pain, and degradation” (74)—without understanding them as tall tales rather than as reports of Sut’s “true” experiences.

Chapters 5 and 6 are discussions of Mark Twain’s Roughing It and his Autobiography, respectively. Since no complete edition of Twain’s autobiography has been published, Brown uses the three partial editions available. Brown compares two of Twain’s stages as tall tale teller. In Roughing It, he chronicles his transformation from a tenderfoot into a seasoned yarnspinner, often making his own, younger self the butt of tall tale humor. In his Autobiography, Twain presents his life and himself as a tall tale completed.

Brown rounds up the book with Chapter 7, “The Way the Natives Talk: A Note on Colloquial Style,” discussing the influence of colloquial, down-to-earth style in American literature, and her “Epilogue,” in which she succinctly traces some tall tale influences in more recent literature, mentions Philip Roth, Ralph Ellison, and Garrison Keillor. At times in this book, it seems that Brown has nearly spread her interpretive net too thin and begun to describe things which are not tall tales at all, but she always reels it back in, as when she admits that much of Keillor’s work resembles local color more than the tall tale (136).

In all, The Tall Tale is an excellent study of the tall tale, especially in its literary incarnations, and an exemplary fusion of folkloristic and literary concerns.


Reviewed by Robert E. Walls

In some of my less optimistic moments, I often think, as a non-native Westerner, that attempting to comprehend the American West—just the literary West—and the romance, sentimentality, mythology, and realism underlying that heritage is a task for which several lifetimes would not be sufficient. To examine the popular, academic, and esoteric voices of the Old West (e.g., Bret Harte, Jack London, Mary Austin, Owen Wister, Mari Sandoz, Louis L’Amour) and of the New West (e.g., Edward Abbey, Larry McMurtry, Gary Snyder, Leslie Marmon Silko, James Welch) to shed some light on the voices of the folk seems so natural, so necessary, yet so formidable. But a book such as A Literary History of the American West offers considerable comfort. Here one can read with confidence about the literary West, recognizing that it is simply impossible to read through all of it. This book does a magnificent job of organizing, summarizing, and clarifying a tremendous quantity of material, all the while making it accessible to a diverse audience.
No less than 81 chapters authored by scholars throughout the country focus on individual writers, literary circles, genres, and present trends in the Far West, Southwest, Midwest, and Rocky Mountains. Folklorists will want to pay particular attention to chapters on people such as J. Frank Dobie, John G. Neihardt, and Vardis Fisher; genres such as Mormon and cowboy novels; and ethnic expression by Scandinavian, Mexican, Asian, and Afro-American writers. There is an excellent section on Native American oral traditions, and three extremely helpful chapters on contemporary Indian writers—a subject so important yet so neglected by folklorists, rarely considered in the pages of folklore journals. Finally, one should definitely not miss the essay—one of the longest in the book—on "Folklore in the American West" by Barre Toelken; it is both informative and provocative to folklorists at any stage of the game.

Of course the book does have some drawbacks. There is painfully little to remind readers of the continued vitality of Native American oral traditions, and while the work of Ivan Doig may be recent, it still had attracted enough attention by 1985 to merit mention by somebody. It is also sad to see so little on Robert Service and popular poetry in general. Additionally, the work's prohibitive cost makes it primarily a library volume, where I hope it survives, as the spine on my copy of this heavy book broke almost immediately. But minor quibbles aside, this work will prove indispensable to folklorists interested in the literary history of the American West.


Reviewed by Sean Galvin

John Lindow, Reimund Kvideland and Henning Sehmsdorf have rendered the folklore community and teachers of folk literature a great service by bringing us these two publications. Each work is invaluable both to Scandinavianists and generalists alike because each serves as a general introduction to an important area of Scandinavian scholarship and provides those who are unfamiliar with Scandinavian languages a chance to become well acquainted with the wealth of resources available in Scandinavian literature and folklore. Secondly, they are both important and long overdue reference tools.

Scandinavian Mythology: An Annotated Bibliography is a welcome addition to the Garland Folklore Bibliographies series (Volume 13). The opening line of the "Introduction" (Pp. x-xv) immediately clues the reader to the parameters