

## BOOK REVIEWS

Classic American Graffiti. Lexical Evidence from Folk Epigraphy in Western North America. A Glossarial Study of the Low Element in the English Vocabulary. By Allen Walker Read.

Pp. 89.

Waukeska, Wis.: Maledicta Press, 1977.

Reviewed by Richard M. Dorson.

This booklet was originally privately printed in an edition of 75 copies in Paris in 1935. The present edition adds a one paragraph foreword by the author, who calls it "a pioneering work at that time," and Afterword by Reinhold Aman, general editor of Maledicta Press Publications, who calls it a "brave and brilliant study--long an underground classic," two and a half pages of excerpts from reviews in learned journals of the first edition praising Read's attention to words omitted by lexicographers, and the addition of the first three words in the title. It is all a little too much for a slight and repetitive work whose field research was conducted in latrines and privies of tourist camps and lodgings during a sightseeing trip to the western United States and Canada in the summer of 1928. Allen Walker Read taught in the English department at Columbia University from 1945 to 1974, where he attained distinction for his studies on American English with special attention to tabooed words, and he had occasionally read papers to the American Folklore Society on such subjects as graffiti on New York subways and the centuries-old practical joke of sending greenhorns for nonexistent objects.

The core of Classic American Graffiti lies in several hundred texts copied by Read and cited in a "Glossary of Stigmatized Words" running from "Ass" to "Wipe." For each word entry he gives a definition of the sense, one of more illustrative texts, and a "Collation" citing dictionaries in which the term is absent or present. For each text he provides the place and date recorded. He preserves the misspellings. For example:

DOSE            Veneral disease  
Here to the girl with the coal black eyes.  
The soul of deceit the inventor of lies.  
I hope in hell she will roost.  
She sucked my dick with a hell of a dose.  
                Merced, California  
                July 10, 1928.  
Other degenerates sign here . . .  
                Adoso Clapp  
                Grants Pass, Oregon  
                July 21, 1928.

Collation - This sense missing in Webster, Century, F. & W. /Funk and Wagnalls/. and OED.

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The same text appears on the previous page, under DICK, with a collation identical to the above, but with these additions: "Found in Farmer & Henley, '3. military. The penis'. Cf. the English Wartime pun of 'D.S.O.' as 'Dick Shot Off'."

In his Introduction Read states that the tradition of folk epigraphy can be traced to classical times, for example in the ruins of Pompeii, and that it represents "folk-material of an autochthonous nature." He uses the term epigraphy because of the problems of deciphering near illegible, miscopied, and layered texts. In terms of environmental influences, he speculates that torrid climatic conditions may increase the virulence of the expression. He states that his collection makes a "valuable contribution to linguistics," because many of the words are recorded for the first time and others have been inadequately annotated, even though all are an active part of the English language. Yet any schoolboy, even in private schools, has known these words,

and a reader of graffiti is struck not by their Rabelaisian vigor but by their poverty of invention and imagination. With the free speech liberalizing movement of the 1960s which extended even to the Journal of American Folklore, this folk epigraphy seems bland and puerile. Perhaps the inclusion of 'pictographs' mentioned by Mr. Read would have spruced up the text.

The Concept of Structuralism: A Critical Analysis. By Philip Pettit.  
Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975. \$10 cloth, \$2.75 paper.

Reviewed by David Pace

For years structuralists have been bombarded with requests for a straightforward introduction to their field, which would elucidate the mysteries of Ferdinand de Saussure, Claude Lévi-Strauss, Roland Barthes, and other prominent proponents of structuralism. Philip Pettit's The Concept of Structuralism is not the answer to this plea. In an area of contemporary thought already marked by complex and esoteric distinctions, Pettit has introduced a whole new technical terminology. His study is apt to remain impenetrable to anyone who lacks a familiarity with the works of the principle structuralists.

But for the reader who has already sampled the work of Saussure, Lévi-Strauss, and Barthes, Pettit has performed an invaluable service. Drawing from a thorough knowledge of the Structuralist literature and of contemporary philosophy, he has produced the most comprehensive and penetrating critique of the strengths and weaknesses of the structuralist paradigm, which is available in English. Unlike some previous commentators, such as Jean Praget, he has kept the concept of "structuralism" within reasonable limits, confining his comments to those areas of linguistics, anthropology, literary criticism, and semiology in which explicitly structuralist concepts have been applied. Moreover, he has avoided both a narrowly empirical approach, which would reject structuralism because it is too theoretical, and a slavish commitment to the model, which would endorse all applications of the structuralist paradigm on the basis of its initial success in linguistics.

Unfortunately, Pettit has avoided explicit treatment of the use of structuralism in folklore. But his work, nonetheless, remains vital both for folklorists who seek to apply structuralist concepts themselves and for those who wish to evaluate the structuralist folklore of others.

San Antonio Rose: The Life and Music of Bob Wills. By Charles R. Townsend.  
Pp. xvii + 395, bibliography, index. Discography and filmusicography by Bob Pinson.  
Urbana, Chicago, London: University of Illinois Press, 1976.

Reviewed by Simon J. Bronner

Charles Townsend has produced an impressive book, San Antonio Rose, filled with detailed information compiled from extensive oral interviews. An additional bonus is the book's revealing photographs which are generously distributed in the text. Townsend carefully documents his work and as a tribute to detail, he includes Bob Pinson's filmusicography and discography in the book.

Townsend states that the purpose of his book is twofold: to trace the life of Bob Wills and to place his music in the spectrum of American popular music. Toward the first end, he presents Wills' early years and later career in sequence, employing oral accounts and anecdotes to fill in gaps left by printed documents. The author's