

John WRIGHT, *Travelling the High Way Home : Ralph Stanley and the World of Traditional Bluegrass Music* (University of Illinois Press, 1993, pp. xx+258, ISBN 0-252-02024-3)

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When I was asked to read this book for review, I thought that what I would find most interesting in such a book would be the exploration of a music form, its history and people that I have found intriguing for a very long time. To my substantial delight the book clearly fulfilled my expectations on this score; but it has done much more than this. There is no question that this book really is a must read for anyone interested in traditional bluegrass music whether they are interested in the contemporary expressions of this genre or in the history of this particular music. It contains an extensive compendium of notes on recordings. The book would be a success if it only reached this peculiar audience; but it reaches out to a greater pluralistic readership.

John Wright has created and constructed a set or several sets of reflections and images of a particular person (Ralph Stanley) and his music; but he has done it in such a way that the book is a marvellous performance of multiple textualities. For anthropologists, this is a milestone piece in the praxis of plural voices and textualities. At least 21 people provide various and particular living discourses about Ralph and Carter Stanley and many other bluegrass musicians. Each discourse reveals many facets of these people, but at the same time reveals their own characters that could easily be mobilized as sets of life histories as they touch upon and construct the life history of Ralph Stanley. The book is clearly marked textually, so that it is always clear to the reader which words are the words of an authorial author and which words are the words of authorial participants and co-constructors of a multi-layered textuality. For anthropologists it is an engaging performance of the dynamic relationship between what is "text" and what is "discourse". It is, amongst other things, a credible construction of polyphony in action. It is a plural reconstitution of a shared and not-so-shared history.

In fact, the book challenges readers to discern the difference between history and tradition, and, in doing so, it creates an image of tradition, a particular tradition, as a living, alive and current textual and discursive experience. There is history here, but, there is, in addition, a living culture that is portrayed and revealed. In a way this "text" could be perceived as a very different form of a sociometric star analysis using, not so much observed interaction patterns as "data" but the "data" of discourse about particular individuals. It strikes me as more than plausible that this book could be used in a variety of courses which are interested in research methodologies, textual constructions, discursivity, and life history constructions.

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