

***New Old-Fashioned Ways: Holidays and Popular Culture.* By Jack Santino. (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1996. Pp. xviii + 175, index, references, \$14.95 US, 0-87049-952-1 pbk.)**

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detailed presentation and analysis of musical and social practice, as is the case throughout the volume, they seem to fit quite naturally.

This, though, leads me to a question which goes beyond Sugarman's fine volume. The better the theory "fits", the more I wonder about our knowledgeable, expert and — imaginative? — constructs of worlds (I was going to say "others'" worlds but then wondered about the use of "other"). In this era of "imagined communities" and "invented traditions", just what is and isn't invented; who is constructing whose worlds?

In any case, *Engendering Song* both provides a detailed reference to this one seemingly small musical world and connects it to issues which go far beyond it, while maintaining a consistently and obviously sincere, humane, and sympathetic, never condescending, vision.

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New Old-Fashioned Ways: Holidays and Popular Culture. By Jack Santino. (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1996. Pp. xviii + 175, index, references, \$14.95 US, 0-87049-952-1 pbk.)

Jack Santino's *New Old-Fashioned Ways* is an important and much needed study. Produced as a result of a course he taught at Bowling Green State University in "Holidays and Popular Culture," (xv) Santino's project is to understand the interrelationship between popular culture and American holidays. As the author notes, "... all holidays as manifested in popular commercial culture... suggest that there is a cultural logic to them; and by delineating some examples, to begin to outline some of the principles and processes involved in this cultural logic" (xviii).

Santino takes issue with the dismissal of popular culture artifacts as merely consumerist products, and instead, sees their *use* as reflexive of contemporary cultural meanings. The dismissal argument, the author notes, is largely irrelevant since, on the one hand, it ignores the historicity of marketing customs (4), and this argument removes the ethnographic consideration of those who willingly participate within this culture of consumerism (24). The diversity of

popular culture artifacts more accurately reflects the diversity of modern America, for example in the socio-cultural diversity of Christmas cards:

The changes in social roles are also seen in greeting cards, which can now be found "for the two of you together", indicating a couple living together; cards for gay couples; cards for Christians to send to Jews at Christmas; and vice versa. These too indicate the growing awareness of diversity in the United States, a diversity that was always there but is becoming increasingly apparent (91-92).

But, as Nancy Jo Silberman-Federman noted in the *Journal of Popular Culture*, especially when dealing with cross-cultural exchanges of popular culture artifacts, there is a partial emic resistance to the acculturation by the greeting card companies of non-Christian, that is non-hegemonic, celebrations (Silberman-Federman, *passim*).

Santino instead sees the absence of explicit representation of Christian iconography during many of the West's most popular celebrations (Christmas, Valentine's Day, Halloween, etc.) as an incorporation of non-Christian groups into the celebratory mainstream (read, Christian), as evidenced by the greeting card companies' products (51). The assertion seems naive, at best, but also implies a potentially Orientalist approach to popular celebrations in North America (cf. Said, *passim*), whereby non-Christian celebrations in the United States are seen to be *similar* to Christian customs, and therefore appropriation of those icons and celebrations are marked by consumerist marketing strategies.

Elsewhere in the book, Santino discusses films which use holiday themes, from *It's a Wonderful Life* to slasher-films like *Halloween* and *Silent Night, Deadly Night* (119-127). Here Santino is on even less sturdy ground:

First, it must be said that the success of [director John] Carpenter's *Halloween*, which came as a surprise to the film industry, set the model for the later films. In other words, one way of imitating Carpenter's film was to use a holiday, celebration, or ritual of some sort as the setting. Since Halloween was already taken, others had to do. However, it is significant that one of the first such special calendrical occasions utilized was *April Fool's Day*, a day that, like Halloween, is customarily marked by pranking and tricking; that is, by the inversion of social conventions (120).

It is worth noting, parenthetically, that not only is Santino's chronology incorrect (*April Fool's Day* is quite late in the slasher genre — made in 1986 — almost ten years after *Halloween*), he misclassifies the film *as* a slasher-film, rather than as the parody of the genre (albeit relatively unsuccessful a parody)

as it was intended. There is room in this subject for a study of calendar custom slasher-films and what discourses they open with the celebrations themselves, but this is not it.

In discussing these films, Santino does touch upon what attracts us, and film producers, to using customary celebrations to horrify us. As the author notes, "... familiar and reassuring events and figures such as Santa Claus become frightening. The tension is created by inverting the symbol, taking the comforting event and making it threatening" (119). But further to this point, and Santino does not go there, although he points the way, at Halloween — with its deep play aspects of the frightening — the monstrous is always revealed, by the end of the night, to be "just a game." To turn that expectation around, and remove the play dimension for the diegetic characters of a film (i.e. this is not a game of hide and seek in monster masks, but a real "hide or die" scenario, at least for the characters) maintains this comfort and familiarity, as it turns it around by making it threatening. An intriguing thesis to be sure; I just wish Santino followed through on it.

Too much of *New Old-Fashioned Ways* smacks of the "show and tell" school of folklore: Santino throughout presents the reader with examples of how consumerist culture appropriates popular celebrations and he presents interesting ideas or premises with which to think about these presentations, but he too often leaves it at that. Even his attempts at drawing theoretical discussions from his presentations seem to be afterthoughts:

If we feel comfortable with this kind of interpretation of materials that we ourselves are involved with, this suggests several things. First and most obvious is that we need the ethnographic data... to make a more informed analysis. Second, however, I feel that the kinds of meanings I am talking about tend to be unarticulated, so the fact that they may sound far-fetched to some people when they first hear them does not necessarily rule out the possibility that there may be some truth to them (141).

On this second point, Santino too infrequently attempts to draw out the meaning-making possibilities of these phenomena. He introduces them, but does not follow through with any kind of rigorous analysis, or connect the presentations into a larger cultural framework.

Yet it is his first point, quoted above, that is both a strength and weakness of *New Old-Fashioned Ways*: although the "ethnographic data" that Santino notes is essential to a study such as this, particularly in understanding the unofficial uses of such mass-marketed products, it is here not much more than

feedback from his undergraduate students. Yes, such responses are ethnographic, but more data of this kind needs to be generated, with a particular attention to responses from outside of the academy.

So how is this criticism a strength? Because of the ethnographic context Santino is operating within, *New Old-Fashioned Ways* would operate well on an undergraduate syllabus in Folklife or Custom courses. The book contains many examples of familiar and enjoyable representations of the phenomena discussed, and there is enough academic merit and interesting points for seminar discussion to engage an undergraduate student. Santino uses popular culture to engage his students in the larger social and cultural nexus that surrounds us. And left at that level, this work is both valuable and important.

References

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Silberman-Federman, Nancy Jo. "Jewish Humor, Self-Hatred, or Anti-Semitism: The Sociology of Hanukkah Cards in America". *Journal of Popular Culture* 28.4 (1995): 211-229.

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Postmodern Fairy Tales: Gender and Narrative Strategies. By Cristina Bacchilega. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997. Pp. xi + 208, index, references, 0-8122-3392-1 cloth.)

The title of Christina Bacchilega book, *Postmodern Fairy Tales*, is a tad misleading, which is perhaps one of the reasons why I was disappointed with it. From the title, I expected an "against the grain" reading of the *Märchen* canon to include marginal voices and to problematize the hegemonic interpretations of gender and society by the bourgeoisie. As Bacchilega herself notes, one of the main projects of this work is to "establish a typology of contemporary fairy tale transformations which would move towards a critical systematizing of their proliferation and yet resist closed classifications" (5).