

***Folklore, Literature, and Cultural Theory: Collected Essays.* By Cathy Lynn Preston, editor. (New York and London: Garland Publishing, Inc, 1995. P. xi + 256, ISBN 0-8240-7271-5.)**

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Folklore, Literature, and Cultural Theory: Collected Essays. By Cathy Lynn Preston, editor. (New York and London: Garland Publishing, Inc, 1995. P. xi + 256, ISBN 0-8240-7271-5.)

In his article "Re-presentations of (Im)moral Behavior in the Middle English Non-Cycle Play *Mankind*," Michael J. Preston states "I attempt to re-situate *Mankind* so that it might be better understood over all...My methodology is eclectic" (p. 215). The project of textual re-situation and eclecticism in methodology defines the essays presented in *Folklore, Literature, and Cultural Theory: Collected Essays* edited by Cathy Lynn Preston. The thirteen essays presented in this volume represent a diversity of voice, scholarship, and discipline, and their aim is to "attempt to extend and, in some cases, to rethink current discussions of cultural production" (p. ix). The project of "[establishing] a cross-disciplinary dialogue between folklore and literature and among folklorists, literary scholars, and cultural theorists" (p. ix), and the resulting "somewhat eclectic nature of the collection" (p. xiii), bear witness to the important contribution folklorists offer in the discussion of cultural theory. Yet, as folklorists are all too keenly aware, the folkloristic voice is often a faint one in the ever-widening discussion of cultural representation. Preston asserts that "appropriation is a *mutual* (emphasis hers) process," and calls for a "counter-move" and "[reclamation] of folklore as an important site of contestation in the production and re-production of culture" (p. x). Most important, Preston urges the centralization of the political voice of folklore.

As such, the essays in this anthology represent a wide array of emergent voices that are often omitted from cultural guest lists, marginalized as they are by the colonization of thought and language of which we are all, as players in

the arena of cultural critique, culpable. Alesia Garcia's essay "Politics and Indigenous Theory in Leslie Marmon Silko's 'Yellow Woman'" and Sandra Cisneros' "Woman Hollering Creek" open the discussion in Part I: The Literary. Garcia's discussion of Native American storytelling re-defines "politics" as referring to "the idea of resistance through language" (p. 5). Building from poet Simon Ortiz's critique of "the idea of a homogeneous America or an 'American' language or literature," (p. 5) Garcia positions indigenous narrative and theory as emergent, "[shifting] and [changing] in different contexts" (p. 7). It is within the context of narrative structure that theories of storytelling emerge: in Silko, the centrality of landscape and crossing of borders; in Cisneros, the deliberate fragmentation and the re-working of the La Llorana legend. Garcia illustrates how the crossing of borders and "weaving stories within stories" demonstrate the "theory of the web, which in its criss-cross pattern represents a literary tradition that is just as important and complex as dominant literary theories" (p. 12).

Danielle M. Roemer's article "Graffiti as Story and Art" examines the contextual and intertextual tensions of graffiti as central to the plot of Julio Cortazar's short story "Graffiti." The emergence of graffiti is defined by Roemer as contextually separate and continually interfacing: "wall writing comes to stand for the exercise of rights of expression and assembly, rights denied the citizens of [the story's] police state" (p. 23). Viewing the creation of graffiti as an act of "resurfacing," Roemer concludes that a "sense of emergent and dialogic meaning...is ultimately frustrated by the powers of authority" (p. 24). In the context of "Graffiti," the emergent and dialogic meaning is one of language and play gone awry: "authority and individuality, context and text, come into uneasy dialogue" (p. 27) whereby erasure is transcribed as harsh punishment and loss of hope (p. 25).

Mark E. Workman, in "Folklore and the Literature of Exile", returns to folklore's "root metaphor" (p. 29) of community to bring forth "the countercurrent at work in culture as well as a centripetal one...This countercurrent is the force of exile" (p. 30). As the folkloristic perspective of community and tradition moves "towards permanence, towards inscription," Workman writes, "To speak of exile as a force is to acknowledge that community is not a fixed entity but something in-the-making, a process whose termination, like life's, means death" (p. 30). Workman brings the works of Kundera, Kafka, and Roth together as exemplifying "folklore [as] the manifestation of a dialectic between language and babel, sense and non-sense, constraint and freedom,"

arguing quite forcefully that “against the imperiousness of tradition is waged the impertinence of the exile” (p. 34).

