similar to those put forward in sociological methodology texts. Descriptions of "*the* research process" and "*the* writing process" (my emphases) are disappointingly univocal.

In this work, Alasuutari seems to be trying to discipline cultural studies into a particular framework. Admittedly, the demarcations he uses are somewhat more extensive than those which are usual for cultural studies. Yet while this book may be a useful reference for some folklorists, its lack of engagement with folklore writing and folklore issues (although by no means uncommon in cultural studies) is disappointing. Folklore methodology could profit from some of the rigour that Alasuutari advocates; I'm not sure, however, that this book extends boundaries. There is nothing on action research or oppositional research, and little on autobiography, reflexivity, feminism, and other methods/ methodology conflating formats.

Harrington and Bielby's *Soap Fans*, on the other hand, focuses upon a topic more customarily of interest to cultural studies than to folklore. A few folkloristic works have paid attention to narrative structures of, and narration about, soap operas. Very few folkloristic studies on any topic, however, have done the extensive consideration of *audiences* that is this book's hallmark. Audiences may be an implicit, unacknowledged presence in most folklore work, but their importance in the formation, reproduction, and selective maintenance — and, sometimes, neglect — of folkloric processes and texts indicates that lack of specific attention to audiences is a serious lacuna.

Working in a North American sociocultural context which alternately trivialises and pathologises fans, Harrington and Bielby construct an ethnography with many telling implications. At times, they avoid obvious feminist implications; the near-universal vilification of both soaps and their fans results from their female gendering, unlike the general acceptance which is the lot of male gendered sports fans, for example. The authors argue, however, that gender is less salient than other aspects in explaining fans, whom they distinguish from other audience members by their greater, and often qualitatively different, participation in "publicly visible activities" as well as "a wonderfully rich private realm of meaning and experience" (p. 25).

Harrington and Bielby address soap fans' relationships to the multivocal, coded, structured televised texts they engage with, usually on a daily basis. They show quite clearly that such engagement on the part of fans does not lead to an uncritical view of the genre or of specific shows. The chapter "Entering the Wild Zone" is particularly useful for its exploration of the pleasures of soap operas, from identification to fantasy to resistance.

And the final chapter explores an issue of considerable interest for folklorists: the multiple authorship of, and authority for, cultural texts. In a structure like the soap opera, as in many traditional texts, the author (as actual creator, originator) is often much less significant than the owner (who has a right to claim or use the text) or (and here Harrington and Bielby introduce a concept that may be resonant for folklorists), what they call the "moral author...who feels that a soap opera is morally or emotionally theirs, regardless of who might have actually written the text" (p. 155). In tracing the myriad links of these levels/forms of authorship/ownership, Harrington and Bielby's work shows how difficult it is to disengage the individual strands. Soap operas are not exactly the product of Francis Barton Gummere's singing and dancing throng (1907), but the interactions between writers, fans, and the genre are complex indeed.

I don't think we need to worry about whether or not soap operas themselves are folkloric texts; clearly soap opera fans form a group that most folklorists would see as relevant to folkloristic analysis. And the connections between this group and the televised texts to which they attend, as charted by Harrington and Bielby, could provide models for the examination of more standardly recognised traditional texts. I might note in addition that this work is eminently readable and engagingly written, and refers to a wide range of scholarship from cultural studies to sociology to psychology to literature — and even a folklorist or two!

I wanted to include Ronald L. Grimes' *Marrying & Burying: Rites of Passage in a Man's Life* because I know and admire his previous works. Among many other accomplishments, he is one of the creators of the interdiscipline of ritual studies, and a theorist whose work in religion and culture should be familiar to folklorists. I also maintain an ongoing interest in undertakings by heterosexual men to consider the gendering of their lives, and having met and talked with Grimes on several occasions, I expected that his endeavour would provide some very telling material.

I had not expected this work to be so unusual; its cover photograph of Mexican day of the dead figures makes it appear more conventional an academic work than it actually is. In fact, it's as unconventional an academic work as I have read in a long time. Clifford Geertz might call its form a blurred genre (1988), as it combines autobiography, semi-autobiographical fiction, poetry, and ritual analysis in an ethnographic framework. Grimes' own life is unique and individual, of course, but his experiences and knowledge have implications for gender studies, as well as for ritual studies.

It is very hard to describe *Marrying & Burying.* At times it's brilliantly analytical, and at others it's embarrassingly personal. I wonder if a book like this by someone who was not as eminent as Ron Grimes would ever be published, let alone read. I wonder what would happen if a student presented a work like this as a thesis or dissertation. (Well, actually, I know it would be rejected as a thesis or dissertation at any university I've ever been involved with.) But this book is perhaps ahead of its time in taking postmodernist explorations of the politics of identity, and the particularity of subject positions, to their logical endpoint. If everything we know and understand is filtered through our experience, then we had better figure out ways of elucidating and explaining that experience, as well as our knowledge and understanding.

