

NOTES

¹ **English Ritual Drama** (London: The Folklore Society, 1967).

² See, for example: Henry Glassie, **All Silver and No Brass: An Irish Christmas Mumming** (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1975); and the special issue on folk drama of the **Journal of American Folklore**, edited by Thomas A. Green, 94(1981).

Folklore and Oral History. Edited by Neil V. Rosenberg.

St. John's Newfoundland: Memorial University of Newfoundland, 1978. Pp. xx + 101. No price given.

Reviewed by Joseph P. Goodwin.

The three years between the second annual meeting of the Canadian Aural/Oral History Association in 1975 and the publication of this book containing some of the papers presented at that conference represent an unfortunate delay. Materials dealing with both folklore and oral

history have not exactly proliferated since the sixth national colloquium of the United States Oral History Association held in 1971, at which a panel of folklorists led by Richard M. Dorson discussed relationships between the two fields.

Folklore and Oral History contains eleven essays, two of which are in French. Each article is accompanied by a *précis*, in French for the English papers and in English for those written in French. A headnote (in English) introduces each entry, providing an additional summary as well as information concerning the author.

Rosenberg's introduction gives the reader a brief overview of oral history and of audio recorded folklore research in Canada. Frederick A. Aldrich, Dean of the School of Graduate Studies at Memorial University in St. John's, Newfoundland carries the origins of oral history back beyond modern times to Thucydides (ca. 471-400 BC), who wrote of the problems inherent in oral history:

I have described nothing but what I either saw myself, or learned from others of whom I made the most careful and particular enquiry. The task was a laborious one, because eye-witnesses of the same occurrences gave different accounts of them, as they remembered or were interested in the actions of one side or another. And very likely the strictly historical character of my narrative may be disappointing to the EAR.

(Quoted by Aldrich on page 2, with the citation "Bk. 1, Ch. 22.").

Opening the series of essays is an excellent rebuttal of various criticisms of oral history. Leslie Harris, a historian and Academic Vice-President at Memorial, begins "Without Strap Nor String" with an unwarranted apology for his incompetence at dealing with oral history. Harris refutes such criticisms as

The oral historian... will have manufactured what amounts to a written document, except that it will be an inferior document because it will consist of **ex post facto** recollection, that it will be a jumble of impressionism, of second hand knowledge, of hearsay,

of myth, of legend, and that it will not be subject to the normal and rigorous checks of textual criticism.

But might we not... ascribe most of those same weaknesses to many of the written documentary evidences with which we deal? (p. 10).

Harris goes on to back up this assertion, and he does it well.

"The Culture of Working People and Oral History: A Newfoundland Report," by historian Peter Neary, presents the value of folklore and oral history to the development of a program in Newfoundland studies, and offers little to the volume.

Paul Carpentier of the National Museum Center for Folk Culture Studies rightly points out in "Folklore et document oral" that most people have been neglected by historians. He offers a few tips for interviewers, and talks briefly about equipment and archives.

Robert C. Cosby's background in literature, folklore and oral history have combined to give him a unique insight into the interviewing process, which he explains in a superb, thought provoking article, "The Psychodrama of the Interview Arena." Cosby points out that the presence of the tape recorder creates a third party, the user. The collector has to remain constantly aware of this fact, conducting the interview accordingly. In addition the interviewer must be cognizant of the needs of the informant.

Anthropologist Elliot Leyton proposes in "The Life History in Newfoundland Anthropological Studies" that folklorists and oral historians "turn their attention to the compilation and publication of life histories" (p. 47) because "the life history... communicates the richness of a culture and the complexity of a human being in a way no other research technique can do" (p. 46). Leyton stresses the value of the life history to the anthropologist, and implies that oral historians and folklorists should gather these autobiographies so that anthropologists have more time to spend on other types of research.

While presenting the advantages of "A Multi-Disciplinary Approach to the Reconstruction of the History and Culture of Rural Population," Thomas F. Nemec, an anthropologist, points out that despite its value, the oral inter-

view must be used in conjunction with other resources in order to get the fullest picture possible.

David Alexander, an economic historian, is uncomfortable with oral histories and the inaccuracies which he feels are inherent in oral interviews. He does, however, think that oral history is useful as a technique for recording memoirs. He concludes "Oral History at the Maritime History Group" by saying that "oral sources will constitute an additional rather than a fundamental source to the writing of modern and contemporary history." (p. 61).

Three topics are addressed by Gerald Thomas, a member of Memorial University's Department of French Language, in "Les études de folklore et d'histoire oral chez les Franco-Terreneuviens." He briefly discusses the history of the French Newfoundlanders, the work accomplished thus far in folklore and oral history, and outlines research concerning these people. Thomas shows the need for oral history and folklore in gathering information concerning Newfoundland's Francophones. He also describes the holdings of the Centre d'Etudes Franco-Terreneuviens.

According to Paul O'Neill of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, radio and television can provide a service to oral history by preserving recordings of coverage of historical events. In "Responsibilities of the Broadcast Media" O'Neill points out that "these media have the means, talent, and money to undertake oral history projects that are often outside the ability and scope of other groups." He then illustrates this point of view with examples of projects undertaken by the CBC.

John Scott's "'I Don't Think There's Anything in the World That the Common Man Will Take a Bigger Chance [for] Than He'll Take for a Seal.': Some Contributions of Oral History Toward an Understanding of the Newfoundland Disaster" shows that oral history can provide a context and thus a better understanding of historical events. Scott, a doctoral candidate in folklore at Memorial University, uses the example of a disaster in 1913 in which seventy-eight men froze to death while hunting seals. Through oral history interviews it appears that the captain of the men's ship was not acting in an unusual manner and was not necessarily responsible for the deaths as has been assumed in the past.

The final essay in the collection, "The Preservation of History and Culture Among the Inuit of Labrador Through Their Own and Contact Languages," by F.W. Peacock, a Moravian missionary, is based upon the premise that "single words reveal and contain history within themselves" (p.92). While the article is interesting from a linguistic viewpoint, it really does not belong in a volume concerned with folklore and oral history.

The papers presented in **Folklore and Oral History** are highly uneven in quality; several articles barely mention folklore, and one does not pertain to either field. The collection is valuable due to its inclusion of the Harris and Cosbey articles, and because it underscores the fact that while there is much room for cooperation between folklore and oral history, the basic treatises still remain to be written.

The Vanishing Hitchhiker. American Urban Legends and their Meanings. By Jan Harold Brunvand. New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1981. Pp. xiv-208, glossary, appendix, index. \$14.95 cloth.

Reviewed by Peter Voorheis.

When we encounter works whose every sentence and paragraph conveys its message after only one reading, we may suspect that the author is speaking not to us but to the rabble outside the ivory tower. The style and format of **The Vanishing Hitchhiker** does suggest that Jan Brunvand wishes his readership to extend beyond folklorists-- to scholars in other disciplines as well as to the society at large. All of the most widely known modern legends-- the Hook, the Boyfriend's Death, etc., are represented, though for reasons of space he cannot render them the exhaustive treatment we have become accustomed to for single-legend studies in **Indiana Folklore** and elsewhere. Yet we should not too quickly equate brevity with mediocrity or lack of scholarly utility.

As many of his earlier writings indicate, Brunvand is an eclectic researcher, and presents his material without