BOOK REVIEWS


Reviewed by John H. McDowell

Michael Heisley and his collaborators merit the highest praise for having assembled this exemplary bibliography. A vast body of research, scattered throughout the publishing empires of both Mexico and the United States, finds itself properly cited, indexed, and in many cases, annotated in Heisley's bibliography, which must henceforth be considered an indispensable scholarly tool for inquiries into the folkloric traditions of Chicano populations in the United States.

To be more specific, the bibliography has four endearing traits. The coverage is more than adequate, even complete, though one hesitates to use this term in reference to such a dynamic field of investigation. The scheme of organization is readily intelligible, reflecting the conventional parsing of our intellectual domain. Brief descriptive notes attached to the more readily available items neatly convey the range and scope of scholarship in each case. And a set of indices (by author, geographical locale, and subject matter) renders previously fugitive materials as handy as one's mastery of the alphabet.

This bibliography should facilitate (and perhaps even stimulate) work by professionals and apprentices alike in the rich domain of Chicano folk expression. In its pages we gain access to the major threads of scholarly interest affecting this domain, including the quest for Indian and European sources, the description of Mexican prototypes, the exploration of the crucible of Chicano experience in the Southwest, and the documentation of contemporary forms emerging out of a Chicano matrix which is increasingly urban and resistant to facile geographical or sociological description.


Reviewed by G. J. Longenecker

Johannes Wilbert's book, Yupa Folktales, represents some of the long and hard work this anthropologist and director of the UCLA Latin American Studies Center has accomplished with South American Indian groups. Because of Wilbert's distinguished background and his previous work, one would expect a volume such as this to have some new theoretical aim or some startlingly fresh tales to contribute to folktale research. This work does neither. It is simply one more scholarly plodding through stories claiming them to be typical of a culture and relating them to that culture. Fortunately, and to Wilbert's credit, his writing style is not as dull as his theoretical objectives.

This book contains a Preface and an Introduction in addition to three main sections. The first section, "Ethnography and Narrative Reality," deals with the ethnographic features of the Yupa as they are revealed in the narratives. Wilbert offers some extra information to that found in the tales in order to round out an overview of the Yupa. "Narrative Material and Motif Content," the second section of the work, contains the tales. It is instructive to note that he entitles this section "material" and not "folktales" (as is done in the title) since what Wilbert does is to relate the stories as he understands them. He does not offer the recorded tales of the narrators
Wilbert states that he "became acquainted with two elderly Pariri Yupa subtribe women who consented to narrate the stories contained" in the book (p. xi). After reading this and realizing that two women only were responsible for the narration of the stories which Wilbert presents, I began asking myself if these tales could truly be considered typical of the Yupa. I looked to see how Wilbert defined subtribe and his statement on this term left me more unsure as to the appropriateness of labeling these tales "Yupa." A subtribe is a group "socioeconomically limited to its own territory," by "deep river valleys" which serve as effective political boundaries" (p. 3). Further, "fierce hostility among the subtribes has contributed to isolation and resulting linguistic separation" (p. 5). Wilbert then relates how a son of one of the women listened to the stories as they were told in Yupa, translated them to Wilbert in Spanish, and then he translated them into English (enlivening them to make them more readable for a larger audience). I believe that my remarks to this point have demonstrated that Wilbert's labeling the stories he presents as "Yupa" is a misleading one and an error which creeps into other areas of the book.

In the fifty-six page section entitled "Ethnography and Narrative Reality," Wilbert discusses how the tales reflect Yupa society. He writes of a "narrative reality" in the tales and remarks that this is "no more and no less that the reality expressed through the folktales. As such it is governed by its own laws of reality . . . [that] . . . permits its acceptance as an important part of the overall cultural reality of a particular society and as the compliment of the ethnographical documentation" (p. xii). At first this appears as an impressive statement concerning folktales and their place in a cultural milieu. When Wilbert puts this concept to work, however, it amounts to nothing more than a recounting of the world views, customs, and artifacts of the Yupa as they appear in the stories presented. That is, given a corpus of stories, features of social, cultural, and technological significance are extracted from it and referred to as "narrative reality." Wilbert implies he would have written a more detailed analysis with more significant conclusions of the Yupa narrative reality but, he apologizes, "our knowledge of Yupa culture does not allow full analysis of their ethnography and folktales" (p. xii). I suggest that given this state of affairs, Wilbert should have presented the "narrative reality" of the two Pariri women and their son. This would certainly have contained more significant conclusions about their immediate social and cultural group.

As the book now stands, it is little more than annotations to a fieldworker's notebook on tales from a few narrators. The stories themselves are enjoyable to read, it is their treatment and interpretations which is lacking.