Grimes structures his autobiography around ritual and ritualising, clearly manifesting the significance of such activity in his own life. He does so in a much more compelling and intelligent manner than can be found in the works of Robert Bly (1990) and other popular masculinists who advocate for male rituals. He doesn't present ritual as a social or psychological panacea for masculine angst in a supposedly post-feminist world. It is clear that Grimes' relationship to ritual is sometimes contradictory and challenging. *Marrying and Burying* is not a "go into the forest, beat a drum with a bunch of other men, and come out feeling better" book. In fact, Grimes wants very much to include both sexes in his ritualising, while recognising distinctiveness in women and men. His work shows clearly that explorations of heteromasculinity need not be anti-feminist.

There are probably very few people who could enact such a self-exposure as is evident here; I'm sure I don't want other people to know as much about my failings as I now know about Ron Grimes'. But the confessional aspect of this work is no act of intellectual flashing. That impulse to take personal accountability for one's life as well as one's decisions is crucial for the work of folklorists who have some interest in doing something more than simply getting and maintaining tenure in a university. Yes, but is it folklore? Yes. No. Who cares?

Finally, Antonia Mills' *Eagle Down Is Our Law: Witsuwit'en Law, Feasts, and Land Claims* is a conventional ethnography sandwiched between a groundbreaking and personal Prologue and Epilogue concerning the generally failed use of that ethnography, and Mills' own ethnographic testimony, in the land claims case of the Gitksan-Witsuwit'en, called *Delgamuukw v. the Queen.* These are sobering, indeed potentially depressing, indications of the ineffectiveness of anthropological theorising and method in supporting the interests of people who have traditionally been its subjects. As James Clifford's work also shows (1988), anthropologists tend to be interpreted in the legal system as less rigorous, objective, and scientific than other academics, notably historians.

The First Nations groups involved had never signed a treaty; they continued to use the disputed land. However, they argued that they "maintain jurisdiction over their territories through their system of governance, that is, the matrilineal succession of titles designated at feasts (potlatches)" (p. 5). In contrast, the Crown case was that the land "belongs to the Queen, by the colonial right of sovereign nations to claim unoccupied (!?) land" (p. 5.). But, as Mills states, "My expert opinion report and the much greater testimony of the Gitksan-Witsuwit'en chiefs did not have the desired effect of assisting the judge to appreciate the Gitksan-Witsuwit'en viewpoint" (p. 14). I don't need to go into the complexities of the case as Mills outlines them. You should read the book. Suffice it to say here that Chief Justice Allan McEachern's decision clearly displayed the court's adherence to an evolutionary model of society placing colonisers at the pinnacle; its judgement, based upon culturally biased premises, of aboriginal society in the past as irredeemably primitive and in the present as irredeemably altered and corrupted by the colonisers; its lack of respect for, and inability to comprehend the significance and meaning of, the testimony of oral tradition; and its unquestioning ethnocentrism.

Mills also demonstrates the bias involved in McEachern's differential treatment of the testimony of the anthropologist who testified on behalf of the Crown, Sheila Robinson, which did "not involve fieldwork or first-hand experience" (p. 19). Indeed, perhaps most compelling from the perspectives of anthropologists and folklorists is McEachern's dismissal of anthropological testimony on behalf of the First Nations groups by Mills herself, as well as by her fellow anthropologists Hugh Brody and Richard Daly, on the basis that "the anthropologists were 'too closely associated with the plaintiffs'" (p. 19). As Mills notes, "In anthropological circles, continued contact with the peoples with whom one works is considered commendable and desirable" (p. 20). Here we have what is currently a fundamental cultural clash between anthropological and legal worldviews.

I'm sure that Mills would not like to see this text as an indication that active, politicised collaboration between anthropologists and the peoples they work with is doomed to failure. It should, however, be required reading for all anthropologists and folklorists, whether or not their work involves aboriginal land claims, because it shows the compelling need to consider *all* cultural contexts — including that of any legal system — in understanding modes of seeing the world. The cultural violence and racism of the colonial system, and of its institutions — legal, educational, political, and so on — continues.

In conclusion, I'm not sure that the question, "Yes, but is it folklore" is as good to think with as it might have been in the past. I leave aside for the time being its use to constrain the work of students into areas of faculty, university, and/or governmental interest, as these are not issues directly relevant to these books. What does seem to emerge from a consideration of these four works together, in the context of a journal addressing folklore/*ethnologie* is the extent to which methodological and topical concerns are changing across interdisciplinary perspectives, and the ways in which activism, whether in the form of searching for a ritual location for the self, or as direct advocacy, is finally making its way into the academic scene. If folklore as a discipline remains mired in limiting questions, or continues to constrain its already restricted power base in reactive, defensive postures, the exciting possibilities these works show will never find a place within its disciplinary purview.

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