

***Folk Tradition and Folk Medicine in Scotland: The Writings of David Rorie.* Edited by David Buchan. (Edinburgh: Canongate Academie, 1994. Pp. 317, references, bibliography, glossary, 19.95, ISBN 1-898410-01-1 cloth)**

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Chieftaincy. In her analysis of the meaning of two accounts narrated by two male narrators of royal standing, Hofmeyr points out that it is the context of oral historical narrative that determines its meaning. She also contends that although the notion of chieftaincy is not the only theme treated in the oral historical accounts, the idea of chieftaincy is “one of the horizons shaping” the narrators’ oral historical accounts (p. 131).

In Part Four, “The Three Ms: Memory, Manuscript and Monuments,” Hofmeyr discusses the changing phenomenon of oral history (p. 160). In particular, she deals with the transference of the oral historical accounts of the siege of Gwasa from verbal to written and monument versions, and the impact of these changes on the patterns of this oral history. The oral history has been altered as a result of changes in its situational and cultural contexts, types of audience and media of transmission.

Written versions of the story relating the siege of the cave of Gwasa by the Boers in 1854 contain certain aspects of the folkloric or oral storytelling traditions. This suggests that the oral versions of the stories formed the background for the manuscript and monument versions. It also further validates the notion that there is no absolute division between orality and literacy.

Hofmeyr’s book has many strengths, but some of them deserve special mention. The reader comes to realize and understand that oral history derives its techniques and styles from the wider context of oral storytelling traditions and hence it can be considered as one of the genres of oral literature.

This study does not focus exclusively on the text of oral historical narrative, as many scholarly examinations of African literature tend to do; it also considers the context, style, technique, the tellers and their points of view (thus, oral literary criticism). The main topics selected for discussion are presented chronologically and are well outlined and examined. This makes the discussions easy to follow. “*We Spend Our Years As A Tale That Is Told*” should be seen as an important addition to Africanistics, and, in particular, to the study of oral traditions.

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***Folk Tradition and Folk Medicine in Scotland: The Writings of David Rorie.*** Edited by David Buchan. (Edinburgh: Canongate Academic, 1994. Pp. 317, references, bibliography, glossary, 19.95, ISBN 1-898410-01-1 cloth)

David Rorie, as David Buchan explains in his introduction to this book, had both literary talents and ethnographic skills. After training as a physician

at the University of Edinburgh in the 1880s, Rorie spent the next forty years practising among miners, fishers and rural folk in Northeast Scotland. He wrote extensively, acquiring some renown among Scots as a poet in his own right, and in Buchan's view, pioneering in the fields of industrial and medical folklore. Buchan suggests further that David Rorie's name be added to those of Walter Gregor and Gavin Greig to form a "triad — minister, dominie, and doctor — of Northeast folklorists whose work's importance transcends the region" (p. 19).

To this end, Buchan has gathered together a number of David Rorie's writings to bring them to the attention of the wider community. Since Rorie frequently published the same material for readers of popular, medical and folkloristic journals, Buchan has expunged some of the lengthy repetitions to make Rorie's work easier to read. The collection's division into two parts, on folk medicine and folk tradition, belies the heavy emphasis throughout on medical-and health-related beliefs and customs. Essays focus mainly on Scottish folk medicine, thematically discussed by life-cycle events and by disease or condition and cures. A few describe superstitions, second sight, riddles, New Year's festivities, and other traditional fare. Those who are unfamiliar with Scottish dialect will find Buchan's glossary helpful.

These essays provide ample evidence of Scottish humour in Rorie's own writing. His light-hearted approach is most noticeable in his public addresses, including an essay on "Folk Medicine in Scottish Ballad Literature." Humour abounds in the sayings and stories of those in his community as well. Here is just one example: after his visit to a bone-setter, a small boy answers a question about whether he suffered pain with "No fear! dae ye think I was sic a saftie as gie him the sair leg?" (p. 28).

David Buchan's sensitive and informed introduction certainly provides the needed context for Rorie's lifetime of work, for without it the reader may wonder about the "rather arch" tone (p. 11) of the first few essays. In "The Scottish Bone-Setter," "Popular Pathology: Being an Essay on What the Patient Thinks," and "Some Fifeshire Folk-Medicine" in particular, the younger, ingenuous Rorie cleaves to the superior stance probably expected by his medical readership, and he cannot refrain from including snarky asides. In his rewriting of the same passages later in life, one can easily see his maturation as scholar and folklorist — perhaps even as physician. For instance, in 1904 he wrote in the *Edinburgh Medical Journal* that he knew "a case of a woman actually collecting these undesirables [head lice] and transplanting them to the head of a sickly child, under the belief that the invalid would gain strength thereby! Truly a curious piece of muddled reasoning" (p. 42); in 1914 for a volume on county folklore, he presented this case less incredulously: "By a curious piece of confused reasoning I have known them to be deliberately placed on the head of a weakly child with the idea that the invalid would thereby gain strength" (p. 245). By 1908, in fact, Rorie had become acquainted with the literature of

folklorists, thereby developing greater awareness and understanding of “how carefully organised” (p. 58) were the beliefs he encountered. As he was to observe in 1926, then as a figure of medical authority in his capacity as editor of the *Caledonian Medical Journal*, the physician must recognize that he did not deal “with the individual vivid imagination of the garrulous old woman who repeats [a belief], but that she is a retailer and not a manufacturer” (p. 58). These insightful comments preface nine articles “On Scottish Folk-Medicine,” published for the first time in 1926-31 from Rorie’s 1908 M.D. thesis of the same title.

As Buchan believes, these writings therefore reveal David Rorie as an important, sympathetic and astute recorder of Scottish lore, a physician who genuinely cared for his patients in both senses of the word. This volume not only adds to a scholarly understanding of Scottish beliefs and customs up to the 1930s; it would also prove useful to medical and health professionals who might wish to reflect on the value of quiet humility as displayed by its writer. As David Rorie himself implies (p. 58), physicians cannot assume uncritical or passive compliance with their wishes in communities maintaining strong traditional beliefs and a healthy disrespect for scientific authority:

When the doctor cures,  
The sun sees it.  
But when he kills,  
The earth hides it. (p. 113)

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***Canadian Country Furniture, 1675-1950.*** By Michael S. Bird. (Toronto: Stoddart, 1994. forward by Howard Pain, introduction by Claudia Kinmonth. Pp. 403, photographs, endnotes, glossary, acknowledgments, bibliography, index, \$75.00, ISBN 1-55046-087-0 cloth.)

Michael Bird has accomplished the daunting task of surveying Canadian regional furniture from Newfoundland to British Columbia and imparting his findings through the vehicle of a coffee table book. *Canadian Country Furniture, 1675-1950* is an impressive photographic inventory of examples of furniture drawn from a wide cross-section of forms, periods, styles and geographic areas. It is organized by region, i.e. Atlantic Provinces, Quebec, Ontario and Western Provinces, and it includes a relatively large number of items from such ethnic communities as the Hutterites, Mennonites, and