

Michaelis-Jena, Ruth. The Brothers Grimm; Praeger Publishers, New York and Washington, 1970. 212 and xvi pp. Index, Bibliography, Genealogical Table of the Grimm Family, 24 plates, 35 other illustrations. With a Preface by Ludwig Denecke. \$8.95.

Folklorists naturally share in the scholar's propensity for rambling on in adulatory tones about the great men in the field, living and deceased. For example, most of us are aware indeed of the significance, influence, and greatness of Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm. This would not be remarkable were it not for the fact that ninety percent of American folklorists don't know enough German to read the label on a bottle of Löwenbrau beer. Add to this the fact that much of the brothers' major work has never been translated, and to the fact that, despite their being a major scholarly industry in their homeland, there are only a few scattered articles on them and their accomplishments in English, and we wind up with a strange situation. Either we American folklorists carry on a very active oral tradition about the Grimms or we are talking through our mortarboards. But whatever may be the case on that score, we have at last an interesting and serviceable full-length life of the brothers in English, The Brothers Grimm, by Ruth Michaelis-Jena.

Miss Michaelis-Jena's biography should evoke wide interest among folklorists, literary scholars and, one would hope, institutional and public libraries, if only because it's "all we have" on the subject. But that is not to say that the book should be seen merely as a stop-gap contribution, as a work with which we shall have to make do until something better comes along. On the contrary, it is a well written, basically well conceived, warm and human appraisal of two remarkable scholarly figures and their fraternal and familial relationships. It covers their lives (one is tempted to say life) in great but never oppressive detail over seventy-odd years, treating their family matters and friendships as well as their publications and research endeavors. There is a useful chapter on the influence of the Household Tales internationally, and copious illustrations lend the book much visual charm. The plates depict the brothers, their circle of family, friends and informants, and their environment, and each chapter is enlivened by smaller illustrations, line drawings of Steinau decorative arts, engravings from various editions of the Household Tales, and the like.

Doubtlessly, folklorists will feel that the book has its shortcomings. It is not really an attempt to deal with the scholarship of the Grimms or with their theoretical conceptions. And there is a strong concentration on the Household Tales at the expense of other works. Little space is devoted to the Deutsche Sagen (still untranslated) and the appearance of Jacob's important Mythology is dealt with in a single paragraph. But of course to make such criticisms is to demand that the book be something that it does not pretend to be. Miss Michaelis-Jena tries to concern herself with the "human" side of the brothers' careers and to give a faithful chronology of their trials and achievements. In this her book succeeds. It is biography first and intellectual-literary history only secondarily. Thus it should prove its worth to the general, non-scholarly reader, for the brothers' story is a readable and interesting one.

So far as scholars are concerned, one may well hope that Michaelis-Jena's work signals a new surge of interest in the Grimms in the English-speaking world and that discussions of their ideas and of the influence of their theories will soon follow.

F. A. de Caro
Department of English
Louisiana State University

Folktales of Mexico, edited and translated by Américo Paredes. University of Chicago Press, 1970.

In this superlative addition to the growing list of volumes of the Folktales of the World Series, Dr. Paredes has presented a relatively representative view of the oral narrative tradition of Mexico. He demonstrates to the reader not only the Märchen brought over by the Conquistadores and adapted and adopted by the New World inhabitants and still alive in Mexican tradition today, but also he presents a glimpse of remaining pre-Columbian beliefs and motifs. All levels of Mexican social structure are represented in the tales since Dr. Paredes has included tales from modern, cosmopolitan Mexico City as well as narratives from the campo. Aside from the usual stereotyped characters of much of the world's folktale tradition, we find Aztec deities and monsters, charismatic caudillos, psychiatrists, and such famous personages as Kim Novak and Pedro de Urdemalas (a favorite protagonist of tales throughout Central America and found as far south as Chile). The miraculous and the mundane, the fictitious and the historical are present. It is unfortunate however, that although both Paredes and Dorson, in their respective Introduction and Preface, underline the importance of religious and anti-gringo sentiments as major factors of the Mexican tradition, they have opted to present only a very few examples of narratives dealing directly with these themes.

Dr. Paredes has done an outstanding job of translating these tales into an English which retains much of the flavor of Mexican Spanish without falling into the trap of allowing the narratives to sound as if they were written for utterance by Mexican bandidos of a spaghetti western. His Introduction traces the history of the folkloristic scholarship within Mexico and points out the successes and failures of some of that scholarship. This Introduction, coupled with Dr. Dorson's Preface, which sketches the major events and influences in the development of modern Mexico, serve to give a background against which the selected tales can be better understood.

Folktales of Mexico stands as one of the few works available to non-Spanish speakers and readers which portrays with relative accuracy a Latin American tradition of oral narrative.

P. Brandt George
Indiana University