Cathy Lynn Preston’s project, “Writing the Hybrid Body,” represents an “[attempt] to read literary texts...as viable sites for historical ethnographic and folkloristic fieldwork” (p. 75). This is a heavily descriptive essay that highlights issues such as gendered landscapes, bawdy song, the pastoral, cross-dressing and pornography in the work of Thomas Hardy. Preston’s assertion that “[Tess Durbeyfield] as a fictional character, and Hardy, as author of that character, both participate in this displacement [of identity], suggests the extent to which all voices, even those contestive of dominant social structures, are enmeshed within those structures” (p. 61) and also indicates the point at which Preston’s own ideology converges with these voices. This is not an essay for the faint-hearted; yet the close reading it requires yields to the twists and turns marking the terrain of the culturally hybrid body.

Cristina Bacchilega examines the paradigms of “writing” and “voice” in the Italian novel *La Lunga Vita di Marianna Ucria* written by Dacia Maraini. Bacchilega’s reading asserts the necessity of recognizing the impact of Derridean and deconstructionist French feminism as “contributing to a dual feminist project of reconstruction and deconstruction in folklore and literary studies” (p. 84). Although Bacchilega pays homage to Bahktinian theory, the latter author’s absence is marked by “his conceptualization of discourse that does not problematize the speaking subject” (p. 90). Bacchilega further suggests that rejection of Saussearan langue/parole binary is implicit in the work of Bahktin, Cixous, and Derrida, and that it is “Cixous [that] offers a way into the struggle: by privileging ‘voice,’ she peoples language and makes Derrida’s ‘writing’ less overbearing and more diversified from the perspective of those who are marginalized by it, who are traditionally ‘other’ in it” (p. 88). Describing Maraini’s novel as “an extreme case in point,” (p. 91) Bacchilega demonstrates how “folkloric forms are doubly inscribed in writing” in a novel that illustrates “the violent silencing of women and the unexpected ways in which women talk back” (p. 92).

Maria Herrera-Sobek’s article “Social Protest, Folklore, and Feminist Ideology in Chicana Prose and Poetry” once again (re) presents the La Llorona legend as exemplifying how “the Chicana author [specifically Cisneros] has artistically rewritten the legend and, at the same time, has retained its underlying feminist ideology” (p. 109). Referring to the works of Chicana artists (writers, visual artists, etc.) Herrera-Sobek critiques Gramsci’s perception of folklore

(and the folk) as anti-intellectual and in conflict with the higher classes, arguing that “Gramsci’s perception of folklore denies much of what is creative in subaltern culture, and, in fact, rewrites literary history, for much of cultured writing is derivative or inspired by folk motifs and genres” (p. 113).

Part II of the anthology begins with John D. Dorst’s article “Sidebar Excursions to Nowhere: The Vernacular Storytelling of Errol Morris and Spalding Gray.” Dorst links the complexity of the video game *Super Mario Five* as a correlative to “the so-called hyperspaces that theorists of postmodernism are so concerned with” (p. 121). Ultimately, Dorst surmises, folklorists need to resist the urge to “suppress whatever might seem negative in our depictions of those we study” (p. 129). This position invites us to take what Dorst defines as the “weirdness of advanced consumer culture” (p. 131) more seriously, and allow for the relocation of storytelling “under the regime of advanced consumer culture” (p. 132). This article is interesting as well in that its critical springboard, observing our own children at play, brings to bear the impact of the oft-ignored realm of childlore onto the discussion of postmodernist consumer culture.

Clover Williams’ and Jean R. Freedman’s essay “Shakespeare’s Step-Sisters: Romance Novels and the Community of Women” takes us where some of us may be reluctant to go: into the ample (and forever heaving) bosom of the popular romance novel. Although such books are typically perceived as not worthy of attention, scholarly or otherwise, Williams and Freedman suggest that romance novels function less as vehicles for escapism than as a means of validating the position that “relaxation and escape need not constitute a denial of everyday life” (p. 154). Williams and Freedman present a plausible case for the exoneration of both romance novels and their largely female readership, given the complexities of critical response reflected in the “denigration” of both the genre and its audience. Thus, romance novels emerge as a “very curious entity: a form of popular culture slighted by popular culture theorists, a form of women’s literature decried by literary critics, a kind of book mocked by intellectuals” (p. 161).

