

Review

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the opportunity to elicit particular responses to his or her questions that historians can never duplicate with documentary evidence. Thus, the authors argue, oral history can supplement, complement, or even supply written history with an illuminating texture of insights and minute details. Yet until comparatively recently, oral history has remained the least exploited method in local historical research.

Understanding limitations or patterns in orally communicated history often heightens its potential value as a research tool. Standard chronology is often disregarded in interviews, the authors maintain, and historical time may be telescoped to bring key events into direct association with each other. Other patterns such as clustering of oral accounts, reliance on visual imagery, displacement of the original actors, and the migration of dramatic narrative elements all serve particular functions in aiding folk memory's organization and need not subtract, if their function is clearly identified and properly understood, from the validity of the narrative. Another important characteristic is the emotional association of persons as an organizing principle. People quite naturally remember by association and associate local historical events amid much discussion with particular personalities. Even folklore motifs common in other sections of the country are often embroidered into a local narrative only to reinforce salient points that people consider important. So the basic historical document would remain unchanged even if it were possible to remove all traces of such folkloric elements.

The different nature of orally communicated history should nevertheless not excuse it from rigid and careful scrutiny. Internal tests such as the narrative's own self-consistency must be used alongside external tests—comparison with written accounts or physical evidence—to make critical evaluations, the authors maintain. To illustrate how such interpretation, criticism, and correlation actually works, an extended collection of orally communicated history about one topic, the legend of Calvin Logsdon, is offered in an appendix.

One suspects that professional historians will perhaps benefit more from Allen and Montell's informative and often entertaining insights into the use of oral history than will amateur historians or local antiquarians. Fortunately, as the authors themselves point out, local history is increasingly being researched by growing numbers of professional historians in the United States. Montell's own *Saga of Coe Ridge* is an outstanding demonstration of the potential of oral history sagaciously examined and systematically utilized. Yet methodology, even within the single discipline of history, regrettably continues to be fragmented. Scholars have recently pushed the study of the family into the forefront of American social history. But their quantitative tools and comparative theoretical insights all too often leave unanswered precisely the questions best illuminated—attitudes, values, and the texture of everyday life—by careful use of oral history herein outlined by Allen and Montell!

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## Native American Indian Folklore

*Traditional American Indian Literatures: Texts and Interpretations.* Compiled and edited by Karl Kroeber. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1981. Pp. 162, acknowledgments, notes, index. \$16.50 cloth; \$5.95 paper)

This book is a welcome addition to studies of American Indian folklore and ethnopoetics. Karl Kroeber has compiled five essays by himself, Jarold Ramsey, Dennis Tedlock, Barre

Toelken and Tacheeni Scott, and Dell Hymes to support his argument that Indian narratives are first-rate works of art that need sophisticated critical attention. The book's purpose is twofold: to correct critical ethnocentrism and to enable readers to recognize the artistry of traditional American Indian narratives.

Kroeber has pitched this volume at literary critics and nonspecialists in traditional American Indian literature. Thus, folklorists may find his strong exhortations to literary critics to treat Indian narratives as sophisticated, complex art forms self-evident. Similarly, his suggestion that literary critics follow Alan Dundes's advice to explore the interrelationships between text, texture, and context may seem old hat. But given the general lack of critical attention that has been paid to Indian literature, Kroeber's case is well taken. He argues that the "primary discovery" to be made when we apply the same critical attitude used with other literature to Indian literature will be that "diversity of interpretation is possible because the narrative truly is a work of art" (p. 8). Indeed, Kroeber claims that each essay in the book stresses not "a single definitive reading" of a story but rather, "ways of entering into the rich complexity of meanings provided by traditional American Indian literary art" (p. 8). The essays bear him out.

In his opening essay, "An Introduction to the Art of Traditional American Indian Literature," Kroeber cogently supports his claims for the excellence of Indian narrative by interpreting three progressively more complex tales. His first discussion of a short Kato tale, "The Man Eater," translated by Earle Pliny Goddard, effectively demonstrates the rewards of comparing interlinear and free translations. For example, the Kato transliteration enables Goddard to comment on the aural patternings that reinforce the hard/soft imagery in the tale.

Kroeber's second analysis, of John Swanton's translation of a Creek tale, "The Fawn, The Wolves, and The Terrapin," shows that this tale of "the fooling fool fooled" is of the same caliber as Chaucer's "The Miller's Tale." In his third interpretation, of "Red Willow," a Nez Percé tale translated by Archie Phinney, Kroeber illustrates the capacity for self-analysis in Indian narratives. Kroeber's interpretation provides convincing support for his argument that understanding stories as *art* can lead to a deeper anthropological understanding.

