

reparation, corridos become a form of emotional release for community members either directly or indirectly involved in violence.

While McDowell presents the three theses independently of each other and cites previous academic works on corridos that rely exclusively on each, he maintains that none of them tell the whole story on their own. Instead, throughout *Poetry and Violence*, McDowell argues for the integration of these three approaches into a cohesive analytical framework. This framework explains how a given corrido can simultaneously celebrate an infamous violent encounter while warning against such violence and consoling any grieving parties. That is, all of these functions may be part of a particular corrido's context, and may very well shift from performance to performance.

By the end of the book, McDowell has built a strong case for his multifaceted approach to the relationship between poetry and violence as found in the corridos of Costa Chica. Ranging from songs composed a hundred years ago to those that are months old, the performance of corridos comprises a living ballad tradition that continues to reverberate strongly with Costa Chican society. But, as McDowell asks in his last chapter, can his analytical framework serve in attempting to understand other cases of the relationship between poetry (or music) and violence? As he was making final changes to his manuscript, news of the Columbine High School tragedy in Colorado broke and an onslaught of cultural criticism and painful reflection followed. McDowell closes his book wondering how the kinds of work folklorists do can be useful in times of social and emotional crisis, and while he does not claim to offer any solutions, the questions he poses point us—as scholars and as people—in some intriguing directions.

James A. Matisoff. **Blessings, Curses, Hopes, and Fears: Psycho-Ostensive Expressions in Yiddish.** Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000. Reprint ed. (1979). Pp. xxxi + 160, new preface, notes, new bibliography. \$40.00 cloth, \$15.95 paper.

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Stanford's reprint of James Matisoff's *Blessing, Curses, Hopes, and Fears* in the series "Contraversions: Jews and Other Differences" is to be welcomed by students of Yiddish language and folk culture, and by those interested in folk narrative and folk speech and language more generally.

The material for his study is drawn primarily from three sources: various native speakers, Immanuel Olsvanger's collections of Yiddish folk narrative, and his own, though nonnative, knowledge of Yiddish. While Matisoff's book offers a classification of Yiddish expressions according to psycho-semantic categories, it is far more a study of what he refers to in his new preface as "the prepatterned nature of language: playing with set expressions" (xv) (in fact, his formal classification of the expressions often seems like a playful satire of some of the formalist explanations of language dominant when his book first appeared). As he writes,

Linguists have been paying increasing attention to the fact that a good portion of one's daily communication with others involves the trading of ready-made, predictable, prepackaged utterances, ranging from the 'Hello?' with which one answers the telephone to small talk about the weather. . . . Entire conversations can be made up of formulaic expressions so naturally that the interlocutors are not at all disturbed by their lack of 'generative originality'—indeed, quite to the contrary: there is great comfort and security to be derived from fitting into a well worn communicative groove. (xv)

Matisoff is especially concerned with, as his subtitle indicates, "psycho-ostensive expressions," that is to say, with expressions that are "intended by the speaker to be accepted as the direct linguistic manifestation of his psychic state at the moment" (4), such as blessings for health like "zay gezunt!" (be healthy!) (32), or expressions about the dead (65–70). Even a cursory reading of Yiddish folklore and literature reveals how important these expressions were as part of the discourse of daily life of Yiddish-speaking Jews, and Matisoff has given us a careful and enjoyable guide to the semantics and significance of the expressions.

But, as he reminds us, similar expressions are also an important part of the linguistic expression of emotion in other languages and culture—as he writes, “a language’s psycho-ostensive formulas do, in fact, furnish excellent clues to its cultural preoccupations” (109). Icelandic, for instance, has its own set of ready-made, predictable, prepackaged utterances and psycho-ostensive expressions that must be learned before a person can become fully linguistically and culturally competent in Icelandic culture, and, even with only brief reflection on these after reading Matisoff’s book, it was obvious to me that they reveal much about the cultural concerns of Icelanders. Thus, even though Matisoff has here focused on Yiddish culture, his book could easily be used as a model for the study of psycho-ostensive expressions in other languages. It is in any case a book that anyone interested in folklore and language, folk narrative and narrative style, or Yiddish folklore should know.

Gary Stewart. **Rumba on the River: A History of the Popular Music of the Two Congos.** New York: Verso, 2000. Pp. 436, index, photographs, bibliography, discography, maps. \$35.00 cloth, \$22.00 paper.

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Capturing the tumultuous history of Central Africa in the telling of popular music history, Gary Stewart presents a thoroughly researched project in *Rumba on the River*. Moving in short chronological arcs, he examines the development of Congolese popular music—the guitar-driven dance songs that have swept across the world—from acoustic beginnings in the 1940s on through the golden age of the 1950s and 1960s and into the hi-tech soukous of the 1980s and 1990s.

Relying on historical research coupled with interviews of key figures, Stewart pieces together a story untold in such detail until now. His focus on key figures—Franco, Docteur Nico, Abeti, Rochereau—is not at the expense of the numerous other individuals and groups from either side of the Congo river who helped to create the popular