Peter Narváez’s discussion of “Chuck Berry as Postmodern Composer-Performer” suggests that Berry’s fortuitous impact was the result of more than his being in the right place at the right time, that the image put forth by Berry himself responded to the need for a popular, youthful, racially ambiguous persona. According to Narváez, Chuck Berry “pioneered...postmodern aesthetic techniques in popular music” by “[blurring] boundaries between racial cultures

and age cultures" (p. 173). Here, Berry emerges as more than a musical phenomenon, but a "malleable method actor" in the emergent ambiguity of postmodernist culture.

Lee Haring's essay "Pieces for a Shabby Hut" highlights the imperative of "presence" in ethnography by revising the concept of myth as well as "the criterion of authenticity" (p. 19). Looking at myth-collecting in colonial Madagascar, and the attendant compilation of early twentieth-century texts by Charles Renel, Haring suggests that the editorial constraint imposed by collectors such as Renel "also accounts, I believe, for why the narrators and transcribers made native culture so uninteresting" (p. 197). His own stance that "paradox and ambiguity are thus at the center of Renel's book or any like it," (p. 200) offers a form of resolution: "thus, of all the human sciences, the study of performance offers the most vigorous defense of metaphysics of presence because it insists on the primacy of the human voice" (p. 200).

In "Slave Spirituals: Allegories of the Recovery from Pain" Laura O'Connor re-works the idea of spirituals as a form of liberation, suggesting it would be more accurate to say that they represent "a temporary respite from pain...a safety value in the interests of white masters by effectively increasing the slave's tolerance for pain and thereby prolonging it" (p. 209). O'Connor's analysis of spirituals from structural, allegorical, and apocalyptic perspectives speaks to the "deeply representative" (p. 212) complexity of rhythms and voices that "re-present the self...with ever-increasing insistence, making denial of that selfhood impossible" (p. 212).

Michael J. Preston's article (referred to in the introduction) sets out to re-order "our cultural tendency to confuse manners with morals" (p. 217) by revisiting several critical evaluations of the medieval play *Mankind*. Preston recognizes the difficulty and/or impossibility of working with historical documents, but allows that "the patient accumulation of evidence and the stripping away of biased perspective may make possible a 'better' or 'fuller' understanding" (p. 222-23); a task that he himself undertakes here vis-a-vis the contributions and omissions of scholars such as Bevington, Gash, etc. as concerns re-situating and repositioning the play, or at least the places where scholarship has often (mis)led us in the search for understanding.

In "Oralities [and Literacies]: Comments on the Relationships of Contemporary Folkloristics and Literary Studies," Eric L. Montenyohl raises the possibility that folklorists have "lost our focus...lost sight of texts and performances, distracted by theoretical wrangling over what a text is, how it

can mean?" (p. 241). Montenyohl suggests that Ong's definition of orality is problematic for the folklorist, in that his focus on the preliterate has ushered orality to a premature death. Montenyohl urges the acknowledgement that "language and literature scholars and folklorists have basically been looking at different oralities" and that perspective on orality from a folkloristic standpoint must be reclaimed as communicative and performative.

This deceptively slim anthology belies the weighty impact and presence of folklorists in the discussion of cultural theory. This book offers something for everyone; in the "true" folkloristic tradition, definitions and assumptions are revisited and re-invigorated, and discussions integrate foundations (i.e. Tylor) as well as new directions (i.e. Shuman and Briggs). Overall, the theoretical groundedness of this anthology makes the strange familiar and complicates both. This volume could be effectively used for both the beginning student and the practiced theorist in many disciplines, as it simultaneously offers moments of comfort, shock(s) of recognition, and above all, intellectual rigor. In the discussion of cultural theory, this anthology reflects the fact that the critical folkloristic voice is well-placed, confidently emergent, and perhaps best of all, smart.

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Marius Barbeau: *Man of Mana*. By Laurence Nowry. (Toronto: New Canada Publications, 1995. P. 496, chronology, index, bibliography, \$27.95, ISBN 1-550210100-5, pbk.)

Nowry's *Man of Mana* is a biographical account of the life of Marius Barbeau (1883-1969), the renowned anthropologist and leading pioneer of the folklore studies movement in Canada. Born in 1883, in Ste-Marie-de-Beauce, Quebec, Barbeau initially had aspirations to become a priest. In 1907 he instead acquired his first degree as a lawyer from Laval. Shortly thereafter, he was awarded a Rhodes scholarship, studying anthropology, archeology and ethnology at Oxford University. Barbeau finished off his education abroad by spending time furthering his studies in anthropology at the Sorbonne.

In 1911, at age 28, Barbeau joined the staff of the Geological Survey of Canada (later to become the National Museum of Canada) as assistant