

One problem remains: the book is interesting and informative, delightful to read and replete with factual history, but how can it possibly be of use to folklorists? The answer comes, not unexpectedly, from a cultural geographer, E. Joan Wilson Miller:

However extraordinary some of them may seem, toponyms have meaning and value to the cultural geographer. Many of them represent selective oral material disseminated regionally by ingrained, persistent speech habits. Such names belong to the folk because they are a part of a shared experience and are a reaction to a real, immediate, and practical situation. Some of their origins are elusive and variants concerning these origins exist. The study of place names indicates that they are a geographic expression of cultural processes that are still dynamic. So they, too, are a part of the continuum of man's changing occupation of the land.\*

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\* E. Joan Wilson Miller, "The Naming of the Land in the Arkansas Ozarks: A Study in Culture Processes," Annals of the Association of American Geographers, LIX (1969), 251.

Umeasiegbu, Rems Nna. The Way We Lived, illus. Heinemann Educational Books, Malta, 1969. 139 pages.

The Way We Lived is one of those unusual but increasingly common books mushrooming in Africa. This book is particularly strange because of the details of its creation, described in a letter by the author to his father (page viii). The author belongs to the Ibo, a famous tribe in the Eastern region of Nigeria. His father, G.U. Umeasiegbu, was (or is, I can't tell), a leading elder in the county of Aba, and he customarily entertained such dignitaries as the councillors of the Aba Urban Council. One day when the councillors gathered in his homestead, he asked his son, Rems Nna Umeasiegbu, to bring in palmwine for the guests. The son served the palmwine without taking a sip first, a violation of Ibo custom. The father threatened to remove him from school, which, the father felt, was corrupting his knowledge of the Ibo traditions. The serious sermon following the reprimand left such an imprint on Umeasiegbu's mind that he later decided to reconstruct the Ibo customs as he recollected them while studying at Oxfordshire in Britain. Thus his only informant in retrospect was his father, and his only methodology, recollection of his father's sermons and tale-telling sessions. This book treats the traditional, fashionable path of desiring to reconstruct the African cultural past which is believed to have died out. While a number of authorities in African folklore (or studies) would have us believe that oral traditions in Africa are a living reality, Mr. Umeasiegbu emphasizes: "Practically all the customs detailed in this book are now obsolete and are nowhere to be found amongst the Ibo today. They have been put down here for record purposes."

This book is divided into two parts: 1. Customs and 2. Folklore. The customs include birth of children, birth of twins, teething of children, circumcision, marriage, hunting, naming babies, divorce, funerals, worshipping idols, oaths, greetings, festivals, games, breaking kola nut and hospitality. The author gives synopses of the various

customs, and points out regional variations. In the section on folklore, he brings together 48 folktales, 4 folksongs, 2 recitations and a myth. All these 52 narratives come from one tribe. He has mentioned and recorded the song texts but has not transcribed the musical notation. Thus it is difficult for a non-Ibo to sing the tunes, or to compare them with tunes from other areas. There is a general absence of myth and legend; no explanation is given for this. Only one narrative, no. 31, "Origin of Death," can be classified as myth. I doubt that Umeasiegbu's father had no myths and legends in his repertoire to pass on to his son. Likewise I doubt that the general absence of myths and legends indicates that the Ibo do not have myths and legends. I suspect that myths and legends are among some of the narratives which escaped Mr. Umeasiegbu's memory.

All along, this book speaks with the voice of and in the language of an informant. Mr. Umeasiegbu is certainly an informant in search of a folklorist. He does not know what to do with his folklore materials and he does not want to see them wasted, that is, to fade out of his memory. The intentions of the book should not in the least be regarded as scholarly. If anything, they are patriotic and economic. Thus the book is not organized in the conventional folkloristic, scholarly format, nor was there originally any attempt at scholarly organization. There are no type and motif indexes, not is there a respectable scholarly introduction. The preface is far below the expectations and demands of any folklorist. However, this book makes some contributions. The synopses on the various customs illustrate both the need and possibilities of a scholarly ethnography of Ibo culture. Furthermore, future scholars might want to avail themselves of the material provided in this book. For instance, as a result of the existence of many tortoise tales in this volume, one might want to undertake a comparison of the role of the tortoise in Ibo tales and that of Anansi in Akan tales.

There is, however, one unfortunate complication created by Mr. Umeasiegbu's rigorous editorship: "To avoid monotony, I have changed some of the names of the characters of the fables. It does not make good reading if the tortoise appears as the principal character in all the stories." He does not mention the stories in which the character of the tortoise has been eliminated. Thus the importance of the tortoise is underplayed by Mr. Umeasiegbu's overprojection of his personality into the narratives and his overanxiety for variety. This leads to another problem: we cannot ascertain accurately the role and frequency of occurrence of the tortoise in these tales. Furthermore, Mr. Umeasiegbu naturally cautions us to doubt the authenticity of the characters in these tales. If his efforts to preserve Ibo customs in writing were fruitful, at least one thing escaped his grasp: authenticity. Nonetheless, The Way We Lived is not wholly valueless; every reader will be wiser after reading it.

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#### FOLKLORE FORUM CONTEST

The FOLKLORE FORUM will award a prize to the individual who correctly guesses the number of typographical errors in this issue.