

BOOK REVIEWS

Galaal, Muusa H.I. The Terminology and Practice of Somali Weather Lore, Astronomy and Astrology; published by the author, Mogadishu, Somali Republic, 1968. 77 pp. No price mentioned.

It may be initially redundant to note the rather unique and specialized nature of this work. Not everyone will find reason to read this interesting and valuable monograph, but as with all good studies there is fertile ground for pontificating on folklore theory and method of general concern.

A review from the Somali News (6/7/68) of Mr. Galaal's work gives us a starting point. Using an archaic "rationale" for folklore and anthropology, the review warns that this "proto-science" (weather lore) is fast disappearing and must be recorded soon so that modern science (from animal husbandry to astronomy) can learn from it. This idea is certainly admirable and may even be possible, but it is burdened with a patronizing assumption of the "functionalism" of ethnological studies that harkens back to Tylor. Such an optimistic literal approach is frequently found in folklore studies today. Limiting ourselves to weather lore, we find an article by H.A. Hasen (a meteorologist himself), "The Origin and Value of Weather Lore" (1900), in which he seeks the origins of weather superstitions in "real" experience. This concept of weather lore as a "proto-" or "pseudo-science" is also the apparent basis of a more recent, rather gross work by Eric Sloane. In The Folklore of American Weather (1963), Sloane helpfully draws diagrams of clouds for us and, in case we get into any trouble, adds large "Ts" and "Fs" (True and False) for each item, with an occasional "P" for "Possible," thus leaving the field open to further meticulous research.

Perhaps I belabor this point too much, for the idea that the "folk" may actually be right (i.e., "scientifically correct") should not be ignored, but it is hardly the most valuable or central aspect of belief systems. The fact that the Somali pastoralists believe and adjust their lives to the judgements of the weather lorist is "truth" enough. It is hardly important whether their decision as to the number of days in a certain month is "correct." And it might be recalled that we must still adjust our "advanced" system of time reckoning (Indiana's time zone dilemma? leap year). Unless one wishes to merely add "Ts" and "Fs" a literal explanation has little value, if a study does not also consider the role of such beliefs in their full contexts. In other words, the value of Mr. Galaal's very thorough study is not to establish the degree of validity or "correctness" of Somali weather lorists' observations, but the role of the beliefs in the society, their effects on the pastoralists' lives, the extent of belief in relation to practice. Unfortunately, Mr. Galaal does not provide enough of this type of information and if there is a major failing in his unique work it is that.

The book is essentially a listing of beliefs, although it is more thorough than comparable section in, for example, Buying the Wind (1964) or Ozark Superstitions (1947). The author has provided much information on the important astral configurations, phases of the moon, methods and terminology of time reckoning, and animal lore. The original literary contexts with translations (which are themselves beautiful poetry) for each

item are usually provided and conflicting reports are included. The appendix contains charts, a map indicating regional distinctions, and a list of informants. But excluding a brief introduction and the serious tone of the whole work, we are left to assume the importance of the role of the weather lorist. A person who predicts weather is obviously crucial to a pastoral people, but we are given little indication of other determining factors, the social status of the weather lorist, or the relation of belief and practice (i.e., the "ideal" vs. "real").

There are several other problems in Mr. Galaal's book from the viewpoint of a "foreign scholar." The valuable use of Somali terms and inclusion of variations in beliefs quickly become confusing without at least a general survey of Somali and a glossary. Although the author admirably includes original texts, there is no interlinear translation and no commentary as to how, when, where, why, or to whom these weather observations and prophecies are presented. After making these rather standard criticisms, I would make an important qualification. Mr. Galaal intended his work mainly for a Somali audience and, therefore, cultural background and contextual elaborations were unnecessary. Also it must be stressed that this very dedicated "amateur" folklorist got the thing done and published by himself. Many of us bemoan the absence of "indigenous" scholarship (how can we study them?), but when such work appears proceed to condemn it in terms of our own academic standards---the same ones we feared originally would destroy a "real" study. I have included the above observations because if, as Mr. Galaal himself suggests, comparative studies are to grow out of this initial effort, we certainly need more than just the beliefs alone. As Mr. Galaal has been involved in such research in the past and will obviously continue to record the lore of Somali, we hope he will turn to more detailed and comprehensive works that can be more helpful and more easily understood by those of us who are not Somali pastoralists or astrologists.

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Thompson, Stith. One Hundred Favorite Folktales; Indiana University Press, Bloomington, Indiana, 1968. Drawings by Franz Altschuler. 438+xii pp. \$12.50.

Anthologies of folktales for the general public have indeed been manifest in past years, yet few of these since Andrew Lang's amazing Fairy books have been compiled by competent folklorists. Those which have and have also found wide favor, such as Vance Randolph's books or Richard Chase's The Jack Tales, are often collections from limited areas rather than broadly conceived anthologies drawing on a wide range of available materials. Stith Thompson's newest book is such an anthology and will fill the need of students and general readers for an adult, one-volume compilation of tale texts.

Thompson's criterion for a "favorite" tale is that of frequent collection; beyond that, his selection of the actual variant is based on whether the tale seems "well told" (all but six of the hundred come from oral sources) and whether it is a representative example of its type. Hence we have the favorite tales of the "folk" (assuming that sheer quantity of collection indicates popularity), although more sophisticated readers will al-