

## FOLKLORE BOOK REVIEWS

With many important folklore studies and collections being published or republished today, it seems unfortunate that folklore journals are too often unable or unwilling to provide adequate, perceptive discussion of them. The quality of folkloric book reviews, and perhaps of scholarly reviews in general, remains low and our discipline suffers from our seeming inability to generate lively, intelligent and lengthy discussion of the latest scholarship in the field. Reviews are often years late and sometimes disturbingly close to the mere summarizing and "I liked this book very much and you will like it too" of the high school English class report.

Obviously not all books published rate extensive treatment and those which do not can perhaps best be handled in a paragraph or two (Choice reviewers often manage meaty and informative reviews in the brief space allotted them). But to see four quite important collections, two of W.H. Barrett's collections of Fens tales, Ranke's Folktales of Germany and Susie Hoogasian-Villa's 100 Armenian Tales all dispatched in a single 400 word review (Western Folklore, October, 1968) is a trifle shocking. And to treat Gomme's Folklore as an Historical Science and Brunvand's The Study of American Folklore each in three sentences (New York Folklore Quarterly, September, 1968) is little short of outrageous. The attention, or lack of attention, accorded a number of recent reprints is also a case in point. Gale Research Company, for example, has brought out an impressive series of out of print works of folkloric interest. Many of these, doubtless, can well be ignored; yet in the latest Abstracts of Folklore Studies Bibliographical Notes one finds works of definite historical importance by George W. Cox, Jeremiah Curtin, Patrick Kennedy and William Hone listed without comment amidst miscellaneous antiquarian compilations of varying, usually mediocre, merit. The issuance of important reprints should offer us the opportunity for a retrospective look at the classics of the past. Yet we seem uninterested in or ignorant of the ideas which shaped our discipline in the past.

We don't mean to imply that good reviews are easily written and obtained, or to cast blame on any journal or individual in particular. We certainly do not contend that the FORUM, any more than JAF, has begun to rival the New York Review of Books, although it has been our policy to encourage essay type book reviews whenever possible. We understand that W. Edson Richmond had hoped to initiate a policy of publishing at least one or two major reviews in each number of JAF, but was never able to fully implement such a policy. We are too used to reading and writing snappy, shoddy "discussions" of books.

One solution might be for journals to be more selective, devoting much space to only a few new volumes. The Journal of the Folklore Institute has done this with some success. But then too many books would be ignored entirely. Perhaps a totally new approach should be applied, with the American Folklore Society sponsoring a new journal, similar to the Abstracts, devoted only to reviews. Thus space for long, discursive reviews would be made available and more short reviews might also be included. Such a publication might easily prove to be as valuable as the Abstracts.