

studies, the book also clearly introduces key concepts in sociolinguistics and narratology. Johnstone also discusses rhetorical implications of using everyday language to tell stories in a specific place for a certain community; writing instructors could use this to help students expand their compositional abilities.

Barbara Johnstone's *Stories, Community, and Place: Narratives from Middle America* explores the narrative conventions and inventions of white, middle class Americans—an underconsidered group in terms of much folkloristic study. The book expands the possibilities of folkloristic research and methodology by allowing "mainstream" subject matter and public documentation as sources. However, the book also offers to readers from other fields a folklorist's perspective on individual and social concerns in relation to traditional and innovative expressions. *Stories, Community, and Place* invites its readers, from any place and of many communities, to consider and appreciate the possibilities and continuities involved in storytelling.

Roger D. Abrahams. **Singing the Master: The Emergence of African American Culture in the Plantation South.** New York: Pantheon Books, 1992. Pp. xxvi + 341, illustrations, notes, appendices, index. \$25.00 cloth.

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Singing the Master examines a ritual festive performance on the plantations in the South, rooted in deference, spectacle, and sub-Saharan aesthetics, which became an important site for and emblemizes the development of African American performance culture.

In the antebellum South, the neighborly harvest junket for corn, a Husking or Cornshucking, functioned importantly both in agriculture and community. Former slaves often recalled them as "good times." The spectacle and celebration of the cornshucking likewise inspired written anecdotes before and after the War Between the States.

The Southern cornshucking evolved from the English harvest home and reproduced its basic features. After the corn sat in a huge pile, the archetypal plantation cornshucking included shucking the corn—arranged often as a competition—vibrant antiphonal singing led by a "Captain," capturing and carrying the master to the house, a feast, and frequently an all night dance; consumption of whiskey, brandy, or beer familiarly accompanied the evening. The essence of the cornshucking, though, moved in its festival mien. During the shucking, its participants changed from

"everyday" life to celebratory life. In the course of this, the shucking became suffused with an African aesthetic and became recast in African styles. The mixing of the traditions of planter and slave also took place outside of the form and in the space of the event itself. Situated in the yard halfway between the House and slave quarters and fields, the shucking unfolded in a liminal space commanded partially by the culture of the slaves and partially by the culture of the planter. At its core, the cornshucking embodied a half-and-half amalgamation dually charged with meaning. African Americans enjoyed the cornshucking as an opportunity to celebrate as a community their lives as workers, musicians, and dancers. To the planter, though, the shucking gave an assurance of paternal ability and a spectacle of entertainment.

Abrahams's idea of plantation cornshucking roughly fits this delineation. Oriented with the viewpoint, the book sets out to draw a circle of reciprocity among three entities—African American culture, cornshuckings, and the spectacle of cornshucking observed by whites. Piecemeal, Abrahams crafts and maintains his argument with strength and perspicuity. His brilliance, however, is intermittent. Where his strength lies in adducing holistic, universal arguments, his weaknesses let parts of the landscape pass unnoticed. Not a first-class history book, *Singing the Master* is an intelligent, readable essay well attuned to the folklore community.

Peter Narváez and Martin Laba, editors. **Media Sense: The Folklore-Popular Culture Continuum.** Bowling Green, Ohio: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1986. Pp.168. \$18.95 cloth, \$9.95 paper.

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It has become a commonplace of contemporary folklore scholarship that mass media and folklore, including folk ways and aesthetics, can no longer be considered mutually exclusive categories. Electronic media influences, and is influenced by, folklore in much the same way that exposure to print media continues to interact with expressive folk culture. Many folklorists have pushed the boundaries between folklore and popular culture; others have been explicit about defining and researching areas of overlap between the two fields: each has come to terms with the boundaries of both fields largely in terms of his or her own interests and the study at hand. Folklorists, and especially modern legend scholars, have done well at both adapting theories from popular culture and other disciplines, and at building a corpus of their own scholarship at the intersection of these fields.