

**Simon J. BRONNER, ed., *Creativity and Tradition in Folklore: New Directions* (Logan, Utah State University Press, 1992, ix + 352 p., ISBN 0-87421-158-1)**

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Simon J. BRONNER, ed., *Creativity and Tradition in Folklore: New Directions* (Logan, Utah State University Press, 1992, ix + 352 p., ISBN 0-87421-158-1).

This collection of essays has been published to honour W. F. H. Nicolaisen. It contains contributions by seventeen scholars involved in the humanities and social sciences, i.e., Ian A. Olson, D. K. Wilgus and Eleanor R. Long-Wilgus, W. K. McNeil, Ronald L. Baker, Linda Dégh, Klaus Roth, Christina Bacchilega, Elizabeth Tucker, Wilbur Zelinsky, Wolfgang Mieder, J. Derrick McClure, Alexander Fenton, Mary Ellen Brown, Venetia Newall, Roger E. Mitchell and Simon J. Bronner. I would not be surprised if at least twice as many of Nicolaisen's colleagues as listed above could be found for a sequel to this volume. An introduction by Simon J. Bronner precedes the other essays in this collection. The volume ends with a selected bibliography of Nicolaisen's publications.

The articles reflect to some extent Nicolaisen's scholarly interests. Thus, we have a number of them dealing with onomastics, a topic very close to his heart. Bronner suggests as much quoting from Nicolaisen's "Place-Name Legends: An Onomastic Mythology" (*Folklore* 87 [1976]: 146-59).

*Onomastics* — says Nicolaisen — has been my academic bread and butter and my own entertainment for a quarter of a century. During these twenty-five years I have moved from an initial preoccupation with the product — the name, via fascination with the process — naming, to an infatuation with the product — Man. I have no doubt that this quest for homo nominans has already been a journey towards a discovery of self, and incorrigible optimist that I am — I am convinced that if one embarks on that journey, one would somewhere along the road get (be vouchsafed, one would have said last century) the teeniest-weeniest glimpse of the divine — in us (p. 15).

To do justice to Nicolaisen's onomastic inclinations, at least four essays in the present volume deal mainly with this area of studies, i.e., "On the Naming of Places and Kindred Things", "Some Songs of Place and Ballads of Name", "What, if Anything, Is a Scotticism", and "Words and Things in Gaelic Scotland". Place names may be viewed either as intriguing or matter of fact phenomena. Zelinsky's thesis, elaborated in the first essay of this group, that names interact with places and space in intellectually provocative ways, seems to have been inspired both by Nicolaisen and by Adam. "Adam", because according to Genesis, he "gave names to the cattle, to the fowl of the air and to every beast of

the field" (p. 184), and Nicolaisen because of his infectious "essays on the nature of names and naming and the interconnections between places and names" (p. 169-170). The next article functions as a road map leading the reader from the vicinity of Aberdeen to Mounthooly Hill, the village of Monymusk, the farm of Sleepytoon close to the village of Rhynie and finally to the remains of the castle of Dunnideer and the Hill of Netherhall. Each location appears in relief in the Child ballads discussed by Ian A. Olson, the essay's author. The last two articles deal with aspects of the language spoken in Scotland. On the one hand, in a discussion of the state of Gaelic in Scotland, Alexander Fenton suggests that, in the study of this language, more stress should be placed on the investigation of *Sachen*, so that the *Wörter* referring to them would not disappear (p. 232). J. Derrick McClure's essay on Scotticisms, on the other hand, indicates that this linguistic term "is something undesirable by definition" (p. 207). Although the Scottish culture is celebrated in these last three essays there also seems to be a devolutionary undercurrent within the last two essays with regard to this cultural entity.

A similar undercurrent may be detected in the three essays dedicated to aspects of folklife. The longest article in this group describes the life and work of the Pennsylvania-German Reformed pastor, Isaac F. Stiehly (1800-1869) who somehow "managed to teach, preach, carve, craft, farm, and do all the other things he did" (p. 306). Bronner, who authored this article, demonstrates "the preacher [i.e. Stiehly] — creatively working a traditional text to relate to a modern context, offering communal stability and individual inspiration... through the stones" (p. 306). Roger E. Mitchell's essay on the acculturation of a much more recent settler group, i.e., the Hmong refugees in the United States, begs a comparison with the more established Pennsylvania-Germans. The American way of life 'in the fast lane' is much more difficult to accept by the Hmong than the calmer lifestyle of their rural predecessors. The expected tensions existing between the older and younger generations is expressed by these newcomers to the 'land of the free' in the proverb, "We escaped from the frog (Communists) but face the snake (Americans)". Venetia Newall's "Celebration of the *Slava* by a Serbian Family in England" is one more example of how minorities try to maintain their traditions as well as to make some accommodations to the mainstream society. The *Slava*, an Orthodox and partially pre-Christian feast celebrated by Djordje and Seka Novakovic is testimony of how this family "strategically uses this tradition to fashion roles and customs for reinforcement of family and ethnic identity" (p. 262).

The remaining essays deal with traditional verbal genres, D. K. Wilgus and Eleanor R. Long-Wilgus' "The *Aisling* and the Cowboy... and Factory Girl" reveals the influence of ancient Irish vision poems on later Irish and North American popular songs. W. K. McNeil's "'The Dollar and the Devil': From Poem to Traditional Song" describes the transformation of an authored poem to

a traditional song. Mary Ellen Brown's "The Forgotten Makars: The Scottish Local Poet Tradition" represents more than a simple plea for the recognition of marginal literary tradition. Ronald L. Baker's "Pearl Bryan in Legend" shows a different narrative content than Pearl Bryan as a ballad. Linda Dégh's "The Legend Conduit" is an illustration of how legends are spontaneously transmitted by a group of people. Klaus Roth's "Narrating in Socialist Everyday Life: Observation on Strategies of Life Management in Southeast Europe" is an exposé of how narration functions in the management of reality and the dissemination of information. Elizabeth Tucker's "I Saw the Tree Had Souls': Personal Experience Narratives of Contemporary Witches" portrays the interrelationship between magic tale heroes and those of personal experience narratives of modern witches. Christina Bacchilega's "The Fruit of the Womb: Creative uses of Naturalizing Tradition in Folktales" represents an investigation of the appeal of the "Innocent Persecuted Heroine" tales. Last but not least, Wolfgang Mieder's "Paremiological Minimum and Cultural Literacy" is a study of the currency and frequency of proverbs.

Altogether, this volume again proves how refreshing new directions to various aspects of traditional culture can be. To quote from Nicolaisen's presidential address to the American Folklore Society, 1983:

*Tradition... guides and safeguards continuity in a world of change without restraining or jeopardizing individual ingenuity. There is a toughness and a persistence about folk culture from which even the most independently minded escape only with difficulty. Yet — and this is the fascinating miracle of all folk cultures — the filter of individuality, of creative identity, of recognizable personality, prevents the products of tradition from becoming faceless and interchangeable (p. 1).*

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