One of the major contributions this volume makes is to focus attention on the need for grounding interpretations on a critical examination of Indian texts as *translations*. Indeed, the essays by Toelken and Scott, and Hymes are centrally concerned with translation issues.

Barre Toelken deserves credit for his courage in subjecting his earlier translation of "The 'Pretty Languages' of Yellowman: Genre, Mode, and Texture in Navaho Coyote Narratives" to critical scrutiny. With co-author Tacheeni Scott, Toelken retranslates the story "to see what discoveries could be made about the story which *should* have been part of my original discussion" (p. 70; italics in original). After reprinting the entire essay and prose translation of the first "Pretty Languages" article, Toelken and Scott present a new translation, changing the earlier prose format to a poetic line-by-line one. Then they compare the two translations.

Although the new text, with descriptions of delivery style and audience responses in the right-hand margin is easier to read, I was disappointed that the authors abridged the performance descriptions: "Not much detail is given because these matters are already discussed in the earlier article" (p. 92). In an essay that extols the importance of recording performance features, this decision to omit some notations from the second text perpetuates the notion that these nonverbal and contextual features are secondary.

The comparison of the two versions yields useful insights, such as the discovery that one intensifier, "hááhgóóshíí" (the oral equivalent to several exclamation points), was not even translated in the first text. I only wish the discussion would account for more of the changes in the wording between the two versions. An interlinear translation would be a helpful addition.

Dell Hymes's "Reading Clackamas Texts" offers a close analysis of the rhetorical-poetic uses of the noun prefixes accompanying the naming of Grizzly Woman and Waterbug. In Clackamas, one may choose to prefix a noun with *wa*, *a*, or to omit the prefix,  $\emptyset$ . Since English does not have an equivalent linguistic form, the prefixes do not appear in most translations. Through a careful examination of the places in the dramatic structure in which the prefixes occur, Hymes discovers that the rhetorical choice between *wa*, *a*, or  $\emptyset$  is based on the relative strength and activity of the character. *Wa* expresses more activity and power than *a*, and *a* in turn expresses more power than  $\emptyset$ . A reference to an oral performance of the tale might strengthen Hymes's conclusions. Perhaps one reason *wa* conveys more power than *a* rests in the added lip movement of pursing the lips to form *wa* and in the sound symbolism attendant with such movement.

One comes away from this fascinating study wishing for a more economical and compelling mode of presenting the evidence. The simple expedient of substituting the Clackamas word for Grizzly Woman in the text would enable readers to see firsthand where the character was named as *Wakitsimani* or *Akitsimani*; or prefixing Grizzly Woman with *wa*, *a*, or  $\emptyset$  would accomplish the same purpose.

Dennis Tedlock's "The Spoken Word and the Work of Interpretation in American Indian Religion" discusses the hermeneutics of one genre of Zuni narrative, the stories of "The Beginning." Tedlock concentrates on the nonchanted interpretations of "The Beginning," which, unlike the chanted "fixed" versions performed in ritual contexts, offer narrators the opportunity to add new details and explanations. This provocative essay raises a number of questions about the hermeneutics of oral narratives. Tedlock's statement that this genre entails "criticism" and hermeneutics, in contrast to performances in which the teller is "merely repeating memorized words," or "merely giving a dramatic 'oral interpretation' of a fixed script" (p. 48), implies that such performances are not hermeneutical. Such a statement seems to contradict Tedlock's earlier work in showing how paralinguistic features reflect a teller's critical interpretation. (See "On the Translation of Style in Oral Narrative.") Certainly it contradicts the conclusion of hermeneuticist Richard Palmer, who argues that "An adequate literary criticism moves toward the oral interpretation of the work on which it is focused" (p. 18, *Hermeneutics: Interpretation Theory in Schleiermacher, Dilthey, Heidegger, and Gadamer*). Despite this difficulty, Tedlock's comparison of a chanted text to a story version provides rich insights.

Jarold Ramsey's "From 'Mythic' to 'Fictive' in a Nez Percé Orpheus Myth" is a beautiful, engaging piece of criticism. His comparison of several Indian Orpheus myths and detailed examination of Phinney's translation of the Nez Percé "Coyote and the Shadow People" discovers a unique episode in North American Indian Orpheus myths. While other stories end with the hero desiring to go back after his lost loved one, in this version Coyote "actually does set out again, as if moving beyond the finalized terms of his own myth, as explained to him by the spirit guide" (p. 34).

One of the best features of this excellent book is that it contains ten complete tale texts. Thus, the book can be extremely useful in the classroom, since students can compare their own interpretations to those of the authors.

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