

Kurt Ranke has unselfishly dedicated his life to the establishment of folk narrative research as an international discipline, and this volume of essays, the value of which is even further increased by the detailed name, subject, and type indices, attests to the splendid success of these efforts. May Kurt Ranke look forward to many more active years as the grand old man of folk narrative research, as editor of the already mentioned Enzyklopädie des Märchens, and, of course, as the dedicated editor of his journal Fabula.

A Critical Bibliography of Folk Art. By Simon J. Bronner. Pp. 112, graphics, index. Folklore Publications Group Monograph Series, Volume Three. Folklore Publications Group: Bloomington, Ind., 1978. \$2.50 + postage, paper.

Reviewed by Betty J. Belanus.

The Folklore Publications Group may not put out a product that looks as professional as it might, but the quality of what they do publish is as scholarly and valuable as the slick product of the professionals. Moreover, the long delay of professional publishing is avoided, making current works available when they will make the most impact. Simon J. Bronner's A Critical Bibliography of American Folk Art is a case in point.

Bronner has done a great service to students interested in folk art from the folklorists' point of view, by assembling this 704-item bibliography covering American (i.e., continental United States, and excluding most American Indian material) folk art: painting, drawing, sculpture, carving, and "other artistic forms" including a smattering of entries on such items as quilts, furniture, rugs, toys, pottery, scrimshaw, and wall stencils. In his introduction, Bronner poses his practical and useful definition of the term folk art as "art in traditional society and traditional art in contemporary society." Tradition is defined as "behavior, skills, or information transmitted by oral or mimetic means through time or space" (p. 2). The criteria for what is "art" follows folk culture specialist Henry Glassie's distinction of art from "craft"--that is, that the concept of "art" stresses a pleasure-giving function over a practical function. "Folk art" as defined by Bronner, then, excludes most decorative craft, and his bibliography follows suit. Some folk art enthusiasts may regret this narrowing of the term, but it is Bronner's stance that the separation of art from craft is necessary in developing a focus for folk art study. Bronner does include craft literature, however, "when it contains discussions of decorative or aesthetic considerations" (p. 5).

Bronner rightly points out the abuse of the term "folk art: by art historians who have labeled the products of the folk artist "naive," "primitive," and "crude" and equated them with self-teaching instead of tradition. He espouses the contextual approach which delves into the living artist's community, sources, and background. Historic folk artifacts must be examined for evidence of medium, technique, depiction, and design. The item of folk art, in other words, cannot be isolated as "art for art's sake," but must be seen as a cultural product reflecting the personality of the artist, the tradition the artist belongs to, and the artist's life in the society. This holistic approach to art, and material culture in general, is absolutely necessary in the study of American folk culture.

Bronner also points out the possibility of a fruitful cross-disciplinary cooperation in the study of folk art, "which can result in a valuable synthesis of differing research approaches" (p. 2). This is a pleasant dream, but the day has not yet come when the folklorist can lie down with the art historian, museum director, and anthropologist and come up with a valuable synthesis in the area of folk art. As more young scholars like Bronner work for this type of cooperation, however, it may yet be possible.

The "critical" portion of Bronner's work is one of its weak points. Admittedly, critical comments on all 704 entries would have greatly lengthened the work--but also would have greatly strengthened it. Granted, Bronner makes sure we know what each entry deals with, if this is not apparent from the title, but his critical comments are all too sparse, and some of those included are rather pedestrian. Perhaps he was trying to keep his necessarily subjective opinion out of the way, but a few scathing comments and/or profuse praises would have been not only helpful but interesting. Bronner's opinion, after all, is to be respected--one does not have to agree with it, but it would have been nice to have had some of it. The result might have been some lively debate, at least.

In general, though, Bronner's work is highly praiseworthy. It is an invaluable research tool for all those interested in folk art and will undoubtedly, as Bronner hoped, help to "begin answering some of the pressing questions facing the field of folk art today" (p. 7).